

PRAISE FOR *A HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL*

The scope and nature of this well-researched, highly accessible history of ancient Israel is unparalleled in the twenty-first century. With strong affirmation of Scripture's authority, Grisanti and Bolen rigorously assess and systematically present the known historical and geographical data related to the patriarchs and their descendants stretching from Abraham to Malachi and beyond. In the process, they help clarify God's covenantal purposes that climax in Christ and the very foundations of the Christian faith. I celebrate this study that dependably proclaims to "the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD" (Ps 78:4).

JASON S. DEROUCHIE, Research Professor of
Old Testament and Biblical Theology and Rich and
Judy Hastings Endowed Chair of Old Testament Studies,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Writing a history of ancient Israel is a daunting task that demands a wide range of expertise. To their credit, Grisanti and Bolen offer an accessible overview that seeks to correlate biblical materials with other historical sources. Although some may interpret the evidence differently, Grisanti and Bolen's book offers valuable insights into many complex issues. This is an excellent resource for anyone interested in ancient Israel's history.

T. DESMOND ALEXANDER, Senior Research Fellow in Biblical Studies,
Union Theological College,
Belfast, Northern Ireland

The authors have provided us with a unique treasure, a history of Israel that distinguishes itself in three ways. First, this history embraces the Bible for what it is, God speaking to us through time and place to reveal who he is and how he thinks about us. Second, this history tells a story which is fully grounded. The authors write not just from their office desks but from their experiences in the Holy Land, teaching the geography and archaeology of the biblical world. Context matters and these authors take that seriously. And third, this history is filled with an anthology of scholarly voices, some hold the authors' views and others do not. As such, it models how Christian scholars might best engage the thoughts of others, even those with whom they disagree.

JOHN A. BECK, Adjunct Faculty,
Jerusalem University College

Do we need another evangelically oriented history of ancient Israel? Because of new archaeological discoveries in the past generation, it is imperative to continually reevaluate and redefine our understanding of ancient Israel's past and its relevance for the Christian. In the tradition of Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests* (which is now nearly forty years old), Grisanti and Bolen have done the evangelical community well by writing a thorough volume, up-to-date in its treatment of background material from the ancient Near East, as well as fully cognizant of current historical issues that are debated in the academic community. They are to be commended for this rich and detailed resource.

MARK W. CHAVALAS, Emeritus Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History,
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

I heartily endorse this up-to-date history of Israel, written from a thoroughly evangelical perspective that understands the biblical account as Scripture. The authors are aware of various approaches to the subject and maturely address issues of method. To their credit, they devote the lion's share of the volume to the actual history of Israel as recorded in Scripture, supplementing their study with archaeological evidence. The volume is sure to become a standard within evangelical circles.

ROBERT B. CHISHOLM, JR., Chair and Senior Professor of Old Testament Studies,
Dallas Theological Seminary

Evangelicals will applaud the publication of this much-needed, up-to-date history of Israel. Grisanti and Bolen have provided us with an outstanding volume that is extraordinarily thorough, well-balanced, and reader/student friendly. Every evangelical pastor, scholar, and serious student of the Bible should consider adding this book to their library.

J. DANIEL HAYS, Senior Professor of Old Testament,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary *and*
Professor of Biblical Studies Emeritus, Ouachita Baptist University

Scholars, pastors, students, and well-motivated laypeople should welcome this tour de force on ancient Israel's history by Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen. It stands as the most comprehensive history of Israel from an evangelical perspective, and it should serve as the gold standard for decades to come. The authors explain well the disciplines of historiography (history writing), archaeology, and more, topics often misunderstood or misused in evangelical and non-evangelical circles alike. They show that the study of history not only uses the Bible's written texts, but also written and non-written sources outside the Bible, and yet they also acknowledge the necessary intersection of history and theology. They delve deeply into all the important historical issues from the patriarchal to the postexilic periods. This book will serve well as a complement to overviews of the message and theology of the Old Testament. I recommend it highly!

DAVID M. HOWARD, JR., Professor of Old Testament,
Bethlehem College and Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota *and*
Professor of Old Testament Emeritus, Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen have graced us with an intelligent, accessible, and thorough accounting of the history of Israel as presented in the Old Testament and supported by archaeology and extrabiblical texts. Their work is based on their solid commitment to Scripture as God's Word and their conviction that the Bible reliably presents history from the time of the patriarchs to the postexilic period. I heartily recommend *A History of Ancient Israel* to all serious students of the Old Testament.

TREMPER LONGMAN III, Distinguished Scholar and
Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Westmont College

A History of Ancient Israel: From Abraham to Exile is a much-needed, up-to-date textbook encompassing Israel's story from Genesis to Malachi. Grisanti and Bolen have produced a thoughtful and highly accessible textbook that will undoubtedly become a mainstay for evangelical seminary students and upper-division graduate students alike. It is destined to supplant Eugene Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests* as the most thorough textbook for the history of ancient Israel written from an evangelical conservative perspective. Many scholars (myself included) will not agree with their dating of the early phases of Israel's story (e.g., the dating of the exodus). Nevertheless, there can be no question that Grisanti and Bolen have produced a careful, consistent, and coherent treatment that incorporates the latest archaeological discoveries and geographical research throughout the biblical world. The extensive treatment of the Divided Kingdom is a particular strength, highlighting the authors' extensive research and background in this incredibly important period in Israel's history. Most of all, Grisanti and Bolen are consummate students and passionate teachers of the Hebrew Scriptures and, especially, the biblical places where they occurred. Their deep love for the text and the many generations of students that they have inspired (myself included!) is evident throughout.

CHRIS MCKINNY, Associate Professor of Archaeology,
Lipscomb University

The authors provide a sweeping narrative of the Bible while keeping true to an orthodox and high view of Scripture. This work updates and replaces Eugene Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests*, and it is fitting that Gene's volume would be updated and advanced by his students. As an archaeologist, I am pleased to see that it is informed by the disciplines of historical-geography and some recent archaeological discoveries. I highly recommend *A History of Ancient Israel* to those who have a high view of Scripture but also desire to study the Old Testament within its historical and cultural context.

STEVEN M. ORTIZ, Director, Lanier Center for Archaeology and
Professor of Archaeology and Biblical Studies,
Lipscomb University

A History of Ancient Israel: From Abraham to Exile by Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen is a thoughtful and engaging introduction to Israel's history, reflecting years of teaching, firsthand experience in the biblical lands, and careful historical research. Writing from the conviction that the biblical text is a trustworthy historical source, the authors skillfully integrate Scripture with archaeological discoveries, extrabiblical sources, and geographical insights to present a balanced and compelling account. Clear, well organized, and accessible, this volume will benefit university students, pastors, Bible teachers, and interested lay readers alike. The accompanying resources through Zondervan's TextbookPlus further enhance its usefulness. I enthusiastically recommend this excellent work to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of the Bible in its historical setting.

CARL RASMUSSEN, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament,
Bethel University

Reliable. Expansive. Clear. What would a history of ancient Israel look like if the Bible was taken seriously? *A History of Ancient Israel* by Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen shows us. The authors are seasoned scholars of the Old Testament, ancient history, and archaeology who have each spent extensive time on the ground in Israel in recent decades. This book does not shy away from the critical debates that swirl around Israel's ancient history. Readers can have confidence because no history of ancient Israel prioritizes the evidence in the Bible more than this much-needed volume. It is easy to recommend this outstanding book.

GARY EDWARD SCHNITTJER, Distinguished Professor of
Old Testament for Cairn Theological Seminary,
Cairn University

The debate about how many of the events in the Old Testament actually happened has been raging for many centuries, leaving many Christians with questions about these events and how they fit into the broader ancient Near East. Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen have now provided us with an excellent summary of how the Old Testament can be read with a high view of Scripture. While evangelicals will continue to debate exact dates and interpretations, this book will be an important reference work for many years in the future for those seeking to determine historical details in the Old Testament.

CHARLIE TRIMM, Associate Professor and Chair of Old Testament
(Undergraduate Division), Interim Program Director of Biblical
and Theological Studies, Talbot School of Theology,
Biola University

These two scholars have written a very readable and well-researched history of Israel. Their time spent in Israel and working on archaeological digs provides a fascinating wealth of material to draw upon. The book highlights important archaeological finds but also warns of the dangers of relying too much on the so-called “facts” of archaeology without realizing that they, too, are interpreted materials also. It often mentions places where scholars disagree on topics related to the areas of the history of Israel and then provides their own very balanced handling of these issues (see especially the introduction). At a time when it is very difficult to write a history of ancient Israel because of all the controversies surrounding the issues, these two scholars have done an excellent job of creating an important resource for understanding the history of Israel. I highly recommend this book for those wishing to have a more in-depth understanding of ancient Israel’s history.

PAUL D. WEGNER, Senior Distinguished Professor
of Old Testament Studies,
Gateway Seminary

Michael Grisanti and Todd Bolen’s *A History of Ancient Israel: From Abraham to Exile* promises to become a go-to source for Bible readers seeking to understand the mighty acts of God throughout biblical history. The book’s energetic approach embraces Scripture on its own terms while drawing on a wealth of information from archaeology, geography, and ancient Near Eastern texts to illustrate the biblical account. With special emphasis on establishing a chronology of biblical events, *A History of Ancient Israel* anchors not only a sequence of things that happened but the ongoing revelation of God in a down-to-earth world.

PAUL H. WRIGHT, President Emeritus,
Jerusalem University College, Jerusalem, Israel

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**ANCIENT
ISRAEL**

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ISRAEL**

FROM ABRAHAM TO EXILE

**MICHAEL A. GRISANTI
AND TODD BOLEN**

 **ZONDERVAN
ACADEMIC**

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A History of Ancient Israel

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*To my beloved children (8) and grandchildren (10 at this point)
who shared Dad and Papa with this project. May your love of
our great God and the history He directs impact your lives.*

—Michael

To Mom and Dad, for all their love and support.

—Todd

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ÄAT.....	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABC</i>	<i>Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles</i> . Albert Kirk Grayson. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ApOTC.....	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASOR	American Schools of Overseas Research
ASORDS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AUSTR.....	American University Studies, Series 7: Theology and Religion
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BO</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>

-

- ISBE*.....*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Edited by
 Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
 1979–1988
- ITC*.....*International Theological Commentary*
- JAEL*.....*Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*
- JAOS*.....*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JATS*.....*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*
- JBL*.....*Journal of Biblical Literature*
- JETS*.....*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JIBS*.....*The Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies*
- JJOA*.....*Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology*
- JNES*.....*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
- JQR*.....*Jewish Quarterly Review*
- JSOT*.....*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
- JSOTSup*.....*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement*
 Series
- JSSEA*.....*Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
- KEL*.....*Kregel Exegetical Library*
- LHBOTS*.....*The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies*
- LSB*.....*Legacy Standard Bible*
- LXX*.....*Septuagint*
- MSJ*.....*The Master's Seminary Journal*
- MT*.....*Masoretic Text*
- NAC*.....*New American Commentary*
- NEA*.....*Near Eastern Archaeology*
- NEAEHL*.....*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the*
Holy Land. Edited by E. Stern. 5 vols. Jerusalem: Israel
 Exploration Society and Carta, 1993–2008
- NEASB*.....*The Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin*
- NIDB*.....*New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by
 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon,
 2006–2009
- NIDOTTE*.....*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*
and Exegesis. Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols.
 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
- NICOT*.....*New International Commentary on the Old Testament*
- NIVAC*.....*NIV Application Commentary*
- OLA*.....*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*

xxvi ♦ A HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

- OROT *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Kenneth A. Kitchen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006
 OTL Old Testament Library
 PEQ *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
 Presb. *Presbyterion*
 ResQ. *Restoration Quarterly*
 RIMA Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods
 RINAP Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
 SAK *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*
 SBJT. *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
 SHANE. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
 SHCANE Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
 SJOT. *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
 SwJT. *Southwestern Journal of Theology*
 TA. *Tel Aviv*
 Them *Themelios*
 THOTC Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
 TOTC Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
 TTCS. Teach the Text Commentary Series
 TynBul *Tyndale Bulletin*
 VT *Vetus Testamentum*
 VTSup. Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
 WBC Word Biblical Commentary
 ZAW. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
 ZDPV *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
 ZECOT. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

PREFACE

Writing the history of ancient Israel began long before printing presses, publishing houses, and university classrooms. Moses began the book of Deuteronomy with a recounting of Israel's trek through the wilderness; the psalmists repeatedly rehearsed the years from Abraham to David; and the Israelite community in Nehemiah's day recalled God's faithfulness from creation to the exile (Deut 1–3; Pss 78, 105, 106; Neh 9). This was all very appropriate for Israel given the Lord's repeated command to “remember”—to reflect upon his constant compassion and to confess their repeated rebellion.

This book is the latest in a long line that reviews the history of God's people in order to understand more deeply what God was doing and how he did it. Unlike the briefer, inspired accounts of Scripture, ours aims for a certain degree of comprehensiveness, drawing on the records of ancient Israel's neighbors and archaeological discoveries to fill out the necessarily selective accounts preserved in the Old Testament. Our goal, in short, has been to write a history of the nation of Israel, from Abraham to the return from exile, that draws on all available source material to create an accurate, engaging, and compelling record that exalts the Lord and edifies the reader. We unapologetically begin with the conviction that all Scripture is God-breathed. And yet, as the following pages will show, that conviction does not make our work easy, but it demands painstaking study worthy of the Lord of all history.

The writing of comprehensive histories of Israel, especially by a single author or a pair, was once common but now largely seems to be a thing of the past. In the twentieth century, works like those by John Bright, Martin Noth, J. Maxwell Miller/John H. Hayes, and Eugene Merrill were well used and well regarded.¹

1. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981); Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1960); James Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History*

The trend in this century has been toward books written by a multitude of authors (e.g., one edited by Hershel Shanks and another edited by Jennie R. Ebeling, J. Edward Wright, Mark Elliott, and Paul V. M. Flesher), or those focused on more specific issues and sources, such as the work by Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess.² The history of Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III has a 150-page introduction without parallel, but that depth requires significant selectivity in its treatment of the historical events themselves (a total of 250 pages for everything from the patriarchs to the exile).³ While we have benefited tremendously from these and other labors, we have been excited to prepare a work that reflects continuity of approach in a detailed and systematic recounting of what transpired among the descendants of Jacob for approximately fifteen hundred years.

For Michael, his love of history since his high school days led to studying that subject further in various settings (United States and Israel). The joy of teaching some facet of Israel's ancient history in churches, Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries served as an added blessing. Many years ago, Stan Gundry invited him to write this volume. However, regular teaching overseas at various training centers and leading trips to Israel for his seminary students and solid churches delayed his progress, so he turned to his friend and colleague, Todd Bolen, to help make this book a reality. Their combined efforts made this book better than it would have been if written by just one author. We both pray that God will use this project for his great glory, to the four corners of the world.

For Todd, writing this book was a dream almost unimaginable since his studies as a teenager at the Institute of Holy Land Studies (now Jerusalem University College). His love of Dr. Eugene Merrill's *Kingdom of Priests* inspired a vision of one day writing a similar volume for the next generation. The opportunity to regularly teach a course on the history of ancient Israel, first at The Master's University's Israel Bible Extension (IBEX) campus and in more recent years on the school's home campus, has kept that dream alive.

For both of us, we believe that our intimate knowledge of the geography

of *Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

2. Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, 3rd ed. (Boston and Washington, DC: Prentice Hall and Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011); Jennie R. Ebeling et al., eds., *The Old Testament in Archaeology and History* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, eds., *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

3. Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

and archaeology of the land of Israel and surrounding regions provides a unique strength to what we write. Michael has guided dozens of seminary and church tours in Israel, and Todd lived and taught in the Jerusalem area for more than a decade. Both of us have participated in a variety of archaeological excavations, and we believe that our experiences bring to this book not only energy and excitement but also a keener awareness of the contributions that these disciplines are continually making to our understanding of the past.

We would love for this book to be used not only by graduate and undergraduate students like our own but also by laypeople in the church who recognize the great need to understand this often-neglected area of study. The two of us have for the last decade led a Sunday morning adult Bible fellowship at our church, studying a chapter of the Old Testament week by week, and this book is for them and all those like them who want to better understand lesser-known portions of God's Word. But we have intended as well to make this book a useful resource for those pursuing advanced studies in the field, and we hope that some potential dissertation topics may be stimulated by our fresh ideas and detailed footnotes.

The two of us divided our work on this book by our areas of expertise, which providentially complement each other quite well. Michael wrote the book's introductory chapter (1), the chapters spanning the years from Abraham to Saul (2–6), and the chapters on the exilic and postexilic eras (16–17). Todd wrote the chapters from the rise of David to the fall of Jerusalem (7–15). Michael has placed a few excurses at the end of most of his chapters to provide supplemental and yet important information that seemed too bulky for the main content of the chapter.

This book was designed to be supplemented by additional study resources, including a substantial number of beautiful photographs, all available at no charge at Zondervan's TextbookPlus website. Those looking for even more comprehensive image resources will benefit from the Photo Companion to the Bible, created by the BiblePlaces.com team under Todd's direction, which includes volumes for the books of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Many people deserve our gratitude for serving us in various ways as we wrote this book. Michael is deeply thankful for his sweet wife, Martha Ann, who has shared him with this project. He has benefited from teaching various forms of this volume's content and receiving feedback from his numerous students. A sabbatical provided by The Master's Seminary and their reducing his teaching load as part of his promotion to Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament played a significant role in seeing this project

reach completion. He also stands on the shoulders of some of his own beloved professors (including Dr. Eugene Merrill). He is also thankful for friends and colleagues who read and provided feedback for some of his chapters, including Iosif Zhakevich, Paul Twiss, Peter Goeman, and Jack Beck. His eight children, Michael J., Mark (and Tiana), Trisanna, David, Jonathan (and Meghan), Joshua (and Tinese), Caleb, and Theresa have faithfully supported their dad's pursuit of this endeavor as well.

Todd is grateful to the students of his course on the history of ancient Israel, whose classroom interaction and careful research has always sharpened his thinking. A number of his friends read through some or all of his chapters and provided valuable feedback, including Kaelyn Peay, Kris Udd, Charity Pearson, Chris McKinny, Matt Switzer, and Rachel Miller. He is also grateful to the administration of The Master's University for providing a sabbatical for writing, and to his colleagues inside and outside of TMU's School of Biblical Studies for their friendship and encouragement. Todd is ever thankful for his wife, Kelli, who did not roll her eyes or run when, early in their dating relationship, he proposed that together they memorize Edwin Thiele's chronology of ancient Israel's kings. His gratitude extends to his children, Luke, Mark, Bethany, Katie, and Jonathan, for their encouragement and support in various ways over the years that this book was being written.

The authors are both grateful to Zondervan for all they have done to greatly improve our efforts. In particular, we thank Katya Covrett for all of her initial counsel and Nancy Erickson for her editorial expertise.

One of the historical psalms, Ps 78, provides a seventy-two-verse account of Israel's history, for the explicit purpose of telling "the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done . . . so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children" (Ps 78:4, 6). This is surely a worthy goal in writing a history, and it is our prayer that this would be accomplished in some measure through the pages of this book.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE VALUE OF HISTORY

A study of Israel's ancient history has significant value for students of the Bible. God's redemptive plan culminates in his Son, Jesus Christ, but the beautiful and necessary foundation for that plan unfolds in space and time as God chooses the family of Abraham to become the nation of Israel. Throughout the history of Israel, the Lord faithfully blesses, judges, and makes covenantal promises to accomplish his glorious plan of salvation for all the families of the world. Gaining a better grasp of that history leads to a clearer understanding of our God and his intentions. What are some detailed ways that giving attention to Israel's ancient history might impact a student of that history?

First, studying that history provides us with vivid examples of our great *God's identity* through his actions and his character. Israel's history represents much more than a simple collection of facts from the past. In his Word, God gave historical narratives through his prophets to provide humankind with an amazing tapestry of his identity. Since these narratives delineate Israel's history according to God's intentions, his numerous interventions in human history, as part of bringing his larger program to pass, give us glimpses of his surpassing character. His historical actions show him to be characterized by mercy and grace, willing to judge rebellion, and totally faithful to bring to pass what he promised, just to name a few amazing character traits. Through Israel's history, we can learn more about God's value system, what he considers important and what he presents as worthless. His followers should happily embrace the former and reject the latter.

Second, ancient Israel's history provides a very necessary *historical backdrop* for biblical people and events. God worked in and through his covenant people in time and place. This historical context informs the significance and setting for those biblical realities. Knowing international and political realities helps the reader better understand details of the biblical narrative that may otherwise be

mysterious or confusing. Since biblical events and people took place in history, learning about that history is essential for a clear understanding of God's word.

Third, throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh's actions primarily focus on his covenant people, which has clear implications for the larger world. Understanding Israel's ancient history benefits from knowledge of the larger Semitic world, the ancient Near East (ANE). Since Israel interacted with various local (Philistines, Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites) and regional (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia) powers, an awareness of Israel's history and those relationships provides insight into ways that Israel fits into the larger historical narrative. Since God's creation of the universe, his intentions have had a *worldwide breadth*. He chose Israel to be a witness to that larger world so that they would direct the nations' attention to his incomparable character.

GUIDELINES FOR A BIBLICAL HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

Every work of history operates with certain assumptions, and this book is no different. Below are three broad interpretive guidelines that drive various aspects of this study of ancient Israel's history. First and foremost, we embrace the Bible on its own terms because of its own presentation of its contents as inspired by God, inerrant, and authoritative (Ps 19:7–11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 2 Pet 1:20–21). Scripture serves as our first source for explaining the flow of Israel's ancient history. The Bible and its authority must be taken seriously. To draw on a statement from American jurisprudence, the Bible is “innocent until proven guilty.”

Second, careful consideration is given to extrabiblical texts—literary artifacts—from the larger ANE world, regarding them as reliable unless objective evidence indicates otherwise. These texts often provide helpful insights into Israel's own history since it took place in a larger world. Nations, events, people, and cultures in the Semitic world both inform our understanding of Israel's history as well as present a contrast with God's progressive work in and through his dealings with his chosen people.

Third, biblical narratives that present Israel's ancient history provide divinely authorized historical context for understanding literary and archaeological artifacts.¹ As already stated above, Israel's ancient history took place in

1. We will address this further toward the end of this chapter. Literary and archaeological artifacts provide helpful information that supplements biblical narratives. However, the biblical presentation of Israel's history should have a place of priority in interpreting how to understand the intersection of biblical history and artifactual evidence.

specific times and at various places. An awareness of various literary artifacts, inside² and outside of Israel,³ can contribute to our understanding of the Bible and Israel's ancient history. These literary artifacts supplement and complement the information supplied by the biblical text, sometimes confirming or illuminating aspects of Israel's history.⁴ Archaeological artifacts also offer examples of various aspects of Israel's historical existence—evidence of cultural practices, places, and people. An understanding of Israel's ancient history derived from biblical narratives provides the interpretive context for grasping the significance of those literary and archaeological artifacts. In other words, biblical historical narratives provide the correct background and framework for understanding those artifacts rather than the artifacts determining an interpretive grid by which those narratives are to be understood.

HISTORIOGRAPHY⁵ AND HISTORY

How we define history and how written history came into being—its divine origin—lays the groundwork for this volume's presentation of the history of ancient Israel. While “history” focuses on historical facts and events or “the study of what people have done and said and thought in the past,”⁶ “historiography”

2. For example, Lachish letters, Tel Dan Inscription, Khirbet Qeiyafa Inscription, Samaria Ostraca.

3. For example, Eponym Lists, Babylonian Chronicles, Moabite Stela, Taylor Prism, Black Obelisk.

4. The reliability of the biblical presentation of Israel's ancient history benefits from archaeological artifacts and literary sources. However, that reliability is not *squarely based* on those extrabiblical sources. What the Bible says about itself in numerous passages authorizes an expectation of reliability that is supported (but not proven) by extrabiblical evidence.

5. The following resources represent only a selection of those that helpfully address issues related to historiography: Y. Amit, “Narrative Art of Israel's Historians,” in *DOTHB*, 708–715; Mark Zvi Brettler, “The New Biblical Historiography,” in *Israel's Past in Present Research*, ed. V. Philips Long (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 43–50; Chang-Dae Kim, “A Study on the Truthfulness of Narrative in Old Testament Historiography,” *한국개혁신학*, 79 (2023): 34–60; Jens Bruun Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Mary Joan Winn Leith, “Biblical Israel: History and Historiography to 586 BCE,” in *Jewish Studies on Premodern Periods: A Handbook*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich and Sara R. Horowitz (Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 13–26; V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1994); S. L. McKenzie, “Historiography, Old Testament,” in *DOTHB*, 418–25; Eugene H. Merrill, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Chronicles*, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 48–53. Merrill, “Must Stories Be ‘Factual’ to Do Theology?: Old Testament Narrative and Biblical Inerrancy,” *Presb* 46, no. 1 (2020): 8–23; Iain Provan, “In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel,” in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of ‘Biblical Israel’*, ed. V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 161–97; Alan R. Millard, “Story, History, and Theology,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 37–64; Alexander Rofé, “Properties of Biblical Historiography and Historical Thought,” *VT* 66, no. 3 (2016): 433–55; Edwin M. Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History*, 1–36.

6. Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 1.

4 ♦ A HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

deals with the way those events or facts are described, shaped, or presented by a historian. History writing or historiography involves a representation of the events, but not the events themselves. Since biblical historical facts and events come to us through a biblical historian, written history requires interpretation.⁷

Consequently, the historical data in Scripture, our primary source, must be interpreted through the grid of appropriate literary analysis. This entails giving attention to the literary and rhetorical conventions at work in the overall context in which the texts originated—drawing on extrabiblical texts, inscriptions, and material evidence—uncovered by archaeology.⁸ For example, the poetic description of the exodus (Exod 15) and what Yahweh accomplished through Deborah and Barak's actions (Judg 5) must be read as descriptions of actual historical events (Exod 14 and Judg 4) but also as poetic passages, with hyperbolic descriptions and stereotypical language. They were designed to draw attention to Yahweh as the Almighty Sovereign and Heavenly Warrior in the context of a concrete historical event.⁹ The presence of poetic imagery does not imply that a narrative describes something less than actual events.

Nevertheless, it is correct to state that the study of the historiography of the Old Testament is “in a state of flux.”¹⁰ Over the past few decades, scholars have changed how they understand the way in which biblical texts narrate the Israelite past. Previously, scholars generally viewed biblical books as history, i.e., a generally accurate depiction of the Israelite past. More recently, other scholars utilize historiography “to emphasize the creative nature of historical texts.”¹¹ Scholars often refer to “cultural memory” as how biblical historians presented these distant remembrances.¹² In contrast, the authors of this volume embrace the historicity and accuracy of the biblical presentation of the history of ancient Israel.

7. David M. Howard Jr., “History as History: The Search for Meaning,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, ed. David M. Howard and Michael A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 27.

8. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 26. Cf. Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 5.

9. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 26. Cf. Michael A. Grisanti, “Old Testament Poetry as a Vehicle for Historiography,” *BSac* 161, no. 642 (2004): 163–178; Richard D. Patterson, “Victory at Sea: Prose and Poetry in Exodus 14–15,” *BSac* 161, no. 641 (2004): 42–54.

10. V. Philips Long, “Historiography of the Old Testament,” in *FOTS*, 146.

11. Brettler, “The New Biblical Historiography,” 43.

12. For example, Ronald Hendel, “The Exodus in Biblical Memory,” *JBL* 120, no. 4 (2001): 601–22; Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Cf. Jens Bruun Kofoed's interaction with this issue in “The Old Testament as Cultural Memory,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 303–23. Some, but not all, who refer to “cultural memory” use that phrase to argue for the unreliability of the biblical presentation of the historical events.

SOURCES FOR HISTORICAL WRITING: WRITTEN TEXTS

We affirm that anyone who writes Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21), functions as a prophetic figure. Since God brings Scripture to his intended completion, whoever is involved in the writing of Scripture—original author, copyist, editor, compiler—was guided by the Holy Spirit, having a prophetic function.¹³ The prophetic figures who composed biblical narratives could have drawn on various sources in that effort. Sources of any kind are not themselves facts but only provide access to facts that must be evaluated or carefully considered.¹⁴

The most important source for prophetic historians involved written materials. Howard suggests two categories of written materials: “casual history” and “deliberative history.”¹⁵ First, “casual (or official) history” involves records produced at various levels of society. In the ANE, it could include historical annals, administrative and economic documents, international treaties, and inscriptions. More directly, some of the preexisting written raw materials utilized by the biblical writer are songs, poems, census lists, king lists, and historical annals. These sources supplement the information provided in biblical narratives. Various passages refer to sources like “the Book of the Wars of the LORD” (Num 21:14), “the book of the kings of Israel and Judah” (2 Chr 35:27), and several others.

The second category, “deliberative (or literary) history,” builds on “casual history” and represents genuine historiography. The prophet uses the raw data—casual history—as building blocks for his deliberative history—biblical historical narratives. Howard affirms that this deliberative history is “analytical, interpretive written history. It is the product of selection by an author, with specific purposes in mind, creatively arranging the final product.”¹⁶ The work of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20–21) guarantees the accuracy of any information drawn from preexisting written records that became part of a biblical historical narrative. While the biblical historians used literary craft and good plot structure, the Holy Spirit guided them in the accuracy of the written record, resulting in inspired Scripture.

13. Michael A. Grisanti, “Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture,” *JETS* 44, no. 4 (2001): 580–82.

14. According to Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 21, the factuality of the source content must receive careful consideration. He suggests that the factuality of source contents must be “determined by careful investigation of their settings, their claims, their testability, their internal self-consistency, and their compatibility with other data from the same times and places.”

15. Howard, “History as History,” 29–30. The summaries below are taken from Howard.

16. Howard, “History as History,” 30.

SOURCES FOR HISTORICAL WRITING: ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral tradition is a significant topic that receives only brief attention here—with a focus on the example of the Genesis narratives that predated Moses's life. Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, may have utilized preexisting written materials and carefully transmitted oral traditions for certain narratives.¹⁷ Along with preexisting written materials mentioned above, whatever a prophetic historian included in a biblical narrative represented accurate history as the result of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21).

HISTORY AS THEOLOGY OR IDEOLOGY

In large sections of the OT, the Bible presents itself as relating and interpreting historical events. Beyond simply presenting historical data and facts, this history includes theological overtones. In that history, God has revealed himself in creation through various events and dialogues that make up a narrative or story. The conviction that Yahweh “was the Lord of history” serves as the most strategic aspect of biblical history.¹⁸ It was “written from his perspective and designed according to his objectives.”¹⁹ Since theology presents the story of God, its purpose “is more than merely to provide information about God; it is also designed to communicate clearly the human predicament and how that predicament can be resolved by the (re)establishment of a redemptive, divine-human relationship.”²⁰

The following paragraphs develop the crucial nature of this connection between history and theology. We affirm that biblical historical narratives were written and arranged according to Yahweh's intentions through biblical prophets, resulting in a *selective* presentation of people and events that were part of that history. The conviction that divine intentions guided the biblical historians (ideology), resulting in a selective presentation of that history, has caused various scholars to view biblical historical narratives as unreliable, fictional accounts rather than credible, factual history. We will demonstrate why what some scholars call “ideological biblical history” should be regarded as reliable rather than unreliable history.

17. As did authors of other narrative texts—Kings and Chronicles—Moses would have drawn on direct revelation, as well as preexisting written material, and carefully passed on oral tradition. The prophetic author would write down all content received.

18. G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 217.

19. Eugene H. Merrill, “Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:69.

20. Merrill, “Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective,” 1:69–70; cf. Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 31–34.

The Essential Connection of Theology and Historicity

To properly understand biblical history, readers must recognize that the Bible joins together history and theology rather than keeping them separate. Scholars have chosen one of three ways to explain this connection. First, they can reject any theological undertones in biblical historical accounts and reject the historicity of those narratives altogether.²¹ Second, they might grant some of those theological underpinnings and still dismiss the comprehensive factuality of biblical history.²² Third, readers of biblical history can embrace the compelling interrelationship of theological emphases in Scripture and the accompanying historicity of those narratives. This is the position taken by the authors of this volume.

Recognizing the theological undertones in biblical narratives and dismissing their factuality misses the *significant* interrelationship of theological emphases and historicity. It is appropriate to ask this question: If the historical basis on which the supposed revelation rested was false, then why should we give any special credence to the ideas resting on that basis?²³ If we cannot be confident about historical accuracy, which we can check to a degree, how can we be confident about the Bible's affirmation of eternal truths, which we cannot check at all?

Oswalt affirms that if "God did indeed intervene in Israel's life in order to reveal himself to the world, then the reports of the events and their interpretations must be as much revelation as the actions themselves, or the whole attempt would be fruitless."²⁴ The recorded event and its meaning of factual reality must not be separated.²⁵ Yahweh's acts to intervene in human history must be accorded the same revelatory status as the biblical narratives' presentation of those events. The Bible "claims for the interpretations the same divine origin as for God's mighty acts."²⁶ As Goldingay also states, "The theology is dependent on the events, their veracity is a *sine qua non* of the validity of the theology."²⁷

21. This is the position of minimalists and more extreme liberal scholars. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974) and John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), are classic minimalists. Consult the "early second millennium setting" in the below section, "Overview of History of Israel Methods," for other explanation and proponents of this view.

22. This is the position that has been held by somewhat conservative liberal scholars like W. F. Albright (*The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* [New York: Harper & Row, 1963]), John Bright (*A History of Israel*, 4th ed., ed. William P. Brown [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000]), and several other students of Albright. These scholars attribute some historicity just to certain individuals and events.

23. John N. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 31.

24. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 141.

25. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 141–42.

26. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 142.

27. John Goldingay, "That You May Know that Yahweh Is God: A Study in the Relationship between Theology and Historical Truth in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 23 (1972): 80.

Provan, Long, and Longman correctly affirm: “Ideological literature can, in whole or in part, be historically accurate literature. We should therefore not assume *in advance* that *any* testimony about the past, whatever its ideological shaping and partiality, fails to speak about the past truthfully.”²⁸ The fact that OT historical narratives represent God demonstrating who he is and how his plan for his creation works its way out through Israel and surrounding nations (theology or ideology) leads to the selective nature of those narratives.

Ideology and Selectivity

Although the “ideology” and focus of biblical narratives cause several scholars to question the historical value of biblical narrative accounts, all historical accounts are selective.²⁹ A consideration of the parallel narratives in Scripture—2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings with 1–2 Chronicles or the parallels within the NT Synoptic Gospel accounts—clearly demonstrate that historical narratives serve as abridgments of the sum total of events and discourse that occurred (cf. John 21:25).

As the ultimate author of Scripture, God orchestrates the details of these narratives to delineate the flow of his program for his creation. Consequently, some events or individuals receive much more or less attention than others. For example, ANE historical texts present Omri, king of Israel, as a very significant king, referring to the territory of the northern kingdom as the “house of Omri” or the “land of Omri” for a century after his death.³⁰ In contrast, the narrative of Kings only devotes six verses to his reign (1 Kgs 16:23–28). The biblical prophet devoted six chapters to Omri’s son, Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29–22:40), while the narratives of Chronicles do not even refer to either of their reigns.³¹ As Merrill points out:

Only that which contributes to the story of God; i.e., to the theological intention of the text, is worthy of comment. Thus, whole centuries can

28. Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 91.

29. Here are just two categories of examples of authorial selectivity that do not imply a lack of historical reliability. First, in the account of David’s sin with Bathsheba, the biblical text focuses on David’s culpability for the immorality, attempted coverup, and murder of Uriah and gives no attention to any evidence of Bathsheba’s responsibility or guilt. The prophetic author wants the biblical interpreter to fully grasp the weight of David’s role. Second, the prophetic author(s) of Kings writes that the other events of Solomon’s, Jeroboam’s, and Rehoboam’s reign are written in “the book of the annals of Solomon” (1 Kgs 11:41), “the book of the annals of the kings of Israel” (1 Kgs 14:19), and “the book of the annals of the kings of Judah” (1 Kgs 14:29). The biblical writer(s) selects the events and people from concrete extrabiblical sources that serve their purpose (and Yahweh’s intentions) in the biblical narrative.

30. Winfried Thiel, “Omri (Person),” trans. Charles Muenchow, in *ABD* 5:19–20.

31. The narratives of 1–2 Chronicles only delineate the reigns of kings of the southern kingdom. Nevertheless, that selectivity is part of the divine agenda behind those narratives.

be bypassed (e.g., the approximately 335 years between Jacob's death and Moses' birth) or long chapters can be devoted to a relatively brief period of time (e.g., the forty years covered by Exod 12 through Deut, 125 chapters!). What happened in Hyksos Egypt was of enormous significance to world history of that period but it mattered little to the salvific story. On the other hand, the Exodus deliverance, the forming of the covenant relationship at Sinai, the giving of its stipulations, and the providential care of Israel in the desert—all these, though of no concern to the empires of the world, were crucial to the working out of sacred history. Theological history speaks loud and clear, then, by what it does not recount as well as by what it does.³²

This selectivity in OT narratives results from divine intentions. The narratives communicate what God wanted his followers to know that would help them understand his program in the past and what he intends to do in the future.

This selectivity of biblical history and the presence of clear theological emphases (often called ideology) have caused various scholars to question or totally reject the possibility that biblical history can be regarded as genuine or factual and instead identify it as fiction. Nevertheless, acknowledgment of the theological underpinnings of biblical narratives is essential to correctly understanding them.

History or Fiction

Scholars have long debated whether biblical history presents an accurate record of what actually happened or whether it represents fiction. For example, Finkelstein and Silberman write that “the historical saga contained in the Bible . . . was not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination.”³³ Miller and Hayes regard the biblical narrative regarding early Israel—their arrival in Egypt through the conquest of Canaan—as “*an artificial and theologically influenced literary construct*.”³⁴ Sparks asserts that the lack of Egyptian evidence for the Israelite exodus represents an essential argument against its historicity.³⁵ Sparks's assessment of the gap between historical or

32. Merrill, “Old Testament History: A Theological Perspective,” 1:72.

33. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 1.

34. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 78, emphasis added. See a similar perspective in Bernard Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 102.

35. Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 157.

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archaeological evidence and the Bible's claims is that "original events were much less significant historically than the Bible now remembers."³⁶ Notice how these scholars feel they know the goal of the writers of biblical history and rule out the miraculous. At least in part, they reach these conclusions because of the selectivity and the claim of divine involvement in biblical narratives.

The rejection of the possibility of historicity for biblical narratives based on divine involvement draws on dogmatic assumptions rather than clear evidence. Younger points out that various ANE narratives that scholars generally regard as reliable history also include some reference to the involvement of a given deity. He contends that the presence of divine activity in human affairs does not remove the possibility of regarding a narrative as genuine history.³⁷

Beyond that, there is something even more important to consider. The idea that a deity acted in some fashion in human affairs is not the key issue to notice. Oswalt emphasizes that biblical historians referred to divine involvement in Israel's history in their historical records *for a unique reason*, especially compared with ANE historical accounts. He points out that in biblical historical accounts alone is where Yahweh, the God of Israel, acts in a way that

had significance for human beings, that those actions were according to a consistent, long-term purpose, that he was using the details of human-historical behavior to reveal that purpose, and that he was just as capable of using enemies as he was friends to accomplish his good purposes—that, I maintain, is not found anywhere else in the world, ancient or modern, outside of the Bible and its direct derivatives. Thus, the idea of God acting in history is not unique. But *what Israel makes of that idea is unparalleled*.³⁸

That unique theological metanarrative emphasizes the historicity of the biblical narrative.³⁹

Colin Brown describes the deficiency of a minimalist approach (i.e., that

36. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words*, 157. Gösta Ahlström, a minimalist, also writes: "Biblical historiography is a literary phenomenon whose primary goal is not to create a record of factual events. . . . One may question the reliability of their product" ("The Role of Archaeological and Literary Remains in Reconstructing Israel's History," in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact, and Israel's Past*, ed. Diana V. Edelman [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991]), 118. Cf. Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: Continuum, 1988), 53.

37. K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 39. He suggests that all history is not simply objective, impartial recording of events. Cf. Millard, "Story, History, and Theology," 67–74.

38. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, 142–43; emphasis added.

39. John Walton provides five clear points of distinctiveness between biblical and ANE historical materials (*Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1989], 233–34).

of Thompson, Finkelstein, Ahlström)⁴⁰ that rejects the historicity of biblical historical accounts. He argues that without a corresponding historical base, an event like the exodus—a paradigm for God’s care for his people—offers *no genuine comfort and hope to his people of any generation*.⁴¹ Hoffmeier provides a marvelous overview of references to the exodus in scores of biblical passages, from most biblical genres, that refer to God’s deliverance of his covenant people from Egypt *as a concrete historical event*.⁴² Millard writes: “If, for example, no Israelites escaped from Egypt and made their way to the Promised Land, the exodus story becomes a pious fiction and its portrayal of a redeeming God is no more than a dream.”⁴³

Another example of an OT event that various critical scholars often regard as legend involves Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15). However, this event does not simply represent a story about an awesome intervention of Yahweh’s power in human affairs (the very reason some scholars reject its historicity). Beyond that, numerous OT and NT passages refer to it as a *paradigm of divine intervention* (Neh 9:11; Pss 66:6; 74:13; 78:53; 105:26–43; 106:9–12; 114:3, 5; Isa 63:12–13; Heb 11:29). Even in the poetic version of the Red Sea crossing (Exod 15:1–21), the song celebrates this event as evidence of Yahweh’s power, incomparability, praiseworthiness, and role as Israel’s redeemer. The historical event serves as the grounds that should compel Yahweh’s covenant people to embrace him as their great Sovereign.

Accepting the historical accuracy, rather than fictional significance, of references in Scripture to people and events in Israel’s ancient history is essential for those historical realities to have the divinely intended impact on God’s people. The historical reality of those people and events provides the basis for the revelation of God’s character, activity, and his intentions for his servant nation. Merrill affirms that “the Old Testament is the Word of God and that it is therefore reliable and authoritative not only when it teaches doctrine and theology but also when it professes to convey historical information.”⁴⁴ He goes on to write that “one cannot seriously lay claim to a theological

40. The “Overview of History of Israel Methods” below provides more summary of these critics who regard the Scriptures as a totally inadequate source for any historical reconstruction.

41. Colin Brown, *History and Faith: A Personal Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 76.

42. James K. Hoffmeier, “These Things Happened: Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, 112–132. In chapter 3 of this volume, we will pay more attention to the historicity of the exodus from Egypt.

43. Millard, “Story, History, and Theology,” 38. Even William Dever, a liberal OT scholar, wonders why “the Bible is automatically held guilty unless proven innocent” (*What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 128).

44. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 25.

history of the Old Testament that does not draw upon actual historical events that took place precisely as the biblical texts describe them.”⁴⁵

OVERVIEW OF HISTORY OF ISRAEL METHODS

Scholars have taken various approaches over the past several centuries concerning Israel’s history.⁴⁶ A brief survey of their methods is particularly valuable in understanding why various scholars reach such different conclusions. For the sake of brevity, this survey will focus on their approaches to patriarchal narratives as representative of their interpretive method.

Early Criticism of the Pentateuch

As source criticism developed in the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries AD, critical scholars rejected any historical value for the pentateuchal materials and assumed a late final composition of the Pentateuch (ca. 400 BC, according to the JEDP theory). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Julius Wellhausen, who systematized source criticism, was inclined to view Abraham “as a free creation of unconscious art.”⁴⁷ He also wrote that in Genesis, “we attain no knowledge of the patriarchs, but only of the time when the stories about them arose in the Israelite people.”⁴⁸

Historicity

Referring to critical scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, Drane, a source critic, writes that proponents of source criticism regarded the patriarchal narratives (and the patriarchs) “either as fiction, or as the vaguely remembered exploits of tribes—even at times of ancient deities—personified to become the story of just a few individuals. On this view, people like the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . *could not be regarded as real people*, but as representations of various social and religious movements in the millennium before Israel became a nation in the true sense.”⁴⁹

45. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 26.

46. A fuller overview of that history from a critical perspective can be found in John H. Hayes, “The History of the Study of Israelite and Judaeon History,” in *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 1–69, and a helpful treatment from an evangelical perspective in Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 25–37.

47. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: Black, 1885), 320.

48. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 318–19. Wellhausen adds: “This later age is here unconsciously projected . . . into hoar [very ancient] antiquity . . . and is reflected there like a glorified mirage” (p. 19).

49. John W. Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Lion Scholar, 2019), 133, emphasis added.

Mid-First Millennium Setting

Proponents of this view assumed that the customs, as well as the personal and place names of the Pentateuch, are totally out of place in the timeframe envisioned by the patriarchal narratives (i.e., second millennium) but belong to a much later period and are therefore not accurate or historical presentations of those realities.

This consensus significantly impacted seminaries and churches of main-line denominations throughout Europe and the United States until a significant shift was engineered by critical scholars who paid careful attention to archaeological discoveries in the ancient Near East in the early 1900s.

W. F. Albright and His Students

Historicity

In the mid-twentieth century, W. F. Albright and others challenged the widespread skepticism that characterized biblical scholarship. They embraced the patriarchs as generally historical and set them against the background of the Middle Bronze II Age (ca. 1900–1550 BC).⁵⁰ Albright affirmed that “archeological and inscriptional data have established the historicity of innumerable passages and statements of the Old Testament.”⁵¹

Early Second Millennium Setting

As part of those efforts to change the direction of critical scholarship, Albright and several of his students (E. A. Speiser, Cyrus H. Gordon, G. E. Wright, John Bright, and others) invested significant energy in pointing out various practices in the ANE world that they believed served as parallels to customs found in the biblical accounts describing the patriarchs. In contrast with what the earlier critical scholars had affirmed without reservation, these parallels served to demonstrate that the patriarchal accounts described generally historical individuals who lived in antiquity, rather than being literary projections from a much later period.⁵²

In 1949, Albright wrote that only “a few diehards among older scholars”

50. W. F. Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, and Early Biblical Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 22–41; Cyrus H. Gordon, “Biblical Customs and the Nuzi Tablets,” *BA* 3 (1940): 1–12; Gordon, “Hebrew Origins in the Light of Recent Discoveries,” *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 3–14.

51. W. F. Albright, “Archaeology Confronts Biblical Criticism,” *American Scholar* 7, no. 2 (1938): 181.

52. John Bright strongly affirmed: “We can assert with full confidence that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were actual historical individuals . . . a part of that migration of seminomadic clans which brought a new population to Palestine in the early centuries of the second millennium BC” (*A History of Israel*, 92). Cf. M. J. Selman, “The Social Environment of the Patriarchs,” *TynBul* 27 (1976): 114–16, and nn.

had not accepted the essential historicity of the patriarchal traditions in light of the “rapid accumulation of data supporting the substantial historicity of patriarchal traditions.”⁵³ It was no longer fashionable to view those traditions as artificial creations by the scribes of the monarchic period.⁵⁴

Although this return to acceptance of at least some historical credibility for biblical narratives was refreshing, it also demonstrated the need for scholars to use discernment and caution in making strong connections between a given ANE practice and biblical customs. Nevertheless, the critical consensus quickly returned in extreme forms (next view) and more traditional ways (fourth view below).

Minimalists

In the mid-1970s, several scholars (generally affiliated with the University of Copenhagen and the University of Sheffield) evaluated Albright’s and his students’ work. They correctly pointed out several overstatements in their conclusions regarding the alleged parallels between numerous ANE practices and vocabulary and those in the OT.⁵⁵

No Historicity

Proponents of this perspective found little use for biblical narratives for any historical reconstruction.⁵⁶ According to Lemche, the Bible presents a situation where “Israel is not Israel, Jerusalem not Jerusalem, and David not David. No matter how we twist the factual remains from ancient Palestine, we cannot have a biblical Israel that is at the same time the Israel of the Iron Age.”⁵⁷

Instead of modifying the conclusions that preceded them, these scholars (often called “minimalists”⁵⁸) *abandoned* the views of Albright and Gordon

1–8, for these and other scholars who made much of various customs in the ANE that they believed were clear parallels with patriarchal practices, demonstrating the historicity and antiquity of the Patriarchs.

53. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, 2. He placed the sojourn by Terah and Abram from Ur to Harran in “about the third quarter of the twentieth century BC” (ca. 1925 BC).

54. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, 2.

55. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*; and D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Gösta Ahlström, Philip Davies, Niels Lemche, and Keith Whitlam are other scholars with similar positions.

56. Provan, Long, and Longman described this approach as “historical revisionism with a vengeance” (*A Biblical History of Israel*, 105).

57. Niels Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 166. Thomas Thompson states without equivocation that one must discount “what is obviously non-historical,” i.e., the miraculous (“History and Tradition: A Response to J. B. Geyer,” *JSOT* 15 [1980]: 59).

58. William G. Dever, “Hershel’s Crusade, No. 2: For King and Country: Chronology and Minimalism,” *BAR* 44, no. 2 (2018): 31–36; Hershel Shanks, “Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers,” *BAR* 23, no. 4 (1997): 26–29, 32–38, 40–42, 66.

(and other scholars who embraced their views)⁵⁹ and instead denied once again the historicity of the patriarchs and the historical reliability of the patriarchal narratives. They rejected the use of archaeology to confirm the antiquity of biblical characters and events except for the latter part of the divided monarchy.

Late First Millennium Setting

According to one minimalist author, “not only has ‘archaeology’ *not proven* a single event of the patriarchal traditions to be historical, it has not shown any of the patriarchal traditions to be likely.”⁶⁰ They regard the patriarchal narratives as nonhistorical literature of the late first millennium BC, even as late as the Persian or Hellenistic periods. They contend that there is absolutely no archaeological or ancient literary evidence that supports a second millennium setting for the patriarchs.⁶¹

Later Critical Scholars—Consensus Liberal View

Minimal to No Historicity

Even though the above minimalist view has not had a widespread impact on critical scholarship, several critical scholars have embraced some of the points made by minimalists, reacting to some excesses concerning several of the parallels suggested by Albright and others. Consequently, they moved back toward the standard critical perspective, dating from the time of Wellhausen on, concerning the patriarchs and the biblical narratives describing them. Nevertheless, John Bright (a student of Albright) continued advocating a historical exodus from Egypt and some kind of conquest of Canaan. Even though he did not regard all the biblical details as actual history, he accepted the general historicity of those accounts.⁶² His starting point was the assumption that “the writing of history must begin with an analysis of the documents of history.”⁶³

59. Cf. E. F. Campbell and J. Maxwell Miller, “W. F. Albright and Historical Reconstruction,” *BA* 42, no. 1 (1979): 37–47. In this article, Campbell favors Albright’s conclusions, while Miller rejects them.

60. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 328 (emphasis added). A statement like this sounds impressive, but it is not based on evidence. It is an argument from silence. Many events, people, and traditions that scholars embrace as reliable also have no archaeological evidence but are presented as factual in ancient literary sources. We discuss skepticism without “evidence” below.

61. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 187–193; van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, 104–112. It is a valid observation that we have limited archaeological evidence for the third- and early second-millennium timeframe.

62. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 120.

63. John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing. A Study in Method* (London: SCM, 1956), 122.

Gradually, however, by the end of the twentieth century, many scholars had totally returned to nineteenth-century opinions about *the lack of any substantive historical reality* behind Israel's ancestral traditions.⁶⁴ As Dever points out, "After a century of exhaustive investigation, all respectable archaeologists have given up hope of recovering any context that would make Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob credible 'historical figures.'"⁶⁵ He adds that "no scholar . . . thinks these materials anything other than 'myth.'"⁶⁶ McCarter regards the patriarchal narratives as *ideology*, not *history*.⁶⁷

Varied Settings Suggested

Some scholars affirm that the story of the patriarchs in its final form reflects the community's self-understanding at the end of the settlement period, about 1000 BC.⁶⁸ However, after dismissing all the evidence that Albright, his students, and evangelical scholars have presented, John Collins affirms that there is, then, "no positive evidence that requires us to set the background of the patriarchs in the early or middle part of the second millennium. . . . Even if we allow that some references may have been added secondarily, this evidence makes it unlikely that these stories originated earlier than the end of the second millennium B.C.E. or the beginning of the first."⁶⁹

Consensus Evangelical View

This section discusses two evangelical views on the patriarchs in Israel's history, whether they lived in ca. 2100 BC or 1900 BC.

Historicity

Proponents of this view have demonstrated that several parallels between Middle Bronze archives and the book of Genesis have *genuine value* for grasping the general timeframe of the patriarchs.⁷⁰ The fundamental point of

64. Bill T. Arnold, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 91.

65. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, 98. He also affirms that scholars "have long recognized that only with the United Monarchy, beginning in the early tenth century BC, do we have reasonably reliable historical sources ("Archaeology and the Bible—Understanding Their Special Relationship," *BAR* 16, no. 3 [1990]: 52–53).

66. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, 98, n. 1

67. P. Kyle McCarter Jr. "The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," in *From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 18.

68. McCarter, "The Patriarchal Age," 19.

69. John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: An Inductive Reading of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 85–86.

70. M. J. Selman, "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age," in *Essays on the Patriarchal*

these parallels is twofold. They demonstrate that the people and the customs described in the book of Genesis can be credibly regarded as historical and that those customs point to an early second millennium (or earlier⁷¹) setting for those narratives.

Late Third or Early Second Millennium Setting

Richard Hess provides the broad chronological parameters of the patriarchal period in light of various lines of evidence: “On multiple levels, from a wealth of archaeological and textual evidence, the world of the ancestors as described in Genesis 12–50 is identical to the world of the Middle Bronze Age in the region of the Levant, ca. 2200–1600 BCE.”⁷² Kenneth Kitchen documents several other features in the patriarchal narrative that fit *only* the Middle Bronze Age horizon.⁷³ For example, Joseph’s brothers received twenty shekels for their young brother (Gen 37:28), approximately the right price in the eighteenth century BC. As Kitchen points out, this represents the average price in the laws of Hammurabi (expressed as one-third of a mina there; §§116, 214, 252), exactly that amount in real-life transactions at Mari, as well as in other Old Babylonian documents (within a fifteen to thirty shekel range, averaging twenty-two shekels).⁷⁴ He also compares the form of the treaties found in Genesis with those that characterized Mari and Leilan in the early second millennium BC.⁷⁵

Summary

The above section provides a broad summary of different approaches to ancient Israel’s history, focusing on the patriarchs as a narrow interpretive

Narratives, ed. Alan R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 91–139; Daniel E. Fleming, “Genesis in History and Tradition: The Syrian Background of Israel’s Ancestors, Reprise,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan R. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 193–232; Bill T. Arnold, “The Genesis Narratives,” in *Ancient Israel’s History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 23–45.

71. The evidence for the historicity and the early second-millennium setting for the patriarchs summarized here also has relevance for the late third-millennium view of the patriarchs’ origin.

72. Richard S. Hess, “The Ancestral Period,” in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 193.

73. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *OROT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 316–22. For other examples, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), xx–xxv, xxx–xxxv.

74. Kitchen, *OROT*, 344. Kitchen provides a nice visual of this comparison in “The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?” *BAR* 21, no. 2 (1995): 53. See Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 117.

75. Kitchen, “The Patriarchal Age,” 52–55. I would posit that the evidence cited by Kitchen and Hess does not exclude a late third-millennium setting for the patriarchs. Other biblical chronological factors loom large in one’s conclusions on this specific point.

issue (for brevity and simplicity). Numerous subcategories of views have also been presented in the last half-century that are not covered by this overview.

Long summarizes the fundamental question evident in the various methodologies and assumptions employed by history of Israel scholars over the years: “The basic question, in other words, is whether the OT can be viewed as a worthy source, even if not an exhaustive or exclusive one, for the reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel.”⁷⁶ Sharp disagreement among contemporary scholars on this question continues to the present time. The present volume gives first consideration to biblical texts, carefully considering potential insights from extrabiblical texts, archaeological artifacts, and a few other relevant disciplines.

Therefore, this volume echoes Merrill’s emphatic statement:

Although sources of all kinds make essential contributions to the reconstruction of the past, they are of different weight or value, particularly in terms of biblical research. The Bible occupies a place of unchallenged supremacy and authority, at least to readers who accept its truth claims at face value. Christians who hold the Bible to be inerrant Scripture have no more need to apologize for their *a priori* conviction than do skeptics who, on the same philosophical grounds, view it as mere fable or unsupportable religious tradition. At the same time, Christian historians are obligated to examine sources critically, that is, with minds open to the complexity and perplexity attendant to the historical data with which they must deal.⁷⁷

BIBLICAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Basic Definition of Archaeology

The term “archaeology” literally means “a study of ancient things.” Currid points out that the “primary goal of archaeology is to *discover, observe, preserve, and record the buried remains of antiquity and to use them to help reconstruct ancient life.*”⁷⁸ The discipline of biblical archaeology provides a greater understanding of the land and culture, helping the interpreter better understand the biblical context (their time) to correctly preach and teach Bible passages to their current audience (our time).

76. Long, “Old Testament History: A Hermeneutical Perspective,” 1:87.

77. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 31.

78. John D. Currid, *The Case for Biblical Archaeology: Uncovering the Historical Record of God’s Old Testament People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020), 5.

Although archaeology offers many benefits to studying biblical history, scholars debate the exact relationship between these two disciplines. Archaeological work began in earnest in the Middle East in the last half of the nineteenth century AD. Some work took place in the Levant (Syria, Jordan, and Israel), but the main focus was on major sites in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Several literary archives⁷⁹ were uncovered that provided an enlightening window into the culture of the ANE world.⁸⁰ Although these and other discoveries impacted the course of critical methodologies, the unearthed ANE archives and artifacts had varied impact on the interpretation of biblical history (see above summary of the ebb and flow of history of ancient Israel studies).

Artifacts Versus Biblical Text

First, as stated above, minimalists affirm that only clear archaeological discoveries in the latter part of Israel's history, not the written text of Scripture, deserve careful attention for reconstructing Israel's ancient history.⁸¹ Second, a larger group of more traditional liberal scholars seeks to interact with archaeology and biblical texts. Although their exact methods vary, archaeology carries more objective weight than the authority of the biblical text. It represents independent data that existed in real life. On the other hand, they contend, texts are simply products of the writer's imagination.⁸² Minimalists conclude that artifacts provide an objectivity absent from written texts.

However, the objectivity of artifactual evidence and the interpretation of those artifacts must not be assumed, as Gary Knoppers, a liberal scholar, points out:

Comparing literary texts with material evidence is highly fraught, but concentration on material remains is *no guarantee of objectivity*. Interpreting material artifacts themselves is *a profoundly subjective enterprise*. The significance of material remains, no less than literary remains, *is not self-evident*. In dealing with excavated sites, archaeologists differ in their assumptions,

79. For example, the Rosetta Stone, the Behistun Inscription, and the Amarna letters.

80. See helpful summaries of this early phase of archaeological work in James K. Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson, 2008), 13–17; Currid, *The Case for Biblical Archaeology*, 32–38. *COS* is a three-volume compendium of translated ANE literature.

81. Gösta W Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 28–29, 44.

82. Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 10.

questions, methods, dating of strata, and understanding of critical material finds. Even when they employ the same methods and agree on the dating of strata, scholars may come to contradictory conclusions about the significance of relevant remains.⁸³

A scholar must recognize that an archaeological discovery alone provides the basis for only general conclusions. Considering the written source in conjunction with the archaeological discovery will provide many specifics. Therefore, one's approach to God's word will affect one's view of the significance of an archaeological discovery.⁸⁴

Our knowledge of the past, Israel's ancient history, depends on "testimony." Since biblical testimony provides the fullest presentation of that history,

it must be folly to marginalize biblical testimony in any modern attempt to recount the history of Israel. It can be considered perfectly rational to consider that testimony along with other testimonies. . . . We should make our judgments on a case-by-case basis, however, rather than prejudging the matter by utilizing faulty methodological criteria that allegedly lead us to "firm ground" for historiography within or outside of biblical testimony.⁸⁵

The testimony of Scripture, ancient literary texts, and archaeological artifacts all require interpretation, and all interpreters have presuppositions and different starting points. Since archaeological artifacts are mute, interpreting them involves greater subjectivity than interpreting biblical texts.⁸⁶

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

As a biblical historian interacts with archaeological artifacts or ANE literary evidence, evaluation and interpretation are appropriate. However, neither "blind faith in testimony, nor radical suspicion in response to it, is necessary (or sensible)."⁸⁷ Over the last fifty years in particular, as critical

83. Gary N. Knoppers, "The Vanishing Solomon: The Disappearance of the United Monarchy from Recent Histories of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 116, no. 1 (1997): 44 (emphasis added).

84. J. Maxwell Miller, *The Old Testament and the Historian* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 46–47.

85. I. Provan, "Knowing and Believing Faith in the Past," in *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. Bartholomew et al., Scripture and Hermeneutic Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003), 262–63.

86. Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 24.

87. Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 53.

scholars seek to explain how archaeology should impact biblical interpretation, they generally assume that the Bible is unreliable and erroneous until this or that passage is *proven* to be correct based on some independent source.

The reigns of David and Solomon serve as one of the historical periods that often receive this general skepticism. In describing David's historicity, McCarter writes: "No archaeological discovery can be securely linked to him. . . . We cannot assume, therefore, that a statement about David in a given part of the Bible derives from an early source. The David of Chronicles, for example, is the idealized David of the Second Commonwealth, not the David of history."⁸⁸ In response, Provan, Long, and Longman helpfully critique this liberal presupposition that tends to ask for corroboration of the biblical text "before the text is taken seriously, rather than asking whether evidence shows that the text should not be taken seriously."⁸⁹

Alan Millard also writes: "Biblical commentators have long approached the texts from a negatively critical standpoint, producing negative results, claiming that without independent support the statements of the texts cannot be accepted. Nevertheless, discovery after discovery points to the accuracy of biblical narrators and the reality of the circumstances they portray."⁹⁰

He also points to a ridiculous assumption on the part of the critics, that historical events and people would take care that clear evidence supporting their existence or accuracy was left behind for people to find centuries later:

One aspect of archaeological evidence that needs constant recognition is its random nature. Ancient people did not bury their possessions so that archaeologists might discover them. Nor did they leave in their houses or their tombs fully representative selections of all their belongings (except perhaps in Egyptian tombs). What the archaeologist can recover, therefore, is only partial and always incomplete evidence for ancient activities.⁹¹

In this volume, we seek to carefully consider archaeological discoveries as we embrace the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Artifacts do not enjoy

88. P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Historical David," *Int* 40, no. 2 (1986): 117. Of course, McCarter authored this article before the discovery of the Tel Dan Inscription in 1993. This is an example of how the absence of archaeological artifacts leads a scholar to question the historical reality of an event or person.

89. Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 250.

90. Alan R. Millard, "Did the Patriarchs Meet Philistines," in *"An Excellent Fortress for His Armies, a Refuge for the People": Egyptological, Archaeological, and Biblical Studies in Honor of James K. Hoffmeier*, ed. Richard E. Averbeck and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 230.

91. Alan R. Millard, "Texts and Archaeology—Weighing the Evidence: The Case for King Solomon," *PEQ* 123 (1991): 21.

a privileged position in how we understand the biblical presentation of history. As Provan, Long, and Longman affirm, “archaeology cannot function as a ‘high court’ in historical research, pronouncing upon the truth of the past independently of testimony.”⁹²

The Value of Archaeology

Archaeology offers the interpreter great potential value in studying Scripture and “reconstructing” Israel’s ancient history. However, interpreters must consider its built-in limitations. We will consider its benefits or value first.

The discoveries of biblical archaeology lend credibility to the Bible. Frequently, they clarify the text, most often adding color and background. The historical setting that archaeology provides generally confirms the setting the biblical text presumes.

Nevertheless, we must avoid saying archaeology “proves the Bible.” Archaeological evidence never provides *certifiable proof* that a given individual lived or that a particular event took place. Our confidence in the accuracy and historicity of the people and events referred to in God’s word draws on other evidence, primarily theological statements the Bible makes about itself.

Biblical archaeology functions with the values of illumination and confirmation, among others.⁹³

Illumination

This value serves as the most prominent benefit of archaeological work. Many discoveries shed light on various aspects of life in the ANE world. This contributes to a biblical reader’s understanding of a passage and enhances their ability to teach that passage with clarity, accuracy, and impact.

Cultural and historical setting. In several instances, archaeology makes an otherwise unclear practice understandable. Archaeological digs have uncovered scores of artifacts that shed light on daily life in Israel. Examples of helpful discoveries involve threshing floors and sleds, winnowing forks, olive presses, cisterns, marriage practices, horned altars, boundary stones, and housing layout. These discoveries help students of Scripture understand practices referred to in biblical texts. This knowledge helps them interpret biblical narratives that include those practices or artifacts that are outside of a reader’s experience or knowledge.

92. Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 53.

93. These categories of “value” are revised from Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 16–21.

Knowledge of people, places, things, and events. There is much we do not know about the biblical world and details of the life it recounts. Archaeology often adds to our understanding of several people and events in that world. Archaeology has added to the biographies of dozens of Bible characters. Obviously, there are many historical gaps in the Bible. Scripture mentions only a selection of individuals and events. Archaeology has recorded many events that supply illuminating details passed over in the biblical account. The inscriptions below supplement what the Bible describes, filling in gaps in our knowledge.⁹⁴

- The *Merneptah Stela* (ca. 1208 BC) is a large stela that describes Pharaoh Merneptah's campaign through the Syria-Palestine region. He refers to his encounter with "Israel" (as a people) and claims to have wiped them out.⁹⁵
- The *Kurkh Monolith* (The Chronicles of Assyrian kings, 853 BC) refers to Ahab's participation in the battle of Qarqar against Shalmaneser III.
- The *Tel Dan Inscription* (ca. 830 BC) is an Aramean inscription that includes the phrase "house of David" to describe Ahaziah, king of Judah. It was one of the first extrabiblical references to David as the originator of a dynasty of kings.
- The *Black Obelisk* (841 BC) is a relief commissioned by Shalmaneser III. It depicts Jehu, an Israelite king, bowing down before Shalmaneser and offering him tribute.
- The *Moabite Stone* (820 BC) is a stone memorial inscribed by King Mesha of Moab that speaks of the strength of Omri's dynasty and Israel's weakness during the reign of Jehu.
- *Sennacherib's Prism* (ca. 701 BC) describes the Assyrian conquest of much of Judah in the late eighth century BC.

Confirmation

Archaeology also provides "*confirmation*" of people, places, and events. Although the Bible does not need to be "proven" as God's word, archaeology

94. These are further explained in the following chapters, where a given inscription sheds light on a person or event referred to in the biblical narrative.

95. The line referring to Israel affirms: "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not." Although many scholars suggest that Merneptah claims to have exterminated Israel, Michael G. Hasel suggests that Merneptah took all the grain from the areas he conquered in Israel ("Israel in the Merneptah Stela," *BASOR* 296 [1994]: 48).

has repeatedly *supported* its authenticity. It can give credence to the existence of a person, custom, or event. Scores of archaeological findings have been made that confirm historical statements in the Bible in clear outline or exact detail.

Some examples of archaeological discoveries that provide a “ring of truth” for biblical realities include the practice of writing in early Israel,⁹⁶ the existence of a Hittite empire,⁹⁷ evidence that David established a royal dynasty, Hezekiah’s labors on Jerusalem’s water system,⁹⁸ and bullae or seals.⁹⁹ Subsequent chapters will provide dozens of examples of these discoveries, which support the reliability of Scripture’s presentation of historical realities.

Summary of the Value of Archaeology

Archaeological discoveries relating to biblical lands offer the interpreter of Scripture various benefits:

1. These discoveries help the reader of Scripture reconstruct patterns of ancient biblical life. Archaeology provides a better understanding of the cultural and historical context of numerous passages, which is essential to accurate and relevant teaching and preaching.
2. Although it does not “prove” the Bible, archaeology can provide *confirmation* of people, places, and events.
3. It illustrates or explains various cultural implements and practices from the biblical world with which most interpreters are unfamiliar.
4. It can expand our understanding of various biblical people, places, and events.
5. It provides inscriptions that give us a clearer picture of the biblical and ancient Near Eastern worlds.

96. Alan Millard, “The Knowledge of Writing in Iron Age Palestine,” *TynBul* 46, no. 2 (1995): 207–17; Richard S. Hess, “Literacy in Iron Age Israel,” in *Windows into Old Testament History*, 82–102.

97. Philo H. J. Houwink ten Cate, “Hittite History,” in *ABD* 3:220–21; cf. Aharon Kempinski, “Hittites in the Bible: What Does Archaeology Say?” *BAR* 5, no. 5 (1979): 20–43.

98. David Tarler and Jane M. Cahill, “David, City of (Place),” in *ABD* 2:62–64.

99. Bullae or seals are hardened pieces of clay that sealed messages sent by an authority figure. Scholars have found hundreds of them in various archaeological digs. They refer to names that match the period and place of people mentioned in various biblical passages. The interesting aspect of this category of artifacts is that they involve less significant people in biblical narratives, confirming their existence as described in those narratives. See Ariel Winderbaum, “The Iconic Seals and Bullae of the Iron Age,” in *The Summit of the City of David Excavations, 2005–2008, Final Reports, Volume I—Area G*, ed. Eilat Mazar (Jerusalem: Shoham, 2015), 363–419.

The Limitations of Archaeology
Archaeology Does Not Demonstrate Everything
That Happened or Existed in the Past

How much material from ancient times is available to study today? According to John Currid, “What archaeology provides for the reconstruction of culture is by nature fragmentary, piecemeal, and incomplete.”¹⁰⁰ In the end, scholars draw on several other disciplines to better understand the culture of a certain period of biblical times: anthropology, geography, geology, history, and linguistics.¹⁰¹

In his book *The Stones and the Scriptures*, Edwin Yamauchi interacts with the issue of the fragmentary nature of archaeological evidence.¹⁰² The following five statements serve as subheadings in the section of his chapter entitled “the fragmentary nature of the evidence”; that is, the fraction of evidence that has survived, been surveyed, excavated, examined, and published. According to Yamauchi:

Now if one could by an optimistic estimate reckon that one-tenth of our materials and inscriptions have survived, that six-tenths of the available sites have been surveyed, that one-fiftieth of these sites have been excavated, that one-tenth of the excavated sites have been examined, and that one-half of the materials and inscriptions excavated have been published, one would have $(1/10 \times 6/10 \times 1/50 \times 1/10 \times 1/2)$ at hand but six, one hundred-thousandths $[6/100,000]$ of all the possible evidence.¹⁰³

Of course, Yamauchi’s estimates are not precise but reasonable. The primary takeaway from the total figure that results from these estimates involves recognizing that only a comparatively tiny amount of evidence left behind by the Israelites has been excavated and explained. This reality should cause scholars to be cautious about presenting far-reaching conclusions that determine skeptical interpretive conclusions that do not consider the biblical narrative seriously.

100. Currid, *The Case for Biblical Archaeology*, 6.

101. All these disciplines have objective, scientific, and subjective interpretations of data. We must always remember that presuppositions in the realm of belief and method clearly impact one’s conclusions (as they do for us).

102. Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures* (New York: Lippincott, 1972), 146–57.

103. Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*, 156.

Archaeological Evidence Should Not Serve as the Ultimate Basis for a Written Text's Historical Reliability

As stated above, in the section on “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” scholars who begin their understanding of biblical texts with skepticism seem to ignore the fact that archaeological remains also need interpretation. Archaeological objects are “mute” while biblical texts provide us with interpretation of events. Both categories of interpreters begin with a certain set of presuppositions. Archaeology has no automatic greater authority.¹⁰⁴

After describing what is known about the Amorite domination of Babylon in the mid-second millennium BC, Millard points out that *no archaeological artifacts* provide evidence of that change in power. There are no apparent changes in building structure, pottery styles, or technological innovations, e.g., glassmaking, horse training, or ironworking. He concludes: “Only the texts prove the presence of Amorites in Babylonia.”¹⁰⁵

Millard also argues that ancient documents (including biblical accounts) should be carefully considered unless “there is conclusive, indisputable evidence against them, or very strong statements indeed for which no alternatives can be found.”¹⁰⁶ Of course, interpretation of those ancient texts must occur, but in accordance with the world of those texts rather than modern theories and realities that treat ancient texts as sources of little worth. Millard encourages interpreters who embrace biblical inspiration to interpret ancient narratives with the author’s standpoint in mind. That should motivate interpreters to pursue interpretations that do not easily deny the affirmations of biblical texts or regard them as sources of little value.¹⁰⁷

There is no doubt that regarding biblical texts as reliable sources for accurate history or rejecting their reliability has a clear impact on the direction of someone’s research and the interpretive conclusions that an interpreter of Scripture will make. The question is this: Is it even-handed scholarship to reject the credibility of a written text based on the assumption that the textual source offers nothing credible unless all of its content has been certified through

104. Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 24.

105. Alan R. Millard, “Amorites and Israelites: Invisible Invaders—Modern Expectation and Ancient Reality,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan R. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 152.

106. Millard, “Amorites and Israelites,” 160.

107. Millard also gives two other examples of skeptical modern interpretations of biblical texts: scholars who view the biblical description of Solomon’s wealth as though it were in the Arabian Nights genre or those who reject the biblical statement of God’s intervention on Hezekiah’s behalf. See Alan R. Millard, “King Solomon in His Ancient Context,” in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium*, ed. Lowell K. Handy, SHCANE 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 25–29, 30–53, esp. 31–42; Millard, “Sennacherib’s Attack on Hezekiah,” *TynBul* 36 (1985): 61–77.

external or archaeological sources? Why not start with the possibility that a biblical text correctly presents the existence of a person, place, or event before dismissing it as a credible or historically reliable source? Millard recognizes that “the results of all studies should rest on facts known about the biblical world and interpretations that are consistent with current knowledge of that world.”¹⁰⁸

Considering the fragmentary nature of archaeological evidence, all scholars should be cautious about stating that something presented with clarity in the Bible did not happen, is not true, or did not happen in the way a biblical narrative describes it. On the other hand, it is also impossible to use archaeology to *prove* the Bible. Because of the relatively random nature of artifactual evidence, archaeology also does not provide scholars with enough evidence to prove that every single biblical event happened precisely how the Bible presents it.¹⁰⁹

Archaeology Is Not Totally Objective and Without Bias

Rainey points to the built-in subjectivity of archaeological interpretations and the flawed conclusions archaeologists have reached; he calls them “howlers.”¹¹⁰ He adds: “Too often the opinion of an excavator has usurped the place of true archeological evidence.”¹¹¹ According to William Dever, “Good scholars, honest scholars, will continue to differ about the interpretation of archaeological remains simply because archaeology is not a science. It is an art. And sometimes it is not even a very good art.”¹¹²

Jericho is often cited as a “parade example” of how archaeology has shown the Bible to be historically unreliable. John Strange states that it “goes without saying that the book [of Joshua] as such does not relate any actual conquest and division of the promised land to Joshua. Everybody agrees on that.”¹¹³

108. Millard, “Amorites and Israelites,” 160.

109. The authors of this volume enthusiastically embrace the belief that what the Bible says about itself (inspired, inerrant, true, and infallible) provides the foundation for how we should view the historical narratives of Scripture. Archaeology can illuminate or confirm the existence of a historical event, place, or person. However, the purpose of archaeology is not to prove or disprove that the Bible presents a true and accurate history.

110. Anson F. Rainey, “Historical Geography—The Link Between Historical and Archeological Interpretation,” *BA* 45, no. 4 (1982): 220–21.

111. Rainey, “Historical Geography,” 222.

112. Hershel Shanks, “Is This Man a Biblical Archaeologist? BAR Interviews William Dever—Part One,” *BAR* 22, no. 4 (1996): 35.

113. John Strange, “The Book of Joshua: A Hasmonian Manifesto?” in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to Eduard Nielsen*, ed. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 141. John Van Seters also writes: “The invasion of the land of Canaan by Israel under Joshua was an invention of DtrH [the Deuteronomistic Historian]. The conquest narrative is a good example of ancient historiography, but it cannot pass for historical by any modern criteria of historical evaluation” (“Joshua’s Campaign of Canaan and Near Eastern Historiography,” in *Israel’s Past in Present Research*, 180).

After digging at Jericho from 1952–1958, Kathleen Kenyon concluded that the destruction of City IV occurred at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, ca. 1550 BC, and that the wall structure of the city that collapsed outward should be dated to that time. She also affirmed that the city was unoccupied for several centuries after that.¹¹⁴ This meant that Joshua and the Israelites had no city of Jericho to conquer, and so there is no evidence for any historical reality behind the narrative of Josh 6. For most biblical scholars and archaeologists, this removed all evidence for both the early and late dates of Israel’s conquest of Canaan. More broadly, it created a scholarly consensus in the critical world that the biblical account of the conquest had absolutely no historical basis.

However, archaeologists’ interpretive worldview—impacting how they interpret archaeological evidence and the consideration they give or don’t give to biblical input—plays a significant role in reaching their interpretive conclusions. If a scholar gives Scripture input first consideration *as a reliable historical source*, that creates an awareness that must be part of the interpretive process. Notice the following correlations between some of the archaeological evidence and the content of Josh 6:

Biblical Input	Archaeological Evidence
The city was strongly fortified (Josh 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20).	Jericho had a double wall around the city.
The attack occurred just after harvest time in the spring (Josh 2:6; 3:15; 5:10).	Archaeologists uncovered numerous storage jars full of barley, the crop harvested in early spring. Full storage jars point to a short rather than a customary long siege by the attacking army.
The inhabitants had no opportunity to flee with their stored grain (Josh 6:1); that valuable grain was not taken as plunder by the invaders (Josh 6:18–19)	
The siege was short (Josh 6:15).	
The walls were leveled and fell outward (Josh 6:20).	All archaeological teams found evidence of walls that collapsed outward except at the north end of the tell.
The city was burned (Josh 6:24).	Archaeologists uncovered various clear burn layers at different places on the tell, part of the same layer of destruction.

114. Kathleen Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho* (London: Benn, 1957), 262.

Archaeologists were not unaware of this archaeological evidence. However, their interpretive methods did not include giving serious consideration to Scripture. Their interpretive worldview or presuppositions influenced their conclusions. All archaeologists and students of Scripture have an interpretive worldview and approach Scripture and archaeology with various presuppositions. The question raised here is whether those preunderstandings allow room for or preclude serious consideration of Scripture. Interpretation inherently involves biases that affect outcomes.

For example, Kenyon's interpretation of the pottery evidence played a crucial role in her conclusions about Jericho.¹¹⁵ Her methodology and interpretive worldview clearly impacted her conclusions. Her rejection of the potential of Joshua actually leading Israel's conquest of Jericho is not only based on the archaeological evidence and her interpretive worldview, but limited amounts of evidence also skewed her conclusions. She makes several conclusions based on what she and her team did not find. Many have stated that the massive erosion of the site and the less-than-convincing nature of the archaeological evidence make any conclusion based solely on that archaeological evidence somewhat tentative.

Amihai Mazar, who does not regard Josh 6 as a factual presentation of what actually happened at Jericho, stated:

The finds at Jericho, however, show that a settlement was present during the Late Bronze Age, though most of its remains were eroded or removed by human activity. Perhaps, as at other sites, the massive Middle Bronze fortifications were reutilized in the Late Bronze Age. Archaeological evidence provides evidence that the occupation gap in Iron Age I followed the Late Bronze settlement at Jericho. Thus, in the case of Jericho, the archaeological data cannot serve as *decisive evidence to deny a historical nucleus* in the book of Joshua concerning the conquest of this city.¹¹⁶

There are times that interpretive preunderstandings rather than compelling evidence provide the impetus for conclusions based on archaeology. Let us summarize a key point in the above section. First, what a biblical passage

115. The presence of Egyptian amulets and the carbon dating of burnt wood and grain also play a role in her conclusion and the continuing discussion on the issue. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jericho*, 58, 73–74, 228–29.

116. Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 331; emphasis added. In chapter 4 of this volume, we will give more attention to the archaeological evidence unearthed at Jericho.

provides does not answer every question that relates to a given historical site (date of destruction, manner of destruction, size of population, or all social structures). Second, the Bible does provide important authoritative information that sheds light on key interpretive questions. Third, archaeological discoveries also have genuine limitations. The bias of the interpreter of that data plays a significant role in their interpretation. The authors of this volume believe that historians and interpreters of Scripture must be more cautious about allowing archaeological conclusions to serve as the primary arbiter of how we should understand a biblical passage that also has historical import. Instead, Scripture should be given first consideration as we draw on other areas of evidence.

Summary of the Limitations of Archaeology

Archaeological discoveries have made and will continue to make significant contributions to our understanding of numerous biblical passages as well as several features of Israel's history (places, people, customs, and events). Two of archaeology's main values involve illumination and confirmation of historical realities. There are also limitations to the ways archaeological artifacts contribute to biblical understanding. Much of what ancient Israelites left behind has not been uncovered, and what has been uncovered requires interpretation, a much less objective process than the scientific principles guiding the uncovering of those artifacts. What a scholar believes about the ultimate authority of Scripture clearly impacts the value and limitations of archaeological discoveries.

Millard provides a necessary caution: "Balancing the testimony of the Bible, ancient texts, and archaeology is a delicate task. Each type of evidence has its own weight and has to be given its due. To diminish one without compelling, preferably objective, reasons or to enhance the significance of another without positive grounds will produce a skewed reconstruction."¹¹⁷

1. Archaeology does not demonstrate everything that happened or existed in the past.
2. Archaeological evidence should not serve as the ultimate basis for a written text's historical reliability.
3. Archaeology is not totally objective and without bias.

117. Millard "Texts and Archaeology," 26.

CHRONOLOGY

There are two types of dating or chronology: relative and absolute. Relative dating places events and people within a timeline or sequence *relative to others*. Absolute dating seeks to establish *fixed dates and the amount of time between key events or people* (relating those events to the history of the larger world).¹¹⁸ Relative dating, for example, seeks to confirm the chronological sequence of individuals in patriarchal history or the kings of the divided monarchy. Absolute dating is a much more specific endeavor, seeking to calculate how many years ago a particular person lived or when an event took place. For example, when did Abraham enter the land of Canaan, what was the date for Israel's exodus from Egypt, and when did the division of the Israelite monarchy happen?¹¹⁹

How Do We Establish Biblical Chronology?

Before the mid-1800s AD, scholars had access to very few ANE chronological sources. However, with the discovery of eponym lists (especially for Neo-Assyrian kings) in the 1860s AD, scholars finally had a solid basis for reconstructing the history and chronology of Neo-Assyria, Neo-Babylon, Persia, Egypt, and Israel.¹²⁰ These lists name each year after the current king or an important official, refer to a key military campaign for that year, as well as exceptional events. Because the year of one Assyrian official, Bur-sagale, mentions the occurrence of a solar eclipse (dated to June 15 or 16, 763 BC), that year provides the basis for dating the previous and subsequent listings of eponyms.¹²¹

118. Richard S. Hess, "Introduction: Foundation for a History of Israel," in *Ancient Israel's History*, 19–20. Cf. David A. Warburton, "Biblical Archaeology 101: Dating in the Archaeological World," *BAR* 44, no. 5 (2018): 49.

119. Historically, the birth of Jesus was the fulcrum for the chronological eras BC (before Christ) and AD (*anno Domini* = "in the year of our Lord"). Many scholars have recently replaced these designations with BCE (before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era), respectively.

120. Alan R. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire 910–612 B.C.*, State Archives of Assyria 2 (repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 13. M. B. Rowton agrees with Millard that these name lists are quite reliable except for a handful of Assyrian kings (where the lists are broken), M. B. Rowton, "Chronology, Ancient Western Asia," in *CAH: Prolegomena and Prehistory*, Vol. 1, Part 1, ed. I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd, and N. G. L. Hammond, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 195. Edwin R. Thiele points out other ANE king lists and the voluminous records of Ptolemy (*Almagest*) that confirm the dating of these Neo-Assyrian eponym lists (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, repr. [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994], 69–73).

121. Millard, *The Eponyms of the Assyrian Empire*, 2. See Thiele's helpful explanation of how this dating of the years of the eponym lists provides an absolute or anchor date for biblical chronology as well (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 67–78). Various scholars have checked these resultant years where a key date in ANE history occurs to confirm the accuracy of eponym list dates.

Having an absolute or anchor date for biblical chronology does not preclude continuing debates concerning that chronology. Setting aside (for now) the questions surrounding the dating of the patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, and the conquest of Canaan, scholars have given much attention to the “apparent” contradictions in dating the kings of the divided monarchy. Thiele solved most of the chronological problems for the divided monarchy period by offering six fundamental principles.¹²² Due to the discovery of the Neo-Assyrian eponym lists and work by Thiele and other scholars, there is widespread agreement on key biblical dates: Solomon’s death and division of the monarchy—931 BC; the accession of Jehu—841 BC; the fall of the northern kingdom—723 or 722 or 721 BC; the invasion of Sennacherib—701 BC; the fall of the southern kingdom—587 or 586 BC; and the beginning of the Persian kingdom and reign of Cyrus—539 BC.¹²³ The most hotly debated dates will be discussed in the chapter where those events best fit.

What Are the Key Factors in Chronological Decisions?

Broad Overview of the Discussion

Evangelicals and several critical scholars share a fundamental confidence concerning dates for the key historical events and people in the first millennium BC, primarily because of the credibility provided by the ANE eponym lists, other junctures between biblical and ANE literature, and more abundant archaeological evidence. The confidence of critical scholars wanes significantly as one considers chronology earlier than Solomon.

Among evangelicals, the debates about chronology focus on the time from the patriarchs through the time of Saul. Whereas many conservative evangelicals view the chronological data points as concrete and reliable chronology indicators—allowing for round numbers—other evangelicals view some of those data points symbolically.

First Kings 6:1 provides an example of this debate.¹²⁴ This verse states that Solomon began building the temple in the fourth year of his reign

122. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 43–60. Cf. Kenneth A. Kitchen’s helpful summary of those principles as well (“Chronology,” in *DOTHB*, 184–86). More attention will be given to those principles in the chapters dealing with the divided monarchy.

123. Although a one-year difference between key date alternatives results from a slightly different understanding of the chronological evidence, that difference does not represent a significantly different interpretive view.

124. This chronological debate receives more attention in chapter 3’s discussion of the date of the exodus.

(ca. 967 BC). It also affirms that temple construction began in the 480th year after Israel's exodus from Egypt. On the one hand, some scholars (and the authors of this volume) regard that timeframe as credible chronological information. By adding the 479 preceding years to 967, Solomon's fourth year, the exodus can be dated to ca. 1446 BC.

Other scholars regard the 480-year figure as a symbolic or schematic number.¹²⁵ The most common suggestion is that it stands for twelve generations of forty years. Since a generation more accurately involves twenty-five years, it signifies a three-hundred-year period. Consequently, 1 Kgs 6:1 points to ca. 1266 BC as the date of Israel's exodus.¹²⁶ This schematic understanding of "480 years" draws on archaeological information that some scholars believe favors a thirteenth-century-exodus date. Later chapters of this volume will interact with several other chronological issues.

Suggestions for Understanding OT Chronological Data Points

The interpretive differences between most evangelicals concerning chronology do not involve accepting chronological errors, but variations in interpretive methodologies and conclusions. Here are some essential considerations for correctly handling biblical chronological statements.

Relative chronology fundamentally deals with the time elapsed between events in order to assign accurate dates to those events (and the people involved). When working with the chronology for biblical narratives, which involve actual history, that chronology provides key contextual elements for that history. Biblical chronology has qualitative rather than simply quantitative concerns. It seeks "to detail the relation of a people to its God and to show the inevitable effect *in history* of the character of that relationship."¹²⁷

Consequently, OT writers only had a secondary interest in chronological details. However, that does not suggest that biblical chronological data is without value. Oswalt provides three reasons that chronological statements possess interpretive significance. First, the secondary value of chronological information does not mean that biblical writers gave no concern to the accuracy of that information. He states that the "very claim of the Hebrews that they had met God in history would suggest that they took a very careful

125. Kenneth A. Kitchen points to these two main options for the "480 year" figure in 1 Kgs 6:1, either taken at face value or regarded symbolically or schematically ("Exodus, the," in *ABD* 2:702). The schematic option is discussed further in chapter 3.

126. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *OROT*, 307–10, and other scholars.

127. J. N. Oswalt, "Chronology of the OT," in *ISBE*, 1:673.

attitude toward historical data.”¹²⁸ Second, chronological data has ongoing value. Over the past several decades, archaeological discoveries have repeatedly confirmed chronological details found in biblical narratives. The accuracy of biblical chronological data lays the foundation for correctly interpreting those historical narratives. Finally, using round numbers in various passages would allow for some degree of approximation rather than exact chronological data points in every passage.¹²⁹ In some passages, chronological statements could involve exact numbers, while others involve round numbers. These principles provide the impetus for a key starting point: “The statements of Scripture shall—until proven otherwise—be regarded as correct and as being capable of harmonization with the data from other spheres of investigation.”¹³⁰

Building on that starting point, biblical scholars must wrestle with the complexity of juxtaposing biblical, chronological, historical, and archaeological data. Here is a crucial question: If there is tension between any of these realms, which should be given interpretive priority?¹³¹ We are not presenting an exclusive priority list that would govern all interpretive junctures. Giving first consideration to the chronological information given by Scripture would be the general starting point. For all interpreters, the way they handle these chronological realities has a clear impact on their interpretive decisions.

Basic Approach to Chronology for This Volume

Our basic approach for handling chronological data points is to interpret that data as having concrete, face-value significance—whether exact or round numbers—unless the immediate context demonstrates with clarity that the prophetic historian intended something metaphorical or schematic. Archaeological evidence must be considered since it belongs to the world of Scripture and may shed light on chronological realities. However, since archaeology has built-in limitations, we will not set aside what a passage clearly states because of certain archaeological discoveries (or things not discovered). Finally, good chronological decision-making will draw on related chronological issues that might impact the exact understanding of a chronological data point.

128. Oswalt, “Chronology of the OT,” 1:673.

129. Oswalt, “Chronology of the OT,” 1:674.

130. Oswalt, “Chronology of the OT,” 1:673.

131. J. H. Walton, “Exodus, Date of,” in *DOTP*, 268–69.

Key Periods for Israel's History

Patriarchal Period	2091–1876 BC
Egyptian Sojourn	1876–1446 BC
Wilderness Sojourn	1446–1406 BC
Conquest and Judges	1406–1051 BC
United Monarchy	1051–931 BC
Divided Monarchy	931–587 BC
Exile to Babylon	587–539 BC
Return and Restoration	539–ca. 332 BC

GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL¹³²

Geography is key to understanding Israel's ancient history as recorded in the Scriptures. It provides some of the context essential for understanding biblical narratives. Knowing travel routes, notable features of topography, place names, water sources, and connections between places serves as one tool that helps us grasp biblical history.

This geography section will first provide an overview of key geographic features of *key regions* of the ancient Near East—Mesopotamia, Egypt, Aram/Syria, and Phoenicia. However, since most biblical events and passages are set in Canaan, later called Israel, this geographic summary will devote more attention to the basic geography of Israel.

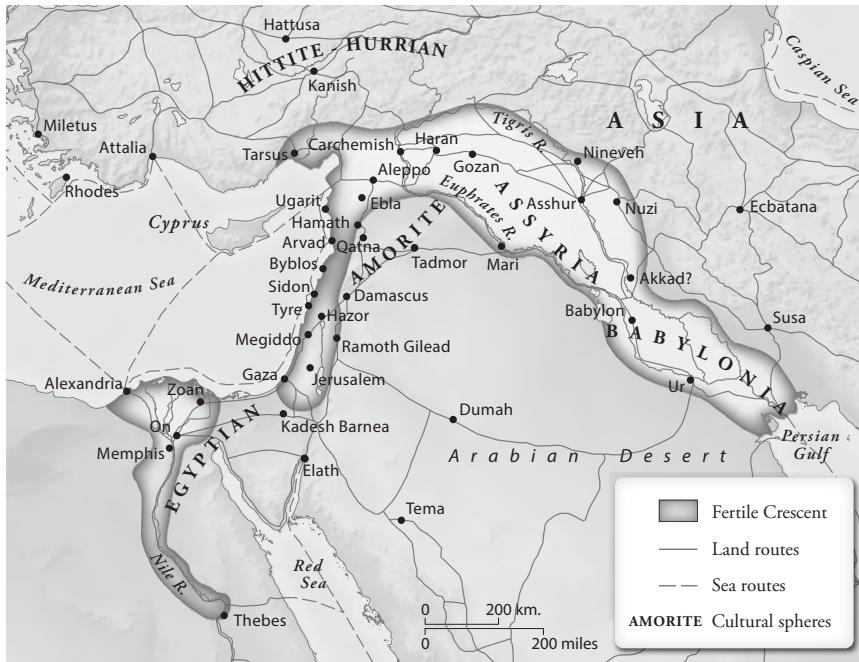
Ancient Near East

The ANE, called the Middle East today, includes Mesopotamia, Egypt, Aram/Syria, Phoenicia, and Asia Minor, and is part of two continents, Asia and Africa. Its main boundaries are the Nile River and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, mountains on the north (Amanus and Ararat ranges), the Zagros range, and the Persian Gulf on the east. Since this section focuses on geography and not history, the geography of the regions receives primary

132. This section summarizes information drawn from the following Bible atlases: John A. Beck, *Discovery House Bible Atlas* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2015); Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2025); John D. Currid and David P. Barrett, *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); and Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010). Only specific quotes are footnoted.

attention rather than the varied people groups who occupied those regions in different historical periods.

Major Regions



1.1 The Fertile Crescent and Its Main Routes

Fertile Crescent

The Fertile Crescent is a region of the ANE that touches on the key regions of the ANE. It involves a large sickle of habitable and cultivable land, lying between the sea (on the west), the desert (on the south), and the mountains and rivers (on the north and east). This sweeping arch of land stretches for 1,800 miles from the Nile Valley to the Persian Gulf. Three major rivers—the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers, which flowed year-round—and numerous irrigation canals occasioned the growth of sufficient agricultural products. As this “crescent” extends through Israel, it creates a land bridge joining three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe), making this area especially economically and militarily strategic.

Mesopotamia

This regional name draws on the Greek expression translated “between rivers,” understood as the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

These rivers are dominant features of Mesopotamia. Both rivers begin in the mountains to the north of the region. They predominantly travel southeast until they reach the Persian Gulf. Many scholars suggest that this region served as the “cradle of civilization.” Abraham was born in Ur, in southeastern Mesopotamia, and eventually moved westward to the land of Canaan. The major empires of Mesopotamia, Assyria and Babylon, had dealings with Israel at various times in her history.

Egypt

Like Mesopotamia, a river represented a dominant feature of this region as well, the Nile River. About 4,130 miles long, this river served as a long oasis surrounded by desert. Only about 4 percent of Egypt involves arable land. The yearly flooding of the Nile deposited rich soil on the land on both sides of the river. The famous Greek historian wrote, “Egypt was given them by the river.”¹³³

Unlike Mesopotamia, Egypt was geographically isolated. It was cut off from the rest of the ANE by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the cataracts of the Nile to the south, a desert, the Gulf of Suez, and the barren Sinai Peninsula to the east, as well as the massive North African desert to the west. This isolation occasioned the development of a culture, language, and religion that was stable, unified, and quite unique.

Lesser Regions—The Levant

The “Levant” describes the land between the Mediterranean coastline to the west, the Syro-Arabian desert to the east, the mountains to the north, and Egypt to the south. The northern half of this area involves Aram, later called Syria, and Phoenicia. The southern half entails Israel, which we will consider in greater length below. All these regions enjoyed a degree of independence until the 840s BC, when Assyria dominated that region for a time.

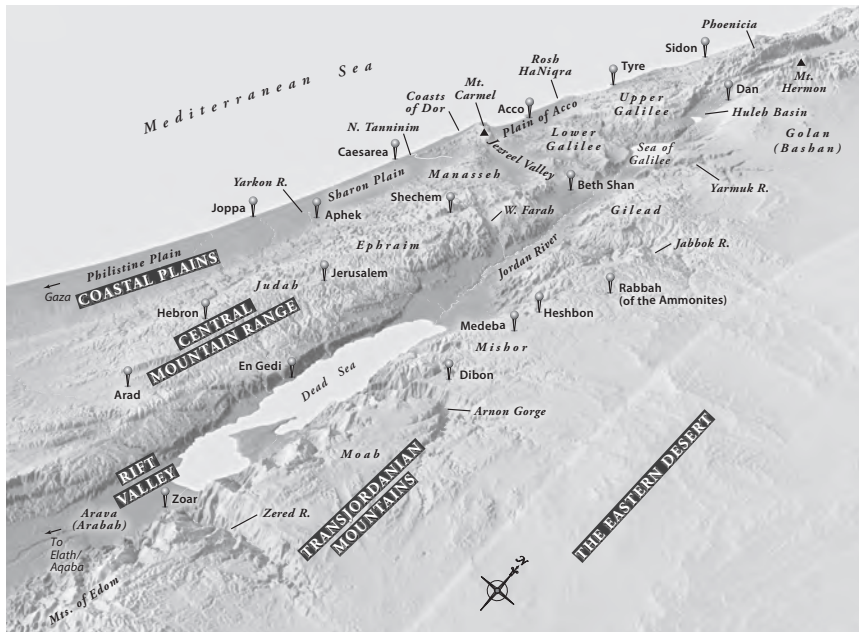
Aram/Syria and Phoenicia

The coastal plain of Aram/Syria and Phoenicia extends about four to eight miles eastward from the Mediterranean Sea. Then, one encounters two ranges of mountains with a significant rift valley between them. The mountains are known for the cedars of Lebanon. The influence and territorial size of both Phoenicia and Aram/Syria increased and diminished due to the power of other regional kingdoms. They both had access to the coastal region

133. Herodotus, *Herodotus: The Persian Wars*, vol. 1, trans. A. D. Godley, ed. J. Henderson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 2.5, 281.

of the Mediterranean Sea. Aram/Syria was generally a much larger region than Phoenicia. The Phoenicians developed into a powerful trading nation, establishing colonies and harbors throughout the Mediterranean basin.

From the city of Babylon, the International Coastal Highway (ICH; see more below) passed to the east of the second range of mountains because of natural obstacles to north-south travel between the two ranges, such as swamps, gorges, and lakes.¹³⁴ After passing through Mari in northeast Mesopotamia, it passed through Tadmor and Damascus, where it split into two international routes that continued southward: the ICH, which extended to the Israelite city of Hazor and eventually Egypt; and the King's Highway, which passed through the Transjordan region, intersecting with Elath and the Asian spice trade routes.



1.2 The Lower Levant—Regions of Israel

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF ISRAEL

The area of the land of biblical Israel involves about approximately 6,750 square miles (about the size of Massachusetts). Only four states of the United States are smaller: Hawaii, Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island. The

¹³⁴ Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, 75.

dimensions of the land are about 150 miles in length and 30–85 miles in width. The following overview of the regions of biblical Israel will highlight eight regions. Four of them could be called “longitudinal” since they run the length of the country. We will consider them from west to east. The other four regions are latitudinal or lateral. They do not run the country’s length but occupy partial regions and will be considered from north to south.

Longitudinal Regions

Coastal Plain

This area runs along the length of Israel at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is primarily flat, with hills no higher than 150 feet. The region has abundant natural resources and is the first area to receive rain from the storms heading inland from the Mediterranean Sea (16–25 inches/year). This region did not have good, natural harbors that matched the harbors at Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia. Gaza, Ashdod, Joppa, and Dor served as limited ports during the OT. The major international highway (ICH) passed through this region, giving it great commercial and military value and making it desirable to larger empires.

Hill Country

This region extends through the backbone of Israel from the Negev highlands in the south up through Galilee in the north. Others call it the Central Mountain Ridge or the Watershed Ridge. These limestone ridges rise to elevations of 1,500 to 3,000 feet. The best way to travel north or south through the hill country is along the central ridge—the “Way of the Patriarchs” (see below). Like ribs going out from the spine, various east-west ridges connect to this central ridge. The valleys created between the east-west ridges are “V-shaped” and make travel difficult. Only a few of these generally east-west valleys and ridges provide suitable conduits for travel between the coastal plain or the Jordan Rift and the heart of Israel. In this region, farming primarily occurred on terraces cut into the hillsides. Significant amounts of limestone blocks were also quarried from this region for building purposes. Based on the boundaries between Israel and Judah during the divided monarchy period, scholars often divide this large area into the hill country of Samaria (northern half) and hill country of Judah (southern half).

Jordan Rift Valley

This valley extends from the Huleh valley at the north end of Israel, through the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, extending south to the upper

tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. The valley is just one segment of the Afro-Arabian Rift Valley that extends for more than four thousand miles from Turkey into East Africa. The valley is a sunken block of rock between two fault lines. The Bible sometimes uses the term “Arabah” for the entire Jordan Valley (e.g., Deut 1:1; 2:9; 3:17). In modern geographical terms, the “Arabah” refers to the valley area south of the Dead Sea, as far as Eilat (Ezion Geber).

Four smaller rivers serve as the headwaters for the Jordan River. The northern end of the Jordan Rift Valley gets much more rain than the south. No significant trade routes travel through the valley, but various regional routes carry trade east and west at key junctures. In biblical times, the Jordan River was an average of 150 feet wide and as deep as 10 feet. In the mid-nineteenth century AD, an explorer recorded twenty-seven significant rapids, some so threatening that his expedition had to portage their boats and supplies.¹³⁵

The Sea of Galilee is just below the Huleh Valley, approximately 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. From that body of water, the Jordan River flows south another 65 miles, about 135 miles of meandering, actual length, and ends its journey as it empties into the Dead or Salt Sea. The surface of that sea is approximately 1,300 feet below sea level, about 1,000 feet deep north of the Lisan, and much shallower south of the Lisan, the tongue of land extending into the Dead Sea from the eastern shore. The traditional dimensions of the Dead Sea—47 miles long by 11 miles wide—vary because of decreasing amounts of water that flow into it. The Rift Valley continues south for 110 miles until it reaches the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Transjordanian Plateau

The easternmost of these longitudinal regions is the Transjordanian Plateau (“Beyond the Jordan,” Josh 13:8; 18:7). Its western ridge line rises to well over 5,000 feet in places. The plateau tilts in the direction of the Arabian Desert to the east. Several canyons interrupted north-south travel on the King’s Highway: Yarmuk, Jabbok, Arnon, and Zered. The Transjordanian Plateau has five subregions determined by deep river canyons and varied territory characteristics: Bashan, Gilead, Mishor, Moab, and Edom.

First, the rich volcanic soil and plentiful rain make the northern region, Bashan, desirable for raising cattle and sheep, as well as wheat farming. Its borders involve Mount Hermon to the north, the Jordan Rift Valley to the

135. Beck, *Discovery House Bible Atlas*, 27.

west, the Yarmuk Canyon to the south, and the desert to the east. Several extinct volcanic cones dot the region, responsible for covering the region with lava that eventually became very fertile soil. It receives the most rain of all five subregions. Bashan is generally a flat plateau, like the Mishor further south.

Second, Gilead extends from the Yarmuk Canyon to an imaginary line just north of the Dead Sea. The Jabbok River bisects Gilead. The western side of Gilead entails numerous east-west “V-shaped” valleys. Since the terrain is generally rougher, herding sheep and goats was more common than growing grains.

Third, the Mishor is a flat region between Gilead and the Arnon Gorge. Like Bashan, it was profitable for growing grains even though it received less rain than Bashan. The Israelites conquered this territory when they defeated Sihon of Heshbon (Num 21:21–32). The Ammonites generally controlled the eastern half of the Mishor.

Fourth, the land between the Arnon and the Zered canyons to the south was the customary land of Moab. Inhabitants grew grain crops but were more occupied with grazing animals. During the divided monarchy, the Moabite king Mesha was known for the large size of his herds. He sent “a tribute of 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams” to Israel (2 Kgs 3:4).

Fifth, Edom’s region extended from the Zered Canyon to the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. The western edges of this region received enough rain to grow crops, but limited rainfall over much of this territory favored grazing. In the third century BC, the Nabateans, who pioneered transporting spices from Asia to Gaza, replaced the Edomites.

Latitudinal Regions

Galilee

This region is really an extension of the hill country. Since both the OT and NT (esp. relating to the life of Christ) name this region, it receives a distinct geographic name. A fault line, marked by the east-west Beth Hakkerem valley, extended from the coastal city of Acco to the area just north of the Sea of Galilee, dividing the region into two sections, Upper and Lower Galilee. Upper Galilee had rough terrain—the mountains reach almost 4,000 feet—causing difficulty in travel, little agriculture, and limited population. The Huleh Valley and the coastal plain served as its eastern and western borders.

The hills of Lower Galilee are all below 2,000 feet. The Rift Valley and the Sea of Galilee provide its eastern border, the Jezreel and Harod Valleys its southern border, and the coastal plain its western edge. Two key east-west valleys—Beth Hakkerem and Beth Netophah—facilitated east-west travel and

provided abundant crops of grain, olives, and grapes. Shimron was a significant OT city, known through archaeology but not referred to in Scripture, along with two other cities, Nazareth and Cana, which would become more significant in the NT. The Nazareth Ridge, the Hill of Moreh, and Mount Tabor are considered the southern edge of Galilee. Several OT events intersected with these topographical features. Even Lower Galilee does not seem to have been densely populated during OT times.

Jezreel Valley

Although the name “Jezreel Valley,” named after the city of Jezreel at its eastern end, only occurs three times in Scripture, it is the name used most frequently in secondary literature. This is Israel’s most agriculturally productive valley, having deep topsoil and a high-water table. Mount Carmel and Mount Gilboa serve as the southern border, and the ridges of Galilee—the Nazareth Ridge and Hill of Moreh—provide part of the northern boundary. The Kishon River passes northwest through the narrow Kishon Pass toward the Mediterranean Sea at the western end of the valley. The wider Harod Pass passes southeast between Mount Gilboa and the Hill of Moreh, exiting into the Jordan Rift Valley. Close to that juncture, the Harod River passes by the OT city of Beth Shan. The major international route (ICH; see below) also passes through this important valley. It enters the valley via the Megiddo Pass and departs through the Tabor Pass, heading to the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee. This valley represented a set of crossroads, the ICH and a route that connected the Mediterranean Sea with the Jordan Rift Valley and the King’s Highway (see below) in the Transjordan. Several OT and NT narratives describe significant events that took place in this valley.

Shephelah

Just to the east of the southern half of the coastal plain, this region provides a gentle transition from the flat coastal plain to the rugged hills/mountains of the hill country. Five west-east valleys cut through the region: Aijalon, Sorek, Elah, Guvrin, and Lachish. Rolling hills and wide valleys characterize this region. All but the Sorek Valley provide some access to the Watershed Ridge Route in the heart of Israel. The best west-east access goes through the Aijalon Valley and then transitions to the Way of Beth Horon (see below). Most armies who intended to attack Jerusalem traveled on that route. Joshua’s “long day” (Josh 10), the events of Samson’s judgeship (Judg 13–16), and David’s battle with Goliath (1 Sam 17) are just a few of the significant

events that took place in this region. The hills are made up of softer Eocene limestone along with chalk deposits. The more expansive valleys facilitate abundant harvests of grain, grapes, and olives.

Negev

The Negev, meaning “south” or “dry,” is the southernmost lateral region of Israel. It is located south of the hill country of Judah and north of the more barren wilderness areas. The coastal plain and the Jordan Rift Valley serve as its western and eastern borders. Rainfall is minimal and occurs mainly in the rainy season (November–March). Not as helpful for raising crops, this region worked well for grazing sheep and goats. The patriarchs spent much of their lives in this area. Beersheba was the key city of this region.

The Negev can be visualized like an hourglass placed on its side. The eastern basin has Arad as its key city, while Gerar is the main city of the western basin. Beersheba is located at the junction of the two basins. Four wadis or riverbeds come together at Beersheba, giving the city its prominence in the region. Also, various trade caravans from Arabia passed through the Negev on their way to the port of Gaza.

Road Systems

People must travel from one place to another, whether for personal, commercial, or military reasons. Two international routes passed through Israel, along with numerous secondary regional routes for travel within Israel. We will consider both international routes and two of the secondary regional routes within Israel.



1.3 International and Local Roads of Significance

International Roads

We will consider the International Coastal Highway (ICH) and the King's Highway. First, the ICH is also called the Great Trunk Route or the Via Maris (Way of the Sea). Beginning in Egypt, it progresses along the north end of the Sinai Peninsula and turns up the coastline of Israel. It runs along the coast somewhat inland in order to avoid the sand dunes along the sea. It touches the coast at Joppa and then turns sharply east-northeast and skirts the western border of the hill country to avoid the Yarkon River and the swamps of Sharon. After that, it enters the Megiddo Pass, passes through the Jezreel Valley, and heads northeast to the Jordan Rift Valley, traveling the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. After heading north to Hazor, the ICH heads northeast to Damascus, east to Mari, and southeast to Babylon. Several secondary routes split off the ICH and head in different directions to various destinations. The Egyptian Pharaoh Neco II traveled on the ICH when he was going to fight against the Babylonians at Haran (609 BC). During that movement of his army, Neco engaged Josiah in battle and killed him near Megiddo (2 Kgs 23:29–30). Abraham and his family would have traveled northwest on this route in their journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran (Gen 11:31).

Second, the King's Highway is a less important international route. It begins at Elath/Ezion Geber, at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba. It heads north and passes through the main cities of the Transjordan region—Petra, Bozrah, Heshbon, Rabbah, and Ramoth Gilead—before ending at Damascus. Because this route passed through the deep Zered and Arnon canyons along with other difficult terrain, there was an alternative route called the “Way of the Wilderness” that avoided those terrain issues and traveled along the fringe of the Syro-Arabian desert. It rejoined the King's Highway at Rabbah. At various points, different east-west regional routes connected the King's Highway with the regions of Canaan (and later Israel) located on the western side of the Jordan River.

Internal Roads

The internal network of roads that served the various sections of Israel served at least two purposes. It provided access to the international trade routes for the areas not bordering those routes and also met the needs of internal travel. Of the many routes that fall in this category, only two will be cited.

First, the Ridge Route, also called the Watershed Ridge Route, was *longitudinal* and extended from Beersheba in the Negev (passing through Hebron, Bethlehem, and Gibeah) to Shechem in the hill country (of Samaria). North of Shechem, the routes were more diverse and less distinct. It was the major

internal north-south route of Canaan. Because the patriarchs spent considerable time at Beersheba and Shechem, traveling between these two places, this route is commonly called “the Way of the Patriarchs.” It served as the primary means for internal north-south travel.

Second, the “Way of Beth Horon” functioned as the most crucial *latitudinal* route that connected the ICH with the Watershed Ridge Route via the Aijalon Valley in the Shephelah. After someone entered the valley, they would climb onto a ridgeline that passed through lower and upper Beth Horon—hence the name “Way of Beth Horon.” This route eventually intersected with the Watershed Ridge Route in the Central Benjamin Plateau, near the city of Ramah. This crossroad was incredibly significant for internal travel and trade. One of the clearest examples of its significance was when King Baasha of the northern kingdom conquered Ramah and fortified it. He sought to cut off King Asa of the southern kingdom from that essential major crossroad (1 Kgs 15:16–22) and the trade and travel it provided.

Summary

Understanding the geography of Israel enhances a reader’s understanding of the flow of historical events. It also provides a helpful awareness of geographic and topographical features that impact our grasp of how people in the biblical lands lived, as well as specific dimensions of the land that emphasize certain aspects of a narrative text.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the necessary background for understanding the history of ancient Israel (HAI) presented in the following chapters. Here are a few of this chapter’s key affirmations.

First, consider three guiding principles that impact our understanding and presentation of this history. We seek to embrace the Bible on its own terms, as inspired and inerrant. Along the way, we give attention to extra-biblical texts and ANE historical realities because biblical history took place in a larger world. Perhaps most significant is that we believe that the biblical narratives provide the divinely authorized historical context for the events and people described in those texts.

Second, the ideology or theological perspective of historical narratives works hand-in-hand with biblical historical presentations. The clear veracity of those events and people is absolutely necessary for us to reach a theological understanding that is correct, life-impacting, and God-honoring.

Third, this introduction provides a brief and focused overview of methods employed by various scholars, focusing on the patriarchal period as the consistent historical realm given consideration. Using this narrow focus, we look at how scholars from the seventeenth century AD to the present day understood and explained biblical historical narratives. The breadth of the methodological and theological spectrum evidenced by this overview prepares the reader for some of the interpretive options embraced or rejected in the following pages.

Fourth, this chapter briefly considers the relationship between archaeological discoveries and historical understandings. Does one discipline receive priority in the interpretive process, and why? We happily recognize the value that archaeological discoveries bring to the following presentation of HAI. We also acknowledge the limitations of those discoveries in how we grasp the significance of biblical historical narratives. Both of us regard Scripture as having ultimate authority for our understanding of HAI, drawing on the value and clarity gained by considering artifactual evidence of the world of Scripture.

Fifth, this introduction addresses the key issues related to presenting a valid chronological framework for biblical history. Various chapters draw on the basic concepts introduced here. In short, we accept the face-value significance of chronological statements as we present our understanding of that framework.

Finally, this chapter offers an overview of the geographic realities of the land of Israel and the surrounding regions of the biblical world. This overview helps the reader connect biblical statements with places, routes, terrain, and other features that provide an essential element in a robust context for understanding Scripture.

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