

# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 1 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** You don't need me to tell you that human civilization is very, very old. Nevertheless, our knowledge of the earliest stages of human civilization was quite limited for many centuries. That is, until the great archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which unearthed for us the great civilizations of the Ancient Near East, of which I have drawn a remarkably life-like map here on the board: [laughter] Mediterranean, I always start with the Mediterranean Ocean, the Nile River, the Tigris and the Euphrates. So: the great civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the area we refer to as the Fertile Crescent, of which a little part here about the size of Rhode Island is Canaan. And archaeologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were stunned to find the ruins and the records of remarkable peoples and cultures--massive, complex empires in some cases but some of which had completely disappeared from human memory. Their newly uncovered languages had been long forgotten; their rich literary and legal texts were now indecipherable. That soon changed. But because of those discoveries, we are now in a position to appreciate the monumental achievements of these early civilizations, these *earliest* civilizations.

And so many scholars, and many people, have remarked that it's not a small irony that the Ancient Near Eastern people with one of the, or perhaps *the* most lasting legacy, was not a people that built and inhabited one of the great centers of Ancient Near Eastern civilization. It can be argued that the Ancient Near Eastern people with the most lasting legacy is a people that had an idea. It was a new idea that broke with the ideas of its neighbors, and those people were the Israelites. And scholars have come to the realization that despite the Bible's pretensions to the contrary, the Israelites were a small, and I've actually overrepresented it here, I'm sure it should be much smaller, a small and relatively insignificant group for much of their history. They did manage to establish a kingdom in the land that was known in antiquity as Canaan around the year 1000. They probably succeeded in subduing some of their neighbors, collecting tribute--there's some controversy about that--but in about 922 [BCE] this kingdom divided into two smaller and lesser kingdoms that fell in importance. The northern kingdom, which consisted of ten of the twelve Israelite tribes, and known confusingly as Israel, was destroyed in 722 [BCE] by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom, which consisted of two of the twelve tribes and known as Judah, managed to survive until the year 586 [BCE] when the Babylonians came in and conquered and sent the people into exile. The capital, Jerusalem, fell.

Conquest and exile were events that normally would spell the end of a particular ethnic national group, particularly in antiquity. Conquered peoples would trade their defeated god for the victorious god of their conquerors and eventually there would be a cultural and religious assimilation, intermarriage. *That* people would disappear as a distinctive entity, and in effect, that is what happened to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom to a large degree. They were lost to history. This did not happen to those members of the nation of Israel who lived in the southern kingdom, Judah. Despite the demise of their national political base in 586 [BCE], the Israelites alone, really, among the many peoples who have figured in Ancient Near Eastern history--the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Babylonians, the Hittites, the Phoenicians, the Hurrians, the Canaanites--they emerged after the death of their state, producing a community and a culture that can be traced through various twists and turns and vicissitudes of history right down into the modern period. That's a pretty unique claim. And they carried with them the idea and the traditions that laid the foundation for the major religions of the western world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

So what is this radical new idea that shaped a culture and enabled its survival into later antiquity and really right into the present day in some form? Well, the conception of the universe that was widespread among ancient peoples is one that you're probably familiar with. People regarded the various natural forces as imbued with divine power, as in some sense divinities themselves. The earth was a divinity, the sky was a divinity, the water was a divinity, had divine power. In other words, the gods were identical with or imminent in the forces of nature. There were many gods. No one single god was therefore all powerful. There is very, very good evidence to suggest that ancient Israelites by and large shared this world view. They participated at the very earliest stages in the wider religious and cultic culture of the Ancient Near East. However, over the course of time, some ancient Israelites, not all at once and not unanimously, broke with this view and articulated a different view, that there was one divine power, one god. But much more important than number was the fact that this god was outside of and above nature. This god was not identified with nature. He transcended nature, and he wasn't known through nature or natural phenomena. He was known through history, events and a

particular relationship with humankind. And that idea, which seems simple at first and not so very revolutionary--we will see, that's an idea that affected every aspect of Israelite culture and in ways that will become clear as we move through the course and learn more about biblical religion and biblical views of history, it was an idea that ensured the survival of the ancient Israelites as an entity, as an ethnic religious entity. In various complicated ways, the view of an utterly transcendent god with absolute control over history made it possible for some Israelites to interpret even the most tragic and catastrophic events, such as the destruction of their capital and the exile of their remaining peoples, not as a defeat of Israel's god or even God's rejection of them, but as necessary, a necessary part of God's larger purpose or plan for Israel.

These Israelites left for us the record of their religious and cultural revolution in the writings that are known as the Hebrew Bible collectively, and this course is an introduction to the Hebrew Bible as an expression of the religious life and thought of ancient Israel and as a foundational document of western civilization. The course has several goals. First and foremost, we want to familiarize you with the contents of the Hebrew Bible. We're not going to read every bit of it word for word. We will read certain chunks of it quite carefully and from others we will choose selections, but you will get a very good sense and a good sampling of the contents of the Bible. A second goal is to introduce you to a number of approaches to the study of the Bible, different methodological approaches that have been advanced by modern scholars but some of which are in fact quite old. At times, we will play the historian, at times we will be literary critics. "How does this work as literature?" At times we will be religious and cultural critics. "What is it the Israelites were saying in their day and in their time and against whom and for what?" A third goal of the course is to provide some insight into the history of interpretation. This is a really fun part of the course. The Bible's radically new conception of the divine, its revolutionary depiction of the human being as a moral agent, its riveting saga of the nation of Israel, their story, has drawn generations of readers to ponder its meaning and message. And as a result, the Bible has become the base of an enormous edifice of interpretation and commentary and debate, both in traditional settings but also in academic, university, secular settings. And from time to time, particularly in section discussion, you will have occasion to consider the ways in which certain biblical passages have been interpreted--sometimes in very contradictory ways--over the centuries. That can be a really fun and exciting part of the course.

A fourth goal of the course is to familiarize you with the culture of ancient Israel as represented in the Bible against the backdrop of its Ancient Near Eastern setting, its historical and cultural setting, because the archaeological discoveries that were referred to [above] in the Ancient Near East, reveal to us the spiritual and cultural heritage of all of the inhabitants of the region, including the Israelites. And one of the major consequences of these finds is the light that they have shed on the background and the origin of the materials in the Bible. So we now see that the traditions in the Bible did not come out of a vacuum. The early chapters of Genesis, Genesis 1 through 11--they're known as the "Primeval History," which is a very unfortunate name, because these chapters really are not best read or understood as history in the conventional sense--but these 11 chapters owe a great deal to Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The creation story in Genesis 1 draws upon the Babylonian epic known as Enuma Elish. We'll be talking about that text in some depth. The story of the first human pair in the Garden of Eden, which is in Genesis 2 and 3 has clear affinities with the Epic of Gilgamesh, that's a Babylonian and Assyrian epic in which a hero embarks on this exhausting search for immortality. The story of Noah and the flood, which occurs in Genesis 6 through 9 is simply an Israelite version of an older flood story that we have found copies of: a Mesopotamian story called the Epic of Atrahasis [and] a flood story that we also have incorporated in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Biblical traditions have roots that stretch deep into earlier times and out into surrounding lands and traditions, and the parallels between the biblical stories and Ancient Near Eastern stories that they parallel has been the subject of intense study.

However, it isn't just the similarity between the biblical materials and the Ancient Near Eastern sources that is important to us. In fact, in some ways it's the dissimilarity that is remarkably important to us, the biblical transformation of a common Near Eastern heritage in light of its radically new conceptions of God and the world and humankind. We'll be dealing with this in some depth, but I'll give you one quick example. We have a Sumerian story about the third millennium BCE, going back 3000--third millennium, 3000 BCE. It's the story of Ziusudra, and it's very similar to the Genesis flood story of Noah. In both of these stories, the Sumerian and the Israelite story, you have a flood that is the result of a deliberate divine decision; one individual is chosen to be rescued; that individual is given very specific instructions on building a boat; he is given instructions about who to bring on board; the flood comes and exterminates all living things; the boat comes to rest on a mountaintop; the hero sends out birds to reconnoiter the land; when he comes out of the ark he offers a sacrifice to the god--the same narrative elements are in these two stories. It's just

wonderful when you read them side by side. So what is of great significance though is not simply that the biblical writer is retelling a story that clearly went around everywhere in ancient Mesopotamia; they were *transforming* the story so that it became a vehicle for the expression of their own values and their own views. In the Mesopotamian stories, for example, the gods act capriciously, the gods act on a whim. In fact, in one of the stories, the gods say, "Oh, people, they're so noisy, I can't sleep, let's wipe them all out." That's the rationale. There's no moral scruple. They destroy these helpless but stoic humans who are chafing under their tyrannical and unjust and uncaring rule. In the biblical story, when the Israelites told the story, they modified it. It's God's uncompromising ethical standards that lead him to bring the flood in an act of divine justice. He's punishing the evil corruption of human beings that he has so lovingly created and whose degradation he can't bear to witness. So it's saying something different. It's providing a very different message.

So when we compare the Bible with the literature of the Ancient Near East, we'll see not only the incredible cultural and literary heritage that was obviously common to them, but we'll see the ideological gulf that separated them and we'll see how biblical writers so beautifully and cleverly manipulated and used these stories, as I said, as a vehicle for the expression of a radically new idea. They drew upon these sources but they blended and shaped them in a particular way. And that brings us to a critical problem facing anyone who seeks to reconstruct ancient Israelite religion or culture on the basis of the biblical materials. That problem is the conflicting perspective between the final editors of the text and some of the older sources that are incorporated into the Bible, some of the older sources that they were obviously drawing on. Those who were responsible for the final editing, the final forms of the texts, had a decidedly monotheistic perspective, ethical monotheistic perspective, and they attempted to impose that perspective on their older source materials; and for the most part they were successful. But at times the result of their effort is a deeply conflicted, deeply ambiguous text. And again, that's going to be one of the most fun things for you as readers of this text, if you're alert to it, if you're ready to listen to the cacophony of voices that are within the text.

In many respects, the Bible represents or expresses a basic discontent with the larger cultural milieu in which it was produced, and that's interesting for us, because a lot of modern people have a tendency to think of the Bible as an emblem of conservatism. Right? We tend to think of this as an old fuddy-duddy document, it's outdated, has outdated ideas, and I think the challenge of this course is that you read the Bible with fresh eyes so that you can appreciate it for what it was, [and] in many ways what it continues to be: a revolutionary, cultural critique. We can read the Bible with fresh and appreciative eyes only if we first acknowledge and set aside some of our presuppositions about the Bible. It's really impossible, in fact, that you not have some opinions about this work, because it's an intimate part of our culture. So even if you've never opened it or read it yourself, I bet you can cite me a line or two--"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," and I bet you don't really know what it means. "The poor will always be with you": I'm sure you don't really know what that means. These are things and phrases that we hear and they create within us a certain impression of the biblical text and how it functions. Verses are quoted, they're alluded to, whether to be championed and valorized or whether to be lampooned and pilloried. But we can feel that we have a rough idea of the Bible and a rough idea of its outlook when in fact what we really have are popular misconceptions that come from the way in which the Bible has been used or misused. Most of our cherished presuppositions about the Bible are based on astonishing claims that others have made on behalf of the Bible, claims that the Bible has not made on behalf of itself.

So before we proceed, I need to ask you to set aside for the purposes of this course, some of the more common myths about the Bible. I have a little list here for you. The first is the idea that the Bible's a book. It's not a book. We'll get rid of that one. The Bible is not a book with all that that implies, that it has a uniform style and a message and a single author, the sorts of things we think of when we think in a conventional sense of the word "book." It's a library. It's an anthology of writings or books written and edited over an extensive period of time by people in very different situations responding to very different issues and stimuli, some political, some historical, some philosophical, some religious, some moral. There are many types or genres of material in the Bible. There's narrative, wonderful narrative stories. There's all kinds of law. There are cultic and ritual texts that prescribe how some ceremony is supposed to be performed. There are records of the messages of prophets. There's lyric poetry, there's love poetry, there are proverbs, there are psalms of thanksgiving and lament. So, there's a tremendous variety of material in this library, and it follows from the fact that it's not a book but an anthology of diverse works, that it's not an ideological monolith. And this is something a lot of students struggle with. Each book, or strand of tradition within a book, within the biblical collection sounds its own distinctive note in the symphony of reflection that is the Bible. Genesis is concerned to account for the origin of things and wrestles with the existence of evil, the existence of idolatry and suffering in a world that's created by a good

god. The priestly texts in Leviticus and Numbers emphasize the sanctity of all life and the ideal of holiness and ethical and ritual purity. There are odes to human reason and learning and endeavor in the wisdom book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes reads like an existentialist writing from the twentieth century. It scoffs at the vanity of all things, including wisdom, and espouses a kind of positive existentialism. The Psalms are very individual writings that focus on individual piety and love and worship of God. Job, possibly the greatest book of the Bible, I won't give away my preferences there, challenges conventional religious piety and arrives at the bittersweet conclusion that there is no justice in this world or any other, but that nonetheless we're not excused from the thankless and perhaps ultimately meaningless task of righteous living. One of the most wonderful and fortuitous facts of history is that later Jewish communities chose to put all this stuff in this collection we call the Bible. They chose to include all of these dissonant voices together. They didn't strive to reconcile the conflicts, nor should we. They didn't, we shouldn't. Each book, each writer, each voice reflects another thread in the rich tapestry of human experience, human response to life and its puzzles, human reflection on the sublime and the depraved.

And that leads me to my second point, which is that biblical narratives are not pious parables about saints. Okay? Not pious tales. They're psychologically real literature about very real or realistic people and life situations. They're not stories about pious people whose actions are always exemplary and whose lives should be models for our own, despite what Sunday School curricula will often turn them into. And despite what they would have us believe. There *is* a genre of literature that details the lives of saints, Hagiography, but that came later and is largely something we find in the Christian era. It's not found in the Bible. The Bible abounds with human not superhuman beings, and their behavior can be scandalous. It can be violent, it can be rebellious, outrageous, lewd, vicious. But at the same time like real people, they can turn around and act in a way that is loyal and true above and beyond the call of duty. They can change, they can grow. But it's interesting to me that there are many people who, when they open the Bible for the first time, they close it in shock and disgust. Jacob is a deceiver; Joseph is an arrogant, spoiled brat; Judah reneges on his obligations to his daughter-in-law and goes off and sleeps with a prostitute. Who are these people? Why are they in the Bible? And the shock comes from the expectation that the heroes of the Bible are somehow being held up as perfect people. That's just not a claim that's made by the Bible itself. So biblical characters are real people with real, compelling moral conflicts and ambitions and desires, and they can act shortsightedly and selfishly. But they can also, like real people, learn and grow and change; and if we work too hard and too quickly to vindicate biblical characters just because they're in the Bible, then we miss all the good stuff. We miss all of the moral sophistication, the deep psychological insights that have made these stories of such timeless interest. So read it like you would read any good book with a really good author who knows how to make some really interesting characters.

Thirdly, the Bible's not for children. I have a 12-year-old and an 8-year-old. I won't let them read it. I won't let them read it. Those "Bible Stories for Children" books, they scare me. They really scare me. It's not suitable for children. The subject matter in the Bible is very adult, particularly in the narrative texts. There are episodes of treachery and incest and murder and rape. And the Bible is not for naïve optimists. It's hard-hitting stuff. And it speaks to those who are courageous enough to acknowledge that life is rife with pain and conflict, just as it's filled with compassion and joy. It's not for children in another sense. Like any literary masterpiece, the Bible is characterized by a sophistication of structure and style and an artistry of theme and metaphor, and believe me, that's lost on adult readers quite often. It makes its readers work. The Bible doesn't moralize, or rarely, rarely moralizes. It explores moral issues and situations, puts people in moral issues and situations. The conclusions have to be drawn by the reader. There are also all kinds of paradoxes and subtle puns and ironies, and in section where you'll be doing a lot of your close reading work, those are some of the things that will be drawn to your attention. You'll really begin to appreciate them in time.

The fourth myth we want to get rid of: the Bible is not a book of theology, it's not a catechism or a book of systematic theology. It's not a manual of religion, despite the fact that at a much later time, very complex systems of theology are going to be spun from particular interpretations of biblical passages. You know, there's nothing in the Bible that really corresponds to prevailing modern western notions of religion, what we call religion, and indeed there's no word for religion in the language of biblical Hebrew. There just isn't a word "religion." With the rise of Christianity, western religion came to be defined to a large degree by the confession of, or the intellectual assent to, certain doctrinal points of belief. Religion became defined primarily as a set of beliefs, a catechism of beliefs or truths that required your assent, what I think of as the catechism kind of notion of religion. That's entirely alien to the world of the Bible. It's clear that in biblical times and in the Ancient Near East generally, religion wasn't a set of doctrines that you ascribed to. To become an Israelite, later on a Jew--the word "Jew" isn't something we can really historically use until about this time [ca. 500

BCE], so most of our period we're going to be talking about the ancient Israelites--to become an Israelite, you simply joined the Israelite community, you lived an Israelite life, you died an Israelite death. You obeyed Israelite law and custom, you revered Israelite lore, you entered into the historical community of Israel by accepting that their fate and yours should be the same. It was sort of a process of naturalization, what we think of today as naturalization. So the Hebrew Bible just isn't a theological textbook. It contains a lot of narratives and its narrative materials are an account of the odyssey of a *people*, the nation of Israel. They're not an account of the divine, which is what theology means, an account of the divine. However, having said this, I should add that although the Bible doesn't contain formal statements of religious belief or systematic theology, it treats issues, many moral issues and some existential issues that are central to the later discipline of theology, but it treats them very differently. Its treatment of these issues is indirect, it's implicit. It uses the language of story and song and poetry and paradox and metaphor. It uses a language and a style that's very far from the language and style of later philosophy and abstract theology.

Finally, on our myth count, I would point out--well I don't really need to cross this out, this is something to discuss--I would point out that the Bible was formulated and assembled and edited and modified and censored and transmitted first orally and then in writing by human beings. The Bible itself doesn't claim to have been written by God. That belief is a religious doctrine of a much later age. And even then one wonders how literally it was meant--it's interesting to go back and look at some of the earliest claims about the origin of the biblical text. Similarly, the so-called five books of Moses--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the first five books we call the Pentateuch of Moses--nowhere claim to have been written in their entirety by Moses. That's not something they say themselves. Some laws in Exodus, you know, the Book of the Covenant, a few things--yes, it says Moses wrote those down, but not the whole five books that tradition later will ascribe to him. The Bible clearly had many contributors over many centuries, and the individual styles and concerns of those writers, their political and religious motivations, betray themselves frequently.

I leave aside here the question of divine inspiration, which is an article of faith in many biblical religions. It's no doubt an article of faith for people in this very room. But there is no basic incompatibility between believing on faith in the divine inspiration of the Bible and acknowledging the role that human beings have played in the actual formulation and editing and transmission and preservation of that same Bible. And since this is a university course and not perhaps a theological course or within a theological setting, it's really only the latter, the demonstrably human component, that will concern us.

It's very easy for me to assert that our interest in the Hebrew Bible will be centered on the culture and the history and the literature and the religious thought of ancient Israel in all of its diversity rather than questions of faith and theology. But the fact remains that the document is the basis for the religious faith of many millions of people, and some of them are here now. It is inevitable that you will bring what you learn in this course into dialogue with your own personal religious beliefs, and for some of you, I hope all of you, that will be enriching and exciting. For some of you it may be difficult. I know that, and I want you to rest assured that no one in this course wishes to undermine or malign religious faith any more than they wish to promote or proselytize for religious faith. Religious faith simply isn't the topic of this course. The rich history and literature and religious thought of ancient Israel as preserved for us over millennia in the pages of this remarkable volume, that is our topic, and so our approach is going to be necessarily academic; and especially given the diversity of people in this room, that's really all that it can be, so that we have a common ground and common goals for our discussions. But it has been my experience that from time to time students will raise a question or ask a question that is prompted by a commitment, a prior commitment to an article of faith. Sometimes they're not even aware that that's what they're doing, and I want you to understand that on those occasions I'll most likely respond by inviting you to consider the article of faith that lies behind that question and is creating that particular problem for you. I'm not going to be drawn into a philosophical or theological debate over the merits of that belief, but I'll simply point out how or why that belief might be making it difficult for you to read or accept what the text is actually and not ideally saying, and leave you to think about that. And I see those as wonderful learning opportunities for the class. Those are in no way a problem for me.

All right, so let's give a few sort of necessary facts and figures now about the Bible and then I need to talk a little bit about the organization of the course. So those are the last two things we really need to do. An overview of the structure of the Bible. So you have a couple of handouts that should help you here. So, the Bible is this assemblage of books and writings dating from approximately 1000 BCE--we're going to hear very diverse opinions about how far back this stuff dates--down to the second century: the last book within the Hebrew Bible was written in the 160s BCE. Some of these

books which we think are roughly from a certain date, they will contain narrative snippets or legal materials or oral traditions that may even date back or stretch back further in time, and they were perhaps transmitted orally and then ended up in these written forms. The Bible is written largely in Hebrew, hence the name Hebrew Bible. There are a few passages in Aramaic. So you have a handout that breaks down the three major components. It's the one that's written two columns per page. Okay? We're going to talk in a minute about those three sections, so you want to have that handy.

These writings have had a profound and lasting impact on three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For the Jewish communities who first compiled these writings in the pre-Christian era, the Bible was perhaps first and foremost a record of God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people. So Jews refer to the Bible as the *Tanakh*. It's the term you see up here. It should be also on that sheet, *Tanakh*, which is really the letter [sounds] "t", "n" and "kh", and they've put little "a"s in there to make it easy to pronounce, because kh is hard to pronounce, so Tanach. Okay? And this is an acronym. The T stands for Torah, which is a word that means instruction or teaching. It's often translated "law"; I think that's a very poor translation. It means instruction, way, teaching, and that refers to the first five books that you see listed here, Genesis through Deuteronomy. The second division of the Bible is referred to as *Nevi'im*, which is the Hebrew word for "prophets." The section of the Prophets is divided really into two parts, because there are two types of writing in the prophetic section of the Bible. The first or former Prophets continues the kind of narrative prose account of the history of Israel, focusing on the activities of Israel's prophets. All right? So, the Former Prophets are narrative texts. The Latter Prophets are poetic and oracular writings that bear the name of the prophet to whom the writings are ascribed. You have the three major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and then the twelve minor prophets, which in the Hebrew Bible get counted together as one book, because those twelve are very small. The final section of the Bible is referred to as *Ketuvim* in Hebrew, which simply means "Writings," and that's probably about 50% of the Hebrew you're going to get in the whole course, so please don't be scared. You know, I've got two or three other terms that'll be useful along the way, but there's really no need to know Hebrew. I just want you to understand why *Tanakh* is the word that's used to refer to the Bible. So the *Ketuvim*, or the Writings, are really a miscellany. They contain works of various types, and the three parts correspond very roughly to the process of canonization or authoritativeness for the community. The Torah probably reached a fixed and authoritative status first, then the books of the Prophets and finally the Writings. And probably by the end of the first century, all of this was organized in some way.

If you look at the other handout, you'll see, however, that any course on the Bible is going to run immediately into the problem of defining the object of study, because different Bibles served different communities over the centuries. One of the earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible was a translation into Greek known as the Septuagint. It was written for the benefit--it was translated for the benefit of Jews who lived in Alexandria--Greek-speaking Jews who lived in Alexandria, Egypt in the Hellenistic period somewhere around the third or second century BCE. The translation has some divergences with the traditional Hebrew text of the Bible as we now have it, including the order of the books, and some of these things are charted for you on the chart that I've handed out. The Septuagint's rationale for ordering the books is temporal. They've clustered books Genesis through Esther, which tell of things past; the books of Job through the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon contain wisdom that applies to the present; and then the prophetic books, Isaiah to Malachi, contain or tell of things future. Some copies of the Septuagint contain some books not included in the Hebrew canon but accepted in the early Christian canon. The Septuagint, the Greek translation, became by and large the Bible of Christianity, or more precisely it became the "Old Testament" of the Hebrew Bible [correction: Professor Hayes meant to say Christian Bible instead of Hebrew Bible here]. The church adopted the Hebrew Bible as a precursor to its largely Hellenistic gospels. It was an important association for it, with an old and respected tradition. Our primary concern is the Bible of the ancient Israelite and Jewish community--the 24 books grouped in the Torah, Prophets and Writings on that other sheet--which is common to all Bibles. Whether Jewish or Christian, those 24 are the baseline common books. So those are the 24 that we're going to focus on.

Because the term "Old Testament" is a theologically loaded term, it sort of suggests the doctrine that the New Testament has somehow fulfilled or surpassed or antiquated the Bible of ancient Israel, you're going to hear me refer to the object of our study as the Hebrew Bible. You may certainly use any other term, and you may certainly use the term Old Testament, as long as it's clear we're talking about this set of 24 books and not some of the other things that are in the Old Testament that aren't in the traditional Hebrew Bible. It means you're studying less, so that might be a good thing. So, it's fine with me if you want to use that but I will prefer the more accurate term "Hebrew Bible." Also while we're on terminology, you'll notice that I use BCE to refer to the period before 0 and CE to refer to the period after 0; the Common Era and Before the Common Era, and in a lot of your secondary readings and writings they'll be using the

same thing. It corresponds to what you know as BC, Before Christ, and Anno Domini, AD, the year of our Lord. It's just a non-Christian-centric way of dating and in a lot of your secondary readings you'll see it, so you should get used to it: BCE and CE, Before the Common Era and the Common Era.

From earliest times, Christians made use of the Bible but almost always in its Greek translation, and the Christian Old Testament contains some material not in the Hebrew Bible, as I've mentioned. And some of these works are referred to as the Apocrypha--so [some of] you will have heard that term. These are writings that were composed somewhere around here, sort of 200 BCE to 100 CE. They were widely used by Jews of the period. They simply weren't considered to be of the same status as the 24 books. [beeping noise] I'm glad they pick up the garbage at 11:10 [laughs] on Wednesday mornings. But they did become part of the canon of Catholic Christianity and in the sixteenth century, their canonical status was confirmed for the Catholic Church. With the Renaissance and the Reformation, some Christians became interested in Hebrew versions of the Bible. They wanted to look at the Hebrew and not the Greek translation from the Hebrew. Protestants, the Protestant church, denied canonical status to the books of the Apocrypha. They said they were important for pious instruction but excluded them from their canon. There are also some works you may know of, referred to as the Pseudepigrapha--we'll talk about some of these things in a little more detail later--from roughly the same period; [they] tend to be a little more apocalyptic in nature, and they were never part of the Jewish or the Catholic canon, but there are some eastern Christian groups that have accepted them in their canon. The point I'm trying to make is that there are very many sacred canons out there that are cherished by very many religious communities, and they're all designated "Bibles." So again, we're focusing on that core set of 24 books that are common to all Bibles everywhere, the 24 books of what would in fact be the Jewish *Tanakh*.

Not only has there been variety regarding the scope of the biblical canon in different communities, but there's been some fluidity in the actual text itself. We don't, of course, have any original copies of these materials as they came off the pen of whoever it was who was writing them, and in fact before the middle of the twentieth century, our oldest manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts of the Bible dated to the year 900. That's an awful long distance from the events they're talking about. And we've got to think about that, right? You've got to think about that and what it means and how were they transmitted and preserved without the means of technology, obviously, that we have today; and what was so exciting in the middle of the twentieth century was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I'm sure that you've heard of them. They brought about a dramatic change in the state of our knowledge of our Hebrew manuscript evidence. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in caves in the Judean desert. We used to think they were a library of a sectarian community; now I think they think it was a pottery factory or something. So maybe they were just shoved there by people fleeing the Roman conquest in 70 [see note 1].

So that's up for grabs. But we have this really great collection of scrolls, and among them we have found an almost complete copy of every book of the Bible. Sorry--almost complete copy of the Book of Isaiah and then partial copies or fragments of all of the biblical books, except maybe Esther. Am I wrong about that? I don't think there's an Esther from Qumran, I think that's the only one. [This is correct. No book of Esther has been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.] And some of them date back to the fourth and third century [BCE]. So do you understand now why everybody was so excited? Suddenly, we have evidence, thirteen or fourteen hundred years earlier, that people were reading this stuff and, by and large, it's a pretty constant textual tradition. Sure there are differences, sure there are differences. We see that our manuscripts are not exactly like those fragments, but there is a remarkable degree, a high degree of correspondence so that we really can speak of a relatively stable textual tradition but still some fluidity. And that's going to be interesting for us to think about.

There are many translations of the Bible, but I would like you to purchase for this course the *Jewish Study Bible* [see References]. So let me turn now to just some of the administrative, organizational details of the course, the secondary readings that we'll be using. I'm asking you to pick up the *Jewish Study Bible* not only for the translation of the *Tanakh*, which is a very good translation, but because it contains wonderful scholarly articles in the back. It used to be we had a course packet for this course that was two volumes, and now with the purchase of this, I've been able to really consolidate the readings. They're really wonderful; great introductions to the individual books of the Bible and so I think you will find that this will become like a Bible to you [laughs]. So you need to pick that up. It's at the Yale bookstore. I also would like you to pick up this paperback, it's not terribly expensive. We're going to be using it in the first few weeks especially: *The Ancient Near East* [see References]. Other readings, the secondary readings for the course, are all already online [for on-campus students]. I will be also making them available at Allegra [bookstore] for people who

would like to just purchase them already printed out so you don't do it yourself, but I know some people really prefer to work online--and certainly for the first week of reading, you can get started because it is online. I don't think things will be available at Allegra's until probably tomorrow afternoon.

The syllabus. As you can see, it's a pretty thick syllabus, but it's divided into a schedule of lectures and then a schedule of readings. All right? So, understand that there are two distinct things there. It's not just all the scheduled lectures. The last few pages are a schedule of the actual readings, and the assignment that you'll have for the weekend and for next week's lectures are the readings by Kaufman. I really, really need you to read that before the next class, and I want you to read it critically. Kaufman's ideas are important, but they are also overstated, and so they're going to be interesting for us. We're going to wrestle with his claims quite a bit during the course of the semester. The secondary readings are heavier at the beginning of the course when we are reading very small segments of biblical text. That will shift. Right? Towards the end of the course you're going to be reading, you know, a couple of books in the Bible and maybe a ten-page article of secondary reading; so, you know, it's front loaded with secondary readings. So you'll want to get started on the Kaufman, because for the first few weeks it's quite a bit of secondary reading but we're covering just a few chapters of Bible each time in the first few weeks.

Sections: We're going to be doing this online registration thing that I've never done before, so I hope it works. We do have three teaching fellows for this course. I hope that will be sufficient. Actually, if the teaching fellows could stand up so people could at least recognize you, that would be wonderful. Anyone wants to volunteer, we could have a fourth. Okay, so we have two in the back there, we have Tudor Sala raising his hand and Tzvi Novick here. They will be running regular discussion sections and then Kristine Garroway will be running a writing requirement section. I don't think that was listed in the Blue Book [Yale College Programs of Study], but it should've been listed online that it is possible to fulfill your writing skills requirement through this course. So Kristine will be running that. We will bring on Monday--so please have your schedules as well-formed as they are, on Monday--we will put up times and we will take a straw poll to figure out if we can accommodate everybody within the times.

One more extremely important announcement, it's on your syllabus, but I want to underline it even more than it is already underlined and boldfaced. I want to underline the importance of the section discussions in this course. In fact, it's really wrong to call them section discussions. It sounds like you're discussing the lectures and the readings and you're really not. The section discussions are a complement to the lectures. What I mean is: this is an awfully big thing to spend just one semester studying, and I can't do it all, and in my lectures I'll be trying to set broad themes and patterns and describe what's going on, but I want you to have the experience of actually sitting and reading chunks of text and struggling with that and understanding the history of interpretation of passages and how so many important things have happened historically because of people's efforts to understand this text. So in sections, a large part of the focus in section will be on specific passages, reading and struggling with the text, the kind of thing I can't do in lecture. This is important because your final paper assignment will be an exercise in exegesis, an interpretation. The skills that you will need for that paper I am fairly certain are not things that you would've acquired in high school and, if we have some upperclassmen--I don't know, but maybe not even some upperclassmen will have acquired here yet. Exegesis is a very particular kind of skill and the teaching fellows will be introducing you to methods of exegesis. So it's really a training ground for the final paper, and we have found that people don't succeed in the course in the final paper without the training they get in section discussion, which is why section participation is worth ten percent of your grade. However, if there are repeated, unexcused absences, there will be an adjustment in the grade calculation, and it will be worth twenty to twenty-five percent of your grade, and it will be a negative grade also. And believe me, this is a favor to you. It is definitely a favor to you. These sections are critically important in this course. Okay? So, if you have any questions, I can hang around for a few minutes, but thank you for coming. We'll see you Monday.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. This most recent challenge to the long-standing hypothesis that the settlement at Qumran near the Dead Sea was home to a monastic sect, has been issued by archaeologists Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Peleg. In "Back to Qumran: Ten

years of Excavations and Research, 1993-2004," in *The Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretation and Debate*, eds. Katharina Galor, Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and Jurgen Zangenberg (Brill, 2006), Magen and Yuval argue that Qumran was the site of a pottery factory, and that there is no essential connection between the activity of the site and the library of scrolls found in near-by caves. The view has raised interest but has not replaced the prevailing consensus that the scrolls were the library of a monastic sect that lived at Qumran.

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## **References**

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 2 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** I mentioned in the opening lecture that this course is going to examine the biblical corpus from a variety of different viewpoints and take a variety of approaches, historical, literary, religious, cultural. And today we are going to begin our appraisal of the first portion of the Bible as the product of a religious and cultural revolution. The Bible is the product of minds that were exposed to and influenced by and reacting to the ideas and cultures of their day. And as I suggested in the opening lecture, comparative study of the literature of the Ancient Near East and the Bible reveals the shared cultural and literary heritage at the same time that it reveals great differences between the two. In the literature of the Bible some members of Israelite society--probably a cultural religious and literary elite--broke radically with the prevailing norms of the day. They mounted a critique of prevailing norms. The persons responsible for the final editing and shaping of the Bible, somewhere from the seventh to the fifth or fourth century BCE--we're not totally sure and we'll talk more about that--those final editors were members of this group. And they had a specific worldview and they imposed that worldview on the older traditions and stories that are found in the Bible. That radical new worldview in the Bible was monotheism. But why, you might ask, should the idea of one God instead of many be so radical? What is so different? What's different about having one God, from having a pantheon of gods headed by a superior god? What is so new and revolutionary about monotheism?

Well according to one school of thought there isn't anything particularly revolutionary about monotheism; and the classical account of the rise of monotheism, that has prevailed for a very long time, runs as follows, and I have a little flow chart here to illustrate it for you. The argument goes that in every society there's a natural progression: a natural progression from polytheism, which is the belief in many gods--usually these are personifications of natural forces--to henotheism--"heno," equals one, god--or monolatry, which is really the worship of one god as supreme over other gods, so not denying the existence of the other gods, ascribing reality to them, but isolating one as a supreme god, and onto monotheism, where essentially one believes only in the reality of one god. And in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this progression was viewed as an advance, which is not very surprising because the whole theory was put forward by scholars who were basically western monotheists. And these scholars maintained that certain elements of biblical religion represented pure religion, religion evolved to its highest form, no longer tainted by pagan and polytheistic elements of Canaanite religion generally. So applying an evolutionary model to religion carried with it a very clear value judgment. Polytheism was understood as clearly inferior and primitive. Monolatry was an improvement. It was getting better. It was getting closer. But monotheism was judged to be the best and purest form of religion. And at first the great archeological discoveries that I talked about last time in the nineteenth century seemed to support this claim--that Israelite monotheism had evolved from Ancient Near Eastern polytheism. Cuneiform tablets that were inscribed with the great literature of Mesopotamian civilizations were uncovered and when they were deciphered they shed astonishing light on biblical religion. And these discoveries led to a kind of "parallelomania"--that's how it's referred to in the literature. Scholars delighted in pointing out all of the parallels in theme and language and plot and structure between biblical stories and Ancient Near Eastern stories. So more than a thousand years before the Israelite legend of Noah and the ark you have Mesopotamians telling the stories Ziusudra, or in some versions Utnapishtim who also survived a great flood by building an ark on the instruction of a deity, and the flood destroys all life, and he sends out birds to scout out the dry land, and so on. So with parallels like these, it was argued, it was clear that the religion of the Israelites was not so different from the religions of their polytheistic or pagan neighbors. They also had a creation story. They had a flood story. They did animal sacrifices. They observed purity taboos. Israelite religion was another Ancient Near Eastern religion and they differed from their neighbors only over the number of gods they worshiped: one or many. It was just a more refined, more highly evolved, version of Ancient Near Eastern religion.

Well, this view, this evolutionary view, or evolutionary model, was challenged by man a named Yehezkel Kaufmann in the 1930's. And Kaufman argued that monotheism does not and cannot evolve from polytheism because the two are based on radically divergent worldviews, radically divergent intuitions about reality. And in a multivolume work which was later translated and abridged, and you've got a selection of reading from the translated abridgment, so it's translated by Moshe Greenburg, an abridged version of his massive work *The Religion of Israel* Kaufman asserted that the monotheism of Israel wasn't, it couldn't be, the natural outgrowth of the polytheism of an earlier age. It was a radical break with it. It was a total cultural and religious discontinuity. It was a polemic against polytheism and the pagan

worldview. That's implicit, he says, throughout the biblical text. It's been said that Kaufman replaces the evolutionary model with a revolutionary model. This was a revolution not an evolution. Now one advantage of Kaufman's model is that we can avoid some of the pejorative evaluations of polytheism as primitive, as necessarily earlier and primitive and inferior. We're simply positing the existence of two distinct orientations, two divergent worldviews. They each have their explanatory merits and they each have their specific problems and difficulties. It's not to say that Kaufman wasn't clearly judgmental but at least the potential is there for us to understand these as two distinct systems, each again, as I say, with its explanatory merits. But as we'll see some of the things that monotheism solves only invite other sorts of problems that it has to wrestle with throughout its long life.

Now in Kaufman's view the similarities, therefore, between the Israelites and Ancient Near Eastern religion and cultures that everyone was so busily finding and celebrating, these were in the end similarities in form and external structure, appearance. They weren't essential similarities. They differed in content. Sure they both have animal sacrifice. Sure they both have ritual purity laws. Sure they share certain stories and legends. But these have been adopted by the Israelites and transformed, transformed into vehicles that convey the basic ideas of the monotheistic worldview. So a similarity in form doesn't mean a similarity in function; and in this, Kaufman is anticipating arguments made by anthropologists. The ritual cult of the Israelites may look like that of their neighbors but it functioned very differently; its purpose was drastically different from that of Israel's neighbors. The Israelites like their neighbors may have set up a king over themselves. But Israelite monarchy differed from Canaanite monarchy in significant ways because of their monotheism. These are all things we will test and explore. So the meaning and function of Israel's cult, of Israel's king, of its creation stories or any of its other narratives--they derive from the place of those items within the larger cultural framework or worldview of Israel and that larger framework or worldview is one of basic monotheism.

So let's turn then to Kaufman's description of the fundamental distinction between the polytheistic worldview and the revolutionary monotheistic worldview that took root in Israel. And I am going to be rehearsing and then critiquing the arguments that are in that hundred-page reading that I assigned for you this week. This is the only time something like this will happen in the course. And I do that because these ideas are so fundamental and we are going to be wrestling with them throughout the course, so it's important to me that you absorb this stuff right from the beginning and think about it and be critical of it and engage it. Kaufman's ideas are very important. They're also overstated in some ways and that's why we're going to be wrestling with some of these ideas throughout the course.

So, let's begin with Kaufman's characterization of what he calls pagan religion--that's the term that he uses. The fundamental idea of pagan religion, he says, and I quote, is "the idea that there exists a realm of being prior to the gods and above them, upon which they [the gods] depend, and whose decrees," even "they must obey" [Kaufman 1972, 22]--the metadivine realm. This is the realm of supreme and ultimate power and it transcends the deities. The deity or the deities emerge from and are therefore subject to the laws of the metadivine realm, the forces and powers of the metadivine realm. And the nature of this realm will vary from pagan tradition to pagan tradition. It might be water. It might be darkness. It might be spirit. Or in ancient Greek religion, a more sort of philosophical polytheism, it might be fate. Even the gods are subject to the decrees of fate; they have no control over that. Kaufman asserts, therefore, this belief. Once you posit a primordial realm, some realm that is beside or beyond the gods, that's independent of them and primary, you have automatically limited the gods. So what I've done is I've spelled out here for you, consequences, logical consequences of positing a metadivine realm. Once you have a metadivine realm all of these things are going to follow.

The gods are going to be limited. They are not the source of all. They are bound by, they're subservient to, this metadivine realm. There can therefore, be no notion of a supreme divine will, an absolute or sovereign divine will. The will of any one god ultimately can be countered by the decrees of the primordial realm and the will of all the gods can be thwarted by the decrees of the primordial realm. The will of any one god can be thwarted by perhaps another god. So the gods are limited in power. They're also limited in their wisdom: that falls under this as well. They're not going to be all-knowing or all-wise because of the existence of this realm that's beyond them and which is in many ways mysterious to them as well. It's unpredictable to them too. It's not in their control or in their power. Individual gods might be very wise; they might be wise in particular crafts. There might be a god of healing, very very wise in healing, or a god of some other craft or area of knowledge. But they possess wisdom as an attribute, not as an essential characteristic.

Kaufman asserts that mythology is basic to pagan religions. Mythologies are the lives or tales of the lives of gods, tales

of the lives of the gods. In pagan religions the gods are born, and they live lives very similar to human lives but on a grand scale and then they die. They might be reborn too. Pagan religions contain theogonies, birth of a god, "theogony", accounts of the births of gods. Now this impersonal primordial realm, Kaufman declares, contains the seeds of all beings. Very often in these creation stories there is some sense of some realm from which life begins to emerge usually beginning with gods. So these cosmogonies and theogonies will describe the generation of sexually differentiated divine beings; also the generation of the natural world; also the generation of human beings and animals: in other words, this is the primordial womb for all that is--divine, human and natural. It is the source of everything mundane and divine.

What that means, Kaufman asserts, is that in pagan religion there's very often a fluid boundary between the divine, the human, and the natural worlds. They blur into one another because they all emerge ultimately from the same primordial world stuff. These distinctions between them are soft. We see this in the fact that the gods are very often associated with natural powerful forces, right? The sky is a god; the fire is a god; fertility--a natural process--is a god. So there's no real distinction between the worship of gods and the worship of nature. Second, he says, because humans also emerge ultimately from this primordial realm there's a confusion of the boundary between the divine and the human that's common, he says--he chooses the word "confusion"--that's common in pagan religion. And so we often have in pagan religions unions between divine beings and human beings. Kaufman argues, and I quote, that "the continuity [of] the divine and human realm is [at] the basis of the pagan belief in apotheosis" [Kaufman 1972, 36]--humans becoming gods; perhaps after death for example becoming immortal, or very often kings when they ascend to the throne become gods.

Whatever power the gods have, Kaufman says, is not due to the fact that their will is absolute or their spirit is absolute. The realm that transcends the gods, this metadivine realm, is that which has ultimate power and the stuff of which it is made is what has ultimate power. So power is materially conceived. It inheres in certain things, in certain substances, particularly substances or materials that are deeply connected to whatever this primordial world stuff is. So if it's blood, then blood that courses through the veins of living creatures is seen to have some deep and powerful connection with the metadivine realm and that is where power resides. If it is water, then water will be viewed as particularly materially powerful in that particular system.

So gods have power only insofar as they are connected with that primordial world "stuff," a technical term that I use throughout this lecture! That means that magic is possible in such a system. Because power is materially conceived--in other words, since it is believed to inhere in certain natural substances that resemble or are connected to the primordial world stuff that's the source of all power--then magic is possible by manipulating those material substances in certain ways. It might be clay. It might be water. It might be blood. Then whatever is believed to hold the power of this primordial life force, humans can tap into, and influence the activities of the metadivine realm. So through manipulation, magical manipulation of certain substances, they can harness, Kaufman says, they can harness these forces, these independent self-operating forces. And so the human magician is really a technician and he can make these forces come to bear on even the gods, to coerce the gods to do his will and so on. So magic in a pagan system, Kaufman claims, is a way of getting around the gods, circumventing the capricious will of the gods and demons. His magic is directed at the metadivine realm, trying to tap into its powers. It's not directed at the gods. It's trying to tap into the ultimate source of power to use that power to influence the gods in a particular way or protect oneself against the gods. Similarly, divination. Divination is an attempt to discern the future that, once again, heads right to the source of power. It's not directed at the gods, unless you're hoping to use them as a medium through which to get access to the metadivine realm, but ultimately most divination is aimed at tapping the secrets of the metadivine realm and not the gods. Discerning the will of the gods is really of little use, because even their will can be thwarted or overthrown by other gods or by the decrees of the metadivine realm.

The pagan cult, Kaufman claims, is a system of rites. Now I use the word "cult" and every year people look at me and say "what is cult? I don't even understand what that means." We'll learn more about "cult," but it refers to a system of rites, okay? A system of rites, and we'll be looking at the Israelite cult later. So the pagan cult, he says, is a system of rites that involves a manipulation of substances--again, blood, animal flesh, human flesh, precious metals and so on--that are believed to have some kind of inherent power, again, because of their connection to whatever the primordial world stuff may be in that tradition. So according to Kaufman there's always an element of magic in the pagan cult. It's seeking through these rituals and manipulations of certain substances to, again, let loose certain powers, set into motion certain forces, that will coerce a god to be propitiated, for example, or calmed or to act favorably or to vindicate the

devotees, and so on. Some of those cultic acts might be defensive or protective so that the god cannot harm the worshiper. Many of the cultic festivals are keyed in to mythology, the stories of the lives of the gods. Many of the cultic festivals will be reenactments of events in the life of the god: a battle that the god had—the death of the god. Usually in the winter, cultic rituals will reenact the death of the god and then, in spring, the rising or resurrection of the god. These are all reenactment festivals that occur very often. And it's believed that by reenacting these festivals in this cultic way, one brings magical powers into play and can in fact ensure and maintain the reemergence of life in the spring. So it's essential for the maintenance, preservation of the world.

One final and very important point, and we're going to wrestle with this quite a bit during the year: Kaufman claims, again, in the polytheistic worldview, the primordial realm contains the seeds of all being: everything is generated from that realm, good and bad. So just as there are good gods who might protect human beings there are also evil gods who seek to destroy both humans and other gods. Death and disease are consigned to the realm of these evil demons or these impure evil spirits, but they are siblings with the good gods. Human beings are basically powerless, he says, in the continual cosmic struggle between the good gods and the evil demons, unless they can utilize magic, divination, tap into the powers of the metadivine realm, circumvent the gods who might be making their lives rather miserable. But what's important is that Kaufman insists that in the pagan view evil is an autonomous demonic realm. It is as primary and real as the realm of the holy or good gods. Evil is a metaphysical reality. It is built into the structure of the universe. That's the way the universe was made. The primordial stuff that spawned all that is, spawned it good and bad and exactly as it is, and it's there and it's real.

Salvation, he says, is the concern of humans. The gods aren't interested in human salvation from the capricious forces and powers in the world because they're trying to save themselves. You know, the good gods are being attacked by the evil gods; the powers and decrees of the metadivine realm are hassling them as well as anybody else. So they can't be worried about humans; they're worried about themselves. Salvation is attained through magic or gnostic means--gnosticism refers to knowledge of secrets that can in some way liberate one from the regular rules--and so as long as one can somehow circumvent the gods, tie oneself into the powers of the metadivine realm to be beyond the reach of the demons and the capricious gods who make life on earth a misery, that is the path for salvation.

So, Kaufman says that the pagan worldview is one of an amoral universe [looking at the blackboard] somewhere around here—there we go. Amoral universe. Not a moral universe; not an immoral universe; but an amoral universe. It is morally neutral. There are gods who are legislators and guardians of social order and justice. But their laws aren't absolute: they can be leveled by the decrees of this supreme metadivine realm. And since the knowledge and wisdom of each god is limited, morality can be defined as what a particular god likes or desires and that may be different from what another god likes or desires. And there's no absolute morality then. And it's that picture of the universe, Kaufman wants to argue, that is challenged by the monotheistic revolution. Again he sees this as a revolution of ancient Israel.

So according to Kaufman the fundamental idea of ancient Israelite writing, which receives no systematic formulation but permeates the entire Bible in his view, is a radically new idea of a god who is himself the source of all being--not subject to a metadivine realm. There's no transcendent cosmic order or power. He does not emerge from some preexisting realm and therefore he is free of all of the limitations of myth and magic--we'll go through these one by one--but a God whose will is absolute and sovereign. All right? So what then are the implications of the elimination of this metadivine realm? Just as these points flowed logically from positing a metadivine realm, what flows logically from eliminating a metadivine realm and positing simply a god that does not emerge from any preexisting power or order or realm? Well, first of all there's no theogony or mythology in the Bible. God isn't born from some primordial womb; he doesn't have a life story. There's no realm that is primary to him or prior to him and there is no realm that is the source of his power and wisdom. So in the opening chapters of Genesis, God simply is. He doesn't grow, he doesn't age, he doesn't mature, he doesn't have in the Bible a female consort. God doesn't die. So in the Hebrew Bible, Kaufman claims, for the first time in history we meet an unlimited God who is timeless and ageless and nonphysical and eternal.

That means that this God transcends nature. Which means we're going to get rid of number three [on the blackboard] as well, right? As the sovereign of all realms, God isn't by nature bound to any particular realm. He's not identifiable as a force of nature or identified with a force of nature. Nature certainly becomes the stage of God's expression of his will. He expresses his will and purpose through forces of nature in the Bible. But nature isn't God himself. He's not identified [with it]. He's wholly other. He isn't kin to humans in any way either. So there is no blurring, no soft boundary between

humans and the divine, according to Kaufman, in the Bible. There's no apotheosis in the Bible. No life after death in the Bible either. Did you know that? Have to wait a few centuries for that idea to come along, but certainly not in the Hebrew Bible: people live 70 years and that's it. So there's no process by which humans become gods and certainly no process of the reverse as well. Magic in the Hebrew Bible is represented as useless. It's pointless. There's no metadivine realm to tap into. Power doesn't inhere in any stuff in the natural world. So the world is sort of de-divinized. Demythologized. Power isn't understood as a material thing or something that inheres in material substances. God can't be manipulated or coerced by charms or words or rituals. They have no power and cannot be used in that way, and so magic is sin. Magic is sin or rebellion against God because it's predicated on a whole mistaken notion of God having limited power. There are magical conceptions throughout the Bible--you're going to run into them. But interestingly enough the editors of the stories in which they appear will very often hammer home the conclusion that actually what happened happened, because God willed it to happen. The event occurred because God wanted it to occur. It didn't occur independently of his will or by virtue of some power that's inherent in the magician's artifices. So Kaufman argues that magic in the Bible is recast as a witness to God's sovereignty, God's power. And they're stripped--magical actions are stripped--of their autonomous potency. Again, they're serving as vehicles then for the manifestation of the will of God.

Divination is also unassimilable to the monotheistic idea, according to Kaufman, because it also presupposes the existence of some metadivine realm, some source of power, knowledge or information that transcends God. And again, it's an attempt to reveal God's secrets in an ungodly way, predicated on a mistake. It is permitted to make inquiries of God through oracular devices but God only conveys information at his own will. There's no ritual or incantation, Kaufman says, or material substance that can coerce a revelation from God. So, we will see things that look like magic and divination and oracles and dreams and prophecy in the pagan world and in ancient Israel. But Kaufman says the similarity is a similarity in form only. And it's a superficial, formal, external similarity. Each of these phenomena he says is transformed by the basic Israelite idea of one supreme transcendent God whose will is absolute and all of these things relate to the direct word and will of God. They aren't recourse to a separate science or lore or body of knowledge or interpretive craft that calls upon forces or powers that transcend God or are independent of God.

By the same token the cult, Kaufman says, has no automatic or material power. It's not just sort of a place where certain kinds of magical coercive acts happen. The cult isn't designed to service the material needs of God, either. It doesn't affect his life and vitality by enacting certain rituals: you don't ensure that God doesn't die and so on. No events in God's life are celebrated--the festivals that are carried out in the cultic context. So the mythological rationales for cult that you find amongst Israel's neighbors are replaced, and they're replaced very often by historical rationales. This action is done to commemorate such and such event in the history of the nation. So pagan festivals in Israel, Kaufman says, are historicized, commemorating events in the life of the people and not in the story of the god's life since we have no mythology. But we are going to be spending a fair amount of time talking actually about the meaning and the function of Israel's purity laws and cultic laws in a later lecture.

Now since God is himself the transcendent source of all being and since he is good, in a monotheistic system there are no evil agents that constitute a realm that opposes God as an equal rival. No divine evil agents. Again, in the pagan worldview the primordial womb spawns all sorts of beings, all kinds of divinities, good and evil that are in equal strength. They're sort of locked in this cosmic struggle. But in the Israelite worldview, if God is the source of all being, then they're can't be a realm of supernatural beings that do battle with him. There's no room for a divine antagonist of the one supreme God, which is leading us down here to this point: that sin and evil are demythologized in the Hebrew Bible. And that's very interesting. It's going to lead to a lot of interesting things. It's also going to create a really huge problem for monotheistic thought [that] they're going to struggle with for centuries and actually still do struggle with today. But again, in the pagan worldview, sin is understood very often as the work of a demon or an evil god that might possess a person, might have to be exorcised from that person by means of magic. If you tap into some of these substances then you can use the magical, the powers in those substances, to coerce the demon to be expelled from the person's body. These are things that are very common in polytheistic and pagan practices. But in Israel we have no metadivine realm to spawn these evil beings, these various gods. So Israelite religion did not conceive of sin as caused by an independent evil power that exists out there in the universe and is defying the will of God. Instead evil comes about as a result of the clash of the will of God and the will of humans who happen to have the freedom to rebel.

There's nothing inherently supernatural about sin. It's not a force or a power built into the universe. Kaufman is claiming

therefore that in Israel evil is transferred from the metaphysical realm (built into the physical structure of the universe) to the moral realm. I've put it up here for you. Evil is a moral and not a metaphysical reality. It doesn't have a concrete independent existence. And that means that human beings and only human beings are the potential source of evil in the world. Responsibility for evil lies in the hands of human beings. In the Hebrew Bible, no one will ever say the devil made me do it. There is no devil in the Hebrew Bible. That's also the invention of a much later age. And that is an important and critical ethical revolution. Evil is a moral and not a metaphysical reality [pointing to a student in the classroom]. You had a [question].

**Student:** What about the serpent in the Garden of Eden?

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Great. That's what you get to talk about. Wonderful question. Well what about when Eve is tempted by the serpent? Who is the serpent? What is he doing? What's going on? What is Kaufman claiming? Okay. That's exactly the kind of stuff that should be popping into your head---What about...what about?--okay, and in section, you're going to be discussing exactly that story. Okay? And that's one of those texts... and in a minute if I haven't at the end of a lecture, ask again if I haven't kind of gotten to part of an answer to your question. Okay? But again, this emphasis on evil as a moral choice--think of Genesis 4, where God warns Cain, who's filled with anger and jealousy and is thinking about doing all kinds of horrible things to his brother, and God says, "Sin couches at the door; / Its urge is toward you, / Yet you can be its master" [Gen 4:7b]. This is a question of moral choice.

Final point then is...and we're not going to talk about salvation right now...but we're going to talk about the fact that the only supreme law is the will of God, because God is a creator God rather than a created God. He's imposed order, an order upon the cosmos. And so the pagan picture of an amoral universe of just competing powers, good and evil, Kaufman says, is transformed into a picture of a moral cosmos. The highest law is the will of God and that imposes a morality upon the structure of the universe. So in sum, Kaufman's argument is this: Israel conceived of the divine in an entirely new way. Israel's God differed from the pagan gods in his essential nature. The pagan gods were natural gods. They were very often associated with blind forces of nature with no intrinsic moral character, he says. And the god of Israel was understood to transcend nature and his will was not only absolute, it was absolutely good and moral. A lot of people say, well in a way didn't we just rename the metadivine realm God? No. Because the difference here is that it's posited not only that this God is the only power but that he is only good. And that was not the case with the metadivine realm. Right? That was morally neutral. But there's a moral claim that's being made by the writers of the Hebrew Bible about this supreme power, this God. God is depicted as just, compassionate. Morality therefore is perceived as conforming to the will of God. And there are absolute standards then of justice and reverence for life.

Now Kaufman says God is demythologized, but even though he's demythologized he's not rendered completely impersonal. He's spoken of anthropomorphically, so that we can capture his interaction with human beings. This is the only way, Kaufman says, you can write in any meaningful sense about the interaction between God and humanity. So he has to be anthropomorphized. But the interaction between God and humans, he says, happens not through nature but through history. God is not known through natural manifestations. He's known by his action in the world in historical time and his relationship with a historical people.

I just want to read you a few sentences from an article Kaufman wrote, a different one from the one that you read. But it sums up his idea that there's an abyss that separates monotheism and polytheism and he says that it would be a mistake to think that the difference between the two is arithmetic--that a polytheistic tradition in which there are ten gods is a lot more like monotheism than a polytheistic tradition in which there are 40 gods, because as you get smaller in number it gets closer to being monotheistic. He says the pagan idea, and I quote, "does not approach Israelite monotheism as it diminishes the number of its gods. The Israelite conception of God's unity entails His sovereign transcendence over all." That's the real issue. "It rejects the pagan idea of a realm beyond the deity, the source of mythology and magic. The affirmation that the will of God is supreme and absolutely free is a new and non-pagan category of thought" [Kaufman 1956, 13]. That's in an article in the *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People*. And he goes on again to say that this affirmation isn't stated dogmatically anywhere but it pervades Israelite creativity, biblical texts. He also asserts that the idea kind of developed over time, but that basically there was a fundamental revolution and break, and then within that there was some development of some of the latent potential of that idea.

So, which is it, which is part of the question that came from over here, [gestures toward student who had earlier asked a

question]? You have on the one hand the claim that Israelite religion is essentially continuous with Ancient Near Eastern polytheism. It's merely limiting the number of gods worshipped to one, but it houses that God in a temple. It offers him sacrifices and so on. And then on the other hand we have Kaufman's claim that Israelite religion is a radical break from the religions of the Ancient Near Eastern. Well, the value of Kaufman's work, I think, lies in the insight that monotheism and polytheism in the abstract--now I'm not sure they exist anywhere in the world--but in the abstract are predicated on divergent intuitions as systems. They do seem to describe very different worlds. And therefore as a system, the difference between Israel's God and the gods of Israel's neighbors was not merely quantitative. It was qualitative. There's a qualitative difference here. However when you read his work it's clear that he often has to force his evidence and force it rather badly. And it's simply a fact, that practices and ideas that are not strictly or even strongly monotheistic do appear in the Bible. So perhaps those scholars who stress the continuity between Israel and her environment are right after all.

And this impasse I think can be resolved to a large degree when we realize that we have to make a distinction between--well let's do it this way first. We're going to talk about a distinction between the actual--I hate to say that as if I can somehow show you a snapshot of what people did 3,000 years ago--but between the actual religious practices and beliefs of the actual inhabitants of Israel and Judah, we're going to call that Israelite-Judean religion: what somebody back in the year 900 BCE might have done when they went to the temple; and what they might have *thought* they were doing when they went to the temple, because I'm not sure it was necessarily what the author of the Book of Deuteronomy says they were doing when they go to the temple; so there's a difference between what actual people, the inhabitants of Israel and Judah, did--we'll call that Israelite Judean religion--and the religion that's promoted, or the worldview, I prefer that term, that's being promoted by the later writers and editors of biblical stories who are telling the story of these people--we'll call that biblical religion, the religion or the worldview that we can see emerging from many biblical texts. That distinction is found in an article in your *Jewish Study Bible*, an article by Steven Geller (Geller 2004, 2021-2040). You're going to be reading that later on in the course. But be aware of that distinction and that article.

What second millennium Hebrews and early first millennium Israelites or Judeans, Judahites, actually believed or did is not always retrievable, in fact probably not retrievable, to us. We have some clues. But in all likelihood Hebrews of an older time, the patriarchal period, the second millennium BCE--they probably weren't markedly different from many of their polytheistic neighbors. Archaeology would suggest that. In some ways that's true. We do find evidence in the Bible as well as in the archaeological record, of popular practices that are not strictly monotheistic. The worship of little household idols, local fertility deities, for example. Most scholars conjecture that ancient Israelite-Judean religion, the practices of the people in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the first millennium BCE, was maybe monolatrist. They might have promoted the worship of one God, Yahweh, without denying the existence of other gods and still kept their little idols and fertility gods or engaged in various syncretistic practices. It was probably monolatrist rather than monotheistic, really asserting the reality of only one God. Moreover our evidence suggests that Yahweh was in many respects very similar to many of the gods of Canaanite religion. And we'll be talking about some of those at the appropriate time. But continuities with Canaanite and Ancient Near Eastern religions are apparent in the worship practices and the cult objects of ancient Israel and Judah as they're described in the biblical stories and as we find them in archaeological discoveries.

The Hebrew Bible also contains sources that exhibit features of what Kaufman has described as contemporary polytheisms. In Genesis 6--I mean, the text you pointed out is a good one but even better, go look at Genesis 6 where you have these *nephilim*, these divine beings who descend to earth and they mate with female humans. That's a real fluid boundary between the divine and human realms, if you ask me. But it only happens there, in one spot. In many passages too Yahweh is represented as presiding over a council of gods. Certainly in the Psalms we have these sort of poetic and metaphoric descriptions where God is, "Okay guys, what do you think?" presiding--or he's one of them, actually. In one Psalm--it's great--he's one of the gods and he says, "You know, you guys don't know what you're doing. Let me take over." And he stands up in the council and takes over. And there are other passages in the Bible too that assume the existence of other gods worshipped by other nations. So there's certainly stuff like that in there you have to think about.

Now nevertheless, the most strongly monotheistic sources of the Bible do posit a God that is qualitatively different from the gods that populated the mythology of Israel's neighbors and probably also Israelite- Judean religion. In these sources the Israelites' deity is clearly the source of all being. He doesn't emerge from a preexisting realm. He has no divine siblings. His will is absolute. His will is sovereign. He's not affected by magical coercion. And biblical monotheism,

biblical religion, assumes that this God is inherently good. He's just. He's compassionate. And human morality is conformity to his will. Because certain texts of the Bible posit this absolutely good God who places absolute moral demands on humankind, biblical monotheism is often referred to as ethical monotheism, so it's a term that you'll see quite a bit: ethical monotheism. Beginning perhaps as early as the eighth century and continuing for several centuries, literate and decidedly monotheistic circles within Israelite society put a monotheistic framework on the ancient stories and traditions of the nation. They molded them into a foundation myth that would shape Israelite and Jewish self-identity and understanding in a profound way. They projected their monotheism onto an earlier time, onto the nation's most ancient ancestors. Israelite monotheism is represented in the Bible as beginning with Abraham. Historically speaking it most likely began much later, and probably as a minority movement that grew to prominence over centuries. But that later monotheism is projected back over Israel's history by the final editors of the Bible. And that creates the impression of the biblical religion that Kaufman describes so well.

But the biblical text itself, the biblical record, is very conflicted, and that's part of the fun of reading it. And you will see the biblical record pointing to two different and conflicting realities. You will find religious practices and views that aren't strictly monotheistic and you'll find later religious practices and views that are. And the later sources, which we might best call biblical religion, are breaking therefore not only with Ancient Near Eastern practices but also with Israelite-Judean practices, with other elements within their own society. So biblical religion as Kaufman describes it, isn't, I think, just a revolution of Israel against the nations. I think it's also a civil war of Israel against itself. And that's an aspect that is really not entertained by Kaufman. And I think it's an important one for us to entertain so that we can allow the biblical text to speak to us in all its polyphony. And not try to force it all into one model: "Well, I know this is monotheistic text so, gosh, I'd better come up with an explanation of Genesis 6 that works with monotheism," You're going to be freed of having to do that; you're going to be freed of having to do that. Let the text be contradictory and inconsistent and difficult. Let it be difficult. Don't homogenize it all.

So the differences between the god of the monotheizing sources of the Bible and the gods of surrounding Mesopotamian literature and older Israelite ideas, perhaps, they're apparent from the very first chapters of Genesis. That's a creation story in Genesis 1, we're going to see, a creation story that's added to the Pentateuch, Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy. This creation story is added to the Pentateuch probably in one of the last rounds of editing, probably sixth century perhaps, we don't really know. But Genesis 1 is a very strongly monotheistic opening to the primeval myths that are then contained in the next ten chapters of Genesis. So next time we're going to start with a close reading and examination of Genesis 1 through 4. We're going to read these stories with an eye to Israel's adaptation of Near Eastern motifs and themes to sort of monotheize those motifs and themes and express a new conception of God and the world and humankind.

Before you race out of here please be sure that you've handed in--we really want to know if we're going to need a new TF, I think we might; so we'd like to know--please hand in an index card, even if you're utterly confused and don't know your schedule. Put your name on an index card so we know you're interested in taking the course and we know how many bodies we have. Look on the Classes V2 server [Yale course management server] for an announcement about where Wednesday's class will meet. You can hand the card to me or one of the TFs who will now stand and raise their hands. Let people know where you are.

[end of transcript]

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 3 Transcript

September 13, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Today what I'd like to do is begin our survey of Genesis 1 through 11, in order to illustrate the way that biblical writers--and precisely who we think they were and when they lived is something we'll talk about later--but the way biblical writers drew upon the cultural and religious legacy of the Ancient Near East that we've been talking about, its stories and its imagery, even as they transformed it in order to conform to a new vision of a non-mythological god. We're going to be looking at some of Kaufman's ideas as we read some of these texts.

Now one of the scholars who's written quite extensively and eloquently on the adaptation of Ancient Near Eastern motifs in biblical literature is a scholar by the name of Nahum Sarna: I highly recommend his book. It appears on your optional reading list, and I'll be drawing very heavily on Sarna's work as well as the work of some other scholars who have spent a great deal of time comparing Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern stories, particularly these opening chapters, in order to see the features that they share and to wonder if perhaps there isn't after all a chasm that divides them quite deeply.

In our consideration of Genesis 1 and 2, we first need to consider a Babylonian epic, an epic that is known by its opening words at the top of the column over there, *Enuma Elish*, which means "when on high," the opening words of this epic. And the epic opens before the formation of heaven and earth. Nothing existed except water, and water existed in two forms. There's the primeval fresh water, fresh water ocean, which is identified with a male divine principle, a male god Apsu. You have a primeval salt water ocean which is identified with a female divine principle, Tiamat. Tiamat appears as this watery ocean but also as a very fierce dragon-like monster. I will be reading sections from Speiser's translation of *Enuma Elish*, part of the anthology put together by Pritchard [Pritchard 1950, 1955, 60-61]. It begins:

When on high the heaven had not been named,  
Firm ground below had not been called by name,  
Naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter,  
[And] Mummu-Tiamat, she who bore them all,  
Their waters co-mingling as a single body;  
No reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared,  
When no gods whatever had been brought into being,  
Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined--;  
Then it was that the gods were formed within them.

So there's some sort of co-mingling or union of these male and female divine principals, a sexual union of Apsu and Tiamat that begins a process of generation and it produces first demons and monsters. Eventually gods will begin to emerge. Now, in time, Tiamat and Apsu are disturbed by the din and the tumult of these younger gods.

The divine brothers banded together,  
They disturbed Tiamat as they surged back and forth,  
Yea, they troubled the mood of Tiamat  
By their hilarity in the Abode of Heaven.

...  
Apsu, opening his mouth,  
Said unto resplendent Tiamat:  
"Their ways are verily loathsome unto me.  
By day I find no relief, nor repose by night.  
I will destroy, I will wreck their ways,  
That quiet may be restored. Let us have rest."

...

Then answered Mummu, [Mummu Tiamat] giving counsel to Apsu;  
[Ill-wishing] and ungracious was Mummu's advice:  
"Do destroy, my father, the mutinous ways.  
Then shalt thou have relief by day and rest by night."  
When Apsu heard this, his face grew radiant  
Because of the evil he planned against the gods, his sons.

So he decides to destroy the gods and he is thwarted by a water god named Ea, an earth-water god--sorry, he's a combination earth-water god--named Ea. And Apsu is killed. Tiamat now is enraged and she's bent on revenge. She makes plans to attack all of the gods with her assembled forces. The gods are terrified and they need a leader to lead them against her army and they turn to Marduk.

Marduk agrees to lead them in battle against Tiamat and her assembled forces, her forces are under the generalship of Kingu, and he agrees to lead them against Tiamat and Kingu on condition that he be granted sovereignty, and he sets terms.

His heart exulting, he said to his father:  
"Creator of the gods, destiny of the great gods,  
If I indeed, as your avenger,  
Am to vanquish Tiamat and save your lives,  
Set up the Assembly, proclaim supreme my destiny!  
...Let my word, instead of you, determine the fates.  
Unalterable shall be what I may bring into being,  
Neither recalled nor changed shall be the command of my lips."

And the agreement is struck. And Marduk fells Tiamat in battle. It's a fierce battle and there is in fact a memorable passage that details her demise.

In fury, Tiamat cried out aloud,  
To the roots her legs shook both together.  
...Then joined issue, Tiamat and Marduk...,  
They strove in single combat, locked in battle.  
The lord [Marduk] spread out his net to enfold her,  
The Evil Wind, which followed behind, he let loose in her face.  
When Tiamat opened her mouth to consume him.  
He drove in the Evil Wind that she close not her lips.  
As the fierce winds charged her belly,  
Her body was distended and her mouth was wide open.  
He released the arrow, it tore her belly,  
It cut through her insides, splitting the heart.  
Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life.  
He cast down her carcass to stand upon it.

Well, what do you do with the carcass of a ferocious monster? You build a world, and that's what Marduk did. He takes the carcass, he slices it into two halves, rather like a clamshell, and out of the top half he creates the firmament, the

Heaven. With the other half he creates the land, the Earth.

He split her like a shellfish into two parts.  
Half of her he set up and ceiled it as sky,  
Pulled down the bar and posted guards.  
He bade them to allow not her waters to escape.

Alright, so he has used her body to press back her waters and that's what the ceiling is, the firmament, a firm sheet or structure that's holding back waters. When little holes come along, that's rain coming through. And the bottom part is the land, which is pressing down waters below. They come up every now and then in springs and rivers and seas and lakes and things.

That is the created world, but he doesn't stop there and he creates various heavenly bodies at this point. "He constructed stations for the great gods"--the heavenly bodies were understood as stations for the great gods--

Fixing their astral likenesses as constellations.  
He determined the year by designating the zones;  
He set up three constellations for each of the twelve months.

...

The moon he caused to shine, the night to him entrusting.

And then the complaints begin to roll in. The gods are very unhappy because they have now been assigned specific duties in the maintenance of the cosmos. The moon god has to come up at night and hang around for a while and go back down. And the sun has to trundle across the sky, and they're pretty unhappy about this and they want relief from working and laboring at their assigned stations, and so Marduk accedes to this demand.

He takes blood from the slain General Kingu, the leader of Tiamat's army, the rebels, and he fashions a human being with the express purpose of freeing the gods from menial labor.

Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.  
I will establish a savage, "man" shall be his name,  
Verily, savage man I will create.  
He shall be charged with the service of the gods  
That they might be at ease.

...

"It was Kingu who contrived the uprising,  
And made Tiamat rebel, and joined battle."  
[So] They bound him, holding him before Ea.  
...[And] Out of [Kingu's] blood they fashioned mankind  
[And] Ea imposed the service and let free the gods.

So the grateful gods now recognize the sovereignty of Marduk and they build him a magnificent shrine or temple in Babylon, pronounced "Bab-el" which simply means gateway of the god, the gate of the god. Babylon means the city that is the gateway of the god. And a big banquet follows and Marduk is praised for all that he's accomplished, and his kingship is confirmed and *Enuma Elish* ends.

It was the great national epic of the city of Babel or Babylon. It was recited during the New Year festival, which was the most important festival on the cultic calendar, and Nahum Sarna points out that it had four main functions which I've listed over here [on the blackboard]. The first of those functions is theogonic. It tells us the story of the birth of the gods, where they came from. Its second function is cosmological. It's explaining cosmic phenomena: the land, the sky, the heavenly bodies and so on, and their origins. It also serves a social and political function, because the portrait or picture of the universe or the world and its structure corresponds to and legitimates the structure of Babylonian society. The position and the function of the humans in the scheme of creation corresponds [to] or parallels precisely the position of slaves in Mesopotamian society. The position and function of Marduk at the top of the hierarchy of authority parallels and legitimates the Babylonian King, with others arranged within the pyramid that falls below.

The epic also explains and mirrors the rise of Babel as one of the great cities in the Ancient Near East. It explains its rise to power, and Marduk's rise from being a city god to being at the head of the pantheon of a large empire. This also had a cultic function as well. According to Sarna and some other scholars, the conflict, that battle scene between Tiamat and Marduk which is described at some length, symbolizes the conflict or the battle between the forces of chaos and the forces of cosmos or cosmic order. And that's a perpetual conflict. Each year it's dramatized by the cycle of the seasons, and at a certain time of the year it seems that the forces of darkness and chaos are prevailing but each spring, once again, cosmic order and life return. So the epic served as a kind of script for the re-enactment of the primeval battle in a cultic or temple setting, and that re-enactment helped to ensure the victory of the forces of cosmos and life each year over the forces of chaos and death.

So if we recall now, some of the things we were talking about last time and the theories of Kaufman, we might describe the worldview that's expressed by *Enuma Elish* in the following way, and this is certainly what Sarna does. We're going to consider first of all the view of the gods, the view of humans, and the view of the world: three distinct categories. First of all the gods. The gods are clearly limited. A god can make a plan and they're thwarted by another god who then murders that god. They are amoral, some of them are nicer and better than others but they're not *necessarily* morally good or righteous. They emerge from this indifferent primal realm, this mixture of salt and sea waters, that is the source of all being and the source of ultimate power, but they age and they mature and they fight and they die. They're not wholly good, not wholly evil, and no one god's will is absolute.

The portrait of humans that emerges is that humans are unimportant menials. They are the slaves of the gods, the gods have little reciprocal interest in or concern for them, and they create human beings to do the work of running the world. To some degree, they look upon them as slaves or pawns.

The picture of the world that would seem to emerge from this story is that it is a morally neutral place. That means that for humans it can be a difficult and hostile place. The best bet perhaps is to serve the god of the day--whatever god might be ascendant--to earn his favor and perhaps his protection, but even that god will have limited powers and abilities and may in fact be defeated or may turn on his devotees.

Now if we turn to the creation story, the first of the two creation stories that are in the Bible, because in fact there are two creation stories with quite a few contradictions between them, but if we turn to the first creation story in Genesis 1 which concludes in Genesis 2:4...and, not for nothing, but everyone understands the function of the colon, right? So if you say Genesis 1:1, I mean chapter one, verse one. And then it goes to Genesis 2 chapter two, verse 4; left side of the colon is chapter, right side of the colon is verse, and every sentence has a verse number in the Bible; approximately [each] sentence.

If we look now, we'll see a different picture emerging. The biblical god in this story, which I hope you have read, is presented as being supreme and unlimited. That's connected with the lack of mythology in Genesis 1 or rather the suppression of mythology. Okay, there's a distinction between the two and we'll have to talk about that, and I hope that you'll get into some of that in section as well. I'm using the term mythology now the way we used it in the last lecture when we were talking about Kaufman's work. Mythology is used to describe stories that deal with the birth, the life events of gods and demi-gods, sometimes legendary heroes, but narrating a sequence of events. The biblical creation account is non-mythological because there is no biography of God in here. God simply is. There's no theogony, no account of his birth. There's no story by means of which he emerges from some other realm. In the Mesopotamian account, the gods themselves are created and they're not even created first, actually; the first generation of beings creates

these odd demons and monsters, and gods only are created after several generations and the god of creation, Marduk, is actually kind of a latecomer in the picture.

And this is also a good time for us to draw a distinction between mythology and myth. Kaufman and others have claimed that mythology is not in, certainly, this biblical story or if it's not there it's at least suppressed. But in contrast, myth is not mythology. Myth is a term we use to refer to a traditional story. It's often fanciful, it relates imaginatively events which it claims happened in historical time, not in a primordial realm before time, and a myth is designed to explain some kind of practice or ritual or custom or natural phenomenon. "And that is why to this day," you know, "there...", I don't know, give me some myth that we all know of, you know, Paul Bunyan's axe handle is *something* in American nature which I now no longer remember! But myths are fanciful, imaginative tales that are trying to explain the existence of either a thing or a practice or even a belief...sometimes it's a story that's a veiled explanation of a truth, we think of parables, perhaps, or allegories. And so the claim that's often made is that the Bible doesn't have full-blown mythology. It doesn't focus on stories about the lives and deaths and interactions of gods, but it does certainly contain myths. It has traditional stories and legends, some quite fanciful, whose goal it is to explain how and why something is what it is.

So returning to Genesis 1, we have an absence of theogony and mythology in the sense of a biography of God in this opening chapter and that means the absence of a metadivine realm. If you remember nothing else from this course and certainly for the mid-term exam, you should remember the words "metadivine realm." There's a little hint for you there. It's an important concept. You don't have to buy into it, you just have to know it, okay. But there is an absence of what Kaufman would call this metadivine realm, this primordial realm from which the gods emerge. We also, therefore, have no sense that God is imminent in nature or tied to natural substances or phenomena. So, the biblical god's powers and knowledge do not appear to be limited by the prior existence of any other substance or power. Nature also is not divine. It's demythologized, de-divinized, if that's a word; the created world is not divine, it is not the physical manifestation of various deities, an earth god, a water god and so on. The line of demarcation therefore between the divine and the natural and human worlds would appear to be clear. So, to summarize, in Genesis 1, the view of god is that there is one supreme god, who is creator and sovereign of the world, who simply exists, who appears to be incorporeal, and for whom the realm of nature is separate and subservient. He has no life story, no mythology, and his will is absolute.

Indeed, creation takes place through the simple expression of his will. "When God began to create heaven and earth," and there's a parenthetical clause: "God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light." He expressed his will that there be light, and there was light and that's very different from many Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies in which there's always a sexual principal at work in creation. Creation is always the result of procreation in some way, male and female principles combining. There's a very similar Egyptian creation story actually in which the god Ptah just wills "let this be." It reads very much like Genesis 1 and yet even so there's still a sexual act that follows the expression of those wills, so it is still different.

Consider now the portrait of humans, humankind, that emerges from the biblical creation story in contrast to *Enuma Elish*. In Genesis, humans are important; in Genesis 1 humans are important. And in fact the biblical view of humans really emerges from both of the creation stories, when they're read together--the story here in Genesis 1 and then the creation story that occupies much of 2 and 3. The two accounts are extremely different but they both signal the unique position and dignity of the human being. In the first account in Genesis 1, the creation of the human is clearly the climactic divine act: after this God can rest. And a sign of the humans' importance is the fact that humans are said to be created in the image of God, and this occurs in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." What might that mean? Looking at the continuation of the verse, of the passage, we have some idea because humans, we see, are going to be charged with specific duties towards, and rights over, the created world. And it seems, therefore, that the idea of being created in the image of God is connected with those special rights and duties. A creature is required who is distinguished in certain ways from other animals. How are humans distinguished from other animals? You could make a long list but it might include things like the capacity for language and higher thought or abstract thought, conscience, self-control, free-will. So, if those are the distinctive characteristics that earn the human being certain rights over creation but also give them duties towards creation, and the human is distinct from animals in being created in the image of God, there's perhaps a connection: to be godlike is to perhaps possess some of these characteristics.

Now being created in the image of God carries a further implication. It implies that human life is somehow sacred and

deserving of special care and protection. And that's why in Genesis 9:6 we read, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, in exchange for that man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God was man created" [Hayes' translation]. [They] invoke that rationale from Genesis 1 in the absolute prohibition on murder. There is no way to compensate or punish someone for murder, it simply means forfeiture of one's own life. That's how sacred human life is. That's the biblical view.

So, the concept of the divine image in humans--that's a powerful idea, that there is a divine image in humans, and that breaks with other ancient conceptions of the human. In Genesis 1, humans are not the menials of God, and in fact Genesis expresses the antithesis of this. Where in *Enuma Elish*, service was imposed upon humans so the gods were free--they didn't have to worry about anything, the humans would take care of the gods--we have the reverse; it's almost like a polemical inversion in Genesis 1. The very first communication of God to the human that's created is concern for that creature's physical needs and welfare. He says in Genesis 1:28-29, he blesses them, "God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and all the living things that creep on earth.'" In Genesis 2:16 after the creation story there, "And the Lord God commanded the man saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat.'" His first thought is what are you going to eat? I want you to be fruitful and multiply, and so on.

So, humans in Genesis are not presented as the helpless victims of blind forces of nature. They're not the menials and servants of capricious gods. They are creatures of majesty and dignity and they are of importance to, objects of concern for, the god who has created them. At the same time, and I think very much in line with the assertion that humans are created in the image of God, humans are not, in fact, gods. They are still creatures in the sense of created things and they are dependent on a higher power. So in the second creation story beginning in Genesis 2:4, we read that the first human is formed when God fashions it from the dust of the earth or clay. There are lots of Ancient Near Eastern stories of gods fashioning humans from clay; we have depictions of gods as potters at a potter's wheel just turning out lots of little humans. But the biblical account as much as it borrows from that motif again takes pains to distinguish and elevate the human. First, the fashioning of the human from clay is--again--in that story, it's the climactic or, well not quite climactic, it's the penultimate, I suppose, moment in the story. The final climactic act of creation is the creation of the female from the male. That is actually the peak of creation, what can I say [laughter]? Second and significantly, not an afterthought, it's the peak of creation! Second and significantly, God himself blows the breath of life into Adam's nostrils. So while he fashions this clay figure, this carcass actually--and then breathes life, his own life into it. So, in the second creation story just as in the first, there's a sacred imprint of some kind that distinguishes the human creation from the other creatures. So this idea that the human being is a mixture of clay, he's molded from clay, but enlivened by the breath of God, captures that paradoxical mix of sort of earthly and divine elements, dependence and freedom that marks the human as unique.

It should further be noted that in the first creation account, there's no implication that man and woman are in any kind of unequal relationship before God. The Hebrew word that designates the creature created by God is the word *adam*. It's actually not a proper name, small a; it is *adam*, it's a generic term. It simply means human or more precisely earthling because it comes from the word *adamah*, which means ground or earth. So this is *adam*, an earthling, a thing that has been taken from the earth. Genesis 1 states that God created *the adam*, with the definite article: this is not a proper name. God created the *adam*, the earthling, "male and female created he them." That's a line that has vexed commentators for centuries and has spawned many very fascinating interpretations. And you will be reading some of those in the readings that are assigned for section discussion next week and I think having a great deal of fun with them. Moreover, this earthling that seems to include both male and female, is then said to be in the image of God. So that suggests that the ancient Israelites didn't conceive of God as gendered or necessarily gendered. The *adam*, the earthling, male and female was made in the image of God. Even in the second creation account, it's not clear that the woman is subordinate to the man. Many medieval Jewish commentators enjoy pointing out that she was not made from his head so that she not rule over him, but she wasn't made from his foot so that she would be subservient to him; she was made from his side so that she would be a companion to him. And the creation of woman, as I said, is in fact the climactic creative act in the second Genesis account. With her formation, creation is now complete. So, the biblical creation stories individually and jointly present a portrait of the human as the pinnacle and purpose of creation: godlike in some way, in possession of distinctive faculties and characteristics, that equip them for stewardship over the world that God has created.

Finally, let's talk about the image of the world that emerges from the creation story in Genesis 1. In these stories, there's a very strong emphasis on the essential goodness of the world. Recall some of Kaufman's ideas or categories again. One of the things he claims is that in a polytheistic system, which is morally neutral, where you have some primordial realm that spawns demons, monsters, gods, evil is a permanent necessity. It's just built into the structure of the cosmos because of the fact that all kinds of divine beings, good and bad, are generated and locked in conflict. So the world isn't essentially good in its nature or essentially bad. Note the difference in Genesis. After each act of creation what does God say? "It is good," right? Genesis 1 verse 4, verse 10, verse 12, verse 18, verse 21, verse 25... and after the creation of living things, the text states that God found all that he made to be very good. So there are seven occurrences of the word "good" in Genesis. That's something you want to watch for. If you're reading a passage of the Bible and you're noticing a word coming up a lot, count them. There's probably going to be seven or ten, they love doing that. The sevenfold or the tenfold repetition of a word--such a word is called a *leitwort*, a recurring word that becomes thematic. That's a favorite literary technique of the biblical author. So we read Genesis 1 and we hear this recurring--"and it was good... and he looked and it was good... and he looked and it was good," and we have this tremendous rush of optimism. The world is good; humans are important; they have purpose and dignity.

The biblical writer is rejecting the concept of a primordial evil, a concept found in the literature of the Ancient Near East. So for the biblical writer of this story, it would seem that evil is not a metaphysical reality built into the structure of the universe. So all signs of a cosmic battle, or some primordial act of violence between the forces of chaos and evil and the forces of cosmos and good are eliminated. In *Enuma Elish*, cosmic order is achieved only after a violent struggle with very hostile forces. But in Genesis, creation is not the result of a struggle between divine antagonists. God imposes order on the demythologized elements that he finds: water, but it's just water. Let's look a little bit more closely at Genesis 1 to make this case.

The chapter begins with a temporal clause which is unfortunately often translated "In the beginning," which implies that what follows is going to give you an ultimate account of the origins of the universe. You sort of expect something like, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth," like this was the first thing to happen in time. So, that translation causes people to believe that the story is giving me an account of the first event in time forward; but it's actually a bad translation. The Hebrew phrase that starts the book of Genesis is pretty much exactly like the phrase that starts *Enuma Elish*: "When on high," there was a whole bunch of water and stuff, then suddenly this happened--very similar in the Hebrew. It's better translated this way: "When God began creating the heavens and the earth... he said, 'Let there be light and there was light.'" And that translation suggests that the story isn't concerned to depict the ultimate origins of the universe. It's interested in explaining how and why the world got the way it is. When God began this process of creating the heaven and the earth, and the earth was unformed and void, and his wind was on the surface of the deep and so on, he said, "Let there be light and there was light." So, we find that, in fact, something exists; it has no shape. So creation in Genesis 1 is not described as a process of making something out of nothing: that's a notion referred to as creation *ex nihilo*, creation of something out of utter nothing. It's instead a process of organizing pre-existing materials and imposing order on those chaotic materials.

So we begin with this chaotic mass and then there's the *ruah* of God. Now sometimes this word "ruah" is kind of anachronistically translated as "spirit"; it really doesn't mean that in the Hebrew Bible. In later levels of Hebrew it will start to mean that, but it is really "wind," *ruah* is wind. So: "when God began to create heaven and earth--the earth being unformed and void," the wind of God sweeping over the deep. Remember the cosmic battle between Marduk and Tiamat: Marduk the storm god, who released his wind against Tiamat, the primeval deep, the primeval water, representing the forces of chaos. And you should immediately hear the great similarities. Our story opens with a temporal clause: "When on high," "when God began creating"; we have a wind that sweeps over chaotic waters, just like the wind of Marduk released into the face of Tiamat, and the Hebrew term is particularly fascinating. In fact, the text says "and there is darkness on the face of deep." No definite article. The word "deep" is a proper name, perhaps. The Hebrew word is Tehom. It means "deep" and etymologically it's exactly the same word as Tiamat: the "at" ending is just feminine. So Tiam, Tehom--it's the same word, it's a related word. So, the wind over the face of deep, now it's demythologized, so it's as if they're invoking the story that would have been familiar and yet changing it. So the storyteller has actually set the stage for retelling the cosmic battle story that everyone knew. That was a story that surely was near and dear to the hearts of many ancient Israelites and Ancient Near Eastern listeners, so all the elements are there for the retelling of that story. We've got wind, we've got a primeval chaotic, watery mass or deep, and then surprise, there's no battle. There's just a word, "let there be light." And the Ancient Near Eastern listener would prick up

their ears: where's the battle, where's the violence, where's the gore? I thought I knew this story. So something new, something different was being communicated in this story.

And don't think the biblical writers didn't know this motif of creation following upon a huge cosmic battle, particularly a battle with a watery, dragon-like monster. There are many poetic passages and poetic sections of the Bible that contain very clear and explicit allusions to that myth. It was certainly known and told to Israelite children and part of the culture. We have it mentioned in Job; we have it mentioned in the following psalm, Psalm 74:12-17: "O God, my king from of old, who brings deliverance throughout the land;/it was You who drove back the sea with Your might, who smashed the heads of the monsters in the waters;/it was You who crushed the heads of Leviathan," a sea monster. Other psalms also contain similar lines. Isaiah 51:9-10: "It was you that hacked Rahab"--this is another name of a primeval water monster--"in pieces,/[It was you] That pierced the Dragon./It was you that dried up the Sea,/The waters of the great deep." These were familiar stories, they were known in Israel, they were recounted in Israel. They were stories of a god who violently slays the forces of chaos, represented as watery dragons, as a prelude to creation. And the rejection of this motif or this idea in Genesis 1 is pointed and purposeful. It's demythologization. It's removal of the creation account from the realm and the world of mythology. It's pointed and purposeful. It wants us to conceive of God as an uncontested god who through the power of his word or will creates the cosmos.

And he follows that initial ordering by setting up celestial bodies, just as Marduk did. They're not in themselves, however, divinities: they are merely God's creations. In the biblical text, the firmament appears to be a beaten, the word in Hebrew is something that's been beaten out, like a metal worker would hammer out a thin sheet of metal. And that's what the firmament [pointing at blackboard] this by the way is the portrait of the world; it looks a lot like my map of the Ancient Near East, but it's not. So you have this firmament, which is beaten back to hold back primeval waters that are pressing in; you have land which is holding down the waters here. We inhabit the bubble that's created in that way. That's the image in *Enuma Elish* and it's the image of Genesis 1. And later on when God gets mad he's going to open up some windows up here, right, and it's all going to flood. That's what's going to happen in the Flood. That's the image of the world that you're working with. So, the firmament is sort of like an inverted bowl, a beaten-out sheet of metal that's an inverted bowl, and again as I said: echoes of *Enuma Elish*, where you have Marduk dividing the carcass of Tiamat, like a shellfish. He separates the waters above and the waters below and creates this space that will become the inhabited world.

Now the story of creation in Genesis 1 takes place over seven days, and there's a certain logic and parallelism to the six days of creating. And I've written those parallels here [on the blackboard]. There's a parallel between day one, day four; day two and five; day three and six. On day one, light and dark are separated. On day four, the heavenly bodies that give off light by day or night are created. On day two, the firmament is established. That water is separated, that bubble has opened up so we've got the sky created and we've got the waters collected in certain areas down here, and we've got sky. On day five, the inhabitants of the skies and the waters are created, birds and fish. On day three, land is formed to make dry spots from the waters below. So you have land being formed on day three, it's separated out from the sea and on day six you have the creation of land animals. But days three and six each have an extra element, and the fact that the first elements here pair up nicely with each other suggests that the extra element on day three and the extra element on day six might also be paired in some important way. On day three, vegetation is produced, is created, and on day six humans are created after the creation of the land animals. So the implication is that the vegetation is for the humans. And indeed, it's expressly stated by God that humans are to be given every fruit bearing tree and seed bearing plant, fruits and grains for food. That's in Genesis 1:29. That's what you are going to eat. There's no mention of chicken or beef, there's no mention made of animals for food. In Genesis 1:30, God says that the animals are being given the green plants, the grass and herbs, for food. In other words, there should be no competition for food. Humans have fruit and grain-bearing vegetation, animals have the herbage and the grasses. There is no excuse to live in anything but a peaceful co-existence. Therefore, humans, according to Genesis 1, were created vegetarian, and in every respect, the original creation is imagined as free of bloodshed and violence of every kind. "And God saw... [that it was] very good."

So on the seventh day, God rested from his labors and for this reason he blessed the seventh day and declared it "holy." This is a word we'll be coming back to in about five or six lectures, talking about what it is to be holy, but right now it essentially means it belongs to God. If something's holy, it doesn't belong to you, it belongs to God. And part of the purpose of this story is to explain the origin of the observance of the Sabbath, the seventh day, as a holy day. So this is a myth in the sense that it's explaining some custom or ritual among the people.

So Israelite accounts of creation contain clear allusions to and resonances of Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies; but perhaps Genesis 1 can best be described as demythologizing what was a common cultural heritage. There's a clear tendency in this story towards monotheism in the abstract terms that Kaufman described. A transformation of widely known stories to express a monotheistic worldview is clearly important to these particular biblical writers, and we'll be talking later about who these writers were who wrote Genesis 1 as opposed to Genesis 2 and 3. But these stories rival, and implicitly polemicize against, the myths or mythologies of Israel's neighbors. They reject certain elements but they almost reject them by incorporating them. They incorporate and modify them.

So, one of the things I've tried to claim in describing Genesis 1 is that in this story evil is represented not as a physical reality. It's not built into the structure of the world. When God rests he's looking at the whole thing, [and] it's very good, it's set up very well. And yet we know that evil is a condition of human existence. It's a reality of life, so how do we account for it? And the Garden of Eden story, I think, seeks to answer that question. It actually does a whole bunch of things, but one thing it does, I think, is try to answer that question, and to assert that evil stems from human behavior. God created a good world, but humans in the exercise of their moral autonomy, they have the power to corrupt the good. So, the Garden of Eden story communicates what Kaufman would identify as a basic idea of the monotheistic worldview: that evil isn't a metaphysical reality, it's a moral reality. What that means ultimately is that evil lacks inevitability, depending on your theory of human nature, I suppose, and it also means that evil lies within the realm of human responsibility and control.

Now Nahum Sarna, the scholar whose work I referred to earlier, he points out that there's a very important distinction between the Garden of Eden story and its Ancient Near Eastern parallels. He says the motif of a tree of life or a plant of life or a plant of eternal youth, that's a motif that we do find in other Ancient Near Eastern literatures, in Ancient Near Eastern myth and ritual and iconography, and the quest for such a plant, or the quest for immortality that the plant promises, that these were primary themes in the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. We'll have occasion to talk in great depth about this story next time. But by contrast, Sarna says, we haven't as yet uncovered a parallel in Ancient Near Eastern literature to the biblical tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It's not the tree of knowledge, it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil--it's a longer phrase. What is the significance of the fact that the Bible mentions both of these trees? It mentions a tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and then goes on to just focus on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It virtually ignores the tree of life until we get to the end of the story, and that's important. But this tree of life which seems to be central to many other myths of this time and this part of the world... Sarna argues that the subordinate role of the tree of life signals the biblical writer's dissociation from a preoccupation with immortality. The biblical writer insists that the central concern of life is not mortality but morality. And the drama of human life should revolve not around the search for eternal life but around the moral conflict and tension between a good god's design for creation and the free will of human beings that can corrupt that good design.

The serpent tells Eve that if she eats the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she will become like God. And he's really not telling a lie, in a certain respect. And God knows that, that human beings will become like God knowing good and evil. It's one of the things about God: he knows good and evil and has chosen the good. The biblical writer asserts of this god that he is absolutely good. The humans will become like gods, knowing good and evil, not because of some magical property in this fruit; and it's not an apple, by the way, that's based on an interesting mistranslation. Do we know what the fruit is? No, I don't think we really know but it's definitely not an apple. That comes from the Latin word which sounds like apple, the word *malum* for evil is close to the Latin word for apple which if anybody knows... whatever [see note 1]. And so iconography began to represent this tree as an apple tree and so on, but it's not an apple tree. I don't know if they had apple trees back then, there! But it's not because of some magical property in the fruit itself, but because of the action of disobedience itself. By choosing to eat of the fruit in defiance of God--this is the one thing God says, "Don't do this! You can have everything else in this garden," presumably, even, you can eat of the tree of life, right? It doesn't say you can't eat of that. Who's to say they couldn't eat of that and just live forever? Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Student:** Is there any sort of an explanation for why God says you can't eat of this tree when he's given all of the fruit bearing trees...

**Professor Christine Hayes:** There have been about--how many thousands of years of speculation--on what's going on and you're going to be reading a wonderful and interesting gnostic interpretation. And so, yep, there's been lots of

interesting... and this is all in the realm of literary interpretation: read the story closely, see if you can figure out what's going on here. Why does God do this? Isn't this, in a way, putting an obstacle in front of someone almost ensuring they're going to trip over it? That's been an argument that some commentators have made. Others see it differently. So, keep that thought, take it to section and read Elaine Pagels' work and some of the other interpretations. That's something that people have struggled with for centuries. Where does this come from? Who's the serpent and what's he doing there? They're all very important.

It is true--and maybe this will go a little bit of the distance towards answering it--it's by eating of the fruit in defiance of God, human beings learn that they were able to do that, that they are free moral agents. They find that out. They're able to choose their actions in conformity with God's will or in defiance of God's will. So paradoxically, they learn that they have moral autonomy. Remember, they were made in the image of God and they learn that they have moral autonomy by making the defiant choice, the choice for disobedience. The argument could be made that until they once disobeyed, how would they ever know that? And then you might raise all sorts of questions about, well, was this part of God's plan that they ought to know this and should know this, so that their choice for good actually becomes meaningful. Is it meaningful to choose to do the good when you have no choice to do otherwise or aren't aware that you have a choice to do otherwise? So, there's a wonderful thirteenth-century commentator that says that God needed creatures who could choose to obey him, and therefore it was important for Adam and Eve to do what they did and to learn that they had the choice not to obey God so that their choice for God would become endowed with meaning. That's one line of interpretation that's gone through many theological systems for hundreds of years.

So the very action that brought them a godlike awareness of their moral autonomy was an action that was taken in opposition to God. So we see then that having knowledge of good and evil is no guarantee that one will choose or incline towards the good. That's what the serpent omitted in his speech. He said if you eat of that fruit, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll become like God. It's true in one sense but it's false in another. He sort of omitted to point out... he implies that it's the power of moral choice alone that is godlike. But the biblical writer will claim in many places that true godliness isn't simply power, the power to do what one wishes. True godliness means imitation of God, the exercise of one's power in a manner that is godlike, good, life-affirming and so on. So, it's the biblical writer's contention that the god of Israel is not only all-powerful but is essentially and necessarily good. Those two elements cannot become disjoined, they must always be conjoined in the biblical writer's view. And finally, humans will learn that the concomitant of their freedom is responsibility. Their first act of defiance is punished harshly. So they learn in this story that the moral choices and actions of humans have consequences that have to be borne by the perpetrator.

So, just to sum up, Sarna sees in the Garden of Eden story, as I've just explained it, a message that's in line with Kaufman's thesis about the monotheistic world view. He says this story conveys the idea that, "...evil is a product of human behavior, not a principal inherent in the cosmos. Man's disobedience is the cause of the human predicament. Human freedom can be at one and the same time an omen of disaster and a challenge and opportunity" [Sarna 1966, 27-28]. We've looked at Genesis 2 and 3 a little bit as an attempt to account for the problematic and paradoxical existence of evil and suffering in a world created by a good god, and that's a problem monotheism really never completely conquers, but other perspectives on this story are possible. And when we come back on Monday, we're going to look at it from an entirely different point of view and compare it with the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Again, I'm sorry about sections, we will continue to communicate with you. If you did not fill out a card last time, please come and give us your email address.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. The identical word *malum* in Latin also means apple.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 4 Transcript

September 18, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** So, last time I gave a reading of the creation accounts that are in Genesis 1 to 3. These are two very different stories but their placement side by side suggests the possibility of a joint reading. Nevertheless they are very different in character, and today I want to focus in on the second creation story. This is a story that is predominantly in Genesis 2 and trickles into Genesis 3, and I'm going to look at it mostly in isolation from the first account. I'm going to be looking at it in light of an important parallel. This parallel is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*--I get to point this way now, to the boards, okay? *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and I'll be drawing on the work of many scholars, Nahum Sarna probably most prominently among them, but others also who have devoted themselves to the study of these textual parallels, and developing an interpretation of these stories. I'd like you to carry that with you into your discussion sections as you look at some of the other interpretations from antiquity and on into the modern period.

Now *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is a magnificent Mesopotamian epic that relates the exploits of a Sumerian king, King Gilgamesh of Uruk. That's the name of the city-state over which he is king. And the epic as we now have it was probably composed between 2000 and 1800 BCE. Gilgamesh was apparently a historical character, an actual king of Uruk, but the story of course has fantastic and legendary qualities to it. We have a full text of the epic that was located in the library of Assurbanipal, an Assyrian king. It's a seventh century copy of the story. But we have fragments that are much, much older (that date back to the eighteenth century) that were found in Iraq. So clearly it's an old story and we have even older prototypes for elements of the story as well.

The story opens with a description of Gilgamesh. He's an extremely unpopular king. He's tyrannical, he's rapacious, he's undisciplined, he's over-sexed. The people in the city cry out to the gods. They want relief from him. They particularly cite his abuses towards the young women of the city. And the god Aruru is told that she must deal with Gilgamesh. Aruru is on the board.

So Aruru fashions this noble savage named Enkidu. Enkidu is designed to be a match for Gilgamesh, and he's very much like the biblical human in Genesis 2. He's sort of an innocent primitive, he appears unclothed, he lives a free, peaceful life in harmony with the animals, with nature and the beasts, he races across the steppes with the gazelles. But before he can enter the city and meet Gilgamesh he has to be tamed.

So a woman is sent to Enkidu and her job is to provide the sexual initiation that will tame and civilize Enkidu. I'm reading now from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Pritchard 1958, 40-75):

For six days and seven nights Enkidu comes forth,  
mating with the lass.  
After he had had (his) fill of her charms,  
He set his face toward his wild beasts.  
On seeing him, Enkidu, the gazelles ran off,  
The wild beasts of the steppe drew away from his body.  
Startled was Enkidu, as his body became taut.  
His knees were motionless--for his wild beasts had gone.  
Enkidu had to slacken his pace--it was not as before;  
But he now had [wi]sdom, [br]oader understanding.  
Returning, he sits at the feet of the harlot.

I'm not sure why that translation [harlot]. I've been told by those who know Akkadian that the word could mean "harlot/prostitute," it could mean some sacred prostitute--I'm not an expert in Akkadian. But:

He looks up at the face of the harlot,

His ears attentive, as the harlot speaks;  
[The harlot] says to him, to Enkidu:  
"Thou art [wi]se, Enkidu, art become like a god!  
Why with the wild creatures dost thou roam over the steppe?  
Come, let me lead thee [to] ramparted Uruk,  
To the holy Temple, abode of Anu and Ishtar,  
Where lives Gilgamesh, accomplished in strength  
And like a wild ox lords it over the folk."  
As she speaks to him, her words find favor,  
His heart enlightened, he yearns for a friend.  
Enkidu says to her, to the harlot:  
"Up lass, escort thou me (to Gilgamesh)  
I will challenge him [and will boldly] address him."

So that's tablet I from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

So through this sexual experience Enkidu has become wise, growing in mental and spiritual stature, and he is said to have become like a god. At the same time there's been a concomitant loss of innocence. His harmonious unity with nature is broken, he clothes himself, and his old friends the gazelles run from him now. He will never again roam free with the animals. He cannot run as quickly. His pace slackens, he can't even keep up with them. So as one reads the epic one senses this very deep ambivalence regarding the relative virtues and evils of civilized life, and many of the features that make us human. On the one hand it's clearly good that humans rise above the animals and build cities and wear clothes and pursue the arts of civilization and develop bonds of love and duty and friendship the way that animals do not; these are the things that make humans like the gods in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. But on the other hand these advances have also come at a cost. And in this story there's also a sense of longing for the freedom of life in the wild--the innocent, simple, uncomplicated life lived day to day without plans, without toil, in harmony with nature, a somewhat Edenic existence.

So there are very obvious parallels between this part of the epic that I've just read to you and our second creation story. Enkidu like Adam is fashioned from clay. He's a noble savage, he's a kind of innocent primitive, and he lives in a peaceful co-existence with animals. Nature yields its fruits to him without hard labor. He's unaware of--he's unattracted by--the benefits of civilization: clothing, cities and all their labor. Just as Enkidu gains wisdom and becomes like a god, and loses his oneness with nature, so Adam and Eve after eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil are said to have become like gods, and they also lose their harmonious relationship with nature. In Genesis 3:15, God says to the snake:

"I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your offspring and hers;  
They shall strike at your head,  
And you shall strike at their heel."

Presumably there had been a peaceful relationship between creatures like snakes and humans to that point. They [humans] are banished now from the Garden. It used to yield its fruits to them without any labor, but now humans have to toil for food and the earth yields its fruits only stingingly. So in Genesis 3:18, God says to Adam:

"Cursed be the ground because of you;  
By toil shall you eat of it  
All the days of your life:

Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.  
But your food shall be the grasses of the field;  
By the sweat of your brow  
Shall you get bread to eat"

So knowledge or wisdom or perhaps moral freedom, seem to come at a very high price.

But there are important differences between these stories too. And the most important has to do with the nature of the act that leads to the transformation of the human characters. It's Enkidu's sexual experience, his seven-day encounter with the woman that makes him wise and godlike at the cost of his life with the beasts. There has been a long tradition of interpreting the deed or the sin of Adam and Eve as sexual, and there are some hints in the story that would support such an interpretation. I was just reading recently a scholarly introduction to Genesis that very much argues and develops this interpretation. Adam and Eve eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in violation of God's command. Now eating can perhaps be a metaphor for sex, some have argued. Knowledge of good and evil--perhaps that could be understood in sexual terms. In biblical Hebrew the word "to know" can mean "to know" in the biblical sense. It can mean sexual intercourse. Snakes are symbols of renewed life and fertility in the East because they shed their skins so they seem to be eternally young; and they're also phallic symbols. Eve says that the snake seduced her. [She] uses a term that has some sexual overtones.

So do all of these hints suggest that, in the biblical view, the change in Adam and Eve came about through sex? If so, is sex a negative thing forbidden by God? It would depend if you view the change as a negative thing. That seems unlikely in my view. You will certainly hear it argued, but it seems unlikely in my view. God's first command to the first couple was to be fruitful and multiply. Now admittedly that comes from the first creation story in Genesis 1; nevertheless in the second creation story when the writer is recounting the creation of woman, the writer refers to the fact that man and woman will become one flesh. So it seems that sex was part of the plan for humans even at creation.

Also, it's only after their defiance of God's command that Adam and Eve first become aware of, and ashamed by, their nakedness, putting the sort of sexual awakening after the act of disobedience rather than at the same time or prior to. So maybe what we have here is another polemic, another adaptation of familiar stories and motifs to express something new. Perhaps for the biblical writer, Adam and Eve's transformation occurs after an act of disobedience, not after a seven-day sexual encounter.

The disobedience happens in a rather backhanded way. It's kind of interesting. God tells Adam before the creation of Eve that he's not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that's in Genesis 2:16, on pain of death. Eve doesn't hear this command directly. She has not yet been created. In Genesis 3 we meet the cunning serpent, and although many later Hellenistic Jewish texts and the New Testament will identify the snake as a Satan, an enticer, a tempter, some sort of evil creature, he doesn't seem to be so in this fable. There's no real devil or Satan character--we'll talk about Job later--in the Hebrew Bible, the snake in Eden is simply a talking animal. He's a standard literary device that you see in fables of this period, and later--the kind that you find for example in the fables of Aesop. And the woman responds to the serpent's queries by saying that eating and even touching the tree is forbidden on pain of death.

One wonders whence the addition of touching. Did Adam convey God's command to Eve with an emphasis all his own? "Don't even touch that tree, Eve. It's curtains for us if you do." She didn't hear the original command. Or did she just mishear in some very tragic version of the telephone game. And the serpent tells her, No, "you are not going to die" if you touch or eat the fruit. In fact, he adds, the fruit will bring you wisdom making humans like gods who know good and bad. And in fact that's certainly true. He tells her the truth.

Genesis 3:7 is a very critical verse and it's rarely properly translated. Most translations read like this: "She took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband and he ate." The implication is that Eve acts alone and then she goes and finds Adam and gives him some of the apple and convinces him to eat it. But in fact the Hebrew literally reads, "She took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband *with her*, and he ate." "With her" is a very teeny-tiny little word in

Hebrew, so I guess a lot of translations figure they can leave it out. But the "with her" is there in the Hebrew. At that fateful moment, Adam and Eve are standing together at the tree, and although only the woman and the serpent speak, Adam was present, and it seems he accepted the fruit that his wife handed him. He was fully complicitous, and indeed God holds him responsible. He reproaches Adam. Adam says: Well, Eve handed it to me. She gave it to me. Eve explains, the serpent tricked me. God vents his fury on all three, and he does so in ascending order: first the snake for his trickery and then the woman, and finally the man.

So just as the harlot tells Enkidu after his sexual awakening that he has become like a god, so Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit are said to be like divine beings. Why? Perhaps because they have become wise in that they have learned they have moral choice. They have free will, they can defy God and God's plans for them in a way that animals and natural phenomena cannot. But now that means there is a serious danger here, and in Genesis 3:22, God says, "Now that man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil [bad], what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever?" So it's the threat of an immortal antagonist that is so disturbing and must be avoided. And so God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden and he stations these *kerubim*, these cherubim--not puffy cute little babies like Raphael painted, but these fierce monstrous creatures--and a fiery, ever-turning sword to guard the way back to the tree of life. It is now inaccessible.

So the acceptance of mortality as an inescapable part of the human condition: it's a part of this story. It's also one of the themes of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. As the story continues Enkidu enters the city and Enkidu earns Gilgamesh's respect and deep love. This is the first time that this rapacious tyrant has ever actually loved anyone and his character is reformed as a result. And then the rest of the epic contains the adventures of these two close friends, all of the things that they do together. And when Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh is absolutely devastated. He's for the first time confronted with his own mortality. He's obsessed with grief over Enkidu, and he's obsessed with the whole issue of mortality. He begins a quest for immortality, and that takes up most of the rest of the epic. He leaves the city, he travels far and wide, he crosses these primeval seas and endures all sorts of hardships. And finally exhausted and battered he reaches Utnapishtim, also there on the board, Utnapishtim, who is the only mortal ever to have been granted immortality by the gods, and he comes to him and asks for his secret. It turns out that Utnapishtim can't help him, and we'll come back to Utnapishtim later in the flood story, and Gilgamesh is devastated. He then learns the whereabouts of a plant of eternal youth. And he says: Well that's better than nothing. That at least will keep him young. And so he goes after the plant of eternal youth, but he's negligent for a moment and a thieving snake or serpent manages to steal it and that explains why snakes are always shedding their skins and are forever young. Gilgamesh is exhausted, he feels defeated, he returns to Uruk, and as he stands looking at the city from a distance, gazing at it, he takes comfort in the thought that although humans are finite and frail and doomed to die, their accomplishments and their great works give them some foothold in human memory.

Now Nahum Sarna is one of the people who has pointed out that the quest for immortality, which is so central in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, is really deflected in the biblical story. The tree of life is mentioned, and it's mentioned with a definite article. Genesis 2:9 says, "with *the* tree of life in the middle of the garden," as if this is a motif we're familiar with, as if this is something we all know about. But then it's really not mentioned again as the story proceeds. The snake, which in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is associated with the plant of eternal youth, in Genesis is associated instead with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That's the focus of our attention in Genesis, and it's only at the end of the story that the tree of life appears again in the passage that is emphasizing its permanent inaccessibility.

And we could perhaps draw two conclusions from this. First it may be that Adam and Eve had access to this tree up to that point. As long as their will conformed to the will of God, there was no danger to their going on eternally, being immortal. Once they discovered their moral freedom, once they discovered that they could thwart God and work evil in the world, and abuse and corrupt all that God had created, then God could not afford to allow them access to the tree of life. That would be tantamount to creating divine enemies, immortal enemies. So God must maintain the upper hand in his struggle with these humans who have learned to defy him. And he maintains the upper hand in this, the fact that they eventually must die. Second of all the motif of guards who block access to the tree of life suggests that no humans have access to immortality and the pursuit of immortality is futile. So it might be then that God really spoke the truth after all. The fruit did bring death to humankind.

Before we leave this story and move onto Cain and Abel, I just want to make a couple of quick observations. First of all

the opening chapters of Genesis, Genesis 1 through 3, have been subjected to centuries of theological interpretation, and I hope that you're in the midst of reading some of them now. They have generated for example the doctrine of original sin, which is the idea that humans after Adam are born into a state of sin, by definition. As many ancient interpreters already have observed, the actions of Adam and Eve bring death to the human race. They don't bring a state of utter and unredeemed sinfulness. In fact what they tell us is that humans have moral choice in each and every age. The story is primarily etiological rather than prescriptive or normative. We've talked about this: these etiological tales are tales that are trying to explain how or why something is the way it is. This is why serpents shed their skin, for example. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* they were the ones who got the plant of eternal youth. It's etiological. The writer observes that humans emerge from innocent childhood to self-conscious adulthood. The writer observes that survival is a difficult endeavor and that the world can sometimes seem harshly hostile. The writer observes that women are desirous of and emotionally bonded to the very persons who establish the conditions of their subordination. The story is explaining how these odd conditions of life came to be as they are, which is not to say that it's the ideal situation, or even that it's God's will for humankind; these are etiological fables, and they're best read as such.

Second of all in this story we see something that we'll see repeatedly in the Pentateuch, and that is that God has to punt a bit. He has to modify his plans for the first couple, by barring access to the tree of life. That was not something presumably he planned to do. This is in response to, perhaps, their unforeseen disobedience: certainly the way the story unfolds that's how it seems to us. So despite their newfound mortality, humans are going to be a force to be reckoned with. They're unpredictable to the very god who created them.

Finally I'll just draw your attention to some interesting details that you can think about and maybe talk about in section. God ruminates that the humans have become like "one of *us*" in the plural. That echoes his words in Genesis 1 where he proposes, "Let *us* make humans," or humankind, "in our image." Again in the plural. Who is he talking to? And what precisely are these cherubim that are stationed in front of the tree of life barring access? What do we make of these allusions to divine colleagues or subordinates in light of Kaufman's claims regarding biblical monotheism? You should be bringing some of the things we talked about when discussing his work, into dialogue with and in conflict with some of the evidence you'll be finding in the text itself. So think about these things, don't pass over these details lightly, and don't take them for granted.

The Cain and Abel story which is in Genesis 4:1 through 16: this is the story of the first murder, and it's a murder that happens despite God's warning to Cain that it's possible to master the urge to violence by an act of will. He says, "Sin couches at the door;/Its urge is toward you/Yet you can be its master," Genesis 4:7. Nahum Sarna and others have noted that the word "brother" occurs throughout this story repeatedly, and it climaxes in God's question, "Where is your *brother*, Abel?" And Cain responds, "I don't know; am I my *brother's* keeper?" And ironically you sense, when you read this that, even though Cain intends this as a rhetorical question--"Am I my brother's keeper?"--in fact, he's right on the money. Yes. We are all of us our brothers' keepers, and the strong implication of the story is as Sarna puts it, that all homicide is in fact fratricide. That seems to be the message of this story.

Note also that Cain is culpable, and for someone to be culpable of something we have to assume some principle that they have violated. And therefore this story assumes the existence of what some writers, Sarna among them, have called "the universal moral law." There seems to be in existence from the beginning of creation this universal moral law, and that is: the God-endowed sanctity of human life. We can connect it with the fact that God has created humans in his own image, but the God-endowed sanctity of human life is an assumption, and it's the violation of that assumption which makes Cain culpable.

The story of Cain and Abel is notable for another theme, and this is a theme that's going to recur in the Bible, and that is the tension between settled areas and the unsettled desert areas and desert life of the nomads. Abel is a keeper of sheep. He represents the nomadic pastoralist, unlike Cain who is the tiller of soil, so he represents more settled urban life. God prefers the offering of Abel, and as a result Cain is distressed and jealous to the point of murder. God's preference for the offering of Abel valorizes the free life of the nomadic pastoralist over urban existence. Even after the Israelites will settle in their own land, the life of the desert pastoralist remained a sort of romantic ideal for them. It's a theme that we'll see coming up in many of the stories. It's a romantic ideal for this writer too.

Now the murder of Abel by Cain is followed by some genealogical lists. They provide some continuity between the

tales. They tell us folkloric traditions about the origins of various arts, the origins of building, of metalwork and music, but finally in Genesis 6:5 we read that, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart," the human heart, "was evil continuously" [Revised Standard Version translation]. And this sets the stage then for the story of a worldwide flood.

Now here again the Bible is making use of older traditions and motifs and adapting them to their own purposes. I've hinted at this already and we'll look at it in a bit more detail now. We know of a very ancient Sumerian flood story. The hero is Ziusudra, also on the board. We also know of a very early Semitic work, the *Epic of Atrahasis*, in which there's a flood. But the most detailed flood story we have actually comes from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, on the eleventh tablet of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. You'll remember that in his search for immortality Gilgamesh sought out Utnapishtim, the one human who had been granted immortality. He wants to learn his secret. And when he begs for the secret of eternal life he gets Utnapishtim's story, and it's the flood story. He learns that Utnapishtim and his wife gained their immortality by a twist of circumstances: they were the sole survivors of this great flood, and as a kind of reward they were given immortality.

The Sumerian story of Ziusudra is very similar to the Genesis account. In both you have the flood coming about as the deliberate result of a divine decision; you have one individual who's chosen to be saved from the flood; that individual is given specific instructions on building an ark, and is given specific instructions on who to bring on-board the ark. The ark also comes to rest on a mountaintop, the hero sends out a bird to reconnoiter the land, to find out if it's dry yet. When the hero emerges he builds an altar. He offers sacrifice to the deity and receives a blessing. Very similar, parallel stories, and yet there are significant contrasts between the Mesopotamian story and its Israelite adaptation.

Let's compare some of the elements from all three of the stories with the biblical story. In *The Epic of Gilgamesh* we have no motive given for the divine destruction whatsoever. It just seems to be pure capriciousness. In the *Epic of Atrahasis* we do in fact read of a reason, and the text there states, "The land became wide and the people became numerous. The land bellowed like wild oxen. The god was disturbed by their uproar. Enlil heard the clamor and said to the gods, "Oppressive has become the clamor of [hu]mankind. By their uproar they prevent sleep" [Pritchard 1950, 1955, 104]. So it seems that humankind is to be destroyed because they irritate the gods with their tumult and noise. In the Gilgamesh epic, Ea, an earth-water god, does ask another god, Enlil, how he could have brought the flood on so senselessly. He says, "Lay upon the sinner the sin; Lay upon the transgressor his transgression" [Pritchard 1950, 1955, 95], which would indicate that in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* there is this element of capriciousness.

The biblical writer in retelling the story seems to want to reject this idea by providing a moral rationale for God's actions. The earth, the text says, is destroyed because of *hamas*. *Hamas* is a word that literally means violence, bloodshed, but also all kinds of injustice and oppression. Noah is saved specifically for his righteousness, he was righteous in his generation. He was chosen therefore for moral reasons. So the writer seems very determined to tell the story in a way that depicts God as acting not capriciously but according to certain clear standards of justice. This was deserved punishment and the person who was saved was righteous.

Furthermore in the Mesopotamian accounts the gods do not appear to be in control. This is something that's been pointed out by many writers. Enlil wants to destroy humankind completely. He's thwarted by Ea who drops hints of the disaster to Utnapishtim so Utnapishtim knows what to do and therefore manages to escape the flood. But that's thwarting the design of the god who brought the flood. He wanted everything destroyed. When the flood comes the gods themselves seem to have lost control. They're terrified, they cower. The text says they "cowered like dogs crouched against the outer wall. Ishtar," the goddess Ishtar, "cried out like a woman in labor [travail] [Pritchard 1958, 69]. And moreover during the period of the flood they don't have food, they don't have sustenance. At the end when Utnapishtim offers the sacrifice, the gods are famished and they crowd around the sacrifice like flies, the text says [Pritchard 1958, 70].

The biblical writer wants to tell a different story. In the biblical flood story, God is represented as being unthreatened by the forces of nature that he unleashes, and being completely in control. He makes the decision to punish humans because the world has corrupted itself through *hamas*, through bloodshed and violence. He selects Noah due to his righteousness and he issues a direct command to build an ark. He has a clear purpose and he retains control throughout the story. At the end, the writer doesn't depict him as needing the sacrifice for food or sustenance.

We might say that this story, like the story of Cain and Abel before it, and like the story we will read later of Sodom and Gomorrah, this story presupposes this universal moral law that Sarna and Kaufman and others have talked about, this universal moral law that seems to govern the world, and if God sees infractions of it, then as supreme judge he brings humans to account. If morality is the will of God, morality then becomes an absolute value, and these infractions will be punished, in the biblical writer's view.

The message of the flood story also seems to be that when humans destroy the moral basis of society, when they are violent or cruel or unkind, they endanger the very existence of that society. The world dissolves. So corruption and injustice and lawlessness and violence inevitably bring about destruction.

Some writers have pointed out that it's interesting that these humans are not being punished for religious sins, for idolatry, for worshipping the wrong god or anything of that nature, and this is important. The view of the first books of the Bible is that each nation worships its own gods, its own way, perhaps. At this point in the story, perhaps the view is that all know of God even if they ignore him. But the view eventually will be that only Israel is obligated to the God of Israel, other nations aren't held accountable for their idolatry in the books of the Torah. We'll see this as we continue along. And yet everyone, all humans, Israelites or non-Israelites alike, by virtue of having been created by God in the image of God--even though they may not know that God, or may ignore that God--they are bound to a basic moral law that precludes murder and, perhaps from this story, we could argue other forms of oppression and violence.

What better way to drive home the point that inhumanity and violence undermine the very foundations of society than to describe a situation in which a cosmic catastrophe results from human corruption and violence. It's an idea that runs throughout the Bible, it also appears in later Jewish thought and some Christian thought, some Islamic thought. The Psalmist is going to use this motif when he denounces social injustice, exploitation of the poor and so on. He says through wicked deeds like this "all the foundations of the earth," are moved, "are shaken" [Psalm 82:5, RSV].

The Noah story, the flood story, ends with the ushering in of a new era, and it is in many ways a second creation that mirrors the first creation in some important ways. But this time God realizes--and again this is where God's got to punt all the time. This is what I love about the first part of Genesis--God is trying to figure out what he has made and what he has done, and he's got to shift modes all the time--and God realizes that he's going to have to make a concession. He's going to have to make a concession to human weakness and the human desire to kill. And he's going to have to rectify the circumstances that made his destruction of the earth necessary in the first place.

So he establishes a covenant with Noah: covenant. And humankind receives its first set of explicit laws, no more implicit, "Murder is bad." "Oh I wish I had known!" Now we're getting our first explicit set of laws and they're universal in scope on the biblical writer's view. They apply to all humanity not just Israel. So these are often referred to as the terms of the Noahide covenant. They apply to all humanity.

This covenant explicitly prohibits murder in Genesis 9, that is, the spilling of human blood. Blood is the symbol of life: that's a connection that's made elsewhere in the Bible. Leviticus 17[:11], "The life is in the blood." So blood is the biblical symbol for life, but God is going to make a concession to the human appetite for power and violence. Previously humans were to be vegetarian: Genesis 1, the portrait was one in which humans and animals did not compete for food, or consume one another. Humans were vegetarian. Now God is saying humans may kill animals to eat them. But even so, he says, the animal's life is to be treated with reverence, and the blood which is the life essence must be poured out on the ground, returned to God, not consumed. So the animal may be eaten to satisfy the human hunger for flesh, but the life essence itself belongs to God. It must not be taken even if it's for the purposes of nourishment. Genesis 9:4-6, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of humans So if you are killed by a beast or a human, there will have to be a reckoning, an accounting. "of every person's brother I will require the life of the person. Whoever sheds the blood of a person, in exchange for that person shall his blood be shed, for God made humans in his image [Hayes translation]. All life, human and animal, is sacred to God. The covenant also entails God's promise to restore the rhythm of life and nature and never again to destroy the earth. The rainbow is set up as a symbol of the eternal covenant, a token of the eternal reconciliation between the divine and human realms.

We should note that this notion, or this idea of a god who can even make and keep an eternal covenant is only possible

on the view that God's word and will are absolute, insusceptible to nullification by some superior power or some divine antagonist.

Now, I handed out, or there was handed out to you a sheet of paper. You might want to get that out in front of you because we're going to talk a little bit about the flood story in Genesis 6 through 9. When we read the flood story in Genesis 6 through 9, we're often struck by the very odd literary style. I hope you were struck by the odd literary style, and the repetitiveness and the contradictions. So I want to ask you now, and be brave and speak out, in your reading of the story did anything of that nature strike you? Was the story hard to follow? Was it self-contradictory, and in what ways? Anything? Just don't even be polite, just throw it right out there. Yes?

**Student:** [inaudible]

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Okay, we seem to have two sets of instructions. Someone's pointing out here, we seem to have two sets of instructions about what to bring on-board: either to bring two of each sort of living thing, animals and birds and creeping things, or in another passage God tells Moses to bring on seven pairs of pure animals and one pair of impure animals and seven pairs of birds. Right? Different sets of instructions. Anything else strike you as odd when you were reading this story?

**Student:** [inaudible]

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Okay, rain seems to be there for different amounts of time, doesn't it? There are some passages in which the flood is said to have lasted for 40 days, or be on the earth for 40 days. We find that in Genesis 7:17, but in Genesis 7:24, 150 days is given as the time of the flood. Anything else? Any other sorts of doublets or contradictions, because there are a few more?

Who's giving the instructions? That's not hard; you have it right in front of you. Who's giving the instructions?

**Student:** [inaudible]

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Okay, God. We have the word "God" being used I guess in that translation, right, with a capital G. What else is used?

**Student:** [inaudible]

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Lord. Those are actually different Hebrew words underneath there, okay? Those two terms are different names of the deity that's giving the instruction. Okay, so there are two designations used for God. *Yahweh*, which is the sacred Tetragrammaton, it's written with four letters in Hebrew, they don't include vowels. We don't really know how it's pronounced; I'm guessing at Yahweh, and that is a proper name for God, and in your translation that would be translated as "LORD" in small caps. So wherever you see "LORD" in small caps, that's actually the English translation for Yahweh, the proper name, like almost a personal name for God. And then in other places we have this word *Elohim*, which actually is the word for "gods," a sort of generic term for deities in the plural. However, when it's used to refer to the God of Israel it's clearly singular, it always has a singular verb. So that will be appearing in your text as "God" with a capital G. So whenever you see "Lord" or "God" those are actually pointing to different words that are being used in the underlying Hebrew text.

Twice God is said to look down on creation. Twice it is said that he is displeased. Twice he decides to destroy all living things. Twice he issues instructions and as we've seen they're contradictory. We seem to also have a different account of how long the flood lasted; there are more subtle contradictions throughout as well. Sometimes the flood seems to be the result of very heavy rain, but in other descriptions it seems to be a real cosmic upheaval. You'll remember the description of the world from Genesis 1 as an air bubble essentially that's formed by separating waters above and waters below. They're held back or pressed back by the firmament above. And it's the windows in the firmament that are opened--those waters are allowed to rush in and dissolve that air bubble. It's as if we're back to square one with the deep, right? Just this watery mass again. So it's creation undoing itself in some of the descriptions, as opposed to just heavy rain.

And in keeping with that idea of a kind of a return to chaos, Noah is represented in a way as the beginning of a new creation. Because like Adam and Eve in the first creation story, Noah is told to be fruitful and multiply. He's also given rule over everything, and that's now extended to the taking of human life [correction: Professor Hayes actually meant to say animal life here].

The Bible contains a lot of repetition and contradiction. And sometimes it occurs in one passage, as in the flood story here, and sometimes it occurs in stories or passages that are separate from one another, for example, the two creation stories. There are many significant differences between the two creation stories. They differ greatly in style. Genesis 1 is formalized, it's highly structured, it has the seven days and everything's paired up. It's beautifully structured, it's very abstract. Genesis 2 is much more dramatic, much more earthy. The first creation story doesn't really contain puns and wordplays, it's a little bit serious. The second creation story is full of them: there are all sorts of little ironies and puns in the Hebrew. *Adam*, the earthling made from the earth. *Adam* is made from *adamah*. Adam and Eve are naked, *arum*, which is the same word for clever or shrewd, and the snake is *arum*, he's clever and shrewd: there are lots of little puns of this kind.

There are also differences in terminology between the two stories. Genesis 1 speaks of male and female, one set of Hebrew terms, but Genesis 2 uses man and woman, a different set of Hebrew terms to describe the genders. So the terms for gender are different in the two stories.

Genesis 1 refers to God, as in your translation "God," Elohim, the word that's translated as "God." He's remote, he's transcendent. He creates effortlessly through his word and through his will. But Genesis 2 refers to the deity as a name that's really a combination, it's Yahweh Elohim, so you'll see "Lord God" right? You see that a lot in the Bible as well, Lord God. That tells you both of those words were side by side in the original Hebrew. So in Genesis 2 the deity is Yahweh Elohim. He's much more down to earth. He forms the human like a potter working with clay. He talks to himself, he plants a garden, he takes a stroll in the garden in the cool of the evening. He makes clothes for Adam and Eve. He's spoken of in much more anthropomorphic terms than the God that we encounter in Genesis 1.

So what we have in the first few chapters of Genesis are two creation stories that have distinctive styles, distinctive themes, distinctive vocabularies and they're placed side by side. In Genesis 6 through 9 we seem to have two flood stories with distinctive styles, and themes, and vocabularies, and substantive details, but they're interwoven instead of being placed side by side. And there are many such doublets in the Bible.

At times we have whole books that repeat or go over the same material. In fact the whole historical saga that's recorded from Genesis through the end of 2 Kings is rehearsed again in the books of First and Second Chronicles. What are we to make of the repetitions and the contradictions here and throughout the Bible? What are the implications?

Suppose you came across a piece of writing that you knew nothing about just lying there on the table. You didn't know who wrote it, where, when, how, why, and someone says to you, "I want you to draw some conclusions about that piece of writing. I want you to draw some conclusions about its authorship and the way it was compiled or composed." And so you pick it up and you start reading and you notice features like this. What might you conclude? Throw it out, what might you conclude? No presuppositions. You pick up the work and you find these features. What might you conclude about its authorship or manner of composition?

**Student:** There are multiple authors.

**Professor Christine Hayes:** You might conclude that there are multiple authors. Right? Multiple authorship. Yeah?

**Student:** There are revisions.

**Professor Christine Hayes:** That revisions may have been made, so that you might have different sources that have been revised or put together in different ways. Right? Revisions implying that you've got something and then it's worked over again, additions might be made so now that's a new source. You might conclude that these features are evidence of multiple authorship; a good deal of revision which points itself to a kind of composite structure, different layers maybe, different sources.

Well as early as the Middle Ages there were some scholars who noticed these things in the biblical texts. They noticed that there are contradictions and repetitions and there are anachronisms too, other features that were evidence of multiple authorship, revisions and composite structure. So what? Why would that be a big deal?

**Student:** [inaudible]

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Okay, it could be a bit of a problem if this text has become the basis for a system of religious faith or belief, and your assumptions about it are that its telling a truth that is singular in nature. And also what about the traditional beliefs on the origin of this text? Right, who wrote this text according to traditional beliefs? [inaudible comments from audience] I'm hearing Moses, I'm hearing God, I'm hearing a bunch of different things, but there are traditional ideas about generally the Mosaic authorship of the Bible, certainly the first five books of the Bible.

And so these features of the text which were noticed were a challenge to traditional religious convictions regarding the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Bible, and in many ways the perfection of the Bible, as speaking with a unified voice on matters of doctrine or religious theology. So medieval commentators for example began to speak a little bit more openly about some of these features. One of the first things they noticed is that Deuteronomy 34 describes the death and burial of Moses. So they decided it was possible that Moses didn't write at least that chapter.

Similarly there are some anachronisms that they had to explain. One of the most famous is in Genesis 13:7. It's in the midst of a story about dividing the land between Lot and--at that time his name was Abram, it later becomes Abraham--but between Lot and Abram. And the narrator in telling this story sort of interjects and turns to us, the readers, and says, "The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land." Now what's weird about that sentence? The narrator is speaking to us from a time in which the Canaanites and Perizzites don't live in the land, right? "That's back when the Native Americans lived in Connecticut." Is that writer living at a time when Native Americans are still living in Connecticut or owning Connecticut? No. They're writing from a later point of view. So the narrator breaks and talks to the audience in Genesis 13:7 and says, "That was back in the time when the Canaanites were in the land." When did Moses live? Who lived in the land in the time of Moses? The Canaanites. I know you haven't gotten there yet, but when you get to Deuteronomy you're going to find out he doesn't make it into the land. So he never makes it in there, he never gets in before the Israelites conquer. He dies--the Canaanites are still in possession. So that line was certainly written not by Moses; it was written by someone at a much later time who's looking back and referring to the time when the Canaanites were in the land.

So these are the kinds of things that people began to notice. And with the rise of rationalism in the modern period, traditional notions of the divine and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the Torah, the first five books of Moses, were called into question. The modern critical study of the Bible begins really with Spinoza who in the early seventeenth century suggested that the Bible should be studied and examined like any book: without presuppositions about its divine origin or any other dogmatic claims about its composition or authorship. But it was a Catholic priest, Richard Simon, who first argued that Moses didn't write the Torah, and that it contained many anachronisms and errors.

Well we've run out of time, but I'll pick up this fascinating story on Wednesday and we'll learn a little bit more about critical ideas about the composition of the Bible. Please be on the look out for emails from section leaders with study guides for sections which will be meeting this week; you'll have a lot of fun with the creation stories.

[end of transcript]

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 5 Transcript

September 20, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** We were talking last time about evidence of the use of different sources in the biblical text, and I mentioned Richard Simon, who was the first to argue that perhaps Moses wasn't the author of the entire Torah. In the mid-eighteenth century a fellow named Jean Astruc first noticed the use of the name Yahweh in certain stories and passages, and the name Elohim in others. And on this basis he came, and others came, to identify what have come to be known as the J and E sources. J being pronounced "y" in German, as a "Y," so Yahweh is spelt with a "J". So the J and the E sources. Now Astruc actually happened to maintain the idea of Mosaic authorship. He argued the Moses was drawing from two separate long documents, which he identified as J and E. They used different names for God, and he was drawing on those in his composition of the Torah. But in the next century his work would be expanded by Germans who identified other sources that made up the Pentateuch especially, the first five books of the Bible especially.

And in 1878 we have the classic statement of biblical source theory published by Julius Wellhausen. He wrote a work called *The History of Israel*, and he presented what is known as the Documentary Hypothesis. Now you've read a little bit about this in your source readings, but it's the hypothesis that the historical or narrative sections of the Bible-- Genesis and stretching on really through 2 Kings--is comprised of four identifiable source documents that have been woven together in some way. And he argued that these documents date to different periods and reflect very different interests and concerns. These four prior documents, he says, were woven together by somebody or some group of somebodies to form the narrative core of the Bible.

Wellhausen argued that these sources therefore do not tell us about the times or situations they purport to describe, so much as they tell us about the beliefs and practices of Israelites in the period in which they were composed. This is going to be an important claim; this is an important predicate of the documentary hypothesis. So although the sources claim to talk about events from creation, actually, forward, Wellhausen says, no, they really can only be used to tell us about the beliefs and religion of Israel from the tenth century, which is when he thinks the oldest was written, and forward.

Now his work created a sensation. It undermined of course traditional claims about the authorship of God and the work of Moses. It's still disputed by conservative groups and Roman Catholic authorities, although Roman Catholic scholars certainly teach it and adopt it.

The four sources that were identified by Wellhausen are, as I said, the J source and the E source, but also P, the priestly source, and D, which is primarily the book of Deuteronomy. Now as I said the first two sources are named because of the names of God that they employ, but it goes a little deeper than that. According to J, the knowledge of the proper or personal name, if you will, of God, Yahweh, begins with the first human, with the *adam*. So already in Genesis 4, *adam* seems to know this name and refer to God by this name. If we look at other sources such as P and even E, Yahweh's name is not known to humankind until he chooses to reveal it to Moses, and this happens in the time of the Exodus. So in Exodus 6:2-3, which is assigned by source critics to the P source, the Priestly source, God appears to Moses and he tells Moses then that he is Yahweh. He says, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," the patriarchs before you, "as El Shaddai, but I did not make myself known to them by name, Yahweh." So the P source has a different sort of theology, if you will, of God's name, or the revelation of God's name. And the same sort of thing happens in Exodus 3:13-16, and that's assigned to the E source.

So once you've identified rough blocks of material according to not just the name of the deity but also their assumptions about when humankind knows the name of the deity, then you can analyze these blocks or chunks of text and begin to identify certain characteristic features: their style, the terminology they use. Source critics were able to come up with a list of what they believed were the main characteristics of the various sources. So the main characteristics of the J source, which begins with the second creation story, so the J source picks up in Genesis 2:4, second half of verse 4 are: (1) that it uses a personal name Yahweh for God from the time of creation, and that will be in your Bibles as "Lord"; (2) It describes God very anthropomorphically. It's the J source that has God shut the door of the ark after Noah. It's the J source that has God smelling the sacrifice after the Flood, the sacrifice that Noah offers. It's in the J source that God eats

with Abraham and bargains with him. It's in the J source that God meets with Moses in this mysterious passage and tries to kill him one night; (3) J has a very vivid and concrete earthy style; and, (4) It uses the name Mount Sinai to refer to the place where the Israelites with Moses will conclude the covenant with God.

As for the date? Well source critics felt that a clue to the dating of the J source could be found in the passage in which God promises a grant of national land to the Israelites. The boundaries of the land are given there as the River of Egypt, the Nile, and the Euphrates. It was argued by some that those were basically the borders of the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon. Think of 1000 as your date for David, that's basically when the monarchy begins. So the beginning of the tenth century. The argument is that under David and Solomon the empire reached that boundary and so clearly this is a writer from the tenth century who's seeking to justify Israel's possession of its kingdom from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates; it's presenting that kingdom as a fulfillment of a promise of land that God made to Israel's ancient ancestors. For that reason source critics thought J must date to about the tenth century and to the time of perhaps King Solomon.

It also seems to reflect the interests of the south. Remember, we talked about the fact briefly that at a certain point in Israel's history there is a division upon the death of Solomon in the late tenth century. The kingdom divides into a northern kingdom now called Israel and a southern smaller kingdom called Judah. And the southern interests seem to be reflected in the J document. So source critics decided this is a Judean document from the tenth century.

The E source, which source critics say begins around Genesis 15 is really the most fragmentary. It seems to have been used to supplement the J source rather than being used in a larger form. So sometimes it seems very difficult to isolate, and there's a lot of debate over this, but the E source's characteristics are that (1) it uses Elohim, again it's a plural form of the word god or gods, but when it's used with a singular verb it refers to the God of Israel; (2) it has a much less anthropomorphic view of God; (3) God is more remote. There aren't the direct face-to-face revelations in the E source; most communications from the divine are indirect. They'll be through messengers or dreams and; (4) there's also an emphasis on prophets and prophecy in the E source. Miriam, Moses--they're both referred to as prophets in the E source; (5) The style is more abstract, a little less picturesque, and; (6) the E source uses a different name for the mountain where the covenant was concluded. It uses the name Horeb. So you will sometimes see as you are reading the text, they will sometimes refer to Horeb instead of Mount Sinai, or you'll see the two names used interchangeably. And it's been the theory of scholars that that's because it comes from a different source.

The E source seems to be concerned primarily with the northern tribes, therefore the northern kingdom. And so source theorists decided that it was most likely composed in the northern kingdoms about the ninth century.

And then, according to this hypothesis, the J and E sources were combined, primarily J with E being used to supplement it, probably somewhere in the eighth century, late eighth century; and that was the backbone of the Pentateuchal narrative. It covers the early history of humankind, of Israel's early ancestors known as the patriarchs and matriarchs. Their stories are told in Genesis. It contained the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt in the book of Exodus, and the stories of the wandering in the wilderness that are found in the book of Numbers. The anonymous scribe or editor who combined these sources didn't care to remove any redundant material or contradictory material, as we've already seen.

Now there are two other sources according to classical source theory, and these are D and P. D, which is the Deuteronomistic source, is essentially the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy differs from the narrative sources. This is a book of speeches. The book purports to be three speeches delivered by Moses as the Israelites are poised on the east side of the Jordan River—I'm not good with directions; I had to stop and think—the east side of the Jordan River, about to enter the Promised Land. But according to the source theorists it clearly reflects the interests of settled agrarian life. It doesn't reflect the interests of people who have been wandering around nomadically. It has laws that deal with settled agrarian life. The main characteristic of D, however, which assisted source theorists in fixing its date, is the following: D is the one source in the Bible that clearly insists that one central sanctuary only is acceptable to Yahweh. God cannot be worshiped at makeshift altars. God cannot be worshipped through sacrifices at some local sanctuary; all sacrifices must be offered in the one central sanctuary where "he will cause his name to dwell." It doesn't actually ever say Jerusalem, which is why Samaritans think that it's at Mount Gerizim and that they have the correct temple and that they're authorized to offer sacrifices. They [the Israelites] got it wrong when they thought it was

Jerusalem; Samaritans think that that [Mt. Gerizim] is where God caused his name to dwell. So Jerusalem is not actually mentioned in Deuteronomy, that's a later reading, but the place where God will cause his name to dwell, and only at the temple there, can there be sacrifices. This is a very different perspective from other biblical books. So you're going to see in the stories of the patriarchs that they're wandering all around the land and they're offering sacrifices. There are other books too where it's clear that there are local shrines, local sanctuaries, local priests who are offering sacrifices for people throughout the land. But Deuteronomy insists: one central sanctuary. All of the outlying alters and sacred places must be destroyed.

Now centralization of the cult was a key part of the religious reform of a king of Judah in 622. I've marked a couple of dates on the timeline up here: 722 is the fall of the Northern Kingdom, 622 a reform by King Josiah in Judah [correction: Professor Hayes meant Judea, not Judah here]. We read about this in one of the historical narratives where the temple's being refurbished. A book is found that says one central sanctuary. King Josiah says: What have we been doing? Get rid of the outlying altars, everything has to be centralized here. So that reform, Josiah's reform has caused many scholars to associate Deuteronomy, the centralizing book or source, with the late-seventh century, around this time in Judah.

The trouble is D seems to reflect a lot of northern traditions, the interests of tribes who are in the north. Well the Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722; so this is the theory: source critics conclude that D is an old source that was originally composed in the north in the eighth century. When the northern kingdom fell, when the Assyrians conquered and many Israelites would have fled to the southern kingdom, Deuteronomy or the D source was brought to Jerusalem, stored in the temple where a hundred years later it was discovered and its centralization was put into force by King Josiah.

P is the Priestly source, and that is found mostly in the books of Leviticus and the non-narrative portions of Numbers. Now the major characteristics of P, the Priestly source, are (1) a great concern with religious institutions, with the sacrificial system, with the Sabbath, with holidays, with rituals like circumcision, the Passover, dietary restrictions (the laws of *kashrut*) the system of ritual purity and impurity, and also holiness, ethical holiness and cultic or ritual holiness. P does have some narrative, and you've read some of it: Genesis 1, the first creation account, is attributed to P. It's orderly, it's systematized, the god is extraordinarily abstract. Because in the P source another characteristic is that; (2) God is transcendent, and even perhaps remote, much more so than in J, for example. Generally in the P source, God is concealed and revealed only in his *kavod*. This is a word that's often translated as "glory," but what it refers to actually is a light-filled cloud. God seems to be the burning fire inside this light-filled cloud. He travels before the Israelites in that form, leading them through the wilderness and so on. That seems to be in the P source. P is also; (3) interested in covenants, in censuses, in genealogies. All of those sections very often that link stories, are attributed to the P source. And because P elements often serve that kind of function as a bridge between stories, or very often P sources seem to introduce a story or conclude a story, the source critics felt that priestly writers were probably responsible for the final editing of the Bible, bringing together J and E and D and adding their materials and finally editing the work. Now, Wellhausen dated the priestly source to [or after] the exilic period, the period after the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 586 when the Babylonians have taken many of the Judeans into exile in Babylon.

So the narrative parts of P, J and E are continuous parallel accounts of the history of the world, if you will, from creation until the death of Moses. Source critics believe that they have a uniform style, uniform vocabulary, uniform set of themes, and chronological framework. So according to Wellhausen, and I sort of schematized it chronologically for you up here [on the board], the priestly school drew together all of this older material, added some of its own editorial material--bridges, introductions, conclusions--inserted the large priestly documents of Leviticus and Numbers, and so the Torah--and they did this [after] sitting in exile in Babylon--and so the Torah is really the result of five centuries of religious and literary activity. And this of course is a very, very different portrait from traditional claims about the authorship of the Pentateuch by one man, Moses, in approximately the fourteenth century BCE.

There are different terms that we use to describe the modern, critical study of the Bible in the late nineteenth century as I've just described it. One term is literary criticism, because it proceeds by closely analyzing the literary features of the text: the terminology, the style, the motifs. But because the goal of this literary critical school was to identify specific sources, isolate sources, we also refer to it as source criticism. You'll see those terms used interchangeably in your literature. Today literary criticism has a slightly different connotation from what it was in the nineteenth century, so

people prefer the term source criticism. But you should know both are used.

However, the purpose of identifying and isolating these sources was not just to say, "Look at that, there are these different sources." The purpose was to ascertain as far as possible their relative dates to one another, and to therefore enable the work of historical reconstruction to proceed: primarily a reconstruction of the history of the religion of Israel, and the historical situation of the authors of the different sources. Therefore literary criticism is not only called source criticism. It's also called historical criticism, because its ultimate goal and purpose was not just to isolate the sources, but to arrange them according to relative dates as far as they might be ascertained, and then to chart changes in Israel's religion.

You have a very readable introduction to some of this in Norman Habel's little work [*Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*]. Another excellent work which is not on your syllabus that is also critical of Wellhausen and some of the biases in his work, is found in a little work called *Who Wrote the Bible* by Richard Friedman, which has a great cover because it says "*Who Wrote the Bible?* Richard Friedman," [audience laughter].

So to sum up: the documentary hypothesis is an effort to explain the contradictions, the doublets, anachronisms and so on in the Bible by means of hypothetical source documents. So the theory posits hypothetical sources, traditions and documents to explain the current shape of the Torah the way we have it, to account for some of these phenomena that we find. As a next step the sources are assigned relative dates, not absolute dates, relative dates, and then they're analyzed to reveal the different stages of Israel's religious history. And so source criticism is also known as historical criticism because it's a tool for getting at the history, not just at the text, but ultimately a history of Israelite religion. That is how it has been used.

Now Wellhausen's work is subtle and it's quite brilliant, but it certainly reflects biases of nineteenth-century German scholarship, which believed strongly in the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. In his writings Wellhausen has some things to say about Judaism that are none too flattering. He describes Judaism at the end of the biblical period as a dead tree, twisted and perverted. He especially harbored a distaste for things cultic: priests, cult, ritual, in keeping with what was going on in Germany at the time, and the Protestant movement and so on. And these sorts of biases are very apparent in his work, and very apparent in his dating of the sources, and in his description of the evolutionary stages of Israel's religion.

So for example, source critics before Wellhausen all thought that P, the priestly material, was some of the oldest material in the Bible, that it was an early source. But Wellhausen said no, it must be a late source, because priestly, cultic, ritual material--that's clearly a degenerate stage of religion that shows a sort of guilt-ridden behaviorism. It's not true of spiritual religion, so clearly that's the latest stage of Israelite religion when it had died and was waiting to be reborn in new form with the arrival of someone in the first century. Clearly his dating of P owes a great deal to his biases and religious ideology. He saw the priestly material as having to come from the [post]-exilic age, post 586 [or later] [see note 1], and this is one of Wellhausen's most controversial points that's still hotly debated today, and we're going to return to this debate when we actually take a look at Leviticus and Numbers. At that time we'll be able to see what's at stake in the whole question of the dating of the priestly material.

The historical critical method, and the documentary hypothesis in particular, are not inherently biased, I want to make that point very strongly. They are simply analytical tools: look at the text and its features and draw some conclusions based on what you're finding. They are simply analytical tools. They're not inherently biased. They can be applied fairly to the text, and they're extraordinarily useful. It's just that some of the earlier practitioners of these methods did have ideological axes to grind, and we need to be aware of that.

The documentary hypothesis works fairly well when you have parallel accounts. It works a little bit less well when the accounts are interwoven because sometimes picking apart the sources can become dry and mechanical, sometimes to the point of absurdity. Some of the people who have carried this method to its extreme will go through and almost word for word--this is J, this is E, the next word is P--it's quite remarkable how certain they feel that they can break things down almost on a word-to-word basis as if an editor sat there with scissors and paste, cutting out word for word, and putting them together. It sometimes can reach heights of absurdity, and it can really destroy the power of a magnificent story, sometimes, when you carve it up into pieces that on their own don't really make all that much sense.

It needs to be remembered that the documentary hypothesis is only a hypothesis. An important and a useful one, and I certainly have used it myself. But none of the sources posited by critical scholars has been found independently: we have no copy of J, we have no copy of E, we have no copy of P by itself or D by itself. So these reconstructions are based on guesses. Some of them are excellent, excellent guesses, very well supported by evidence, but some of them are not. Some of the criteria invoked for separating the sources are truly arbitrary, and extraordinarily subjective. They are sometimes based on all sorts of unfounded assumption about the way texts were composed in antiquity, and the more that we learn about how texts in antiquity were composed, we realize [for example] that it's perhaps not unusual for a text to use two different terms for the same thing within one story, since we find texts in the sixteenth, seventeenth century BCE on one tablet using two different terms to connote the same thing.

So the criteria that are invoked for separating sources often ignore the literary conventions of antiquity, and the more that we learn about that the better able we are to understand the way the biblical text was composed. Repetition isn't always a sign of dual sources; it often serves a rhetorical function. Variant terms aren't always a sign of dual sources; they may have a literary or aesthetic function.

So most biblical scholars today do accept some version of Wellhausen's theory--yes, we feel the Bible is composed of different sources. We don't always have tremendous confidence, though, in some of the finer details and conclusions of his work and the work of other scholars who followed after him. Some doubt the existence of E altogether--it is so fragmentary and so isolated. Others defend the antiquity of P --we'll be coming back to that. Others argue that everything is post-exilic, everything's after the fifth century. It was written in the fourth, third century in the Persian period. None of it comes from an older period. Scandinavian scholars, they're not enthusiastic about source criticism at all. The whole Copenhagen School of Bible scholarship prefers--many of them prefer--to see the Bible as basically an oral narrative that just grew through accretion over time. So I did assign readings in the documentary hypothesis--it's extraordinarily important--but you do need to understand that it is one hypothesis, a major and controlling hypothesis out there, but it's not without criticism.

Moreover, while it's a very important and worthwhile project to analyze the component sources and examine their specific concerns and contribution, and you'll see that I'm a very great fan of P, we must remember that whatever sources were woven together, they were woven together with great skill and care by a final redactor, or redactors, who wanted them to be read as a unity, and surely that must mean something. It must mean they *can* be read as a unity and that that's a challenge that's been issued to us. So the Bible can be read both analytically and synthetically. We need to combine an awareness of origins, not gloss over the problems and the contradictions and say, "Well, we can resolve it by coming up with some strange scenario that makes both things work." Be aware that there are problems, contradictions, these derive from different sources, but also be sensitive to the artistry of the final composition. What does it mean that both of these elements have been retained here side by side? What is the phrase? The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. So keep that awareness.

And in the last 20 years or so, source criticism--actually 30 years or so--source criticism in the conventional sense of the analysis of documentary sources has been supplemented by other new and exciting methodologies in the study of the Bible, and we'll see some of those.

I've also included as optional reading for you sometimes, a couple of articles that analyze biblical stories. They are written by someone who thinks that documentary hypothesis just doesn't really help us out much at all, and she gives some wonderful, coherent readings of stories that argue this scene here or this contradiction here isn't a sign of a different source; it serves this literary purpose, that literary purpose. And I put those in subversively for you to have a look at in your own time. They're brilliantly written and they give you insight into the various ways in which we can read the text [see note 2].

But many of the alternative methodologies for studying the text do assume sources, in some broad sense even if not all the details of Wellhausen's theory, so it's clear that a great deal of biblical scholarship owes its accomplishments and its theories to the work that was done by the source critics of the nineteenth century.

I want to flip back to text for a moment before I return to talk about a whole contradictory set of methodologies, or methodologies that pull in another direction. But first I want to get us up to the patriarchs and matriarchs where we're

going to be starting off on Monday.

We have just had a flood, and then we move into Genesis 10; and Genesis 10 contains a genealogical table of nations. In this table, peoples of various lands are portrayed as having descended from a common source, a common ancestor, Noah, through his three sons, Japheth, Ham and Shem. Shem: Shemites, Semites. Shemites are said to descend from Noah's son, Shem. The biblical text at this point is understanding humanity as basically sharing a common root united by a common language. The story that follows in Genesis 11 can be understood then as an etiological tale, a tale that comes to explain something, and this tale is coming to explain the diversification of language: when we look around we see that in fact people don't seem to be that united and are in fact divided by their languages and so on. So how are we to account for the diversification of languages, the spread of different ethnic linguistic groups throughout the lands of the earth if we all come from one common creative moment, one common ancestor?

Genesis 11 explains that. The story is therefore going to act as a bridge between the first section of Genesis which has a universal scale, a universal scope, and what happens in Genesis beginning in Chapter 12, where we're going to focus in on one ethnic, linguistic group and one land. This story serves as the bridge, first of all explaining how it is that a united humanity speaking a common language even becomes diversified linguistically and ethnically, to then focus in on one group and one land.

Babel, pronounced "*bavel*" in Hebrew, is Babylon. The tower in the story of the Tower of Babel is identified by scholars as a very famous tower, a ziggurat, a ziggurat to Marduk in Babylon. The Bible's hostility to Babylon--after all it's going to be the Babylonians who are going to destroy them in 586--but the Bible's hostility to Babylon and its imperialism is clear. This story has a satirical tone. The word Babel, *Bavel*, means Gate of the God, but it's the basis for a wonderful pun in Hebrew, which also actually happens to work in English. Babble [is] nonsensical speaking, confusion of language. And I think there's obviously some onomatopoeic quality to "Babel" that makes it have that kind of a meaning both in English and a similar word in Hebrew [*balbel*]. So this word can also with a little bit of punning mean confusion, or confused language. So this mighty tower that was obviously the pride of Babylon in the ancient world is represented by the biblical storywriter as the occasion for the confusion of human language.

The construction of Marduk's ziggurat is represented as displeasing to God. Why? There are very many possible interpretations and our commentaries are full of them. Some interpreters view the tower builders as seeking to elevate themselves to storm heaven by building a tower with its top in the sky. Others see the builders as defying God's direct order. Remember, God said, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," spread out and fill the earth. But these people are said to come together, they congregate in one place, and instead of spreading out they're trying to rise high. There seems to be a real defiance of God's design for humanity, and so God frustrates their plan for self-monumentalizing, and he scatters them over the face of the earth. He makes it more difficult for them to do this again by confusing their tongues. Once again there's a very steep learning curve for this God. He has to keep adjusting things depending on what it is that humans are doing. So now he's got to confuse their languages.

Some interpreters see this story as representing a rejection of civilization or certain aspects of civilization. Monumental architecture, empire building, these are always things that are looked upon with suspicion for most of the biblical sources and biblical writers. Those sorts of ambitions are viewed negatively. They lead to human self-aggrandizement. They are indicative of an arrogant sort of self-reliance--that the prophets will certainly rail against--and in some sense a forgetting of God. So this is a time in which humans spread out, lose their unity, and this is also a time really when they turn to the worship of other gods.

The first 11 chapters of Genesis then have given us a cosmic, universal setting for the history of Israel. Those first chapters cover 2500 years if you go through and add up the chronologies. The rest of Genesis, Genesis 12 through 50, will cover just four generations: the generations of the patriarchs and the matriarchs. They will be Abraham and Sarah; their son Isaac, his wife Rebekah; their son Jacob, his two wives Rachel and Leah, I am leaving out other wives; but finally their children, 12 sons and one daughter.

So God's focus has shifted dramatically, the text's focus has shifted dramatically. Why? When you get to the end of Genesis 11 you feel that God has been rather shut out. Things aren't going well. Although God created the earth as an intrinsically good paradise, he created humans in his image, he provided for them, humans to this point have put their

moral freedom pretty much to poor use.

Many scholars, Kaufman, Sarna and others, say that one of the differences then between these myths of Israel and the mythologies of their neighbors is that in Ancient Near Eastern mythologies you have the struggle of good and evil cosmic powers. In the myths of the Bible this is replaced by a struggle between the will of God and rebellious humans. So these myths are telling also of a struggle, but it's on a different plane. Adam and Eve, Cain, the generation of the flood, the builders of the tower of Babel--God has been continually spurned or thwarted by these characters. So he's withdrawing his focus, and is going to choose to reveal himself to one small group, as if to say, "Okay, I can't reach everybody, let me see if I can just find one person, one party, and start from there and build out."

And so in Genesis 12 which begins the second stage of the Bible's historical narrative, we read that God calls to Abram to leave the land of his fathers and travel to a land which God will show him, beginning a whole new stage of the biblical narrative, and we'll sense that there's a very different feeling when you get to Genesis 12. When you read that material, it will feel different to you. And because of that we need to talk a little bit more about ways to read the biblical text, methods of criticism and so on.

In preparation for looking at the biblical narrative material that deals specifically with the Israelites, we need to think of some, or learn about some, of the other critical methodologies that are used in biblical scholarship, and for a moment we're going to adopt the role of historian. I'm going to ask you to think like historians--whatever that might mean--now and as we move into next week and look at Genesis 12 through 50.

The source critical method that we talked about today focuses on the hypothetical period of the compilation of the text, the compilation of the four sources into the Torah. But later scholars began to ask, "Well, what about the pre-history of those sources? What were the sources' sources?" Why should that be important? Remember that the source critics claimed and concluded that J, E, P and D were written from the tenth to the sixth centuries, and the implication, well actually not just the implication, the strong assertion of many of them was that despite the fact that they purport to tell of events prior to 1000, in fact they're just not at all reliable for those periods. They were written centuries after the fact, we really can't know anything about Israel, Israel's religion, Israel's history, religious history before the tenth century.

That was a very dissatisfying conclusion to many people, because the writers of J, E, P and D probably didn't sit down at typewriters and just invent their documents out of whole cloth. It doesn't seem that that's the way these materials would have been composed. They didn't invent, probably, all of these cultic rules and ritual practices all of a sudden. It seems likely that they were drawing on older traditions themselves: older stories, older customs, older laws, ritual practices. Scholars in the next wave of biblical scholarship began to ask a different set of questions; they became interested in asking: what materials did the compiler or the compilers of J or E or P draw on in the composition of those sources? Did they use more ancient materials, and if so can we figure out what they were? Do they contain reliable traditions for an earlier stage? And if so, then maybe we do have access after all to information regarding Israelite history prior to the year 1000. Suddenly you see an analytical approach to the Bible that's going to pull in the exact opposite direction from the classical source theory.

One of the leading scholars to take up this question was Hermann Gunkel, whose name is at the top over there [on the board]. Gunkel had a great knowledge of the oral literature of other cultures, other nations, and that led him to ask: Can we perhaps analyze these four literary source documents and figure out the pre-literary stages of their development? What went into their compilation and composition? He found support for this idea within the Bible itself because at times the Bible seems to name earlier sources quite explicitly. We don't have records of those sources anymore, but they seem to be named in the Bible. In Numbers 21:14 there's a little poetic excerpt that gives the boundaries between Moab and the Amorites, and it's quoted and it says it's from the Book of the Wars of the Lord. It's quoted as if this is a source that the person is drawing on and using in the composition of his text, and it's quoted in a way that makes it sound as if the source should be familiar to the reader.

We also have mention of something called the Book of Yashar in Joshua, that's also quoted, in Joshua 10:13. Or in 2 Samuel 1:18, we have David lamenting, a very beautiful lament over the death of Saul and his beloved Jonathan. It seems to actually be an epic song that recounts acts of Israel's heroes. He's reciting that now as he laments over the death of these two, and so it seems to be an earlier source that's been put into the story of David and his lament.

So it seems reasonable in light of the practices of other people, other ancient cultures and literatures as well as some contemporary literatures, and it seems reasonable in light of the explicit citation of sources in the biblical text to suppose that in fact the four primary documents are themselves compilations from other source materials, or drawing on written or oral materials from an even earlier period.

Gunkel began to focus on small little units. He was interested in small units within the four primary documents, and he identified genres or forms, what he called forms. The German word is a *Gattung*, *Gattungen*, forms. He would identify these small units, and that gave rise to the name of this approach, which is form criticism. He believed that what he was doing was identifying older, pre-literary forms that had been taken up and incorporated by the literary sources, by J, E, P and D.

Examples of the kind of form, or *Gattung*, that he would identify are things like a hymn, a proverb--we often have biblical texts quoting proverbs that seem to be folk sayings--laws, rituals, folk stories of a particular type, poems, legends, songs, fragments of mythology. So for example he says of Genesis 6:1-4, a passage that you've read:

When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them. The Lord said, "My breath shall not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years." It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim [these giants of some kind] appeared on earth--when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring [these giants, these Nephilim]. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

That's just stuck in there, in Genesis 6:1-4. This is an older fragment of a mythology or a legend which is put into place here. It's explaining the origin of heroes and great men of renown in the old days.

He also says that there are etiological stories. We've talked about those--legends that give the origin of a name, or a ritual, or an institution. There are different types of etiological stories. He says there are ethnological legends that will give you the story accounting for the origin of a particular people: so the Moabites for example, and the Ammonites--not a flattering story at all following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Obviously the Israelites didn't care for those people very much and gave them a pretty nasty origin.

We also have etymological legends, because they're explaining the name of something. It's given this particular name because of an etymological connection with some event earlier.

So all of these things, he argues, are probably older existing traditions that have been taken up and adapted by the biblical writer, and they may preserve some historical reminiscence. More importantly, more important than the actual events that they might be reporting, is the fact that behind each of these is some sort of function. Each one of these did some sort of cultural work, it had some function or setting in life. That's what we can discover when we isolate these forms: this setting in life. That helps us learn something about ancient Israelite society or culture way before the tenth century. That's Gunkel's claim.

So form criticism wasn't content with just identifying these various types of material, these various genres; it asked what was their function? What was their *Sitz im Leben*? What was their situation in life, their cultural context? What does it tell us that we have a large number of liturgical texts? What does it tell us that we have a large number of texts that seem to point to some sort of judicial context? What does it tell us that we have a great deal of proverbs, or wisdom material in certain parts of the Bible that we might date to a certain time? What does this tell us about society and what people were doing?

Growing out of form criticism is tradition criticism. This is a type of criticism that focuses on the transmission of traditional material through various stages, oral stages and literary stages, until it reaches its present form in the text. Now you can imagine as a story is told and then it's retold, it is obviously changed and adapted. Tradition criticism looks at that. Looking at Ancient Near Eastern parallels is very helpful. You can see how some of those motifs and

themes were changed in the process of being transmitted within Israelite culture and society, and again, to serve some sort of cultural function, or purpose. So the present text of the Pentateuch obviously rests on a very, very long period of transmission, both oral recitation and transmission, very much like the Greek classics, Homer's classics, the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*: they also had a long history of oral recitation and transmission, and were transformed along the way. Tradition criticism likes to look at the way people receive traditional material, rework it in creative ways and then adapt it to their own purposes and contexts and transmit it.

Sometimes that process is reflected in the Bible itself. Traditions in one part of the Bible will be picked up in a later part of the Bible, and written rather differently with a different point of view. So Deuteronomy, for example, recounts events that we've also read about in Exodus, and sometimes the differences are startling. Sometimes there are completely new emphases and the story can come out to be a very, very different story. 1 and 2 Chronicles are a retelling and a reworking of much of the material from Genesis through 2 Kings, and it cleans up a lot of the embarrassing moments. It presses its own themes in retelling those stories. Early laws are subject to reinterpretation. Ezekiel comes along and does some interesting things with some of the legal material that we find in Leviticus. This is all the kind of thing that tradition criticism looks at. Tradition criticism wants to uncover the changes that occur in the transmission of traditional material. It's already happening--we can see it--within the Bible, and the assumption therefore is that it happens before the material even gets into the Bible. Perhaps we can figure some of that out, and it's a process that also aids in historical reconstruction.

So you can see after classic source criticism, which came along and leveled people's interest in anything before the tenth century, and said: all we have are these written accounts that reflect the biases of the people at the time who wrote them, you then have the rise of types of scholarship that say: we're not satisfied with that. That's not really how literature works. People don't sit down and invent things out of whole cloth, particularly material of this type. It clearly has a history, they're clearly drawing on sources and maybe we can use analytical tools to figure out something about the period that you might think would be lost to history. So these types of criticism are emphasizing the real life historical setting of the materials that are in the biblical sources, their relationship to the wider culture, and that's something that earlier source criticism didn't care too much about.

All of these analytical modes of studying the Bible--by analytical I mean sitting down and analyzing the features, the literary features of the text, and drawing conclusions from them--all of these modes of examining the Bible--most of them developed by German scholars--can be contrasted with the North American tradition of scholarship which emphasized the correlation of biblical and archaeological data. I've written the name Albright; William F. Albright, was a leading scholar at the American school of biblical studies, and he was an expert in the fields of Palestinian archaeology and Assyriology. He focused on illustrating the Bible with the Ancient Near Eastern sources that at that time were newly coming to light-- archaeological findings; and his argument was--and it's an argument that's to a large degree not accepted anymore but--his argument at the time was that archaeology supported the basic historicity of biblical tradition.

There are some definite problems, however, with viewing the Bible as history. There are certainly problems with chronology: it's hard to pin down dates for a lot of things. Many of the events are given more than one date. A lot of the numbers...the Bible tends to use ideal numbers; it tends to use fives and multiples of five, or multiples of five plus seven. You have ten generations from Adam to Noah. You have ten generations from Noah to Abram. These things begin to raise suspicions. We have suspicious repetitions of events, things that happened to two or more of the patriarchs: twice Abraham goes into foreign territory and tries to pass his wife off as his sister. Isaac does the same thing. Are these three versions of one basic tradition that got assigned to different patriarchs? Are we supposed to think of these as representing three separate historical incidents? What's the likelihood of these things happening? Is that historically reasonable? So there are lots of reasons to feel that biblical chronologies of the patriarchal period are not accurate historical records: I use that phrase [accurate historical record] with some timidity. But in the twentieth century scholars of Albright's school argued that many of the traditions in the book of Genesis contained authentic reflections of the historical period they claimed to deal with. And they cited a number of considerations.

We'll take those up on Monday, but I would like you--as you read Genesis 12 and forward and think about that material--I'd like you to ask yourself: Is this historical writing? By what criteria do I judge historical writing? What do I think historical writing is? What makes some writing historical? What makes other writing fictional? Where do we get these

genres from? Why is so important to us to figure out what this is? Think about some of those issues, and we'll talk a little bit more about that as we turn to the texts in Genesis 12.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. In general the terms exilic and post-exilic are not used with great precision in these lectures. Technically speaking the term exilic is used to refer to the period between the destruction (586 BCE) and the Restoration in the 530s BCE, while post-exilic refers to the period initiated by the restoration. However, in these lectures the term exilic is occasionally used to refer to any time from the exile on. Strictly speaking, Wellhausen placed the P source in the post-exilic period.

2. See on the syllabus, under "Optional," the articles by Pamela Tamarkin Reis.

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 6 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** So last time we started discussing the historical merits of the biblical stories of the patriarchs and the matriarchs. These are contained in Genesis 12 through 50. Scholarly opinion on this matter is seriously divided; something you need to know. Some scholars will point to internal biblical evidence for the authenticity and the antiquity of the patriarchal stories. So for example, Nahum Sarna argues that representing Abraham and Isaac and Jacob as foreigners and strangers in Canaan is hardly a convenient tradition for a people who are seeking to establish their claim to its homeland. And if this myth of origins were the fabrication of a later writer, then surely they would have written the story in such a way as to give their ancestors a less tenuous hold or claim, connection, to the land.

He also notes that some of the material in the patriarchal stories would be offensive to later religious sensibilities. Jacob is married to two sisters simultaneously. That is something that is explicitly forbidden in the book of Deuteronomy. Wouldn't a later writer have cleaned up this ancestral record if this were in fact something composed at a later period? Also, he notes that the representation of inter-ethnic relationships in the patriarchal stories does not accord with the reality of a later period. So for example, the Arameans are considered close kin to the Israelites. "A wandering Aramean was my father," it says [Deuteronomy]. And spouses are always chosen--daughters for sons are always chosen by going back to the Aramean people and choosing someone from close kin. But in the period of the monarchy--that's going to be after 1000--in the period of the monarchy, there were very poor relations with the Arameans. They were bitter enemies. So why, according to scholars like Sarna, would a biblical author from that period portray the Arameans as close kin, unless they had some older tradition, established tradition that reflected that fact?

So Sarna and other scholars hold that the patriarchal traditions are not entirely fabricated retrojections from a later period. They contain authentic memories of an earlier historic situation. The patriarchs, it's maintained, were semi-nomads. They lived in tents. From time to time, they wandered to Egypt or Mesopotamia often in search of pasture for their animals. And various details of their language, their customs, their laws, their religion, it's argued, seem to fit well into the period of the Late Bronze Age. I've given you the periods at the top of the chart: early Bronze Age; middle Bronze Age from about 2100 to 1550; we date the late Bronze age from about 1550 until 1200--the introduction of iron and the beginning of the Iron Age in 1200. Prior to that, the Bronze Age, which is divided into these three periods. So that's on the one hand: scholars who see these stories as reflecting historical memories and having a certain authenticity to them.

Then on the other hand, at the other extreme, you have scholars who see the patriarchal stories as entirely fabricated retrojections of a much later age. And they vary significantly as to when they think these stories were written: anywhere from the period of the monarchy all the way down to the fourth century, some of them. Works published in the 1970s by authors like Thomas Thompson, Jon Van Seters, take the position that these stories are filled with anachronisms, their chronologies are confused. These anachronisms and confused chronologies in the patriarchal stories are the rule rather than the exception in their view, and they are evidence of a very late date of composition.

So you have these two extremes based on the internal evidence of the Bible itself. But you also have the same two extreme positions reflected in the discipline of archaeology. In the early days, archaeology of the region tended toward credulity. And it was explicitly referred to as biblical archaeology--an interesting name, because it suggests that the archaeologists were out there searching for evidence that would verify the details of the biblical text. We're doing biblical archaeology; archeology in support of the biblical text.

I mentioned last time William F. Albright, an American archaeologist. He believed strongly that archaeological findings were important external evidence for the basic historicity and authenticity of, for example, the patriarchal stories. And certainly some archaeological findings were quite remarkable. Scholars of the Albright school pointed to texts and clay tablets that were discovered in second millennium sites. So you see down on the bottom [of the blackboard] the second millennium BCE, obviously going down to 1000; first millennium: 1000 to 0. The second millennium really wasn't longer than the first millennium, it's just that I ran out of board! But specifically sites like Nuzi and Mari--I've placed

them in their approximate places on the timeline--Nuzi and Mari are sites that are near the area that's identified in the Bible as being the ancestral home of the patriarchs in Mesopotamia or on the highway from there to Canaan. These texts and clay tablets were believed to illuminate many biblical customs and institutions. So in the Nuzi texts from about the middle of the second millennium, we learn of the custom of adoption for purposes of inheritance, particularly the adoption of a slave in the absence of offspring. Biblical scholars got very excited about this. They point to the biblical passage in which Abraham expresses to God his fear that his servant, Eliezer, will have to be the one to inherit God's promise because Abraham has no son.

Also according to the Nuzi texts, if a wife is barren, she is to provide a maidservant as a substitute to bear her husband's children. And this is something that happens with three out of the four matriarchs, who are afflicted with infertility: Sarah, Rachel and Leah. There are other parallels in family and marriage law that correlate with certain biblical details.

In the eighteenth century [BCE], the texts from Mari. They contain names that correspond to Israelite names: Benjamin, Laban, Ishmael. So biblical scholars, buoyed up by these correlations between the archaeological finds, the texts found by archaeologists, and biblical stories, asserted that the patriarchs were real persons and their customs and their legal practices and their social institutions could be verified against the backdrop of the second millennium as revealed by archaeological findings.

However, it's been argued that some of these ancient sources have been misread or misinterpreted in an effort to find parallels with biblical institutions. A lot of gap-filling is going on to make these texts look as though they correspond to biblical institutions. And skeptics like Thomas Thompson and John Van Seters point out that many of the biblical customs which are paralleled in Ancient Near Eastern sources were still alive and well down in the first millennium. So reference to these customs in the patriarchal stories really doesn't tell us anything about dating. They could derive from anywhere in the second or first millennium. And for other reasons, they think it is much more reasonable to date the composition of these stories to the first millennium, in some cases, quite late first millennium. Furthermore, over time, many discrepancies between the archeological record and the biblical text became apparent. Increasingly, practitioners of what was now being termed Palestinian archaeology, or Ancient Near Eastern archaeology, or archaeology of the Levant, rather than biblical archaeology--some of these archaeologists grew disinterested in pointing out the correlations between the archaeological data and the biblical stories or in trying to explain away any discrepancies in order to keep the biblical text intact. They began to focus on the best possible reconstruction of the history of the region on the basis of the archaeological evidence regardless of whether or not those results would confirm the biblical text, the biblical account. In fact, this reconstruction often does contradict biblical claims. We're going to see this quite clearly in a few weeks when we consider the book of Joshua and its story of Israel's lighting invasion of the land of Canaan. The archaeological record just doesn't support such a story.

Still, many people have clung to the idea of the Bible as a historically accurate document, many times out of ideological necessity. Many fear that if the historical information in the Bible isn't true, then the Bible is unreliable as a source of religious instruction or inspiration. And that's something they don't want to give up. This is all really a very unfortunate and heavy burden to place on this fascinating little library of writings from late antiquity. People who equate truth with historical fact will certainly end up viewing the Bible dismissively, as a naïve and unsophisticated web of lies, since it is replete with elements that cannot be literally true. But to view it this way is to make a genre mistake. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, while set in Denmark, an actual place, is not historical fact. But that doesn't make it a naïve and unsophisticated web of lies, because we accept when we read or watch *Hamlet* that it is not a work of historiography, a work of writing about history. It is a work of literature. And in deference to that genre and its conventions, we know and accept that the truths it conveys are not those of historical fact, but are social, political, ethical, existential truths. And the Bible deserves at least the same courteous attention to its genre.

The Bible doesn't pretend to be and it shouldn't be read as what we would call "objective history"--and see the scare quotes, you should be looking up here so you'll see the scare quotes: "objective history"--in other words perhaps, a bare narration of events. To be sure, we do find that some events that are mentioned in the biblical texts correlate to events that we know of from sources outside the Bible. So for example, Pharaoh Shishak's invasion of Palestine in 924. This is mentioned in the biblical text, it's mentioned in the Egyptian sources--there's a nice correlation. The destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722, the capture of Jerusalem in 597, the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 586--these are all recorded in the biblical text and they are in Assyrian and Babylonian records as well; as well as other

events from the period of the monarchy. So as a result, because of these correlations, many scholars are willing to accept the general biblical chronology of the period from the monarchy on: starting about 1000 on, they accept that general chronology; the sequence of kings and battles and so on.

But ultimately, it is a mistake, I think, to read the Bible as a historical record. The Bible is literature. Its composition is influenced and determined by literary conventions and goals. Now, of course we all know that there is no such thing as purely objective history anyway. We have no direct access to past events. We only ever have mediated access in material: archaeological remains that yield information to us only after a process of interpretation, or in texts that are themselves already an interpretation of events and must still be interpreted by us. The biblical narrative is an interpretation of events that were held by centuries' long tradition to be meaningful in the life of the people. And to the biblical narrators, these events known perhaps from ancient oral traditions pointed to a divine purpose. The narrative is told to illustrate that basic proposition. The biblical narrators are not trying to write history as a modern historian might try to write history. They're concerned to show us what they believed to be the finger of God in the events and experiences of the Israelite people.

One scholar, Marc Brettler, whose name I've also put up here, Marc Brettler notes that in the Bible, the past is refracted through a theological lens if not a partisan political, ideological lens [Brettler 2005, 22]. But then all ancient historical narrative is written that way, and one could argue all contemporary historical narrative is written that way. With due caution, we can still learn things from texts ancient and modern. We can still learn things about Israel's history from the biblical sources, just as classical historians have learned a great deal about classical history, Greece and Rome, despite or through the tendentious, partisan and ideologically motivated writings of classical writers.

So our discussion of the patriarchal stories is going to bear all of these considerations in mind. We're not going to be asking whether these stories are historically accurate. I'm going to assume they are not. And once we rid ourselves of the burden of historicity, we're free to appreciate the stories for what they are: powerful, powerful narratives that must be read against the literary conventions of their time, and whose truths are social, political, moral and existential.

So what are these truths? We'll begin to answer this question--*begin* to answer this question, you'll spend the rest of your life finishing the process of answering this question. But we'll begin by identifying some, by no means all, of the major themes of Genesis 12 through 50. And we're going to begin with the story of Terah and his family. This is a story that's marked by the themes of divine command and divine promise. Now, the biblical writer represents the emigration of Terah's son Abram, whose name will be changed to Abraham, so sometimes I'll say one and sometimes the other. But they represent this emigration as divinely commanded. It's the first step in a journey that will lead ultimately to the formation of a nation in covenant with God. First we meet our cast of characters. This is in Genesis 11:27 on through chapter 12:3.

Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. And Abram and Nahor took them wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai [who will become Sarah]; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah.... And Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai, his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; [getting confused yet?] and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there.

And the days of Terah were 205 years: then Terah died in Haran.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you."

I will make of you a great nation,  
And I will bless you;  
And make your name great  
So that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you, I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves [source unknown].

So Abram is commanded to go forth from his home and family to a location to be named later, a location that remains for now unspecified. And this is a fact that has caused commentators for centuries to praise Abram for his faith. That is a virtue--faith is a virtue--that is connected or associated with Abram/Abraham in other biblical contexts and also in later religious tradition. He is seen as the paradigm, the paradigmatic exemplar of a man of faith. The command is coupled with a promise: "I will make of you," God says, "a great nation, and I will bless you." But, we have just learned in chapter 11 that Sarai is barren. It was a seemingly irrelevant detail, whose import is suddenly clear. How clever of the narrator to plant the information we need to realize that Abram has to take God's word on faith, and how perfectly the narrator sets up the dramatic tension and the great confusion that is going to run through the next several chapters, because Abram doesn't seem to understand that the progeny will come from Sarai. You have to read these stories as if you're reading them for the first time. You have the great disadvantage of knowing the ending. It's a terrible disadvantage. You have to discipline yourself to read these stories as if you don't know what's coming next and put yourself in the position of the character. Abram's just been told he's going to be the father of great nations and he has a barren wife. He doesn't seem to understand that the progeny is going to come from Sarai, and why should he think that it would? God wasn't specific. He simply says, "I shall make of you a great nation." He says nothing of Sarai, and after all she's barren. So Abram may be forgiven for thinking that perhaps some other mate awaits him. And so he surrenders her easily to other men, to Pharaoh of Egypt immediately following this scene in chapter 11 [and 12]; immediately after that, in Egypt, he surrenders her. He willingly accepts Sarai's offer of a handmaid, Hagar, to bear a child Ishmael, in Sarai's place. How cleverly the narrator leads us with Abram to pin our hopes on Ishmael as the child of the promise. And how cleverly is the carpet pulled out from under our feet in Genesis 17, when God finally, perhaps impatiently, talks specifics: No, I meant that you would father a great nation through Sarah. And Abraham, as he's now called, is incredulous: "She's past the age of bearing, Lord." And he laughs. And God is silent. And in that silence I always imagine that this light goes on: this click, this awful, sickening light. And Abraham says, O, that Ishmael might live in your sight! Or something like that. I think I probably misquoted. "O, that Ishmael might live by your favor"-- sorry, that's the actual words. But God is determined. Sarah will bear Isaac and with him God will make an everlasting covenant.

All of this drama through the first five chapters made possible by a seemingly irrelevant line in 11:30, a sort of throw-away datum in a family list that one might gloss over: "and Sarai was barren; she had no child." And that's the power and beauty of biblical narrative. You have to get yourself into the mindset to read it that way.

A few verses later, when Abram and his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot and those traveling with them all reach Canaan, God makes an additional promise. He says in verse 7, "I will assign this land to your offspring." So in just a few short verses--we've just gone from 12, we've just gone seven verses now into chapter 12--in just a few short verses, the writer has established the three-fold promise that underpins the biblical drama that's about to unfold: the promise of progeny, of blessing, and of land. And that establishes a narrative tension for the stories of the patriarchs, but also for the story of the nation of Israel in subsequent books. Because in the patriarchal stories, there is this suspenseful vacillation between episodes that threaten to extinguish God's promises and episodes that reaffirm them. Israelite matriarchs seem to be a singularly infertile group. The lines of inheritance defy our expectations: it doesn't seem to go to the person that we think that it's going to go to. The process by which the promise is fulfilled is halting and torturous at times. We're going to look at one example of an episode in which the promise is affirmed--or confirmed, reaffirmed--and an example of an episode in which the promise is supremely threatened.

In Genesis 15, God's promise to Abraham is formalized in a ritual ceremony. God and Abraham are said to "cut" a covenant--that's the verb that's used in making a covenant--and "covenant" is a central biblical concept. The Hebrew word for covenant, which I've written over here is *berit*. It means vow, promise, perhaps contract, agreement or pact. Parallels to the biblical covenant have been pointed out by many Ancient Near Eastern historians and scholars. We have in our Ancient Near Eastern texts--and we'll come back to these in more detail when we get into Exodus--we have in our Ancient Near Eastern texts, two types, two main types of covenant: the suzerainty covenant and the parity covenant. As

you can imagine from the name, a suzerainty covenant is a covenant in which a superior party, a suzerain, dictates the terms of a political treaty usually, and an inferior party obeys them. The arrangement primarily serves the interest of the suzerain, and not the vassal or the subject. In a parity covenant, you have really two equal parties who both agree to observe the provisions of some kind of treaty.

Now, there are four major covenants in the Hebrew Bible. They're initiated by Yahweh as expressions of divine favor and graciousness. And two of these appear in Genesis. We've already seen one, the Noahide covenant; and the Abrahamic covenant, which we're looking at now. Now, the Noahide covenant in Genesis 9:1-17 is universal in scope. It encompasses all life on earth. It stresses the sanctity of life and in this covenant, God promises never to destroy all life again. By contrast, the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant with a single individual. So we've gone from a covenant with all of humanity to a covenant with a single individual. And it looks very much like an Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty covenant. God appears as a suzerain. He's making a land grant to a favored subject, which is very often how these work. And there's an ancient ritual that ratifies the oath. In general, in this kind of covenant, the parties to the oath would pass between the split carcass of a sacrificial animal as if to say that they agree they will suffer the same fate as this animal if they violate the covenant. In Genesis 15, Abraham cuts sacrificial animals in two and God, but only God, passes between the two halves.

The striking thing about the Abrahamic covenant is its unilateral character. Only God seems to be obligated by the covenant, obligated to fulfill the promise that he's made. Abraham doesn't appear to have any obligation in return. And so in this case, it is the subject, Abraham, and not the suzerain, God, who is benefited by this covenant, and that's a complete reversal of our expectation. Note also that the biblical writer goes out of his way to provide a moral justification for this grant of land to Israel. In the biblical writer's view, God is the owner of the land, and so he is empowered to set conditions or residency requirements for those who would reside in it, like a landlord. The current inhabitants of the land are polluting it, filling it with bloodshed and idolatry. And when the land becomes so polluted, completely polluted, it will spew out its inhabitants. That process, God says, isn't complete; so Israel is going to have to wait. The lease isn't up yet, and the Israelites will have to wait. He says in Genesis 15:16, the iniquity of the Amorites will not be fulfilled until then. So here, and in other places in the Bible, it's clear that God's covenant with Israel is not due to any special merit of the Israelites or favoritism: this is actually said explicitly in Deuteronomy. Rather, God is seeking replacement tenants who are going to follow the moral rules of residence that he has established for his land.

Genesis 17 seems to be a second version of the same covenant. This time, scholars attribute it to P--the Priestly writer, the P source. There are some notable differences, emphasizing themes that were important to the Priestly writer. God adds to the promises in Genesis 17 that a line of kings will come forth from Abraham, and then, that Abraham and his male descendants be circumcised as a perpetual sign of the covenant. So here there is some obligation for Abraham. "Thus shall my covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact" [Gen 17:13]. Failure to circumcise is tantamount to breaking the covenant, according to the text. Now, circumcision is known in many of the cultures of the Ancient Near East. It's generally a rite of passage that was performed at the time of puberty rather than a ritual that was performed at birth, [or] eight days after birth. So that's unusual in the Israelite context to have it occur with infants. But as is the case with so many biblical rituals or institutions or laws, whatever their original meaning or significance in the ancient world, whether this was originally a puberty rite or a fertility rite of some kind, the ritual has been suffused with a new meaning in our texts. So circumcision is here infused with a new meaning: it becomes a sign of God's eternal covenant with Abraham and his seed.

These texts are typical of affirmations of God's promise. But despite them, the patriarchal episodes or stories are peppered with episodes in which the realization of the promise and the blessing is threatened. In chapter 12, Abram surrenders his wife Sarai to Pharaoh in order to advance his position among the Egyptians, plausibly not knowing that it is Sarai who is supposed to bear the child of God's promise. As I said, that's left unclear until chapter 17, when God says: No, no, no, you misunderstood. I meant Sarai. God intervenes, however, and returns Sarai to Abraham. Sarai's barren state really casts a shadow over the promise from the very beginning of the story of Abraham and Sarah. Desperate, Sarah takes advantage of the custom that is attested in the ancient world of giving her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to Abraham to bear a child in her stead. But Hagar apparently lords this over her mistress, and an embittered Sarah forces her from the house. Hagar and her child Ishmael cry out to God in the wilderness and God assures Hagar that Ishmael, who's regarded by Muslims as the ancestor of the Arabs and the inheritor of the blessing and the promise, that Ishmael shall become a great nation too [see note 1]. But really the greatest threat to the promise comes from God

himself, and that is in Genesis 22 when God tests Abraham with the most horrible of demands. The child of the promise, Isaac, who was born miraculously to Sarah when she was no longer of child-bearing age, is to be sacrificed to God by Abraham's own hand. And the story of the binding of Isaac is one of the most powerful, most riveting stories not only in the Bible but, some have claimed, in all of world literature.

The story is a marvelous exemplar of the biblical narrator's literary skill and artistry. This week's assigned reading includes selections from Robert Alter's book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, which I heartily recommend to read in its entirety. Alter describes the extreme economy of biblical narrative, economy in the description of physical settings and character as well as speech. Rarely does the narrator comment on or explain a character's actions or thoughts or motives. There's only the barest minimum of dialogue. And on the few occasions that the Bible will violate this principle of verbal economy--for example if two characters converse at length--you can be sure it's significant. You'll want to pay extra attention. The biblical narrator's concealing of details and the motives of the characters, God and Abraham and Isaac, leads to ambiguity, and the possibility of very many interpretations. And that is a striking characteristic of biblical prose: its suppression of detail, its terse, laconic style. That makes the little that *is* given so powerful, so "fraught with background" to use the phrase of Eric Auerbach, whose article you are also to read this week. Auerbach contrasts the literary style of Homer with the biblical writer's style specifically in connection with the story of Genesis 22.

The ambiguities and the indeterminacy of this story make it one of the most interpreted texts of all time. Why is God testing Abraham? Does God really desire such a sacrifice? What is Abraham thinking and feeling as he walks--for three days, already--walks with his son, bearing the wood and the fire for the sacrifice? Does he fully intend to obey this command, to annul the covenantal promise with his own hand? Or does he trust in God to intervene? Or is this a paradox of faith? Does Abraham intend faithfully to obey, all the while trusting faithfully that God's promise will nevertheless be fulfilled? What's Isaac thinking? Does he understand what is happening? How old is he? Is this a little boy or a grown man? Is he prepared to obey? He sees the wood and the firestone in his father's hand. Clearly a sacrifice is planned. He's got three days to figure that out. He asks his father: Where is the sheep for the burnt offering? Does he know the answer even as he asks? Does he hear the double entendre in his father's very simple and solemn reply, which in the unpunctuated Hebrew might be read, "The lord will provide the sheep for the offering: my son." Does he struggle when he's bound? Does he acquiesce?

The beauty of the narrative is its sheer economy. It offers so little that we as readers are forced to imagine the innumerable possibilities. We play out the drama in countless ways, with an Abraham who's reluctant and an Isaac who's ignorant. Or an Abraham who's eager to serve his God to the point of sacrificing his own son, and an Isaac who willingly bares his neck to the knife. Read the story one verse, one phrase, one word at a time. There are so few words that you can be sure that they were chosen with care. You'll be looking at Genesis 22 closely in your section discussions. And as you read the story, remember its larger context: God's promise to make Abraham the father of a great people through his son, Isaac. It's this context, this promise, that gives the story its special power and pathos.

But of course the story can be contextualized in a number of different ways. For example, one can read the story in its historical context of child sacrifice in the Ancient Near East. Although child sacrifice was adamantly condemned in various later layers of the Bible, there's plenty of evidence that it was probably practiced in different quarters throughout the period of the monarchy. Does Genesis 22 assume or reject the practice of child sacrifice? Some scholars argue that a core story promoting child sacrifice has been edited so as to serve as a polemic against child sacrifice now in its final form. Do you think so? Can you see the seams and feel the narrative tensions that would support such a claim? Does the story pull in more than one direction?

Or we can read the story in its immediate literary context. Abraham has just permitted the expulsion of Ishmael, the only beloved son of Hagar. And now God demands that he sacrifice his beloved son. What might he be trying to teach Abraham? Is this a trial in the sense of a test or a trial in the sense of a punishment? The Hebrew term can tolerate both meanings.

Or Genesis 22 can be contextualized another way. And at this point, we need to backtrack a little bit to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is in Genesis 18 and 19, to contextualize the story a little bit, in terms of Abraham's character development. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in Genesis 18 and 19, Yahweh tells Abraham of his plan to investigate reports of the wickedness of the city, the Canaanite city of Sodom--its violence, its cruelty to strangers--

and to destroy it. And Abraham's reaction comes as something of a surprise. He objects to the plan, and he starts to argue with God. "Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" That's in Genesis 18:23-25. The question is of course rhetorical. Abraham is evidently quite confident that God would not act unjustly, would not destroy the innocent along with the wicked. Indeed, Abraham is banking on the fact that God is merciful and will overlook evil for the sake of righteous individuals. And so Abraham haggles with God for the lives of the innocent:

"...Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" And the Lord answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." Abraham spoke up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?" And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?"

And in this way, Abraham manages to whittle the number down to ten: "And God answers, 'I will not destroy for the sake of the ten.'"

But ten innocent men are not found. The narrator makes that very clear. He takes pains to point out that the mob that comes to abuse the two divine visitors includes all the people to the last man: very clear statement. So Sodom and its four sister cities of the plain, around the Dead Sea, are destroyed. But out of consideration for Abraham, Abraham's nephew Lot is saved. Genesis 19:29: "God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval." Now, this text is often identified as the source for the doctrine of the merit of the righteous, which is the idea that someone who is not righteous is spared for the sake of, or on account of, the accrued merit of one who is righteous. So Lot himself is no prize, but he is spared on Abraham's account. This is an idea that will have repercussions in later biblical thought.

In this story, we see Abraham rising to the defense of a thoroughly wicked and reprehensible group of people, arguing quite pointedly that the innocent should never be wantonly destroyed. Can this be the same Abraham who a few chapters later, when told to slaughter his only son, his perfectly innocent and presumably deeply loved son, not only makes no objection, but rises early in the morning to get started on the long journey to the sacrificial site? What are we to make of the juxtaposition of these two stories? Which represents behavior more desirable to God?

Before leaving this story, I just want to make two quick comments. First, I've included in your reading packet, and it's uploaded on the [Yale College course] website, a very interesting article by a writer who relates her efforts since childhood to understand why Lot's wife should have been turned into a pillar of salt as punishment for looking back as she fled from her burning home [Goldstein 1994, 3-12]. It's not a biblical scholar, but someone who's simply reacting to the text. Was this, in fact, a punishment, or was it a mercy? Second, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has often been cited as a biblical condemnation of homosexuality, as if the Sodomites were condemned to destruction because of homosexual behavior. In fact the very terms "sodomy" and "sodomize" represent this interpretation. But the idea that the fundamental sin of Sodom was homosexual behavior is not present in the Hebrew Bible. It appears only in later documents. It's found in the Christian New Testament, in the book of Jude 7:2; the book of Peter 2:6-10; and subsequent interpretations. The Sodomites, like the generation of the Flood, stand condemned by the "outcry against them," a particular Hebrew word that's used to refer to outcry. It's a term that's generally associated with the appeal of victims of violent oppression, bloodshed, injustice. God hears this outcry of victims, against the Sodomites: the Sodomites' violation of the unwritten desert law of hospitality to strangers, their violent desire to abuse and gang rape the strangers that they should have been sheltering. This is merely one instance of a pattern of violent brutality.

Now, Isaac, who is the child of God's promise to Abraham, is often described as the most invisible of the patriarchs or the most passive of the patriarchs. Perhaps his passive acceptance of his father's effort to sacrifice him serves as the key to the biblical narrator's perception of his character. By contrast, his wife Rebekah is often described as the most

determined and energetic of the matriarchs. She runs to extend hospitality to a stranger. She quickly draws water for him. She quickly draws water for his camels and waters them all. She seems to run everywhere, and she does all this not knowing that the man she greets is the servant of Abraham who has come to seek a wife for his master's son, Isaac. Rebekah herself personally, accepts the offer of an unknown bridegroom in a far away land and overrides the urgings of her mother and her brother to delay her departure. No, she says, I'm ready to go. I'll go now. There's a very moving conclusion to the betrothal story. We read in Genesis 24:67 that Isaac brought Rebekah "into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her and thus found comfort after his mother's death."

But like the other matriarchs, Rebekah is barren. So Isaac pleads with the lord for a child on her behalf. And Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. The older child is Esau--Esau will be the father of the Edomites--and the younger is Jacob, who will be the father of the Israelites. Now, Jacob is the most fully developed, the most colorful and the most complex of the patriarchs. Jacob has long been identified by commentators as the classic trickster, a type that we know from folklore. Marc Brettler has described the Jacob stories as a kind of morality tale, the main message of which is "trick and you shall be tricked" [Brettler 2005, 51]. Jacob tricks his brother out of his birthright, and in turn is tricked by his brother-in-law, his wife and later his own sons. How much of Jacob's trickery is really necessary? After all, Rebekah, who suffers tremendous pain during her pregnancy, is told by God that the twins who are fighting and struggling for priority in her womb will become two nations, the older of which will serve the younger. That happens in Genesis 25:23. "Two nations are in your womb; two separate peoples shall issue from your body; one people shall be mightier than the other; and the older shall serve the younger." And indeed, the real life nations of Israel and Edom were long-time enemies--Esau is the father of the Edomites according to the biblical texts--and for a time, Edom was subjugated by Israel, according to the biblical texts, under King David.

Some scholars, like Nahum Sarna have argued that this announcement, that the older shall serve the younger is the narrator's way of establishing for the reader that the younger child, Jacob, is the son who will inherit the divine blessing, and that that then raises serious questions about Rebekah and Jacob's morally dubious efforts to wrest the blessing and birthright from Esau. Are we supposed to be comforted by the fact that they are fulfilling a divine plan? Are we supposed to conclude that it's alright to fulfill a divine plan by any means, fair or foul? Or are we to conclude, as Sarna and others suggest, that Jacob's possession of the birthright was predetermined, it was disengaged from all of his acts of trickery? And if so, then Jacob's efforts are indicative of a deceitful and narcissistic personality? He takes advantage of Esau's hunger, offering him a pot of lentil stew in exchange for the birthright. He and Rebekah plot to deceive Isaac in his dotage into bestowing the blessing of the firstborn on Jacob instead of Esau. So perhaps by informing us that Jacob had been chosen from the womb, the narrator is able to paint a portrait of Jacob at this stage in his life as grasping and faithless: a great contrast to his grandfather, Abraham.

Now, Jacob's poor treatment of his brother, Esau, earns him Esau's enmity and Jacob finds it expedient to leave Canaan and remain at the home of his mother's brother, Laban. On his way east, back to Mesopotamia from Canaan, where Laban resides, in Mesopotamia, Jacob has an encounter with God. At a place called Luz, Jacob lies down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. And he has a dream in which he sees a ladder. The ladder's feet are on the earth, it reaches to heaven and there are angels ascending and descending on the ladder. In the dream, God appears to Jacob and reaffirms the Abrahamic or patriarchal covenant. He promises land, posterity and in addition, Jacob's own safety, his own personal safety until he returns to the land of Israel. Jacob is stunned: we read in Genesis 28:16-17: "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is [present] in this place; and I did not know it.' / Shaken, he said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven.'" The stone that served as his pillow, he then sets up as a cultic pillar, some sort of memorial stone. He sanctifies the stone with oil and he renames the site Bethel, *Beyt El*, which means the house of God.

But it's significant that despite this direct vision, Jacob, so unlike Abraham, is still reluctant to rely on God and his promise. And he makes a conditional vow:

If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father's house--the Lord shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You.

So where once God had tested Abraham, it seems now that Jacob is almost testing God. If you can do all this, fine: you can be my God.

Well, Jacob spends some 14 years in the household of his uncle, his mother's brother, Laban. And Jacob meets Laban's two daughters: Leah is the elder daughter and Rachel is the younger. And he soon loves Rachel. He agrees to serve Laban for seven years for the hand of the younger daughter Rachel. When the seven years pass, Laban deceives Jacob and gives him the elder daughter, Leah. Jacob, the trickster, is furious at having been tricked himself, and in much the same way--an older and a younger sibling, one disguised as the other or wearing the covering of the other, just as he tricked his own father. But he is willing to give seven years more service for Rachel. Rachel, Leah, and their two handmaidens will conceive one daughter and 12 sons, from whom will come the 12 tribes of Israel. But it's the two sons of Rachel, the beloved wife, the two sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin, who are the most beloved to Jacob.

Jacob determines finally to leave Laban and return to Canaan. There's one final remarkable incident in Jacob's life that occurs on his return journey. It's an incident that most readers associate with a significant transformation in his character, and that is Jacob's nighttime struggle with a mysterious figure, who in some way is representative of God. This struggle occurs as he is about to cross the river Jabbok and reconcile himself with his former rival and enemy, Esau. Jacob has sent everyone on ahead: his wives, his children, his household, his possessions. He's standing alone at the river. And we read, Genesis 32:25-33.:

â€ a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and men, and have prevailed." Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping on his hip.

Many scholars, Michael Coogan and others, see this story as an Israelite adaptation of popular stories of river gods who threaten those who wish to cross a river, or trolls or ogres who guard rivers and have to be defeated by a hero, making the river safe to cross. In its Israelite version, however, this story is historicized. It serves an etiological function. It's associated with one particular character at a historical time and it serves to explain why the Israelites abstained from eating the sciatic nerve of an animal even to this day. We also learn how Peniel gets its name. We learn how Israel gets his name. Names are an important theme of this story. In the biblical context, names encapsulate the essence of their bearer. Naming something or knowing the name of something gives one control over, or power over, that thing. And that's why the stranger will not reveal his name to Jacob. It would give Jacob power over him.

Jacob's own name is the occasion for some punning in this story. His name is built on this root Y.'.Q.B: *Ya-'a-qov* It means to supplant or uproot. He emerges from the womb grasping his brother's heel. 'aqev here [on the board], the word for "heel," is based on that root. It's part of his effort to supplant Esau right at birth, and he continues that effort at supplanting through his early life. The writer makes that explicit in Genesis 27:36 when Esau cries out, "Was he then named *Ya'aqov* that he might supplant me these two times?" Yes. And in this chapter, Jacob *wrestles*. The word for wrestle is built on this root, just switching two letters [Y.'.B.Q]. He wrestles with the mysterious, divine being at the Jabbok [Y.B.Q.] river. So you see all of this punning with the name. Jacob's very name hints at and foreshadows the struggling, the wrestling, the trickery that are the major themes of his life. But his striving has reached a climax here. And so the angel names him *Yisra'el*, Israel, which means he who has striven with God. Because as the stranger says, he has striven and wrestled all his life with men, particularly his brother, and now with God. *El* means god. It's the name of the chief god of the pantheon of Canaan. *Yisra'el*, he who has struggled with God. We'll talk about the way in which the change of name means a change of character, change of essence for the patriarch when we return.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. This promise comes after the second expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael, in chapter 21.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 7 Transcript

September 27, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** We were talking last time about the mysterious episode by the Yabbok River, when Jacob undergoes a change in name, and I mentioned the fact that in the biblical view, the name of something somehow encapsulates its very essence. Knowing the name of something gives one power and control over that thing. Many commentators have observed that the change in name accompanies a change in character, a change of essence in Israel. So some have noted, one scholar in particular has noted that the struggle with the angel is the final purging of the unsavory qualities of character that marked Jacob's past career [Sarna 1966, 206]. And although Jacob appears to be something of an anti-hero--he actually literally limps into the Promised Land alone--Jacob is a new and honest man. We see this immediately in his reunion with Esau. He greets his former rival and enemy with these words--this is in Genesis 33:10-11: "'If you would do me this favor, accept for me this gift, for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please accept my present, which has been brought to you, for God has favored me, and I have plenty.' And when he urged him, he accepted."

With Jacob, who is now Israel, God seems perhaps to finally have found the working relationship with humans that he has been seeking since their creation. God learned immediately after creating this unique being, that he will exercise his free will against God. God saw that he had to limit the life span of humans, or risk creating an enemy that was nearly equal to him. So he casts the humans out of the Garden, blocks access to the tree of life. But humans continue their violent and evil ways, and in desperation, God wipes them out, and starts again. This second creation proves to be not much better. They forget God, they turn to idolatry. God has promised at this point, however, not to destroy all humankind again, so he experiments with a single individual of faith. Abraham's faith withstands many a trial. He is obedient to God in a way that no one has been up to this point in the narrative, but perhaps ultimately the model of blind obedience is rejected, too. When Abraham prepares to slaughter his own son, perhaps God sees that blind faith can be as destructive and evil as disobedience, so God relinquishes his demand for blind obedience: he stops Abraham himself.

The only relationship that will work with humans is perhaps one in which there is a balance between unchecked independence and blind obedience, and God seems to find that relationship with Jacob. And the metaphor for that relationship is a metaphor of struggle, or wrestling. Remember Yisrael means "one who wrestles, who struggles with God." God and humans lock in an eternal struggle, neither prevailing, yet both forever changed by their encounter with one another.

Now the rest of Genesis relates the story of Joseph and his brothers, the 12 sons of Jacob. It's one of the most magnificent psychological dramas in the Bible. The story is intensely human. We don't have a lot of supernatural interference in this story. It focuses very much on the family relationships, on the jealousies, [with] very little reference to a divine perspective. It's like a little novella. Scholars are divided over the authenticity of the Egyptian elements in the story. You will read radically diverse things. Some point to the presence of Egyptian names, and customs, and religious beliefs and laws as a sign of some historical memory being preserved in these stories. Others point to all the problems: the anachronisms, the general lack of specificity as a sign that these are composed quite late. The art of dream interpretation places a very important role in this story, and dream interpretation was a developed science, particularly in Egypt, and the other parts of Mesopotamia, but the Egyptians were known in the ancient world as dream interpreters. Joseph is also known for his ability to interpret dreams, but the biblical narrator, the monotheizing biblical narrator, is very concerned to describe him as reporting what God reveals to him, rather than relying on some kind of occult science of interpretation.

Now Joseph's brothers are jealous of Jacob's partiality to Joseph, and they conspire to be rid of him. But at the last moment, his brother Judah convinces the brothers that, if instead of killing him, they sell him, they can profit a little for their troubles. So Joseph is sold [and] ultimately ends up in the household of Pharaoh in Egypt, and his adventures there prove his meritorious character. He rises to a position of great power when he correctly interprets some dreams regarding an impending famine, and with Joseph as the governor of the country, in control of the grain supply, Egypt successfully weathers seven years of famine. Now, this famine, which strikes Canaan as well, drives Joseph's brothers to Egypt in search of food, and Joseph doesn't reveal himself to his brothers. He puts them to the test. He wants to know if

they are the same men who so callously broke their father's heart by selling Joseph, his father's favorite, so many years ago. In the climatic moment in the story, Joseph demands that his frightened brothers leave Benjamin--the other son of Rachel, the other son of the beloved wife--leave Benjamin as a pledge in Egypt. And Joseph knows that it would decimate his father Jacob to lose Rachel's only remaining son, but he's testing his brothers to see whether they have reformed since the day that they sold him into slavery. And indeed Judah, the one who had figured so prominently in the sale of Joseph, that had crushed his father, Judah steps forward and offers himself instead of Benjamin: he says: It would kill my father now to lose Benjamin, the last son of his beloved wife, Rachel. So the brothers, having proven their new integrity--Joseph weeps, he reveals his identity in a very moving scene, and ultimately the family is relocated to, and reunited in Egypt, where they live peacefully and prosperously for some generations.

That's the basic outline of the story of Joseph and his brothers, but one of the important themes of these stories is the theme of God's providence. The writer wants to represent Jacob's sons, their petty jealousies, their murderous conspiracy, Joseph himself, all as the unwitting instruments of a larger divine plan. In fact, Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today." Joseph's betrayal by his brothers, his decent into Egypt, set the stage, not only for the reformation of his brothers' characters, which is an important part of the story, but for the descent of all of the Israelites into Egypt, so as to survive widespread famine. So yet another threat to the promise is overcome: threat of famine is overcome by the relocation to Egypt.

Significantly, God says to Jacob in Genesis 46:4, "I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back." So, in short, there seems to be a plan afoot. The writer wants to represent God going down there, and he will bring them back.

Israel's descent to Egypt sets the stage for the rise of a pharaoh who, the text says, didn't know Joseph and all that he had done for Egypt. And this new pharaoh will enslave the Israelites, and so embitter their lives, that their cry will rise up to heaven--the same cry from the generation of the flood, the same cry from Sodom and Gomorrah. And thus begins the book of Exodus, which will lead us from Egypt to Sinai.

Most of the narrative account in Genesis 12 to 50--with the exception of the Joseph story, actually--but most of Genesis 12 through 50 is assigned by scholars to the J source, and certain themes emerge in the J narrative. The first is, that while God's promise is sure, the manner and the timing of its fulfillment is quite unpredictable. The land never belongs to the patriarchs to whom it was promised. Their descendants will take possession of it, but only after tremendous struggle. In other ways God's methods are curious. Why does he go against the traditional Ancient Near Eastern practice of primogeniture, inheritance by the first born? He chooses Jacob, a liar and a cheat in his early life, over the elder Esau. Why does he choose young Joseph, who's an arrogant spoiled brat? He provokes his brothers with his delusions of grandeur. Compare the law of primogeniture that's listed in Deuteronomy 21:15-17: "If a man has two wives, one loved, and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him sons, but the first-born is the son of the unloved one-- / when he wills his property to his sons, he may not treat as first-born the son of the loved one in disregard of the son of the unloved one who is older." And yet isn't this what happens to Ishmael? Isn't this what happens to Esau? Isn't this what happens to all of Joseph's brothers who are born before him? And there's no explanation in the text. Yet despite the false starts, and the trials, and the years of famine, and the childlessness, and the infertility, the seed of Abraham survives, and the promise is reiterated: "I will go down myself with you to Egypt, and I myself will also bring you back." So ultimately, the J source would appear to assert God does control history, all tends towards his purpose.

The book of Exodus is really the sequel, then, to the book of Genesis. Despite God's promise of land and blessing, things don't look so good at the end of Genesis. The book closes with the Israelites residing in Egypt. They've managed to procure no more than a burial plot in the Promised Land. Even God has left his land, descending with the Israelites into Egypt, so the promises and their fulfillment seem quite remote. The book of Exodus will relate the beginning of the process by which the promises will be fulfilled.

I've just charted the structure very briefly for you [on the blackboard], so you can get your footing in the book of Exodus. The first fifteen chapters tell the story of Israel in Egypt: the rise of a new Pharaoh who didn't know Joseph; the oppression of the Israelites; their enslavement in a state labor force; the killing of all first born Hebrew males; the birth,

the early life, the call of Moses; the struggle for freedom, Moses will plead with the Pharaoh to let his people go and worship their god in the wilderness; and then the final liberation, when God does something at the Reed Sea--we'll talk about that later--so that the Israelites can pass, leaving the heavy Egyptian chariotry to flounder in the mud. We have about two-and-a-half chapters, 15:22 until chapter 18, that recounts, then, the journey towards Sinai. This is a journey that's filled with complaints. The people complain they're going to starve, and God responds with quail, and manna, and water. Chapters 19 to 24 are very, very important chapters that contain the theophany, the self-revelation of God to the Israelites, and the covenant that's concluded at Sinai. We'll be talking more about that next time. Chapters 25 to 40 contain, beside the unfortunate incident with the golden calf which is in Exodus 32, the rest of this unit from 25 to 40, is God's instruction on how to build or erect the tabernacle, and then an account of the Israelites actually constructing, erecting the tabernacle. Source critical scholars believe that J supplies the main narrative of this unit in Exodus. It's supplemented by excerpts from E, and then the addition of considerable legal and ritual and genealogical material from P.

Now, the historical value of the Exodus story has fascinated scholars, but also lay people, for generations. Could the Exodus really have happened? And if so, when? And does it matter? And is there any evidence for this story, for example, in external sources, outside the Bible? Well, no, there isn't any direct evidence outside the Bible, but let's start at the beginning. We do have a victory hymn, a victory hymn that's inscribed on a stele--that's a slab of stone--which was erected in the year 1204 BCE. It was erected by a pharaoh, Pharaoh Merneptah. So the stele of Merneptah dates to about 1204, and in this victory hymn he's boasting of his victory over various groups in Canaan, and one of the groups he claims to have defeated is Israel. Now, this is a fabulously important inscription, because it's the earliest known reference outside the Bible to any person or entity that is mentioned in the Bible, and it suggests that a people known as Israel was indeed in the land of Canaan by the end of the thirteenth century BCE. Whether they arrived there after an exodus from Egypt is not of course indicated. The source doesn't tell us that, and in fact there's really no archeological evidence of a group, a large group, entering the land of Canaan at this time. There's a steady cultural continuum, not evidence of destruction as we would expect for a big invasion. We'll talk more about that when we get to the book of Joshua.

But nevertheless, let's just go with this for a minute, and if we suppose that it took about a generation to enter the land--so you see, I've done the math on the side [of the blackboard] here. I suppose I should have done subtractions, since we're talking BCE, but if we put 20 years in for actually arriving and settling in the land, that takes us to about 1225; and if we assume 40 years of wandering in the desert, or wandering from Egypt, that takes us to about 1265 as a date for the Exodus. Well, in 1265, the Eighteenth Dynasty's most illustrious pharaoh occupied the throne, Ramses II--who in fact was pharaoh for, what, 70 years, or something--most of the thirteenth century--and he's very famous for his building projects. Now, according to the biblical record, the Hebrews were set to work on urban building projects in the Delta region, at the north part of the Nile--the delta region of the Nile in the cities of Pithom and Ramses. The Bible states that Israel was in Egypt for 430 years, so if we add that, then that would put their descent into Egypt--Joseph, the other sons of Jacob--around the year 1700. Well, there's a certain appeal to that scenario, because in the 1720s, Egypt was invaded and conquered by a Semitic people known as the Hyksos. They established a dynasty of Semitic rulers. They were centered in the north of Egypt, in the area known as Goshen, so it's possible that the pharaohs of the Hyksos dynasty might have favored other Semites: they might have allowed them to enter in times of famine, and to dwell in the land of Goshen, which the Bible says--the Israelites lived in the land of Goshen. That Joseph, a Semitic foreigner, could be elevated to an important post, the post of governor, is a little less surprising, if we suppose there was a Semitic regime.

In the sixteenth century, the native Egyptians, who were smarting and smoldering under the humiliating foreign rule of the Hyksos, finally succeeded in rising up and driving them out, and reestablishing a native Egyptian dynasty. So some scholars have speculated that that's the historic reality behind the statement in Exodus 1:18, that a new pharaoh, who knew nothing of Joseph and what he had done for Egypt, began to oppress the Hebrews. The feeling is that the establishment of a new native Egyptian dynasty might have led to the enslavement of any remaining Semites or Semitic outsiders, and that would include, of course, the Hebrews. So in all probability, anyone who was associated with the hated occupying regime would be treated poorly. It all seems to fit.

Well, there's a problem with this theory. The Bible itself contains very contradictory statements regarding the length of the Israelites' stay in Egypt. So Exodus 6:16-20 says that the Israelites were there for only four generations, maybe 80

years, from Levi to Moses--Levi was the great grandfather of Moses--so only four generations--which would mean an arrival in Egypt a long time after the Hyksos, not 430 years; and we don't even know whether migration occurred in the Hyksos period, so what we have really is only a hypothesis. The 430 years number is also something of an ideal number. It places the Exodus 480 years before Solomon's building of the Temple: 480 is a multiple of 12, and the Bible really likes multiples of 12, so it is an ideal number. It's the kind of number that crops up a lot in biblical chronologies, which makes it suspect for other sorts of reasons, as well.

So the Hyksos theory is one that got people very excited for a while, but is really not well supported. Still, there's some very interesting circumstantial evidence for Semites engaged in building projects in the thirteenth century, however and whenever they might have gotten to Egypt. We do know, archaeologically, that the fortified city of Pi-Ramesses, very much like Pithom, was rebuilt in the early thirteenth century on the site of the old Hyksos capital. There was a capital [at] Avaris. They had moved the capital up to the Delta region. It had fallen into decay. Now, in the thirteenth century, this is being rebuilt, and that's in the area of Goshen. So the city was being reoccupied in the time of the pharaoh Ramses, Ramses II, in the thirteenth century. We do know that Egyptian officials allowed hungry nomads to enter the Delta region for food: we have records, written records of this. We also know that Semitic slaves are well attested in Egypt at this time, the end of the thirteenth century: we also have records of that. We know of a people called the Hapiru or 'Apiru. They don't seem to be an ethnic group so much as a marginalized social class, but some have suggested a connection with the word "Hebrew." We know that they worked on the building of the capital city of Ramses II. Other scholars deny that there would be any connection with "Hebrew." The debates are endless. One thirteenth-century Egyptian papyrus describes Egypt's tight control of her border areas, and another reports some Egyptian officials pursuing some runaway slaves. Obviously this happened from time to time, escaping into the desert. The Exodus story also contains many Egyptian elements. The names Moses, Aaron, Pinhas--these are all Egyptian names. "Moses" is simply this part of Ramses [underlines the letters m-s-e-s]: Tutmosis, Ramses, this [m-s-s] is Egyptian for "born of," [Ramses equals] born of the God Ra. And even Moses is an Egyptian name.

So none of this, of course, corroborates the specific details of the biblical story. There's no Egyptian record of the biblical Moses, no record of plagues, no record of a defeat of Pharaoh's army. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence, and some scholars think that that lends plausibility to a story of slaves working on building projects who escape from Egypt at this time, and if there's any historical basis to the Exodus, then the most plausible time, the most plausible backdrop would be the thirteenth century BCE. Some scholars assume there's a historical memory behind the elaborate and dramatic story of a miraculous redemption by God. Why would you invent a hero, a national hero who's entirely Egyptian and has an Egyptian name? Why would you invent a myth of origins in which your ancestors are slaves? Nevertheless, as I emphasized earlier in the patriarchal stories, in the end we're dealing here with sacred history. We're dealing with a highly embellished and theologically interpreted myth of origins for a nation. So much more important than historical verifiability is the conviction of the ancient Israelites who received and venerated these traditions, and developed them, and embellished them, that God had once acted on their behalf, rescuing them from bondage, binding them to himself in an eternal covenant.

A little bit about the outline of the story, and then we're going to finally have an introduction between God and Moses, which will I think bring us back to some of the conversations we had at the beginning of the course. So let me first say a little bit about the story line, and some of the themes at the beginning of Exodus, the first six or seven chapters. According to the text, the Israelites have multiplied, they've filled the land of Goshen that had been given to them during Joseph's tenure in office, and this new pharaoh who feared them--he didn't know Joseph, he feared the foreign presence--he rose and he attempted to curb their growth. He pressed all of the adult males into slavery. The text says "harsh labor at mortar and brick," but the text says, "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out," so Pharaoh resorts to more drastic measures. He decrees the murder of all newborn Israelite males at the hands of Egyptian midwives. He's thwarted by these midwives. They say: Oh, these ladies are too quick; we get there too late, they've already given birth by the time we arrive. They allow the male infants to live. So the pharaoh enlists all of the people to annihilate the Israelites by drowning all newborn males in the Nile River. This leads then to the account of the birth of Moses, and his exposure to the Nile River. He is born into a Levite family. The Levites will be priests in Israel, so he's born to a priestly family. He's hidden away for three months, and then he's placed in a wicker basket, which is lined with bitumen, a tar, and set among the bulrushes at the edge of the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter will eventually discover him. His own mother will volunteer to be his nurse, and Pharaoh's daughter will eventually adopt him and name his Moses: again, this is an Egyptian name. The etymology given in the biblical text is invented.

A lot of scholars have noted that this story is full of irony. The rescue of Moses, who will foil Pharaoh, is affected by the daughter of that pharaoh, and Moses grows up and is sheltered right in the pharaoh's own palace. Further, the significance of Moses is hinted at through literary allusions in the narrative of his birth, his infancy. The basket in which he is placed is called an ark: the Hebrew word is *tevah*. This word is used precisely twice in the entire Hebrew Bible. It's not the same word that's used for Ark of the Covenant, by the way: the Ark of the Covenant, the word is *aron*. This word for ark, *tevah*, occurs exactly twice: here, and in the story of Noah's ark. Noah's ark is a *tevah*. Scholars have always been quick to point out that in both cases, this ark, this *tevah*, is in the words of one scholar "the instrument of salvation through perilous waters" [Sarna 1986, 28], waters that threaten to capsize it, and so blot out God's hopes and plans for his creatures. Moreover, the basket is placed among the reeds--the Hebrew word for reeds is *suph*--and that's a hint or an allusion to the fact that Moses will lead the Israelites through the "Reed Sea," the Yam Suph. It's not the Red Sea, it's the Reed Sea, but we'll talk about that later also.

This legendary birth story has important parallels in Ancient Near Eastern and other literature. It's very common to find stories of the extraordinary events that surround the birth of someone who will later become great: Cyrus of Persia, Oedipus, Jesus, and so on. Many scholars have pointed out that this story in particular is paralleled by the birth story of a great Akkadian king, Sargon, from about 2300 BCE, Sargon of Akkad. Strikingly similar story to Moses. [He's] placed in a basket lined with tar, put in the river, and so on. It underscores the degree to which this story is part of a literary genre, part of a literary convention, how much the Exodus story itself is very much a literary story. Nothing is said of Moses' childhood, but we learn of his awareness of his Israelite identity, or his identification with the Hebrews, in the following passage: this is in Exodus 2:11-15:

Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that, and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting, and so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened and thought: Then the matter is known! When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.

So coming to the aid of an oppressed kinsman, Moses kills an Egyptian, and he has to flee to the territory of Midian. There at the well, again he acts to defend the defenseless. This is a key to his character; these two episodes are the two that we're given of Moses' life. So continuing verses 16 and 17 in Exodus 2: "Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock; but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock." So again, this is a key to Moses' character, aiding the defenseless. Moses will later marry Zipporah, one of these women, and live as a shepherd in Midian for about 40 years.

Now, the situation of the Israelites in Egypt, the text says, remains bitter. Exodus 2:23-24: "The Israelites were groaning under the bondage, and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." One day in the wilderness at a place called Horeb, also Sinai, where there's a mountain, Moses sees a flame in a bush that doesn't consume the bush, and then he hears a voice. And the voice says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and Moses hides his face in fear, but God continues. He has a job for Moses:

"I have marked well the plight of my people in Egypt, and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmaster; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. And I've come down to rescue them from the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now the cry of the Israelites has reached me. Moreover I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free my people, the Israelites, from Egypt." [Exodus 3:7-10]

Moses demurs: Who me? Why not my big brother Aaron, he's a much better public speaker? This is the line that he takes: I'm slow of tongue. But as we've already seen in Genesis, God chooses whom he chooses, and his reasons aren't always fathomed.

Moses says: May I say who sent me? He asks for God's name. The Israelites will want to know who has sent me, and God replies with a sentence, "*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*." This is a first person sentence that can be translated, "I am who I am," or perhaps, "I will be who I will be," or perhaps, "I cause to be what I cause to be." We really don't know, but it has something to do with "being." So he asks who God is, God says, "I am who am I am" or "I will cause to be what I will cause to be." So Moses, wisely enough, converts that into a third-person formula: okay, he will be who he will be, he is who he is, "*Yahweh asher Yahweh*." God's answer to the question of his name is this sentence, and Moses converts it from a first-person to a third-person sentence: he will be who he will be; he is who he is; he will cause to be, I think most people think now, what he will cause to be, and that sentence gets shortened to "Yahweh." This is the Bible's explanation for the name Yahweh, and as the personal name of God, some have argued that the name Yahweh expresses the quality of being, an active, dynamic being. This God is one who brings things into being, whether it's a cosmos from chaos, or now a new nation from a band of runaway slaves. But it could well be that this is simply God's way of not answering Moses' question. We've seen how the Bible feels about revealing names, and the divine being who struggled and wrestled with Jacob sure didn't want to give him his name. So I've often wondered if we're to read this differently: Who am I? I am who I am, and never you mind.

There are certain important and unique features of this burning bush dialogue. First God identifies himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and as numerous commentators have pointed out, in so doing, the biblical writer is trying to establish an unbroken historic continuity between the present revelation to Moses, and the revelations and promises that are received by Israel's forefathers, the patriarchs. And yet, paradoxically, the very assertion of continuity only serves to underscore a fundamental discontinuity, because even as God asserts that he is the God of the patriarchs, he reveals to Moses a new name, Yahweh, so that Yahwism, and the Yahweh cult, can be said to begin only with Moses. Now, as we've seen, the biblical sources differ on this point. According to the J source, in Genesis 4:26, the earliest humans worshiped Yahweh as Yahweh. The name was always known. J wants to assert a direct continuity between the God of the patriarchs, and the God of the Exodus. The P and E sources tell it a little differently. Exodus 6:2-4, a very important passage, is assigned to P, and here God says, "I am [Yahweh]. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name [Yahweh]." Now, this contradicts the J source, and many scholars have suggested that P and E preserve a memory of a time when Israel worshipped the Canaanite god, El. P and E wish to claim that the God who covenanted with the patriarchs is the God of the Exodus, but now with a new name. They also, like J, want to assert a continuity, but in doing so, they do it in a way that really ultimately draws attention to the fundamental discontinuity, the sense of a *new* beginning. To understand that new beginning, we need to look at the differences between patriarchal religion, and the new Yahwism.

There's a list on your handout, so I hope everyone got a copy of the handout. If you didn't, perhaps you can raise your hand, and if the TFs [Teaching Fellows] have any left -- you'll want to take a look at these differences between patriarchal religion and Mosaic Yahwism, and this is going to help us. This list is based on information that's supplied by many scholars. I've relied very much on Michael Coogan, but others as well. Look first at the sheet that gives you the titles of God, and you'll see that in the patriarchal traditions--so we're talking about Genesis primarily; I've thrown in some other texts also, but focusing for a moment on the patriarchal traditions of Genesis--God is six times called El Shaddai. Other names are El 'Elyon, and El Olam, El Ro'i, El Beyt El. You can see the translations of these: the everlasting God, God most high, the God of seeing, the God of the house of God, and so on. El is the name of the chief God in the Canaanite pantheon.

Flip over to the other side of your handout, where I discuss an important set of texts that were discovered at a place called Ras Shamra. Ras Shamra was ancient Ugarit. In 1928, a peasant in Syria discovered a tomb at Ras Shamra, which was subsequently excavated by the French, and it was found to contain a library of tablets that were written in a language very, very close to biblical Hebrew. It's clear that Hebrew is simply a Canaanite dialect--in fact, I remember reading one scholar who said if you go back far enough, you'd be really hard pressed to tell the difference between Canaanite and Hebrew--and in these texts we read of the exploits of the gods of Canaanite religion. These gods include

the sky god, El, I've listed here, the father of the various gods and humans. El has a wife, Asherah: she's listed third on your paper, a mother goddess; their daughter, Anat, who is a goddess of love and war. She's quite fierce. And then their son, Baal, who is a storm god. He's depicted in mythological literature as defeating both the chaotic sea god, Yam, and the god of death, Mot.

There are striking resemblances between the biblical gods of the Patriarchs and the Canaanite god El. El is the head of a council of gods. He is said to have a long white beard. He dwells on a mountaintop in a tent. His epithets include "Father of all creatures," "Bull," "King." He's also described as the protector of patriarchs, patriarchal figures, "a God of the father of the clan," it says in the text. He guides them. He protects them. He promises them descendants. Many biblical passages depict God exactly this way, as the head of a council of divine beings. He's occasionally described with some of the epithets that are associated with El. He's referred to as the father of all creatures. There are poetic passages in which he is referred to as "Bull." Also certainly as "King." And in the patriarchal narratives, God refers to himself as the God of the Father. "I am the God of the father," the same way El is referred to. He guides and protects the patriarchs. He makes promises of progeny to Abraham and his heirs. He also is associated with a mountaintop, Sinai, and gives instructions for the building of a tabernacle, a tent-like structure, in which he will dwell. Many personal and place names in the patriarchal narratives are compounds in which one element is El. Israel, Ishmael, Beth-el. El is the God of the Patriarchs. By contrast, after the time of Moses, Israelite names start to be formed using Yah, or Yahu, as part of the name Yahweh: Elijah in Hebrew is Eliyahu. So you start to have theophorics, names that use a name of a deity, which are using forms of Yahu instead of El.

There are other descriptions in the Bible of God, which are much more reminiscent, however, of the storm god, Baal. According to Canaanite mythology, Baal defeated El, and assumed his position at a certain point as the head of the Canaanite pantheon, so there was a switch in Canaanite mythology, from El to Baal becoming supreme. Like Baal, Yahweh is said to ride on the clouds: we have a poetic passage in which that's the case. His revelations are accompanied by thunderstorms, earthquakes: Baal is the god of the storm. There are poetic fragments also that allude to Yahweh's victory over water foes, and that is a motif that's associated with Baal, who does battle with the Yam, with the sea. And finally, also associated with Israel's God, we have Ancient Near Eastern holy war traditions. God is depicted as a warrior, who leads his host [he's], the Lord of hosts in battle. He's armed with spear and bow and arrows.

The worship practices of ancient Israel and Judah clearly resemble what we know of Canaanite and Ancient Near Eastern worship practices. Canaanite religious ritual took place in small temples that housed cultic statues. There were stone pillars, perhaps symbols of the gods, or memorials to the dead. There were altars for animal sacrifices, cereal, liquid sacrifices. Similarly, Israel's gods, or Israel's God, was worshiped at various high places: they're referred to as elevated or high places. They were shrines with little altars, maybe cultic pillars, and wooden poles: the word for a wooden pole that's used in the Bible is *asherah*. These shrines may have been associated with some kind of contact with ancestors, some kind of cult of the dead. Now, worship at these local altars and high places would come to be banned: Deuteronomy is going to polemicize against this. Deuteronomy will insist that all worship must occur in one central sanctuary and these outlying areas, and their *asherot* are to be destroyed. It will decree the destruction of all of these altars and high places. The patriarchal stories are clearly not the work of the Deuteronomist, and these stories must have had very longstanding traditional authority if they were adopted without serious modification by the Deuteronomist redactor--[there's] some modification, but not serious.

So what is going on here? What are we to make of the incredible similarity of Israel's deity and cult to those of her neighbors? How are we to understand the rise of Israel's God, Israel's religion? Well, so far we've had two models that have been thrown out to you: the kind of classic evolutionary model. From polytheism's worship of many gods there's a natural evolution to henotheism's elevation of one god to a supreme position. One comes to be favored and then eventually becomes so important, the others really fall away, and you have the denial of all gods but the one. We saw Kaufman in the 1930s reacted against this. He argued that monotheism and polytheism are so radically distinct that one could not possibly have evolved from the other. Surely there's an element of truth in both models.

The evolutionary model is, I think, responding to, and picking up on, the fact that in many respects, Yahweh resembles the gods of Israel's neighbors. To be blunt, the patriarchs seem to have worshiped the Canaanite God, El. The problem with the evolutionary model is that it doesn't account for those aspects of the biblical text that show a clear polemical relationship between Israel's religion and that of her neighbors. Now, we saw when we read Genesis 1, that there was

something going on there, there's a polemic going on. There are strata within the Bible that are clearly polemicizing against a certain kind of mythological presentation of the deity. By contrast, Kaufman's revolutionary model focuses almost exclusively on the dissimilarities and the polemical relationship between Yahwism and Canaanite polytheism. [But] the revolutionary model also fails because it doesn't acknowledge the many, many areas of contact, similarity, and even identity.

So a third way has emerged in the last 20 years, or 15 years or so, and it's one that seeks to avoid this dichotomy between polytheism and monotheism. Instead of viewing Israelite religion as an evolution from and a refinement--just this natural process of refinement--of Canaanite religion, *or* as a radical break with and polemic against Canaanite religion, we have some biblical scholars--Mark S. Smith is among them, and Steven Geller--who examine the cultural and ideological negotiations that gave rise to Israelite monotheism. What do I mean? Mark Smith specifically describes the origin and development of Israelite religion as a process of what he calls convergence and differentiation. He writes, "Convergence involved the coalescence of various deities, and/or some of their features into the figure of Yahweh" [Smith 2002, 7-8]. There's a period of convergence and blending of the deities. By contrast, he describes differentiation as a process whereby Israel came to reject its Canaanite roots, and create a separate identity. At some point there was a desire to separate, and in that process of identity formation, a polemic began to develop that created Yahweh in a distinct way, differentiated from the Canaanite deities.

So let's consider Smith's convergence first. The Canaanite roots of Israel's ancestors are clear. The Hebrew language itself is essentially Canaanite, a Canaanite dialect. The Canaanite god El was, from the biblical text, the God of Israel's earliest ancestors. Through a process of convergence, he argues: the God Yahweh was the god that we think originally came from a region further south, Sinai, Edom, somewhere further south--but this god, through a process of convergence and cultural mixing, began to take on the characteristics of other deities, first El, and then Baal, or sort of simultaneously El and Baal. Later, certain aspects of this convergence would be polemicized against, and rejected as a Yahweh-only party sought to differentiate itself from those that it would now label as other, and call Canaanites, as distinct from Israelites. Smith's model of convergence and then differentiation, has great explanatory power. It explains the deep similarity of Israel's deity and the deities of her neighbors, but it also explains the vehement biblical polemic against Canaanite religion, and Baal worship in particular, which we will come to see. It reminds one of sibling rivalry. Siblings who obviously share a tremendous amount, and can be extraordinarily similar are precisely the siblings who can struggle and wrestle the most to differentiate themselves from one another.

Smith's model of convergence and differentiation also avoids unhelpful dichotomies. Israel is either like or unlike her neighbors--that's not helpful. It helps us understand Israel's God as the end product of familiar cultural processes, processes of convergence--we see convergences of cultures all the time--and differentiation. Differentiations of culture happen all the time as well. When and why, you may ask, did this differentiation occur? When and why did some Israelites adopt a Yahweh-only position, and seek to differentiate what they would call a pure Yahwism from the cult of Baal, for example? The debate over that question is fierce, and it's one we're going to leave for another day. We will come back, as we continue moving through the biblical text, and we will address that question.

But to sum up, it's clear that the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs are not strict Yahwists, as we will come to understand that term. The P and the E sources preserve this insight; and they preserve it in their insistence that the Patriarchs worshiped God as El, but at the time of the Exodus, God revealed himself as Yahweh. There's an interesting passage in the book of Joshua, Joshua 24:14-15. Joshua was the successor to Moses. He presents the Israelites with the following choice: "Now therefore revere the Lord," using the word Yahweh, "revere Yahweh, and serve him with undivided loyalty. Put away the gods that your forefathers served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt"--put away the gods your forefathers served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt--"and serve Yahweh. / Choose this day which ones you are going to serve, but I in my household will serve Yahweh," serve the Lord. Only later would a Yahweh-only party polemicize against and seek to suppress certain what came to be seen as undesirable elements of Israelite-Judean religion, and these elements would be labeled Canaanite, as a part of a process of Israelite differentiation. But what appears in the Bible as a battle between Israelites, pure Yahwists, and Canaanites, pure polytheists, is indeed better understood as a civil war between Yahweh-only Israelites, and Israelites who are participating in the cult of their ancestors.

I have a couple of quick announcements that I want to make about the schedule, so I wanted to stop two minutes early....

[end of transcript]

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 8 Transcript

October 4, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** So following the theophany at the burning bush, Moses returns to Egypt, and he initiates what will become ultimately a battle of wills between Pharaoh and God. The story in Exodus has high drama, and lots of folkloric elements, including this contest between Moses and Aaron on the one hand, and the magicians of Egypt on the other hand. This kind of contest is a very common literary device. It's a kind of "our boys are better than your boys" device. The Egyptian magicians who are initially able to mimic some of the plagues that are brought on by God--they are quickly bested, and Yahweh's defeat of the magicians is tantamount to the defeat of the gods of Egypt.

There are ten plagues. These include a pollution of the Nile, swarms of frogs, lice, insects, affliction of livestock, boils that afflict humans and animals, lightning and hail, locusts, total darkness, and all of this climaxes in the death of the firstborn males of Egypt in one night. And source critics looking at this material discern numerous, diverse sources that are interwoven throughout. These sources preserve different traditions on the number and the nature of the plagues, as well as the principal actors in the drama: God, Moses, Aaron. So according to the source critical analysis, no source contains ten plagues. J has eight and E has three, and P has five, and some of them are the same as one another, and some of them are different, and so on. Some of them are unique to one source, some are not, but ultimately, the claim is that these have all been merged, and have left us then with an overall total of ten. This may in fact be true.

Nevertheless, as much as we like to engage sometimes in this kind of analysis about the sources that have gone into the composition of the text, it's also always important to keep your eye on the final form of the text as we've received it. Literary analysis that is sensitive to the larger contours of the account will reveal the artistic hand of the final editor. I have charted this at the top of the board here.

Some scholars have noticed that the plagues are organized in three sets of three. There are literary links that connect them and make it clear that these are three sets of three, followed by the climactic tenth plague--and again, three and ten are ideal numbers in our biblical texts. Each set of three shares certain structural and literary features. So in each set, the first and second plague are forewarned--that's what the FW is on the side--whereas the third plague is not. So a warning, a warning, and then a third plague; a warning, a warning, and then a third plague; a warning, a warning, and then a third plague. In each set, the first plague is accompanied by a notation of the time in the morning. It's also introduced by God's speech, when God says, "Present yourself before Pharaoh," and to do this in the morning. So each of the first plagues in the sets of three is introduced this way. Now the second plague in each set of three is introduced with the divine instruction, "Go to Pharaoh." The third plague in each set has no forewarning and no introduction.

So this sort of structural repetition creates a crescendo that leads then to the final and most devastating plague, which is the slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn sons. The slaughter may be understood as measure for measure punishment for the Egyptians' earlier killing of Hebrew infants, but it's represented in the biblical text as retaliation for Egypt's treatment of Israel, and Israel is referred to as the firstborn son of Yahweh. So in Exodus 4:22, Yahweh tells Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, 'Israel is my firstborn son. I have said to you, "Let my son go, that he may worship Me," yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your firstborn son.'" So it's seen as retaliation. In this last plague, God or his angel of death passes over Egypt at midnight, slaying every Egyptian firstborn male. Moses orders each Israelite to perform a ritual action, and this action will protect them from the slaughter. The ritual consists of two parts. Each family is told to sacrifice a lamb. The lamb will then be eaten as a family meal, and its blood will be smeared on the doorposts to mark the house so the angel of death knows to pass over that house, --and the pun works in Hebrew, as well as English, which is kind of handy. In addition, each family is to eat unleavened bread. So according to Exodus, this Passover ritual was established on Israel's last night of slavery while the angel of death passed over the dwellings that were marked with blood.

The story attests to a phenomenon that's long been observed by biblical commentators and scholars, and that is the Israelite historicization of preexisting ritual practices. In other words, what we probably have here are two older, separate, springtime rituals. One would be characteristic of semi-nomadic pastoralists: the sacrifice of the first lamb born in the spring to the deity in order to procure favor and continued blessing on the flocks for the spring. The other

would be characteristic of agriculturalists: it would be an offering of the very first barley that would be harvested in the spring. It would be quickly ground into flour and used before it even has time to ferment, [so as] to quickly offer something to the deity, again, to procure favor for the rest of the crop. It's supposed by many that Israel was formed from the merger, or the merging of diverse groups, including farmers and shepherds in Canaan. The rituals of these older groups were retained and then linked to the story of the enslavement and liberation of the Hebrews. So you have older nature festivals and observances that have been historicized. They're associated now with events in the life of the new nation, rather than being grounded in the cycles of nature. This may in fact be then part of the process of differentiation from the practices of Israel's neighbors, who would have celebrated these springtime rituals. So now the blood of the sacrificial lamb is said to have protected the Hebrews from the angel of death, and the bread now is said to have been eaten, consumed in unleavened form, because the Hebrews left Egypt in such a hurry. They had no time to allow the dough to rise. Historicization; and we'll see this historicization of rituals recurring again and again.

And following the last plague, Pharaoh finally allows the Israelites to go into the desert to worship their God, but he quickly changes his mind, and he sends his infantry and his chariots in hot pursuit of the Israelites, and they soon find themselves trapped between the Egyptians and something referred to as *Yam Suph*, meaning Reed Sea. It isn't the Red Sea. That's a mistranslation that occurred very, very early on, so it's led to the notion that they were at the Gulf of Aqaba, or somewhere near the actual big ocean water. Some of the Israelites despair, and they want to surrender. "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying let us be, we will serve the Egyptians, for it's better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses rallies them, and then in the moment of crisis, God intervenes on Israel's behalf.

Once again, source critics see in the account of the parting of the Reed Sea, in Exodus 14 and 15, three different versions of the event that have been interwoven. I have to stress, though, that scholars differ very much on where the seams in the text are, what parts of the story belong to J, or E, or P, so you'll read very, very different accounts. There's some consensus, but a lot of disagreement. One thing that most people do in fact agree on is that the oldest account of the event is a poetic fragment that's found in Exodus 15, verses one to 12, in particular. This is often referred to as the Song of the Sea, and here the image is one of sinking and drowning in the Sea of Reeds. You have a wind that blasts from God's nostrils, the waters stand straight like a wall, and at a second blast, the sea then covers the Egyptians, and they sink like a stone in the majestic waters.

The hymn doesn't anywhere refer to people crossing over on dry land. It seems to depict a storm at sea, almost as if the Egyptians are in boats, and a big wind makes a giant wave, and another wind then makes it crash down on them. So they're swamped by these roiling waters. But the name *Yam Suph*, Reed Sea, implies a more marsh-like setting, rather than the open sea. John Collins, who is a professor here at the [Yale] Divinity School, points out that this image--particularly in poetic passages--this image of sinking in deep waters, occurs often in Hebrew poetry [Collins 2004, 115-1190]. It occurs particularly in the book of Psalms, where it's a metaphor for distress. In Psalm 69, the Psalmist asks God to save him, for "waters have come up to my neck. / I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me" [RSV; see note 1]. But a few verses later it's clear that the poet isn't really drowning: this is a metaphor for his difficult situation. "More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause. Many are those who would destroy me, my enemies who accuse me falsely." So Collins suggests that the poem in Exodus 15 is celebrating and preserving a historical memory of an escape from or a defeat of Pharaoh, and that the drowning image is used metaphorically, as it is elsewhere in Hebrew poetry to describe the Egyptians' humiliation and defeat.

Later writers take this poetic image and fill out the allusion to drowning in this ancient song, and compose the prose accounts in Exodus 14, in which the metaphor is literalized. According to these prose accounts now, Pharaoh's army was literally drowned in water. But even in the prose accounts in Exodus 14, we can see a composite of two intertwined versions. In the material that's usually associated with P, Moses is depicted as stretching out his staff, first to divide the waters, which stand like a wall so that the Israelites can cross over on dry land; and then, he holds out his staff to bring the waters crashing down on the Egyptians. But according to one little section--this is just verses 24 and 25 in Exodus 14; some attribute this to J--it seems that the Egyptians were stymied by their own chariots. The image we get there is that the Israelites are working their way through the marsh on foot, and the Egyptians' chariot wheels can't make it through the marsh. They get stuck in the mud, and this forces them to give up the chase. So, the final narrative that

emerges from this long process of transmission: perhaps a core image of escape on foot, where chariots are bogged, a poem that describes the defeat in metaphorical terms using a drowning and sinking image, and then prose elaboration on these previous traditions that have a very dramatic element of the sea being parted and crashing down on the Egyptians. A long process of transmission, interweaving, literary embellishment has gone into the creation of this account in Exodus 14 and 15. But the story as it stands reiterates a motif that we've seen before: that of the threatened destruction of God's creation, or God's people, by chaotic waters, and of divine salvation from that threat.

What's interesting about the Song of the Sea, this poetic fragment in Exodus 15, is that here the Hebrews adopt the language of Canaanite myth and apply it to Yahweh. If you still have that sheet that was handed out before, listing different epithets for Baal, and listing epithets for Yahweh, it would be handy to have that, or to take a look at it later again, because the description of Yahweh is that of a storm god in Exodus 15. He heaps up the waters with a blast of wind, like a storm at sea, and this is reminiscent of the Canaanite storm god Baal, as you see on your handout. Baal is said to ride on the clouds, he's a storm god, and he's accompanied by wind and rain. At the beginning of the rainy season, Baal opens a slit, or makes a slit in the clouds, and thunders and shakes the Earth. In one important legend that we have from the Canaanite texts, the Ugaritic texts, he defeats an adversary who's known as Prince Sea, or Judge River. After he vanquishes this watery foe, he is acclaimed the king of the gods, and the king of men, and he is housed in a home, not a tent as El was. El was housed in a tent, but now this Baal is housed in a permanent structure, a home that is on top of a mountain, and is built of cedar.

Now, ancient Hebrew descriptions of Yahweh employ very similar language in the poetic passage here in Exodus 15, but also in other poetic passages. So, for example, Psalm 68:5, "Extol him who rides the clouds, the Lord is his name," Yahweh is his name. So "Extol him who rides the clouds, Yahweh is his name," as if to say [Yahweh] not Baal. So Yahweh is described like Baal, as riding on the clouds. Psalm 29 also employs the language of a storm god. "The voice of the Lord is over the waters. The God of glory thunders, the Lord, over the mighty waters." Some scholars think this actually was originally a psalm about Baal that was simply adopted and referred to Yahweh. Images of God engaged in a battle with some kind of watery foe also appear in the Psalms. Psalm 74: "O, God, my king from of old, who brings deliverance throughout the land; it was You who drove back the sea with Your might, who smashed the heads of the monsters in the waters;" and so on. Judges 5 is also another ancient song fragment in verses four to five. It uses the same kind of imagery.

Now, Michael Coogan, who's a very important biblical scholar and an expert in the Canaanite texts, the Ugaritic materials, has made some intriguing observations in connection with the biblical representation of Yahweh in terms that are so reminiscent of the storm god, Baal [Coogan 2006, 101-3]. He notes that Baal was the key figure in a change, a change in the religion of Canaan, that happened somewhere between 1500 and 1200 BCE, and that is also the traditional time for what we think of as the Exodus and the introduction of Yahwism, or the differentiation of Yahwism. At this time, somewhere in this period, there was a transfer of power in the Canaanite pantheon from the older gods to younger gods. The older god El, the sky god, was replaced by the younger storm god, Baal, and he was replaced by virtue of his defeat of Prince Sea, or whoever this watery foe is. So El is replaced by Baal after a defeat of some watery foe.

Coogan notes that about the same time, there seems to have been a similar change in many of the world's traditions, or many of the traditions of the region. We have a younger storm god who usurps power from an older god by virtue of a victory over a water god. Remember *Enuma Elish*, which we read at the very beginning of the semester. You have the young storm god, Marduk, who defeats Tiamat, the watery ferocious deep monster, and does so by blasting a wind into her, and so establishes his claim to rule, instead of the old sky god, Anu. In India, the storm god Indra about this time assumes the place of a previous god, Dyaus. In Greece, Zeus, who is associated with a storm, thunder--lightening bolts you think of in the hands of Zeus--he replaces Kronos, who had been the head of the pantheon. And so here in Exodus, we find that just as the nation of Israel is coming into existence, just as the Israelites are making the transition from a nomadic existence to a more settled way of life ultimately in their own land, there seems to be a collective memory of a similar change in her religion. Like the storm gods in the myths of Israel's neighbors, Yahweh heaps up the waters with a blast of wind. He wins a stunning victory, he establishes himself as the god of the Israelites in place of El, who was worshipped by Israel's patriarchs, remember. And like the Canaanite god, Baal, Yahweh, as we will see as we continue to read the text, will eventually want a house for himself atop a mountain, Mount Zion, and it will be lined with cedar.

There are of course, important ways in which Israel's use of the storm god motif diverges from that of other Ancient

Near Eastern stories. The most important is that Yahweh's battle is a historic battle, rather than a mythic battle. The sea is not Yahweh's opponent, nor is Yahweh's enemy another god. Yahweh is doing battle here with a human foe, the Egyptian pharaoh and his army. The sea is a weapon deployed. It's a weapon in the divine arsenal, and it's deployed on behalf of Israel, but, again, Yahweh is depicted by the biblical writer as transcending nature, using forces of nature for a historical purpose, acting in history to deliver his people, and create a new nation, Israel. So just as in Genesis 1, the universe is created when the wind of God parts the primeval waters, so in Exodus 14 and 15, a new nation is created when the wind of God parts the waters of the Reed Sea. But to describe what was understood to be a historic event, a one time event, not a recurring mythical event, but a historic event, the ancient Israelites employed language and images drawn naturally from the traditions and myths of their broader cultural context, or I should say, [traditions and myths] that were the cultural context in which they themselves existed, while at the same time differentiating themselves to some degree.

Now, as has long been noted, the Exodus event became the paradigm of God's salvation of his people, and when I say salvation, I don't mean that in the later Christian sense of personal salvation from sin. That's a notion that's anachronistically read back into the Hebrew Bible. It's not there. Salvation in the Hebrew Bible does not refer to an individual's deliverance from a sinful nature. This is not a concept we find in the Hebrew Bible. It refers instead, to the concrete, collective, communal salvation from national suffering and oppression, particularly in the form of foreign rule or enslavement. When biblical writers speak of Yahweh as Israel's redeemer and savior, they are referring to Yahweh's physical deliverance of the nation from the hands of her foes. We're going to see this increasingly as we move to the prophetic material.

So the exodus is a paradigm for salvation, but it would be a mistake, I think, to view the Exodus as the climax of the preceding narrative. We've gotten to this point now: we had this big dramatic scene at the Reed Sea, but the physical redemption of the Israelites is not in fact the end of our story. It's a dramatic way-station in a story that's going to reach its climax in the covenant that will be concluded at Sinai, and as many sensitive readers of the Bible have noted, the road from Egypt leads not to the other side of the Reed Sea, but on to Sinai. God's redemption of the Israelites is a redemption for a purpose, a purpose that doesn't become clear until we get to Sinai, for at Sinai the Israelites will become God's people, bound by a covenant. And so the story continues. In the third month, after the Exodus, the Israelites arrive at the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamp at the mountain where Moses was first called by God, the text says. The covenant concluded at Sinai is referred to as the Mosaic covenant. So this is now our third covenant that we have encountered; we will have one more coming. And the Mosaic covenant differs radically from the Noahide and the Abrahamic or patriarchal covenants that we've already seen, because here God makes no promises beyond being the patron or protector of Israel; and also, in this covenant, he sets terms that require obedience to a variety of laws and commandments. So the Mosaic covenant is neither unilateral--this is now a bilateral covenant, [involving] mutual, reciprocal obligations--nor is it unconditional like the other two. It is conditional. So this is our first bilateral, conditional covenant. If Israel doesn't fulfill her obligations by obeying God's Torah, his instructions, and living in accordance with his will, as expressed in the laws and instructions, then God will not fulfill his obligation of protection and blessing towards Israel.

Now, the biblical scholar Jon Levenson, here, maintains that historical critical scholarship has been unkind to biblical Israel, because of a pervasive bias between the two main foci of the religion of ancient Israel [Levenson 1995, Introduction]. Those are (1) the Torah, or the law-- understood as the law--not a great translation, I prefer instruction, but Torah, taken to mean the law on the one hand; and, (2) the temple on the other. He says that, on the one hand, negative stereotypes rooted in Paul's condemnation of Mosaic law as a deadening curse from which belief in Jesus offers liberation--that account colors scholarly accounts of the giving of the Torah. On the other hand, a Protestant distaste for priest-centered cultic ritual colors scholarly accounts of the temple, and its meaning for ancient Israelites. These biases are so much embedded in our culture, he says, they permeate the work of even secular scholars of the Bible, so that a negative view of the law affects interpretation of the book of Exodus. Scholars tend to place great emphasis on the deliverance from Egypt as the high point in the Exodus narrative, rather than the more natural literary climax, which is the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai, and the delivery of the Torah. So Levenson, in his book *Sinai and Zion*, tries to correct this prejudicial treatment. He says he seeks to give the two central institutions of Torah on the one hand, and Temple on the other, a fair hearing.

So in his book, *Sinai and Zion*, Levenson explores what he calls the two great mountain traditions that express these

central concepts: the tradition of Mount Sinai--that's where Israel received the Torah, and entered into this defining covenantal relationship with God--and then on the other hand, the tradition of Mount Zion. Zion will be the future site of the nation's holy temple in Jerusalem. Mount Zion is in Jerusalem, it's the Temple Mount today where the [El-Aqsa] mosque now is. Today, we'll consider Levenson's analysis of the Sinai tradition as an entrance into the Israelite concept of the Torah, and the covenant bond, its meaning and its implications.

Levenson stresses the importance of the covenant formulary. There are Ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Sinai covenant of the Bible--especially Hittite treaties that date 1500 to 1200, or so; also Assyrian treaties in about the eighth century, but they are in many ways continuous with what you find in the Hittite treaties--treaties between a suzerain and vassal. Remember we talked about two types of treaties: suzerainty treaties and parity treaties. Parity treaties [are] between equals, but suzerainty treaties are between a suzerain, who has a position obviously of power and authority, and a vassal. He details the following six elements, which I hope you can all see [on the board], especially in the Hittite treaties. They're not all found in every treaty, but they're often enough found that we can speak of these six elements.

First there is a preamble. That's found in every one. The suzerain identifies himself. Second of all, there's generally an account of the historical circumstances that are leading to the treaty: so some kind of historical prologue. Then we usually have some sort of set of stipulations and requirements, upon the vassal generally. Fourth, there's generally some arrangement, either for the publication of the treaty, or its deposition, its safe-keeping in some sort of shrine. There is generally a concluding invocation of witnesses, usually the gods are invoked as witnesses to a binding oath, some kind of covenantal oath that brings the treaty into effect, and it's witnessed by gods. Lastly, there will be very often a list of blessings for the party who obeys, and curses for the party that violates the pact. The curses are particularly emphasized in the Assyrian treaties.

Levenson then identifies many of these elements in Yahweh's very first speech to Moses. Moses and the Israelites arrive at Sinai, in Exodus 19, and God says the following in verses 3b to 8:

The Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Moses came and summoned the elders of the people and put before them all that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered as one, saying, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the people's words to the Lord.

So Levenson, who draws actually on long-standing work by other scholars, and earlier in the twentieth century even [see note 2], Levenson finds several of the main elements of the Hittite suzerainty treaties in this speech. So verse 4, "You've seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings," is the historical prologue. That's the reason that we're in the situation we're in now, and making this covenant. Verse 5 contains God's stipulations. It's a very general condition--"If you obey my laws." Basically, keep my covenant, obey me faithfully, that's the conditional. That's going to be filled out and articulated at great length in the subsequent chapters when all the laws they have to obey are spelled out. The second half of verse 5 and 6 gives the reward: God is conferring on the Israelites this elevated status of royalty, of priesthood; "You'll be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." In verse 8, the people solemnly undertake to fulfill the terms of the covenant, so we have at least three of the steps that we find in the Hittite treaties, as well.

If we take a broader view of the full biblical account of Israel's covenant with God, all six elements can be identified in the biblical narrative. They're scattered throughout the text, however. We have the preamble, and the historical background to the covenant in God's summary introduction to the people in Exodus 20: "I am Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt." It sums it all up: introduction, who I am, and why we are historically connected. So this fact of

God's bringing Israel out of Egypt, presumably establishes God's claim to sovereignty. The terms of the treaty are then stipulated at great length in the instructions that are found in Exodus chapter 20 through chapter 23. Moses reads the book of the covenant--it's called the Scroll of the Covenant--publicly: this is said in Exodus 24:7. In Deuteronomy we read that it will be deposited for safekeeping in a special ark. The Israelites vow that they'll obey [in] Exodus 24:3, also 7b. The covenant is then sealed by a formal ritual. In this case it's a sacrifice in Exodus 24:8. In a monotheistic system you can't really call upon other gods to be witnesses to the sealing of the oath, so we have heaven and earth being invoked as witnesses--Deuteronomy 4:26; Deuteronomy 30:19; 31:28--heaven and earth, the idea being perhaps the inhabitants thereof should witness. As for blessings and curses, we have a long list of each found in Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 28, also interesting reading. Some of these curses, particularly the ones in Deuteronomy bear a very striking resemblance to curses in an Assyrian treaty that we have that dates to about 677 BCE [from] the Assyrian king Esarhaddon--and many of the curses are really almost word for word. So while no one passage contains all of the elements of the Hittite treaty form, there are enough of them scattered around to suggest it as a model, as well as its later instantiation in Assyrian culture.

So what's the meaning of this? Why does it matter that Israel understands its relationship with God, and uses the covenant as a vehicle for expressing its relationship with God, the vehicle of the suzerainty treaty? According to Levenson, the use of a suzerainty treaty as a model for Israel's relationship to Yahweh, expresses several key ideas. It captures several key ideas. First, the historical prologue that's so central to the suzerainty treaty, grounds the obligations of Israel to Yahweh in the history of his acts on her behalf. So it's grounded in a historical moment, and we'll come back to this and what that might mean about her perception of God. Second, the historical prologue bridges the gap between generations. Israel's past and present and future generations form a collective entity, Israel, that collectively assents to the covenant. And even today, at Passover ceremonies everywhere, Jews are reminded to see themselves, they're reminded of the obligation to see themselves as if they personally came out of Egypt, and personally covenanted with God.

The historical prologue, thirdly, explains why Israel accepts her place in the suzerain-vassal relationship. Israel's acceptance of a relationship with God doesn't stem from mystical introspection, or philosophical speculation, Levenson says. Instead the Israelites are affirming their identity and their relationship with God by telling a story, a story whose moral can only be that God is reliable. Israel can rely on God, just as a vassal can rely on his suzerain. The goal is not, Levenson says, ultimately the affirmation of God's suzerainty in a purely verbal sense. The point is not mere verbal acclaim of God as suzerain. Levenson points out that the affirmation of God's suzerainty is rendered in the form of obedience to commandments, not mere verbal acclamation. Observance of God's commandments is, as Levenson puts it, the teleological end of history. Why is that important? Unless we recognize that the road from Egypt leads inextricably to Sinai, that the story of national liberation issues in and is subordinate to, is ultimately subordinate to, the obligation to God's covenantal stipulations and observance of his laws, then we run the risk of doing what has been done for some centuries now: of reading Exodus as first and foremost a story of a miraculous delivery, rather than the story of a relationship, which is expressed through obligations to the observance of specific laws, commandments, and instructions.

The suzerain-vassal model has further implications. Levenson and other scholars, point many of these out. Just as the Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties specified that vassals of a suzerain are to treat other vassals of the suzerain well, Israelites are bound to one another then as vassals of the same suzerain, and are to treat one another well. So covenant in Israel becomes the basis of social ethics. It's the reason that God gives instructions regarding the treatment of one's fellow Israelites. So the suzerain-vassal relationship grounds the social ethic within Israel.

Also, just as a vassal cannot serve two suzerains--that's pretty explicit in all the treaties, you owe exclusive service to your suzerain--so the covenant with God entails the notion of Israel's exclusive service of Yahweh. The assertion is not that there is no other god, but that Israel will have no other god before Yahweh. The jealousy of the suzerain is the motivation for prohibitions against certain intimate contacts with non-Yahweh peoples, because these alliances will end up entailing recognition of the gods of these peoples. The covenant with Yahweh will also, we shall see soon, preclude alliances with other human competitors. If Israel serves a divine king, she can't, for example, serve a human king, and that's an idea that will express itself in biblical texts, as we'll see, that are clearly opposed to the creation of a monarchy in Israel. Not everyone was onboard with the idea that Israel should be ruled by a king. So there are texts that will object to the creation of the monarchy of King Saul, and King David, and so on. There are also texts that are going to object to

alliances with any foreign king, or subservience to any foreign king, whether it's Egypt or Assyria or Babylonia. So subservience to a human king, native or foreign, is in these texts considered a rejection of the divine kingship, which is the ideal--the exclusive kingship of Yahweh--and it's seen as a breach of the covenant.

Now, Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty models also speak repeatedly of the vassal's love for the suzerain. Vassal so-and-so will love the Assyrian lord so-and-so, and that's an element that is not absent at all in the biblical texts that deal with the covenant bond. The Israelites promise to serve and to love Yahweh. That's an additional theme that's associated regularly with the covenant. It's one that we'll take up in greater detail, though, when we get to the book of Deuteronomy, where it is stressed to a greater degree than it is in Exodus, but for now, we can accept Levenson's claim that Sinai represents an intersection of law and love, because of the use of the suzerainty model.

So the covenant concept is critical to the Bible's portrayal and understanding of the relationship between God and Israel. The entire history of Israel, as portrayed by biblical writers, is going to be governed by this one outstanding reality of covenant. Israel's fortunes will be seen to ride on the degree of its faithfulness to this covenant.

The book of Exodus closes, with the construction of the sanctuary, and when the sanctuary is completed, the text says the presence of the Lord filled the tabernacle. This is a sign of divine approval. The long section where we have the receipt of the instructions for the building of the temple, and then we have an actual account of those instructions being fulfilled, not the temple, tabernacle, excuse me: it's just a tent structure at this stage--so receiving the instructions and then the actual construction of the tabernacle, that extends from Exodus 25 to the end of the book, Exodus 40; but it's interrupted in Exodus 32 by the account of the Israelites' apostasy with the golden calf, which is a great and very ambiguous story. The moment of Israel's greatest glory is to be the moment of her greatest shame.

As Moses receives God's covenant on Mount Sinai--he's there at the top of Sinai communing with God-- the Israelites who are encamped at the foot of the mountain grow restless, and rebellious, and they demand of Aaron a god, because they don't know what's become of "this fellow Moses." They say: what about this guy, Moses? They use a very colloquial kind of term to dismiss him. So Aaron, feeling the heat, makes a golden calf, and the people bow down to it, and someone declares, "This is your God, oh Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt." Well, an enraged God tells Moses: You know what's going on down there? And he tells him to descend from the mountain. The people are sinning, they've already gone astray, and he says: I'm through. I want to destroy the nation, and I'm going to start a new nation again from you, Moses. Moses manages to placate God momentarily, and then he turns around to face the people. He comes down from the mountain, he approaches the camp, he's stunned by what he sees. He's carrying the tablets, the instructions, and then he smashes them at the foot of the mountain in fury. He manages to halt the activities. He punishes the perpetrators, he has a few choice words for Aaron. This temporary alienation from God is ultimately repaired through Moses' intense prayer and intercession. It actually takes several chapters to reach a resolution, and God pouts for quite a while, but a renewal of the covenant does occur, and another set of stone tablets is given, and according to one rabbinic text the broken tablets, as well as the new tablets, are both placed in the ark [see note 3].

And this embarrassing episode is just the beginning of a sequence of embarrassing events that will occur as the Israelites move from Egypt towards the land that's been promised to them. Most of these episodes will occur in the book of Numbers, and they involve the rebellion of the people in some way, generally God's fury in reaction to that rebellion, Moses' intervention usually on behalf of the people, and God's appeasement. The book of Numbers recounts the itinerary of the Israelites throughout the 40 years of their wanderings and encampments around the sacred tabernacle. The tabernacle always moves in the center of the tribes, and they're positioned in certain specific positions around the tabernacle as they move. They stay at Sinai for a year, I believe, in the text, before they begin their movement, and Numbers contains some law, and much narrative material. The material tells of God's provision for the people in the desert, but it also tells of the Israelites' constant complaining, and rebellion. The Israelites rebel against Moses and God, and they long for Egypt. There are several times when God threatens to exterminate them, but Moses manages to dissuade him.

In Numbers 14, for example, when the Israelites complain again, God is determined to destroy them, and Moses intervenes, and the intervention leads to a compromise. God swears that none of the adults who witnessed the Exodus -- with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, who did not join in the rebellion -- none of the adults who witnessed the Exodus would see the fulfillment of God's salvation, and enter the Promised Land. This means the Israelites will have to wander

for 40 years in the desert until all of those who left Egypt as adults pass away, leaving a new generation that hasn't really tasted slavery, to enter the land and form a new nation.

The book of Numbers, I think, is most remarkable for the relationship that it describes between Moses and God. I love reading these particular stories, and just hearing the dialogue between them, and imagining it, because the two of them alternate in losing patience with the Israelites, and wishing to throw them over. But each time the one convinces the other to be forbearing. The relationship between Moses and God is a very intimate one, very much like a husband and wife, who are working together as partners and parenting a difficult child. They're partners in the preparation of Israel for their new life, readying Israel for life in God's land as a nation, as a people. I'm going to just give you two examples of the way Moses and God act as a check upon each other. The first excerpt is from Numbers 14, and it shows Moses' ability to placate the wrath of God. Now, in this story, the Israelites express great fear. They've just heard a report from a reconnaissance team that scouted out the land, and they come back and say: Oh, boy, you know, it looks really bad--and that they think that the chances of conquering the Promised Land are very, very slim.

The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night. All the Israelites railed against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in the land of Egypt," the whole community shouted at them, "or if only we might die in this wilderness! Why is the Lord taking us to that land to fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be carried off! It would be better for us to go back to Egypt!" And they said to one another, "Let us head back for Egypt."

And the Presence of the Lord appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites.

And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me, and how long will they have no faith in Me despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst? I will strike them with pestilence and disown them, and I will make of you a nation far more numerous than they!" But Moses said to the Lord, "When the Egyptians, from whose midst You brought up this people in Your might, hear the news, they will tell it to the inhabitants of that land. If then You slay this people to a man, the nations who have heard Your fame will say, 'It must be because the Lord was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them on oath that He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' Therefore, I pray, let my Lord's forbearance be abounding in kindness; forgiving iniquity and transgression. Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt."

And the Lord said, "I pardon, as you have asked."

So note God's offer to start all over again with Moses. This is a pattern with this god, you know--create, gets upset, a flood wipes them out, let's start again, oh, still not too good, let's choose one person, Abraham, see how that goes; oh, disappointed, let's go with Moses--so this is a bit of a pattern. But Moses refuses to accept the offer, and instead he defends the Israelites, and he averts their destruction. He appeals primarily to God's vanity: What will the neighbors think if you destroy them? They'll think you couldn't fulfill your promise. They'll think you're not the universal God of history. But the roles are reversed in the following passage, and this is where the text blows hot and cold. In fact, there's a rabbinic image, there's a rabbinic tradition that talks about this period of time, and has God and Moses talking, and God says: Listen, between the two of us, whenever I blow hot, you blow cold, or when I pour hot water, you pour cold, and when you pour hot, I'll pour cold, and together we'll muddle through, and get through here. The Israelites won't be wiped out. But in this next passage, which is Numbers 11, Moses is the one who is impatient with the Israelites' constant complaints and lack of faith, and he's ready to throw in the towel. I'll just read this last passage.

The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt

Okay, we were slaves, but the food was free, you know? I just love that line. We used to eat this fish free in

Egypt.

“the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look at!”

“

Moses heard the people weeping, every clan apart, each person at the entrance of his tent. The Lord was very angry, and Moses was distressed. And Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant [me], and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me? Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. If You would deal thus with me, kill me rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness!"

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy of Israel's elders of whom you have experience as elders and officers of the people, and bring them to the Tent of Meeting and let them take their place there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; they shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone.

So again, hot and cold. And in many ways, Moses sets the paradigm for the classical prophet. He performs this double duty. He chastises and upbraids the Israelites for their rebellion and failures. When he's turning and facing the people, he's on their case. But at the same time, he consoles the people when they fear they've driven God away irreparably, and when he turns to face God, he defends the people before God. He pleads for mercy when they do in fact deserve punishment--and he knows they deserve punishment. He even says as much, but please [he says] have mercy. At times he expresses his frustration with the difficulty of his task, and resentment that it's been assigned to him. But we'll consider the character and the role of Moses in much greater detail when we reach the book of Deuteronomy next Monday.

For the coming week, I would like you to please pay particular attention: we're dealing with two topics that will be, I think perhaps for some of you, a little different, new, alien. We're going to be dealing with biblical law on Monday, and biblical ritual, purity text, holiness, temple, on Wednesday. These are worlds apart from many of the things we know, so please, there's a lot of textual reading to do for Monday and Wednesday. Please do it carefully, and I might even hand out a little bit of a study guide to help you with that.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
2. Correction: Professor Hayes is referring to the work of Mendenhall in the 1950s. She meant to say even earlier in the 1900s or the twentieth century.
3. Correction: Professor Hayes is referring to a talmudic tradition that is not in the Bible.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 9 Transcript

October 9, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Today we're going to be turning to Leviticus. And Leviticus is a primary document of the Priestly School. And we identify this work as Priestly because it deals with matters that were of special concern to and under the jurisdiction of priests: the sanctuary, its cultic rituals, the system of sacrifices, the distinction between the holy and the profane and the pure and the impure. So the Priestly materials are found as a block in Leviticus, a large part of Numbers, and then they're scattered throughout Genesis and Exodus. And because of these common themes, we say that they were produced by a Priestly School: we hypothesize a Priestly School. We don't quite clearly understand exactly what that means and who and exactly when. These materials emerged over a period of centuries; that's clear. They reached their final form in the exilic or post-exilic period. But they certainly often preserve older cultic traditions and priestly traditions as well.

We can break the book of Leviticus down into the units that are listed on that side of the board. You have in chapters 1 through 7 the sacrificial system. Chapters 8 through 10 recount the installation of Aaron as high priest and the Aaronides then as the priestly clan within Israel. Chapters 11 through 15 cover the dietary system, the dietary laws as well as the ritual purity laws. Chapter 16 describes the procedure to be followed on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. Chapters 17 through 26 then are a block of material that's referred to as the "Holiness code" because of its special emphasis on holiness. So most scholars think that that block of material comes from a different priestly school, and so we designate that H: holiness. The relative dates of P and H, P now meaning the non-H parts of the Priestly materials, they're much debated; but I think increasingly, the consensus is that H--the block of material in Leviticus 17 through 26 and then also its got passages scattered around other parts of the Bible--but the consensus increasingly is that H is later. It's a redactor or editor of the other priestly materials. So P is a difficult term of reference, because P can refer to the entirety of Priestly writings altogether. But when we think about H and talk about H then P in contrast to H means the Priestly writings that are not H: so maybe a small P and a capital P, I don't know.

Now, the Priestly materials have for a long time been I think a devalued part of the Hebrew Bible. And scholarship of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century is generally characterized by a deep-seated bias that views impurity rules as primitive and irrational taboos, and sacrifice as controlled savagery that's empty of any spiritual meaning. Religion without such rites is evolutionarily superior or higher; more spiritually meaningful. And with those kinds of attitudes, it's not difficult to understand why scholarship on Leviticus and those parts of the Bible tend to be rather dismissive. In the later part of the twentieth century, the situation began to change. As anthropologists and ethnographers began to study the danger avoidance practices of many cultures, the taboos and rituals of many cultures, including modern Western culture, new avenues for understanding the danger avoidance practices of the Bible began to emerge.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas changed forever the way scholars would approach the impurity rules of the Bible, because she insisted on their interpretation as symbols, symbols that conveyed something meaningful to those who followed them. Biblical scholars like Jacob Milgrom and more recently Jonathan Klawans, attuned to developments in the social sciences, have made very great advances in our understanding of Israelite purity practices. They've tended to view the elaborate and carefully constructed texts of P as part of a system whose meaning derives from the larger cultural matrix or grid in which those materials are embedded. How much the system laid down by P represents what ordinary Israelite Judeans thought and did; how much these rules were actually enacted and followed; how much they drew upon older random practices, brought them together, modified them, imposed some semblance of order upon them; how much the represent just the ideal construction or blueprint of an elite group: these are all unanswerable questions. The fact is, no one really knows. But we do know from living cultures that people do engage in all kinds of ritual and symbolic actions because of genuine beliefs about the importance of those actions, because those rituals and symbols are extraordinarily meaningful to them. And in any event, our primary concern is with the program of the texts as they stand before us: is there a symbolism operating here? What are the key ideas and the key themes of the Priestly material? How do these ideas or how does this material jive with other aspects of Israelite religion that we've talked about so far? What ultimately is the purpose toward which these materials are aiming?

Well, like the rest of the ancient world, Israel had a cultic system, and that cultic system featured a sanctuary: a sacred space with holy objects; sacred objects, where priests performed a variety of ritual acts. So Israelite-Judean religion on the ground shared many cultic forms and practices and rituals with Canaanite and Ancient Near Eastern culture generally. Sanctuaries in the ancient world were understood to be the dwelling place of the deity. Sacrifices were offered to the deity in his or her sanctuary. P describes a portable sanctuary, a *mishkan*, that's used in the wilderness period. Now, if you look on your handout, there's a reconstruction of this tent-like sanctuary at the top as well as a schematization of its contents below. So woven curtains hung from wooden frames that could easily be assembled and disassembled. And these curtains surround the sacred precincts. You see that in the top picture. And within those precincts, within that enclosure, there's a large, open courtyard. That was accessible to all Israelites. The main sacrificial altar with a large ramp stood in that courtyard as well as a basin that was there for ablutions. And then halfway across the courtyard, there was a screen that marked the entrance to another little enclosure, which is the shrine proper, the sanctuary proper; and only priests have access to that area. The shrine or sanctuary housed an incense altar. And then on one side a seven-branched lampstand or menorah. And on the other, a table, which held loaves of bread that were changed on a weekly basis.

The backmost square-shaped chamber of that inner shrine was the inner sanctum or the holy of holies. And that was accessible only to the high priest and only on the Day of Atonement following a series of heightened purity observances. Inside that holy of holies was the ark. It was about four feet by two-and-a-half feet. It was a wooden ark covered in gold. On top was a kind of covering. It's referred to as a *kapporeth*: we don't really know what this word means, it's traditionally translated "mercy seat," I think that's how the JPS [Jewish Publication Society] might translate it. But it's some kind of gold cover and then there were two cherubim, these enormous winged lions that flanked the ark. Likely they were connected to that mercy seat cover. If so, then what they were was a throne. And we have in Ancient Near Eastern iconography thrones of this type. We have pictures of gods and kings seated on these seats, the sides of which are these giant winged cherubim, and then their feet rest on a footstool. Likewise, in some biblical verses, God or Yahweh is described as enthroned upon the cherubim. The ark then is said to serve as his footstool. So that's sort of the box that he would have rested his feet on. The ark itself contained the tablets of the covenant. And so it was a testament to the covenant between God and Israel.

Interestingly, unlike most ancient sanctuaries, the Israelite sanctuary did not contain a statue of the deity. And that's I think evidence of the very strong aniconic tendency of Israelite religion. Nevertheless, God was believed to be present in the sanctuary. Often in the form of a cloud that will fill, that will descend to fill the tabernacle, particularly as it's assembled in a new encampment, and then God will descend down and the cloud will fill the tabernacle. So it is God's presence there that sanctifies, which simply means "makes holy, makes sacred," to sanctify, to make holy, the tabernacle. And to understand this, we need to understand the Priestly conception of holiness.

Now, the Hebrew word "holy" has a root meaning of separate. Separate. That which is holy is separate. It's withdrawn from common, everyday use. In the Priestly view, only God is intrinsically holy; intrinsically holy. God can impart holiness to, he can sanctify, persons and places and things when they're brought into a specific kind of relationship with him, a relationship that's best described as a relationship of ownership. What is holy is what is in God's realm, something that's separated to him. That which is outside God's realm is common. The Hebrew word for "common" is sometimes translated by the English word "profane." That has a negative connotation in English, but in fact it really doesn't bear that negative connotation. Profane simply means not holy; not sacred. We use it differently now. But the fact is that the common or profane state is the natural default state of most objects and things. This table is just profane. It's common. It's available for everyday use. It's not separated or marked off for special kind of treatment because it's holy. For a common object to become holy, you need a special act of dedication to God, an act of sanctification to transfer the thing to God or God's realm or God's service.

So holiness entails necessarily separation in both its positive and negative aspects. It entails separation of an object to that which sanctifies it, which is God; and it involves separation from, in the form of safeguards against, anything that would threaten to remove its sanctity. So separation from that which threatens its sanctity. Holy things are holy because they are removed from the realm of the common by means of rules or safeguards that demarcate them as different and separate and determine that we use them differently. The preservation of holy status therefore depends on those rules and safeguards. Their observance protects the holy object from profanation, from being profaned, reverting from holy status back to common status.

Now, it's evident from the schematic representation or the way I've described the sanctuary that holiness increases as you move deeper into the sanctuary. And the principle here that holiness increases as proximity to God increases. The principle is graphically demonstrated in spatial terms. So in the biblical view, the area or the land outside the Israelite camp is just common, profane land. The Israelite camp bears a certain degree of holiness. Then as you move in, the outer courtyard, the outer enclosure of the sanctuary, bears a slightly higher degree of holiness. It's accessible to Israelites who are pure. The sanctuary proper, which is in closer proximity to God, bears a still higher degree of holiness: it's accessible only to the priests, who are said to be the holy ones within Israel. And then the inner shrine is the holiest area: it's accessible only to the holiest member of the nation, the high priest.

You have similar concentric circles of holiness characterizing the priestly conception of time. There are ordinary, common, profane days, work days. Then there are certain holy days: for example, the New Year or the Passover holidays--that's where our word "holiday" comes from, holy day--and they are separated and demarcated from common time by special rules that mark them as different. Holier than these days is the Sabbath, which is demarcated by even further rules and observances. And the holiest day is Yom Kippur, known as the Sabbath of Sabbaths. This day is separated from all other days by additional rules and observances in keeping with its profound holiness. The holiness of persons, of objects, of time and of space all converge on Yom Kippur, because it's only on this most holy day that the most holy person, high priest, enters the most holy of holies, the innermost shrine, and performs a ritual upon the most holy of objects, the mercy seat and ark itself once a year.

Well, now we need to consider the deep connection that exists between holiness and purity. Because the two are not identical despite massive amounts of scholarship that confuses this issue: thinks holy means pure, thinks common means impure, and it just doesn't: these are different binary oppositions. The two are not identical. To be holy means to belong to or to be in the realm of God. Things can't become holy and can't come into contact with the holy or the sacred if they are not first pure. Purity, which is the absence of impurity, is a prerequisite for access to the holy or for holy status. To be in a state of purity simply means that one is qualified to contact the sacred: to enter the sacred precincts, to handle sacred objects, and so on. To be in a state of impurity simply means that one is not qualified to contact the sacred. So if you're impure at home and just minding your own business, it's no big deal. It's only a problem if you decide you want to go to the sanctuary. So purity and impurity are states of qualification or disqualification for contact with sancta. The holy is by definition pure: by definition. Only that which is free of impurity can contact the holy. If an impure object--and you will see here these overlapping pairs, which were also in your handout--if you can imagine the lower pair sort of being plunked down on top of this pair, that will give you an idea of what we're trying to convey with this image. Okay? Things are either holy or common. But if they're holy, they must be pure. Common objects can be pure or impure; it just depends whether or not they've been in contact with a source of impurity or not. Alright? If--but notice that the holy and the impure are never conjoined--if an impure object comes in contact with a holy object, then the holy object is immediately defiled; it's immediately rendered impure. The word "defiled" means to take on some form of ritual impurity. And it loses its holy status automatically. So it becomes both impure and profane.

To be restored, then, you're going to have to have two things happening. First of all, it's got to be purified--you've got to get rid of the ritual impurity, so there'll have to be some ritual procedure that purges the impurity. So once you've done that, you've made it pure; but it's still common, profane. So it has to, if it's to be made holy again, it has to be rededicated or given over to God again, re-sanctified: maybe a little holy anointing oil poured on it, that's one means of sanctification; simply handing it over to God, elevating it towards God is another way of re-sanctifying something. But there has to be two steps: a purification and then a sanctification to make it holy again. Increased access to the holy requires increased, an increased degree of purity. That's the connection between holiness and purity. So the purity that's required of a priest, who has access to the sanctuary proper, is higher than that of an Israelite, who has access to the outer courtyard only. The purity required of the high priest is even greater.

So to be pure, one must separate oneself from sources of impurity. What are these sources of impurity? And I hope you've had a chance to look at the reading material, because I'm going to go through this relatively quickly. Jonathan Klawans has been the most vocal proponent of the claim that biblical texts speak of two distinct types of impurity: ritual impurity and moral impurity, which I have up here [on the board]. You've read the short article he has in the *Jewish Study Bible*, but he's also written about this at great length in other places. And according to Klawans and others, ritual impurity arises from physical substances and states which are not in themselves sinful. There's no intimate connection with sin when we're talking about ritual impurity. In fact, a lot of ritual impurity is unavoidable and sometimes even

obligatory, right? Sexual contact makes one ritually impure, and yet God commands humans to be fruitful and multiply. Burying the dead makes one ritually impure, but God commands proper care of the dead. So there's nothing inherently sinful about contracting ritual impurity.

Ritual impurity, which is generally permitted, is distinguished by the characteristics I've quickly jotted down here. It's contagious, that is, it's transferred to other persons or objects, depending on how receptive they are--perhaps by physical touch, perhaps in the case of severe impurity by sharing an enclosed space, by being together under an overhanging roof, tent. Ritual impurity is also impermanent. It can be removed or reduced through rituals of ablutions or just the passage of time or other sorts of ritual observances. Ritual impurity also defiles or renders impure sancta, and so it has to be kept separate from sancta. In very severe cases, it can even defile some common objects, and in those cases, the source of impurity might have to be isolated or excluded if necessary.

Now, the concept of ritual impurity was a central and integral feature of most, if not all, ancient religions. And the biblical laws of purity and impurity strongly resemble those of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures: Egyptian, Mesopotamian, even Hittite culture. And certainly, there are Ancient Near Eastern and Canaanite roots for Israelite purity practices. But the system of ritual purity and impurity that is crafted in the Priestly writings of the Hebrew Bible represents an attempt to monotheize, to monotheize Israelite purity practices and to create a system that differentiated Israel from her close neighbors. So, for example, impurity was often connected with belief in evil spirits and impure demons. It's quite possible that Israel's purification rituals may have originated and even long endured as rituals of exorcism that expelled a demon who was believed to be causing the affliction in question. That may be their origin and source; but in the Priestly writings, impurity is generally divorced from any association with evil spirits.

Some scholars theorize that the ritual purity system reflects an original concern with health or hygiene. But this isn't very convincing. Only one set of diseases is said to generate ritual impurity, and many substances that are widely considered unhygienic by most cultures--for example, human and animal excrement--these are not sources of ritual impurity to Israel's priests. So Klawans is among those who insist that any effort to understand the purpose and the meaning of Israelite purity practices as schematized by the monotheizing Priestly writers in Leviticus 12 through 16--and again whether actual Israelite Judeans did this or understood things this way, we'll never know--but to understand the schematization of, the monotheizing schematization of Israel's purity practices, we would do better to ignore questions of origins and to attend to the larger symbolism of impurity and holiness in these writings: in particular, we need to try to understand the antithetical relationship between impurity and holiness. The two are opposites. They are opposed and antagonistic towards one another.

So Klawans points out, as you know, that there are three main sources of impurity in P. First of all, corpses and certain carcasses are a source of ritual impurity: *sara'at*, which is this--we translate it "scale disease," it's been called leprosy. It's definitely not leprosy. People who know such things have read the details in the biblical texts and it's not what is truly known as leprosy. But it's some sort of skin disease, flaking skin disease or other sorts of boils and skin states that seem to be associated, at least in the Israelite mind, with decomposition and death. We have a couple of passages, one in the book of Numbers, one in the book of Job, which describe this condition in a way that identifies it with death. An aborted fetus is often described as looking like it has this condition, for example--not often, it happens once in the book of Job. But the point is there's a connection between this condition, this skin condition, and its decomposition and death. The third source of ritual impurity would be genital discharges, both normal and diseased. So Klawans notes in the article you read that the physical substances and states that are labeled impure and are therefore designated as antithetical to the realm of holiness are states that are associated with death on the one hand, and procreation on the other. Why should this be?

The Priestly conception of god, you will recall, is of an immortal and asexual being. Think back to the first creation story, which is the Priestly creation story. To enter the realm of the holy, in which there is neither death nor procreation, requires a separation from death and procreation. It is association with death and sexuality that renders one impure and disqualifies one from entering the holy sanctuary. That is not to say that one shouldn't deal with death or sexuality in the ordinary course of life. On the contrary, God explicitly commands humans to be fruitful and multiply, and he does that in the P-source, right? In Genesis 1. He commands proper care of the dead, and he also does that in the P-source. It simply means that one cannot enter the holy sanctuary, God's realm, when impure through contact with death or sexuality.

So according to Klawans, ritual purification involved separation from those aspects of humanity, death and sex, that are least God-like. To enter God's realm requires imitation of God or *imitatio dei*, right, an idea that I put up here, *imitatio dei*: imitation of god. And Klawans further argues that the concept of *imitatio dei* also explains the practice of sacrifice which, on the face of it, contradicts the idea that you must avoid death in connection with the holy, right? Because sacrifice entails killing right in the sanctuary, killing of animals right in the sanctuary. So Klawans argues, and I quote, that "sacrifice involves in part the controlled exercise of complete power over an animal's life and death." Which is, he says "à€precisely one of the powers that Israel's God exercises over human beings. As God is to humanity, humans in imitation of God are towards their domesticated animals." So the process of sacrifice, I won't go into his argument here, but Klawans develops a strong argument that the process of sacrifice can be understood itself as an act of *imitatio dei*, because sacrifice involves a variety of behaviors in the biblical text that are analogous to behaviors attributed elsewhere in the biblical texts to God: the care and feeding and raising of domestic animals, the selection of one that is deemed perfect, control over its life and death and so on. And these are all spoken of in terms that are analogous to terms used to describe God as the shepherd of his flock of Israel and in control of life and death and so on. So Klawans argues that the process of sacrifice, which grants the offerer complete control over life and death, is a kind of *imitatio dei*.

But Klawans also asserts, and I quote, that "*Imitatio dei* does not exhaustively explain sacrifice in ancient Israel," and in fact, we should be surprised if any one single theory would indeed explain sacrifice. So he just says that there are really two organizing principles or overriding concerns in the Priestly traditions and the Priestly materials regarding sacrifice. The first, as we've seen, is *imitatio dei*. But the second is a desire to attract and maintain the divine presence, the continued presence of God in the sanctuary. The majority of the sacrifices that are described in the opening chapters of Leviticus, in Leviticus 1 through 7, are voluntary sacrifices. These are sacrifices that are offered as gifts or in times of celebration. I put a little list of them up here, but the first three are the ones that will concern us now.

We have first of all, the whole offering or "burnt offering," it's sometimes called. This is when an animal is entirely burned to create, as the text says, a pleasant smelling odor or pleasant smelling smoke that ascends to God. So according to P, the priests are to offer two such burnt offerings with pleasing-smelling odors to the Lord every day: one in the morning and one in the evening on a regular basis from the community. The second kind of offering that's described is the grain offering. This is a gift of flour and oil and incense, which is burned after a portion is removed for the priests as dues to the priests, the rest is burned on the altar again with a sweet smell from the incense. Third, we have a set of offerings known as well-being offerings, "peace offerings" it's sometimes translated. These offerings are generally consumed by the offerer and his family, very often in a festive situation, as a big feast, after certain portions are donated to the priests, again. Well-being offerings are of three main types. You have the thanksgiving offering. You have a freewill offering--just because someone wants to do this, a freewill offering. And you have a vow offering that would be offered on the successful completion of a vow, for example. And these sacrifices are all entirely optional. They were offered in celebration. They were offered in thanksgiving or upon the successful completion of a vow. In other words, the sacrificial cult was primarily a vehicle for worshipers' expression of a wide range of emotions: joy over the birth of a child, thankfulness for a good harvest and so on.

Now, texts from Ancient Near Eastern cultures suggest that a central function of the rituals that were performed in sanctuaries was to secure the perpetual aid and blessing of a well-disposed deity. And in important ways, the Israelite cult is strikingly similar, particularly in the sacrifices I've just described. The Israelites certainly hoped to secure the perpetual aid and blessing and protection of a well-disposed deity. Blessing and benefaction flow from God's presence in the midst of the community in his sanctuary: when he is there, there is blessing. So Klawans follows earlier scholars in suggesting that the rituals and sacrifices performed in this sanctuary were designed to ensure God's continued residence within and blessing of the community. In particular, the daily burnt offerings sacrificed by the priests twice each day, and emitting this pleasing odor: these were an effort to attract the deity. Likewise, the gifts--the other foods and pleasing odors of the sacrifices brought by individual worshipers--attracted and maintained the continued presence of God in the sanctuary. So this is the second overriding concern or organizing principle of the sacrifice: not simply that there should be *imitatio dei* within God's realm, but also that the activities there should attract and maintain the presence of the deity for the well-being of the community.

But just as God is attracted by certain kinds of behaviors, so he is repelled by others. And in the Priestly system, grave sins generate an impurity, now a moral impurity, so now we're coming to the second kind of impurity, moral impurity that repels the divine presence. Okay? So moral impurity is the second kind of impurity that's described by Klawans and

others. In contrast to ritual impurity, moral impurity does arise from the commission of sins. Ritual impurity does not: there's nothing that's prohibitive about-- you're never told not to become ritually impure, okay? There's nothing sinful about it, inherently. But moral impurity arises specifically from the commission of certain heinous sins specifically. The three that I've listed here are the biggies: idolatry, homicide and sexual transgressions. These are spelled out in Leviticus 18 and Leviticus 20, those two chapters. Besides defiling the sinner, moral impurity symbolically defiles various sancta, especially the sanctuary, but also God's name and also the Holy Land itself.

Moral impurity differs from ritual impurity not simply because of its origin in sin, but also in the fact that it's not contagious, alright? You don't contract impurity by touching a murderer, the way that you contract ritual impurity by touching somebody with gonorrhoea. Also, moral impurity is not removed or reducible through rituals, through washings and launderings, ritual ablutions and the like. That does not touch moral impurity in a person. Moral purity of persons can be achieved only by punishment for heinous sins: for example, the punishment of *chirate*, or cutting off, is a divine punishment of being extirpated from the House of Israel; death, alright, that's one way to be rid of moral impurity. Also it can be achieved by simply avoiding or abstaining from defiling, immoral acts in the first place: that's another way to achieve moral purity. Also, if you atone for unwitting sins that you perhaps later realize and regret; acknowledge and confess, then that can also have a reduced moral impurity.

Very severe moral impurity defiles the innermost areas of the sanctuary as well as the land. Now, the sanctuary can be purified of moral impurity, and I'll come back and talk about that in a second; but the land really cannot. Land that is repeatedly defiled, or the holy land of God that is repeatedly defiled by sexual transgressions, for example, cannot be purified. Eventually it will simply "vomit out," the biblical text says, it will simply vomit out those who dwell on it. This is a reference to exile. This is consistent with the representation of the expulsion of the Canaanites from God's land. Remember when God said, "The sin of the Amorites is not yet complete, when they have sinned so much and to such a degree, they will be vomited out and then your tenancy can begin"? The land will purge itself of the impurity by vomiting them out. And this is consistent then with the repeated warnings in Leviticus to the Israelites not to engage in similar abominable and sinful practices--the sexual transgressions, the bloodshed, the idolatry--because they too will pollute the land until it vomits them out. They will be expelled.

The land is also defiled by illicit homicide. There is legal homicide, of course, judicial death and so on in the Bible, but illicit homicide, whether intentional or unintentional, murder or accidental homicide. The manslayer bears blood guilt, what is referred to as "blood guilt." That's a kind of moral impurity, and his life is forfeit because of that. In cases of deliberate murder, blood guilt and impurity are removed only by the death of the murderer himself: only blood atones for blood. In cases of accidental homicide, the perpetrator can take refuge in one of five cities that are designated for this purpose: the five cities of refuge. They can live there until the death of the high priest, and the death of the high priest symbolically serves to purge or remove the blood guilt or impurity of the accidental homicide. Idolatry also defiles the land. Offenders are subject to stoning and the divine penalty of *chirate*, of cutting off. The Bible repeatedly warns that idols and their cultic appurtenances must be completely destroyed from the Holy Land, right? The Israelites have to eradicate that, they're polluting the land.

Now, in contrast to the land, God's sanctuary can be purified for moral impurity by means of a special sacrifice. And this is the fourth sacrifice listed here, the *hatta't*, which is the purification sacrifice. It's often erroneously translated as a "sin offering." It's better translated as a purification offering. How does it operate? The blood of the animal, the blood of the sacrifice is the key to the whole ritual. Remember that impurity and sin are often associated with death. Holiness, that which is holy, is often associated with life. And if the two are antithetical then it makes sense. If impurity is associated with death, it makes sense that its antithesis, holiness, would be associated with life. According to the Priestly source, blood, the blood that courses through one's veins, represents the life force. Remember in the Noahide covenant, in Genesis 9, which is a Priestly passage, the Priestly blood prohibition: You may not spill human blood. And you may not eat animal flesh that has the lifeblood in it because the blood is the life and that belongs to God, that's holy, right? So the life force is holy and the life force is in the blood. Leviticus 17:11 says this; it repeats the blood prohibition, and then it offers a rationale. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar." I've assigned it to you to use in sacrificial practices. It is the blood as life that effects expiation, purging and atonement.

So the Priestly texts couldn't be clearer: blood represents life. The blood of sacrificial animals is assigned by God as a

detergent, if you will, to cleanse the sanctuary of the impurities that are caused by the sinful deeds of the Israelites. Sacrifices that purge the sanctuary of ritual impurity, primarily the *hatta't*, always involve the manipulation of the animal's blood, daubing it on the altar and on Yom Kippur, actually entering the innermost shrine and sprinkling it on the throne of God and the footstool, the ark itself. It symbolizes the victory of the forces of life, oath and holiness over death and impurity. Other purifactory rights that are listed in the Bible will sometimes involve the use of reddish substances as a kind of surrogate of blood.

It's a widely--it is widely and mistakenly thought that the purification offering purifies the sinner or the impurity bearer or the offerer. This can't be true. The *hatta't*, the purification offering, doesn't rid a ritually impure person of their ritual impurity. You can't even offer a sacrifice unless you're already ritually pure, because you couldn't get into the sanctuary to offer your sacrifice if you weren't ritually pure. You can't approach to offer a sacrifice if you're not in a state of ritual purity already. So purification offerings are brought after the genital discharge has healed and passed; after the scale disease has healed and passed; after the appropriate ablutions have been observed and the person is essentially pure. But there's one more step they have to take before they're integrated back into the community. The *hatta't* also does not rid a sinner of their moral impurity, because the offering is brought after the sinner has confessed, after the sinner has repented. The purification offering acts on the sanctuary, not on the offerer. It purges the sanctuary of the defilement that is symbolically--it has symbolically suffered from the offerer's state of ritual impurity or sinfulness. Once the sanctuary is purged, the offerer has settled his debt, he's repaired the damage he caused. He's fully atoned, "at one" again with God. And God is no longer repelled by the impurity that marred his sanctuary.

The defiling effect of lesser transgressions is calibrated to the sinner's intentionality and the presence or absence of repentance. So inadvertent sins can be purged, the sanctuary defilement that they cause can be purged by bringing a purification sacrifice. What about deliberate sins? As long as there is repentance, the biblical text says, then they are converted into inadvertent sins, and they also can be purged, or the impurity they cause can be purged with a purification sacrifice. But brazen, unrepentant sins, unrepented sins, or unintentional sins that are never realized--these stand unremedied, and they defile the sanctuary. So for this reason, the sanctuary has to be regularly purged of the accumulated defilements accruing to it as a result of such sins. Leviticus 16 describes the annual ritual which is carried out on the day of atonement or day of purgation, it can be called, Yom Kippur, when a *hatta't* sacrifice, a purification sacrifice is brought on behalf of the community to purify the sanctuary of the impurities that have been caused by Israel's sin. And the high priest loads all of the sins and impurities of the Israelites on the head of a goat, which then carries them off into the wilderness away from the sanctuary.

Purification of the sanctuary was believed to be critical to the health and the well-being of the community. If the sanctuary is not purged of impurity, it can become polluted to the point when God is driven out entirely. Jacob Milgrom has argued that there's a kind of Archimedean principle at work here: every sin creates an impurity that encroaches upon the realm of holiness and displaces a certain amount of holiness. And eventually, God will be completely displaced and the community will be left in a godless state, without blessing or protection. So Milgrom sees the symbolic function of the purity system this way: if the sanctuary symbolizes the presence of God, and if impurity represents the wrongdoing of persons, then by saying that impurity is anathema to God and pollutes his temple, the priests are able to graphically convey the idea that sin forces God out of his sanctuary and out of the community. Jacob Milgrom sees a moral message at the base of this complex, symbolic picture. And that is that humans and humans alone are responsible for the rein of wickedness and death or the rein of righteousness and life. Human actions determine the degree to which God can dwell on earth among his people. So the goal or the objective of the Priestly construction or representation of Israel's impurity laws was, in Milgrom's view, to sever impurity from the demonic and to reinterpret it as a symbolic system reminding Israel of the divine imperative to reject sin, to behave in ways that attract the presence of God and do not repel him.

You also read an article by Milgrom where Milgrom talks about Priestly cultic imagery serving as a kind of theodicy. A theodicy of course is a response to the problem of evil. How can an all-powerful, good God allow so much evil to exist and even go unpunished? And according to Milgrom, this is the priestly answer: every sin pollutes the sanctuary. It may not mark the sinner, but it does mark the sanctuary. It scars the face of the sanctuary. You may think you've gotten away with something, but every act of social exploitation, every act of moral corruption, pollutes the sanctuary more and more until such time as God is driven out entirely and human society is devoured by its own viciousness and death-dealing. So again, the ethical message here is that humans are in control of their destiny and the action of every individual affects and influences the fate of society. This is really the Priestly version of an old biblical doctrine, a doctrine of collective

responsibility. Sin affectsâ€”individual sin affects the entire fabric of society. There's no such thing as an isolated evil; our deeds affect one another. And when evildoers are finally punished, they bring down others with them. Those others, however, aren't so blameless, Milgrom says, because they allowed the wicked to flourish and contribute to the pollution of the sanctuary, the corruption of society. So P's cultic imagery is informed, according to Milgrom, by the same communal ethic that we will see running through the Bible, much of the Bible, until a later period. It's simply conveying that ethic in its own modality through the symbolism of the sanctuary and the cult.

The 11th chapter of Leviticus deals with the dietary laws. We don't have time to go into them at any great length. I will say that Milgrom has also argued that the dietary laws of Leviticus are similarly part of a symbol system that emphasizes life over death. This is the following evidence that he cites; the mainstays of the dietary laws are these: first, the prohibition against eating animal blood from Genesis 9, which symbolizes the life. We also, in Leviticus 11, meat dietary laws that are governed by criteria such as cud chewing and having a split hoof; you can only eat animals that chew the cud and have a split hoof. And those criteria seem arbitrary and meaningless in and of themselves, and he says they are. But look at their practical effect: that limits the number of animals that one can eat to a mere handful out of the hundreds upon hundreds of creatures on the earth, that basically leaves you with--my animal husbandry is not good here--but it leaves you with the bovine and the ovine classes--I guess ovine are goats and some such--so it leaves you basically with goats and sheep and cattle. Some have hypothesized that whatever the origin of various food taboos in Israel, the Priestly texts have tried to create a dietary discipline that drives home the point that all life shared also by animals is inviolable, except in the case of meat, which has been conceded by God, and provided that the animals are slaughtered properly, painlessly, and that their blood, which is symbolic of the life, is not appropriated but returned to God, its sacred source.

So perhaps as it stands, the system of dietary laws does in fact emphasize reverence for life. But they also serve another very important function, and that was the formation and maintenance of a differentiated ethnic identity or in Priestly parlance, the formation and maintenance of a holy peoples separated out from other nations by rules that mark her as God's people. It's surely significant that the dietary laws are followed by a powerful exhortation to be holy in imitation of God, Leviticus 11:43-45. So we've just had the prohibition of not eating certain kinds of small animals, designated as anything that swarms. And the text says,

You shall not draw abomination upon yourselves through anything that swarms; you shall not make yourselves unclean therewith and thus become unclean. For I the Lord am your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves unclean through any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. For I the Lord am He who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy.

Look at how much this is emphasized. The dietary laws are presented by the priests not as a hygienic regimen--who knows if that's how they started--not as a sensible way to avoid various diseases that are caused by the lack of refrigeration in the desert. Whatever the actual origin of these various dietary taboos, they are here embedded in a larger ideological framework concerning the need for the Israelites to separate themselves and to be holy like their god. The dietary laws are connected then with this theme of *imitatio dei*, of imitation of God. As God is holy, separate and distinct, so you shall be holy.

I just want to take two last minutes to quickly point to this theme of holiness that continues in the section referred to as the Holiness Code. This theme, and the exhortation, "you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy," they find their fullest expression in the block of text; Leviticus 17 through 26 that's referred to as the Holiness Code. There's an important difference between Leviticus 1 through 16 and the Holiness Code. According to Leviticus 1 through 16, Israel's priests are designated as holy: a holy class within Israel, singled out, dedicated to the service of God and demarcated by rules that apply only to them. Israelites may aspire to holiness, but it's not assumed. However, in the Holiness Code, we have texts that come closer to the idea that Israel itself is holy by virtue of the fact that God has set Israel apart from the nations to himself, to belong to him, just as he set apart the seventh day to himself to belong with him.

Holy things only exist because of safeguards, rules that keep them separate, that demarcate them. And these safeguards and rules are naturally addressed to human beings. They are the ones charged with the task of preserving the holy in its residence on earth. So although holiness derives from god, humans have a crucial role to play in sanctification, in sanctifying the world. That's illustrated in the case of the Sabbath. God sanctified the Sabbath at creation; he demarcated it as holy. But Israel is the one to affirm its holiness by observing the rules that make it different, that mark it off as holy. So Israel doesn't just in fact affirm the holy status of the Sabbath, they actualize the holy status of the Sabbath. If Israel doesn't observe the prohibitions that distinguish the Sabbath as sacred, it's automatically desecrated. "You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy for you. He who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does work on it, that person is cut off from among his kin." You automatically, it is automatically desecrated and profaned if you don't observe its rules. So there are two components integral and inseparable in the concept of holiness: initial assignment of holy status by God and establishment of rules to preserve that holy status, and secondly, actualization of that holiness by humans through the observance of the commandments and rules that mark that thing off as holy. That's going to lead us very nicely into an understanding of the laws that mark off Israel's status and keep Israel distinct among the nations, which we'll be looking at on Wednesday. So please take a look at the materials that were sent out: the Ancient Near Eastern collection and some of the questions to guide you through this material.

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## **References**

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 10 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** So as we saw last week, before we stopped to talk about the priestly materials and the Holiness Code--as we saw last week, the covenant ceremony at Sinai included God's announcement of and Israel's agreement to certain covenantal stipulations. So Exodus 24:3 and 4, describe this agreement as follows:

Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying "All the things that the lord has commanded we will do!" Moses then wrote down all the commands of the Lord.

So the covenant concluded at Sinai is the climactic moment in the Pentateuchal narrative. And it came to be viewed as the initiation of God's articulation of the laws and rules and ordinances and instruction by which the ancient Israelites were to live. And so later editors consequently inserted law collections from later times and circles into the story of Israel's meeting with God at Sinai, and subsequent sojourn in the wilderness. This was done in order to lend these collections an air of high antiquity and to give them divine sponsorship. The conclusion of biblical scholarship is that a number of separate bodies of law have gravitated to the story of the 40-year period of Israel's formation into a people. So that's the period of the covenant at Mount Sinai and then the journey towards the Promised Land. All Israelite law is represented in the biblical account as having issued from that time, that 40-year period of intimate contact between God and Israel.

So on your handout, I've given a division, a rough division, of the different legal collections that we have in the Pentateuch. The laws that scholars will often refer to as the JE laws, since they sort of are introduced by that narrative--some people think it's best to just think of these as separate legal collections--those occur in Exodus. And so they tend to be dated tenth-ninth century in their written form. The laws of the priestly material are mostly going to be found in Leviticus and Numbers, and those will be formulated somewhere from the eighth to the sixth century. Same period of time roughly we have the laws of D, which are found, obviously, in Deuteronomy. But these sources themselves are clearly drawing upon much older traditions. Some of the individual laws are clearly quite ancient. They have a great deal in common with Ancient Near Eastern legal traditions, generally of the second millennium. The laws of Exodus, for example--some of them bear such similarity to the Code of Hammurabi that we can really assume that they are drawing upon a common legal heritage: Canaanite law or what would have been known as a legal tradition in Canaan. So whatever their actual origin, however, the bible represents these materials as having been given at Sinai or during that 40-year period after.

So given at Sinai, now this is on your sheet, you have the Decalogue--not very well translated as the Ten Commandments--we'll come back to that. Covenant code, so that's a chunk of material, three chapters in Exodus. Then we have a small passage referred to as a ritual Decalogue--we'll come back to that--you have priestly legislation--a little bit in Exodus about the cult, obviously, then on into Leviticus and some Numbers. According to the biblical narrative then, the following materials were given in the 40 years after Sinai, as the Israelites are encamped in the wilderness on their journey toward the land of Israel. So those are presented as supplements in Numbers, but also the Deuteronomic code.

Let's talk a little bit now about the Decalogue. There was a scholar by the name of Alt, A-L-T. Albrecht Alt, a German scholar who examined the legal material of the Bible in general. And he noticed that there were really two forms of law. Yeah--these things I forgot to write down [writes on white board]. There's conditional law and apodictic law. Conditional law is case law, casuistic law. And then there's absolute or apodictic law. He noticed these two forms. Casuistic law is the common form that law takes in the Ancient Near East, and you've seen it in the Code of Hammurabi. It has a characteristic if/then pattern. Casuistic law tells you, for example, if a person does X or if X happens, then Y will be the consequence. It can be complex. It can be quite specific. If X happens, Y is the

consequence, but if X happens under these different circumstances, then Z is the consequence. And it can be quite detailed giving three or four sub-cases with qualifications.

Absolute or apodictic law, by contrast, is an unconditional statement of a prohibition or a command. It tends to be general and somewhat undifferentiated. You shall not murder. You shall love the lord your God. And absolute law, apodictic law, is not unknown as a form in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, but it seems to be most characteristically Israelite. You find a great deal more of it in our legal collections in the Bible than anywhere else. The provisions of the Decalogue--and again, the translation Ten Commandments is actually a very poor translation; in the Hebrew, it simply means ten statements, ten utterances--the ones that are in some sort of legal form, are in absolute or apodictic form. The Decalogue is the only part of God's revelation that is disclosed directly to all of Israel without an intermediary. But its directives are couched in the masculine singular. So it seems to be addressing Israelite males as the legal subjects in the community. And the Decalogue sets out some of God's most basic and unconditional covenant demands. The division into ten is a bit awkward. It probably should be seen as an ideal number, an effort to find ten statements in there. Because, in fact, there are really about 13 separate statements. And we see the fact that ten doesn't work very well in a very interesting phenomenon, which is that the so-called commandments are actually numbered differently by Jews and by Christians and then even within the Christian community, different Christian denominations number the commandments one through ten quite differently from one another. They disagree about what is number one and what is number two and so on.

The first statements, either one through four or one through five depending on your counting, but the first group of statements concern Israel's relationship with her suzerain, with God. She's to be exclusively faithful to God. She's not to bow down to any manmade image. She may not use God's name in a false oath, to attest to or swear by a false oath. She is to honor God's Sabbath day, and honor parental authority, which is arguably an extension of God's authority. The remaining statements then concern Israel's relationship with her fellow vassals, if you will. And they prohibit murder and adultery and robbery, false testimony and covetousness. It's important to realize that the Pentateuch contains three versions of the Decalogue. And there are differences among them. The Decalogue is going to be repeated in Deuteronomy, chapter five. And there are some minor variations. Specifically you'll see that the rationale for observing the Sabbath is different. God's name in Deuteronomy 5 is not to be used in a vain oath as opposed to a false oath. There are differences in the meaning. And there are some more differences too in language. So what are we to make of this?

One scholar, Marc Brettler, whose name I've mentioned before, he says that what we learn from this, these variations, is something about the way ancient Israel preserved and transmitted sacred texts. They didn't strive for verbatim preservation when they transmitted biblical texts. And they didn't employ cut and paste methods that might be important to us in the transmission of something. Texts were modified in the course of their transmission. Verbatim repetition was not valued in the way that it might be for us. So that even a text like the Decalogue, which is represented as being the unmediated word of God, can appear in more than one version.

There's a more surprising variation that occurs, however, in Exodus 34. After smashing the first set of tablets that were inscribed with the Decalogue--the tablets in Exodus 20, those are smashed after the golden calf incident--Moses is then given a second set of tablets. And the biblical writer emphasizes in the story at that point that God writes on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets that were broken. The same words. So we expect now a verbatim repetition of Exodus 20. And yet we don't have it. The Decalogue that follows in fact has very little overlap with the earlier Decalogue. There's really only two statements that even have the same content. And even those, which do overlap in content, vary in wording. This Decalogue, which is often called the ritual Decalogue, so it's listed on there [the handout] in Exodus 34, bans intermarriage with Canaanites lest they entice the Israelites into worship of their gods. It has other terms that give commandments about the observance of the festivals, various festivals, the dedication of first fruits to God, the dedication of first born animals to God and so on; things that were not in the Exodus 20 Decalogue.

So evidently, there were different traditions regarding the contents of the Decalogue. And the story of the golden calf and Moses' destruction of the first set of tablets is a brilliant narrative strategy for introducing this second Decalogue tradition. Also surprising is the fact that the Decalogue in Exodus 20 doesn't stand completely unchallenged in the Bible. Exodus 20, verses 5 through 6, contain explicitly the principle of inter-generational punishment. God is said to spread punishment for sin out over three or four generations. This is understood as a sign of his mercy. It's reducing the punishment on the actual sinner by spreading it out and limiting the consequences to only three or four generations, in

contrast to what is said in the next verse, that kindness he spreads out over thousands of generations. Right? So it's seen as merciful mode of operation. But the notion of intergenerational punishment is something that some segments of the community or perhaps later in time was rejected? Some segments of the community rejected this notion. And so in Deuteronomy 7, we see that quite pointedly. "God punishes only those who spurn him, and does so instantly." Ezekiel, when we get to Ezekiel, we'll see that he will also very adamantly reject the idea of intergenerational punishment. The children do not suffer for the sins of the father, only the father. So what are we to make of this?

Again, Marc Brettler concludes that the Decalogue or Decalogues did not originally possess the absolute authority that is so often claimed for it even today. Later religious traditions have elevated the Decalogue in Exodus 20 to a position of absolute authority. A position that's not completely justified given the Bible's own fluid treatment of the wording, the Decalogue's text, and its content, and its later objection even to one of its terms. So the claim that God's revelation of the Decalogue was fixed in form--the words that we see in Exodus 20, for example--and immutable in substance is not a claim that's really native to or even justified by the biblical text. It's a later ideological imposition upon the text.

And I want to talk a little bit more about biblical law's connection with the legal patrimony of the Ancient Near East. Because certainly biblical law shares in that patrimony, even if sometimes it's clearly reforming it. So it's helpful and it's instructive to compare it with other ancient law collections. And I hope you've had time to sit and read--there was a study guide posted on the website and I hope you had time to work through these materials. They're fascinating. And we'll see that there are certain key features that distinguish Israelite law from the other Ancient Near Eastern legal collections. I've also put on the handout for today just a list of those collections: the Laws of Ur-nammu, the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar, the Laws of Eshnunna, the Code of Hammurabi, which is CH, the Hittite laws, the youngest laws would be the middle Assyrian laws, giving you rough dates and so on. So you have that to refer to for the information about these particular collections.

I should also say that we would do better to understand these materials as legal collections and not codes. I know the word code gets thrown around a lot, Code of Hammurabi and so on. But they really aren't codes. Codes are generally systematic and exhaustive and they tend to be used by courts. We have no evidence about how these texts were used. In fact, we think it's not likely that they were really used by courts. But they were part of a learned tradition and scribes copied them over and over and so on. They are also certainly not systematic and exhaustive. So for example, in the Code of Hammurabi, we don't even have a case of intentional homicide. We only have a case of accidental homicide. So we really don't even know what the law would be in a case of intentional homicide. We can't really make that comparison with the biblical law.

Now, in a very important article that was written nearly half a century ago now, it's hard to believe, by a man named Moshe Greenberg--he's a biblical scholar and he argued that a comparison of biblical law with other Ancient Near Eastern collections reveals the central postulates or values that undergird biblical law [Greenberg 1976]. I'll be drawing extensively on Greenberg's work in this presentation as well as other scholars who have picked up some of his ideas and have taken them in other directions. But it was really Greenberg who was the one who I think made the first foray into this kind of comparative approach, and since then others have taken advantage of that idea.

There is, Greenberg says, an immediate and critically important difference between Ancient Near Eastern collections and the Israelite laws as they're presented by the biblical narrator. And that's a difference in authorship. So if you look, for example, at the prologue to the laws of Ur-nammu: An and Enlil gave kingship to Ur-nammu, but Ur-nammu is said to establish equity and the laws. If you look at Lipit-Ishtar, both the prologue and the epilogue: An and Enlil, the gods, give kingship to Lipit-Ishtar, but Lipit-Ishtar establishes justice. He refers to the laws as "my handiwork" in the first person. Or the prologue to the Code of Hammurabi. Again, lofty Anum and Enlil established for him an enduring kingdom. They name him "to promote the welfare of the people...cause justice to prevail... When Marduk commissioned me... to direct the land" and now it continues in first person speech: "I established law and justice in the language of the land...At that time, (I decreed): the laws of justice," the laws that the efficient King Hammurabi set up. "I wrote my precious words on my stela," which you can go and see at Sterling Memorial Library [Yale University's main library] "and in the presence of the statue of me, the king of justice, I set [it] up in order to administer the law of the land, to prescribe the ordinances of the land, to give justice to the oppressed." And he refers to it as "my justice," "my statutes," no one should rescind them. "My inscribed stela," "my precious words." Do not alter the law of the land which "I" enacted; I, I, I throughout [see note 1].

By contrast in biblical law, authorship is not ascribed to Moses, ever. It is attributed always to God. So you see in Exodus 24:3 and 4:

Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the lord and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying "All the things that the lord has commanded we will do!" Moses then wrote down all the commands of the Lord.

It's the repetition that makes you feel that the biblical writer here is not accidentally saying these things, trying to drive home a very strong point. Exodus 31:18: "When he [God] finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai [with Moses on Mount Sinai], He gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God."

So Greenberg, and since him, Brettler, and many others, have argued that the principle of divine authorship has certain very important implications. First, it has a significant effect on the scope of the law. Ancient Near Eastern and biblical law differ concerning the areas of human life and activity that fall within the concern of the law. That doesn't mean they don't fall within the concern of humanity, they just fall within concern of the law. That's an idea I'll come back to in a minute. Israelite law will contain more than just rules and provisions that fall within the scope of the coercive power of the state to enforce. More than what would fall under the jurisdiction of law courts, for example, or legal decisors. It is holistic. The scope of the law is holistic. It's going to contain social and ethical and moral and religious prescriptions, and very often they're going to be couched in an authoritative, apodictic style, particularly the things that aren't enforceable in a court of law. They will tend to be the ones that are backed up by the authority of God directly: you shall do this, I the Lord am your God. Notice how many times that refrain is used. And it's almost always used with those unenforceable kinds of things. Love your neighbor as yourself, you know, I the Lord am your God. It's me who's watching out for this one, not the court, okay?

The extra-biblical law collections deal almost exclusively with matters that are enforceable by the state. That doesn't necessarily mean they were. We don't know how these were used. But they don't tend to deal with matters that we would call, we would call, matters of conscience or moral rectitude. So you'd be very hard pressed in the extra-biblical collections to find a law like Exodus 23:4 and 5:

When you encounter your enemy's ox or ass wandering, you must take it back to him. When you see the ass of your enemy lying under its burden, and you would refrain from raising it, you must, nevertheless, raise it with him.

Or Leviticus 19:17 and 18: "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart." Can you imagine Congress passing a law like that? "You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsmen, but incur no guilt because of him." And don't carry around a grudge. Reprove him, tell him what's wrong, clear the air. Don't carry around a grudge. "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord." That refrain always comes after those kinds of statements.

So the Bible includes norms for human behavior set by the divine will, even though enforcement has to be left to the individual conscience. And in the Torah, therefore, life is treated holistically in the realm of law. One's actions aren't compartmentalized, and that's why the legal materials to us can sometimes seem like an indiscriminate mix of laws concerning all areas of life. And it's one of the things that makes people confused. Because a lot of moderns have gotten the idea that the Bible only deals with what we call morality. And so they don't understand all this other stuff that's in there, right? And sometimes if we tell ourselves, well, this is a legal collection, then we don't understand why there's all this moral-looking stuff in there. It is a mixture because it's holistic. It is the will of God, and God has something to say about all areas of life.

And so in Exodus 23, you're going to have a law that tells you not to oppress a stranger because you were a stranger. It tells you to not plow your land in the Sabbath year immediately following that to let the poor and needy eat from it. It tells you to observe the Sabbath day rest. You shall not mention any other gods. It tells you how to observe the three

pilgrimage festivals and rules of ritual offering and then there are also civil laws. Same thing in Leviticus: 18 through 20. We have incest laws, we have ritual laws, we have civil laws and we have moral laws all together.

Now, a second implication--another idea that flows from the fact that this law is divinely authored--so a second implication of divine authorship, according to Greenberg, is this connection between law and morality so that in the biblical, legal framework, every crime is also a sin. Every crime is also a sin. Law is the moral will of God and nothing is beyond the moral will of God. So what's illegal is also immoral, and vice versa; what's immoral is also illegal. Law and morality are not separate, as we moderns tend to think they are and ought to be, right, in our society. Offenses against morality in the biblical world are also religious offenses. They're also sins because they are infractions of the divine will. So the fusion of morality and law, Greenberg argues, is the reason that biblical law not only expresses, but legislates a concern for the unfortunate members of society, for example; orphans, strangers, widows, as well as respect for the aged. From the Priestly source, this is Leviticus 19:32, we read, "You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God. I am the Lord." Again, that refrain always has to come with this kind of a statement.

The extra-biblical codes certainly exhibit concern for the rights of the poor. This is very important, particularly in their prologues. We've read some of these prologues. You know, my [the legislator's] desire was to help the orphans, the strangers and so on. But when you look at the content of the laws, as in our society, they don't legislate charity. They don't legislate compassion. It's likely that these were considered acts of, who knows, personal conscience, religious conviction, something that was between the individual and society and their God. I don't know, but they were outside the domain and jurisdiction of the court. That doesn't mean that charity and compassion were not present in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures. The point is that law is not understood as being the appropriate vehicle for the expression of those values. There were other sorts of texts that might do those sorts of things and urge people to charity and compassion. But law, the legislation, is not understood to be the appropriate vehicle for the expression of those values. So again, I'm not trying to say that in Ancient Near Eastern society, everybody was mean, I'm trying to say that [in biblical Israel] law, because of its divine authorship, suddenly takes on a scope, a holistic scope and a fusion of law and morality that are kept separate in other cultures and very much in our own.

So the two, however, are combined. And law is understood to be the appropriate vehicle to legislate compassion, for example. So in Leviticus 19:9, verse 10, legislating charity,

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I, the Lord am your God.

Again, from the Holiness Code, Leviticus 19:14, "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the Lord." Again, always has to back it up because this is not something the courts can back up, right? This is a question of your morality. Or Leviticus 20:18 [correction: 19:18] "Love your fellow as yourself. I am the Lord."

Leviticus 19:33-34: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I, the Lord, am your God."

Deuteronomy 22:6:

"If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life," meaning God will reward you. So again, this is enforceable by God.

Furthermore, Greenberg argues that the fact that every crime is also a sin lays the ground for certain acts to be viewed as absolutely wrong, and transcending the power of humans to forgive. Absolutely wrong and they transcend the power of humans to pardon or forgive. Take for an example, adultery. Deuteronomy 22:22: "If a man is found lying with another man's wife, both of them--the man and the woman with whom he lay--shall die. Thus, you will sweep away evil from Israel." And murder is the other one. Numbers 35:16, "...the murderer must be put to death..." "You may not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer" [this is now verse 31] "who is guilty of a capital crime; he must be put to death." In the view of the biblical text, adultery and murder are absolutely wrong. They must always be punished regardless of the attitude of the offended parties. So a husband can't say "Oh, that's okay, I don't want to punish my wife; let them have their fun. It's no big deal; I don't mind." Alright? And the family of a murder victim can't say, "You know, Joe was such a pain in the neck anyway, you've really done us a favor, you know? Just pay the funeral costs, we'll call it quits." You can't do that. These are absolutely wrong. These deeds, as infractions of God's will, and God's law, they're always wrong. They transcend the power of human parties to pardon or forgive or excuse.

And you compare that with the extra-biblical collections and you see quite a difference. In the Code of Hammurabi, number 129, adultery is considered a private affair. "If the wife of a seignor"--and I have to-- this terminology is just wonderful. Seignor. This comes, I think, from French feudalism. These have to do with class distinctions. And so the translators of this particular translation chose these feudal--very meaningful to you I'm sure--these feudal categories. Essentially what's going on here is the underlying Akkadian words, I guess, are *awilum*, *mushkenum*, and then a third category, slave. When the three--when they appear together, *awilum* tends to refer to an upper class person, a *mushkenum* to a commoner. *Awilum* can just mean an ordinary citizen, but when it's in juxtaposition with the other terms, it's clearly someone of a higher social class. So we'll use aristocrat, which is where we get the French feudal seignor, and then we'll use commoner and slave. So in the Code of Hammurabi, "If the wife of a citizen has been caught while lying with another man, they shall bind them and throw them into the water. But if the husband of the woman wishes to spare his wife, then the king in turn may spare his subject." It's up to the husband. He's the offended party. It's a private matter. He decides.

The middle Assyrian laws on Tablet A numbers 14 to 16. Again, it's a crime against the property of the husband, and so it's within his power to either prosecute or not. "If a seignor," an *awilum* has lain with the wife of another, either in a temple brothel or in the street knowingly," knowing that she was a wife, "then they shall treat the adulterer as the seignor orders his wife to be treated." Okay? So whatever he does to her, they do the same thing to the male. But if he was innocent, he didn't know that she was a married woman, "the seignor shall prosecute his wife, treating her as he thinks fit." It's up to him. "If... the woman's husband," more ifs and thens, but here's a case of "if... the woman's husband puts his wife to death, he shall also put the seignor to death, but if he cuts off his wife's nose, he shall turn the seignor into a eunuch"--I guess this is considered equivalent--"and they shall mutilate his whole face. However, if he let his wife go free, they shall let the seignor go free."

Again, it's a private matter. In the Hittite laws as well, Tablet 2, 197-198, the husband can decide to spare his wife,

If he brings them to the gate of the palace and declares: "My wife shall not be killed' and thereby spares his wife's life, he shall also spare the life of the adulterer and shall mark his head. But if he says, "Let them die both of them!" ...[then] the king may order them killed, [but also], the king may spare their lives.

And we see the same sorts of distinctions in murder cases. We'll come back to them later.

A third implication or consequence of the divine authorship of biblical law, according to Greenberg, is that the purpose of the law in Israelite society is going to be different from the purpose of the law in other societies. So in non-Israelite society the purpose of the law is to secure certain sociopolitical benefits. Think about the preamble of the American Constitution, which states the purpose of the law. It reads almost exactly like the prologues to these ancient collections. You can pick out words that are identical. The purpose of the law is to "establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty."

So when you see the prologue of Ur-nammu, the purpose of the law: "establish equity," protect the underprivileged, promote the common weal and welfare, basically. The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar in the prologue: "establish justice... banish complaints," I like that one, "bring wellbeing"--promote the common weal and welfare. Same again with the Code of Hammurabi's prologue: to promote the welfare of the people, good government, the right way, prosperity.

But for Israel, the law does include these benefits, but is not limited to these benefits. The law also aims at sanctifying. A concept we dealt with at great length in the last lecture. Sanctifying, rendering holy or like God those who abide by its terms. So the laws that are presented in the Holiness Code are introduced with this exhortation, which you don't find in other places. Leviticus 19:2: "You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am, holy." And then the laws begin; "You shall each revere your mother and father,... keep my Sabbath," etcetera, etcetera. But the introduction, "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy"--being holy in imitation of God is emphasized repeatedly as the purpose of the laws in the Holiness Code especially.

The holiness motif is represented as being present at the very inception of the covenant. When Israel is assembled at Mount Sinai, that opening speech that God makes in Exodus 19:5 and 6, "Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, keep my laws, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the rules that demarcate you as dedicated to me; i.e. holy.

Now, there are lots of general and specific similarities and parallels between Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern laws. Lots of goring oxen, lots of pregnant women who are in the wrong place at the wrong time and getting struck and accidentally miscarrying. But we're going to look at some of the formal and stylistic differences between Ancient Near Eastern and biblical law. And we can assume just a tremendous amount of common ground, okay? And some of these are pointed out by Greenberg and some by other scholars. But I've listed them there under "features."

One distinguishing feature of Israelite law is the addition of a rationale or a motive clause in many of the laws. Which again is not something that's really featured in the genre of law writing in these other collections. It's not a part of the genre of writing those. It doesn't mean they didn't have a rationale, but it wasn't how it was presented. So we find this in the Bible particularly in what we might refer to as the humanitarian laws. And on the whole, these rationales will appeal to historical events like the exodus or creation.

Here are a few laws that express the idea that the experience of slavery and liberation should be the wellspring for moral action. It should be the impetus for moral action. Exodus 22:20: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." 23:9: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." And Leviticus 19 contains a similar exhortation not to wrong a stranger who resides with you, but "love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Likewise, in Deuteronomy 5 --this is the Decalogue in Deuteronomy--which is talking about Sabbath observance, and ensuring that all in your abode rest "...you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle..." [any] "stranger in your settlements, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there." Also [Deut 10:17-19], "For the Lord your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty and the awesome God who shows no favor and takes no bribe [bribe]." Takes no bribe also! But takes no bribe [correction: bribe is the correct word] "...but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. [So] you too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

We have two rationales there; one is the explicit rationale of *imitatio dei*. This is what I do and this is what you should do. And there are more. Many of them referring to the exodus in Egypt and others referring to the notion of *imitatio dei*.

So it's also illuminating to compare the Ancient Near Eastern and the biblical legal materials in terms of the concern for the disadvantaged, the elimination of social class distinctions, and a trend toward humanitarianism.

Greenberg notes that the Torah's concern for the disadvantaged of society is quite marked in the actual laws themselves. Many of the extra-biblical legal collections pay homage to this idea in their prologues. It doesn't always seem to be appearing, however, in the actual terms of these collections. Now, these collections are incomplete. We don't have

everything. And again, it may be another literary genre that accomplished some of that work in that culture. The Torah laws-- And also, the laws in those collections very often, despite the prologues' rhetoric that they bring justice to the disadvantaged and so on, many of the laws clearly serve the interests of an upper class. Okay, that's the more important point. They clearly serve the interests of an upper class.

The Torah laws do not contain all the same distinctions of social class among free persons as the contemporary laws--the Laws of Eshnunna, the Laws of Hammurabi. These [latter] laws distinguish between punishments for crimes committed against upper class and lower class persons, not to mention slaves. So if we look at the Code of Hammurabi, there's a stretch of laws numbering 195 to 208 something. And they're--very interesting to read them all in a row. I'll hit some highlights. So if an upper class person, if an aristocrat has destroyed the eye of a member of the aristocracy, they destroy his eye. If he breaks his bone, they break his bone. But as you move down to 198, if he destroys the eye of a commoner or breaks the bone of a commoner, he pays one mina of silver. And if it's a slave, he pays half the value of the slave. On to 200 and 201: If he knocks out an aristocrat's tooth, they knock out his tooth. But if it's a commoner's tooth, he pays a third of a mina of silver, and so on.

The Hittite laws too: there are different amounts fixed by class in the miscarriage laws, 95 and 99. The middle Assyrian laws also distinguish between the *awilum*, the *mushkenum* and the slave. Leviticus 24:17-22--we have, there, laws of personal liability; bodily injury, assault and battery or bodily injury. And we find a clear and explicit statement to the effect that there shall be one standard for citizen and stranger alike. This is known as the principle of *talion*; *lex talionis*. So reading from Leviticus,

"If anyone maims his fellow." "If anyone maims his fellow, as he has done so shall it be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The injury he inflicted on another shall be inflicted on him... You shall have one standard for stranger and citizen alike: for I the Lord, am your God."

This was a radical concept in its day, evidently. The punishment should fit the crime, no more and no less for all free persons--granted slaves are not included--regardless of social class. Equality before the law. And this casts the principle of *talion*, I hope, in a new light. The law of *talion*, which is essentially the principle that a person should be punished according to the injury they inflicted, it's been decried as a primitive, archaic reflex of the vengeance or vendetta principle. The notion of "an eye for an eye" is usually cited or held up as typical of the harsh and cruel standards of the vengeful Old Testament God. But when you look at it in a comparative light in its legal context, we see that it's a polemic against the class distinctions that were being drawn in antecedent and contemporary legal systems, such as the Code of Hammurabi.

According to the Bible, the punishment should always fit the crime regardless of the social status of the perpetrator on the one hand or the victim on the other. All free citizens who injure are treated equally before the law. They're neither let off lightly nor punished excessively. If you read the middle Assyrian laws, don't want to do that on an empty stomach. A.20, A.21 and F1--you have multiple punishments that are carried out. Someone who causes a miscarriage: they have a monetary fine, they have to pay two talents and 30 minas of lead. They're flogged 50 times and then they have to do *corvée*, forced labor for the state for a month. Multiple punishments. For sheep stealing, that's even worse. You're flogged 100 times and they pull out your hair and there's a monetary fine, and you do *corvée*, forced labor, for a month.

So are these ideas--is this idea that the punishment should be neither too little nor too much, it should match the crime, that all free persons are equal before the law, that one standard should apply regardless of the social status of the perpetrator or the victim--are these ideas really primitive legal concepts? In addition to asserting the basic equality before the law for all free citizens, the Bible mandates concern for the disenfranchised. We've already seen that a little bit in the laws of Leviticus 19:9-10, which says that you have to leave, you know, don't go over your fields picking every little last bit. You know, just go through, get what you need, but leave a little bit behind and let the poor and the stranger glean there. Deuteronomy is a little less generous. They substitute the phrase "the widow, the orphan and the stranger" in that law where Leviticus says the poor. Deuteronomy 24:20-22:

When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, [or gather the grapes of your vineyard; see note 2] do not go over them again. That [which remains on the tree] shall go to the stranger, the orphan [see note 3] and

the widow... Always remember you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

So Leviticus supports outright charity for the poor in the form of gleanings. Kind of a welfare system. Deuteronomy has more of a workfare system in mind; they actually never mention the poor. It's only Leviticus that mentions the poor. For Deuteronomy, it's those who really can't provide for themselves: the widow, the orphan and the stranger who may not be able to find employment. The poor should be working. But you can assist them with loans, according to Deuteronomy. And these should be generous. Here's Deuteronomy's admonition to loan money to the poor even if it means potential loss to yourself because the seventh year is imminent; the sabbatical year. In the sabbatical year, all debts were released, cancelled. Okay? Sort of an economic corrective to restore people to a more equal economic situation. So in the sixth year, some people will feel 'I don't really want to lend money out. It's going to be cancelled next year. I won't get my money back.' Loans must be made even if the debt will be cancelled, for the simple reason that the problem of poverty is a terrible and persistent problem.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11:

If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brethren, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need whatever it may be. Beware lest you harbor the base thought, 'the seventh year, the year of debt release is approaching' so that you are mean to your poor kinsman and give him nothing. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, for the poor will never cease out of the land.

Alright, the poor will always be with you. This is where it comes from, but it gets misquoted later. It's taken to mean the poor are always with you, so you don't have to do anything. That's not what it means here in Deuteronomy. Lend to them because the poor will never cease out of the land," therefore I command you, open wide your hand."

Get busy, give charity. It's a problem that never goes away, so you can never rest.

Connected with this is the biblical trend towards humanitarianism. And there is, of course, much in biblical legislation that offends modern sensibilities. There's no point in pretending that there isn't. For example, as in the rest of the ancient world, slavery existed in Israel. It did. Even so, and this is not to apologize for it, there is a tendency toward humanitarianism in the laws concerning slavery. The Bible is equivocating on this institution. In some societies, in their legal systems, it's clear that slaves are the chattel, the property of the master. The Bible, again, equivocates on this question. They affirm some personal rights for the slave, but not all. In contrast to, for example, the middle Assyrian laws, where a master can kill a slave with impunity, the Bible legislates that the master who wounds his slave in any way, even losing a tooth--which is understood to be a minor thing, because it's not in any way an essential organ--so even if he knocks out a tooth, right, he has to set him free. That's in Exodus 21:26-27. Moreover, the slave is entitled to the Sabbath rest and all of the Sabbath legislation. And quite importantly, a fugitive slave cannot be returned to his master. That's in Deuteronomy 23:16-17:

You shall not turn over to his master a slave who seeks refuge with you from his master. He shall live with you in any place he may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever he pleases; you must not ill treat him.

This is the opposite of the fugitive slave law, actually in this country in the nineteenth century, but also in Hammurabi's Code. Right, Hammurabi's Code, 15, 16 through 19: "If a citizen has harbored in his house either a fugitive male or

female slave belonging to the state or private citizen and has not brought him forth at the summons of the police, that householder shall be put to death."

The term of Israelite, *Israelite* slavery, that is to say an Israelite who has fallen into service to another Israelite through, generally, indebtedness--that's a form that slavery took in the ancient world and in the biblical picture--the term was limited to six years by Exodus, by the Covenant Code. In the Priestly code, it's prohibited altogether. No Israelite can be enslaved to another Israelite. So it's actually done away with as an institution altogether. In general, the Bible urges humanitarian treatment of the slave, again, 'for you were once slaves in Egypt' is the refrain.

Other evidence of the trend towards humanitarianism is the lack of legalized violence in the Bible. Here if you compare the Middle Assyrian laws, you'll see something quite different. There, the middle Assyrian laws explicitly authorize inhumane treatment of a deserting wife--you can cut off her ears; legalized violence in the case of a distrainee, a distrainee is a pledge, someone who has been placed in your house because of a debt and is working for you. The citizen may do what he wishes as he feels the distrainee deserves. He may pull out his hair. He may mutilate his ears by piercing them. The middle Assyrian laws also legalized violence against a wife. "When she deserves it" a seignor may pull out the hair of his wife, mutilate or twist her ears. There's no liability attaching to him.

Legal systems often express their values by the punishments that are posited for various transgressions. And here, Moshe Greenberg has done something very interesting, a little controversial, not everyone agrees with this. But he's pointed out that the Bible differs from the other extra-biblical codes in the value that it places on human life. And you consider the crimes that are punished by capital punishment, and the crimes that are punished by monetary compensation, and he feels this is quite revealing.

So I've put this very handy little chart on the board for you listing codes on one side. And you'll see the kinds of things that are punished by monetary fine or compensation. In the Hittite laws, homicide--you pay a certain amount of money to compensate for the death. Personal injury, bodily injury, you pay a certain amount of money. In the middle Assyrian laws also, homicide--it's up to the family. They can decide how they want this to be punished, but they can take money. Code of Hammurabi, we only have an accidental homicide case, we don't have an intentional homicide case, so we don't know, but bodily injury when it's between equals, then the principle of *talion* applies. But when it's not between equals, monetary payment and so on. Death, on the other hand, is the punishment for certain property crimes instead of personal injury and homicide crimes. Death for theft in the Hittite laws and for bestiality. In the middle Assyrian laws, also theft and in the Code of Hammurabi, theft and cheating. I'll go over some of these in a little more detail.

So Greenberg is going to argue that the Bible reverses the view of the other codes, he says, because in those, life is cheap and property is highly valued. So Hammurabi's Code imposes the death penalty for the theft of property, for assisting in the escape of a slave, which is its master's property, for cheating a customer over the price of a drink. Middle Assyrian Laws: there's death to a wife if she steals from her husband and death to any who purchased the stolen goods. The Bible never imposes the death penalty for violations of property rights--personal property rights, private property rights. Only for intentional homicide, and certain religious and sexual offenses, which are seen to be direct offenses to God. Greenberg argues that in so doing, the Bible is expressing the view that the sanctity of human life is paramount in its value system. The Bible states explicitly that homicide is the one crime for which no monetary punishment can be substituted. You cannot ransom the life of a murderer. He must pay with his life.

Numbers 35:31-34: "You may not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of a capital crime; he must be put to death. Nor may you accept ransom in lieu of flight to a city of refuge." Remember if it's an accidental homicide, there is a leniency in the law that that person can run to a city of refuge and remain there until the death of the high priest. The shedding of his blood purges the land of "blood guilt," if you will, because this is a religious crime. But you can't pay money instead of running to the city of refuge. "You shall not pollute the land in which you live." There's a notion here of blood guilt, of pollution.

...blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I myself abide, for I the Lord abide among the Israelite people.

And outside the Bible, we really don't have that absolute ban on monetary compensation for murder. Greenberg has argued that for the biblical legislators, human life and property are simply incommensurable. Crimes in the one realm cannot be compensated by punishment in the other realm. A crime in the realm of life/personal injury has to be compensated in the same realm. In the same way property crimes are not punished by death.

Also in the bible there's no, what I call, literal punishment. You'll sometimes see people refer to this as vicarious punishment. I don't think it's vicarious punishment. I call it literal punishment. Literal punishment: for example, in the Code of Hammurabi, where someone's ox kills a child, then the ox owner's child is killed. That's not vicarious. You're not substituting. It's literal. The legal subject is the father; he has lost a child. So I have to suffer the literal punishment, as a father, I have to lose my child. Right? It's not a substitution; it's a literal punishment for what you did to the other.

And the Bible explicitly rejects that idea. In Exodus 21, it explicitly says that the owner's child is not to be put to death, is not killed. Deuteronomy 24:16 states that, "Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for their parents: a person shall be put to death only for his own crime." The equal value of human life and limb is also protected by the principle of *talion* that we discussed above. In the Code of Hammurabi, an aristocrat can simply pay money for injuring an inferior. That's not going to be much of a hardship to a wealthy person, and it certainly reflects the low value that's placed on the life and limb of a member of the lower class. *Talion* only applies between social equals in the Code of Hammurabi. In the Bible, the extension of *talion* to all free persons, regardless of class, expresses the notion that all persons are of equal value. In the case of rape, the rapist's wife is not raped, as happens in the middle Assyrian laws. Again, a literal punishment.

Other biblical values are reflected in the emphasis on laws that deal with the plight of the poor, the slave, the alien, the rights and dignity of debtors and so on. I've reached just about the end of my time. Just one last statement, because I don't want to leave you with the impression that the biblical materials speak with one voice--they don't. I mean, Greenberg has tried to pull out some common values. Biblical legal materials contain provisions that contradict one another. Later versions of the law, particularly in D for example, will update and revise earlier versions of the law. Leviticus takes issue with the whole institution of Israelite slavery that's accepted in the covenant quoted in Deuteronomy and says just no, that can't happen. All Israelites are servants of God; none of you can be servants to another. So in these laws--there is contradiction.

Nevertheless, I think what Greenberg is trying to say is that it is still fair--even though the materials contain contradictions--it's still fair to say that they sound certain common themes. They express certain important principles and values, which include: the supreme sanctity of human life: that's pretty consistently maintained among the codes; the value of persons over property: pretty consistently maintained; the equality of all free persons before the law: consistently maintained; the importance of assisting the disadvantaged in society: very consistently maintained; the integration and the interdependence of all aspects of human life all coming within the will of God to legislate: very consistently maintained. When we come back on Monday, I just want to say a little bit about the narrative context in which the laws are found before we move on into Deuteronomy. Monday evening will be the time at which the midterm exam will be posted on the website, and that'll be at 6:00 pm Monday evening. You'll have a 24-hour period of time in which to find--I forget what I said--30 or 40 minutes? It'll be clear on the instructions. To just sit and treat it as if you're in an in-class exam situation, and write your essay.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. All citations of the Ancient Near Eastern legal texts throughout this lecture are taken from the translations found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, 1955.
2. This clause appears in the next verse.

3. JPS translation has "fatherless."

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## References

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text." Copyright (c) 1985 by [The Jewish Publication Society](#). Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

Greenberg, Moshe. 1976. Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law. In *Yehezkel Kaufman Jubilee Volume*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960. Reprint, *The Jewish Expression*, ed. Judah Goldin. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 11 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** You may have heard that post-biblical tradition hails Moses as ancient Israel's first and greatest law giver; and certainly the Bible depicts Moses as receiving law from God and conveying it to the Israelites. But clearly Moses isn't the author or compiler of the legal traditions contained in the Bible. Some of the individual laws we know are found in very, very, very Ancient Near Eastern laws: they're part of an Ancient Near Eastern legal tradition. The collections as a whole clearly date to a much later period of time--and we're going to see that clearly when we talk about Deuteronomy today--and they have been retrojected back to the time of Moses. But nevertheless, Moses is the central figure in the biblical narrative, from Exodus all the way through Numbers and into Deuteronomy. And he's going to serve as a paradigm for Israel's leaders to follow.

In the biblical view no one can look upon the face of God and live, and yet Moses, who spoke with God "mouth to mouth," the text says, was an exception to this rule. So why wasn't he permitted to see the fulfillment of his labors? Why was he not permitted to enter the Promised Land? This is a question that plagued ancient Israel, and the Bible contains the effort of tradition to explain this great mystery, or tragedy. When Moses asks God if he can enter the land--that's in Deuteronomy 3:25--God refuses, and he gives his reason in Deuteronomy 32:49-52:

You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people. You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it--the land that I am giving to the Israelite people.

So what happened at Meribath-kadesh that made God so angry? Well you can read the story, it's in Numbers 20, the incident is described there. But the answer is still not entirely clear, it's not clear what Moses did that was so bad as to deserve this punishment. Perhaps it's Moses' failure to follow God's instructions to the letter when he is producing water for the Israelites or demanding water: perhaps that's what angers God. But one gets the impression that the story in Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy's subsequent claim that it was something about that story that earned Moses God's disapproval... you get the impression that these are an attempt to explain what was probably a longstanding tradition about a great leader who died on the east side of the river. For that to have happened, for that death to have happened the writers seem to surmise, he must have sinned; there must have been some punishment for some sin.

After a very poignant scene in which God shows Moses the Promised Land, from a lookout point on the east side of the Jordan River, we then read about the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34:

God spoke to Moses on that same day. "Ascend this Mount Abarim, the peak Nebo, in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look at the Land of Canaan which I am giving Israel for a holding."

..

So Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah, opposite Jericho. And God showed him all the land, from Gilead to Dan [which is in the north], and all of Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all of Judah [in the south] to the outer Mediterranean Sea; and the Negev [the southern wilderness]; and the Plain of the Valley of Jericho, the Palm City, as far as Zoar [the end of the Dead Sea].

...

Then Moses the servant of God died there, in the land of Moab, as God had said, and he buried him in the valley, in the land of Moab...but no man knows the place of his burial, to this day. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the Plains of Moab for thirty days...and there never again arose in Israel such a prophet as Moses, whom God knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to his household and to all his land; none like him in respect of all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.  
[Hayes translation]

There's no other human being in the Bible who earns such a tribute. This is unusual for the biblical writer to speak in such glowing terms of a human character.

I said that Moses becomes a paradigmatic leader in the biblical tradition. And the force of Moses as paradigmatic leader of Israel is apparent in the very first leader to succeed him, and that is Joshua. Deuteronomy closes with a transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua. So in Deuteronomy 34:9 we read, "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses." And in several ways Joshua's going to turn out to be a kind of carbon copy of Moses. Moses crosses the Reed Sea, the waters stand in a heap, and the children of Israel cross over on dry land. We'll see in connection with Joshua that he crosses the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the waters stand in a heap, the children of Israel cross on dry land--that's in Joshua 3:13.

After crossing, the Israelites then celebrate the Passover, and that makes a strong link then to the Exodus led by Moses, also at the time of the first Passover. Moses had a vision of God at the burning bush. He was told to remove his shoes, his sandals, because he was on holy ground. Joshua is also going to have a theophany--that's a vision--after he crosses the Jordan. He'll see a man with a drawn sword who's the captain of the Lord's host and he tells him to remove his shoes, he is on holy ground. Moses is the one to mediate a covenant between God and Israel at Sinai. Joshua will mediate a renewal of the covenant at a place called Shechem. Moses sent out spies to scout out the land; Joshua also sent out spies to scout out the land. Moses holds out a rod during battle in order that Israel prevail over her enemies, and Joshua will do the same with a javelin. So these are all important literary parallels and they signal the importance of Moses in Israelite tradition, as the paradigmatic leader; so other leaders who are praised will be modeled on Moses. It's said of Joshua after the Israelites enter the Promised Land, it's said, "On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel so that they revered him all his days as they had revered Moses." So no greater praise can be given to an Israelite leader than to be compared to Moses. But now we're going to take a close look at Deuteronomy and we'll pick up with Joshua on Wednesday.

So Israel's wanderings in the wilderness end on the Plains of Moab, which is on the east bank of the Jordan River, and it's there that the book of Deuteronomy opens. There Moses is going to deliver three long speeches prior to the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land, and these three speeches constitute the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy. So Deuteronomy differs very much from the other four books of the Pentateuch because in those books you have an anonymous narrator who describes Yahweh as directing his words to Moses to then be conveyed to Israel. Moses will speak to Israel on God's behalf. But in Deuteronomy Moses is going to be speaking directly to the Israelites so that the book is written almost entirely in the first person, whereas the first four books of the Pentateuch are not; they are third person anonymous narrative, narration. Here we have the bulk of the book in the first person: direct speech.

Now Moshe Weinfeld--I've put his name on the board as someone who you should associate always with the book of Deuteronomy--Moshe Weinfeld is one of the leading scholars of Deuteronomy and he describes the book as expressing ideology by means of a programmatic speech put into the mouth of a great leader. That's a very common practice in later Israelite historiography, and he says it's happening here already. And I'll be referring quite a bit to Weinfeld's work as we talk about Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy differs from the other books of the Pentateuch in other significant ways. So for example, according to the Priestly writer, Israel received its laws, its Torah, from God at Mount Sinai. But in Deuteronomy the laws were given here on the Plains of Moab, 40 years after Sinai, before the Israelites crossed the Jordan. At Sinai the Israelites heard the Decalogue but the remainder of the laws, it would seem, are delivered on the

## Plains of Moab.

We can look at the basic structure of Deuteronomy in a couple of ways. We can do a kind of literary division, which I have on this side of the board, according to the speeches. So to begin we have the first speech which is a sort of introductory speech in the first four chapters, going through 4:43. There's an introduction that gives us the location, where the Israelites are, and also then Moses' first sermon. Moses in this sermon is giving a historical review, and the purpose of this historical review is didactic; he wants the Israelites to learn something, to infer something from this review of their history from Sinai to the present day. And in that review, as he retells the story, which we've just been reading about in the previous books, we see his selective choice of events, we see how he's describing things in a way that underscores God's faithful, loyal, fulfillment of the covenantal promise, and he's using this to urge the Israelites to do their part by obeying God's laws.

The second speech extends from 4:44 through 28:6. And this also contains a bit of a historical review, again retelling some of the narrative of the earlier books of the Torah and again giving us an insight into this phenomenon of inner biblical interpretation, or parts of the Bible that review parts elsewhere [and] are already beginning to interpret and present that material in a particular light. But then we have a central section of laws being presented, beginning at about 12; so this is still part of Moses' second speech, but stretching from Deuteronomy 12 through 26 we have laws, and this is in many ways a repetition of much of the revealed legislation we've already encountered. That central portion of laws, 12 through 26, is thought to be the earliest core of the book. We're going to come back and talk about that in a moment.

Now the Greek title for this book, which is Deuteronomy, *deutero nomos*, a second law, a repetition of the law, and that name derives from the fact that the bulk of the book contains this legal core of material which reviews the law. In Chapter 27 we have a covenant renewal ceremony. It takes place on a mountain near Shechem after the Israelites have crossed the Jordan. It describes the ceremony that will take place, excuse me, after they have crossed the Jordan. And from ancient Greece we know that in the ancient world settlers who would colonize a place, particularly if they colonized a place at divine instigation, they would perform certain ceremonies that would be accompanied by blessings and accompanied by curses. They would write the laws on stone pillars, they would erect an altar for sacrifices, they would proclaim blessings and curses for those who obey and disobey--very similar to what happens in chapter 27; all of these elements appear in chapter 27.

Chapter 28 lists the material rewards that will accrue to Israel if she is faithful to God's law, and the punishments if she should disobey--and some of these are very creative. But the importance of the Deuteronomist's view of history in which Israel's fate is totally conditioned on her obedience to the covenant--this is something that will occupy us repeatedly at a future date. I mention it here but it's something we will need to come back to. The third speech of Moses is in Chapters 29 and 30. This speech emphasizes the degree to which evil fortune is the responsibility of the community. Moses enumerates additional misfortunes and sufferings that will befall Israel if she sins. But he emphasizes the choice is Israel's: God has been clear regarding what's required, and it's not beyond Israel's reach to attain life and prosperity. She needs to only choose. And this is all set out in a speech in Chapter 30. I'll read from verses 11 to 20:

Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess.

Listen to the cadences of this kind of language in Deuteronomy. We haven't heard language like this before but it's what

people often think of when they think of biblical language. It starts here in Deuteronomy.

But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life--if you and your offspring would live--by loving the Lord your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the Lord your God swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

So all has been given. It's simply Israel's choice to take it or not. The last section of the book, chapters 31 to 34, is a sort of miscellany of appendices. There's some ancient poetry that's found in chapter 32, which is referred to as The Song of Moses; scholars refer to it as The Song of Moses. We have the blessings of Moses recorded in chapter 33, and then chapter 34 is the story of Moses' death: I read part of that to you.

Now centuries ago already scholars of the Bible noted that Deuteronomy opens with the verse, "These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan," that is to say the trans-Jordan, on the other side of the Jordan. So that line is obviously written from the prospective of someone who is inside the land, saying Moses said that when he was over there, outside the land, on the other side of the Jordan--so he's looking eastward. And so that's a line that one would think could not be written by Moses because Moses did not ever enter the land and would not be in a position to talk about something being on the other side of the Jordan. Likewise the last chapter which describes Moses' death and burial probably was not written by him. So as we shall see, these and many other textual features point to the period of composition for Deuteronomy, which was many centuries after the time that Moses would have been supposed to have lived, if we are to assume he was a historical character.

And so through careful analysis you have scholars like Moshe Weinfeld and many others--I think Bernard Levinson is the one has written about Deuteronomy in your *Jewish Study Bible*, and that's a wonderful introduction to read there, so I encourage you to please make sure you look at that--but analyses of scholars like these have led them to draw the conclusion that the original core of Deuteronomy emerged in the eighth century, and this is now where my interesting little mountain-shaped diagram is going to come into play. It was probably a scroll of laws known as the Book or the Scroll of the Torah. Deuteronomy refers to itself that way in Deuteronomy 17:19-20. And so we think it was probably something roughly equivalent to chapters 12 to 26; maybe there was a little introduction, a little conclusion. And eventually these laws were put into the framework of a speech by Moses: maybe chapters 5 through 11 and maybe 28; maybe that would've been in the eighth, seventh century. And then at some later point several things happened, and I will say them in the following order, but that doesn't mean they happened in this order, we really aren't sure.

At some point several things happened. You have framing chapters, Deuteronomy 1 through 4, the sort of introductory frame and historical review, as well as the appendices at the end, chapters 31 and 34--those get added. You also have laws being updated, passages being expanded, to reflect the experience of exile. You'll remember that as of 586, Jerusalem is destroyed and the Israelites are in exile in Babylonia. Additionally at some point Deuteronomy is appended to the other four books of the Pentateuch. Genesis through Numbers is made to precede this. It's serving therefore as their conclusion, and by being joined to them it confers its title as a book of Torah, as a scroll of Torah, to that material as well. They don't use the word "Torah" in that way, in those books; only Deuteronomy uses the word Torah to speak of God's instruction or revelation overall. So by being appended now to Genesis through Numbers, all of this perhaps comes to be known as Torah, as well. And then finally during the exile or sorry, probably during the period after the exile--no, during the exile, down to the end of the sixth century, Deuteronomy was incorporated into a larger narrative history that runs from Joshua through Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings: that's all a unit, as we'll come to see in the next lecture. And so Deuteronomy in a way served as an introduction to that material looking forward; so a conclusion to the previous four books but also an introduction to a long narrative history that's going to run through to the end of 2 Kings. Now there's a lot of debate over the precise timing of these events and this process by which this material grew and was expanded, but in the post-exilic period, at some point, the entire unit, the Genesis

through Numbers material, Deuteronomy, and then the lengthy historical narrative, all the way through 2 Kings, was solidified.

The Deuteronomistic history [correction: the Deuteronomic history, i.e., the book of Deuteronomy] is sort of an odd conclusion to the Genesis through Numbers material because it doesn't really have the expected narrative climax. You sort of expect the story to end with the entry of the Israelites into the land, and hopefully under Moses, and that doesn't occur. Some scholars have suggested that deferring Israel's possession of the land to the future may have reflected the historical experience of exile, an experience which challenged the very idea of the possession of the land as central to the maintenance of the covenant. So if you are in exile, then perhaps a more satisfying ending is to have Israel not in fact entering the land.

The complex process by which Deuteronomy was formed underscores the fact that modern notions of authorship cannot be applied to biblical texts. We think of an author, we tend to think of an author, as a discrete individual who composes a text at a specific time, but this isn't the way that texts came into being in the ancient world, particularly important communal texts. As Weinfeld points out, the biblical authors were what we would call collectors, compilers, revisers, editors, and interpreters of ancient tradition. Ancient texts were generally the product of many hands over the stretch of many long centuries, and during that time modifications and recontextualizations occurred. And so we refer to those who transmit and develop a text in this way as a school; but you need to understand that we are using that in a relatively informal way. So when we talk about the Deuteronomic School or the Deuteronomistic School, we're really talking about the fact that we have a set of texts that all seem to share a certain sort of ideology or orientation; and yet we know that parts of them seem to date from very, very different times. And so we think of that text as being preserved, transmitted and developed by many hands who share certain commonalities, common ideologies, we call it a school. It's not that we know of the existence of a Deuteronomistic school, and we say, oh, well then they must have produced this text. It's the other way around. We have a text, and its features suggest to us a longstanding tradition of scholarship, that preserved and transmitted the text in that way. Same with the Priestly school: we're speaking about the Priestly materials which clearly have evidence of originating from the eighth, seventh, sixth and fifth centuries, and so there must have been a common stretch of scholarship that would have preserved and transmitted and developed those traditions, and we call that the Priestly school.

The legal core of Deuteronomy--so really from 5 to 26, because 5 is where some of the legal material begins--contains first of all a somewhat expanded version of the Ten Commandments, you have that in Deuteronomy 5, and then other laws, really from 12 to 26, that resemble the legal material that's found in Exodus--the collection of material we've called the Covenant Code. And they also seem to bear some relationship to the laws in Leviticus and Numbers. But the question is, what is the relationship between the different versions of the legal material? Some of these laws will parallel each other quite closely and others do not. So are Deuteronomy's legal traditions a direct response to or modification of the laws in Exodus and Numbers, or are they best understood as just different, independent formulations of a common legal tradition?

Weinfeld has argued that Deuteronomy is dependent on the previous traditions of the Pentateuch, that Deuteronomy revises and reforms them according to new ideas: its new notion of a centralized cultic worship, and secondly its humanitarian spirit. Those are two controlling ideologies he says that shape its revision of pre-existing material. He specifically argues that Deuteronomy is dependent on the E source, the source that some scholars think is pretty hard to isolate or find in the biblical text. But in E, Sinai is referred to as Horeb, and in Deuteronomy Sinai is also Horeb. The author of Deuteronomy limits the revelation at Sinai to the Decalogue and seems to assert that the full law was given to Moses for the Israelites on the plains of Moab. In Weinfeld's view this means that Deuteronomy, with its revisions, would have been seen, would have been presented as and would have been seen as an updated replacement of the old Book of the Covenant, rather than its complement. It exists side by side in our text now, but I think in his view those who promulgated it were understanding it as the updated replacement of the laws of the Book of the Covenant.

For the most part Deuteronomy doesn't really contain much in the way of civil law. It tends to focus on the moral-religious prescriptions--kind of the apodictic law in Israel--and the few civil laws that are there tend to be reworked in line with Deuteronomy's humanity. So, for example, the laws of the tithe, the laws of the seventh year release of debts, the rules for the release of slaves, the rules for the three festivals--these are all ancient laws; they occur in Exodus but they appear in Deuteronomy with modifications, modifications about things that concern the Deuteronomists, and some

of you have discussed some of these in section. So in Deuteronomy the Israelite debt slave comes out of his or her servitude, with generous gifts from the owners. This is not something that appears in Exodus. Or as another example, Deuteronomy extends the Covenant Code's prohibition against afflicting a resident alien. In Deuteronomy there's the insistence that the Israelites must not just refrain from afflicting them, but must love the resident alien. It goes so far as to provide concrete legal benefits, food and so on, for the resident alien.

So while the relationship of D to some of the laws in the Covenant Code is often--not always but often--one of revision, the relationship between D and the laws in the Priestly source is more difficult to characterize. The Priestly source seems to represent an equally early set of laws, legal traditions, that just emanated from a very different circle and had different concerns. It tends to deal with sacral topics, or if it's dealing with other topics it will deal with the sacral implications of those topics. Like D, P often updates and revises laws of the Covenant Code. We can see that in the fact that the Priestly source abolishes Israelite debt slavery altogether and insists that slaves must be acquired only from the nations around Israel: no Israelite can enslave another Israelite. Nevertheless Weinfeld argues that on occasion Deuteronomy contains laws that are also found in P, but presents them in a more rational manner, is the word he uses, or desacralized manner. So D's treatment, Deuteronomy's treatment of sacrifice, we'll see in a moment, is going to be different, for example, from P's. They have different concerns and different foci in their presentation of that material.

In any event, many scholars through their analysis of these texts have been led to conclude that the Deuteronomistic School updated and revised earlier laws, particularly laws in the Covenant Code, but sometimes also in the older legal stratum of P; and they did so in keeping with the circumstances of the eighth to sixth century. So Deuteronomy exemplifies a phenomenon that occurs at several critical junctures in Israel's history--and we're going to see this as we move forward through the biblical text--and that is the modification and re-writing of earlier laws and traditions in the light of new circumstances and ideas. So Deuteronomy is itself an implicit authorization of the process of interpretation. And the notion of canon, or sacred canon, that's exemplified then by biblical texts is one that allows for continued unfolding and development of the sacred tradition. And that's an idea that I think differs very much from modern intuitions about the nature of sacred canons. I think a lot of people have the intuition that a sacred canon means that the text is fixed, static and authoritative because it is fixed and static, or unchanging. That's not the biblical view or ancient view of sacred canon. Texts representing sacred revelation were modified, they were revised, they were rephrased, they were updated and they were interpreted in the process of transmission and preservation. It was precisely because a text or a tradition was sacred and authoritative that it was important that it adapt and speak to new circumstances; otherwise it would appear to be irrelevant. So it's a very different notion of what it means for something to be canonical and sacred, from what I think some moderns have come to understand those terms to mean.

So what are the special circumstances and concerns that guide Deuteronomy's revisions of tradition? One of the primary changes--you probably heard in section as well by now--is the emphasis on worship at a single, central shrine. That's going to represent a great change in Israel's religious practice. According to Deuteronomy the central sanctuary will be located in a place that God himself will choose--it's not named in Deuteronomy--or in a place where he will cause his name to dwell; that's the other phrase that's used. Jerusalem is never explicitly mentioned as the site in question but Jerusalem will later, in fact, fulfill this function, according to other biblical texts.

Now there are striking similarities between Deuteronomy's religious program and the major religious reforms that were carried out in the eighth century by King Hezekiah, but even more so in the seventh century by King Josiah, around 622: King Josiah. This is a reform that's reported in the book of 2 Kings, in 2 Kings 22. This reform has long been noticed and provides scholars with a basis for dating the core materials of Deuteronomy, dating them to the late seventh century. According to the story in 2 Kings, during temple repairs that were being done in the time of King Josiah, the scroll of the Torah--that's how it's phrased--the scroll of the Torah was found and when it was read the king was distressed because its requirements were not being upheld. Now this term, the scroll of the Torah, as I said, does not occur in Genesis through Numbers; it is a phrase that occurs in Deuteronomy, in Deuteronomy 17. Then continuing the account in 2 Kings, Josiah is said to take action. He assembles the people, he publicly reads the scroll, the people agree to its terms and then Josiah's reforms begin. We hear that he purges the temple of vessels that had been made for Baal and Asherah, that were in the Temple of Yahweh. He removes all foreign elements from the cult, he prohibits sacrifice to Yahweh anywhere but in the central sanctuary. He destroys all of the high places--this refers to sort of rural shrines that were scattered throughout the countryside where local priests and Levites might offer sacrifices for people--ritual shrines and pillars being used in the worship of Yahweh: these are deemed to be quite legitimate in the J and E sources.

The patriarchs are doing this sort of thing all the time, building altars all around the country, but it's Deuteronomy that contains commandments to destroy the worship, first of all the worship of other gods but also the worship of Yahweh in high places or in rural shrines. So this is evidence again that what Josiah found to base his reforms on was something like the Book of Deuteronomy: it's Deuteronomy that contains the prohibitions of high places and so on.

After these reforms it's reported that the Passover was celebrated. It was celebrated not as a family observance in individual homes; it was celebrated as a national pilgrimage festival, celebrated by everyone in Jerusalem. That's how its celebration is described in the Book of Deuteronomy. It's described as a family celebration in individual homes in the other books of the Bible. So again this is another basis for the conclusion that the scroll of the law, found by Josiah and guiding his reforms, was something like the legal core of Deuteronomy. Scholars now think that that legal core of Deuteronomy was produced in the Northern Kingdom, the Northern Kingdom of Israel which fell in 722, you'll recall. It was probably produced there in the eighth century, and that is supported by the fact that Deuteronomy has affinities with the writings of some prophets we'll be looking at later from the Northern Kingdom of the eighth century, such as the prophet Hosea, and we'll see this when we look at Hosea's writings. It also has affinities with the E source, which is also connected with the Northern Kingdom. In the ninth and eighth century, the Northern Kingdom was the site of a struggle, a struggle against Baal worship. It was also home to certain prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, who are known for their zealotry and their exclusive Yahwism.

So some scholars think that was going on in the ninth/eighth century in the north, the sort of Yahweh-only party that was working hard and struggling against Baal worship. And they think that those Yahweh-only traditions were brought south; after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722, you have refugees coming south, they brought these traditions with them. Some of these written materials were put into the Temple and then about a century later, during Josiah's time, when the Temple was being refurbished, they were found. Possibly this material was then worked into a larger scroll, given its Mosaic introductions and so on, and that all contributed to Josiah's reform.

So the centralization of the cult also needs to be understood against the larger political backdrop of the late seventh century. The Assyrian threat loomed large. You have to remember that the Northern Kingdom has already been completely destroyed: ten tribes exiled, deported, and essentially lost. The Southern Kingdom managed to escape destruction but only by paying tribute as a vassal to Assyria. So Judah, the Southern Kingdom, is a tribute-paying vassal state to the Assyrian overlord. And of course there's a great deal of Assyrian cultural influence and religious influence in Judah as a result. So 2 Kings tells us that there were foreign forms of worship being introduced right into the Temple. Josiah's reforms have been interpreted by some as an attempt to assert the political and the cultural and religious autonomy of Judah. Unregulated worship throughout the land was no longer going to be acceptable; the people were going to be united around a central, standardized Yahweh cult, which would be purged of any Assyrian influence or foreign influence. And this was deemed as necessary to stand up against or to survive the Assyrian threat. So it's in that context that we can look at the very strong parallels that exist between the Book of Deuteronomy and certain Assyrian treaties, from the seventh century.

We already talked about the Hittite vassal treaties as a model for the Israelite covenant, when we were talking about Exodus. But Deuteronomy is clearly dependent on another model and that is the Assyrian vassal treaty. The best exemplars of these treaties are the treaties of the Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon. He was a seventh century ruler of Assyria, down to about 669. These treaties were discovered about 50 years ago, and Moshe Weinfeld is one of the people who's done a tremendous amount of work with these treaties. He's argued at great length that Deuteronomy reworks the second-millennium Hittite model in accordance with the covenantal patterns that are evident in the first-millennium vassal treaties of Esarhaddon. We see history being used as a motivational tool and we see laws being reinforced by curses; and it's fascinating, if you line up some of the curses in Esarhaddon's treaties with the curses in Deuteronomy, there's an amazing correspondence. Deuteronomy also includes blessings; the Assyrians didn't do that. Weinfeld notes that the Assyrian treaties are really loyalty oaths that are imposed upon vassals, rather than true covenants. And Deuteronomy is also something of a loyalty oath, except that the people are pledging their loyalty to a god rather than to a human king. So you have the exhortation to love the Lord your God--and think back to some of that language that we heard as I read Deuteronomy 30 -- he exhortation to love the Lord your God, to go after God, to fear God, to listen to the voice of God: these are all typical of pledges of loyalty, and they are paralleled in the Assyrian treaties where the vassal has to love the crown prince, he has to listen to the voice of the crown prince. The same phraseologies are used. So it is a political literary form, but it's borrowed and it's referred to God. The Assyrian treaties

also will warn against prophets or ecstasies or dream interpreters who will try to foment sedition. If you'll notice in Deuteronomy 13 we have something quite similar: a warning against false prophets who will try to foment sedition, and lead the people to the worship of other gods. Some scholars refer to Deuteronomy as a kind of counter treaty, if you will, right? A subversive document that's trying to shift the people's loyalty from the Assyrian overlord to God, the true sovereign, and it's part of a national movement.

Deuteronomy differs in style, in terminology, in outlook and in theological assumptions from the other books of the Torah. As a series of public speeches it adopts a highly rhetorical tone, a very... sometimes an almost artificial style. It's a style of a very skilled preacher almost. It employs direct address: you, you; sometimes in the singular, sometimes in the plural, but Moses is constantly speaking in a very personal tone, direct address. And there are all sorts of hortatory phrases, phrases that exhort you: to do this with all your heart and soul, do this in order that it may go well with you. The land is described as a land where milk and honey flow, and if only you will obey the voice of Yahweh your God. This is the kind of language that's used here, and not so much in the other books.

So let's isolate now some of the major themes of Deuteronomy, before we close our study of the Pentateuch. First of all as I've mentioned, the centralization of the cult: that's a key theme in the book of Deuteronomy and it had very important effects. It brought Judean religion closer to monotheism because you have the insistence of worshiping one god in his one central sanctuary. Sacrifice was offered only on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which meant that slaughter of animals for meat in the countryside no longer has a sacral component to it. It's just ordinary, common, profane slaughter. There's evidence that that wasn't true before this reform, that if you wanted to kill an animal for meat you had a kind of a makeshift altar out there in the field, and you would pour out the blood and give it back to God and so on. You might still pour out the blood, obviously, but there was previously a more sacral element to it. Now slaughter in the countryside was simply common, profane slaughter. As a result you have a lot of rural Levites who are out of business now, a lot of people who would have officiated at local shrines, and they're out of business: that probably explains the fact that Deuteronomy makes special provision for the Levites and includes them in its... in legislation, sort of social welfare legislation. There are provisions that are made for the Levites, who are not going to be able to earn their income anymore at these local shrines. So many of them would have gone up to Jerusalem and a real tension is going to develop between the Jerusalem priests and this class of Levites who are newcomers; and we'll see some of that tension played out in some other texts.

So [there's] centralization of the cult and that has some social ramifications. We also have a greater abstraction of the deity; this is something many people point to in the Book of Deuteronomy because Deuteronomy and books that are related to it--those that are going to follow--consistently refer to the sanctuary as the place where Yahweh chose to cause his name to dwell. God himself isn't said to dwell in the temple, nor is the temple described as a house of God. The temple is always the dwelling of his name. The house is built for his name. Weinfeld asserts that this is in order to combat the ancient popular belief that God actually dwells in the sanctuary. Likewise to eradicate or guard against the idea, which is implicit in earlier sources, that God sits enthroned on the cherubim, on the cherubim, who guard his ark, Deuteronomy emphasizes that the function of the ark is exclusively to house the tablets, the tablets of the covenant; that's its purpose. The ark cover isn't mentioned, the cherubim aren't mentioned. We don't have the image of this as a throne with the ark as God's footstool. So it seems to be a greater abstraction of the deity.

Some abstraction is also apparent in the shift from visual to aural imagery in describing God's self-manifestations or theophanies. One hears God but one doesn't see God, in Deuteronomy. And that's very different from earlier texts where we're seeing a sort of a cloud encased fire and so on. So the sanctuary is understood to be a house of worship, as much as it is a cultic center, in which Israelites and foreigners alike may deliver prayers to God who dwells in heaven. So he is in heaven; this is a place of worship. That's not to say that sacrifice is abolished, it's not to say that sacrifice isn't important to Deuteronomy--very far from it, it's an essential part of God's service for Deuteronomy. But Deuteronomy is less interested in cultic matters and in any event when it focuses on sacrifices it focuses on a different aspect of those sacrifices. The sacrifices it talks about consist primarily of offerings that are consumed by the offerer in the sanctuary, or are shared with the disenfranchised in some way: the Levite, the resident alien [correction: resident alien], the orphan, the widow--portions are given to them. So by emphasizing the obligation to share the sacrificial meal with disadvantaged members of society, Deuteronomy almost gives the impression that the primary purpose of the sacrifice is humanitarian, or at least personal--the fulfillment of a religious obligation or the expression of gratitude to God and so on. These are aspects of the sacrifices that are emphasized in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy also emphasizes social justice and personal ethics and neighborly responsibility. God's own righteous behavior on behalf of the weak and the oppressed is a model for Israel's righteous behavior. God assists the orphan, the widow and the stranger, and that's the basis of Israel's injunction to assist them also. It's the basis for the humanitarianism that I mentioned earlier that seems to run through the laws of Deuteronomy 12 through 26.

A further theme in Deuteronomy is the fact that the covenant concept entails the idea that each generation of Israelites understand itself as having been bound with God in the original covenant. So in Deuteronomy 5:2-3: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb [Sinai]. It was not with our fathers that the Lord made this covenant but with us, the living, every one of us who is here today." Now this is interesting because remember the generation has died off, that saw the Exodus and Sinai, right? So these are the children now and they're saying, it was us, every one of us who is here today. So every generation of Israel is to view itself as standing at the sacred mountain to conclude a covenant with God, and that decisive moment has to be made ever-present. That's a process that's facilitated by the obligation to study, to study the laws, to recite them daily, to teach them to your children: these are instructions that are contained in Deuteronomy.

Moreover Deuteronomy 31 proclaims that every seventh year the Torah is to be read publicly, the entire thing. And Weinfeld argues that where many Ancient Near Eastern cultures direct the king to write the laws for himself, to read them, it's only in Israel--he's yet to find a parallel--it's only in Israel that the law is a manual for both the king and the people. It's to be proclaimed and read aloud to the people, on a regular basis, every seven years.

A further theme of Deuteronomy is the emphasis on love. Weinfeld points out that the Assyrian treaties stress the vassal's love for the crown prince, but there's never a reciprocal love by the crown prince for the vassal. And Deuteronomy differs in this respect. Deuteronomy emphasizes God's gracious and undeserved love of Israel, and that's expressed in his mighty acts on Israel's behalf. The Deuteronomist makes it clear that God's great love should awaken a reciprocal love on Israel's part, love of God. Love of God here really means loyalty. The word that is used is a word that stresses loyalty. Love and loyalty are mere abstractions, however, without some sort of vehicle for their expression; and the vehicle for their expression then is God's Torah, the sum total of God's teachings and instructions and laws and guidelines, which are supposed to ensure long life and prosperity in the land.

That idea is found in a very important passage known as the *Shema*. This is a passage that's really a central expression of the love of God in Israel, and it's been singled out as an essential part of the Jewish liturgy, at a very early, early stage, and continues to this day. It's so called because of the first word of the passage. It's in Deuteronomy 6, it begins in verse 4, and the first word is "hear," *Shema*.

Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

So love and loyalty to God is the foundation of the Torah but Torah is the fulfillment of this love and loyalty: studying it and observing it and teaching it and transmitting it.

Another key idea that occurs in Deuteronomy is the idea of Israel as the chosen people. We find it here for the first time. It's an expression of the particularity of Israel and its unique relationship with God, and that uniqueness is expressed by this term, *bachar*, which means "to elect" or "to choose." This is the first time we encounter this. Yahweh has chosen Israel in an act of freely bestowed grace and love to be his special property. Deuteronomy 10:14:

Mark, the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the Lord your God, the earth and all that is on it! Yet it was to your fathers that the Lord was drawn in His love for them, so that He chose you, their lineal descendents, from among all peoples--as is now the case.

This idea may be rooted in the Ancient Near Eastern political sphere in which sovereigns would single out vassals for the status of special property; and in fact the word used [for this special property] is a word we do find in Exodus.

But Deuteronomy contains statements of national pride, national exaltation, and unlike the Priestly materials which portray holiness as a future goal to be attained through the observance of God's Torah--you shall be holy to me by doing the following things--Deuteronomy speaks of Israel as holy now, and thus bound to the observance of God's Torah because of their holiness: you are a holy people to me, therefore you should do... So to put it--and this is perhaps to put it too crudely--for P, for the Priestly source, holiness is a goal to be attained through obedience to God's Torah. For Deuteronomy, holiness is a status to be lost through disobedience to God's Torah.

When we come back I just want to finish up with one or two last comments about a couple of key ideas or themes in Deuteronomy before we move on to the beginning of the Deuteronomistic history that starts in Joshua. This coming week you'll be having midterms as part of your section meeting and in addition at 6 p.m. tonight I'll be making the essay question available online and if it gets to 6:01 and there's nothing online, somebody call me real fast, okay? All right, good, thanks, and good luck with the exam.

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## **References**

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 12 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** I was talking last time about the concept of election or choice, God's choice of Israel, Israel as the chosen one, which occurs for the first time in the Book of Deuteronomy. And I was talking about the fact that for Deuteronomy the election of Israel, God's election of Israel means or entails the idea that Israel is a holy people, holy in the sense of separated to God--that root meaning of holiness which means to be separated from the common or the ordinary. So that separation entails separation from alien peoples and practices that are inconsistent with the worship of God. So for this reason, intermarriage with the Canaanites is prohibited in Deuteronomy. And, in fact, they are to be utterly destroyed. All alien practices are to be removed from the covenant community.

Now, given that there were probably no Canaanites at the time of Deuteronomy's composition, according to some scholars, these texts may be understood as a kind of internal polemic against those elements of Israelite society whose practices didn't conform to Deuteronomy's Yahweh-only policy, or Yahweh-only ideals. This is an idea we will come back to in a minute. I just want to throw it out here.

Separation entails also separation to God's service. That means, of course, the observance of his laws, especially the laws of purity, the rejection of pagan practices, and so on. So the privilege of having been chosen or singled out, of being a holy people to God entails obligations and responsibility.

At the same time, it's interesting that Deuteronomy seems to be aware of some of the dangers in this idea, the danger of a superiority complex, a moral danger involved in the notion of election. So Deuteronomy warns repeatedly: it is by no special virtue or merit that Israel was the one chosen. And Moses admonishes the Israelites not to suppose that their inheritance of the land of Canaan is due to their own powers, or on account of any righteousness or virtue that they possess. In fact, he says, far from it. Israel was chosen by Yahweh in an act of spontaneous love--it does not imply her perfection--an act of spontaneous love for the patriarchs. And the election was entirely God's initiative and is no cause for Israel to boast. So Deuteronomy 7, verses 6-8 read:

For you are a people consecrated [made holy] to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people. It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you --; indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; but it was because the Lord favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

So don't be tempted--Moses later warns the Israelites--don't be tempted to say to yourselves (this is in Deuteronomy 8:17), "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me," or again, to say in Deuteronomy 9:4, "The Lord has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues." On the contrary, he emphasizes, it is only because the wickedness of the Canaanites is so great that the Lord has to drive them from his land, and now he is giving you a chance. But it is conditional for you, just as it was for them. Don't fail him or he will drive you out just as he drove out the Canaanites. That's a theme in Deuteronomy. We are going to see in a moment how important that is, or in a few lectures, how important that idea is for the Deuteronomistic historian in general. But we will get there.

Another theme in the Book of Deuteronomy is the theme of providential concern, and that appears in Deuteronomy 8. God's providential love and care for Israel is expressed through various metaphors in the Bible. And the prophet Hosea, who seems to have very strong connections with the Book of Deuteronomy, the prophet Hosea will develop further this image of parent and child that occurs in Deuteronomy 8. So in a way, the language we were just referring to was really the language of husband and wife, you know, someone who simply loves someone, not because they are perfect, but that is their choice. They favor them. They love the person, and they make a bond with them. It does not imply anything about other people. It is simply [that] that is the person who has been the focus. So we have a lot of sort of love and

marriage imagery, husband and wife imagery, used for God and Israel, but we also have this parent and child imagery that appears. In Deuteronomy 32:10, the image is that of an eagle that bears its young on its wings:

He found him in a desert region,  
In an empty howling waste.  
He engirded him, watched over him,  
Guarded him as the pupil of his eye.  
Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings,  
Gliding down to his young,  
So did he spread his wings and take him,  
Bear him along on his pinions;  
The Lord alone did guide him.â€

It almost seems to play on the idea that when teaching its young to fly, the eagle will push them out of the nest, swoop under them, bear them up for awhile over and over until they get the idea. So God is repeatedly testing and correcting the Israelites until they are ready for the Promised Land.

So Deuteronomy's content, which are these farewell speeches and the death and the burial of Moses, are a fitting capstone to the Pentateuchal narrative. But at the same time, Deuteronomy really does not bring closure to this narrative, because at the end of Deuteronomy, the promises still are not fulfilled. The people are still outside the land. Some have suggested that this is quite purposeful. It points to an exilic date for the work's final composition: that is to say when it was finally redacted, the redactors were in exile, writing for a people living in exile. And the Deuteronomist wants to make it clear that it is fidelity to the Torah, rather than residence in the land that is critically important. But in any event, Deuteronomy is not simply the concluding book of the Pentateuch, or the story that began in Genesis; it's also the first part of a much larger, longer literary work, as I mentioned last time, a work that runs from Deuteronomy through to the end of 2 Kings. And we are going to consider today the program and the work of this so-called Deuteronomistic school.

But before we do that, I wanted to just make a few concluding remarks about source theory and the Pentateuch. We have talked about the Documentary Hypothesis. We have talked about the different sources that scholars believe they have been able to identify as comprising the five books of the Pentateuch. And one of the things I mentioned a couple of times are some of the debates that occur on the question of dating. There is a great deal of ideological baggage that is involved in the dating of the sources. One of the issues that I think is a real problem is the fact that the Priestly source, P, is so often misjudged and maligned. I hope that the little bit of time that we have spent on the Priestly materials gave you some appreciation of its transformation of older Israelite rituals and traditions into symbolic practices that would communicate basic convictions about morality, convictions about holiness. I hope it gave you a sense of its communal ethic as opposed to an individual morality, the idea that the actions of every individual have an impact on society as a whole.

But the anti-priest, anti-cult sentiment, of European Protestantism, is apparent in the history of biblical scholarship in the last few centuries. And it is apparent in that scholarship's negative assessment of the Priestly source of the Bible. So for Wellhausen, the Priestly source, which emphasizes cult and ritual--logically it had to represent a late degenerate stage in the evolution of Israelite religion, because priestly ritualistic cultic practices, these are degenerations. These are movements away from true spirit-filled religion in his view. So according to Wellhausen, the early period of ancient Israel must have been characterized by a free, more natural form of religion, an intimate relationship with God, unencumbered or unsullied by the legalistic cultic obsessions of priests and cult. He argued that in 586, with the destruction of Jerusalem and the people were taken into exile in Babylon, that was when, in Babylon, the priests were able to assume control, and they were able to play on the exiles' overwhelming feelings of guilt and failure. The priests were able to construct a new identity and religion that stressed the sinfulness of the people, and the need for ritual purity and ritual observance and legalism as the road back to God. And they were able to write themselves back into the narratives and stories of Israel's past. And this, according to Wellhausen, was a degeneration.

Well, this reconstruction of the evolution of Israelite history, Israelite religion, excuse me, is really driven more by theological prejudice than it is by historical evidence. And it stems from an obvious projection of the Protestant-Catholic tension onto Israelite history. It also is driven very much by a secessionist account of Judaism as being something that was moribund at the time of Jesus. Jesus came and revived this as a spirit-filled religion again, when it had decayed and withered and degenerated like a dead tree, as Wellhausen refers to it.

This isn't to say that all scholars who date P to the post-exilic period are motivated by the same problematic assumptions. That is certainly not the case. There are scholars of all stripes and allegiances who view P as late; and there is some very good objective evidence for dating parts of P to the post-exilic period, just as there is good objective evidence for dating parts of D and the other sources to the post-exilic period. So when it comes to dating the sources, certainly I would say all scholars agree that the Priestly materials reach their final form in the exile or post-exilic period. So that is the sixth century, right? (You are going to find out, we are going to return from exile in the 530s, o.k.?) So when we talk about the post-exilic period, we are talking about the period after the return. So the period of the exile is the sixth century, the bulk of the middle of the sixth century. So it certainly reached its final form in that period [correction: exilic to post-exilic periods; scholars vary on the details], as did Deuteronomy, and the Pentateuch probably generally.

Nevertheless, there are many data that suggest that the Priestly sources retain very early strata, just as D contains pre-exilic or early material. P espouses a communal ethic, and post-exilic priests are going to turn increasingly to an individual ethic. Many sections of P do not seem to assume a central sanctuary. Remember that the idea of the central sanctuary really took hold in 622, with Josiah and Josiah's reform. So it becomes a real watershed for us in dating texts: texts that are happy with the existence of shrines throughout the land of Israel are probably pre-Josiah, pre-622, pre-exilic. Texts that insist on a central sanctuary are probably Josiah's time or later. And there are many sections of P that don't seem to assume a central sanctuary. There are sections of P that do seem to assume a central sanctuary. More significantly, I think, P contains no universal ban on intermarriage. It does not employ its purity laws or language to mark an inseparable boundary between classes within Israel or between Israelites and gentile others. The use of purity and purity language to inscribe boundaries between Israel and other nations is very characteristic of the post-exilic period. We are going to see that when we get there. So it is very hard to understand P's silence in this regard, if it stems entirely from the post-exilic, priestly circles.

So I think that instead of charting an evolution or a degeneration--as I have over on the side of the board--an evolution or a degeneration from JE, the pure spirit-filled religion, to D, the humanitarian, ethical religion, to P, cultic obsessiveness and guilt-ridden legalism, as is done or implied in some classical source theory (some, not all), it may be better to see these three as really representing three distinct and roughly contemporaneous strands of ancient Israelite tradition and experience told from their own perspectives. These materials were transmitted and developed by different circles within Israelite society over centuries, and they crystallized at different times. JE has fragments that are quite old, but it probably reached its final form before the centralization of the sanctuary. It is still comfortable with the existence of many sacred places throughout the land, so probably before 622. Deuteronomy contains northern traditions from before the fall of Israel, which was in 722, but it was clearly finalized in the exile. There are many passages that make it clear that it's written from an exilic perspective [see note 1]. And the Priestly source, likewise, contains many, many older traditions, but reached its full and final form in the exilic or post-exilic period.

So each of these complex, multi-layered sources--in each one of them you can find different layers--each one possesses its own emphases, its own agenda, its own perspectives. Sometimes they complement one another. Sometimes they challenge and contradict one another, but they are not best seen as linear, as telling a neat, linear story about Israelite religion flowering and fading. Their diversity has not been flattened or homogenized by the final editor of the text. It has been preserved in a manner that stimulates reflection and debate.

So with those concluding remarks, we are going to move on now to the second major section of the Bible. We have been discussing the Torah, or Pentateuch, and now we are moving on to the section of the Bible that is referred to as the Prophets. This section of the Bible is divided into two parts we refer to as the "Former Prophets" and then the "Latter Prophets." The Former Prophets will concern us for the next few lectures. And the Former Prophets include the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. They read as a historical narrative.

This material is a theologically oriented account of Israel's history from the conquest of Canaan, or what is represented as the conquest of Canaan, to the destruction of the state by the Babylonians in 587-586 BCE. This material is therefore crucial background to reading the Latter Prophets. Now the Latter Prophets is a collection of books, each of which bears the name of the individual whose prophecies it purports to contain. These prophets delivered their oracles at critical junctures in Israel's history, in the nation's history, so their words are only going to make sense to us if we first understand the particular historical crises that they are addressing. And that historical narrative that runs from Joshua through 2 Kings provides that information. It tells us of the critical junctures in the nation's history, and that will help us then slot the different prophets in.

So the Former Prophets, or the historical books, like the books of the Bible that we have already studied, contain various older sources that have been put together by a later hand. We have an editor or a group of editors who reworked these older sources. They were oral traditions. Some of them were probably from royal archives and so on. And they wove them together into the form that we have now, and that is a process that is referred to as redaction or editing. The anonymous person or group or school that's responsible for the final composition, the final redaction of these books, would put the materials together by inserting verses and speeches that would frame the older sources and link them together, give them some sort of common uniting thread. The redactors' linking and framing passages and their revisions of the older sources exhibit certain common features. They harp on the same themes over and over again; they use some of the same language over and over again; they share certain assumptions. And those features and assumptions have a lot in common with the book of Deuteronomy, a lot in common with the book of Deuteronomy; and that is what led the German scholar, Martin Noth, to surmise that Deuteronomy and these historical books really form a unit, so that Deuteronomy not only looks back and finishes off the Pentateuchal narrative, it looks forward as the beginning of really the historical account that is to follow.

J, E and P really seem to come to an end here; there is some debate about this, but because the interpretive history that runs from Joshua to 2 Kings is based on ideals that are set out in the book of Deuteronomy, we refer to the person or the persons who redacted this whole unit as the Deuteronomistic historian, or the Deuteronomistic School. The whole unit, as a whole, was redacted after 622: that's clear. It assumes and insists upon the centralization of the cult. The last dated event that is mentioned in 2 Kings is something that occurred in 562. That was when King Jehoiachin was released from prison in Babylon, in 562. So the work was probably concluded shortly after that date: so in exile or towards the end of the exilic period. Martin Noth assumed that there was one editor. Other scholars have assumed that there were two, or even more, successive editions of this history because there are multiple perspectives that seem to be represented. But the last seems to be an exilic perspective, the perspective of someone sitting in exile and we will be returning to that in a future lecture.

Some of the books within this very large unit, or at least the traditions within this very large unit, are less influenced by Deuteronomy and its themes and its concerns. Some contain clearly pre-Deuteronomistic elements and materials, if you will. But I encourage you to read the excellent introduction to the Prophets, the section of the Bible "The Prophets" which was written by Marc Brettler in your *Jewish Study Bible*. I think it is an excellent introduction to the complexity of this material. The most salient feature of the Deuteronomistic School is the conviction that Israel's residence in the land is a function of its obedience or disobedience to the covenant with Yahweh. And that conviction is going to color its presentation, its evaluation and its interpretation of Israel's history and her kings from Joshua right through to 2 Kings. Yehezkel Kaufmann uses the term "historiosophy" which I have written up here, historiosophy, to describe this material. Where a historian might simply record events (as if that is such a simple thing to do, but let's go with that for a moment)--a historian might simply record events, however selectively or partially, might try to indicate cause and effect where possible; but a historiosophy is a more conscious philosophy of history. It's seeking to ascertain the meaning of events to draw larger philosophical, ideological conclusions from the events of history, and to point to the larger purpose or design of history, not to say just what happened, but to say why it happened and what it means for us today that it did happen. So the Deuteronomistic history is not simply a history of Israel until the destruction of Jerusalem, it is a historiosophy. It is making an argument and it's attempting to communicate the meaning and the significance of the events of that time, and it does so through a pattern, a literary pattern we will see, of reward and punishment. This is an important point, and as we begin to go through the material, we will be coming back to this. We will return to this idea.

There are certain key features of Deuteronomistic thought that are evident from Joshua through 2 Kings. One is the belief in the divine election of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city that is referred to in Deuteronomy when it says God will

choose a place to cause his name to dwell. In the Deuteronomistic books, that place is going to be Jerusalem. There is also a belief in the divine election of David as the king of Israel and his dynasty. Now, it's interesting because the other four books of the Pentateuch never mention a king. In Genesis through Numbers none of the legal materials say: when you have a king this is what he shall do. It is only the book of Deuteronomy that assumes or prepares for a monarchy and contains legislation for a king, and the things that he should do. So this, again, underscores the connection between Deuteronomy and the following books. Deuteronomy assumes a king. It is being written and redacted at a time when there is a king in Israel, there have been kings in Israel, and it is providing laws for the construction of an ideal monarchy. So David, the theme of David as the elected king of God, David also as the ideal king, is something else that is a theme of these books.

Another theme that we see in these books or feature of the Deuteronomistic School is the emphasis on what we call the Yahwist prophets -- prophets like Elijah and Elisha. These prophets are held up as heroes and champions of religious purity. They are completely against any kind of mixture of Yahweh worship with other elements, any kind of syncretism. The other thing we see in the Deuteronomistic material is a preference for Judah, the Southern Kingdom, as compared with a very negative presentation of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. The Northern Kingdom Israel is going to come in for very, very bad press at the hands of the Deuteronomistic writers, which shows that they probably favor or come from Judah. So the northern kings are going to be uniformly denigrated. They are going to be denigrated because they maintain cults that rival the central sanctuary of Jerusalem. And this is going to be what does them in. The other theme that we see throughout the Deuteronomistic material is the negative presentation of the Canaanites. But we will talk more about who these Canaanites were and how complicated, in fact, that presentation is.

Now, the books of Joshua and Judges that open the Deuteronomistic history, these books recount or relate the story of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelite tribes, and the early years of the settlement: that's in Judges. To gain an understanding of some of the issues involved, and the emergence of a tribal structure in the land, it's helpful to know something about the geography of Israel, which is why I have handed out for you a couple of different maps, but one that gives you physical features (and that is on the top). It has often been pointed out that in the past 4000 years more wars have been fought for the possession of the tiny strip of land known as Canaan, or the land of Israel, or Palestine, than have been fought for almost any other area in the world. And in the ancient world, the reason for this was that this very small rectangle--it's about 150 miles long and 70 miles wide, about the size of Rhode Island--this very small rectangle lies on the way to anywhere worth going in the Ancient Near East. You've got Egypt over here. You've got Asia Minor up here, and you've got Mesopotamia over here. Not a tremendous amount of inherent value in this strip of land, but it is important for where you could go by traveling through it. So you have three main trade routes that cross the country, and they were used by trading caravans that would carry gold and grain and spices and textiles and other goods between Egypt and the rest of the Fertile Crescent and up into Asia Minor.

So control of these international highways brought a great deal of wealth to the area, but the central location was a double-edged sword, because in times of peace it would bring prosperity, but, of course, in times of war the land was perpetually invaded as armies would crisscross the land going off to do battle with the great powers. So on their way to conquests in Egypt, or Asia Minor or Mesopotamia, armies would tramp through the land. And that explains the succession of rulers that have held the region: the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Greek Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Romans, and the list continues as we go on into the medieval and the modern periods.

Now, despite the fact that this is a very small piece of land, it boasts great geographical diversity. So there are three main geographical subdivisions. You can see them on your map, and they really run in strips from north to south. If you look at your map you will see first on the west side, you've got a low coastal plain. It is about 20 or 30 miles wide. It is the coastal plain, and that provides, or that is the main highway out of Egypt or down to Egypt. That area was controlled by Egypt at the purported time of the Exodus. Running north to south, next to that coastal plain, is a region of low mountains. These low mountains are cut by some valleys that sort of run east-west: you will see one there, the Valley of Jezreel, in particular; that was a particularly fertile valley. So the valleys that cut through the mountains are extremely fertile. The Plain of Megiddo also joins with the Valley of Jezreel. That is the most fertile part of the country, but it was also the site of many of the most bloody battles in Israel's history. Then next to that north-south central hill country, you've got also running north to south, what we call the Great Jordan Rift Valley. It goes the entire length of the country. And the Jordan River runs through this valley. It rises in the Sea of Galilee or the Kinneret in the north, and

then it flows about 65 miles, I believe, down to the Dead Sea. At the northern extreme of the Rift Valley, is Mount Hermon, which is the highest point. It is snow covered, Mount Hermon. And that is the highest point in Israel, it rises about 10,000 feet above sea level. The central mountain area, those are between 4000 and 10,000 feet above sea level. As you move from the central area over to Jerusalem--Jerusalem is about 2,500 feet above sea level--but then as you continue moving east towards the Rift Valley, that area is dramatically lower -- and you feel it as you travel the road there, just how quickly it drops, so that by the time you get to the Sea of Galilee you are 700 feet below sea level, and the Dead Sea is nearly 1300 feet below sea level. That is the lowest point on the earth's land surface--so this dramatic drop in just a very short geographical area. Up in the north, the river is surrounded by very lush vegetation on both sides, but there is no life 65 miles south down by the Dead Sea. This is because the water is 25% salts and minerals--although I hear they found some sort of bacteria or something there, so I guess I should not say anymore that there is no life--but essentially there is no life we would care about in the Dead Sea area. So it is a very desolate area. And tradition identifies this as the site of Sodom and Gomorrah. The area around the Sea is basically semi-desert. We call this the wilderness, the wilderness of Judea between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, the wilderness of Judah or Judea.

So within this relatively tiny area there are radically diverse regions, and this fact held important implications for Israel's history. Unity was difficult. Being somewhat isolated, the inhabitants of each region developed a distinctive economic and cultural character. You have the small settled farmer in the more fertile areas. You have semi-nomadic shepherds. You have city dwellers. You have merchants and traders who are handling the commerce on the trade routes and enjoying broader cultural contacts. So that's the geographical setting for what we are about to read in the Book of Joshua.

The structure of Joshua is really somewhat simple. We can really divide it into two major parts. The first 12 chapters form a unit that conveys the invasion and conquest. There are certain important elements. In chapter 2 we have Joshua sending out spies to scout out the land. In chapter 3 we have the account of crossing the Jordan River. In chapter 6 we have the Battle of Jericho. The story of the Battle of Jericho is really a composite of two accounts that have been woven together into a single narrative. So in one of them Joshua's warriors seem to march silently around the city seven times. In another, the priests carry the Ark around the city 13 times, so scholars think there are two different accounts here woven together. Chapter 8 describes the victory at a place called Ai, which is near Jericho. Chapter 9 tells the story of the Gibeonites who join the Israelites; they are a local group that seems to join them. And then 10 and 11 give us two further military campaigns.

Towards the end of 11, we have summary statements. In Joshua 10:40, we read: "So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb"--;that's the desert here to the south--;"and the lowland"--so you have the hill country, the low land--;"and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed" [RSV; see note 2]. Chapter 11 goes on to stress that Joshua completed the task that had been begun by Moses. In verse 15: "Just as the Lord had commanded His servant Moses, so Moses had charged Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses." And again, in verse 23, the insistence: "Thus Joshua conquered the whole country, just as the Lord had promised Moses; and Joshua assigned it to Israel to share according to their tribal divisions, and the land had rest from war." So Chapters 13 and 21 go on to describe the division of the land among the tribes and then we have some sort of tidying up at the end. The remaining chapters are appendices: 23 is a farewell address, and 24 is a renewal of the covenant at Shechem, which brings everything to a nice conclusion.

So the narrative in the first part of Joshua, Joshua 2 to 12, describes the invading Israelites as an organized confederation of 12 tribes whose conquest is accomplished in a few decisive battles under the military leadership of Joshua. And the disunited Canaanites put up little or no resistance: they're paralyzed by a fear that is sent by God. All of those who were conquered are put to the ban or the *herem*--that's the sacred devotion of objects and persons to God, which entailed killing them, so they were utterly destroyed. So the first half of the book of Joshua contains a streamlined, idealized account according to which the Israelites managed in a relatively short period to take the central hill country, confining the Philistines to a little strip here on the coastal plain. We will come to the Philistines in a minute.

The account of the conquest in Joshua 2 through 12, is concerned to express the basic idea that Israel's victories would not have been possible without Yahweh, without his wondrous help. It was Yahweh who divided the Jordan before them. It was Yahweh who broke down the walls of Jericho. It was Yahweh who put fear in the hearts of the Canaanites.

Yahweh was present at every battle. The Ark was a visible sign of his presence and it marched before them. And soon after the conquest representatives of all of the tribes of Israel are going to meet and make a solemn covenant at Shechem to be the people of Yahweh, to worship him alone. And according to the Book of Joshua, Israel's tribal structure assumed its classical form at this time.

This is a very neat picture of the rapid conquest of Canaan, but it's at odds with statements elsewhere in Joshua and in the book of Judges. For example, the victories in Chapters 2 through 10 are confined to a very small area, what would actually be the tribe of Benjamin basically, so just one small area. In Joshua 13:1: Joshua 13 opens with the statement that Joshua was old, advanced in years, and there was much of the land remaining to be possessed. In Joshua 10 (which is in the first part of Joshua--Joshua 10) verses 36-39 report the conquest of several cities in the south, including Hebron and Debir. But in Judges, we read that they had not been captured: they were captured later, after Joshua's death. Joshua 12:10 reports the defeat of the king of Jerusalem. In Judges 1:8 and 21, we read that the people of Judah did this (conquered the king of Jerusalem) and that despite that victory they failed to actually drive out the inhabitants, the Jebusites, who lived there. And it is not until King David, 200 years later that, in fact, we will read about the capture of Jerusalem. Judges 1 gives a long list of the places from which the Canaanites were not expelled.

Also archaeological evidence contradicts the picture in Joshua. In the Ancient Near East, destroyed cities tended to be leveled, and then a new city would just be built on top of the ruins, and you would have these slowly rising mounds--each one of those is called a *tell* (so you may have heard of Tell Dor?). These are mounds which represent the successive layers of destroyed and rebuilt cities. And excavations will reveal the destruction layers under the floor of new cities. So following the biblical account, we would expect evidence of a thirteenth century destruction of Canaanite cities. And archaeologists for a long time were convinced that they would find these destruction layers. But they were disappointed. They have found really no evidence of extensive conquest and destruction in thirteenth and twelfth century archaeological layers. Some of the sites that are said to be destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites weren't even occupied in this period, the late Bronze Age, beginning of the Iron Age; the Iron Age begins around 1200. Excavations at Jericho and Ai indicate that both of these towns were laid waste at least 200 years before the probable time of Joshua; so there weren't even any walls in Jericho at the time of Joshua. Of 20 identifiable sites that were said to be conquered or captured by Joshua and the next generations, only two show destruction layers for this time, Hazor and Beth-el. And yet interestingly enough, Hazor's capture described in Joshua is contradicted elsewhere in the Bible, because in Judges 4 and 5, it is still a Canaanite city. It is said there that it is still a Canaanite city and Joshua failed to take it.

So the conclusion one can draw from all of this is that Joshua 2 through 12 is a kind of ideological construction, the significance and the purpose of which we will come back to in a moment. But clearly the formation of the nation state, Israel, was much more complicated than the picture that's presented in Joshua 2 through 12. Scholars have proposed three possible models to explain the formation of Israel. The first is an immigration model. This was first posed by German scholars. Since the main Canaanite cities that existed in the land at that time were fortified or walled cities down on the plains, the Israelites, it's thought according to this model, would have entered and they would have occupied the very sparsely populated central highlands. They would slowly have begun to take control of the plains coming down from the highlands. Well, we do know that at the end of the late Bronze Age, beginning of the Iron Age, around 1200, this was a time of great upheaval throughout the Mediterranean world. We have the collapse of Mycenaean civilization. We have the Trojan Wars. The Hittites are invading Asia Minor, modern day Turkey to the north. And these upheavals are leading to mass migrations, migrations of people. Many are sailing from mainland Greece and from the Greek Islands, and they are flooding this area, the coasts of Phoenicia, the coasts of Canaan and Egypt. And these people are spoken about in a lot of our ancient sources. They are referred to as "peoples of the sea," coming in from the sea, from islands and coastal areas of the northeastern Mediterranean. One of these peoples of the sea, one of these groups, inhabited an area here: Perasta or Pelasta. The word "Palestine" comes from this, Perasta, Palesta or Philistines. It is all the same root. And so a group if these sea peoples comes in and occupies this area. They will be the Philistines, the area that is now the Gaza Strip. And they found the five Philistine cities that you will hear about increasingly in the book of Judges: Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ashdod and Ekron.

The idea of the immigration model is that Hebrew settlement would have probably occurred at about the same time in the latter part of the thirteenth century. The Hebrews could take advantage of all of these upheavals and the weakened hold of Egypt. Remember Egypt had control of this area but their grasp was weakening with the flood of people coming in from the sea and other migrations. Their hold was weakening and the Hebrews would have been able to take

advantage of that and enter in and occupy areas in the central highlands. The problem with the immigration model, again, is the archaeological record. Archaeologists have, indeed, found several sites in the central hill country -- which is pretty exciting--and they were clearly newly established in the thirteenth, twelfth, eleventh centuries. So clearly something new was happening in the central highlands at this time. They extend throughout the land, but mostly the central highlands. And these are thought to be Israelite, especially because they appear in places that the Bible identifies as strongholds of Israel. Remember also, you have the Merneptah stele of 1204, in which the Egyptian pharaoh boasts that he managed to wipe out Israel. It is obviously a hyperbolic boast, but the point is it shows that there was an identifiable entity, Israel in Canaan, by 1204.

These new thirteenth century settlements, however, are in their material culture, that is to say their pots and their jars and their houses, entirely Canaanite. The inhabitants seem to have been peasant farmers, like other Canaanites. One interesting difference is the absence of any pig bones, which is kind of interesting. But in any event, this suggests that these settlements were established peacefully, not by a group coming in and conquering. Maybe they emerged from within, rather than being established by peoples immigrating from without.

So there are two other models, then, models different from the immigration model, two other models for understanding the formation of Israel, that build on this archaeological evidence. The second model is what we call the revolt model. The revolt model proposes that Israel began really as a social revolution within Canaan. We do have a set of letters. These are letters that date from the fourteenth century BCE. They were written by people in Canaan to the Pharaoh in Egypt--remember the Pharaoh still has control over Canaan at this time. And in these letters there are lots of complaints about groups that are causing turmoil and upset in Canaan. They are challenging Egypt's rule. And these people are called Habiru, or Abiru. They were not an ethnic group so much as a marginal social group of people in revolt, if you will. Some have suggested that Israelites escaping from Egypt may have joined with these disaffected Canaanites in revolt, known as Habiru, these trouble makers, to establish their own settlements and to worship a liberator god, Yahweh, rather than follow the rule of Pharaoh.

A final model, then, is a model of gradual emergence, which simply holds that Israelites were basically Canaanites who had developed a separate identity and settled increasingly in the central highlands. They withdrew and settled in this area. The theory doesn't try to explain why they separated. We don't know. Perhaps it was disaffection. Perhaps they were pushed out by the invading sea peoples. And maybe it was something else. But they withdrew for some reason. And how and why they took up the worship of Yahweh or the cult of Yahweh isn't really clear; but it seems to have been what marked them as distinct from other Canaanites. The Yahweh cult may have been introduced by people escaping slavery from Egypt. Most scholars see the Exodus story as evidence for the presence of some escaped slaves among this community. So the important thing is that the Hebrews at this stage were probably not a united people. Various elements went into the final mix that would emerge as the nation Israel: local Canaanites who, for some reason, withdrew and established their own settlements, with a continuous material culture, and established agricultural lifestyle--you have them. You have escaping slaves from Egypt. And remember, we do have some evidence of destruction from outside, so there could also have been some foreigners coming in and destroying and settling. It even seems that some local foreigners were admitted to the community. We read of Midianites who covenant into the community [see note 3]. We read of Kenites who covenant into the community. And archaeology supports this picture of merging of peoples, a picture of the merging of peoples, rather than conquest or even large-scale immigration, because the new settlements in this period show such continuity with the past, not a complete break, not the initiation of something radically new. And, again, some of the elements within this group may have brought with them the story of a miraculous escape from Egypt. They may have understood this to be the work of Yahweh, a god known probably from southern regions. And so the mixed group that would join together to become Israel accepted Yahweh, though perhaps not exclusively, and adopted the national story of the Exodus as its own at some point.

The Hebrew tribes, themselves, were likely still in the process of formation. But the tribal structure of Israelite society that would develop would be strengthened by the natural division of the land into these separate geographical areas: that only reinforced the tribalization of society. And these local tribes probably did assimilate elements of the local population. We've really seen already the ethnic mix of various elements reflected in religious imagery and institutions. We've seen that Yahweh is represented in terms reminiscent of the tent dweller, El, the god of the semi-nomadic tent-dwelling Hebrews and their patriarchs, and certainly a god of the Canaanite pantheon. We have seen that Yahweh is also represented in terms reminiscent of Baal of the Canaanite pantheon, the God of the settled Canaanite population. In fact,

in the book of Judges, you will read of a temple to Israel's God, the God of the Covenant, and that temple is called the Temple to the God of the Covenant or Baal Berit. The word "*berit*" means covenant. It is referred to as Baal Berit; it's referred to as El Berit or Baal El Berit; and this is in reference to Yahweh. These terms are all used to describe the God of the Covenant. So in short, we really may hypothesize a union of cultural, religious and ethnic elements: local Canaanite agriculturists, semi-nomadic Hebrews perhaps, of the Exodus, escaped slaves, perhaps Habiru/Abiru, a disaffected group that is in revolt. All of these would come together to produce what would be a new political and religious reality called Israel.

If so, why does the book of Joshua provide such a different account, one of outside conquest by means of a war led by the hosts of the Lord? Because in this account military skill is much less important than ritual preparation and purity. The Israelites march around Jericho for six days with seven priests carrying seven horns and the Ark of the Covenant, and then with a blast and a shout the walls tumble. The conquest is represented as a miraculous victory by God. That's emphasized in Joshua 24:12. It was God, not the sword or the bow, that drove out the enemy. And why the claim of the utter destruction of the Canaanites when evidence points to close Canaanite origins? This practice, which I mentioned before and is known as *herem* or the ban, is not unique to Israel. I know some of you have studied it in sections: you looked at the inscription of King Mesha, King Mesha of Moab. There is a very important, famous inscription from the ninth century BCE, written by King Mesha of Moab Moab is to the southeast of the Dead Sea, so King Mesha of Moab. And in the inscription he writes, he boasts: "And the god Chemosh said to me, go, take Nebo from Israel. So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all 7000 men, boys, women and girls and maid servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for the god Ashtar Chemosh", referring to *herem*. It is likely that such claims are hyperbolic in Moab, and it is likely they were hyperbolic in Israel. But that does not lessen the shock value for a modern reader, even though war in our time is no less savage and no less brutal.

But the important question here is why a biblical writer or editor would want to insist that the Canaanites were to be completely destroyed. I think assertions of national identity and independence are often predicated on differentiation from others. If the Israelites were, in fact, basically Canaanites, who had withdrawn from the larger collective, who insisted on the overlordship of Yahweh, then Canaanites who did not join them in this were a special threat to the new Yahwism. This same dynamic of intense sibling rivalry appears again in the first few centuries of the Common Era, when some Jews separated from others and in differentiating themselves and creating their own identity as Christians, felt it necessary to engage in devastatingly vituperative and violent rhetoric against their fellow Jews. The interesting thing, however, is that we must not ignore another voice that's in the biblical text, and it is a voice that adds a level of complexity to this picture. Because alongside the idealized portrayal of the Israelite conquest in the first half of the book of Joshua, alongside the call for the destruction of all Canaanites, we find interesting tales of alliances and incorporation of various Canaanite groups. Indeed, who was one the heroines of the Battle of Jericho, if not a Canaanite woman, a prostitute no less, named Rahab. She declares her faith in Yahweh and she delivers the city into Joshua's hands. The biblical writer saw fit to preserve and include this account of a heroic Canaanite prostitute. Another Canaanite group, the Gibeonites, trick the Israelites into making a covenant with them, and it is a covenant the Israelites then feel bound to observe.

Michael Coogan has described such stories as etiological tales. They are attempts to explain the fact that there are lots of Canaanite groups included in Israel; and we need to understand and explain that reality as much as we are conveying an ideological account in which all Canaanites are obliterated or destroyed. At the very least, these stories raise questions about the biblical portrait or portrayal of invasion and conquest. And at most, they illustrate the biblical writers' taste for literary subversion yet again, something we will see over and over.

The imperative of preserving a distinct identity--based on giving up the worship of other gods or older gods and observing all that is written in the law of Moses--is reiterated in Joshua's farewell address in Joshua 23, and in the covenant renewal ceremony in 24. And the central idea is that there is one proper response to God's mighty acts on behalf of Israel, and that is resolute observance of the book of the Torah of Moses, without intermingling with the peoples that remain. So in Joshua 23:7-8: "Do not utter the names of their gods or swear by them; do not serve them or bow down to them, but hold fast to the Lord your God as you have done this day." And verses 11 to 13:

For you own sakes, therefore, be most mindful to love the Lord your God. For should you turn away and attach yourselves to the remnant of these nations--to those that are left among you--and intermarry with

them, you joining them and they joining you, know for certain that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out before you; they shall become a snare and a trap for you, a scourge to your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you.

In 24, the Israelites are assembled at Shechem to renew the covenant, and Joshua recounts God's mighty deeds on behalf of Israel and exhorts them to choose whom they will serve: Yahweh, who has done all of this for them so undeservedly, or the gods of those whose lands they are settling in. And the people are warned of God's jealousy. He demands exclusive loyalty. He will not tolerate any deviation in the service of alien gods. The ban on intermarriage here is quite specific. It is directed against Canaanites only, not all non-Israelites, for a very specific reason: religious purity. Marriage with Canaanites, the people closest to you, specifically, will lead to the worship of that spouse's god, and Israel is to show undivided loyalty to God, or God will take the gift of the land from her as he did the Canaanites.

One last remark for you to think about. Consider the position of the Israelites in the sixth century, the time of the final editing of the Deuteronomistic history. The Israelites are sitting in exile in Babylon. They are trying to make sense of the tragedy that has befallen them, the loss of their land. Consider how a text like Joshua 23 and Joshua 24 would go a long way towards explaining their fate while retaining faith in Yahweh. We're going to return to this when we reach the conclusion of the Deuteronomistic history in 2 Kings.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. Deuteronomy's placement as the capstone to the Pentateuch likely occurred in the post-exilic period.
2. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
3. According to the biblical narrative, Moses marries a Midianite woman. His father-in-law is instrumental in the establishment of a judicial system. Subsequent relations with the Midianites oscillate between peaceful co-existence and open hostility and conflict.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 13 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** One thing that kept cropping up [in the mid-term exam], and it is something that crops up every time I teach this course, and I should always say something about it preemptively, is just a terminological issue. Israelites are not Israelis. The word "Israeli," term "Israeli," refers to a citizen of the modern state of Israel. So there are no Israelis before the year 1948. Okay. And we use Israelite to refer to the ancient inhabitants of the ancient kingdom of Israel. So that is an important distinction. I know you hear "Israelis" and so that is just a term that people thought would apply to anyone who inhabited a place called Israel. But Israeli and Israelite are used precisely in order to make that distinction between the ancient and the modern period. Okay. So we are talking about Israelites.

And while we are on the subject, we are not talking about Jews yet, either. We cannot really use the term "Jew." It is not historically accurate for the period that we have been dealing with in the Bible. When we get towards the very end of the biblical period, we'll see that when Persia conquers and reconstitutes this area, or designates as a province, this area as Yehud (so the Persians are going to be the ones to create a province called Yehud in this area, including Jerusalem) they will allow the Israelites who are in exile to go back and live there, and they will become Yehudites. And this is going to be where the word Jew comes from. But that is not going to be historically accurate before the end of the sixth century. And even then it is still a technical term having to do with living in the Province of Yehud. It is not an ethnic term. The word "Yehud" or "Jew" does not become an ethnic term for quite some time. So "Israelites" is the correct term for the group that we are dealing with here. Hebrew is not bad, either, it basically is a linguistic term that refers to people who speak Hebrew. And so the Hebrews--it is something of a social-ethnic term, but based mainly on the linguistic feature of speaking Hebrew. Okay. So no Israelis, only Israelites.

All right. We were reaching the end of Joshua, and we are going to be moving on to Judges today. And the Bible describes the early Israelite socio-political unit as the tribe. And this is what is going to be featured in the last part of the Book of Joshua. We are going to see that tribes are territorial units. A tribe is attached to a territory. Within the tribe you have clan elders, and the clan elders are the ones who dispense justice. They make decisions regarding the general welfare of the tribe. So the second half of the Book of Joshua--so the first half recounts the conquest, and then the second half recounts the division of the land among the 12 tribes, who, it is claimed, were descended from the 12 sons of Jacob. We have a couple of different lists of the tribes in the Bible, so if you take a look some time, you might want to compare the list that is in Genesis 29 or 30. It is pretty much the same list that is in Genesis 49. These are in [a list of] blessings. Patriarchs will very often give blessings of all their children, so you look at the names of the children and you will see the list of twelve. You have the six sons of Leah. You have the four sons of the two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, and the two sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. And that is probably the oldest list that we have. But if you compare it to Numbers 26 and the list that is in Joshua with the distribution of the land, you will see that Levi or Levi is not included, presumably because the Levites, who were to function as a priestly class in Israel, they have no land allotment. They are supported through the cultic practices and the perquisites that come from the sacrifices. And so instead of the Levites, we find that there are tribes named for the two sons of Joseph. So there is no Joseph tribe per se. Joseph's two sons are Ephraim and Manasseh, and this is how we then reach the Number 12. So there is no Levi in the later lists, but the Joseph tribes have been split into Ephraim and Manasseh, if you will, who are said to be the two sons of Joseph.

So the consensus is, the scholarly consensus is, that what you have in Canaan is an alliance of tribes, perhaps not precisely twelve, you know. At different times there might have been a different number and different groups that came together at different times. But you have these tribes who are worshiping Yahweh, perhaps not exclusively as we have seen. And they have some loose obligations of mutual defense in these different alliances. The Book of Joshua presents this very idealized portrait of these twelve tribes who are preexistent. They come into the Land of Canaan already formed basically as twelve tribes. They are united with one another by their covenant with Yahweh, and they conquer the land in concert. But there are other elements of the biblical narrative, as we have already begun to talk about, and will continue to talk about today as we move into Judges, which really suggest there was much more sporadic cooperation among the tribes. You never have more than one or two really acting in concert until the very end of the Book of Judges. And so this suggests that there really was no super-tribal government or coordination at this early stage.

The Ark is said to have circulated among the different tribal territories, it did not rest permanently in the territory of one tribe until somewhat late in the period--it comes to rest at a place called Shiloh. Shiloh. And it seems that only in extraordinary cases would you have the tribes acting together, perhaps by decision of the tribal elders. But superimposed upon the authority of the elders is the authority of certain inspired individuals. And these are known as judges, and it is the exploits of these individuals that are recorded in the Book of Judges. And we will turn to the Book of Judges now.

The Book of Judges is set in that transitional period between the death of Joshua and the establishment of a monarchic system. It is about a 200-year period, from about 1200 to 1000 or so. It is an imaginative and embellished reconstruction of that period of transition. We'll also see it is a very ideologically laden reconstruction. So the stories depict local tribal skirmishes, rather than confrontations between nations. You have pretty much skirmishes with groups around the country. And that makes a lot of sense for this 200-year period, when Canaan is making a transition. A transition from city-states in the Bronze Age to the emerging nation of what will be Israel, next to it Philistia, on the east side, Aram. So we have--nations are going to be coming into being by the end of this period, but there is this 200-year transitional period before you get the formation of these independent states.

Like Joshua, the Book of Judges consists of various sources that were fused together in a Deuteronomistic framework. I will come back to that. In fact, it is really a collection of individual stories that center on local heroes, several of whom are, interestingly enough, socially marginal. These are pretty scrappy characters. You've got the illegitimate son of a prostitute. You've got a bandit. You've got very interesting, colorful, and as I say, socially marginal people. And these stories have a real folkloristic flavor to them. They're full of drama and a lot of local color, local references to places and customs and so on.

So if you were to list the stories of the various judges, the major judges--we have six major and six minor judges; the minor judge is just simply a reference to the fact that they judged for a certain [short] period of time. So there are 12 listed in all, I believe) and there are six major judges for [each of] whom there is a lengthy story, beginning with Ehud in chapter 3. It is a very funny story. Ehud leads the Israelites against the Moabites; a lot of sort of bathroom humor in that one. In chapters 4 and 5, you have Deborah, who helps the Israelites in battle against certain Canaanite groups. You have three chapters, four chapters, chapters 6-9, recording the adventures of Gideon. Gideon fights against the Midianites. Gideon is interesting. There are signs in his story that he is divinely chosen. There is some evidence of the annunciation of his birth, and some signal that he is divinely chosen. Then in 11 and into a little bit of chapter 12, you have the story of Yiftah or Jephthah, who fights against the Ammonites--very interesting and tragic story of his daughter, which echoes similar sorts of stories in Greek legend. You also have in chapters 13-16, Samson who, of course, fights against the Philistines. Samson is somewhat atypical. He also has a tremendous and fatal weakness for foreign women, and that is a strong theme throughout the Samson stories. We will come back to some of that. Then towards the end: you have some interesting chapters at the end. 17 and 18 tell the story of Micah or Micah, and his idolatrous shrine. And then finally, the quite horrifying and gruesome tale, beginning in chapter 19, going on through 20 and 21-- the story of the Levite's concubine and the civil war. We will come back and talk about some of these in a little more detail. But that is just to give you a sense of the different units that are in the story, that are in the book. And these stories have then been embedded in a Deuteronomistic framework. This framework provides the editor's view and pronouncement on and judgment of the period.

Some of the stories seem to have been left pretty much intact themselves. There isn't in many cases, a lot of interference inside the story, only a few interpolations that express the editor's theology of history. But the editor's theology of history is best seen in the preface to the book, which is why I sort of stuck these over to the side, this preface that frames the book. And chapter 1 gives a detailed summary of the situation at the end of Joshua's conquest--taking stock, listing the extensive areas that Joshua had failed to take from the Canaanites, despite the impression that is given by the Book of Joshua (certainly the first part of it) that they did everything they were supposed to have done and fulfilled the commandments to Moses and so on. But here, we get a list of all the places they failed to take from the Canaanites, starting in Judah and moving northward. They tend to always start in the southern area, in Judah, and then list things in a northward direction. Then in Judges 2:1-5, an angel appears before Joshua's death, and the angel recounts God's redemption of the Israelites from Egypt and then quotes God as follows: "I will never break my covenant with you. And you, for your part, must make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you must tear down their altars." That is a phrase that is found in Deuteronomy 12: again, one of those phrases that makes us link Deuteronomy with all of these subsequent books, and we refer to it all as a school, the Deuteronomistic School, because we have these phrases from

Deuteronomy that will be peppered throughout the rest of these books. God will be faithful to his covenant, in other words. But it is a two-way street. And if Israel does not do her part, she will be punished. The editor is setting us up with that expectation before we even begin to read an account of what happens. The angel then relates that Israel has already not been obedient, so God has resolved--this is a *fait accompli* at this point--God has resolved that He will no longer drive the Canaanites out before the Israelites. He will leave them as a snare and a trap to test their resolve and their loyalty. So it is a very far cry from the idealized portrait that we had in the first half of the Book of Joshua.

So that opening announcement listing all of the ways in which they had failed to take the land, and the visit by the angel who tells them: you have already failed in so many ways, and so God is not even going to help you to rout the Canaanites any longer--that is followed then in a section from chapter 2:11 through chapter 3:6. And this is a kind of prospective summary, a summary before the fact of the nation's troubles. And this is a passage that expresses the editor's judgment on the nation of this period. "Another generation arose after them, which had not experienced [the deliverance of] the Lord, or the deeds that He had wrought for Israel. And the Israelites did what was offensive to the Lord," literally what was evil in the eyes of the lord. An important phrase: what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

...They followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples around them, and bowed down to them; they provoked the Lord...Then the Lord was incensed at Israel, and He handed them over to foes who plundered them...as the Lord had declared and as the Lord had sworn to them; and they were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up leaders [see note 1] who delivered them from those who plundered them. But they did not heed their leaders either; they went astray after other gods and bowed down to them...

I am sort of skipping, right? I am condensing all of this.

...When the Lord raised up leaders for them, the Lord would be with the leader and would save them from their enemies during the leader's lifetime; for the Lord would be moved to pity by their moanings because of those who oppressed and crushed them. But when the leader died, they would again act basely, even more than the preceding generation--following other gods, worshiping them, and bowing down to them; they omitted none of their practices and stubborn ways.

So in short, it is the view of the Deuteronomistic historian expressed here in Judges, that Israel's crises are caused by her infidelity to Yahweh, through the worship of Canaanite gods, and for this sin, God sells the Israelites to their enemies and then, moved to pity when they cry out under the oppression, He raises leaders to deliver Israel. This pattern of sin, punishment, repentance and deliverance through leaders is the recurring pattern throughout the book. It punctuates the transition from each of these leaders that God will raise up. So it is this recurring pattern. This Deuteronomistic perspective, as well as Deuteronomistic ideology, generally, isn't always apparent within the individual stories themselves, as I stressed. Some of them seem to be pre-Deuteronomistic folktales about the exploits of these local heroes. They were popular stories. So Gideon, we'll see, builds an altar despite the fact that we know Deuteronomy insisted on centralized worship and prohibited outlying altars or multiple altars. He is also known, his other name, if you will, is Jerubbaal. It is a name that is made with Baal, meaning Baal will strive, or Baal will contend. So this is an alternate name for Gideon. He erects an idol. The people of Shechem, where he is--after his death they continue to worship Baal Berit, the Baal of the covenant, which is an interesting sort of merger of Baalism and covenantal religion. So you have a lot of these elements that presumably the Deuteronomist would disapprove.

The story of Samson also appears to be largely pre-Deuteronomistic. It was again probably a very popular, entertaining folktale about a legendary strong man. You know, he can lift up the gates of the city. He can tie the tails of 300 foxes with torches and so on. But this great strong man is undone by his one weakness, which is a weakness for foreign women, particularly Philistine women (at least we think Delilah was Philistine). And that proves to be his downfall. So you can see in a way how these stories were fodder for the Deuteronomistic editor. The Deuteronomistic editor insists that foreign gods often accessed through marriage to foreign women, exercised a fatal attraction for Israel. And it was

the inability to resist the snare of idolatry that would ultimately lead to ruin. You have to remember that the final editing of this narrative history is happening in exile. Right? It is happening for people for whom all of this is ultimately leading towards a tragedy.

All right. So the leaders who are raised by God are called judges. That is the term that is used in other Semitic texts to refer to leaders in the second millennium, sometimes human and sometimes divine. So the term is used here in the biblical text. It refers always to a human leader, and one who exercises many different powers or functions, not merely judicial. We think of the word "judge" really in a judicial context, but that was not the extent of the function of the judge. The Israelite judge was actually primarily a military leader, commissioned with a specific task, and only in times of national crisis. The judge had a charismatic quality, which in several cases is expressed by the phrase, "the spirit of the Lord came upon him." God would raise up the judge to deliver the people from a specific crisis. The judge might muster troops from two tribes, or three tribes, sometimes only a clan or two, which suggests that there was no real national entity at this particular time. We never see more than one or two tribes acting together or some clans of a tribe. But the institution of judges never created fixed political forms. And each judge differed from the last in background, in class, and even gender. We do have one female judge, Deborah, who did exercise judicial functions evidently, according to the text. The judges are not chosen necessarily for their virtue. Many of them seem to fall into the literary type of the trickster, a bit like Jacob. Some of them. They are crafty, tricky types. Gideon is explicitly chosen for his weakness, and not because of his strength. It turns out that he is quite a ruthless fighter, and he is clearly not a devout Yahwist. Jephthah is an outlaw. Samson is hardly a moral exemplar. So these are not meant to be idealized heroes, but popular heroes.

There is a very interesting tension in the Book of Judges that will continue beyond into the Book of Samuel, as well, but a tension regarding kingship. The individual stories seem to suggest a very deep-seated distrust of kingship. So in Judges 8, the people ask one of the judges, Gideon at that time, to become king. And he responds this way: "I shall not rule over you, nor shall my sons rule over you. Yahweh shall rule over you" [Professor Hayes's translation]. That is 8:23. And indeed, the short reign of Gideon's ruthless son Abimelekh, which means "my father is king" ironically, is a complete disaster. The position of judge is temporary. God was viewed as the permanent king in Israel. The temporary authority of the judge derived from the kingship of God. So the judge's position could not become absolute or permanent. That would be a rejection of God's leadership. The Book of Judges seems to be squarely against the notion of kingship in Israel. But the book as a whole seems to suggest a certain progression towards kingship, and this emerges from some of the editorial elements and interpolations.

The final chapters of Judges document Israel's slow slide into disorder and ultimately into civil war. Chapter 18 opens with an ominous statement or phrase that recurs throughout the final chapters. "In those days, there was no king in Israel." That happens again in chapter 19:1, chapter 21:25. "And in addition it is said that everyone did as he pleased, or everyone did what was right in his own eyes." It is in chapter 21:25. By the end of the book, the Israelites find themselves spiraling out of control in an orgy of violence and rape, and in the final chapter, all out civil war. A Levite's concubine is raped by a gang, murdered by the tribe of Benjamin. And this is an atrocity that is to be avenged by all the other tribes. The Levite takes her body, cuts it into 12 parts, sends a part to each of the tribes as a call to war, to join together in a war of extermination against Benjamin. And many scholars have observed that it is ironic and tragic that the one time the tribes do all act in concert is against one of their own. This is the only time all 12 tribes, or the other 11 tribes, come out against a common enemy and it is the tribe of Benjamin. At a certain point, however, they realize with some regret that the tribe of Benjamin is near extinction. This is not a good thing, so the other tribes then arrange to kidnap women from Shiloh as mates for the remaining Benjaminites. So as a final comment on this horrible symphony of barbarity, of rape, murder, civil war, kidnapping, forced marriage, the Deuteronomistic historian concludes the Book of Judges with this refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel, and every man did as he pleased." It is a wonderfully polysemic phrase, no king in Israel, no human king, perhaps also given their behavior no divine king. So again I see that as sort of an ominous refrain throughout. There was no king in Israel. Every man is doing as he pleases, and look at the situation we have reached by the end of the Book of Judges.

The Deuteronomist's explanation for the moral and social bankruptcy of Israel at the end of the period of the judges at the dawn, or on the eve, of the monarchy, is Israel's continued infidelity. And the prescription for this situation at some level in the text is a king. This sits uneasily with an anti-monarchic trend in some of these stories. But according to the Deuteronomistic historian, the institutional structure of a kingdom of God--right, a sort of "theocracy" is how a later Jewish historian would describe this period--a kingdom in which God is the king and the community is led by inspired

judges in times of crisis--that structure, that institutional structure failed to establish stability, a stable continuous government. It failed to provide leadership against Israel's enemies within and without. You have Ammon and Moab to the east. You have the Philistines to the west, and they soon manage to subjugate the entire land. So the tribes seem to be conscious of the need for a centralized authority, a strong central authority; and the demand for a king arises.

In their search for a new political order, the people turn to the prophet Samuel. Samuel is the last in a line of prophet judges, and they ask him to anoint a king for them. So we are moving now into the Book of Samuel. And the Book of Samuel deals with the transition from the period of the judges to the period of the monarchy. In the first Book of Samuel, you have the opening chapters that record the birth and career of Israel's last judge, Samuel. So that is chapters 1-4. The next few chapters through chapter 7 deal with the Philistine crisis, and at this time the Ark of the Covenant itself is captured and taken into Philistine territory. Chapters 8-15 give us a story of Samuel and Saul, who will be Israel's first king. And then the last half of the book, 16 on to 31, are going to give us the story of Saul and David.

So 1 Samuel opens with the story of Samuel's birth to Hannah, and her dedication of her son to the service of God at Shiloh, at the sanctuary at Shiloh. So Shiloh appears to have been the most important shrine in the period before the monarchy. The prophet, Jeremiah, is going to refer to Shiloh as the place where God first made his name to dwell. You remember the Deuteronomist is always speaking about centralization around a place where God will cause his name to dwell. At first that was Shiloh. It has been noted that after the birth of Samuel, the text conveys a sense of three crises, and I have listed them on the far side of the board over there.

The first crisis is a religious crisis. The priest of the time, Eli--he is also described as a judge, but perhaps that is just to fit him literarily into the pattern of leadership that predominates in this section of the Bible--he is said to be aging, and his sons are quite corrupt. As a result, the text says, "The word of Yahweh is rare in those days." So there is a crisis in religious leadership. There is also a crisis in political leadership, or political succession to some degree. Judges 2 tells us that Eli's two sons are clearly not worthy. They dishonor the sacrifices, and according to one reading they lie with the women at the door of the shrine. God says he will cut off the power of Eli's house. His two sons will die in one day. And God will find and raise up a faithful priest. But in the meantime, no leader is apparent. So we have a crisis in succession, if you will. The third crisis is a military crisis. In Judges 4-7, the Israelites suffer a defeat at the hands of the Philistines. I'm sorry, in 1 Samuel! They suffer defeat at the hands of the Philistines. The Ark is captured. Eli's two sons are killed and the news of all of this kills Eli, as well. So when we first meet Samuel we wonder: is he going to be the answer to all of these crises, these problems? Chapter 3 says that the word of God comes to Israel through Samuel. In contrast to the statement that the word of God was rare in those days, we hear that the word of God is now coming to Israel through Samuel. It raises some hope. In chapter 7, Samuel exhorts the people to stop serving alien gods and Ashteroth and to serve God, and only then will God deliver them. So the people do this, and Samuel leads them. He employs--his military tactics mostly include prayer and confession and sacrifice, but he manages to lead them to victory over the Philistines. God thunders and the Philistines flee in fear.

So Samuel seems to be combining in one person several functions. He is a priest. He is in the shrine. He offers sacrifices. He builds altars. He is also a seer and a prophet. He receives the word of the Lord and, like a prophet, he will be anointing kings. And he is also a judge in the sense that he leads Israel to military victory. But he also travels a circuit acting as a judge in a judicial sense--it says throughout Israel, but really most of the places we hear about are within the confines of Benjamin. So this story seems to mostly be focused in the southern region in the tribe of Benjamin. But even he is unable to provide Israel with the kind of leadership that the text suggests is required. The Philistine threat is going to reemerge, and the crisis of succession will remain, obviously. And so the representatives of the twelve tribes come together to Samuel to ask for a king. Samuel is therefore a kind of a transition figure between Israel, the semi-democratic confederation, and Israel, the nation and monarchy. It is going to be a huge transformation, as we will see. But he is going to be the one to bridge the gap to this new kind of leadership.

Now as in Judges, the historical account that we have in 1 Samuel contains many contradictions, many duplicates, so scholars take these as evidence of the existence of various conflicting sources and traditions that have been put together in a larger framework. So for example, we have three different accounts of the choice of Saul as king. We have two accounts of his being rejected ultimately by God. We have different accounts of how David came to know Saul and how David entered Saul's service. We have more than one account of David's escape into Philistine territory, of his sparing Saul's life. That happens twice. Twice he has the opportunity to kill him. Twice he spares his life, and so on. Goliath is

killed twice. Only one of those occasions is by David. On the other occasion he is killed by some other hero. So most important for us, however, is the existence of sources that hold opposing views of the institution of kingship. This makes for an interesting and complicated structure in the book. Some of the passages are clearly anti-monarchic and some are clearly pro-monarchic. And I have put them up here, the anti-monarchic passages: 1 Samuel 8. There is a passage in 10. There is a passage in 12. The pro-monarchic passages are sandwiched in between these, right, in 9 and 11. So you have this alternating sequence of anti, pro, anti, pro, anti.

1 Samuel 8 is a classic example of the anti-monarchic perspective. Samuel is initially opposed to the whole idea. He apparently resents the usurpation of his own power. Until God says,

Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king... Heed their demand; but warn them solemnly, and tell them about the practices of any king who will rule over them. [1 Sam 8:7-9]

And so Samuel does that. He does that in verses 11-18. He warns of the tyranny of kings, the rapaciousness of kings, the service and the sacrifice they will require of the people in order to support their luxurious court life and their large harem, their bureaucracy and their army. "The day will come", Samuel warns, "when you cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and the Lord will not answer you on that day"--a very anti-monarchic passage. The people won't listen to him, and they say quite significantly, "No... We must have a king over us, that we may be like all the other nations: Let our king rule over us and go out at our head and fight our battles" [1 Sam 8:19-20]. So this is an explicit and ominous rejection, not only of Yahweh, but of Israel's distinctiveness from other nations. And what, after all, does it mean to be a holy nation, but to be a nation separated out from, observing different rules from, other nations. In Samuel 12, Samuel retires, and he says as he does so, "See, it is the king who leads you now. I am old and gray" [Professor Hayes's translation]. And he, again, outlines what is required of a good king, and then again chastises the people for even having asked for a king, warning that really God must be served wholeheartedly. A king should not interpose himself.

Some have argued that the editors who compiled the text preserved the pro-monarchic perspective of their sources, but they chose to frame the pro-monarchic passages with their own anti-monarchic passages, with the result that the anti-monarchic passages really provide a stronger interpretative framework and are dominant. The implication is that despite positive contemporary evaluations of Israel's kings, from the perspective of the later period, from the perspective of the editors and perhaps those sitting in exile, the institution of kingship was a disaster for Israel. And that negative assessment is introduced by the Deuteronomistic redactor into his account of the origin of the institution: that God, himself, warned at the time that this transition was being made and this request was being made--God himself, warned that this had the potential to be quite disastrous. Others feel that the pro-monarchic and anti-monarchic views were contemporaneous and both ancient, and we see that simply reflected in these dueling sources. So whether one view is older and one more recent, whether both are ancient views or both are recent or later views, the end result is a very complex narrative. As you read it you feel thrown back and forth between these positive and negative assessments of kingship. And we feel these, and see these very different views of monarchy in ancient Israel. So these views really defy categorization in the end. They are one of the things that give the book such complexity and sophistication.

Not only is there ambivalence, however, about the institution of kingship or monarchy, there is also a great deal of ambivalence about the first inhabitant of the office, the first king, King Saul, himself. Judges has three different accounts of Saul's appointment as king. In chapter 9, 1 Samuel 9, it is a private affair. It is just between Saul and the prophet Samuel. Samuel anoints Saul as king with oil in a kind of a private encounter. The anointing of kings is also found among other ancient Near Eastern groups, the Hittites, for example. In Israel, it seems to be a rite of dedication or consecration, making sacred to God, ("con-secration," making sacred). And it is done not just for kings. It is also done for high priests. They are also anointed with sacred oil. Then in 1 Samuel 10, you have Saul's appointment represented as being effected by a lottery. It is a lottery that is presided over by Samuel, but there is a lottery system and the lot falls to Samuel to be appointed king. In the next chapter, in 1 Samuel 11, we have Saul victorious in a battle over the Ammonites and so he is elected by popular acclaim, if you will. These could all be complementary ways of his slowly

securing the position. They could be seen as competing accounts. But he is an important and a striking figure. Nevertheless there seems to have been some controversy about Saul and it is preserved within our sources. On the one hand, he is described in very positive terms. He is tall. He is handsome. He is winning. He is charismatic. In fact, he is associated with ecstatic prophecy: the spirit of the Lord comes upon him and he prophesies in a sort of raving and dancing and ecstatic mode. He defends his own tribe. He is from the tribe of Benjamin, and he defends them from Ammonite raids. And he is hailed by the tribes as a leader in time of war. As king he did enjoy some initial military victories. He drove the Philistines from their garrisons, and he was such a popular and natural leader that even Samuel, who at first resented Saul and resented the idea of a king, came to appreciate him and was said to really grieve for him upon his death.

But once David enters the story, which is about halfway through the Book of 1 Samuel (it's 1 Samuel 16), then we begin to see clearly negative assessments of Saul, perhaps because the sources about David stem from circles that were loyal to the House of David, and David is going to succeed Saul, obviously, as the second king of Israel. Perhaps the negative assessment is because of Saul's ultimate failure and suicide. That had to be accounted for by identifying some fatal flaw in him. So now his ecstatic prophecies are presented as irrational fits of mad behavior. So where once the spirit of the Lord was said to come upon him, now he is said to be seized by an evil spirit from the Lord that rushes upon him suddenly causing him to rave in his house. Elsewhere he commits errors. He doesn't obey Samuel's instructions to the letter, and that is going to cost him the support of Samuel and ultimately God. We have two stories of disobedience related in 1 Samuel. One is in chapter 13. He sees that the morale of his men is sagging and so to rally them together he officiates at a sacrifice. He was supposed to wait for Samuel to arrive and do it, but he sees that it needs to happen now, and so he officiates at the sacrifice himself. And this appropriation of a priestly function enrages Samuel, and this is Samuel's first pronouncement or prediction that God will not establish Saul's dynasty over Israel, despite the fact, by the way, that other kings at other times will sacrifice with impunity. So it is interesting because David and others will sacrifice and it doesn't seem to be a problem. But here it is given as the occasion for Samuel's fury and his first pronouncement that the dynasty of Saul will not be established.

In chapter 15, we have a second instance of disobedience that earns Samuel's disapproval. Again, against Samuel's order, he spares the life of an enemy king. This is King Agag. He spares his life and otherwise violates the terms of *herem*: this notion of total destruction or devotion of booty and enemies to God through total destruction. And, again, when he violates the order of *herem*, Samuel again announces that God regrets having made Saul king. "The Lord has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you." That is chapter 15:28. In any event, with his support eroding, Saul seems to sink into a deep depression and paranoia. And toward the end of his life, he is depicted as being completely obsessed with David and the threat that David poses to Saul himself, but also his dynasty. Saul is angry that his own son, Jonathan, who presumably should succeed him to the throne, has a deep friendship with David and, in fact, throws his support over to David instead of himself. In several jealous rages Saul attempts to kill David or to have him and his supporters killed. In one particularly violent incident he kills 85 priests whom he believes have given shelter to David and his supporters. So in these encounters between Saul and David, the sources portray Saul as this raving, obsessed paranoid person, and David is seen as a sort of innocent victim, and he protests his loyalty and his support for Saul. He does not seem to understand why Saul should view him as a threat. And twice he passes up the opportunity to do away with Saul himself. He says, I will not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed [see note 2]. So the portrayal of Saul as a raving and paranoid man who is obsessed with David probably reflects the views of later writers who were apologists for the House of David.

Positive views of Saul's character weren't entirely extinguished by the biblical writer. David's own lament, when he hears of Saul's death by suicide, and Jonathan's death, also, may reflect Saul's tremendous popularity. David orders the Judahites to sing what is called the Song of the Bow in praise of Saul.

Your glory, O Israel,  
Lies slain on your heights;  
How have the mighty fallen!

...

Saul and Jonathan,  
Beloved and cherished,  
Never parted

In life or in death!  
They were swifter than eagles,  
They were stronger than lions!  
Daughters of Israel,  
Weep over Saul,  
Who clothed you in crimson and finery,  
Who decked your robes with jewels of gold.  
How have the mighty fallen  
In the thick of battle--  
Jonathan, slain on your heights!  
I grieve for you,  
My brother Jonathan,  
You were most dear to me.  
Your love was wonderful to me  
More than the love of women.  
How have the mighty fallen,  
The weapons of war perished! [2 Sam 1:19, 23-27]

Of course, representing David as bewailing Saul and Jonathan in these terms, would have served an apologetic function, as well. And David is cleared of any part in or even desire for the death of Saul. So half way through the Book of Samuel then, is the first part of the story of David and his encounters with Saul, running through to the end of 1 Samuel and the first few chapters of 2 Samuel--about Second Samuel 5. And this whole section, this first part of the story of David, has the feel of a historical novel, or narrative. There is a lot of direct speech and lots of dialogue. So it has the feel of fiction, of a novel. Given that the ruling family in Judah was referred to as the House of David for several centuries, and given a wonderful archaeological find dating from the ninth century--it's a Syrian inscription that refers to the House of David dating to the ninth century--so given those two pieces of evidence, I think most scholars would see David as a real person. None of the details of the biblical account can really be confirmed, of course, but I think the consensus is that David was a real person. There are obviously some who do not hold that and believe this is a much later retrojection. But David is, surprisingly enough, presented as very human. He is not a divine character, and he is certainly not even a highly virtuous character. The first installment of his story through about 2 Samuel 5, is clearly sympathetic to David and favorable to David. But it is not entirely obsequious or flattering, which is the sort of genre that we very often have coming out of ancient Near Eastern texts dealing with royalty.

This part of the story may be an apology for David, but it is also subtly critical of him. Certainly David is a hero, but if you read between the lines, he is also an opportunist. He is an outlaw. He serves as a mercenary for the Philistines for some of the time, and he can act pretty unscrupulously. So this isn't royal propaganda in the simple sense, even though to some degree it may be an apology for David. As we are going to see in a minute, David will fare much, much worse in the second installment of his story, and this is the story that takes up the bulk of 2 Samuel. So moving now into the Book of 2 Samuel and the latter part of David's story.

Actually, no, I lied [made a mistake]! We are going to back up for one minute just to talk about the different accounts of David's emergence--the three different stories, if you will, of David's discovery, because in the first, Samuel, again, secretly anoints him king of Judah. So it is a private affair. He anoints him as the king of Judah, which is just the southern region. He does this in Saul's lifetime. David is the youngest of his father's sons, so this anointment is another reversal of primogeniture, the exaltation of the lowly that we see so often in the Bible. In the second account we first meet David when he is summoned to play music for a disturbed Saul who, of course, is suffering from these irrational fits. And then in the third account, David is introduced as the 98-pound weakling who takes on the legendary Goliath. Later, after the death of Saul, David will be anointed king in Hebron over his own tribe, Judah. He then manages to either win over or kill off the rest of Saul's household, anyone else who could make a dynastic claim to the throne based on descent from Saul, anyone who might be a threat to his claim to kingship in the more northern region. And eventually the northern tribes will also elect him king. And so the united kingship of the northern parts of Israel and the

Tribe of Judah is finally formed. Once his reign seems secure, and the nation is consolidated behind him, David then captures Jerusalem and launches attacks against Israel's neighbors. And the text says that the Lord gives him victory. This is in 2 Samuel 8 now, verses 6 and 14. God gives him victory.

The biblical narrative depicts him as the master of a huge empire that stretches from the desert to the sea. There is very little evidence that Israel actually established lasting control over all of the states in this region. It's likely that David was able to take advantage of a power vacuum. Egypt's hold on Canaan was crumbling. Again, the migration of these "peoples of the seas" throughout this region and other peoples pressing in from the desert had really upset the two major powers in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and they really had lost control of the central region. And so David was--and the Israelites were able to take advantage of this and establish an independent state. And David's independent state was probably able to dominate the area for a little while, ending the Philistine threat, for example, and possibly even collecting tribute from some of the surrounding or neighboring states, Ammon and Moab and Edom.

But it is the prophet Nathan, who transmits God's promise to David, a promise that will become the basis for the faith in the eternity of the Davidic kingdom. And that happens in 2 Samuel, chapter 7:8-17, a very important passage and very important in the construction of what we will see is a royal ideology; a royal ideology that comes to contest some of the basic ideology of the nation. "Thus says the Lord of hosts." This is Nathan speaking now, quoting God:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel, and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house." [meaning here dynasty]

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house [meaning now a temple] for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David." [RSV; see note 3]

It's a very important passage, and it's with this passage that you have the idea of an eternal and unconditional covenant between God and the House of David, or the dynasty of David. And this is now the fourth covenant that we have met: the Noahide covenant, the patriarchal Covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, and now the Davidic covenant. Note that God says that David and his descendants may be punished for sin. They certainly will be punished for sin, but he will not take the kingdom away from them as he did from Saul.

So God's oath to preserve the Davidic dynasty and, by implication we will see later, next time, Jerusalem as well, would lead eventually to a popular belief in the invincibility of the Holy City. In addition, the belief in Israel's ultimate deliverance from enemies became bound up with David and his dynasty. David was idealized by later biblical and post-biblical tradition, and became the paradigmatic king. So even when the kingdom fell finally to the Babylonians in 586, the promise to David's House was believed to be eternal. The community looked to the future for a restoration of the Davidic line or Davidic king, or a messiah. Now the Hebrew word *messiah* simply means anointed, one who is "*meshiach*" is anointed with the holy oil. That is a reference to the fact that the king was initiated into office by means of holy oil being poured on his head. So King David was the messiah of God, the king anointed by or to God. And in the exile, Israelites would pray for another messiah, meaning another king from the House of David appointed and anointed by God to rescue them from enemies and reestablish them as a nation at peace in their land as David had done.

So the Jewish hope for a messiah, speaking now in the post-biblical [period] where it is correct to say Jewish, the Jewish hope for a messiah was thus always political and national. It involved the restoration of the nation in its land under a Davidic king. We are going to talk next time about the royal ideology that begins to emerge and challenge the older Sinaitic and covenantal ideology. But that is too much to get into now. So we will deal with that on Wednesday and then move on through the rest of the Deuteronomistic history.

[end of transcript]

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### **Notes**

1. This follows the JPS translation, with the substitution of "leaders" for JPS's "chieftains."
2. This is a paraphrase of 1 Samuel 24:11.
3. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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### **References**

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 14 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** We were talking last time about the establishment of the monarchy or kingship in Israel and I want to say a little bit about some of the features of Israelite kingship, and today I'll be coming back frequently to the Israelite notions of kingship and royal ideology. But to start off: one of the most important things to realize is that the king in Israel was not divine, as he was in Egypt, or even semi-divine. Occasionally, he offered sacrifice but he didn't play a regular role in the cult. Israelite royal ideology was heavily indebted to Canaanite royal ideology. You have similar language that's applied to the kings of Israel. The king is said to be appointed by the deity or deities to end wickedness, to enlighten the land, he is the channel of prosperity and divine blessing for the nation. All of this is true of Canaanite kings as well, and the king, as we've seen, is spoken of as God's son. That doesn't imply divinity. It's a metaphor, the metaphor of sonship. It was used for the Canaanite gods as well, and it expressed the special relationship between the king and the deity. It was the same relationship as was found between that of a suzerain and a vassal, and in our suzerainty treaties, also, the vassal is the son of the suzerain. It's a kind of adoption, and what it means is that the one who is metaphorically the son is to serve the father loyally, faithfully, but is also susceptible to chastisement from him. And that's what we saw in Nathan's statement or pronouncement or prophecy to David last time.

Michael Coogan points out that the notion of the sonship of the king was revolutionary [see note 1]. It was a deliberate effort to replace an earlier understanding according to which the entire nation of Israel was God's son. You remember during the plagues in Egypt when God refers to Pharaoh as having oppressed His son, Israel, His firstborn. As Yahweh's son, the king now is standing between God and the people as a whole. And we're going to return in a moment to this new royal ideology and what's really going to be a very tense juxtaposition with the covenant theology. But first I want to say a little bit more about the characters of David and Solomon before going into the way royal ideology was later developed.

In the Bible, David is second only in importance and in textual space to Moses; the amount of space that's devoted to him, is second only to Moses. There are three characteristics of David which stand out, and the first is that he's described as being quite proficient in music and poetry and so we'll see that later tradition is going to attribute to him not only the invention of various instruments but also the composition of the Book of Psalms. It seems to make sense that he would be the composer of the Book of Psalms in that he has a reputation for poetry and music. He is also credited with great military and tactical skill and confidence. He deploys his army on behalf of Israel but he also, once he is king, deploys his army within Israel against his rivals. Third, he is depicted as a very shrewd politician. And it was David who created permanent symbols of God's election of Israel, God's election of David himself, God's election of David's house or line or dynasty to rule over Israel in perpetuity. It is said that he conceived the idea of a royal capital. He captured the city of Jebus, Yebus--it was a border town so it was free of any tribal association. I guess it's sort of like Washington, D.C.; it's not located really within any one tribe; and he captured this and built it up as the city of David. The city was going to be renamed Jerusalem and it would become understood as the chosen city, the place where God caused His name to dwell: as Deuteronomy said, there would be a place where God would choose to cause His name to dwell. And so Jerusalem becomes a symbol of God's presence, it becomes a symbol of Israel's kingdom, the monarchy; it becomes a symbol of the dynasty of David. It is referred to as the City of David. David transfers the Ark to this city and so he makes it the home to the ancient witness of the covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant. The added implication is that the Davidic dynasty has inherited the blessings of the covenant. It is somehow fulfilling the promise to the patriarchs, which is also associated with the nation of Israel at Sinai. He planned a temple that would become the permanent resting place for the ark and a cultic center for all Israel but the building of this temple was left to Solomon so we'll discuss it and its symbolism when we get to Solomon. But according to the biblical record it was still David who made the chosen dynasty, the chosen city, what would eventually be the temple, into permanent and deeply interconnected symbols of the religion of Israel. And it's really with David that the history of Jerusalem as the Holy City begins.

Now the biblical assessment of David is initially relatively positive, and this changes shortly after his ascension to the throne. Beginning in 2 Samuel from about chapter 9 to 20 and then on into the first couple of chapters of Kings, you have a stretch of text which is often referred to as the Court History or the succession narrative of David. The critical question that drives this particular historical fiction is the question of succession: who will succeed David? He has many

children but one by one his sons are killed, or they're displaced or disqualified in one way or another, until finally there is Solomon. There are lots of wonderful major and minor characters in this drama. It's a very complex drama, lots of intrigue and passion, but the material in this section also presents a rather unusual portrait of David. He's weak, he's indecisive, he's something of an anti-hero. He stays home in the palace while other people are off leading battles and fighting the wars. He enters into an illicit relationship with a married woman, Bathsheva (or Bathsheba). He sees to it that her husband is killed in battle to cover up his affair. It's this combined act of adultery and murder that earns him a sound scolding from Nathan, the prophet Nathan--we'll come to that when we talk about prophets next week. But God punishes him with the death of his son. And it's really from this point on in the story that we see David losing control over events around him; his control declines. He is indecisive on the whole question of succession and that leads to all kinds of resentment and conflict as well as revolts.

There's one revolt, which is a revolt in support of his son, Absalom. That's a revolt that the Deuteronomistic historian also indicates was a punishment for his affair with--for David's affair with Bathsheba. But during this revolt David flees from his enemies, he's stripped of his crown, he's degraded. When Absalom is killed David weeps for his son uncontrollably and this only angers his own supporters who fought so earnestly against Absalom in his [David's] defense; it's a very poignant moment. But by the end of the story, David is almost completely impotent, and senile even. The prophet Nathan and Bathsheba plot to have Bathsheba's son, Solomon, named the successor of David and there really is no point at which there's any divine indication that Solomon has won divine approval, no divine indication that he is the one. It happens through palace intrigue, particularly with Bathsheba and Nathan. But the northern tribes--there are signs throughout the story of the hostility of the northern tribes and that's a warning sign, that's a warning sign of future disunity.

This whole court history is just a wonderful, masterful work of prose. You're going to be reading something from a book by a fellow named Meir Sternberg, which is I think just a wonderful study of the Bathsheba story [see note 2]. Some speak about all of this unit as being authored by the J source. You need to know that source theory has undergone so many permutations. There really isn't any standard view but I think the idea that the sources J, E, P and D extend beyond the Pentateuch is now generally no longer accepted so you will sometimes see people talking about the J source as going all the way through the end of Second Kings and being in fact--J is the author of the court history. But for the most part I think most people think of the source theory as applying to the Pentateuch, and beyond that we talk about the Deuteronomistic historian redacting older earlier sources. I'll talk a little bit more about some of those sources as we move through the later books, the books of the former prophets.

The court history has an array of very richly drawn characters. They act out all sorts of scenes of power and lust and courage and struggle. There's crime, there's tender love. It's a very realistic sort of psychological drama. It's also striking for its uncompromising honesty. We don't see anything like that really in the work of any contemporary historian. David is depicted in very, very human terms. The flattery and the whitewashing that you find in other ancient Near Eastern dynastic histories is lacking here. The flattery and whitewashing that we get for example in Chronicles, the books of Chronicles, are really just a retelling of the material here in the former prophets and they clean up the picture of David. There's no mention of Bathsheba in there. So you do have that kind of whitewashing as part of the historiography of the Book of Chronicles, but it's lacking here. All of the flaws, all of the weaknesses of David, a national hero--they're all laid bare.

Implicitly perhaps, that is a critique of kinship. It is perhaps a critique of the claim of kings to rule by divine right. The author here seems to be stressing that David and, as we shall see, Solomon (he's quite human, Solomon's quite human)--they are not at all divine. They're subject to the errors and flaws that characterize all humans. As we move out of Samuel now and into 1 and 2 Kings, we see that these books, [1 and 2] Kings, contain the history of Israel from the death of King David until the fall of Judah in 587, 586, and the exile to Babylonia. These books also appear to be based on older sources. Some of them are explicitly identified. They will refer sometimes to these works, which evidently were subsequently lost but they'll refer to the Book of the Acts of Solomon or the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel, or the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah. Annals and chronicles were regularly maintained in royal courts throughout the Ancient Near East. There's no reason to think that this wasn't also done in a royal setting in Israel. These annals generally listed events, important events in the reign of a given king. They tended not to have much narrative to them and the beginning of the first 16 chapters of 1 Kings has that kind of feel, not a lot of narrative, and [it's] really reportage of events.

Beginning in 1 Kings 17:17-22, and the first nine chapters of 2 Kings, there's a departure from that [â€] annal style, annal genre [of] the reporting of events in the reign of a king. You have more developed narratives in those sources and these narratives generally feature prophets. So it's going to lead very nicely into our study of Prophets beginning on Monday. Some of the narratives evidently would have circulated independently, particularly the stories, probably, about Elijah and Elisha, these zealous Yahweh-only prophets. They were probably local heroes and these stories circulated independently, but they've come to be embedded in a framework that conforms those sources to the ideology and religious perspective of the Deuteronomistic historian.

1 Kings 2 is the death scene. It has David's deathbed instructions to his son, Solomon. He tells Solomon to kill all of his rivals and opponents and in verse 12 we read, "And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father, David, and his rule was firmly established." And it seems that at this point the three crises that we noted in the Book of Samuel, at the opening at 1 Samuel, the three crises we noted are resolved. The crisis in succession is resolved. David is succeeded by his son, Solomon, and all of the kings of Judah for the next 400 years in fact, until the destruction in 586, all of these kings will be of the line of David. The military crises seem for now to have been resolved. We've had lots of military and diplomatic successes and Israel seems to be secure. And also the religious crisis that we mentioned is resolved. The Ark was retaken from the Philistines, it's been brought to Jerusalem, it's been installed in Jerusalem, and now a magnificent temple is planned that will house the Ark and be a site for the central worship of all Israel.

But the resolution of these crises came at a cost. They produced fundamental changes in Israelite society. From a loose confederation of tribes--however idealistic that picture was--but from a loose confederation of tribes united by a covenant, we've now got a nation with a strong central administration, it's headed by a king. And that king seems to enjoy a special covenant with God. Rather than charismatic leaders who rise as the need itself arises and then fade away, we now have permanent kings from a single family. And preserved in the biblical sources is a tension, a tension between the old ideas of the covenant confederation, what we might call covenant theology, and the new ideology of the monarchy. This new royal ideology combines loyalty to God and loyalty to the throne, so that treason or rebellion against God's anointed is also apostasy, it's also rebellion against God Himself. The two become conflated.

There's a scholar named Jon Levenson, I've talked about him before in connection with the covenant at Sinai, but in this wonderful book called *Sinai and Zion* [see note 3] he really juxtaposes these two ideologies. He points to this deep tension between the covenant theology and the royal ideology. In covenant theology, Yahweh alone is the king. He's got a direct suzerain-vassal relationship with the people. So Israel is the subject of covenant theology. The covenant theology therefore implies almost automatically a somewhat negative view of the monarchy and that's what we've seen here and there, in the Book of Judges and in Samuel. Monarchy is at best unnecessary and at worst it's a rejection of God. Nevertheless, despite that resistance or that critique, monarchy, kingship, is established in Israel, and Levenson sees the royal ideology that developed to support this institution as a major revolution in the structure of the religion of Israel. Where the Sinaitic Covenant was contracted between God and the nation, the Davidic covenant is contracted between God and a single individual, the king. The covenant with David--another scholar, Moshe Weinfeld, whom I've mentioned before as well, he describes the covenant with David as a covenant of grant. This is a form that we find in the ancient Near East also. It's a grant of a reward for loyal service and deeds. And so God rewards David with the gift of an unending dynasty. It's a covenant of grant. He grants him this unending dynasty in exchange for his loyalty. And the contrast with the covenant at Sinai is very clear. Where Israel's covenant with God at Sinai had been conditional--it's premised on the observance of God's Torah [and] if there's violation, then God will uproot the Israelites and throw them out of the land --the covenant with David, by contrast, with his dynastic house (and by implication with David's city and the temple atop Mount Zion), that covenant will be maintained under all conditions. Remember the passage that we read of Nathan's prophecy last time. So the royal ideology fostered a belief in some quarters, and we'll see this in the next few weeks, a belief in the inviolability, the impregnable nature of, David's house, dynasty, the city itself, the chosen city, the sacred mountain, the temple. We'll return to this idea in later lectures. So you have this deep tension lining up Israel's covenant at Mount Sinai, which is conditional, on the one hand, with God's covenant with David, which is centered on the temple and palace complex at Mount Zion, and which is unconditional and permanent.

Scholars have tried to account for these two strands of tradition in Biblical literature in different ways; the covenant theology with its emphasis on the conditional covenant with Moses contracted at Sinai; the royal ideology and its emphasis on the unconditional covenant with David focused on Mount Zion. One explanation is chronological--that early traditions were centered around the Sinai event and the covenant theology. They emphasize that aspect of the

relationship with God, and later traditions under the monarchy emphasize royal ideology. Another explanation is geographical. The northern kingdom, which if you'll recall and we'll talk about in a moment, the northern kingdom is going to break away from the southern kingdom (Davidides will not rule in the northern kingdom) so the assumption is that the northern kingdom, which rejected the house of David--they de-emphasize a royal ideology and its focus on Zion and the house of David, and they emphasize the old covenant theology and the Sinai theology. And by contrast the southern kingdom, in which a member of the house of David reigned right until the destruction, the southern kingdom emphasized Zion and its attendant royal ideology.

Well, Levenson rejects both of these explanations. He says it isn't that one is early and one is late, it isn't that one is northern and one is southern. We find the Sinai and the Zion traditions in early texts and late texts. We find them in northern texts and in southern texts. In the south, David's house was criticized just as roundly as it was criticized in the north, and emphasis was placed on the Sinai covenant over against the royal ideology in the south as well as in the north. So the two traditions he said coexisted side by side, they stood in a dialectic tension with one another in Israel. And eventually they would come to be coordinated and work together, we'll see that more towards the end of the lecture. But he says that the Zion ideology will take on some of the aspects of the legacy of Sinai. Mount Zion will soon be associated with the site of God's theophany or self-revelation; it will become a kind of Sinai now permanently in Jerusalem. It would become the site of covenant renewal. It will be seen as the place where Torah goes forth, and that's an idea of course originally associated with Sinai--that's where God's instruction or Torah went [out] first. But all of these features will be collapsed or telescoped or brought into Mount Zion and the temple complex. But eventually, he says, it's not simply that the Sinai covenant theology was absorbed into the royal ideology and Mount Zion, because the entitlement of the house of David will eventually be made contingent on the observance of God's Torah. The king himself, we will see, is not exempt from the covenant conditions set at Sinai. And even though he would never be completely deposed for violating the Sinaitic Covenant he will be punished for his violations. The two will work in tandem. It's an idea that we'll return to. We'll see it more clearly as we get towards the end of this lecture. But for now keep in mind that the two are going to be held in tension and work together to check one another.

Now David's son, Solomon, is given mixed reviews by the Deuteronomistic historian. He ascends to the throne through intrigue, as I said, there's really no indication of a divine choice or approval, but he's said to reign over a golden age. His kingdom is said to stretch from Egypt to the Euphrates. He made political alliances and economic alliances throughout the region. He would seal these alliances with marriages. He married a daughter of Pharaoh. He married the daughter of the king of Tyre in Phoenicia and so on. The text claims that he built a daunting military establishment: he put a wall around Jerusalem, there were fortified cities--Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer--these were bases for his professional army. It's said that the army featured a very expensive chariot force. He also had accomplishments in the realms of industry and trade. He exploited Israel's natural position straddling the north-south trade routes and was able to bring great wealth to the state in that way. The daily supplies that were needed to maintain Solomon's very lavish court are detailed in 1 Kings, so it seems to have been an extraordinarily elaborate court. He developed a merchant fleet. He seemed to work closely with the Phoenicians and the Phoenician King Hiram in developing a merchant fleet and exploited trade routes through the Red Sea. All sorts of exotic products are listed as coming in to Jerusalem from Arabia and the African coast. We have the famous story of the visit of the queen of Sheba. This could possibly be the Sabean territory in South Arabia and there may be some basis in fact given these trade routes and how well traveled they were at this time. And of course he is known for his magnificent building operations.

Many scholars assume that given this tremendous wealth this would have been a time for a flowering of the arts, and so it's often been maintained that this would have been the time for the early traditions, biblical traditions, early traditions of the nation to be recorded, perhaps the J source. People date it to the tenth century, the time of Solomon. But we should be a little skeptical of this grand picture because archaeologists have found that Jerusalem was a small town; it was a very small town really until the end of the eighth century [when] suddenly it absorbed many refugees from the fall of the northern kingdom. Remember Israel is going to be destroyed in 722, so refugees fleeing southward will greatly expand Jerusalem; we have archaeological evidence of that. But there are very few material remains that attest to a fabulous empire on a scale that's suggested by the biblical text. Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, the three places that are mentioned as fortified military bases, these have been excavated. They do show some great gateways and some large chambers, even some stables, but archaeologists differ radically over the dating of these lairs. Some date them to the time of Solomon, some see it as later. Most concur that Israel was probably at this time the most important power in its region, but still it would have been small and relatively insignificant compared to, say, Egypt or Mesopotamia, some of

the great civilizations at either end of the Fertile Crescent. But it would have been the most important state in that area and probably was able to have some dominance over some neighboring areas as well.

I just want to mention three things about Solomon, things that he's noted for. One is that he's praised for his wisdom and because, again, the biblical text praises him for his wisdom later tradition will find it convenient to attribute the Book of Proverbs to him as well as the Book of Ecclesiastes. These are two works that belong to the genre of wisdom literature we'll be talking about later in the semester. Second, in addition to being praised for his wisdom, he's praised for constructing the temple and in fact the primary focus of all of the biblical material, or the biblical story of Solomon, is the building of the temple, the dedication of this temple for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem. He continued the close association of the cult and the monarchy, the religious and political leadership, by constructing this magnificent new temple within the palace complex and he himself appointed a high priest. So the juxtaposition of the house of the king and the house of the deity on Mount Zion was quite deliberate. And this hill, even though geographically it's very small, becomes in the mythic imagination of Israel, this towering and impregnable mountain.

Levenson again argues that Zion came eventually to take on the features of the cosmic mountain. The cosmic mountain is a mythic symbol that we find in the ancient Near East. The cosmic mountain has these powers or potencies that are universal and infinite and we find it in the religion of Israel as well, specifically in connection with Mount Zion. The cosmic mountain in ancient tradition was understood to be the meeting place of the gods like a Mount Olympus, for example—it's a cosmic mountain. But it was also understood to be the *axis mundi*, that is to say the juncture or the point of junction between heaven and earth, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the axis around which these worlds met or were conjoined. In Canaan—in Canaanite religion the Mountain of Baal, which is known as Mount Zaphon, was conceived precisely in this manner. And Levenson points out tremendous commonalities of language and concept in connection with the Mountain of Baal, the Mountain of El, and the Mountain of Yahweh. In fact, the word "Zaphon," Mount Zaphon is used to describe God's mountain in the Bible in one particular passage. So the temple on Mount Zion came to be understood as sacred space much like the cosmic mountains of other traditions. It's described as a kind of paradise sometimes, almost a Garden of Eden. It's described as the place from which the entire world was created. It's also viewed as a kind of epitome of the world, a kind of microcosm, an entire microcosm of the world. It's also seen as the earthly manifestation of a heavenly temple. The temple came to represent an ideal and sacred realm. And we also see it as the object of intense longing. Many of the Psalms will express intense longing: if I could just sit in the temple, if I could just be in that space, that sacred space—we see it in the Psalms. In a passage describing the dedication of the temple—it's in 1 Kings 8—Solomon explains that the temple is a place where people have access to God. They can petition to Him and they can atone for their sins. It is a house of prayer, he says, and it remained the central focal point of Israelite worship for centuries.

So his great wisdom, his great virtue in constructing the temple notwithstanding, Solomon is very sharply criticized for, among other things, his foreign worship. His new palace complex had a tremendous amount of room for his harem, which is said to have included 700 wives. Many of them were foreign princesses, many of them would have been acquired to seal political alliances or business alliances, noblewomen. 700 wives and 300 concubines, as well as various officials and servants. Now of course these numbers are likely exaggerated, but Solomon's diplomatic alliances likely necessitated unions that would of course have been condemned by the Deuteronomistic historian. He is said to have loved foreign women, from the nations that God had forbidden and he succumbed to the worship of their gods and goddesses, which is really the key point. The whole fear of a foreign spouse is that one will be led to or will support the worship of foreign deities, and so Solomon is said to have built temples for Moabite gods and Ammonite gods. This all may point to a general tolerance for different cults in Jerusalem in the tenth century and in the ninth century. This may not have been an issue in Jerusalem in the tenth and ninth century, but it's an issue for the later Deuteronomistic editor. They have no tolerance [for] this.

So Solomon's primary flaw in the Deuteronomistic historians' view is his syncretism, which is prompted by his marriages to these foreign women who brought their native cults to Jerusalem. His religious infidelity is said to be the cause of the severe problems and ultimately the division of the kingdom that will follow upon his death. In order to support this tremendous court and harem, as well as the army and the bureaucracy, Solomon did introduce heavy taxation as well as the *corvée*, which is forced labor or required labor on state projects. So you have this developing urban structure, complex developing, bureaucratic urban structure that's now being superimposed on the agricultural life, and that leads to all sorts of class distinctions and class divisions between officials, bureaucrats, merchants, large-

scale landowners who are prospering perhaps, smaller farmers and shepherds who are living at more of a subsistence level. So you have divisions between town and country, between rich and poor. And this is a great change from the ideals of the tribal democracy, some of the ideals that some of you looked at when we were talking about legal texts, where there seemed to be these economic blueprints for bringing about economic equivalence through sabbatical years and jubilee years and so on. In short, the list of social and economic ills that were enumerated by Samuel (in 1 Samuel 8, when he was trying to persuade the people from establishing a monarchy), that list of ills--you'll have a standing military, a standing army you'll have to support, you'll have to do labor for the state, you're going to have all kinds of taxes and special levies, you're going to be virtually enslaved--many of these things seem to have been realized, the Deuteronomistic historian would like us to believe, in the reign of Solomon.

Moreover, as we've already seen, the very institution of monarchy itself didn't sit well in some quarters because centralized leadership under a human king seemed to go against the older traditions of Hebrew tribal society, united by covenant with God, guided by priests, prophets, occasional judges inspired charismatically. So already before Solomon's death, the northern tribes were feeling some alienation from the house of David. They're resenting what they perceive to be Solomon's tyranny.

So let me give you a brief timeline of what happens from the death of Solomon down to the destruction. And on one of the earlier handouts I gave you, there is a list of the kings north and south. This is not something you need to memorize and I'm certainly not going to stress it, but if you want to keep score, that's a list that you can refer to. So, when Solomon died in 922 the structure that had been erected by David and Solomon fell into these two rival states and neither of them of course is going to be very strong. You have the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom referred to as Judah, each with its own king: Jeroboam in the north, Rehoboam in the south. Sometimes they're going to be at war with one another, sometimes they're going to work in alliance with one another, but 200 years later, from 922 down to 722, 200 years later the northern kingdom of Israel will fall to the Assyrian empire.

The Assyrians come down to the border of the southern kingdom, to Judah, and Judah remains viable but it is reduced to vassal status. It is tributary to this new world power. Finally, Judah will be destroyed about 150 years later --about 587, 586. The Babylonians, the neo-Babylonian empire, they have conquered the Assyrians and they assume control over the ancient Near East and take the southern kingdom. Now the story of the northern kingdom, Israel, that is presented in Kings, is colored by a Judean perspective, and it is highly negative and highly polemical. So Solomon was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam, but the ten tribes of the north revolted when he refused to relieve their tax burden. They came to him and asked if they could have some relief and he answered them very harshly, so they revolted and a separate kingdom was set up under the rule of the Israelite Jeroboam, just at the end of the tenth century. So divided now into these two kingdoms, they begin to lose power, probably losing any control they may have had over outlying territories.

So let's focus first on the northern kingdom of Israel. The area was more divided by tribal rivalries and religious traditions than Judah. You have ten tribes in that region. Jeroboam didn't seem to be able to establish a very stable rule. 1 Kings 12 tells us of Jeroboam's effort to break the connection with the traditional religious center of Jerusalem in the south. He establishes his own government at Shechem--that was a place that was already revered in Hebrew tradition. This is where we have the covenant renewal ceremony by Joshua, so it's already a somewhat sacred site. So he establishes his capital in Shechem, and then he establishes royal shrines, one in the southern part of Israel and one in the northern part of Israel; on each of the borders, north and south of the kingdom, in Dan and Bethel (Bethel in the south and Dan in the north). A golden calf is placed in each shrine according to the text, and this is viewed by the Deuteronomistic historian as a terrible sin. Indeed the story is written in a manner that deliberately echoes the story of the golden calf that was made by Aaron in Exodus 32. There are linguistic echoes that make it very clear that we are supposed to view this as a sin as great as the sin of Aaron. It may well be that if Jeroboam did in fact do this that he was a good Yahwist and was just trying to establish alternate sanctuaries for Yahweh that would rival Jerusalem's. But the Deuteronomistic historian wants to see this as another instance of idolatry, and therefore, deliberately echoes the primordial cultic sin of the golden calves when talking about Jeroboam's activity. It brands his cultic center as illegitimate idolatry. Jeroboam is represented by the biblical writer as having made unacceptable concessions to Canaanite practices of worship, and so he is criticized for this. Despite his best efforts, his kingship is fairly unstable, and in fact in the 200-year history of the kingdom, the northern kingdom of Israel, we will have seven different dynasties occupying the throne. There was great material prosperity in the northern kingdom. I've just picked out a few kings to highlight so these are not to be understood to be necessarily in order, I've just picked out a few highlights, but

the rule of Omri was a time of some material prosperity and his son, Ahab. Ahab was the first part of the ninth century.

Omri is an interesting person because he's the first king from either kingdom to be mentioned in sources outside the Bible. We have a large stone referred to as the Moabite Stone and in this stone, which boasts of a military defeat, there's the boast that Omri of Israel was defeated. Omri bought and fortified Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and archaeology does reveal that this was in fact quite a magnificent city at this time. But again the Deuteronomistic editors are going to judge him as evil. He's disobeyed God. His son, Ahab, also comes in for bad press. Ahab is also mentioned outside the Bible. We have an inscription of an Assyrian king who describes a coalition of Israelites and Aramaeans who fought against the Assyrians, and Ahab is mentioned in that inscription. Omri and Ahab were clearly very powerful and influential in the region. They are even mentioned outside the Bible. Ahab and his Phoenician wife, Jezebel, seem to have established a very extravagant court life in the capital of Samaria, and for this they are also going to be condemned by the Deuteronomistic editors. Jezebel was Phoenician and when Jezebel tried to establish the worship of her Phoenician Baal as the official cult of Israel (she built a temple to Baal in Samaria) the prophets Elijah and Elisha preach a kind of holy war against the monarchy. Now we're going to come back to these very zealous Yahweh-only prophets of the north when we talk about prophecy next time. Ahab and Jezebel meet a very tragic end and there will be a military coup. A military coup led by an army general, Jehu, in about 842. These are all kind of approximate years, you know--different books will give the--they'll differ by five years one way or the other but it's our best effort at reconstructing things based on some of these outside extra-biblical references that give us a firm date and then we can kind of work around those.

So the army general Jehu in about 842 led a military coup. He was anointed king by the prophet Elisha and he had a very bloody revenge on Jezebel. Jezebel and the priests of Baal were all slaughtered, the text says, as well as every worshipper of Baal in Samaria; they were all slaughtered. By the eighth century you have the new Assyrian empire on the rise, and in 722 the Assyrian king Sargon reduced Israel to the status of a province. And we have an inscription by Sargon that confirms the biblical report of this defeat. And in this inscription Sargon says, "[I besieged, conquered]" Samaria "and led away as prisoners [27,290 inhabitants of it]. [The town I] re[built] better than (it was) before and [settled] therein people from countries which [I] myself [had con]quered." So: population transplanting. "I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and imposed upon them tribute as (is customary) for Assyrian citizens" [Pritchard 1958, 1:195; see note 4]. So there's a basic agreement between this and the biblical account. Many of the governing class, the wealthy merchants, many tens of thousands in all, were carried off to northern Mesopotamia and they were lost to history. These are the ten lost tribes of Israel. There would have remained behind some Hebrew farmers and shepherds, they would have continued their old ways, but as was consistent with their policy, the Assyrians imported new peoples to repopulate this area and to break up any local resistance to their rule and this would then become the province of Samaria. And this ethnically mixed group would practice a form of Israelite religion, but the Deuteronomistic editor does not view it as legitimate and ultimately these Samaritans were going to be despised by the Jews of the southern kingdom, the Jews of Judah. They were seen as foreign corruptors of the faith. They were always ready to assist Judah's enemies against Judah, so they felt very little kinship and very often the Samaritans would join against, [with] those attacking Judah. So there was tremendous rivalry between the Jews of Judah and the Samaritans. Hence, the New Testament story makes sense--this was a hated person, this good Samaritan.

So if we turn our attention now to the southern kingdom of Judah: Judah was comprised of the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and it enjoyed internal stability for the most part. It remained loyal to the house of David ruling in Jerusalem. Shortly after Israel fell in 722 to the Assyrians, the Judahites--whose king at that time was King Hezekiah, so the king Hezekiah had to agree to terms with Assyria. They became subject allies or vassals of Assyria. But Hezekiah began to prepare for rebellion, began to make alliances with neighbors and this prompted the Assyrians to march in and lay siege to Jerusalem. This would have happened about 701, and this siege is described in Assyrian sources, so we have independent records of this from Assyrian sources. We read there: "As to Hezekiah, the Jew,"--of Yehud, right? the Jew--"he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts," etc. "I drove out 200,150 people." Himself I made prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" [Pritchard 1958, 200]. But eventually the Assyrians actually withdrew the siege, Judah was able to withstand the siege, preserve their own kingship. The Assyrian empire is going to fall in 612--this is the fall of Nineveh you may have heard of at some point--and they will fall to the rising Babylonians, the neo-Babylonian empire. It's the neo-Babylonian empire that will succeed in felling Judah under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587 or 586. The walls of Jerusalem are dismantled, many members of the governing classes, wealthier classes, are going to be carried off into exile in Babylonia. And that the

Hebrews didn't fade into oblivion after the loss of political independence and their geographical base, is due in large part to the interpretation of events provided by the Deuteronomistic school.

So we need to talk a little bit about that ideology and why it had the historical effect that it had. As I mentioned before, Deuteronomy isn't just the capstone of the Pentateuch's narrative, it's also the first part of a longer literary history. Martin Noth was the German scholar who first argued for this, argued that the composition and authorship of Deuteronomy has more in common with what follows in some sense than what precedes it. And he argued that we should understand this to be a unit, the product of a particular School. Since this Deuteronomistic School is looking back at the history of Israel up to and including the defeat and exile of the Israelites in 587 or 586, the final form of the work of the Deuteronomistic School--the final form must be post exilic. It's post-586, but there are of course various layers within that larger work that we can't really date with precision.

I just want to say something about the scholarly methodology that led to the conclusion that there is such a thing as a Deuteronomistic School. That method is redaction criticism. And we've already discussed the goals and the methods of other types of criticism: source criticism or historical criticism. We've talked a little bit about form criticism and tradition criticism. But redaction criticism grew out of a kind of weariness with some of these other forms of biblical criticism and their constant fragmentation of the biblical text into older sources or into older genres or into older units of tradition in order to map out a history of Israelite religion. These other methods seem to pay very little attention to the text in its final form and the process by which the text reached its final form. So redaction criticism rejects the idea that the person or the persons who compiled the text from earlier sources did a somewhat mechanical scissors and paste job, didn't really think too much about the effect they were creating by putting things together. Redaction criticism assumes and focuses on identifying the purpose and the plan behind the final form of the assembled sources. It's a method that wants to uncover the intention of the person or the persons who produced the biblical text in roughly the shape that we have it, and what was intended by their producing it in the shape that we have. So redaction criticism proceeds along these lines and this is how it first developed.

First you can usually identify linking passages, that is to say passages that kind of join narrative to narrative or unit to unit, in an attempt to make the text read more smoothly or just to ease the transition from one source to another. And these linking passages are assigned to R for redactor. Also assigned to R are any interpretative passages. That means passages that stand back to comment on the text or interpret the text in some way. Any place where the narrator turns to directly address the audience. So for example, when you have a verse in which the narrator turns and says, "That was when the Canaanites were still in the land," that would seem to be from the hand of a redactor putting the sources together. When you have an etiological comment, that is to say a comment of the type, "And that is why the Israelites do such and such ritual observance to this day," that also seems to be written from the perspective of a compiler of sources, someone who's putting the text together. There are also some passages that vindicate or justify or otherwise comment on what's about to occur, or passages that summarize and offer an interpretation or justification of what has just happened. We'll see that in 2 Kings 17; we also saw that in the Book of Judges. We had this prospective summary saying: this is what's going to happen--there's going to be sin, they're going to cry out, there'll be, you know, God will raise up someone, they'll deliver them and then they're going to fall back into sin again. So these are comments that are looking forward to tell us what it is we're about to read and if you join all such passages together and assign them to R you very often find that there are tremendous stylistic similarities in these passages. They use the same rhetoric over and over again or you'll see the same point of view and it's very often a point of view that isn't in the source materials that they're linking together. And this is how one arrives at some understanding of the role of the redactor in the final production of the text, how the redactor has framed our understanding of the source materials that he has gathered.

And the Deuteronomistic historian who is responsible for the redaction of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and so, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, provides not just a history in the sense of documenting events as they occur (as if there's ever documentation without interpretation) but provides a strong interpretation of history, a philosophy of history. He's trying to ascertain the meaning of events, the larger purpose and design, something we've called a *historiosophy*. And we find the Deuteronomists' interpretation of Israel's history in the preface to the Book of Deuteronomy, we find it in editorial comments that are sort of peppered throughout Joshua through Kings, and we especially find it in the summary of the entire unit that is contained in 2 Kings 17. Before we read that passage we need to think about what it was that prompted the Deuteronomist to adopt a particular interpretation of Israel's historical record.

The Deuteronomistic historian was attempting to respond to the first major historical challenge to confront the Israelite people and the Hebrew religion. And that was the complete collapse of the Israelite nation, the destruction of God's sanctuary, and the defeat and exile of the people of the Lord and God of history. The calamitous events of 722, but especially 587, raised a critical theological dilemma. God had promised the patriarchs and their descendants that they would live in His land. He had promised that the house of David would stand forever but here the monarchy had collapsed, the people were defeated and they were in exile. So the challenge presented by this twist of history was really twofold: Is God the god of history, is he omnipotent, is he capable of all, can he in fact impose and effect His will, and if so then what about his covenant with the patriarchs and his covenant with David? Had he faithlessly abandoned it? Well, that was unthinkable. Then if he hadn't faithlessly abandoned his covenant with his people and with David, he must not be the god of history, the universal lord of all. He wasn't able to save his people.

Neither of these ideas was acceptable to the Deuteronomistic school. It was a fundamental tenet of Israelite monotheism that God is at once the god of history, capable of all, whose will is absolute, whose promises are true and at the same time a god of faithfulness who does not abandon his people, he is both good and powerful. So how could the disasters of 722 and 586 be reconciled with the conviction that God controlled history and that He had an eternal covenant with the patriarchs and with David? The historiography of the Deuteronomistic school is the response of one segment of the Israelite community, we'll see another response when we turn to the Prophets, but the basic idea of the Deuteronomistic School is that God's unconditional and eternal covenants with the patriarchs and with David do not preclude the possibility of punishment or chastisement for sin as specified in the conditional Mosaic covenant.

So you see how both ideas are going to be important to hold in dialectic tension: both theologies, the covenant theology as well as the patriarchal and royal theology. So this is because although God is omnipotent, humans do have free will, they can corrupt the divine plan. So in the Deuteronomistic history the leaders of Israel are depicted as having the choice of accepting God's way or rejecting it. God tries to help them. He's constantly sending them prophets who yell at the kings and tell them what it is God wants of them, but they continue to make the wrong choice. They sin and ultimately that brings about the fall, first of Israel and then of Judah and it's the idolatrous sins of the kings that does it. With the deposition and the execution [correction: death; see note 5] of the last Davidic king, Zedekiah, the Deuteronomistic school reinterpreted the Davidic Covenant in conditional terms on the model of the Sinaitic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, according to which God's favor toward the king depends on the king's loyalty to God, and in this way the fall of the house of David could be seen as justifiable punishment for disobedient kings or rulers like Manasseh. (We'll come back to him.) Remember the Davidic Covenant that Nathan proclaimed in 2 Samuel 7 explicitly said that God would punish and chastise his anointed. That's what it means to be a son, to receive correction, discipline and punishment. I'll have to finish these thoughts on Monday and see specifically how they interpret and understand the history of what happened in a way that enabled certain segments of the population to see this as in fact proof of God's strength and faithfulness. And then we'll turn to prophecy on Monday.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 278.
2. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 186-222.
3. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Harper: San Francisco, 1987)
4. The punctuation in this quotation follows Pritchard's format, in which square brackets mark restorations of the text, and parentheses mark textual interpolations added to ease understanding.
5. According to the biblical text, Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his children, had his eyes put out and was imprisoned until his death.

## References

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text." Copyright (c) 1985 by [The Jewish Publication Society](#). Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

Pritchard, James B., ed. 1958 (rpt. 1973). *The Ancient Near East. Volume I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 15 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** So we were talking last time about the Deuteronomistic historian and their interpretation of the events that befell Israel, a very special interpretation that would make it possible for Israel to remain intact after the destruction of the state, the temple and the national basis of their society. And according to the Deuteronomist, it's the sin of idolatry, specifically the sin of idolatry and particularly the idolatry of the king, for which the nation is punished with exile and destruction. Punishments come for other sorts of sins, but the national punishment of exile and destruction follows upon the idolatry and particularly the idolatry of the king.

So in the book of 2 Kings, a king who permits sacrifice only at the Jerusalem Temple is praised no matter what other faults he may or may not have, and one who does not is condemned, no matter what other accomplishments he may have to his credit. Now the Deuteronomistic historian is aware that the historical record doesn't lend itself very easily to this kind of interpretation. Because there are some good kings who reigned very briefly, and there are some very bad kings, on their view, who reigned for a very long time. Manasseh is a case in point. He reigned for over 50 years and is viewed as the most wicked of all kings.

Sometimes disaster would strike right after the rule of a king that the Deuteronomist would view as a good king because of their faithfulness to Yahweh, and sometimes it would not strike after the rule of a king that was viewed to be very wicked. So the Deuteronomist sounds the theme of delayed punishment-- delayed punishment, deferred punishment.

So for example, Solomon's misdeeds in allowing the building of altars for the worship of foreign gods to please his many wives, his foreign wives, is blamed for the division of the kingdoms, but the punishment was deferred until after his death and the time of his sons, and *then* you have this split between north and south with Jeroboam and Rehoboam reigning, respectively, in the north and south. The Deuteronomist sees Israel's defeat at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 as deferred or delayed punishment for the sins of Jeroboam I. Jeroboam I, 922 or so, came to the throne and installed two cultic centers at Dan and Beth-El, erecting golden calves. This is seen as a sin, for which the nation was punished 200 years later.

As for the southern kingdom of Judah: you had some good kings in the view of the Deuteronomist in the south. Hezekiah--he's judged to be a good king; he instituted sweeping reforms and got rid of idolatrous altars and managed to maintain Judah's independence against the Assyrians. But his son Manasseh, who reigned for a large part of the seventh century, is viewed as extraordinarily wicked. He turned the Jerusalem temple into a pagan temple, and it was a time of great misery for those who were loyal to Yahweh, a time of great terror. And yet, he reigned a long time.

His eight-year-old grandson, Josiah, came to the throne upon his death, sometime, probably, in the 630s. And the Deuteronomist views Josiah as a good king. We've already heard about, or read the story which is reported in 2 Kings 22, of the refurbishing of the temple, which happens when he's about 25 or 26 years old; [he] discovers the book of the law, reads it, and is distressed because its terms are not being fulfilled. And so Josiah orders the abolition of outlying altars and pagan cults. He brings all of the priests to Jerusalem and centralizes all worship there in Jerusalem.

So in the Deuteronomist's view, Josiah is believed to be a very good king for purging the country of these idolatrous rites and centralizing worship. But the sin of Manasseh was too great and it had to be punished. So a prophetess, a prophetess named Hulda, tells Josiah that God plans to bring evil punishment on Judah for these sins, but it will be after Josiah's lifetime as something of a mercy to him.

And, in fact, it's in the next generation that Judah falls. In 586 the walls of Jerusalem are breached and the Temple is destroyed, and the king at that time, King Zedekiah, is blinded and taken in chains into exile with his court. And only the poor are left behind.

This is the Deuteronomist's attempt to account for these anomalies within their historiosophic view. And the result of the Deuteronomist's interpretation was remarkable. Because if the defeat of the nation were to be seen as the defeat of the nation's god by the god of the conquering nation, then the Israelites would have turned from the worship of their god,

Yahweh, and embraced the new ascendant god Marduk. And undoubtedly, there were Israelites who did do this. That would have been the argument of history in their view. But not all did.

For some, defeat did not lead to despair or apostasy because it could be explained by the likes of the Deuteronomistic historian or the Deuteronomistic School as fitting into the monotheistic scheme. This did not impugn God's kingship or lordship over the universe, it was proof of it. God was punishing Israel for the sin of idolatry, which was in violation of his covenant. And to punish Israel, he had raised the Babylonians. They were merely his tool.

The historiography of the Deuteronomistic historian finds its classic expression in 2 Kings 17. I'm going to skim through sections of it so you can see the argument that's laid out there:

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria [the capital of the northern kingdom]. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in various places.

This happened because the Israelites sinned against the Lord their God, who had freed them from the land of Egypt, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshipped other gods and followed the customs which the kings of Israel had practiced.

Putting, again, the blame on the kings as the head of this idolatry.

The Israelites committed against the Lord their God acts which were not right: They built for themselves shrines in all their settlements, from watchtowers to fortified cities; they set up pillars and sacred posts for themselves on every lofty hill and under every leafy tree; and they offered sacrifices there, at all the shrines, like the nations whom the Lord had driven into exile before them.

So now he's going to follow through since they behaved the same way, to drive them into exile also.

They committed wicked acts to vex the Lord, and they worshipped fetishes, concerning which the Lord had said to them, "You must not do this thing."

The Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet [and] every seer,

So God didn't just stand by idly. He was constantly sending prophets, messengers to tell them to turn back to the covenant. And we'll start talking about those prophets today. He sent warnings by "every prophet [and] every seer,"

saying, "Turn back from your wicked ways, and observe My commandments and My laws, according to all the Teaching that I commanded your fathers and that I transmitted to you through My servants the prophets." But they did not obey; they stiffened their necks, like their fathers who did not have faith in the Lord their God; they spurned His laws and the covenant that He had made with their fathers and the warnings He had given them. They went after delusion and were deluded; they made molten idols for themselves--two calves--

and specifically now, the sin of Jeroboam at Dan and Beth-El, two calves, "and they made a sacred post and they bowed down to all the host of heaven, and they worshipped Baal." (We'll hear more about that today.)

They consigned their sons and daughters to the fire; they practiced augury and divination, and gave themselves over to what was displeasing to the Lord and vexed him. The Lord was incensed at Israel and he banished them from His presence; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone.

Nor did Judah keep the commandments of the Lord their God; they followed the customs that Israel had practiced. So the Lord spurned all the offspring of Israel and He afflicted them and delivered them into the hands of plunderers, and finally He cast them out from His presence.

It's a very depressing ending of things that started so auspiciously back in Genesis 1. But if the Deuteronomist laid the blame for the tragic history of the two kingdoms at the door of the sin of idolatry, and particularly the idolatry of the royal house, a different answer will be provided by Israel's classical prophets--no less an answer, no less an interpretation, and no less an interpretation that was intended to shore up faith in this God that one might think had abandoned His people.

We'll be turning to the prophetic answer to this great crisis that faced the Israelites in the next lecture. In this lecture, I first want to talk about the phenomenon of prophecy and some of the prophets who appear in the historical narrative.

So, in the historical books that we've been looking at in the section of the Bible we call the Former Prophets--remember, the section called the Prophets we divide into Former Prophets and Latter Prophets: the section we call Former Prophets is a historical narrative; it runs from Joshua through 2 Kings, and it reads like a narrative--in that material, you have several prophets who appear, and they play a very important role in the national drama. The prophets of the tenth century, the ninth century BCE were associated with religious shrines. On occasion they were associated with the royal court.

But starting in about the eighth century, you have prophets whose words were eventually set down in writing, and they come to be in the books that now bear the names of the prophets to whom they are attributed. So these prophets, the ones whose words get recorded in books that bear their name, these prophets we call the literary prophets or the classical prophets, in contrast to the prophets who are characters in the stories that we read from Genesis through 2 Kings. So there are two kinds of prophets.

The literary prophets: those books are collected together in the section we call the Latter Prophets. I hope this is making sense. So Former Prophets is the historical narrative, which happens to feature kings and prophets as characters in the narrative. The Latter Prophets, those are the books of prophetic oracles that bear the name of the person who gave the utterance, or the oracle. Okay?

And as I just said, the literary prophets, just like the Deuteronomist, struggle to make sense of Israel's suffering and defeat and to come up with an explanation and a message of consolation. And we will get to that next time. Today we'll look at the phenomenon of prophecy in ancient Israel by comparing or examining narratives in Samuel and Kings particularly, narratives that feature prophets. And that will provide very important background for the next lecture, when we turn to the books of the literary or classical prophets and the themes of that literature.

Now, prophecy was very widespread in the Ancient Near East. It took different forms in different societies, but ultimately [it was] very widespread. We know of ecstatic prophets from Second Millennium BCE texts in Mesopotamia. Seventh-century Assyria also has ecstatic prophets. Their primary focus was on delivering oracles for kings, usually favorable. It was always wise to give a favorable oracle to your king. And we have ecstatic prophecy in the Bible also, among the earliest prophets in particular.

The term ecstasy, when it's used in this context, refers to the state of being overcome with such powerful emotions that reason seems to be suspended, self-control is suspended, what we might think of as, you know, normative behavior. These things, normal behavior, these are suspended. Ecstasies would employ music and dance; they would induce a sort of emotional seizure or frenzy. They would often be left writhing and raving, and the Bible attributes this kind of ecstatic state to the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Yahweh, which falls upon a prophet or rushes upon a prophet, comes upon a prophet and transforms him then into some sort of carrier or instrument of the Divine Will or the Divine message.

We'll see that we have bizarre behavior among many of the prophets. We even have bizarre behavior among many of the later literary prophets. Ezekiel, for example, will engage in all kinds of unusual, outrageous, dramatic behavior as a vehicle for the communication of his message. And I think this is the heritage of the ecstatic prophecy that was so much a part of Ancient Near Eastern prophecy.

But not all biblical prophecy has this ecstatic character. The Hebrew word for prophet is a *navi*, and the word *navi* seems to mean one who is called, or perhaps one who announces. That's important because it signals to us that a prophet is someone who is called to proclaim a message, to announce something, called by God to carry a message. And so in the Bible we have this phenomenon of what we call "apostolic prophecy." An apostle is merely a messenger. The word "apostle" means messenger, one sent with a message. So apostolic prophecy--this refers to messenger prophets. They are called by God and charged with a mission. They can even be elected against their will. They must bring the word of God to the world.

This is very different from prophets who are consulted by a client and given a fee to divine something. This is different. This is the deity now charging a prophet with a message to a people.

So these apostolic prophets are represented in the Bible as the instrument of God's desire to reveal himself and to reveal his will to his people. And many scholars have noted that, in a way, Moses is really the first in a long line of apostolic prophets in the Bible. In some ways, his call and his response are paradigmatic for some of these later classical prophets. In many of the literary prophets you will read, they will contain some account of their call, of the sudden, dramatic encounter with God. Usually the call consists of certain standard stages.

You first have this unexpected encounter with God. Maybe a vision of some kind or a voice that issues a summons or a calling. And then you have the reluctance of the individual. And that was also paradigmatic with Moses, wasn't it? The reluctance of the individual concerned to answer this, but ultimately the individual is overwhelmed and eventually surrenders to God and his persuasiveness. That happens in many of the prophetic books.

So in the Bible this kind of apostolic prophecy is a little different from ecstatic prophecy. It's also distinct from divination. Divination is an attempt to uncover the divine through some technique, or, excuse me, the divine will, through some technique, perhaps the manipulation of certain substances, perhaps inspecting the entrails of a sacrificed animal. Divination of this type as well as sorcery and spell casting and consulting with ghosts and spirits are all condemned by Deuteronomy. This is a very important part of the Deuteronomist's diatribe against the practices of other nations. But the fact that Deuteronomy polemicizes so vehemently against these practices is a sure sign that they were practiced--they were practiced at a popular level. This is probably what Israelite-Judean religion consisted of to some degree.

And some of you will be looking in [discussion] section, I know, at the story of the Witch of Endor--when Saul goes to a witch to conjure up the spirit of, the ghost of Samuel to consult with him. Moreover, we do have divination in the Yahweh cult itself. But this was performed by priests. They consulted some sort of divinely designated oracular object or objects. We call these the *urim* and the *tummim*, which should be familiar to all of you here at Yale. But *urim* and *tummim* are usually untranslated in your text, because actually we don't really know what they mean. They might be related to the word for light, which is *or*, and the word for, you know, integrity, perhaps, or perfection, which is *tam*. It's probably something like *abracadabra*, a little bit of a nonsense syllable that plays on words that did have meaning.

We don't really know what the *urim* and the *tummim* were, but they are said to be assigned by God. We think they, it may have been colored stones that were manipulated in some way by the priest to give a "yes or no" determination to a question. But these were said to be assigned by God as a means that he himself authorizes for divining his will. And so, the Deuteronomist accepts these.

But in general, it's the view of the Deuteronomistic historian that divination, sorcery and the like are not only prohibited, they're quite distinct from the activity of prophets. That's not what the prophets were about, according to the Deuteronomistic representation.

The Hebrew prophet wasn't primarily a fortuneteller. And I think this is a very common misconception. The *navi*, the prophet, was addressing a very specific historical situation and was addressing it in very concrete terms. He was revealing God's immediate intentions as a response to the present circumstances. And the purpose of doing this was to inspire the people to change, to come back to faithful observance of the covenant. Any predictions that the prophet might make had reference to the immediate future as a response to the present situation. So in reality the prophet's message was a message about the present, what is wrong now, what has to be done to avert the impending doom or to avert a future calamity?

There were some women prophets in Israel. None of them are found among the literary prophets, that is to say none of those books bearing the names of the prophets who uttered the oracles in them are named for women. So we have no women among the literary prophets, but you do have prophetic or prophesying women besides Miriam in the Pentateuch. There's also Deborah, who was a tribal leader and a prophet featured in Judges 4 and 5. I mentioned Hulda, her advice is sought during the reign of King Josiah. And you also have Noadiah. Noadiah prophesied in the post-exilic period. So this doesn't seem to be limited to males.

Prophecy and kingship are closely connected in ancient Israel. And this is going to be very important. You'll recall, first of all, that the king is the anointed one of Yahweh, and it's the prophet who's doing the anointing. And that makes the connection between kingship and prophecy quite strong. If you think about Israel's first two kings, you also see a strong link with the phenomenon of prophecy. The first king, Saul, who was anointed by the prophet Samuel, is in addition, said to have prophesied himself in the manner of the ecstatic prophets. When he is anointed king, he's then seized by the spirit of Yahweh. He joins a band of men--and this is in 1 Samuel 10:5; they're playing harp, tambourine, flute and lyre, and he joins them and this induces an ecstatic frenzy, a religious frenzy, that transforms him into another man, according to the text. And on another occasion during his ecstatic prophesying, Saul strips himself naked.

We have other accounts in the Bible of ecstatic prophets who would engage in self-laceration. David, the second king, is also said to prophesy himself. He also receives Yahweh's spirit or charisma from time to time, in addition to being anointed by a prophet. Subsequent monarchs aren't said to prophesy themselves. So that ends really with David. It's only Saul and David who are among the prophets. But even so, though subsequent monarchs, do not themselves prophesy, the connection with prophecy remains very, very close. And it's exemplified in several ways.

Again, prophets not only anoint kings, but they also announce their fall from power. They are kingmakers and king-breakers to some degree. Also, you have a remarkable motif that runs through so much of biblical narrative, and that's the motif of prophetic opposition to kings. Every king had his prophetic thorn in the side. So you have Samuel against Saul. You have Nathan against King David. We'll talk about him a bit later. You have other prophets, Elijah, of course, against Ahab, Micaiah against Ahab. You have Elisha against the House of Ahab. Jeremiah is going to also stand against the king quite dramatically.

So that prophetic opposition to the monarch, to the king, sort of God's watchdog over the king, is an important theme throughout the stories of the former prophets. And it sets the stage for us to understand the writings of the named prophets that will come later. Those are very often given in opposition to official policy or royal policy.

Very often you have this literary motif that introduces the prophet's opposition. The Word of the Lord came to X, prophet X, against Y, against king Y. And then you get the content of it: because you have sinned I will destroy you, I will wrest the kingship from you and so on. I want to take a quick look, though, at some of the roles that are played by prophets in the stories in Samuel and Kings. And I have them listed over on the far side of the board.

The first thing I want to consider is the notion of what I call "yes-men," as opposed to true prophets. Like the kings of Assyria, the kings of Israel and Judah found it politic to employ prophetic guilds. And in many cases these court prophets, who were in the king's employ, were little more than endorsers of royal policy.

So on numerous occasions we see these professional prophets, these royal prophets, at odds with figures that the biblical writer will view as true prophets. They [the latter] are truly proclaiming the word of God and not just endorsing royal policy. And they proclaim it whether the king wants to hear it or not, whether the people want to hear it or not.

And the classic example is Micaiah, the son of Imlah. Micaiah prophesies the truth from Yahweh even though it displeases the king and ultimately is going to cost him his freedom--not to be confused with Micah: Micaiah. His story is told in 1 Kings 22.

This story is a pointed critique of the prophetic yes-men who are serving as court prophets for, and automatically endorse the policy of, King Ahab. He's the king in the northern kingdom of Israel in the ninth century. And during King Ahab's reign, the kingdoms of the north and the south, of Israel and Judah, have decided to form an alliance. They want to try to recapture some of the territory that has been lost to the north, territory in Syria. But you didn't undertake any

military expedition without first obtaining a favorable word from the Lord. So King Ahab's prophets--and he has 400 of them--they are called, and the King asks them, "Shall I march upon Ramoth-gilead," this is this region in the north, "for battle? Or shall I not?" "March," they said, "and the Lord will deliver it into Your Majesty's hands" [1 Kings 22:6].

So we see that prophecy here is an institution. It is functioning as a source of royal advice. But the King of Judah, King Jehoshaphat, he had been perhaps hoping for an oracle against the campaign. And he says, "Isn't there another prophet of the Lord here through whom we can inquire? And the King of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, "There is one more man through whom we can inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he never prophesies anything favorable about me, only disaster--Micaiah, son of Imlah" [Hayes's translation].

Well, Jehoshaphat insists and Micaiah is summoned. And he's warned by the messenger who summons him that he'd better speak a favorable word like all the other prophets. The messenger says, "the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them; and speak favorably" [1 Kings 22:13, RSV; see note 1]. It's almost an open admission that the prophets are, you know, little more than yes-men. So Micaiah answers the king's question when he asks about the advisability of marching to the north. And he says, "March and triumph! The Lord will deliver [it] into Your Majesty's hands." He's done what he's been told to do: give the same answer as the other prophets. But he doesn't use the prophetic formula. He doesn't say, "Thus says the Lord" or some other indication that he's had a vision, that he's prophesying, that he's actually conveying the word of the Lord. And the king seems to sense this and sense this deception, and he says, "How many times must I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

So Micaiah lets the king have it, and he tells of this vision that he received from God, a vision of Israel scattered among, I'm sorry, of Israel scattered over hills like sheep. So he's seeing sheep, right, without a shepherd. The implication being that Israel's shepherd, who is the king, is going to be killed in battle and, like the sheep spread on the hill, Israel will be scattered. So the king is very irritated by Micaiah's prophecy. He says, "Didn't I tell you that he would not prophesy good fortune for me, but only misfortune?" [1 Kings 22:18]

What's interesting is, in the section that follows, Micaiah gives an explanation for why he is the lone dissenter. He doesn't accuse the other prophets of being false prophets. He represents them instead as being misled, and as being misled by God, if you will. So for the second time Micaiah utters the word of the Lord. He has a second vision. And this vision is a vision of God, who is seated on a throne and the host of heaven are gathered around him. And God asks, "Who will entice Ahab so that he will march and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And a certain one comes forward; he volunteers for this task, and he tells how he's going to do this. He says, "I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And God says, "You will entice, and you will prevail. Go out and do it." So Micaiah concludes this vision by saying, "So the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours; for the Lord has decreed disaster upon you." [1 Kings 22: 20-23]

It's all part of God's plan. God is setting up Ahab for disaster, presumably as punishment for his many sins, just as he set up Pharaoh by hardening his heart, so that he would be punished--hardening his heart against Moses' pleas to let the Israelites go. This is God's way of insuring their demise and insuring their punishment.

The king's a little upset. He doesn't know whom to believe. So he doesn't kill Micaiah on the spot. He imprisons him; he puts him on rations of bread and water, just to see what the outcome of the battle will be first. And Micaiah agrees to this. He says, "If you ever come home safe, then the Lord has not spoken through me" [1 Kings 22:28]. His prophecy proves accurate, of course. The king tries to disguise himself so that no one will know that he is king and no one will be able to target him in the battle. So he disguises himself. Nevertheless, he is killed in the battle and his army scatters.

The story of Micaiah is polemicizing against what the biblical writer perceived to be the nationalization or the co-optation of the prophetic guild. And in the process, it paints a portrait of what the true prophet looks like. Micaiah is someone who is determined to deliver God's word, even if it's opposed to the wishes of the king or the view of the king and the view of the majority. He's going to proclaim God's judgment, and it will be a judgment against the nation. It will be a message of doom. And interestingly enough, this will eventually become understood as the mark of a true prophet. You know, the prophet of doom is the one who's the true prophet. As you can imagine, this kind of negativity didn't sit well with established interests. But at a later point in time looking back, the tradition would single out some of these

prophets as the ones who had spoken truly. So that's one role. The true prophet stands up against the prophetic guilds, the prophets who are employed by the kings.

A second role that we see prophets playing in this section of historical narrative: we see prophets as God's zealots. And here again there's a contrast between true prophets and false prophets. You find it particularly in those zealous Yahwists, Elijah and Elisha. The Elijah stories are found in 1 Kings 17-19 and 21. The Elisha stories appear towards the beginning of 2 Kings 2-9 and a little bit in chapter 13.

These materials are good examples again of independent units of tradition, popular stories that were incorporated into the Deuteronomistic history. They are highly folkloristic; they have lots of drama and color, plenty of miracles, animals who behave in interesting ways. That this material began as a set of folk stories is also suggested by the fact that there's a great deal of overlap in the depiction of the activities of the two prophets. So you have both of the prophets multiplying food, both of them predict the death of Ahab's queen, Queen Jezebel. Both of them part water and so on. But in their final form the stories have been interspersed with historical footnotes about the two prophets and then set into this framework, this larger framework, of the history of the kings of the northern kingdom.

So they've been appropriated by the Deuteronomistic School, which, remember, is a southern, Judean-based Deuteronomistic School. They've been appropriated for its purposes, which include a strong condemnation of the northern kingdom, of Israel and her kings, as idolatrous.

So Elijah, Elijah the Tishbite--which means that he comes from the city of Tishbeh in Gilead, which is the other side of the Jordan--Elijah is a very dramatic character. He comes across the Jordan. He's dressed in a garment of hair and a leather girdle. At the end of his story he's sort of whisked away, one of the king's servants surmises, by the wind of God. He does battle with the cult of Baal and Asherah. We associate Elijah most with the battle with the cult of Baal and Asherah. This had been introduced by King Ahab to please his Baal-worshipping queen, Queen Jezebel.

And as his first act, Elijah announces a drought. He announces a drought in the name of Yahweh. Now, this is a direct challenge to Baal, because Baal is believed to control the rain. He's believed to control the general fertility of the land and life itself. So Elijah's purpose is presumably to show that it is Yahweh, and not Baal, who controls fertility.

We have very good evidence that Baal was in fact worshipped in the northern Kingdom right down to the destruction. This is something we've touched on earlier as well. It's quite possible that Israelites in the northern kingdom saw no real conflict between the cult of Baal and the cult of Yahweh. But in the Elijah story the Deuteronomistic historian represents these two cults as being championed by exclusivists. It's one or the other.

Jezebel, Ahab's queen, kept a retinue of 450 Baal prophets and was killing off the prophets of Yahweh. And by the same token, Elijah is equally zealous for Yahweh. He refuses to tolerate the worship of any god but Yahweh, and he performs miracles constantly in the name of Yahweh to show that it is Yahweh and not Baal who gives life, for example. He raises a dead child; he multiplies oil and flour and so on, all of this in the name of the Lord to show that it is Yahweh, and not Baal who has true power.

But as I've mentioned before, there are some scholars who argue that biblical religion, again as opposed to Israelite-Judean religion--what actual people were doing in Israel and Judah, that's one thing, but biblical religion, which is this exclusive Yahwism or the tendency towards monotheism--there are some who believe that that biblical religion originated in the activity of zealous prophets like Elijah and Elisha in the north, doing battle with Baal worship. After the fall of the northern kingdom, those traditions, those Yahweh-only traditions, came south and were eventually absorbed in the Deuteronomistic School. So this in fact may be the origin of some: this Yahweh-only party represented by figures like Elijah and Elisha.

The conflict between the two cults, the Yahweh cult and the Baal cult, reaches a climax in the story in 1 Kings 18, this wonderful story in which Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal and Asherah to a contest. We have to remember that a severe drought has fallen on the land, which Elijah attributes to God's punishment for Ahab's sin in introducing Baal worship on a broad scale. Now, Elijah is hiding from the king, who's very angry with him for declaring this drought in the name of God. After three years he returns to Ahab. Ahab sees Elijah, and he says, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" [1 Kings 18:17]. And the prophet responds, "It is not I who have brought trouble on Israel, but you and your

father's House, by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and going after the Baalim. Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel together, with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table" that are supported by the royal house. When all of these people are gathered, Elijah challenges the Israelites. He says, "How long will you keep hopping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; and if Baal, follow him!" [v 21]. You're hopping between two opinions.

So it seems that at the popular level there is no problem with integrating these two cults, but you have the prophets of both that are demanding a certain exclusivity. He's met with silence. So Elijah prepares for a dramatic contest. Two bulls are slaughtered, and they are laid on altars, one an altar to Baal and one an altar to Yahweh. And the 450 prophets of Baal are to invoke their god and Elijah will invoke his God to send a fire to consume the sacrifice. The god who answers first, or the god who answers with fire, is truly God.

So the Baal prophets invoke their god morning to noon, and they're shouting, "Oh, Baal. Answer us." And the description that follows is wonderfully satirical.

But there was no sound, and none who responded; so they performed a hopping dance about the altar that had been set up. When noon came, Elijah mocked them, saying, "Shout louder! After all he is a god. But he may be in conversation, or he may be relieving himself [in the bathroom], or he may be on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and will wake up." So they shouted louder, and gashed themselves with knives and spears, according to their practice, until the blood streamed over them. When noon passed, they kept raving until the hour of presenting the meal offering. [1 Kings 18:26-29; see note 2]

So more hours have gone by and still there's no sound and none who responded or heeded. And then it's Elijah's turn. Elijah sets up 12 stones to represent the 12 tribes; he lays the bull out on the altar. He then digs a trench around the altar and he orders water to be poured over the whole thing so that it's completely saturated and the trench is filled with water. This is going to highlight, of course, the miracle that's about to occur.

And then he calls upon the name of the Lord, and instantly a fire descends from God and consumes everything: offering, wood, stone, earth, water, everything. And the people prostrate themselves and declare, "Yahweh alone is God. Yahweh alone is God."

The prophets of Baal are all seized and slaughtered. Elijah expects an end to the drought, and a servant comes to report to him that "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising in the west," and the sky grows black and there's a strong wind and a heavy storm, and the drought is finally over.

The language that's used to describe this storm is the language that's typically employed for the storm god Baal. It drives home the point of the whole satire, that Yahweh is the real god of the storm, not Baal. Yahweh controls nature, not Baal. It's God who is effective; Baal is silent and powerless, and Israel's choice should be clear. Yahweh should be the only God for Israel, just as he is for Elijah, who's name El-i-yahu means "my God [Eli = my God] is Yahweh."

So Jezebel is pretty upset and she threatens Elijah with execution. He flees into the desert, and he will spend 40 days and 40 nights on a mountain called Horeb, or Sinai. That, of course, is the site of God's revelation to Moses. Moses also spent 40 days and 40 nights there, and many scholars have pointed out the numerous parallels between Elijah and Moses. It seems that there was a conscious literary shaping of the Elijah traditions on the model of Moses, in more ways than just these two. We'll see a few coming up.

Elijah is in great despair at Sinai. He wants to die. He feels that he has failed in his fight for God. And so he hides himself in a rocky cleft, and this is also reminiscent of the cleft that Moses hides himself in in order to catch a glimpse of God as God passes by. Similarly, Elijah hides in a cleft where he will encounter God.

This passage is in 1 Kings 19:9-12:

Then the Word of the Lord came to him. He said to him, "Why are you here, Elijah?" He replied, "I am moved by zeal for the Lord, the God of Hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to the sword. I alone am left, and they are out to take my life." "Come out," He called, "and stand on the mountain before the Lord."

And lo, the Lord passed by. There was a great and mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks by the power of the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind--an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake--;fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire--a soft murmuring sound.

Or perhaps a still, small voice. A lot of translations use that phrase, which is very poetic.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his mantle about his face and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Elijah seems to be renewed somehow at Sinai. This was the mountain that was the source of Israel's covenant with God. But whereas the earlier theophanies there at Sinai had involved earthquake and wind and fire, the narrative here seems to be making a point of saying that God is not in the earthquake and the wind and the fire. He is in the lull after the storm. This might then be providing a kind of balance or corrective to the preceding story that we've just had of Mount Carmel, Elijah on Mount Carmel. God may be the master of the storm, and Elijah dramatically demonstrated that, but he isn't to be identified with the storm in the same way that Baal was. He's not a nature god, and he's known only in silence. A kind of awesome vocal silence.

In the theophony then that follows to Elijah, God instructs Elijah to return. He has to leave Sinai; he has to return to the people. He has work to do; he has to foment rebellion, or revolution I should say, in the royal house. This task is one that Elijah will not complete. His disciple Elisha will end up completing it. But the importance in this scene I think is its emphasis on God as the God of history rather than a nature god. Israel's God acts in history; he's made known to humans by his acts in history. His prophet cannot withdraw to a mountain retreat. He has to return and he has to play his part in God's plans for the nation.

So we've discussed the prophet as God's zealot, particularly as illustrated or exemplified by Elijah and Elisha. The prophets also had other roles, and we'll see this in Elisha. Elisha succeeds Elijah. The cycle of stories about Elijah ends with Elijah's ascent into Heaven on a fiery chariot in a whirlwind. That's a detail in the story that has contributed to the longstanding belief that Elijah never died. And so Elijah will be the harbinger of the Messiah. He will come back to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Elijah left his prophetic cloak to his disciple and successor Elisha. Elisha's involvement in the political arena was also important and highlights another prophetic role we've touched on before, that of kingmaker and king-breaker. So just as Samuel anointed Saul king and then David king in private meetings, you also have Elisha. He sends an associate to secretly anoint Jehu (Jehu is one of Ahab's ex-captains) as king of Israel. This is going to initiate a very bloody civil war. Jehu is going to massacre all of Ahab's family, all of his supporters, his retinue in Israel. He also assembles all of the Baal worshippers in a great temple that was built by Ahab in Samaria, and then he orders all of them killed and the temple demolished. So it is a pitched battle, an all-out war between the Yahweh-only party [and] the Baal party.

We're not going to be looking at Elisha in great detail, but I will just point out one last aspect of his prophetic profile that I think is notable here in the book of Kings. And that is the characteristic of prophets as miracle workers.

Like Elijah, Elisha performs miracles. He causes an iron axe to float; he raises a child from the dead; he fills jars of oil. He makes poison soup edible. He causes 20 loaves of barley to feed a hundred men, and he heals lepers. These legendary stories, in which divine intentions are effected by means of the supernatural powers of holy men, this represents a popular religiosity. People would turn to wonder-working holy men when they were sick or in crisis, when

they needed help. And this kind of religious activity--which was clearly widespread in the Ancient Near East and in Israel--this kind of popular belief, this fascination with wonder-working charismatics, it's also seen very prominently in the gospels of the New Testament.

A final prophetic role is very well-illustrated by the prophet Nathan. Nathan is the classic example of a prophet who serves as the conscience of the king. In 2 Samuel: 11-12, we have the dramatic story of David and Bathsheba.

King David's illicit union with Bathsheba--as you know, she's the wife of Uriah who is fighting in the king's army--his illicit union with Bathsheba results in her pregnancy. And when David learns that Bathsheba is pregnant, he first tries to avoid the issue. He grants Uriah a leave from the frontlines. He says: Come on home and have a conjugal visit with your wife. And Uriah is very pious (and it leaves you to wonder who knew what when). It's a great story. It's told with a lot of subtlety and indirection. But Uriah is very pious, and he refuses: No, how could I enjoy myself when people are out there dying? which is an implicit criticism of the king, who just did that very thing. And so David is foiled there, and he plans to then just dispose of Uriah. So he orders Uriah's commanders to place Uriah in the front lines of the battle and then pull back so that Uriah is basically left on his own and he will be killed. And indeed he is. So David adds murder to adultery.

But not even the king is above God's law, and God sends his prophet Nathan to tell the king a fable. This is in 2 Samuel 12:1 through 14.

"There were two men in the same city, one rich and one poor. And the rich man had very large flocks and herds, but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He tended it and it grew up together with him and his children: it used to share his morsel of bread, and drink from his cup, and nestle in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him. One day, a traveler came to the rich man, but he was loathe to take anything from his own flocks or herds to prepare a meal for the guest who had come to him; so he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

David flew into a rage against the man and said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He shall pay for the lamb four times over because he did such a thing and showed no pity. And Nathan said to David, "That man is you."

It's such a wonderful story, and it's wonderful to think that Nathan wasn't struck down on the spot. He escaped with his life after this accusation. But it's symptomatic of the biblical narrator's view of monarchy, the subjugation of the king to Yahweh, to Yahweh's teachings, to Yahweh's commandments, to Yahweh's true prophets that we don't hear that Nathan is carted off, but instead David acknowledges his guilt and he repents. He doesn't escape all punishment. For this deed the child of the union does in fact die, and there's a great deal of future strife and treachery in David's household as we know, and the writer does blame a good deal of that on the deeds, these terrible sins of David's.

Elijah similarly is going to function as the conscience of King Ahab in 1 Kings 21. There you have a story of a vineyard. The king covets this particular vineyard of a particular man. So the king's wife Jezebel falsely accuses the man of blasphemy. That is a capital crime and the man is stoned to death, even though these are trumped up charges, and his property is transferred to the crown. Shortly after that, Elijah appears, and he pronounces doom upon Ahab and his descendants for this terrible deed. Ahab admits the sin. He repents. And so his punishment is delayed, but as we've seen he is later killed in battle at Ramoth-Gilead.

So in these stories we see the prophets functioning as troublers of Israel--certainly from the royal point of view. And their relationships with the royal house--these relationships are quite adversarial.

So we're ready to move into what we call the period of classical prophecy and the literary prophets. And that's a period that begins with two prophets, Amos and Hosea, whom we'll be talking about next time. The last prophet of the classical prophets was Malachi.

So you have about a 320-year period. You have the prophets prophesying from about 750 down to about 430, 320 years. That's the span of time covered by these books of the literary prophets. And these prophets were responding to urgent crises in the life of the nation. It's easiest if we think of them as being grouped around four periods of crisis or four critical periods, which I've listed here. First we have prophets of the Assyrian crisis. Right? Remember the fall of Israel in 722--so around that, clustering around that time. We have prophets of the Babylonian crisis, the destruction, of course, is 586, so we have prophets who cluster around that time, a little bit before. Then you have prophets of the Exile, the years that are spent in exile in Babylon, and that's primarily Ezekiel. And then we have prophets of the post-exilic or restoration community, when the Israelites are allowed to come back to restore their community. And we'll see certain prophets there.

So in the eighth century, the Assyrian Empire is threatening Israel and Judah. You have two northern prophets, Amos and Hosea. The N is for north, so Amos and Hosea are prophesying in the north, and they're warning of this doom. It's going to come as punishment for violations of the Mosaic Covenant. Israel fell in 722. You have a similar threat being posed by the Assyrians to the southern kingdom, Judah. And so you have two Judean prophets, Isaiah and Micah. They carry a similar message to the Judeans. So those four we associate with the Assyrian crisis.

With the fall of Nineveh the capital of Assyria--that fall is in 612 and that's something that the prophet Nahum celebrates; then Babylon is the master of the region--Judah becomes a vassal state but tries to rebel. And the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah, they prophesy in the southern kingdom, in Judah. Jeremiah, he urges political submission to Babylon because he sees Babylon as the agent of God's just punishment.

We'll come back and look at all these messages in great detail. Post-exilic prophet, or exilic prophet, Ezekiel as I said, a prophet of the exile who's consoling the people in exile in Babylonia, but also asserting the justice of what has happened. And then finally at the end of the sixth century when the first exiles are returning to restore the community, returning to the homeland, they face a very harsh life. And you have Haggai, Zechariah promising a better future. You have prophets like Joel and Malachi who bring some eschatological hope into the mix. So that can help frame--those are the ones we're going to touch on mostly. We're not going to hit all of the prophetic books, but these are the main ones we'll hit. And we'll start with Amos next time.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
2. The Jewish Publication Society's *Tanakh* translation is modified here to reflect the idiomatic usage of "relieving himself."

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 16 Transcript

November 1, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Let me just briefly recap as we are moving into the literary prophets, or the classical prophets, they are sometimes called. It is easiest to think of them as being associated with particular crises in the nation's history. We are not going to be looking at them all, and I have picked out some of the main ones that we will be looking at. Really, they are exemplary in a number of different ways.

So you have prophets of the Assyrian crisis. This is when the two kingdoms still exist. In the north prophesying in Israel, you have Amos and Hosea. And in the south you have Isaiah and Micah. So think of those four books together. It will be easier to note the differences among them if you group them together. And we will be doing that.

Then the prophets of the Babylonian crisis. By this time the northern kingdom has fallen. We are moving towards the end of the seventh century. The Assyrian Empire has fallen in 612. The prophet Nahum talks about the fall of Assyria. And we move then into the very end of the century and down to the beginning of the sixth century, with the destruction of Judah. So prophets associated with that time: particularly Jeremiah, and also Habakkuk. Then we have the prophet of the exile, who is Ezekiel. And then the post-exilic period, or the Restoration, when the Israelites are allowed to return to their land and we have several prophets at that time: Haggai, Zechariah, Joel and Malachi will be the prophets we'll be looking at briefly.

There are three long prophetic works, and I have circled those [on the blackboard]: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, one associated with each of the three crises. So again another mnemonic for you is to think of them each associated with each of those major crises. And the rest are all much shorter works, I think Obadiah being the shortest, really just a very, very short work. There has been a long debate over the degree to which these classical or literary prophets were harking back to long standing Israelite traditions or constructing norms that would later come to be viewed as long standing Israelite traditions. Kaufman describes these classical prophets as the standard bearers of the covenant [Kaufman 1972, Part III]. This is his term. And in his view they could be seen as conservatives, but by the same token he says the new prophecy conceived of ideas that Israelite thought of the earlier time had not conceived. And in this sense, Kaufman argues they are also radical. He describes them as radical conservatives or conservative radicals. As a result of the radical nature of some of their message, the prophets had to speak with great exaggeration. And you will notice this when you read their writing. Great exaggeration, a lot of dramatic imagery, dramatic features. They denounce the people. They chastise the people. And as a result they were often scoffed at or even persecuted in return.

But eventually the nation would come to enshrine their words in its ancient sacred heritage, which is testimony to the fact that their message must have served a crucial role at some time in the changing political and religious reality.

Now, we have already talked about the Deuteronomistic historiosophy, and how it developed as an interpretation of the historical catastrophes of 722 and 586, and this interpretation made it possible for Israelites to accept the reality of the defeat of the nation, the defeat of Israel, without at the same time losing faith in God. The defeat of Israel, the exile of the nation, was not to be taken as evidence that God was not the one supreme Lord of history, or that God was a faithless God, who would abandon his covenant and his people. The defeat and the exile were interpreted to affirm precisely the opposite. God, as the universal God, could use other nations as his tool. He could use these nations to execute judgment on his people, and he did this in an act of faithfulness ultimately, faithful to his covenant, which promised punishment and chastisement for the sins of the people, the sins of idolatry.

The classical literary prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 minor prophets, follow the basic thrust of this interpretation of events. They agree that the defeat and the exile are evidence rather than disproof of God's universal sovereignty, and they agree that they are God's just punishment for sin. But they are going to differ from the Deuteronomist in two significant ways. First they are going to differ in their identification of that sin. For the prophets, it is not just idolatry for which Israel is punished, although that is important, too. And second of all, they are going to differ in their emphasis on a future restoration and glory, a message that we do not find in the Deuteronomistic historian.

The individual books of the prophets are really arranged according to two interacting principles: size and chronology. So you have the first three books, [they] are the very large, prophetic books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in chronological order of the three crises we have outlined here. And then you have the minor prophets, and the minor prophets, again, are roughly chronological order, although book size also plays a bit of a role in arranging these materials. That was very common in the ancient world--for size to determine the order of books in a corpus. We are not going to be following the order of the canon, because it does jump around chronologically; first with the three large books and then going back and having some of the smaller books of earlier prophets. We are going to be looking at them in chronological order. We are going to be looking at them against the backdrop of the historical crisis to which they are responding.

So we are going to begin with the first of the literary prophets, even though it is not the first in the order of the Bible, and that is Amos. Amos preached during a relatively stable period of time. This was in the northern kingdom. It was around 750 under the reign of Jeroboam the Second, not the first. And this is at a time before the Assyrian threat is becoming very apparent, and Assyria's empire building ambitions--before those are becoming very apparent. There are many passages that suggest that Amos was an ordinary shepherd. He came from a small town about 10 miles south of Jerusalem; so he came from the southern kingdom to prophesy in the northern kingdom. He was called to Bethel, which was one of the royal sanctuaries in the northern kingdom, to deliver his prophecies. But despite the suggestion that he was an ordinary shepherd it seems more likely that he was probably a fairly wealthy owner of land and flocks. He was probably educated and literate. The northerners are said to be very surprised by his eloquence and his intelligence. But they did not like his message, and ultimately he is going to be forced to go back to the southern kingdom.

The Book of Amos can be divided structurally into four sections, which I have listed on the board over here. You first have a set of brief oracles of doom. These are in the first two chapters, Amos 1 and 2. And then you have a series of three short oracles, oracles to the women of Samaria, an oracle to the wealthy of Samaria and Jerusalem, and then an oracle to Israel as a whole. These are in chapters 3-6. This is followed then by five symbolic visions which receive interpretation. These are visions of judgment, first locusts, then a fire, then a plumb line that one uses in building a building, a basket of fruit, and then a vision of God standing by the altar at Bethel. This happens [in] chapters 7-9, about verse 8 and 9 [of chapter 7 for the plumb line version]. This section, besides the five visions, also has a little narrative account of Amos' conflict with a priest at Bethel, the priest Amaziah who accuses Amos of treason. And then there is a concluding epilogue in the ninth chapter that runs for about seven or eight verses to the end of the book.

The Book of Amos is a wonderful place to start for us because it contains many features that are going to be typical of all of the classical prophets, all of the literary prophets by and large. And also this book introduces certain major themes. These will become standard themes of prophecy with some variation here and there. So by setting them out in the Book of Amos then we can really go forward and just look at the variations on some of those themes that are sounded by some of the other prophets.

So first some literary features, and then we will talk about the themes of the book. In terms of literary features, I have jotted down a few here. You see in the book what we would call editorial notes. That is to say, you have notes in the Book of Amos which are in the third person. These will very often occur at the beginning of a book. They sort of introduce or set the stage. So we have in Amos. "The words of Amos, a sheep breeder from Tekoa, who prophesied concerning Israel in the reigns of kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam, the son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake." So almost all of the prophetic books are going to contain an introduction of this type. Some third-person phrase which will identify the place and the prophet and his time. There is another kind of writing in some of these works, as well, which is in the first person. It is not always in the third person, but you sometimes have first person passages in which the prophet himself will speak about and describe something about himself. It's a stepping aside from the oracular moment and speaking in some way about some experience that he has had. So we have these first person and these third person passages that give us information about the prophet.

The third-person passages, we surmise, may have been written by the prophet, but they were probably written by disciples or others who were responsible for collecting the prophets' oracles, inditing the prophet's oracles. Amos 7 is an example of this. In Amos 7, we find an example of this kind of writing, again, where you have a description of Amos in debate with a priest, Priest Amaziah, at the Shrine of Bethel. So you have the oracular statements, but you also have these other identifying passages as well, and descriptive passages.

This brings us then to a second point, which is that the prophetic books are a compilation of a variety of materials. They consist of varied materials that have been collected. They have been revised. They have been supplemented. The prophets' oracles, which were delivered in various situations over a period of time, were apparently saved and then compiled, again perhaps by the prophet himself, perhaps by his disciples. We know that prophetic oracles were written down and transmitted in other ancient Near Eastern societies. We know this about Assyria, for example. These were literary compositions and the literary nature of these compositions will account sometimes for their ordering. Sometimes it appears that there is not chronological ordering. This is one of the things that can make it so hard to read some of the prophetic writings, because the oracles are not necessarily in chronological order. They are literary works, and sometimes the prophet or the disciple or the editor would combine principles--I'm sorry, combine oracles or juxtapose oracles according to principles other than chronology--literary principles. So for example, you very often find the principle of a catch word: a prophecy or oracle that might end with a particular word in its last line or last verse, and so next to it will be a second prophecy or oracle which echoes that word in its opening line, and so the two have been brought together for literary reasons. So Amos 3:2, reads: "You alone have I known of all the families of the earth." And that is the concluding line of that particular oracle, and that verb "to know" is probably the catchword for the oracle that follows, because the next one opens, "Do two people walk together unless they know each other?" So that may have suggested the juxtaposition of those two.

So we need to understand that the prophetic books are really little anthologies, anthologies of oracles. They can be connected for literary rather than substantive or chronological reasons. You can't assume chronological sequence. It is not like reading the historical books of Joshua through 2 Kings. It is very, very different.

An interesting question concerns the degree to which the prophetic books preserve the actual oracles of the prophets. Certainly there is no doubt that there has been revision and supplementation of the prophetic books. Not everything in the Book of Amos is from Amos, himself. Additions have been made to most of the prophetic books. It was believed that the words of the prophets had enduring significance. Those who received these words believed that they had enduring significance. And so they were supplemented because of the conviction that they had enduring relevance, not despite of it, because of it. And some scholars believe that this accounts for the oracle in Amos 2 that prophesies the fall of Judah. Amos is living in 750, the latter half of the eighth century, not in the sixth century. He is living in the eighth century. But he prophesies the fall of Judah, and most people would assume that this is an addition which is made to the Book of Amos after Judah's fall. These supplementations and additions and revisions that we will see in some of the prophetic books, and some of them are quite obvious, were not completely promiscuous. I don't want to give you the idea that they were, because there are many instances in which a prophet's words are not updated, are not modified, even though the failure to do this leaves the prophecy woefully out of step with what actually came to be later. So those kinds of inconsistencies between a prophet's words and later fact would suggest that there was a strong tendency to preserve the words of the prophet faithfully. So we will see both tendencies within the literature, a tendency to leave words intact, and at the same place [correction: time], a tendency to supplement or to add sections to the prophet, the prophetic writing.

A third feature that we will see in many of the prophetic books is what we call "the call." And this is common to most of the prophets. It is the claim to authority as a result of having been called by God to deliver his word. We talked before about apostolic prophecy, this notion of the prophet as someone who is sent by God with a message, not someone who is consulted by a client to find out what God thinks. The irresistibility of the call is a feature of these passages, and we find it illustrated in Amos 3:7-8, after citing a series of proverbs that illustrate inexorable cause and effect. For example, he says, "Does a trap spring up from the ground/Unless it has caught something?" And then the oracle continues, "A lion has roared,/Who can but fear?/My Lord God has spoken,/Who can but prophesy?" There is this irresistible call. We find metaphors used liberally throughout the prophetic writings. And Amos describes his prophecy by means of two types of metaphors, word and vision. So many of the prophetic oracles will be introduced by the phrase "the word of Yahweh came unto prophet X." The word of Yahweh came--sort of an image of God speaking directly to these prophets in human language, which is then repeated or passed on to the audience, to the listener.

This could be understood in a literal sense. We could take this as a metaphor. Behind it, however, is the simple idea that it is God who is communicating to the prophet and the prophet then communicates the message to the people. But in addition to hearing, Amos and many of the other prophets also see. So the word of the Lord comes, but in other moments the prophetic oracle will be introduced by verbs or words connected with seeing and vision. Hence the word

"seer" as a designation for a prophet also.

Amos is shown visions of various kinds, particularly those five visions clumped in chapters 7, 8 and 9. And this is true of the prophets generally. These visions might be visions of God speaking, or visions of God performing some kind of action. They might also be visions of perfectly ordinary objects or events that carry some sort of symbolic significance. So we have five visions in Amos in chapters 7-9, and some of them are visions of ordinary objects, but those objects have some special coded meaning or symbolic significance for Israel. And then we have visions of extraordinary things, as well. So we have a locust plague. It is about to consume the crop right after the king has taken his share, his taxes of the crop. Not such an extraordinary vision, but then there is a vision of a fire that consumes the lower waters that are pressed down below the earth, and which threatens to consume even the soil of the earth itself. So it is an extraordinary vision. We have a vision of a plumb line-- the tool that is used by builders. There is a vision of God destroying worshipers in the temple. The vision in chapter 8 is an ordinary vision. It is a vision of a basket of summer fruit. The Hebrew word for summer or summer fruit is *kayits* and this is a pun because the word *kets* means end. So the vision of *kayits* is indicating or symbolizing the *kets*, the end of Israel. And these kinds of symbolic visions will very often typically include puns of this type.

So another point to make about just the literary features of prophetic writings is that they do contain or employ a variety of literary forms. One commonplace form that you will see over and over again in these writings is a form that we call the oracle, an oracle against the nations. This is found in Amos. It's found also in the three large prophetic writings: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Amos 1 and 2 contains seven of these oracles that inveigh against the nations. But Amos gives the form a new twist. And this is what's interesting. Six of the seven oracles are directed against surrounding nations, and they are excoriated for their inhumane treatment of others, Israelites and non-Israelites during wars and conflicts, as punishment for their terrible war atrocities. A divine fire is going to break out and destroy all of their palaces and fortified places. But then the twist comes, because after these six horrific oracles, which condemn the nations for these brutal acts of atrocity in war, Amos then turns to address his own people. And he says the same divine power will consume the people of Yahweh because of the atrocities and inhumanities that they commit even in times of peace!

So the seventh, the climactic oracle, announces that God's wrath will be directed at Israel, and this is a very unwelcome, unexpected statement. And you can see how he perhaps would almost draw his audience in, you know, with these images of their enemies getting what they deserve, only to then turn it around (having drawn them in, seduced them if you will with his words)--to turn around and then charge *them* with something even worse.

The term "Israel" that he uses is, of course, ambiguous. That is one of the problems with some of the prophetic writings. You are never completely sure whether they're prophesying against the northern kingdom, Israel, or the House of Israel--both kingdoms together, the whole tribal confederation. Some passages in Amos would suggest one. Some passages suggest the other. The other thing that we find in Amos is an oracle against Judah, against the southern kingdom. This is in chapter 2. It is just two lines, verses 4 and 5, and it is in chapter 2. And many people identify that as a later addition by an editor. First of all, it's written in very standard, sort of Deuteronomistic language. And also, if we leave it out, then we have a nice literary pattern. We have six oracles plus one. We have six oracles against foreign nations, and then we have one against Israel. And that pattern is a very standard, literary pattern, particularly in poetic sections of the Bible and the prophets are written in an elevated poetic style. We very often have a six plus one pattern. That's related to another pattern that we also see in Amos, which is the three plus one pattern. This is just a doubling of it, six plus one. The three plus one pattern you will recognize. It is quite explicit at times. Amos will say, "for three transgressions of Damascus, for four, I will not revoke it"--the decree, the punishment. A similar kind of language is used in verse 6 for Gaza, in verse 9 for Tyre, in verse 11 for Edom, and verse 13 for the Ammonites, and so on. So we often have this pattern. And so the suggestion by scholars is that without that prophecy concerning the fall of Judah, which post-dates Amos, you would have a nice complete six plus one pattern. And this might be the sign of a later editor updating Amos' prophecy, so that it would look as though he had, in fact, prophesied the fall of Judah.

You have other sorts of literary patterns and forms used in the prophetic works. Some of the literary forms we see are hymns. We see songs. We see laments, particularly laments or mourning for Israel as if her destruction is already a *fait accompli*. You find proverbs. Very often when the prophets cite a proverb, they will turn its accepted meaning on its head. They'll take an old proverb and they'll apply it to some new situation and give it a radically new kind of meaning,

to sort of shock and surprise their audience. And Amos 3-8 contains a lot of proverbs.

Another literary form that we will see, and this is an important one, is a literary form that is called the *riv*, r-i -v. I have it up there [on the blackboard]: a *riv*, which basically means a lawsuit, specifically a covenant lawsuit. Many of the prophetic books feature passages in which God basically brings a lawsuit against the people, charging them with breach of covenant, breach of contract, if you will. And in these passages, you have legal metaphors being used throughout: people testifying or witnessing against Israel--can she speak in her [own] defense?--and so on. So the *riv*, or the covenant lawsuit is a form we will see here. We will also see it again when we get to the Book of Job. So the prophetic corpus draws on the entire range of literary forms that were available in Israelite literary tradition, and very often gives them a rich--and that is what give the books a very rich and varied texture.

So Amos is a model for us in terms of its literary features, but it's also a model for us in terms of some of the themes or the content of the book--because Amos will articulate certain themes that we will see resounding throughout the prophetic literature. There will be some variations on these themes, but some standard themes appear here. So we will review those now.

Many scholars, Kaufman among them, have noted that the literature of the classical prophets is most clearly and strongly characterized by a vehement denunciation of the moral decay and social injustice of the period. It really does not matter what period. "Vehement denunciation" of moral decay and social injustice, is the way the Kaufman phrases it [Kaufman 1972, 347]. Amos criticizes the sins of the nation. He is critical of everyone, the middle class, the government, the king, the establishment, the priesthood--they're all plagued by a superficial kind of piety. For Amos, as for all the prophets we will be looking at, the idea of covenant prescribes a particular relationship with Yahweh, but not only with Yahweh: also with one's fellow human beings. The two are interlinked. It is a sign of closeness to Yahweh that one is concerned for Israel's poor and needy. The two are completely intertwined and interlinked. And so Amos denounces the wealthy. He denounces the powerful and the way they treat the poor. I am going to be reading some passages from Amos to illustrate some of these themes.

So Amos 4:1-3--and listen to the dramatic rhetoric that is used: "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan/On the hill of Samaria"--that is the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel:

Who defraud the poor,  
Who rob the needy;  
Who say to your husbands,  
"Bring, and let's carouse!"  
My Lord God swears by His holiness:  
Behold, days are coming upon you  
When you will be carried off in baskets,  
And, to the last one, in fish baskets,  
And taken out [of the city]--  
Each one through a breach straight ahead--  
And flung on the refuse heap.

It's a wonderful pun here, because the wealthy women of Samaria are referred to as cows of Bashan. Now Bashan is an area that is very rich pastureland in the transJordan. And also it is very common in Canaanite literature to refer to the nobility, and even to gods, with terms like bull or ram or cow. These were not insulting terms, as they might be in our culture. These were, in fact, terms that did not offend. These were very complimentary terms. So when he refers to the cows of Bashan (he speaks to the women of Samaria as the cows of Bashan) he is flattering them to begin with. But the pun is quite wonderful because these women are going to end up like fat cows, as slabs of meat in the butcher's basket or in the fish basket which, you know, is flung out on the refuse heap once it is spoiled. So he takes that term "cows of Bashan," and leads it to this horrendous end.

Amos 6:1 and 4-7. This is another scathing attack on the idle life of the carefree rich who ignore the plight of the poor:

woe to those "at ease in Zion." Of course, that is the capital of the southern kingdom, Jerusalem, and those "confident on the hill of Samaria," the northern kingdom:

You notables of the leading nation  
On whom the House of Israel pin their hopes;  
[â€] They lie on ivory beds,  
Lolling on their couches,  
Feasting on lambs from the flock  
And on calves from the stalls.  
They hum snatches of song to the tune of the lute--  
They account themselves musicians like David.  
They drink [straight] from the wine bowls  
And anoint themselves with the choicest oils--  
But they are not concerned about the ruin of Joseph.  
Assuredly, right soon  
They shall head the column of exiles;  
They shall lull no more at festive meals.

It is a great image of them lying about as the head of the nation. They will be at the head of the nation as it moves into exile! And on an archaeological note, I understand that in Samaria they have, in fact, uncovered all kinds of ivory furniture and ivory coverings that would then be attached to furniture. So the image of them lolling on ivory couches in Samaria apparently makes a lot of sense. So the moral decay, the greed, the indulgence of the upper classes, this is directly responsible for the social injustice that according to the prophets outrages God. Amos 8:4-6:

Listen to this, you who devour the needy, annihilating the poor of the land, saying, "If only the new moon were over, so that we could sell grain; the sabbath, so that we could offer wheat for sale, using [a measure] that is too small and a shekel [weight] that is too big, tilting a dishonest scale, and selling grain refuse as grain! We will buy the poor for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals. The Lord swears by the pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of [their] doings. [See note 1]

Again, notice that they are prone to extreme formulations and high-flown rhetoric, and sometimes when you strip away the rhetoric, you see that the crimes that are being denounced are not murder, and rape, or horrendous physical violence. These [the latter] are obvious and grievous violations of social morality. Rather many scholars have pointed out, I think Kaufman chief among them, that the crimes that are denounced here are crimes that are prevalent in any society in any era. The crimes that are denounced as being utterly unacceptable to God, infuriating God to the point of destruction of the nation, are the kinds of crimes we see around us everyday, taking bribes, improper weights and balances, lack of charity to the poor, indifference to the plight of the debtor.

A second theme that is pointed out again by many scholars, is what Kaufman calls the idea of the primacy of morality [Kaufman 1972, 345]. That is to say the idea or the doctrine that morality is not just an obligation equal in importance to the cultic or religious obligations, but that morality is perhaps superior to the cult. What God requires of Israel is morality and not cultic service. Now, the prophets are all going to have--we are going to see many different attitudes towards the cult among the prophets. So allow that to become a more nuanced statement as we go through. Some are going to reject the cult of the entire nation. Others will not. So there is going to be some variation, but certainly morality is primary. And their words could, at times, be very harsh and very astonishing. Amos 5:21-24. "I loathe"--he is speaking now as God, right? So God is speaking--God says:

"I loathe, I spurn your festivals,  
I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies.  
If you offer Me burnt [sacrifices] or your meal [sacrifices]  
I will not accept them;  
I will pay no heed  
To your gifts of fatlings.  
Spare me the sound of your hymns,  
And let Me not hear the music of your lutes.  
But let justice well up like water,  
Righteousness like an unfailing stream." [See note 2]

This is an attack on empty piety, on the performance of rituals without any meaning, perhaps, behind that performance, or in accompaniment to social injustice--the two can't happen at the same time. And that's a theme that is sounded repeatedly throughout prophetic literature. So for Amos, and for all the prophets, injustice is sacrilege. The ideals of the covenant are of utmost importance. That is why they are called the standard bearers of the covenant, harking back to the covenant obligations. And without these, without the ideals of the covenant, the fulfillment of cultic and ritual obligations in and of itself is a farce. That is not to say that they would be rejected were Israel to be upholding the covenant.

So this rejection of the cult depends, of course, on a caricature of cultic and ritual performance. The prophets caricature it as meaningless. They caricature it as unconcerned with ethics or with the ideals of justice and righteousness. But internal cultural conflicts often do involve the caricaturing or the ridiculing of an opponent's beliefs or practices. But for some of the prophets rejection of the cult was quite radical. That is an idea that is not yet really fully formed in Amos. We are going to see, again, that some of the prophets will reject the cult of the nation, not just the cult of the wicked, but everyone. Even if performed properly and by righteous persons, there will be one or two prophets who believe the cult has no inherent value or no absolute value for God.

In some sense, this is a view that we have already encountered in sources devoted to the cult even in a source like P, the Priestly material. The Priestly material is already moving towards the idea, or establishing the idea, that the cult is an expression of divine favor rather than divine need. It doesn't really have an actual value necessarily for God. It doesn't really affect his vitality. It is given to humans as a ritual conduit, as a way to attract and maintain God's presence within the community, or to procure atonement for deeds or impurities that might temporarily separate one from God. So already in the Priestly source, we have a very complicated notion of the function of the [cult] for society and humanity. So the prophetic doctrine of the primacy of morality seems to be a reaction against other views of cultic practice; perhaps there were popular assumptions about the automatic efficacy of the cult and its rites.

But Kaufman has been joined by many other scholars who argue that the prophets raised morality to the level of an absolute religious value, and they did so because they saw morality as essentially divine [Kaufman 1972, 367]. The essence of God is his moral nature. Moral attributes are the essence of God himself. So Kaufman notes that he who requires justice and righteousness and compassion from human beings is himself just and righteous and compassionate. This is the prophetic view. The moral person can metaphorically be said to share in divinity. This is the kind of apotheosis that you find then in the prophetic writings, not the idea of a transformation into a divine being in life or even after death, but the idea that one strives to be god-like by imitating his moral actions, the idea again of *imitatio dei*.

A third feature of the prophetic writings, this is again underscored by Kaufman, but also many other scholars, and that is the prophets' view of history, their particular view of history, their interpretation of the catastrophic events of 722 and 586. It is an interpretation that centers on their elevation of morality, because the prophets insisted that morality was a decisive, if not the decisive factor, in the nation's history. Israel's acceptance of God's covenant placed certain religious and moral demands on her [Kaufman 1972, 365]. Now in the Deuteronomistic view that we have talked about, one sin is singled out as being historically decisive for the nation. Other sins are punished, absolutely. But only one is singled out as being historically decisive for the nation, and that is the sin of idolatry, particularly the idolatry of the royal house.

So the Deuteronomistic historian presents the tragic history of the two kingdoms as essentially a sequence of idolatrous aberrations, which were followed by punishment. And this cycle continued until finally there had to be complete destruction. While it is certainly true that moral sins and other religious sins in Israel were punishable in the Deuteronomist's view, it is really only the worship of other gods that brings about national collapse, national exile.

And that view is exemplified in 2 Kings 17, which I have read to you. It does not mention moral sins as leading to the collapse of the state. It harps on idolatry. Idolatry was what provoked God to drive the nation into exile. The view of the classical prophets is a little different. Israel's history is determined by moral factors, not just religious factors. So the nation is punished not only for idolatry, but for moral failings. And, of course, the two are to a large degree intertwined. But the emphasis on the moral is striking in the prophets. And it may not be so startling to hear that God would doom a generation or doom a nation for grave moral sins, like murder and violence. This is something we have already seen in the generation of the flood. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah--they were destroyed for grievous violations of morality: murder, violence and so on. The prophets, however, are claiming that the nation is doomed because of commonplace wrongs, because of bribe-taking, because of false scales and false weights that are being used in the marketplace. These are the crimes for which destruction of the nation and exile will take place. Amos 2:6 through 8:

Thus said the Lord:  
For three transgressions of Israel,  
For four, I will not revoke it [the decree of destruction]:  
Because they have sold for silver  
Those whose cause was just [taking bribes in a courtroom setting],  
And the needy for a pair of sandals.  
You who trample the heads of the poor  
Into the dust of the ground,  
And make the humble walk a twisted course!

So this is the first difference really between the Deuteronomistic interpretation of the nation's history--the destruction of Israel--and the prophetic interpretation. For the prophets, the national catastrophes are just punishment for sin, but not just the sin of idolatry, for all sins no matter how petty, now matter how venial, because all sins violate the terms of the covenant code, which is given specially to Israel. And the terms of the covenant--being vassals to the sovereign Yahweh means treating co-vassals in a particular way, and it is breach of covenant not to do that.

And, again, how much the prophets were harking back to an older tradition, to ancient traditions about Israel and its covenant relationship, traditions according to which Israel's redemption and election entailed moral obligations; how much they were the ones to actually generate and argue for this idea again is hotly debated by scholars. It is not an issue that we need to decide. But I would note that the primacy of morality in Israelite religion certainly dates back at least to the times of the earliest prophets, Amos in the eighth century for example, and may indeed have had antecedents. It certainly didn't just arise in the exile as some scholars would have us believe. It certainly was not the invention of the Deuteronomistic historian. It's alive and well in some of these very early prophets.

I am going to turn now to the second difference between the Deuteronomistic and the prophetic interpretation of Israel's history. And that is that the prophets coupled their message of tragedy and doom with a message of hope and consolation. And this is something that just simply doesn't come within the purview of the Deuteronomistic historian's writing. First let me say a little bit about the message of doom and then the message of hope and consolation. One of the things that's so interesting in the classical prophets is that they give a new content to older Israelite ideas about the end of days, or what we call eschatology. *Eschatology* = an account of the *eschaton*, *eschaton* meaning the end. So eschatology is an account of the end.

The prophets warned that unless they changed, the people were going to suffer the punishment that was due them. And, in fact, the people were very foolish to be eagerly awaiting or eagerly expecting what was popularly known as the Day of Yahweh, or the Day of the Lord. And so the prophets refer to the Day of Yahweh as if it were a popular conception

out there in the general culture. It was a popular idea at the time that on some future occasion God would dramatically intervene in world affairs and he would do so on Israel's behalf. He would lead Israel in victory over her enemies. They would be punished. Israel would be restored to her full and former glory. And that day, the Day of the Lord or the Day of Yahweh, in the popular mind, was going to be a marvelous day, a day of victory for Israel, triumph for Israel and a day of vengeance on her enemies. Amos 5:18 and 29, talks about the people as desirous of the Day of Yahweh. They are very confident that this is going to be a day of light, a day of blessing, a day of victory, he says.

But the prophets, Amos among them, tell a different story. According to them, if there is no change then this Day of Yahweh is not going to be some glorious thing that the people should be eagerly awaiting. It's not going to be a day of triumph for Israel. It will not be a day of vengeance on her enemies. It's going to be a dark day of destruction. It is going to be a day of doom when God will finally call his own people to account. So this is another instance of the way in which the prophets try to radically surprise their audience by taking an older concept and reversing its meaning, changing its meaning. And here they have transformed the popular image of the Day of Yahweh from one of national triumph to one of national judgment. Amos 5:18 through 20:

Ah, you who wish  
For the day of the Lord!  
Why should you want  
The day of the Lord?  
It shall be darkness, not light!  
--As if a man should run from a lion  
And be attacked by a bear;  
Or if he got indoors,  
Should lean his hand on the wall  
And be bitten by a snake![there is going to be no place to hide, in other words]  
Surely the day of the Lord shall be  
Not light, but darkness,  
Blackest night without a glimmer.

Or chapter 8:9 through 12:

And in that day--declares my Lord God--  
I will make the sun set at noon,  
I will darken the earth on a sunny day.  
I will turn your festivals into mourning  
And all your songs into dirges;  
I will put sackcloth on all loins  
And tonsures on every head. [mourning rites]  
I will make it mourn as for an only child,  
All of it as on a bitter day.

So again at the heart of this idea that the Day of Yahweh is being transformed into this day of judgment, is the old idea that God is the God of history. Right? God can control the destiny of nations. He can control the actions of nations. That is not a new idea. But in the past, or not so much in the past, I suppose--it would have been present to the prophets--the prophets were reacting against a notion that God's involvement with other nations was always undertaken on Israel's behalf. This is the idea they seem to be battling. In other words, they are battling the idea or the assumption that God controlled other nations by exercising judgment on them and punishing them and subjecting them to Israel. And the prophets are challenging this idea. And they are making what would have been heard as a shocking and extraordinary

claim.

God is, of course, yes, a God of history, of all history. He is concerned with all nations, not only Israel. But his involvement with other nations doesn't extend merely to their subjugation. If need be, or rather if Israel deserves, then God will raise up another nation against her. So the final chapter in Amos begins by proclaiming this idea of utter destruction. I will slay them all, God says, and "not one of them shall survive." Wherever they hide, under the earth, in the heavens, at the bottom of the sea, God is going to haul them out and He is going to slay them. And what about the covenant? Isn't it a guarantee of privilege or safety? Again, for Amos, its primary function is to bind the nation in a code of conduct, and violations of that code are going to be severely punished. So in chapter 9 verses 7 to 8, Amos makes the startling claim that in God's eyes Israel is really no different from the rest of the nations. He elevated her. He can also lower her.

To Me, O Israelites, you are  
Just like the Ethiopians  
True, I brought Israel up  
From the land of Egypt,  
But also the Philistines from Caphtor  
And the Aramaeans from Kir.  
Behold, the Lord God has His eye  
Upon the sinful kingdom:  
I will wipe it off  
The face of the earth!

These are harsh, harsh words. And you also have to remember that Amos was living in a time of relative peace and prosperity, about 750. National confidence is riding high. The people of Israel were pretty convinced that God was with them. They weren't in any real imminent or obvious danger. And Amos was convinced that despite this external appearance of health, the nation was diseased. They were guilty of social crimes and unfaithfulness to their covenantal obligations. And so he says they are headed down this path of destruction. Perhaps because of the optimism of the time, Amos had to emphasize this message of doom, because his book is a pretty depressing book.

Later prophets who were speaking in a different historical setting, in a more desperate historical setting, would often speak words of much more comfort and hope. But Amos doesn't do this. He does indicate that his purpose is the reformation or the reorientation of the nation. He wants to awaken Israel to the fact that change is needed. Amos 5:14 and 15, "Seek good and not evil,/That you may live,/And that the Lord, the God of Hosts,/May truly be with you,/As you think." Right now you think he is with you. He's not. Change, so that he will *truly* be with you. "Hate evil and love good,/And establish justice in the gate;/Perhaps the Lord, the God of Hosts,/Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." The "perhaps" is important, and it is very indicative of Amos' fatalism. This is very much a fatalistic book. The overriding theme of Amos' message is that punishment is inevitable. It is pretty much inevitable. And this is one of the reasons that most scholars believe that the final verses of the book, verses halfway through [chapter 9 verse] 8 down to 15, are a later addition by an editor. It is an epilogue, and it was likely added in order to relieve the gloom and the pessimism and the fatalism of the prophet's message, because in these verses, Amos does an almost complete about-face. We have just finished the first half of verse 8 in Chapter 9. So 9:8a--you have this oracle of complete and devastating judgment: "Behold, the Lord God has His eye/Upon the sinful kingdom:/I will wipe it off/The face of the earth." But then, the second half of the verse, and the beginning of this epilogue that has been added, immediately dilutes this: "But, I will not wholly wipe out/The House of Jacob --declares the Lord." It seems that an editor has qualified this last oracle of doom, has desired to qualify this last oracle of doom. And the editor continues,

For I will give the order  
And shake the House of Israel--  
Through all the nations--  
As one shakes [sand] in a sieve,

And not a pebble falls to the ground.  
All the sinners of My people  
Shall perish by the sword,  
Who boast,  
"Never shall the evil  
Overtake us or come near us."  
In that day,  
I will set up again the fallen booth of David;  
I will mend its breaches and set up its ruins anew.  
I will build it firm as in the days of old,  
[...]  
A time is coming--declares the Lord --  
[...]  
When the mountains shall drip wine  
And all the hills shall wave [with grain].  
I will restore my people Israel.  
They shall rebuild ruined cities and inhabit them;  
[...]  
They shall till gardens and eat their fruits.  
And I will plant them upon their soil,  
Nevermore to be uprooted  
From the soil I have given them--said the Lord your God.

In other words, according to this epilogue, God's punishment of Israel isn't the end of the story. It is one step in a process, and the affliction and the punishment serve a purpose. It is to purge the dross, to chasten Israel. They are going to be put through a sieve. Only the sinners will really perish. A remnant, presumably a righteous remnant, will be permitted to survive and in due time that remnant will be restored.

To summarize Amos, and hopefully this will give us then some foothold as we move into other prophetic books, we need to understand that the Book of Amos is a set of oracles by a prophet addressing a concrete situation in the northern kingdom. It's been subject to some additions that reflect the perspective of a later editor. Amos' message was that sin would be punished by God and it would be punished on a national level--the nation would fall. When the northern kingdom fell, it was understood to be a fulfillment of Amos' words. The Assyrians were the instruments of God's just punishment. So his words were preserved in Judah. After Judah fell, presumably a later editor added a few key passages to reflect this later reality, most significantly the oracle against Judah in chapter 2, verses 4-5, and the epilogue in chapter 9, verse 8b through 15, which explicitly seem to refer to the fall of the southern kingdom. It refers to a future day when the fallen booth of David will be raised. That reflects a knowledge of the end of Judah, the end of the Davidic kingship. And the phrase "on that day" which is used, is a phrase that often signals what we feel is an editorial insertion in a prophetic book. It is pointing forward to some vague future time of restoration. Okay. On Monday, we are going to be moving on to Hosea and Isaiah.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. For clarity, in this quotation Professor Hayes substitutes "a measure" for the JPS *Tanakh* translation's "an *ephah*."
2. In this quotation, Professor Hayes substitutes "sacrifices" for the JPS *Tanakh* translation's "offerings."

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## References

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text." Copyright (c) 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. No part of this text can be reproduced or forwarded without written permission of the publisher.

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 17 Transcript

November 6, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** We're going to move on now to our second literary prophet and this is the prophet Hosea. He was a native of the northern kingdom. So Amos and Hosea you're going to associate with the Assyrian crisis and they are prophets of the northern kingdom of Israel. He's prophesying in the time of Jeroboam II. Jeroboam reigned until about 747. And then he continues to the last king who is, confusingly, named Hosea. So he prophesies in the 740s, '30s, '20s, somewhere in there. He doesn't seem to have seen the fall of Israel though. Now, Hosea is considered by many to be the most difficult of the prophetic books. The Hebrew is very difficult and it sometimes seems rather garbled. It's very hard to render it intelligibly.

But structurally, we can divide the book into two main sections. Chapters 1 to 3 have a certain coherence to them, and then chapters 4 through 14. 1 to 3 tells of the prophet's marriage to a promiscuous woman named Gomer. His marriage is a metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. And these chapters also contain an indictment or a lawsuit. Remember this *riv* form, lawsuit form. We're going to see it both in Hosea and Isaiah today. Then chapters 4 through 14 contain oracles primarily, oracles against the nations but also against the Kingdom of Israel. We're going to be focusing primarily on chapters 1 to 3 since these are so distinctive to Hosea and we'll refer occasionally to some of the other chapters where they might pronounce an important theme for Hosea.

So again, the historical background for the Book of Hosea is the Assyrian threat. The Assyrians are wiping out a number of the smaller states in the Ancient Near East in the middle of the eighth century. And Israel obviously could not be far behind. The line that was taken by Hosea was to condemn the attempts that were made by various kings, by Israel's kings, to withstand defeat or to avoid defeat at the hands of Assyria. If Assyria was going to conquer Israel, Hosea said, then it was God's just punishment. And to fight against it, to fight against the inevitable was simply another kind of rejection of God, another rejection of his plans and purpose. It demonstrated a lack of trust or faith in the power of God. Hosea 10:13 spells out the disastrous consequences of trusting in human power or foreign alliances rather than trusting in God. And this is a theme that we'll see occurring again and again. Hosea 10:13, "You have plowed wickedness, / you have reaped iniquity-- / [And] you shall eat the fruits of treachery-- / Because you relied on your way, / On your host of warriors." He was suggesting inaction. Now, that surely would have been viewed by the king and the court as against all reason. But this was Hosea's insistence. Israel was faced with a choice. In whom should she place her trust? In God, or in human leaders and their armies?

Hosea 1:7 goes so far as to suggest that actually the moment of decision has past for the northern kingdom. There's still some hope for the southern kingdom, but the northern kingdom has obviously made its choice and it was the wrong choice. Hosea says that God says,

"I will no longer accept the house of Israel or pardon them. (But I will accept the House of Judah. And I will give them victory through the Lord their God;" -- a victory through the Lord their God. "I will not give them victory with bow and sword and battle, by horses and riders."

If you think that's what gives you victory you're mistaken. Some see that verse as perhaps a later interpolation into Hosea; it has such a positive assessment of the southern kingdom. But there is this sense of impending disaster that resonates throughout the Book of Hosea. Chapter 8:7, "They sow wind, / And they shall reap whirlwind-- / Standing stalks devoid of ears / And yielding no flour. / If they do yield any, Strangers shall devour it. / Israel is bewildered;" So the catastrophe is unavoidable, and Hosea's often been described as painting a portrait of unrelieved gloom. He's very grim. He seems to hold out no real hope for Israel. She has to pay the price for her infidelity to God.

But we need to look a little more closely at some of the themes of the book before we accept that evaluation entirely. And I think the one overarching theme that helps us organize most of the material in the Book of Hosea, and one that

shows its deep indebtedness to or interconnectedness with the Book of Deuteronomy, is the theme of covenant, particularly Deuteronomy's notion of covenant. So I put covenant at the top there and we see this theme being played out in several different ways.

The first I've just discussed: as Yahweh's covenant partner--as the vassal of the covenant partner, Yahweh, the sovereign--Israel should be placing her confidence entirely in Yahweh. Any foreign alliance, any alliance with Egypt against Assyria for example, is against the terms of that covenant, that exclusive treaty between God and Israel. And she should not be relying on her military might, but relying on the sovereign, the suzerain. So anything short of complete trust in Yahweh's power to save the vassal Israel is a violation of the terms of the covenant. So we see it in the notion of its confidence, exclusive confidence and trust in God and his power.

A second way in which the theme of covenant is expressed is found in Hosea's denunciation of social injustice and moral decay, and of course this is a theme that's common to the prophets. Here he follows Amos. But he's now the first to couch his charge in the form of this formal *riv*, or lawsuit, in which God is said to bring a charge against Israel for violating the terms of the covenant, for breach of covenant. This happens in chapter 4, the first three verses of chapter 4--Israel is charged. And Hosea employs language that deliberately invokes the Decalogue:

Hear the word of the Lord,  
O people of Israel!  
For the Lord has a case [=a lawsuit]  
against the inhabitants of this land,  
Because there is no honesty and no goodness  
And no obedience to God in the land.  
[False] swearing, dishonesty, and murder,  
And theft and adultery are rife.

Picking out key terms from the Decalogue: false swearing; murder, theft and adultery, which of course occur in a threesome in the Decalogue. These things are rife. "Crime follows upon crime! / For that, the earth is withered: / Everything that dwells on it languishes-- / Beasts of the field and birds of the sky-- / Even the fish of the sea perish."

Unlike Amos, Hosea also engages in a prolonged or sustained condemnation of Israel's religious faithlessness, which is figured in terms of adultery. And so here again, the theme of covenant is dominant and organizes the prophet's presentation. To represent Israel's faithlessness he invokes other types of covenantal relationships as metaphors, most notably the metaphor of marriage. Marriage can be referred to as a *brit*, as a covenant between a husband and wife, and so it's an appropriate metaphor. And we see it primarily in chapters 1 through 3. He addresses the relationship between Yahweh and Israel through the metaphor of marriage, and Israel is the unfaithful adulterous wife. He describes, in lurid terms, her lecherous addiction to images and idols, her adulterous worship of Baal. He points to the nation's leaders and their failures, the kings and the priests, their failure to prevent the peoples' waywardness, their debauchery.

The first chapter is reported in the third person. And this contains God's command to Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman as a symbol of God's own marriage with a faithless wife, Israel. "Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom; for the land will stray from following the Lord." (1:2) So he marries this woman named Gomer and she bears three children who have very inauspicious names. These names are symbolic of God's anger over Israel's religious infidelity: (1) Jezreel. Jezreel because God plans to punish Jehu for his slaughter of the house of Ahab. Even though Ahab was no favorite of God, you still should not raise your hand against the Lord's anointed. And so Jehu will have to be--Ahab will have to be avenged. Jehu will have to be punished at Jezreel, which is where the murder happened. (2) Lo-ruhamah, which means "not loved, not forgiven," because God will no longer love or forgive or pardon the House of Israel and (3) the third child's name is Lo-ammi, "not my people," a sign that God has dissolved the covenant bond. He's rejected Israel as his people--divorced Israel. There really could be no more stark and shocking denial of the covenant than this.

Chapter 3 contains a first person (Hosea's first-person) account of God's command to him. There it's said that God

commands him to befriend, although he seems to hire, a woman on condition that she not consort with others. The woman, again, symbolizes Israel, who's brought into an exclusive relationship that requires her to remain faithful to one party in contrast to her customary behavior. And then sandwiched between chapter 1 and chapter 3, both of which have the accounts of these relationships that are metaphors for God and Israel's relationship--sandwiched between them is the almost schizophrenic chapter 2. It contains, again, this sustained violent, very violent account of the faithless wife, of faithless Israel and God's formal declaration of divorce. "She is not my wife and I am not her husband." This would effect a divorce, this statement uttered by a husband. We have that in verse 4. And yet, this chapter also contains a very gentle, very loving portrait of reconciliation.

And it's in that portrait of reconciliation that we see another aspect of the covenant concept emerge. An aspect that was, again, most pronounced in the Book of Deuteronomy. As Israel's covenant partner God loves Israel and he actually longs for her faithfulness. This steadfast covenantal love -- one of the words that's used repeatedly is *hesed*, but it refers to a special kind of steadfast love, loyal love -- this covenantal love will reconcile God to wayward Israel just as Hosea is reunited or reconciled with his faithless wife. And the prophet imagines a return to the wilderness. God is imagining - it would be wonderful if we could return to the wilderness and covenant again, and this time it would even be a permanent, an eternal marriage. And the three children who were cast off at birth, they will be redeemed and accepted by their father. Those are some of the ideas contained in this passage. This is Hosea 2:16-25, the reconciliation:

Assuredly,  
I will speak coaxingly to her  
And lead her through the wilderness  
And speak to her tenderly.  
I will give her her vineyards from there  
And the Valley of Achor as a plowland of hope.  
There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,  
When she came up from the land of Egypt.

(So the period of the Exodus and wandering is romantically imagined as, this time, of a very good and close relationship between God and Israel.)

"And in that day you will call me *Ishi* and no more will you call me *Baali*."

(This is a pun. Both of these words can mean my husband. *Ishi* is "my man," a male. And *Baali* is "my Lord." Women would have used both for their husbands. But Baal, obviously, has connotations with the god Baal. So instead of calling me Baali, "my Baal," you will call me Ishi, "my husband" using a word that's free of Baal connotations.)

"For I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth,  
And they shall nevermore be mentioned by name.

In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I will banish bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus I will let them lie down in safety. And I will espouse you forever:"

(back to the marriage metaphor.)

â€

"I will espouse you with righteousness and justice,  
And with goodness and mercy,  
And I will espouse you with faithfulness;  
Then you shall be devoted to the Lord.

In that day,  
I will respond -- declares the Lord --  
I will respond to the sky,  
And it shall respond to the earth;  
And the earth shall respond  
With new grain and wine and oil,  
And they shall respond to Jezreel."  
[the first of the children]. "I will sow her in the land as My own;"

(Jezreel was a fertile valley not just a place of war and death.)

"And [I will] take Lo-ruhamah [not loved] back in favor;  
And I will say to Lo-ammi, [not my people], "You are my people"  
And he will respond," [You are] my God."

So Hosea isn't unrelievedly gloomy and grim. It does provide these images, these very stirring images of hope and consolation and reconciliation. Amos also held out hope in the form of a remnant that would survive the inevitable destruction. So we need to think about the two traditions that prophets like Amos and Hosea are drawing on in this combined message of doom on the one hand, and hope on the other.

Really, what the prophets are doing is drawing on two conceptions of covenant: the two conceptions that we saw in our study of the Pentateuchal material and on into Samuel. On the one hand they recognize the unconditional and eternal, irrevocable covenant that God established with the patriarchs as well as the eternal covenant with David, with the House of David. Those covenants were the basis for the belief that God would never forsake his people. But on the other hand, of course, they place emphasis on the covenant at Sinai. It's a conditional covenant. It requires the people's obedience to moral, religious and civil laws in the covenant code. And it threatens punishment for their violation. So the prophets are playing with both of these themes. Israel has violated the Sinaitic Covenant and the curses that are stipulated by the covenant must follow: national destruction and even exile. They will follow; they have to. But alienation from God is not, and never will be, complete and irreparable because of the unconditional covenant, the covenant with the patriarchs, the covenant with the House of David. So Israel will be God's people forever despite temporary alienation.

The notion of election, an act of purely undeserved or unmerited favor and love on God's part not due in any way to a special merit of the people undergirds the prophetic message of consolation. And Hosea paints a very poignant and moving portrait of this special and indissoluble love that God bears for Israel. And in doing so, he draws on a second metaphor. So we've had the metaphor of husband and wife, which is a kind of covenantal relationship. We also have the metaphor of parent-son, which can also be understood in terms of a covenant with obligations. The parent-son relationship entails loyalty and love, but also obligation. One of the obligations that is understood to fall on the parent is the obligation of disciplining a rebellious or ungrateful child, while never forsaking that child. So that's a model that works very well with the prophetic message.

Hosea 11:1-4, and then skipping to verses 8 through 9,

I fell in love with Israel  
When he was still a child;  
And I have called [him] My son  
Ever since Egypt.  
Thus were they called,  
But they went their own way;  
They sacrifice to *Baalim*

And offer to carved images.  
I have pampered Ephraim,

--another name for Israel, right? Ephraim--

Taking them in My arms;  
But they have ignored  
My healing care.  
I drew them with human ties,  
With cords of love;  
But I seemed to them as one  
Who imposed a yoke on their jaws,  
Though I was offering them food— How can I give you up, O Ephraim?  
How surrender you, O Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah,  
Render you like Zeboiim?  
[other foreign places]. I have had a change of heart,  
All my tenderness is stirred.  
I will not act on My wrath,  
Will not turn to destroy Ephraim.  
For I am God, not man,  
The Holy One in your midst:  
I will not come in fury.

You have these alternating passages of violent rejection and tender, tender love and reconciliation. And with these alternating passages, the prophet is able to capture or convey a passionate struggle taking place in the heart of God. They're giving us that passionate, emotional portrait of God. It's the struggle of a lover who's torn between his jealous wrath and his undying love. And it's a struggle that is won ultimately by love because God cannot let Israel go.

We're going to see that each of the prophets we'll look at holds these two covenantal ideas in tension, and they will emphasize one or the other depending on the particular situation, the particular historical situation. Sometimes when it's a time of relative ease or comfort, then the prophet emphasizes the violations of the Sinaitic covenant, the punishment that will inevitably come for these violations, and they'll downplay God's eternal commitment to his people. But in times of despair and suffering and destruction then the prophet may point out that violations of the covenant were the cause of the distress but they will emphasize God's undying love for Israel and hold out hope therefore for a better future.

Now, we're going to leave the northern prophets and move to southern prophets. Isaiah is the longest prophetic book. The interpretation of many passages in the book of Isaiah as symbolic references to Jesus make it one of the most quoted books of the Bible by Christians. Isaiah was a contemporary of Amos and Hosea. Second half of the eighth century. He was active for a little bit longer period. He was active into about the 690s, somewhere in there. But he prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah when the Assyrian empire threatened and destroyed the northern kingdom (the northern kingdom falls in 722) and then of course was threatening Judah. So he's active for over 50 years and he counseled Judah's kings. He counsels them through two sieges. I've listed these for you: The siege of 734, where he counsels King Ahaz, and then the siege of 701, where he counsels his son, Hezekiah or Hizkiah, Hezekiah.

I'll give you a little bit of historical background to these sieges so you understand them, but those are the main dates that can help orient your approach to Isaiah. We have excellent evidence, by the way, for all of these events in the Assyrian sources, and also archaeological finds. The archaeological finds show destruction by the Assyrians at the places that we believe were destroyed at the times *they* [the former] were destroyed. But this is what happened. In 734, you have the

Assyrians, who at this time are under Tiglath-Pileser, and they're extending their control through the region. So they're coming from the northeast. First they're going to hit Aram in Syria, and then advance on the northern kingdom of Israel. So Aram and Israel join together in an alliance. They were trying to resist the advancing Assyrians. Judah refused to join the alliance. The southern kingdom refused. So in anger, Aram and Israel moved south and lay siege to Jerusalem. So the first siege, the siege of 734 was actually a siege of Jerusalem by the northern kingdom of Israel in alliance with the Aramaeans. They were trying to force Judah's cooperation in standing against Assyria. King Ahaz of Judah decided to appeal to Assyria for help, to Tiglath-Pileser for help. He submits to the Assyrians as a vassal. He pays tribute. We have a record of the tribute that was paid in the Assyrian records, in 734. And this action is condemned by the biblical writers. The Deuteronomistic historian in Second Kings 16 condemns this action. Isaiah also condemns it.

So, Judah has made itself vassal to Assyria. And this is the case until Ahaz's son Hezekiah decides that he will assert the nation's independence. The Assyrians are angry about this. This is now after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians are angry and under Sennecharib they attack. They devastate many of the cities in the countryside (and again archaeology confirms what we know from the Assyrian records) and they advance on Jerusalem and lay siege to Jerusalem in 701. And just as he had counseled King Ahaz, Isaiah now counsels Hezekiah. In the end Jerusalem wasn't destroyed. Heavy tribute was paid to the Assyrians but eventually the Assyrians did withdraw. They were overextended to a large degree.

That's the general historic background. We'll come back to some of the details in a minute. But let me first give you a sense of the general structure of this very large book.

The claim that the prophetic books are anthologies, anthologies of oracles and other materials compiled by the prophet or by his disciples, that is to say, schools that kept a set of prophecies and then added to those core prophecies because of their firm belief in their continuing relevance--that portrait of the anthological nature of prophetic books is really demonstrable in the Book of Isaiah. I've put the basic structure up there for you. The first 11 chapters contain memoirs. Chapter 1 sets out some of the basic themes of Isaiah but we have a lot of first-person narrative. Then we have various oracles against Israel. Some of this material refers to the attacks on Jerusalem, especially the siege of 701. And there seems to be a kind of concluding hymn in chapter 12. We then have about 11 chapters of oracles against foreign nations (that's a form that we also saw in Amos and Hosea -- denouncing foreign nations) from chapters 13 to 23. I'm skipping over chapters 24 to 27. They are a little apocalypse, a sort of mythological vision of the end of days, and that probably dates to a much later time, the sixth century. That was the time in which the apocalyptic genre was really developing. So we skip over that (we don't think of that as associated with the historical Isaiah) and move on to chapters 28 to 33. Here, we turn from oracles against foreign nations to oracles against Judah and Israel and the relationship with Egypt. This is a time when we're caught between these two powers -- Egypt and Assyria. Judah is trying to figure out with whom to make alliances. Should she cast her lot with Egypt, and so on. And these are from a slightly later period down towards the siege of 701 and they include accounts of Isaiah's counsel to Hezekiah in 701. 34 and 35 we'll kind of skip over for now. These also are post-exilic insertions. And then chapters 36 to 39 -- this is third-person, historical narrative and it is, in fact, 2 Kings chapters 18 to 20. That material has simply been inserted here. So, those three chapters appear here in Isaiah. It's the story of the invasion of Sennecharib and the interactions of Isaiah and Hezekiah during the siege in 701.

So I'm stopping at chapter 39 even though there are 66 chapters in the Book of Isaiah because most scholars agree, I think this is really a very strong consensus, that the remaining material is not the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem. It dates to a period long after Isaiah's lifetime. I've already mentioned the apocalypse which we think is probably from the sixth century. That's embedded in there, chapters 24 to 27. But the remaining material we speak of in two main sections. We refer to these as Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah. Chapters 40 to 55, which we refer to as Second Isaiah, assume a historical setting in which Babylon is dominant, not Assyria. And so we see that as coming at a much later time. Chapters 56 to 66, we refer to as Third Isaiah. This material contains oracles that are spread throughout the eighth to the fifth centuries. So we'll consider those on another occasion, in their proper historical context. Right now we're looking at the material that is most likely attributable to First Isaiah, to Isaiah of Jerusalem.

The book also contains material that is a repetition of material found elsewhere. I've already noted 2 Kings 18 to 20 appears here. But in addition, you have snatches of verses that appear in other places. So Isaiah 2:2-4, are found in Micah, the Book of Micah 4:1-4. Jeremiah 48 is essentially equivalent to Isaiah 15 and 16. So this kind of repetition among or between different books illustrates, again, the anthological nature of the prophetic corpus--that these were

works that were compiled from material that sometimes circulated in more than one school.

So if we turn now to the major themes of Isaiah, let's note first the common ground between Isaiah and the prophets Amos and Hosea that we've already discussed. Isaiah is consistent with Amos and Hosea in denouncing again the social injustice and moral decay, which is the cause of God's just and inevitable punishment. Isaiah 5 extracting from verses 8 through 24:

Ah,  
Those who add house to house  
And join field to field,  
Till there is room for none but you  
To dwell in the land!... Ah,  
Those who chase liquor  
From early in the morning,  
And till late in the evening  
Are inflamed by wine— Ah,  
Those who— vindicate him who is in the wrong  
In return for a bribe,  
And withhold vindication  
From him who is in the right.

He joins Amos in the assertion that cultic practice without just behavior is anathema to God. Isaiah 1:10-17, "Hear the word of the Lord, / You chieftains of Sodom; / Give ear to our God's instruction, You folk of Gomorrah!" (So he's referring to his fellow countrymen as Sodomites, or people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who, of course, were the paragons of immoral behavior). [The text continues:]

"What need have I of all your sacrifices?"  
Says the Lord.  
"I am sated with burnt offering of rams,  
And suet of fatlings,  
And blood of bulls;  
And I have no delight  
In lambs and he-goats— Your new moons and fixed seasons  
Fill me with loathing;  
They are become a burden to Me,  
I cannot endure them.  
And when you lift up your hands,  
I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length,  
I will not listen.  
Your hands are stained with crime--  
Wash yourselves clean;  
Put your evil doings  
Away from my sight.  
Cease to do evil;  
Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice;  
Aid the wronged.  
Uphold the rights of the orphan;  
Defend the cause of the widow.

These are harsh and shocking words: I'm sick of sacrifices. I'm sick of your festivals and holidays as long as you are, of course, committing these terrible acts. And like Amos and Hosea, Isaiah asserts that morality is a decisive factor in the fate of the nation. Again, the passage that begins,

Ah,  
Those who add house to house  
And join field to field,  
â€œIn my hearing [said] the Lord of hosts;  
Surely, great houses  
Shall lie forlorn,  
Spacious and splendid ones  
Without occupants.  
â€œAssuredly,  
My people will suffer exile  
For not giving heed,  
Its multitude victims of hunger  
And its masses parched with thirst.

So there are, of course, commonalities but Isaiah differs from Amos and Hosea in this. He places far greater emphasis on the Davidic Covenant than on the Mosaic Covenant. This is a key feature of Isaiah. The wilderness tradition, the Exodus tradition, the covenant at Sinai, these are so important to Amos and Hosea and are referred to by Amos and Hosea, but they have less of an explicit influence on Isaiah's prophecy. They're not *not* there. But they have less of an explicit influence. Instead, Isaiah has an overriding interest in Davidic theology, the royal ideology that centers on Zion, an ideology that we discussed earlier. So we see this in his *riv*, his covenant lawsuit, which focuses a little less on the violations of the nation than it does on the failure of the kings and the leaders who have misled the nation and who will now have to be punished as was stipulated in the Davidic Covenant.

We also see it in his firm belief in the inviolability of Zion. This is a clear doctrine with Isaiah: the inviolability of Zion. Yahweh has a special relationship with the Davidic royal line and the Davidic capitol, Jerusalem or Zion, and he will not let either perish. And that belief undergirds and informs his consistent advice to the kings of Judah. Times of great danger are opportunities to demonstrate absolute trust in Yahweh's covenant with the line of David, with the House of David. The king must rely exclusively on Yahweh and Yahweh's promises to David and his city, and not on military might or diplomatic strategies.

So if we look at Isaiah's dealings with King Ahaz -- the first siege in 734 -- this is described in Isaiah, chapter 7 and 8. Isaiah, who also has children with portentous names (this is a fad I guess among the prophets -- his children's names are: "only a remnant will survive," and "hasten for spoil, hurry for plunder" which indicates the destruction and exile) -- he goes to visit the king. And his advice to the king is: be quiet and do not fear (chapter 7:4). The crisis will pass. 7:9: "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." [RSV; see note 1] This is an evocation of Zion theology. God is in the midst of the city. That means the Lord of Hosts is with the people. Isaiah then offers Ahaz a sign of the truth of his prophecy. And that is, namely, that a young woman who has conceived will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. It's Hebrew *Immanu el*, "God is with us." Immanu = "is with us", El. So this woman who has conceived will bear a son and will call him Immanuel. This is in 7:14. Now, in the New Testament, Matthew, in chapter 1:22-23, takes this verse as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus. This is based on a Greek mistranslation of the word "young woman" as "virgin." The Hebrew term that's used is not in fact the term for virgin, but it was translated into the Greek with a term that can mean virgin. And moreover, the verb that's used in the Hebrew is in the past tense. A woman has already conceived. The birth is pending. It is imminent. This child will be born. God will be with us.

The identity of the woman that Isaiah is speaking about is a matter of some dispute. So some scholars take the verse as a reference to Isaiah's own wife. She's already had two children with portentous names and now she's pregnant with a third. But the others take the verse as a reference to the king's own wife, who will bear his son Hezekiah, King

Hezekiah. There are some problems with chronology. It doesn't quite work out that he would be the right age. But the fact is Hezekiah was a celebrated king. He did in fact manage to keep Judah intact against the Assyrian threat and kept Jerusalem from falling in the siege of 701. And 2 Kings, the Book of 2 Kings, chapter 18:7, says of Hezekiah, "The Lord was with him." God was with him. Connecting it to the name Immanuel -- God is with us. God is with him. Very similar, very, very similar in the Hebrew. In fact, [it] sounds the same. So in keeping with this interpretation -- the idea that the child (who he says will be able, in a sense, to save Judah) is the child of the king [yet] to be born, Hezekiah -- in keeping with that, scholars see the famous verses in Isaiah 9 as praise of King Hezekiah. These verses are verses that announce, "for unto us a child is born" -- a wonderful counselor, a mighty God, an everlasting father, a prince of peace, referring then to an unending peace in which David's throne and kingdom are firmly established. And again, these verses have also been decontextualized and are utilized in Christian liturgies to this day, again, as if they refer to the future birth of Jesus.

In any event, Ahaz doesn't heed Isaiah's call for inaction. He says he should be doing nothing. How could any king really follow such advice, to seek no political or military solution? And so he appeals to Assyria for help against Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel who are laying siege to him. And this is a disastrous development in Isaiah's eyes.

If we move to the second siege in 701, we see that Isaiah really takes a similar stance. Hezekiah tries to form an alliance with Egypt now to stave off the Assyrian threat. And Isaiah castigates the king and he castigates the king's men for abandoning Yahweh and relying on the frail reed of Egypt. And we find here an example of the bizarre and demonstrative behavior of the prophet. We'll see this in many of the prophets. We'll see it particularly in the prophet Ezekiel, but we see it with others, where they would engage in these symbolic acts that were meant to shock and attract attention. Isaiah paraded naked through the streets of Jerusalem to illustrate the exile and the slavery that would follow from this mistaken reliance on Egypt. He denounces the political advisors who counsel the king to form an alliance with Egypt because they are simply trusting in horses and chariots rather than God. And Isaiah counsels differently. He says, "For the Egyptians are man, not God, / And their horses are flesh, not spirit" (31:3). The king should simply trust in God.

In the narrative account that we have of the siege of 701 that's found in chapters 36 and 38 -- it's also duplicated in 2 Kings -- Isaiah counsels Hezekiah when the siege is underway not to capitulate to the Assyrians. This might seem to contradict his earlier message that Assyria was the rod of God's anger and that Hezekiah should not resist. But in fact, there's a basic consistency to Isaiah's counsel. Just as his earlier counsel to trust in God rather than Egypt was based on his trust in God's promises to David, and the inviolability of the royal city, so now his counsel to resist, not to open the doors of the city to the Assyrians, is based on his belief that Yahweh could not possibly intend to destroy his royal city. Isaiah 37:33-35:

Assuredly, thus said the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:  
He shall not enter this city;  
He shall not shoot an arrow at it,  
Or advance upon it with a shield,  
Or pile up a siege mound against it.  
He shall go back  
By the way he came,  
He shall not enter this city--declares the Lord;  
I will protect and save the city for My sake  
And for the sake of my servant David.

Again, for the sake of the Davidic Covenant. And the fact that Jerusalem did in fact escape destruction after this terrifying siege by the Assyrians only fueled the belief--fueled the belief in the inviolability of David's city, Zion.

Isaiah 6 contains a striking account of the call of Isaiah. Many of the prophetic books will feature some passage which refers to the prophet's initial call. And it's something we might expect to find at the beginning of the book. So obviously,

chronology is not the organizing principle in the Book of Isaiah. But I want to draw your attention to God's extraordinary message to Isaiah at the time of his call or commission:

Go, say to that people: "Hear, indeed, but do not understand;  
See, indeed, but do not grasp."  
Dull that people's mind,  
Stop its ears,  
And seal its eyes--  
Lest, seeing with its eyes  
And hearing with its ears,  
It also grasp with its mind,  
And repent and save itself.

Well, there's a nice literary chiasm (before we get to the substance of it) in the last line: you have "heart," "ears," and "eyes" and then these are repeated but in reverse order, eyes, ears and heart. But in this passage we return to the kind of bleakness that we saw in Hosea. Destruction is inevitable. God's message via his prophet will not be understood. And indeed, God will see to it that the people do not understand the message. They do not heed the call to repent, do not save themselves, and so do not escape God's just punishment.

It's a fascinating, if theologically difficult, passage. God tells Isaiah to prevent the people from understanding, lest through their understanding they turn back to God and save themselves. And again, we see God, or perhaps his prophet, caught in the tension between God's justice and God's mercy. As a God of justice he must punish the sins of Israel with destruction. He indicated he would do so in the covenant and he must be faithful to those terms. But as a God of mercy he wishes to bring his people back. He wishes to send them a prophet to warn them of the impending doom and urge them to repent so that he can forgive them and announce his plan of destruction. Yet, how can he both punish Israel and so fulfill the demands of justice, and yet save Israel and so fulfill the demands of mercy and love? Verses 12 and 13 [correction: meant to say verses 11-13] in chapter 6 answer this question with an idea that we've seen a little in Amos and Hosea. When Isaiah asks how long the people will fail to hear, fail to understand, to turn back to God and save themselves, God replies,

Till towns lie waste without inhabitants  
And houses without people,  
And the ground lies waste and desolate--  
For the Lord will banish the population--  
And deserted sites are many  
In the midst of the land.  
But while a tenth part yet remains in it, it shall repent. It shall be ravaged like the terebinth and the oak, of which stumps are left even when they are felled: its stump shall be a holy seed.

So God will punish. God cannot *not* punish Israel. And so the demands of justice will be met, and God will have upheld the terms of the conditional Mosaic Covenant. But God will at the same time effect the salvation of his people in the future. He has sent a prophet with a call to return and in due time a remnant of the people -- a tenth Isaiah -- will understand and heed that call. They will receive God's mercy and the covenant will be reestablished. And in this way the demands of love and mercy will be met, and God will have been faithful to his covenantal promise to the patriarchs and the royal House of David. The people's delayed comprehension of the prophet's message guarantees the operation of God's just punishment now and his merciful salvation later.

While the notion of a remnant leads to the idea of a future hope, it wasn't a very consoling message at the time. Because the prophets were essentially saying that the current generation would all but cease to exist. Isaiah 10:21-23,

Only a remnant shall return,  
Only a remnant of Jacob,  
To Mighty God.  
Even if your people, O Israel  
Should be as the sands of the sea,  
Only a remnant of it shall return.  
Destruction is decreed;  
Retribution comes like a flood!  
For my Lord God of Hosts is carrying out  
A decree of destruction upon all the land.

Well, we've seen that the prophet's message of destruction and punishment and doom is very often accompanied by, often alternates with, a message of consolation and a promise of restoration, restoration of a purged or purified remnant in the land of Israel. This is where the prophets differ from the Deuteronomistic historian. The Deuteronomistic historian is more concerned with the justification of God's actions against Israel than with painting a vivid portrait of the time of a future restoration. But this period of restoration is elaborately envisioned in some prophetic writings. And it even takes on an eschatological tenor. The word "eschatology" means an account of the end. So in some of them, this becomes an eschatological vision: that the restoration will happen at the end of days. And the restoration will bring about some sort of perfect end time.

So in Isaiah, for example, the return will be a genuine, whole-hearted and permanent return to God. It will be the end of sin. It will be the end of idolatry. All the nations of the earth will recognize the Lord of history. A new epoch will open in world history. It's an enormous transformation. And Isaiah is the first to envisage this kind of transformation, the end of the dominion of idolatrous nations. When God comes to Jerusalem to save the remnant of Israel and gather in the dispersed exiles it will be a theophany, a self-revelation of God, of worldwide scope. Isaiah 2:2-4, "In the days to come, / The Mount of the Lord's House / Shall stand firm above the mountains / And tower above the hills;" So this little hill -- if you've ever been there, it's really not very big -- that the temple stood on, will tower like some large impregnable mountain, over all other hills and mountains,

And all the nations  
Shall gaze on it with joy.  
And the many peoples shall go and say:  
"Come,  
Let us go up to the Mount of the Lord,  
To the House of the God of Jacob;  
That He may instruct us in His ways,  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
For instruction, [torah] will come forth from Zion,  
The word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
Thus He will judge among the nations  
And arbitrate for the many peoples,  
And they shall beat their swords into plowshares  
And their spears into pruning hooks:  
Nation shall not take up  
Sword against nation;  
They shall never again know war.

Note the direction that Israelite thought is taking. The J source in Genesis assumed that all humans had knowledge of Yahweh from the time of creation. And remember that that was one of the distinctive traits of J as opposed to P for example. They assume, however, that humans turned from Yahweh. So Yahweh selected one nation to know him and covenant with him. The Book of Deuteronomy accepts that Yahweh is Israel's God. Other nations have been assigned to the worship of other gods and that's just fine. But in classical prophecy, universal claims are made on behalf of Yahweh. According to the prophets, God will make himself known to all the nations, as he once did to Israel, and the universal worship or recognition of Yahweh will be established at the end of days. This is very different idea. And so as a consequence of this idea, the very notion of Israel's election is transformed by the prophets. In the Torah books, the election of Israel means simply God's undeserved choice of Israel as the nation to know him and bind itself in covenant to him.

But in the prophetic literature, Israel's election is an election to a mission. Israel was chosen so as to be the instrument of universal redemption, universal recognition of Yahweh. When God comes finally to rescue the Israelites he will simultaneously reveal himself to all of humankind. They'll abandon their idols, they'll return to him. A messianic period of peace will follow. And eventually, we're going to see the idea that the mission for which Israel was elected was to become a "light unto the nations." This is a phrase that we're going to see in other parts of Isaiah, Isaiah 49, Isaiah 51, later.

The royal ideology of Judah plays an important role in the eschatological vision of Isaiah because this new peaceful righteous kingdom is going to be restored by a Davidide. It's going to be restored by a king from the Branch of Jesse. David's father name was Jesse. So when you say the branch, or from the stump of Jesse, then you are referring to a Davidide. Isaiah 11 refers to the restoration of the Davidic line, which implies that it had been temporarily interrupted. So Isaiah 11 may be post-exilic. It may date from a time when people were hoping for a messiah to arise and restore the line of David.

Isaiah 11:1-12, 16:

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse,  
A twig shall sprout from his stock.  
The spirit of the Lord shall alight upon him:  
A spirit of wisdom and insight,  
A spirit of counsel and valor,  
A spirit of devotion and reverence for the Lord.  
He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the Lord:  
He shall not judge by what his ears perceive.  
Thus he shall judge the poor with equit  
And decide with justice for the lowly of the land.  
He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth  
And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.  
Justice shall be the girdle of his loins,  
And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.  
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard lie down with the kid;  
The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together,  
With a little boy to herd them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze.

(I think the bear is vegetarian, not killing the cow but eating the grass with the cow.)

Their young shall lie down together;  
And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.

A babe shall play  
Over a viper's hole,  
And an infant pass his hand  
Over an adder's den.

The hostility, the animosity between humans and serpents or snakes which was decreed at the fall, the expulsion from Eden, is reversed in this end-time. This is a return to the situation in paradise. [The text continues:]

In all of My sacred mount  
Nothing evil or vile shall be done;  
For the land shall be filled with devotion to the Lord  
As water covers the sea.

In that day,  
The stock of Jesse that has remained standing  
Shall become a standard to peoples--  
Nations shall seek his counsel  
And his abode shall be honored.

In that day, my Lord will apply his hand again to redeeming the other part of his peoples from Assyria-- as also from Egypt. Pathros, Nubia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath and the coastlands-- Thus there shall be a highway for the other part of his people out of Assyria, such as there was for Israel when it left the land of Egypt.

So this new ideal Davidic king will rule by wisdom and insight and the spirit of the Lord will "alight on him." That's a phrase that we saw being used in the case of judges and in the case of Saul or David. It doesn't refer to military might and strength here. It refers to counsel and a spirit of devotion to God. And this king's reign will begin an ingathering of the exiles of the nation and a transformed world order.

So to conclude: Isaiah is typical of the prophetic reinterpretation of the ancient covenant promises, giving Israel a hope for a better, ideal future. And like the other prophets, he declared that the nation was in distress not because the promises weren't true but because they hadn't been believed. The nation's punishment was just a chastisement. It wasn't a revocation of the promises. The prophets pushed the fulfillment of the promises beyond the existing nation however. So only after suffering the punishment for the present failure would a future redemption be possible. So the national hope was maintained but pushed off to a future day. Alright, we'll deal with some more prophetic books when we come back. Please be sure to take the handouts in the box [refers to Halloween candy] at the side of the room.

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## Notes

1. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 18 Transcript

November 8, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** We were talking last time about prophets of the Assyrian crisis. We've talked about two of the northern prophets, Amos and Hosea, and we started talking about Isaiah who was a southern prophet, a prophet in Judah; and we'll be talking now about the second southern prophet of the Assyrian crisis. That is Micah, or Micah [pronunciation difference]. And he is said to come from the town of Moreshet, which is about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. So he's in Judah, and he's the last of the eighth-century prophets. He's quite different from the city-bred Isaiah. He seems to have been a rural prophet who spoke for the poor farmers. Now, he's prophesying in the second part of the eighth century, so 740 to about 700. He's attacking the northern kingdom, although he's a southern prophet. He attacks Israel for idolatries and says that the kingdom will surely fall because of these. So he also follows the other prophets, as we've seen, in condemning the people for their moral failings. The greedy landowners, the dishonest merchants, the aristocracy, they're all targets of his denunciations as are other leaders: the priests, the judges, royalty, the royal house as well as other false prophets.

But the greatest contrast between Isaiah and Micah--if you want to differentiate these two southern prophets of the Assyrian crisis in your mind--the greatest contrast lies in his view of the city as inherently corrupt. It's inherently sinful; it's inherently doomed to destruction. Isaiah had preached the inviolability of Zion and Micah is sharply critical of the Davidic dynasty. He ridicules the idea of the inviolability of Zion. He ridicules the belief that the presence of the sanctuary in Jerusalem somehow protects the city from harm. He says, on the contrary, that God will destroy his city and his house if need be. Micah 3:9-12:

Hear this, you rulers of the House of Jacob,  
You chiefs of the House of Israel,  
Who detest justice  
And make crooked all that is straight,  
Who build Zion with crime,  
Jerusalem with iniquity!  
Her rulers judge for gifts,  
Her priests give rulings for a fee,  
And her prophets divine for pay;  
Yet they rely upon the Lord, saying,  
"The Lord is in our midst;  
No calamity shall overtake us."  
Assuredly, because of you  
Zion shall be plowed as a field,  
And Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,  
And the Temple Mount  
A shrine in the woods.

A stark contrast then between Isaiah who trusts and has confidence that God will never allow His holy city to be destroyed, his sanctuary to be destroyed. His presence in the midst of the city is a guarantee that it will survive. And Micah says: it's no guarantee of anything.

One of the most famous passages in the Book of Micah is in chapter 6--eight verses in chapter 6--and this is a passage that takes the form of a covenant lawsuit, which we've talked about before, and the structure is as follows (I've put it up on the white board there): The first two verses are the issuing of the summons, the summons to the case. So the prophet here is acting as God's attorney and he summons the accused and he summons the witnesses--those would be the mountains, who are to hear the case against Israel, God's case against Israel:

Hear what the Lord is saying:  
Come, present [My] case before the mountains,  
And let the hills hear you pleading.  
Hear, you mountains, the case of the Lord--  
You firm foundations of the earth!  
For the Lord has a case [=a lawsuit] against His people,  
He has a suit against Israel.

So those are the opening verses and in verses 3 to 5 we then move on to the plaintiff's charge, God's charge or accusation. And this is given, again, through the attorney. He appeals to Israel's memory of all of the events that have manifested his great love for her. That begins with the exodus of course and continues with the entry into the Promised Land and he says Israel seems to have forgotten all of these deeds that God has performed on her behalf, and the obligations that those deeds obviously entail. Israel's conduct in response to this continuous benevolence on God's part is appalling.

In verses 6 to 7 you have the defendant's plea. This is Israel speaking, but Israel really, of course, has no case to plead. And Israel knows that her only choice is to try to effect reconciliation but she doesn't know where to begin. Verses 6-7:

With what shall I approach the Lord,  
Do homage to God on high?  
Shall I approach Him with burnt offerings,  
With calves a year old?  
Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
With myriads of streams of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
The fruit of my body for my sins?

And the prophetic attorney--because the prophet is here acting as the attorney--in verse 8, responds to this.

"He has told you, O man, what is good,  
And what the Lord requires of you:  
Only to do justice  
And to love goodness,  
And to walk humbly with your God." [See note 1]

And the word that has been translated here as goodness, is this word *hesed*. This is a word that we discussed last week in relation to Hosea, and it's a word that seems to refer to that covenantal loyalty, the loyal love of covenantal partners. This is a classic passage that really typifies the prophetic emphasis on morality or the primacy of morality in prophetic thought.

The book of Micah itself structurally alternates three prophecies of doom with three prophecies of restoration or hope. So it's doom, restoration, doom, restoration, doom, restoration. These last prophecies tell of the glory of Zion to come in the future. These restoration passages may seem a little out of keeping or out of step with the scathing denunciations or condemnations of Judah in the other parts of Micah's prophecy, and so some scholars have suggested that those restoration passages and those references to God's unconditional promise to preserve the Davidic kingdom, and the optimistic predictions of universal peace--these must be interpolations by a later editor. And it's true that certain parts

we see again in Isaiah. But this is always a very difficult case or issue, because we know that the prophetic writings do fluctuate wildly between denunciation and consolation. So I think that a shift in theme alone is not ever a certain basis for assuming interpolation--outright contradiction perhaps--but a shift in theme or tone is never a solid basis for assuming interpolation.

Anachronism is a very good guide to interpolation. So Micah explicitly refers to the Babylonian exile, of course, and that's going to be in 586 and he's in the eighth century. He's also going to refer to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The walls of Jerusalem aren't even destroyed until 586 for anyone to even speak about rebuilding them, so those little units or passages may of course represent late editorial interpolations. But in its present form--in that nice structure of alternation of denunciation, restoration, denunciation, restoration, a pattern that happens three times--that structure, is I think typical of the common paradox that we find in the prophetic writings where they try to balance God's stern judgment on the one hand, his punishment, with his merciful love and salvation of his people.

A further paradox lies in the very preservation of prophecies like Micah's prophecy. These prophecies were probably preserved by priests in the temple, even though priests were very often among the targets of the prophets in their denunciations, particularly Micah.

Alright, so we've talked about the prophets who responded to the Assyrian crisis towards the end of the eighth century, two in the north, two in the south. Jerusalem survived the siege of 701 when the Assyrians laid siege in 701. And that gave credence to the royal ideology, the idea that God was with Zion, was with Jerusalem, and was with the House of David and would preserve them, but even so Judah moves into the next century, into the 600s in a considerably weakened state after the siege. And it's during that century--the first half of the next century--that Assyria reached the zenith of its power.

In Judah, you have King Manasseh reigning. Now, King Manasseh reigned for nearly 50 years. We're not sure of exact dates, but somewhere around the 690s to the 640s, about 640: 50 years. Now remarkably, the Deuteronomistic historian devotes only 18 verses to this king who reigned for 50 years and all of those verses are entirely negative. And that's in great contrast to their treatment of his father, Hezekiah, and his grandson who follows him, Josiah. Manasseh was apparently a loyal vassal of Assyria, and according to the biblical writer he reversed the reforms of his father Hezekiah who is said by the writer to have destroyed idolatry and so on. But he is said to have reversed that and to have adopted Assyrian norms. As we move through this century and move towards the latter half of this century, Assyria, which has overextended itself is beginning to decline and some of the other states in the Ancient Near East are able to break away.

First Egypt breaks away; Babylon breaks away. Josiah comes to the throne in Judah in 740 [correction: Professor Hayes meant to say 640]. He sees Assyria's weakness. He decides to take advantage of that and asserts Judean independence, carries out a series of reforms--we've talked about several times--in 622, which include purging the cult perhaps of Assyrian religious influences, centralizing worship of Yahweh only and in Jerusalem, and so on. So this centralization of the cult served probably a political agenda as well, of asserting independence from Assyria. Assyria is continuing to decline towards the end of this century and in 612 the capital Nineveh will fall. The Babylonians manage to conquer the Assyrians by destroying Nineveh; it's actually an alliance of Medes and Babylonians. So things are going quite well. Josiah is king; he's a favored king, but just a few years later he will die in a battle against the Egyptians at Megiddo. So [that's] a little bit of historical background for you as we talk about the next prophets. Alright, so Josiah, the king who's highly favored will die in 609.

Now, Zephaniah was a Judean prophet who prophesied during the reign of King Josiah. So we're going to be moving on now to Zephaniah and Jeremiah, as the prophets of the Babylonian crisis--and we're going to throw in a couple of prophetic characters along the way, but they will be the two main prophets of the Babylonian crisis, obviously in the south--all we have now is a southern kingdom, Judah--but I'll be picking up on two other prophets in a moment as well.

So he prophesied during the time of King Josiah. Some of his prophecies seem to date to the time, we think, before Josiah's reforms in 622. And those prophecies tend to be very pessimistic and very grim. Judah is condemned. It's condemned for apostasy; it's condemned for decadence, all of the things that flourished under King Manasseh. God is wrathful and his wrath is imminent. There will be a universal destruction according to Zephaniah. All life, animal and human, will be exterminated. So, as we saw in the book of Amos this Day of Yahweh, this Day of the Lord, which has

been so eagerly awaited, will not in fact be a day of triumph, but a day of dark destruction and despair. Zephaniah 1:15-18,

That day shall be a day of wrath,  
A day of trouble and distress,  
A day of calamity and desolation,  
A day of darkness and deep gloom,  
A day of densest clouds,  
A day of horn blasts and alarms--  
Against the fortified towns  
And the lofty corner towers.  
I will bring distress on the people  
And they shall walk like blind men,  
Because they sinned against the Lord;  
Their blood shall be spilled like dust,  
And their fat like dung.  
Moreover, their silver and gold  
Shall not avail to save them.  
On the day of the Lord's wrath,  
In the fire of his passion,  
The whole land shall be consumed;  
For He will make a terrible end  
Of all who dwell in the land.

You can see why people didn't enjoy listening to these prophets, but at the same time, like the other prophets, Zephaniah also offered hope. There will be a humble remnant which will seek refuge in God. These Jewish exiles, he says, will be delivered from their oppressors and even Gentiles will join in the worship of God. Zephaniah 3:11-13:

"In that day,  
You will no longer be shamed for all the deeds  
By which you have defied me.  
For then I will remove  
The proud and exultant within you,  
And you will be haughty no more  
On my sacred mount.  
But I will leave within you  
A poor, humble folk,  
"--this idea of purging the dross and leaving the pure remnant--"  
And they shall find refuge  
In the name of the Lord.  
The remnant of Israel  
Shall do no wrong  
And speak no falsehood;  
A deceitful tongue  
Shall not be in their mouths.  
Only such as these shall graze and lie down,  
With none to trouble them."

There will also be an ingathering of any exiled. Verse 20:

"At that time I will gather you,  
And at [that] time I will bring you [home];  
For I will make you renowned and famous  
Among all the peoples on earth,  
When I restore your fortunes  
Before their very eyes."

There's one passage in particular that seems extraordinarily joyous. It seems to announce the salvation as happening now, as present and so a lot of scholars think that this was Zephaniah's reaction to Josiah and Josiah's reform which seemed to him to perhaps be the very salvation for which the nation was longing.

Chapter 3:14 and 15:

Shout for joy, Fair Zion,  
Cry aloud, O Israel!  
Rejoice and be glad with all your heart,  
Fair Jerusalem!  
The Lord has annulled the judgment against you,  
He has swept away your foes.  
Israel's Sovereign the Lord is within you;  
You need fear misfortune no more.

So, this sounds very much like a reaction to these reforms initiated by Josiah. This is hailed as the very restoration of God's presence in the community of Judah that was desired. The judgment has been annulled, these terrible things I've been prophesying will not happen.

Another short prophetic book we should mention now is the Book of Nahum. It's very different from the other prophetic books. It doesn't really contain prophecies and it doesn't really upbraid the people for their failings, which are two things that most of the other prophets do. The Book of Nahum is a short little book and it's really a series of three poems and the first one is an acrostic poem, an alphabetical poem--each line beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet--and these poems rejoice over the fall of Nineveh in 612, the capital of the cruel Assyrian empire. The Assyrians were actually quite widely hated in the Ancient Near East. They were noted for their exceptional brutality, their inhumanity, particularly in their conquests and empire building. They deported populations wholesale; they were guilty of all sorts of atrocities like mutilating their captives; they would butcher women and children--all sorts of horrendous deeds. We have lots of testimony about this, both in Assyrian sources but other Ancient Near Eastern sources [too], texts as well as artwork.

So Nahum, in this poem, is celebrating the avenging and wrathful God who has finally turned around to destroy this terrible enemy of Israel and indeed the world. According to Nahum, it's quite true that God had used Assyria as his tool. He had used Assyria to discipline the kingdom of Israel--they did destroy Israel--and to discipline Judah for Judah's sins. But God is ultimately the universal sovereign and so Assyria's savagery--even if it was part of God's disciplining of his children is--Assyria's savagery is itself something that must be punished. So for Nahum, the fall of Nineveh is God's vengeance upon Assyria for her barbaric inhumanity.

The Book of Nahum has often been praised for its very vivid poetic style. It describes these armed legions that march against Nineveh and plunder its treasure, and some of the most exciting archaeology that's been going on has been the digging up of Nineveh. I think the dig has obviously stopped for reasons having to do with the [political] climate in that part of the world, but the findings of Nineveh and the sacking of Nineveh--how shallow pits were dug and treasures

thrown into them and covered over by the gates of the city as people were fleeing, and many of these things-- when you read the description of Nineveh and look at some of the archaeological data, it's quite fascinating.

But Nahum looks forward to a happy era of freedom for Judah and he says in 2:15 [correction: meant to say 1.15]: "For never again shall the wicked come against you." Well, this isn't true, and in fact, in a few years Josiah's going to be killed. Judah's going to be made subject to Egypt and in fact Babylon. By 605 Babylon manages to extract tribute from Judah as a vassal. So in a way, we have here really a glaring error and it's important to note that this error in Nahum--it wasn't updated, it wasn't repaired in order to protect his prophetic reputation.

So we see this interesting tension. We sometimes see prophetic books being edited, revised, having interpolations put into them, partly out of this conviction that their words must be relevant and continue to have some relevance; and other times, there seems to be good evidence that prophetic oracles were preserved rather faithfully.

But with the fall of Nineveh, national confidence was probably boosted and then things quickly turned sour with the death of Josiah in 609, which was a terrible shock. You have Judah lying trapped, as it were, between two great powers: Egypt in the southwest, Babylon in the northeast. And in 605, as I said, Babylon managed to defeat Egypt and reduce Judah to the status of a tributary vassal under the King Jehoiakim.

King Jehoiakim rebels and in response, the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem. There will be two sieges of Jerusalem by the Babylonians just as we've had two sieges earlier--two sieges: one in 597, one in 587, both under Nebuchadnezzar. He lays siege to Jerusalem in 597, and doesn't destroy Jerusalem. He kills the king, takes the king's son into captivity in Babylon and installs a puppet king, still under the assumption that things could be kept under control. So the puppet King Zedekiah is on the throne but he also decides to rebel and assert Judah's independence against the Babylonians. So Nebuchadnezzar returns, and this is in 587. And now the city is in fact captured, the sanctuary is completely destroyed, and the bulk of the population is exiled and this is what brings to end nearly 400 years of an independent Hebrew nation.

The Book of Habakkuk was written during this period, so 600 to the destruction--somewhere in those years. That's the period in which the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem twice. Habakkuk is another unusual prophetic book. It doesn't contain prophecies, so much as it contains philosophical musings on God's behavior. And we're going to see this increasing now as we move into the next section of the Bible when we complete the prophetic section. We'll be encountering writings of very different genres and some of them do contain these philosophical musings on God's conduct.

Habakkuk 1 and 2 are a kind of poetic dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh, and the prophet complains bitterly about God's inaction. Verses 2 and 3 of the first chapter:

How long, O Lord, shall I cry out  
And You not listen,  
Shall I shout to you "Violence!"  
And you not save?  
Why do You make me see iniquity  
[Why] do You look upon wrong?--  
Raiding and violence are before me,  
Strife continues and contention goes on.

And skipping down to verses 13 and 14,

You whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil,  
Who cannot countenance wrongdoing,  
Why do you countenance treachery.  
And stand by idle  
While the one in the wrong devours

The one in the right?  
You have made mankind like the fish of the sea,  
Like creeping things that have no ruler.

Well, God responds to these charges by saying that the Babylonians are the instruments of his justice even though they ascribe their might and their success to their gods, rather than to Yahweh. Now, we've already seen in other books the idea that a conquering nation is serving as the instrument of God's punishment.

But Habakkuk is a little bit unusual because he doesn't couch this idea in the larger argument that Judah deserves this catastrophic punishment. There's a great difference between Habakkuk and the Deuteronomistic historian, for example, because Habakkuk doesn't assert that the people are suffering for their sins. Habakkuk is struggling with what appears to him to be a basic lack of justice. The Deuteronomistic historian wants to assert God's justice, and whatever suffering happens is justifiable. Habakkuk is resisting that idea and we're going to see that resistance really come to a climax next week when we talk about the Book of Job.

Habakkuk in 1:4 struggles with this, "â€decision fails / And justice never emerges. / For the villain hedges in the just man-- / Therefore judgment emerges deformed." It's not merely that the wicked and the righteous suffer the same fate, it's that the wicked really seem to fare better than the just and that reduces humankind to the level of fish and creeping things for whom sheer power and not morality is the principal consideration. Now, having made this charge, Habakkuk awaits God's answer. In chapter 2:1-5 he says,

I will stand on my watch,  
Take up my station at the post,  
And wait to see what He will say to me,  
What He will reply to my complaint.  
The Lord answered me and said:  
"Write the prophecy down,  
Inscribe it clearly on tablets,  
So that it can be read easily.  
â€the righteous man is rewarded with life  
For his fidelity.  
How much less then shall the defiant go unpunished,â€

Not a terribly deep answer. The righteous simply have to have faith that justice will prevail and this faith has to sustain them through the trials that challenge that very idea. We'll see a deeper answer to this same problem in the Book of Job.

The third chapter then shifts gears. So much so that once again scholars say it must be an interpolation. But again, I would warn that dramatic shifts in tone and theme are not that uncommon in the prophetic books and we have to be careful. But in this third chapter, God is described as a warrior god. He thunders from the east, he hurls his spear, he seeks vengeance on Israel's oppressors. It may be that this is some editor's attempt to respond to Habakkuk's skepticism that Yahweh will bring justice--and bring it soon--[so] that he's waiting: how long? why is this taking you so long? Why are you not acting? And this image of an avenging warrior God answers Habakkuk's opening question: How long will God stand by and watch while the Babylonians rape and pillage? But on the other hand, it's possible that it's Habakkuk himself and again the book exhibits that same paradoxical tension we've seen through so many of the prophetic books.

Specifically, he holds out the paradoxical view that God's justice is slow in coming but the righteous must have complete faith in its ultimate execution. But he's raised the issue of theodicy, the problem of evil, the problem of suffering. Ultimately, he sees the problem's resolution only in some vision of the future--an avenging God, when justice will be done. That is typical of some texts that we will see later, particularly apocalyptic literature, which is going to

emphasize patient waiting for an end time when there will be a cataclysmic final act that will bring justice and judgment.

Now the prophet, who lived at the time of the final destruction of Judah, [and] saw the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 was the prophet Jeremiah, another long prophetic book. So we have our three long prophetic books, Isaiah of the Assyrian crisis, Jeremiah of the Babylonian crisis, and Ezekiel writing from exile in Babylon.

Jeremiah was born of a priestly family in a village near Jerusalem, Anathoth, and he began prophesying while he was still a boy. Now, he was a contemporary of King Josiah and so he saw the renaissance that briefly occurred under his guidance: the sweeping reform, the eradication of Assyrian influences that had been welcomed by King Manasseh, the renewal of the covenant, all of these activities that are so highly favored by the biblical writer. And when Josiah died, Jeremiah also lamented his passing, along with the rest of the nation.

Jeremiah witnessed the final destruction and the exile. The Book of Jeremiah is a collection of very different types of material. There's really no clear organization, there's no clear chronological order, not the kind of thing you can just sort of sit down and read from beginning to end and hope it'll make sense. There are prophecies, there are oracles and diatribes against foreign nations, there are stories, biographical narratives, there's some poetry, and at the very end a little brief historical appendix which really resembles 2 Kings: 24 and 25.

So the literary history of the book itself is also quite complex because there's great variation in our ancient witnesses. The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Bible--third century BCE Greek translation of the Bible--its Jeremiah is much shorter than the Hebrew version of Jeremiah and it's arranged differently; internally, the arrangement is different. There are also significant differences between the Hebrew text that we have now and some fragments of Jeremiah that have been found among the Dead Sea scrolls. So this attests to the very open-ended nature of written compositions in antiquity.

We find three main types of material, however, in Jeremiah. (1) The poetic oracles that generally are attributed to Jeremiah; Then (2) biographical anecdotes and narratives about him, which are attributed to his amanuensis and assistant whose name I don't think I put up here. Baruch ben Neriah, *ben* simply meaning son of, so Baruch, the son of Neriah, whose name comes up quite a bit in the Book of Jeremiah. And he is a scribe who assists Jeremiah, and it's thought that perhaps the biographical narrative sections were composed by Baruch ben Neriah. Then we also have (3) certain editorial notes about Jeremiah that are in the style of the Deuteronomistic historian, Deuteronomistic editor. Jeremiah, in general, seems to have very close connections with the language and the ideology of Deuteronomy.

So if we look quickly at the structure of the book, for the most part, the first 25 chapters, Jeremiah 1 through 25 contain an introduction and an account of Jeremiah's call, but then also poetic oracles with some biographical snippets thrown in there as well. Not snippets [but rather] narratives--biographical narratives as well as poetic oracles. In 26 to 29 we have stories of his encounters--I should say run-ins--with other prophets and with authority figures of various types. Chapters 30 to 33 are oracles of hope and consolation; 34 to 45 are more prose stories, and these stories center around and after the time of the final destruction.

Then we have several chapters, 46 to 51 that contain oracles against nations. Some of these, scholars think, might be from other writers and then again, as I say, it concludes with this historical appendix about the fall of Jerusalem that's extracted from 2 Kings.

Now, Jeremiah preached the inevitable doom and destruction of the nation because of its violation of the covenant, which was the very charter for her existence, and his descriptions were quite vivid and quite terrifying. He denounced Israel's leaders, the professional prophets in particular with whom he has many encounters. The professional prophets are liars, he says, because they prophesy peace. He has some negative references to priests as well, but he's especially critical of King Jehoiakim who's the son of Josiah.

He can be compared to Micah because he also attacked this idea, this popular ideology of the inviolability of Zion. As long as injustice and oppression are practiced in Judah, the presence of the temple is no guarantee of anything. Judah will suffer the fate that she deserves for failure to fulfill her covenantal obligations. So God tells Jeremiah to go stand at the gate of the temple and speak these words, and this is a passage that's often referred to as the "Temple Sermon." It's

from chapter 7:

Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Mend your ways and your actions, and I will let you dwell in this place. Don't put your trust in illusions and say, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these buildings." No, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one man and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widowâ€

You hear the language of Deuteronomy right? Those three are always together in Deuteronomy, drawing very heavily on the same language.

If you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt --then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time. See, you are relying on illusions that are to no avail. Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely,â€

Again, allusion to the Decalogue, right? Those four terms in the Decalogue.

Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other gods whom you have not experienced, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which bears My name and say, "We are safe"? [Safe] to do all these abhorrent things! Do you consider this House, which bears My name, to be a den of thieves? As for Me, I have been watching--declares the Lord.

So he attacked this doctrine of the inviolability of Zion and that would have been iconoclastic to say the least. But he pointed to history as proof for his assertion. He cites the example of Shiloh as an example. You remember during the period of the Judges when the Ark of the Covenant was peripatetic and would stay at different places, but for some time it came to rest at Shiloh with the priest Eli and his sons. And in that time, the Philistines managed to destroy the sanctuary and capture the Ark and carry it off into Philistine territory. So the presence of the Ark of the Covenant is no guarantee of anything, and the belief that God would not allow his temple, his city, his anointed ruler to be destroyed, Jeremiah says, is a deception. It's an illusion.

His political message resembles very much the message of his predecessors. He says that the nation's pathetic attempts to resist the great powers and to enter into alliances with the one against the other--these were all completely futile. And to dramatically illustrate the destruction and the slavery that were inevitable, he paraded around Jerusalem, first in a wooden yoke and then in an iron yoke. He does this in chapters 27 and 28. This is a symbol of the slavery, the yoke of the master that is to come.

In chapter 27:6 he claims that God has power over all the Earth and has given the Earth to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, God's servant. As you can imagine, referring to the destroyer of the nation as God's servant would have been shocking, not to say dangerous. You can imagine parallels in our own time, where people would see the God most commonly understood to be the God of most Americans being the one who orchestrated attacks against us. It would have that same kind of feel and power to people, and in several passages Jeremiah exhorts the king to submit to the Babylonian forces. This is acceptance of God's will, the forces that are surrounding Jerusalem.

To ensure the preservation of his words, which were not popular, Jeremiah had his amanuensis Baruch write down everything that God spoke to him. Chapter 36 gives us an insight into this process. It's kind of interesting because Jeremiah's words are transcribed. God specifically tells Jeremiah how to do this. "Get a scroll," he says, "and write upon

it all the words that I have spoken to you--concerning Israel and Judah and all the nations--from the time I first spoke to you in the days of Josiah to this time" (36:2). Now it's the time of King Jehoiakim and then in verse 4 we read, "So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote down in the scroll, at Jeremiah's dictation, all the words which the Lord had spoken to him."

Now, Jeremiah is in hiding at this time because he's politically very unpopular, so he instructs Baruch to take the scroll to the temple and to stand there and to read it to the people. The king's officials are there. They report to the king about the subversive message which has been delivered by Baruch. So Baruch goes into hiding; the scroll is torn into strips and burned. God orders Jeremiah to get another scroll and repeat the process, and he does. Verse 32 of chapter 36, "So Jeremiah got another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah. And at Jeremiah's dictation, he wrote in it the whole text of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned; and more of the like was added," "so, and then some. They came back with even more.

So it's possible--some scholars suggest--that what was written, would have been the contents of chapters 1 to 25 which really contains the oracular material, the oracles. But in any event, this story gives us some insight into the process of prophecy. It doesn't appear to have been really off the cuff. The compositions of the prophets were literary compositions that were committed to memory; they could then be dictated again.

And on an archaeological note, I should point out that one of the most exciting finds, I think, is a clay--in 1975 they found a clay bulla which is like a clay imprint of Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe "that's what it says on the clay imprint. Another one was found in 1996. It was said to be found in a burnt house in Jerusalem, which would have been around the time of the destruction. And it just showed up on the antiquities market, so some question whether it's genuine or not. The second one that was found has a fingerprint on it and people say, well, that could be the fingerprint of Baruch son of Neriah. Anyway, this is the fun stuff you get to do if you do archaeology, but there are plenty of people who think that these probably are the seals of the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, that he would have used to stamp anything that he would have transcribed or written.

So Jeremiah was rejected; he was despised; he was persecuted by fellow Judeans. Naturally, they would have seen him as a traitor. He was flogged, he was imprisoned. Often in his life he was in hiding, he was a very troubled person and he lived in very difficult times. But we also get an insight into his emotional state which we don't from any of the other prophets. He suffered immensely; he weeps over Jerusalem in chapter 8 and 9. We get a sense of the turmoil that he suffers, particularly because of a group of passages that are referred to as the Confessions of Jeremiah and these are sort of scattered throughout--some in chapters 11 and 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, but these are passages that reveal his inner state. Some people question their authenticity, but in any event they paint a very fascinating portrait of the prophet. He curses the day that he was born; he accuses God of deceiving him, of enticing him to act as God's messenger only to be met with humiliation and shame, but he can't hold it in. God's words rage inside him and he must prophesy. It would be better had he not been born at all than to suffer this ceaseless pain.

Chapter 20:7-18, just selections from there:

You enticed me, O Lord, and I was enticed;  
You overpowered me and You prevailed.  
I have become a constant laughingstock,  
Everyone jeers at me.  
For every time I speak I must cry out,  
Must shout, "Lawlessness and rapine!"  
For the word of the Lord causes me  
Constant disgrace and contempt.  
I thought, "I will not mention Him,  
No more will I speak in His name"--  
But [His Word] was like a raging fire in my heart,  
Shut up in my bones;  
I could not hold it in, I was helpless.  
I heard the whispers of the crowd--

Terror all around:  
"Inform! Let us inform against him!"  
"Accursed be the day  
That I was born!  
"Accursed be the man  
Who brought my father the news  
And said, "A boy / Is born to you,"  
And gave him such joy!  
Let that man become like the cities  
Which the Lord overthrew without relenting!  
"Because he did not kill me before birth  
So that my mother might be my grave,  
And her womb big [with me] for all time.  
Why did I ever issue from the womb,  
To see misery and woe,  
To spend all my days in shame!"

Nevertheless, despite all of his very harsh criticisms of the establishment authorities, the royal house and even scribes, other prophets who are labeled as liars by Jeremiah, his words were preserved by scribes, by the Deuteronomistic editors. Shortly after the fall of Judah, Jeremiah was taken forcibly to Egypt. And he lived his final years out in Egypt. He didn't give up his job though. He kept denouncing people. We have records of his denouncing his fellow Judean exiles down in Egypt for worshipping the Queen of Heaven and as before, it seems very few heeded him there.

But like the earlier prophets, Jeremiah also balanced his message with a message of consolation, and there are some very interesting and unique features of Jeremiah's message of consolation. These passages are found particularly in chapters 30 to 33 where we have more hopeful prophecies. He envisages a restoration; the exile will come to an end, and in fact Jeremiah is the first to actually set a time limit to what we might refer to as the dominion of the idolaters; the idolaters holding sway over God's people, and that time limit he says is 70 years.

Jeremiah writes a letter to the first group of deportees, so remember the first siege in 597? You have the king killed, his son and many people taken into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah, from Jerusalem, writes a letter to that first group of exiles and it's quite remarkable, it's found in chapter 29, and it's quite remarkable for its counsel, its advice to the exiles to settle down in their adopted home and just wait out the time. There is an appointed end. He warns the people not to listen to prophets who say you will return shortly, it's just a lie. The Israelites have to serve the king of Babylon and by doing so they will live.

So in Jeremiah 29:4-7, "Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon,"--he's writing to the exiles:

Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. And seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you..." Instead of seek the welfare of Jerusalem, seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you "and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper.

In other words, you're in for the long haul. And you shouldn't be deceived by the idle dreams or the false prophets who tell you that return is imminent. God has other plans. They are plans for welfare, not for evil, and they will give you a future and a hope.

At the end of 70 years, Jeremiah said, there will be a great war of all the nations and Judah and Israel will be returned to their land. Zion, he declared, would be acknowledged as the Holy City and a new Davidic king would reign. A new covenant would be made with Israel as well. And this time, Jeremiah says, it's a covenant that will be etched on the heart, encoded as it were into human nature.

Jeremiah 31:31-34:

See, a time is coming--declares the Lord--when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, so that I rejected them--declares the Lord. But such is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after these days--declares the Lord: I will put My Teaching into their inmost being and inscribe it upon their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No longer will they need to teach one another and say to one another, "Heed the Lord"; for all of them, from the least of them to the greatest, shall heed Me--declares the Lord.

So this is a remarkable idea. It seems to express some dissatisfaction with the element of free will, which is otherwise so crucial to the biblical notion of covenant and morality: the idea that humans freely choose their actions. After all, when you think about some of the major themes set out in the Hebrew Bible at the very beginning in the opening chapters, this would seem to be a cardinal principle: choice. But free choice does mean of course that there will be bad choices and there will be disobedience and evil, and people can get tired of that and Jeremiah was. So his utopian ideal is inspiring, but it does eliminate the element of free will. It seems to describe a situation in which humans are almost hardwired to obey God's covenant. That's a tension that will also be developed in some later texts. I just note it here.

In a very beautiful passage, Jeremiah describes a future restoration of the temple, the bringing of offerings again, the singing of psalms and praise, and this is in contrast to chapter 25. There, in chapter 25, he warned that God will banish "the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride," leaving the land a desolate ruin. Now in his oracle of consolation Jeremiah says,

Again there shall be heard in this place--in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man, without inhabitants, without beast--the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride, the voice of those who cry, "Give thanks to the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His kindness is everlasting!" as they bring thanksgiving offerings to the House of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as of old--said the Lord [Jer 33:10-11].

So just to kind of summarize these prophets leading up to the time of the destruction (because next time we'll be talking about the exile and later the return): The fall of Jerusalem shattered the national and territorial basis of Israel's culture and religion. The Babylonians had burned the temple to the ground, they carried away most of the people to exile, to live in exile in Babylon, leaving behind mostly members of the lower classes to eke out a living as best they could. And it was the completion of a tragedy that had begun centuries earlier and it was interpreted as a fulfillment of the covenant curses. It was the end of the Davidic monarchy, although the Deuteronomistic historian does close with this note, that the son of Jehoiakim was alive and living in Babylon, kind of holding out hope that the line hadn't actually been killed out, hadn't been completely wiped out.

But the institution seemed to have come to an end for now. It was the end of the temple, the end of the priesthood, the end of Israel as a nation, as an autonomous nation, and so the Israelites were confronted with a great test. As I've stressed before, one option would be to see in these events a signal that Yahweh had abandoned them to, or had been defeated by, the god of the Babylonians, and Marduk would replace Yahweh as the Israelites assimilated themselves into their new home. And certainly there were Israelites who went this route, but others who were firmly rooted in exclusive Yahwism did not, and they're the ones who left us their literature.

How could this faith survive outside the framework of Israelite national culture, away from the temple and the land, uprooted and scattered? Could Israelite religion survive without these national foundations and institutions and on foreign soil, or would it go the way of other national religions? You hear the pain and the despair that would have been experienced at this time in the words of the Psalmist, Psalm 137 which is written at this time:

By the rivers of Babylon,  
there we sat,  
sat and wept,  
as we thought of Zion.  
There on the poplars  
we hung up our lyres,  
for our captors asked us there for songs  
our tormentors, for amusement, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."  
How can we sing a song of the Lord  
on alien soil?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither;  
let my tongue stick to my palate  
if I cease to think of you,  
if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory  
even at my happiest hour.

It was the message of the prophets that helped some Israelites make sense of their situation in a manner that kept them distinct and invulnerable to assimilation. And this was probably the reason for the preservation of the prophetic writings, even though they had often been despised or unheeded in their own lifetimes.

Yahweh hadn't been defeated, they claimed. The nation's calamities were not disproof of His power and covenant, they were proof of it. The prophets had spoken truly when they had said that destruction would follow if the people didn't turn from their moral and religious violations of God's law. So that rather than undermining faith in God, the defeat and the exile when interpreted in the prophetic manner, had the potential to convince Jews of the need to show absolute and undivided devotion to God and His commandments, so that paradoxically the moment of greatest national despair could be transformed by the prophets into an occasion for the renewal of religious faith.

The great contribution of the prophets was their emphasis on God's desire for morality as expressed in the ancient covenant. The great contribution of Jeremiah was his insistence on God's everlasting covenant with his people, even outside the land of Israel and despite the loss of national religious symbols--the temple, the Holy City, the Davidic king. And this insistence that the faithful person's relationship with God wasn't broken, even in an idolatrous land, when added to Jeremiah's notion of a new covenant, provided the exiles with the ideas that would transform the nation of Israel into the religion of Judaism.

Next time we're going to turn to two post-destruction prophets who also helped the nation formulate a viable response to the tragedy that had befallen them. This is a point at which we can begin to use words like "Judaism."

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. This is a modification of the JPS translation from "And to walk modestly with your God."

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 19 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** I'm going to go ahead now and get started with some sixth-century material which-- prophetic literature--which confronts the issues that were raised by the final destruction of Jerusalem.

What was the meaning of this event and how could it be reconciled with the concept of Israel as God's elect? How could such tremendous evil and suffering be reconciled with the nature of God himself? This is going to be a question that will return in the next lecture when we look at the wisdom literature and the Book of Job, and some other texts as well as we proceed through the rest of the course.

In classical terms, if God is God, then he's not good if all these terrible things happened, and if God is good then he mustn't be all powerful because he failed to prevent this evil. That tends to be the dilemma, the way it's phrased.

Now, Ezekiel was a priest and he was deported in the first deportation. You remember there was a deportation of exiles in 597, and then the final siege and destruction and deportation of exiles in 587. Ezekiel was among the deportees of 597. He was therefore, in exile in Babylon during the final destruction and the fall of Jerusalem in 587, but his priestly background and his priestly interests are clearly reflected in his prophecies. He accuses the Israelites of failing to observe cultic laws, ritual laws, and his promises for the future and his vision of a restoration, we will see, center around a new temple and a restored Jerusalem and temple complex.

There's a striking correspondence between Ezekiel and the priestly sources in terms of language and theme, particularly H, the Holiness code. Now, the prophecies in Ezekiel, conveniently and unlike many of the other prophetic books, actually follow a fairly chronological order. So the first section of the book consists of prophecies that were before the final destruction, between 597 and 587, and then beginning in 33, it seems we have prophecies that followed the destruction. He gets the report of the destruction, and then we see how his tone and his message changes.

So in those first 24 chapters where you have prophecies that are delivered in Babylon, before the destruction, we have three chapters that are devoted to his call and his commission as a prophet. We see his inaugural vision. I'll come back and talk about that in a minute as well as many other visions and symbols. Then you have, from chapters 4 to 24, oracles that are condemning Judah and Israel.

There are some interesting elements within this. We have the depiction of the *kavod* (which represents God) departing. We'll talk about that text in a minute. We also have, in chapter 18, a very interesting emphasis on individual responsibility for sin. We'll come back and touch on that as well.

Chapters 25 to 32 contain oracles against foreign nations just as we have in Jeremiah and Isaiah. Throughout, Ezekiel refers to these nations as the uncircumcised. The tone here is vengeful and very gloating, and these oracles have exerted a very strong influence on the New Testament, particularly the Book of Revelation.

After 587, Ezekiel prophesied and those prophecies are contained in the latter part of his book from chapters 33 to 48. So in 33 we hear of the fall of Jerusalem, and then after that, oracles of promise and hope for the future. The last chapters, from chapter 40 to 48 are visions: Ezekiel's visions of the restoration, his vision of a rebuilt Temple and a rebuilt Jerusalem.

So the book opens with a narrative account of Ezekiel's call in about 593 or so in a Jewish community that's on the River Chebar, which is a large irrigation canal off of the Euphrates in Babylon. And this is the first time that we hear of a call of a prophet outside the land of Israel.

It's a remarkable vision. Like many of the visions in the Book of Ezekiel it has a sort of surrealistic, almost hallucinatory quality. The vision itself is very reminiscent of descriptions of Baal, the Canaanite storm god. So there's a stormy wind and a huge cloud, and a flashing fire. God is riding on a kind of throne chariot. He's enthroned above four magnificent creatures. Each of these has a human body and then four faces: the face of a human, the face of a lion, the face of an ox,

and the face of an eagle. There are four huge wheels under this throned-chariot, and they are said to gleam like beryl beneath a vast and awe-inspiring expanse or dome, which gleams like crystal. Above that is the semblance of a throne that is like sapphire, and on the throne was the semblance of a human form that's gleaming like amber, and its fire encased in a frame, which is radiant all about.

So this *kavod*, this cloud that contains or hides the fire that is Yahweh's presence--That is also the term that's used in the Torah, [i.e.,] in Exodus and the priestly sources to describe the presence of God among His people, this fire that's encased in a cloud, the *kavod*.

In Exodus 24 we read that this *kavod* had settled on Mount Sinai representing God's presence. In Exodus 40, this cloud covers the tent of meeting; it fills the tabernacle, so when Ezekiel sees it now he says, that it "was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the Lord. When I beheld it, I flung myself down on my face and I heard the voice of someone speaking." Notice this language; it was the "semblance of the appearance of the Presence." Ezekiel wants to emphasize the transcendent nature of the deity. He's having a vision of something which cannot in fact be seen or perceived, which is a kind of paradox of all of his visions.

The prophet's humanity is emphasized in contrast to this transcendent divinity, and that's something that happens throughout Ezekiel. He emphasizes his humanity with this phrase "Son of Man," *ben adam*. Son of Man; it simply is the Hebrew term for a mortal being as opposed to divine being. Son of Man simply means a human, a *morta*. *Ben adam*, one who is like Adam.

Now, the call of Ezekiel is reminiscent of the call of Jeremiah and Isaiah. He is sent to a nation of rebels, rebels who will not be listening to him. His commission is symbolized by a scroll that's handed to him, and we hear at the end of chapter 2 that inscribed on this scroll are lamentations and dirges and woes, and he's commanded to eat of this scroll and then go to speak to the House of Israel.

So he swallows this scroll and all of its dreadful contents. It tastes to him as sweet as honey and then his task is spelled out in chapter 3. He is to be a watchman, one who gives warning of danger, and people will either heed him or not, but each one of them is ultimately responsible for his or her own fate.

In a vision, in chapter 8, an angel transports Ezekiel to Jerusalem and into the temple courts, and there he sees and gives a very vivid description of the shocking abominations. These are represented as justifying or explaining the destruction of the city and these descriptions are characterized by more than the usual amount of prophetic hyperbole. As he watches the slaughter and the destruction that's going on there, Ezekiel sees the *kavod*, that is the presence of Yahweh, arise from the Temple and move to the east.

Chapter 10:18-19:

...the Presence of the LORD left the platform of the House and stopped above the cherubs. And I saw the cherubs lift their wings and rise from the earth, with the wheels beside them as they departed; and they stopped at the entrance of the eastern gate of the House of the Lord, with the Presence of the God of Israel above them.

In chapter 11:23-25:

...The Presence of the LORD ascended from the midst of the city and stood on the hill east of the city. A spirit carried me away and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God to the exiled community in Chaldea. [So now he's back to Babylon.] Then the vision that I had seen left me, and I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.

So this image draws on Ancient Near Eastern traditions of gods abandoning their cities in anger, leaving them to destruction by another god. The primary difference here is that God, rather than another god, is himself also bringing the destruction.

Moreover, God doesn't retire to the heavens. He doesn't abandon his people. He doesn't remain behind with those left in Judah, but he moves into exile. In the book of Ezekiel those left behind are guilty. God does not stay with them; God moves east with the righteous exiles.

Then at the end of the Book of Ezekiel, we're going to see a vision of a restored Temple, this happens in Ezekiel 43, and here Ezekiel will see the *kavod* returning from the east and back to the temple,

...And there, coming from the east with a roar like the roar of mighty waters, was the Presence of the God of Israel, and the earth was lit up by His presence.

...

The Presence of the LORD entered the temple by the gate that faced eastward.

...

...and lo, the Presence of the LORD filled the Temple.

That was [from] 43:1-6. So just as the presence, the Divine presence, went eastward with the exiles so it will return with the re-establishment of Israel in her home. What is significant here is the idea that God is not linked to a particular place but to a particular people. And the implication then is that God is with His people, even when they are in exile.

So Ezekiel preached a message of doom and judgment like his prophetic predecessors and his contemporaries, but his condemnations tend to emphasize the people's idolatry and their moral impurity and this of course makes sense of his priestly heritage. His denunciations of Jerusalem are among the most lurid and violent that you'll find in the Bible. Again, these prophesies were likely delivered between the two deportations, between 597 and then the final destruction and deportation in 587, 586. And Ezekiel warns that Jerusalem will fall deservedly. He says that rebellion against Babylon would be treason against God. He employs all kinds of very vivid metaphors to describe Israel's situation. Jerusalem, he says, is Sodom's sister except even more vile. Jerusalem is a "vine" but a wild one or a burned one. She produces nothing of use. Purity language is employed metaphorically throughout Ezekiel. Jerusalem has been utterly defiled and there are all sorts of images that inspire revulsion in these chapters. So destruction is the only possible remedy. There are metaphors of sexual promiscuity throughout the book. God's destruction of Israel is figured as the abuse doled out by an insanely jealous husband who is violent, and the images are disturbing, they're haunting, they're quite nightmarish.

Ezekiel also engages in various dramatic signs--prophetic signs or actions--to convey his message. It's something that we've seen in some of the other prophets, but his are so bizarre and so extreme sometimes, that he was accused of insanity. He cooks his food over a fire of human excrement as a symbol of the fact that those besieged by Nebuchadnezzar will be forced to eat unclean food. He doesn't mourn when his wife dies in order to illustrate the fact that Yahweh will not mourn the loss of His temple.

He binds himself in ropes; he lies on his left side 390 days to symbolize the 390 years of exile of Israel, and then he lies on his right side for 40 days to symbolize the length of Judah's captivity, which he says will be 40 years. Neither of these terms of captivity turn out to be correct. Finally, he shaves his beard and his hair and he burns a third of it, he strikes a third of it with his sword, and he scatters a third of it to the winds. He just keeps a few hairs bound up in his robe. This is to symbolize the destruction of a third of the people by pestilence and famine, a third of the people by violence, and the exile of a third to Babylon; only a few will God allow to escape.

Ezekiel makes it clear that those who ignore the warnings are doomed. Those who heed will be spared, and in this, he sounds the theme of individual responsibility that is so characteristic of Ezekiel. I want you to listen to the following passage and compare it to, or think about, other verses or terms in the Torah that you've studied that may relate to the

same topic. How is he modifying those earlier ideas?

This is all from chapter 18, various verses throughout:

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you mean by quoting this proverb upon the soil of Israel, "Parents eat sour grapes and their children's teeth are blunted"? As I live--declares the Lord GOD--this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel. Consider, all lives are Mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine. The person who sins, only he shall die.

...

A child shall not share the burden of a parent's guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child's guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be account to him alone. Moreover, if the wicked one repents of all the sins that he committed and keeps all My laws and does what is just and right, he shall live; he shall not die.

...

Is it My desire that a wicked person shall die?--says the Lord GOD. It is rather that he shall turn back from his ways and live. So, too, if a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does wrong, practicing the very abominations that the wicked person practiced, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he did shall be remembered; because of the treachery he has practiced and the sins he has committed--because of these, he shall die.

...

Be assured, O House of Israel, I will judge each one of you according to his ways --declares the LORD GOD. Repent and turn back from all your transgressions; let them not be a stumbling block of guilt for you. Cast away all the transgressions by which you have offended, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, that you may not die, O House of Israel. For it is not My desire that anyone shall die--declares the Lord GOD. Repent, therefore, and live!"

It's an important Torah idea that Ezekiel is rejecting or contradicting here. And that's the Torah principle of collective or even intergenerational punishment. It's found most famously in the Second Commandment, the declaration that God punishes children for the sins of their fathers unto the fourth generation.

Now, we need to note that we're talking about divine justice here and not human justice. As we saw in our study of biblical law in the sphere of *human* justice, only the guilty are punished in Israelite law. You don't have literal punishment. Someone kills someone's son, then *their* son is put to death--that idea is *rejected* in biblical law. But God operates according to a different principle--the principle of collective responsibility. And that principle is understood in the early sources quite positively.

That the sins of the father's are visited upon the children is an expression of God's mercy. Exodus 34:6 and 7 describe God as merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness and thus tolerating sin, though not completely clearing the guilty. As a mercy he spreads out the punishment over three or four generations. So this notion is tied up with the aspect of God's mercy.

But evidently there are some who found this idea unjust and other biblical passages try to bring a different sense of justice to this picture, and they emphasize that the third and fourth generations themselves must be wicked. That seems

to be the case in Exodus 20:5.

The Book of Chronicles, which is a rewrite of the historical material, the historical narrative in the Book of Kings, rewrites that material in a manner that never explains a catastrophe on the basis of guilt incurred by someone other than the one experiencing the catastrophe. In other words, it rejects the Deuteronomistic historian's device of delayed punishment which you'll remember we discussed. It changes the narrative account so that no one suffers for a crime committed by someone else. It isn't the sin of an earlier generation that's finally visited upon a grandson or a king of a later generation.

So it seems that after 586, or certainly in Ezekiel's case, some accepted the idea that the nation was suffering because of the accumulated guilt of previous generations, notably the Deuteronomist. But for others like Ezekiel, the idea of accumulated guilt and intergenerational punishment seemed to lose some of its explanatory power, perhaps because the destruction and the exile seemed devastatingly severe punishments that didn't fit the individual crimes.

So Ezekiel is one who rejects the doctrine of collective responsibility in the operation of divine justice. In chapter 18, he responds to the idea of suffering for the sins of one's ancestors by declaring that God isn't going to work that way anymore. God will no longer punish people collectively. Each one will be judged individually. Only the sinner will be punished--and that's a major departure from Exodus 34 and even from the contemporaneous Deuteronomistic view.

At this point, I think, we would do well to remind ourselves of the nature of the biblical text. In the opening lecture, I asked you to set aside certain presuppositions about the biblical text. One of them is that it is a uniform or unified text with a single doctrine or theology. I asked you to remember that the Bible isn't a book; it's a library. It's a library of works that originate in vastly differently historical periods, vastly different historical situations. It responds to a variety of shifting needs and events, and reflects a range of perceptions about God and his relation to creation and to Israel. It isn't a book of theology, that is to say, rational argumentation in support of certain doctrines about God. And it most certainly doesn't speak with a single voice on points of theology or matters that are of traditional concern to the discipline of theology. Doctrine isn't its concern. Understanding and making sense of the historical odyssey of the nation of Israel in covenant with God--that is its concern.

So we're going to find many different interpretations of the meaning of that history, the nature of that God, and the meaning of that covenant. And certainly there are some basic points of agreement, but even some of the most basic points of agreement do not pass without some contestation.

So for example, the basic point that humans are free moral agents. This seems to be clearly assumed throughout most of the books of this little library. But there are some isolated episodes that would appear to contradict even that most basic assumption. God hardens Pharaoh's heart. God seals the people's ears sometimes so that they will not hear the message of the prophets, or will not understand them until a later day.

To be sure, there are only a few of these contradictory passages, but they do exist. And so here we find also a major shift in the exilic period, away from the tendency to see divine justice working through collective or intergenerational punishment to the idea of the individual's culpability before God. I shouldn't say a shift away; we see arising a dialectic. This isn't a linear progression. These are different ideas coming out at different times and receiving emphasis at different times. But this kind of polyphony didn't impinge upon the authority of the Hebrew Bible for the nation of Israel, because the Bible's authority doesn't arise from some supposed consistency or univocality. That's a modern notion and it's based on Hellenistic ideals of truth as singular. Western culture, influenced by Greek philosophical traditions, defines truth in monistic terms. Only that which contains no contradiction is true and only that which is true is authoritative. Those notions are somewhat alien to the ancient non-Hellenized world. The Bible doesn't strive to present philosophical truth. It presents the best efforts of sages and prophets, and scribes and visionaries, to respond to and to explain the crises of the nation over a period of centuries. And its authority derives from the explanatory power of its insights into and understanding of God's governance of the world and his plans for Israel.

So those insights and those understandings may shift, and even stand in contradiction with one another, but they are not mutually exclusive and their contradictions don't affect their authority, their ability to explain, to console--their ability to nourish the faith of a people convinced that God would never desert them no matter how difficult it may be to understand his interactions with them.

Back to Ezekiel now; and in chapter 33 we learn that a fugitive from Jerusalem brings news of the fall of Jerusalem. So it's about 587, 586; and when he hears this, Ezekiel exchanges his message of doom for a message of hope.

Before the fall of the city, his task had been to shatter the people's illusions. He wanted to shake them out of their complacency, but now the people are reduced to despair and remorse, and his task is to offer reassurance and hope. God is going to initiate a new beginning.

Though Israel's punishment was deserved, it was not, according to Ezekiel, a sign of the end of the relationship between Yahweh and his people, and a new Israel would rise from the remnant of Judah and Israel. He expresses this restoration by means of many metaphors and visions.

So chapter 34 condemns the shepherds. This is a very common Ancient Near Eastern metaphor for the leadership of a people; a king is always a shepherd and so on. So chapter 34 condemns the shepherds of the people and promises to set up in the future one shepherd of the House of David to be prince among the people.

Chapter 36 uses metaphors of purity and cleansing. Israel will be cleansed from the impurities of the past. She'll be given a new covenant of the heart. This is in verses 24 and 25 in chapter 36.

I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries and I will bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you [pure water upon you], and you shall be clean: [Pure.] I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your fetishes. And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules. [There are echoes here of Jeremiah also.] Then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people and I will be your God.

So we have again this almost utopian redesign of human nature that we heard in Jeremiah. One in which the problems that are associated with the exercise of free will may be obviated.

Another metaphor that's used for the restoration of a new Israel out of the remnant of the old, is the metaphor of revival from death and this is found in chapter 37--a very, very famous passage: Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones:

The hand of the Lord came upon me. He took me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the valley. It was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many of them spread over the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "O mortal, can these bones live again?" I replied, "O Lord GOD, only you know." [Very diplomatic answer.] And He said to me, "Prophesy over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus said the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again, and you shall know that I am the LORD!"

I prophesied as I had been commanded. And while I was prophesying, suddenly there was a sound of rattling, and the bones came together, bone to matching bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had grown, and skin had formed over them.

...

The breath entered them, and they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast multitude. And He said to me, "O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our house is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the LORD GOD: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel. You shall know, O My people, that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves and lifted you out

of your graves. I will put my breath into you and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil. Then you shall know that I the LORD have spoken and have acted--declares the LORD.

In the interpretation that follows the vision, we are told that the bones symbolize Israel now, in this state, in exile. In their despair they're crying: our bones are dried up, we're dead, now our hope is lost. And God promises to raise Israel from the grave, which is a metaphor for exile, and restore her to her own land as one people, north and south, with one prince to rule over her.

This text has often been de-contextualized and cited as an Old Testament or Hebrew Bible source for the doctrine of literal resurrection after death, as if it's speaking about literal resurrection. But I think in its context it's quite clear that it is one of many metaphors that Ezekiel uses throughout this section for the redemption of the community from exile, the restoration of the people back in their own land.

At the center of the restored community that Ezekiel envisions is a new Jerusalem, and at its center is a rebuilt temple. And it is described in great detail in the last nine chapters of the book.

In Ezekiel's utopian vision, the land is equally allotted, it's divided up and equally allotted among all 12 tribes now, who will be brought back. And Jerusalem lies in the center with 12 great gates, one for each tribe, surrounding it. This temple is the source of a never-ending river that gushes forth from it, a river that will make the Dead Sea flow with fresh water again. Ezekiel sees Zadokite priests presiding in the Temple, they are assisted by Levites who are just menials (they are sort of demoted in his vision). And he insists no foreigners will be permitted entry. We're going to see that that's a view that wasn't shared by others in the post-destruction era.

While Ezekiel believed that God would restore a purified Israel to its land under a Davidic monarchy, and he prophesied to this effect, he, like Jeremiah, also maintained that a relationship with God was possible, in the meantime--a relationship outside the chosen land. And the Jewish diaspora ("diaspora" refers to a community living outside of its homeland)--the Jewish diaspora was a new thing; it was a religious-national body of a type that had not been seen before. You had a people remaining loyal to their God, while in exile from their own land (and what was believed to be that God's land) without worshipping him cultically, or by means of sacrifice. Remember the only legitimate site for an altar or for sacrifice to God is Jerusalem. And in time, slowly, a new worship will be fashioned; one without sacrifice, one that consists of prayer and confession, and fasts, and other kinds of ritual observances. Three times a day Jews will pray and they'll pray in the direction of Jerusalem. Worship in synagogues eventually will come into being, and the importance of the Sabbath will grow--the Sabbath as a memorial of the covenant and the symbol of Jewish faith. And so you also find, beginning shortly after this period, for the first time, non-Jews are joining themselves to Yahweh, adopting this religion of Israel out of religious conviction, not simply because they may be residing in the land and have to follow God's laws. This is outside the land. You have people choosing to opt into this community. So again, we see that as the history of the nation of Israel came to an end, the history of Judaism, the "religion" Judaism, begins.

So in Ezekiel we've seen one response to the national disaster and the exile: the idea that while suffering and punishment are fully deserved, a relationship with God remains possible. God is with his people even in exile.

A second response to the destruction and exile can be found in the anonymous writings that are appended to the Book of Isaiah. I mentioned these writings briefly. We'll be able to look now at what's been called Second Isaiah.

So there are two discrete units of material that are appended to Isaiah. Chapters 40 to 55 are referred to as Second Isaiah, and chapters 56 to 66 are referred to as 3 Isaiah. And these chapters differ from Isaiah proper, from the eighth-century prophet, in several ways. It's clear, first of all, that these parts of Isaiah were written after the Exile. Parts of Third Isaiah were written after the Exile, [and] all of second Isaiah, (and Isaiah proper was clearly written in the eighth century on into the early seventh century). Jerusalem is referred to as destroyed. The audience that's addressed is living in exile. Babylon is the oppressor, not Assyria. Assyria was the oppressor in the time of Isaiah proper. The appended materials even seem to know of the overthrow of the Babylonians. That's going to happen in about 539 when Cyrus of Persia will conquer the Babylonians. We have passages that express some euphoria over this, because Cyrus, of course,

authorized the Jews to return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple.

There are also all kinds of stylistic differences between First Isaiah and Second and Third Isaiah. Second and Third Isaiah, for example, have no biographical data and First Isaiah has quite a bit. These materials also have a different theology of history, a different understanding of history, a different attitude towards foreign nations and a very strong and renewed emphasis on monotheism. These [features] also mark it as different.

Among the scrolls that were found in the caves at Qumran near the Dead Sea, we have a very large and very famous Isaiah scroll, which is now in a museum in Jerusalem. On the scroll there is a gap after Isaiah 39, and a new column starts with Isaiah 40. So it seems to signal some sort of implicit recognition that there's a difference between these two sections. They are not the same unit, not the same author perhaps.

So we're going to talk right now about Second Isaiah because this is a wholly post destruction work. The opening or inaugural oracle that occurs in chapter 40 is an oracle of consolation. It's an oracle of comfort, and the prophet sees a straight and level highway prepared in the wilderness for a dramatic procession of Yahweh the shepherd who will lead his people back to Jerusalem. It's very, very famous--made very famous by Handel's Messiah actually. So chapter 40 (taking from various verses in this chapter):

Comfort, oh comfort My people,  
Says Your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
And declare to her  
That her term of service is over,  
That iniquity is expiated;  
For she has received at the hand of the LORD  
Double for all her sins.  
A voice rings out:  
"Clear in the desert  
A road for the Lord!  
Level in the wilderness  
A highway for our God!  
Let every valley be raised,  
Every hill and mount made low.  
Let the rugged ground become level  
And the ridges become a plain.  
The Presence of the LORD shall appear,  
And all flesh, as one, shall behold--  
For the LORD Himself has spoken."

A voice rings out: "Proclaim!"  
Another asks, "What shall I proclaim?"  
All flesh is grass,  
All its goodness like flowers of the field:

...

But the word of our God is always fulfilled!"

...

Behold, the Lord GOD comes in might,

...

Like a shepherd He pastures His flock:  
He gathers the lambs in His arms  
And carries them in His bosom;  
Gently he drives the mother sheep.

So this highway will appear leading the exiles straight to Jerusalem. All of the topography will be flattened and God will lead them as a shepherd leads the lamb.

Why? Because the word of the Lord is always fulfilled. So what this voice is proclaiming is a literal return from exile. God is opening a highway, he's leading His flock home like a shepherd in a new exodus. And this is an idea that's so important that it recurs at the end of the unit as well in chapter 55: the idea of a new exodus.

A second key theme that's sounded at the beginning and end of the unit again (so it happens in chapter 40 and again in chapter 55) is this idea that the word of our God is always fulfilled. Or in some translations, the word of our God "stands forever." This idea is the essence of the Israelites' hope during the period of captivity and exile, and it appears in the first oracle. It's beautifully restated in the last oracle, in chapter 55, verses 10 through 12:

For as the rain or snow drops from heaven  
And returns not there,  
But soaks the earth  
And makes it bring forth vegetation,  
Yielding seed for sowing and bread for eating,  
So is the word that issues from my mouth:  
It does not come back to Me unfulfilled,  
But performs what I purpose,  
Achieves what I sent it to do.  
Yea, you shall leave in joy and be led home  
secure.  
Before you, mount and hill shall shout aloud,  
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

So the everlasting word of the Lord--it's guaranteed fulfillment (specifically--to bring his people home in a new exodus)--these are ideas [that] form an envelope or an *inclusio*, that kind of literary structure where something is mentioned at the beginning and again at the end to form an *inclusio* or an envelope around the entire unit of Second Isaiah.

We see also in Second Isaiah an extreme monotheism. The monotheism is explicit of course in Isaiah--implicit, I'm sorry, implicit in Isaiah, but it becomes quite explicit in Second Isaiah. As we've seen, to come to terms with the destruction of 587 entails the acceptance of the idea that Israel's punishment was deserved, and Yahweh's control of history means he controls not only Israel but all other nations as well and can use them for his purpose, including punishing Israel.

There's no power other than Yahweh. So referring then to the rise and fall of nations, Isaiah 41:4 states,

Who has wrought and achieved this?  
He who announced the generations from the  
start--  
I, the LORD, who was first  
And will be with the last as well.

The first and the last--which is a way of saying everything, all inclusive. There is nothing but me. And Isaiah 44 satirizes those nations who make and worship idols, and ridicules the folly and stupidity of ascribing divinity to that which one has created with one's own hands.

In Isaiah 41, God states his case against these vain and useless idols. He summons them to answer for themselves, show that they are gods by announcing something that will occur, announcing what will occur and seeing if it comes true. Chapter 41:22-24:

Let them approach and tell us what will happen.  
Tell us what has occurred,  
And we will take note of it;  
Or announce to us what will occur,  
That we may know the outcome.  
Foretell what is yet to happen,  
That we may know that you are gods!  
Do anything, good or bad,  
That we may be awed and see.  
Why, you are less than nothing.  
Your effect is less than nullity;  
One who chooses you is an abomination.

But this is only half the picture because not only are the gods of the nations no gods, but Yahweh is the true God of all of these other nations. So who raised Cyrus of Persia from the north to sweep through the Ancient Near East and conquer the Babylonians? No one but Yahweh. Isaiah 41:

"I have roused Him from the north, and he has come  
...And He has trampled rulers like mud,  
Like a potter treading clay  
...The things once predicted to Zion--  
Behold, here they are!" [from vv 25-29].

So in these passages, the author of Second Isaiah is drawing the logical conclusion, perhaps, towards which Israelite religion has tended from its inception. Yahweh, once a Canaanite deity, then the God of Israel's patriarchs, then the national God of Israel, is here the Lord of universal history. The only real God, Second Isaiah is claiming, is the God of Israel.

Second Isaiah is also quite well known for the Servant Songs that it contains, the famous servant songs. These occur scattered in chapter 42, chapter 49, chapter 50, and then most extensively 52:13 to 53:12, so much of 52 and 53. The identity of this servant--I'll read some of these passages in a minute, but it refers to this servant, God's servant, and the identity of the servant has been a puzzle to biblical interpreters for centuries. Sometimes the servant is referred to as a collective figure, sometimes the servant is referred to as an individual figure.

In chapter 49 the servant is referred to or described as a prophet with a universal message rather than a message for the Israelites alone, but then there's some ambiguity here. The servant is first identified, or the prophet--the servant or prophet--is first identified as Israel herself. So in chapter 49:1-3:

...The Lord appointed me before I was born,  
He named me while I was in my mother's womb.  
He made my mouth like a sharpened blade,  
He hid me in the shadow of His hand,  
And He made me like a polished arrow;  
He concealed me in His quiver  
And He said to me, "You are My servant,  
Israel in whom I glory."

Yet, in verse 5 it would seem that this prophet/servant has a mission to Israel to bring her back to Yahweh, and that would imply that the servant or prophet is not Israel. Verse 5:

And now the LORD has resolved--  
He who formed me in the womb to be His  
servant--  
To bring back Jacob to Himself,  
That Israel may be restored to Him.

[Then the mission is expanded a little bit in verse 6:]

For He has said:  
"It is too little that you should be My servant  
In that I raise up the tribes of Jacob  
And restore the survivors of Israel:  
I will also make you a light of nations,  
That My salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

Chapter 50 quite famously refers to the servant as rebellious and as persecuted. Verse 6:

I offered my back to the floggers,  
And my cheeks to those who tore out my hair.  
I did not hide my face  
From insult and spittle.

But it's the famous and difficult passage in Isaiah 53 that most movingly describes the suffering and sorrow of God's servant. 53:3-11:

...He was despised, we held him of no account.  
Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing,  
Our suffering that he endured.  
We accounted him plagued,  
Smitten and afflicted by God  
But he was wounded because of our sins,

Crushed because of our iniquities.  
He bore the chastisement that made us whole,  
And by his bruises we were healed.  
We all went astray like sheep,  
Each going his own way;  
And the LORD visited upon him  
The guilt of all of us."  
He was maltreated, yet he was submissive,  
He did not open his mouth;  
Like a sheep being led to slaughter,  
Like a ewe, dumb before those who shear her,  
He did not open his mouth.

...  
And his grave was set among the wicked,  
And with the rich, in his death--  
Though he had done no injustice  
And had spoken no falsehood.  
But the LORD chose to crush him by disease,  
That, if he made himself an offering for guilt,  
He might see offspring and have long life,  
And that through him the LORD's purpose might prosper.

There have been many attempts to equate this man of sorrows with all kinds of figures. Early on, Jesus' followers saw Jesus as the suffering servant of God in Isaiah. The New Testament writers specifically borrowed passages from Isaiah, particularly this chapter, chapter 53, when constructing their narratives of Jesus, taking those verses and using them in describing his story. So he is depicted as the innocent and righteous servant who suffered for the sins of others. In the teachings of Paul, however, you have a different use of these verses. Christians, generally, are identified as the servant who suffers with and for Jesus.

Despite these later theological interpretations, the anonymous writer of Second Isaiah wasn't writing about a remote Nazarean teacher and charismatic healer who would live more than five centuries later. Examined in its original context, it appears most likely that the servant is Israel herself described metaphorically as an individual whose present suffering and humiliation is due to the sins of other nations, but whose future restoration and exultation will cause astonishment among those nations who will then be humbled to Yahweh.

But there are problems with even this interpretation and you should be aware of that. This has never been solved satisfactorily. The main problem with interpreting Israel as the servant is the verse that describes the servant as having a mission to Israel. It seems a little odd to say that Israel bears a mission to Israel. But this problem can be solved, if we remember that Israel was often divided in prophetic rhetoric. So perhaps the writer envisions a mission of one part, the righteous part, to the other, the part that has gone astray.

Leaving aside this difficulty, the more prominent motif in the servant song of Isaiah is that the servant has a mission to the world. That's the more prominent motif, and that is a role that would suit Israel quite well. Furthermore, you have the phrase, "Israel, My servant," appearing in Second Isaiah about eight times. So the idea of Israel as God's servant to the nations is clearly a part of Isaiah's conceptual world, and since we're dealing with poetry rather than a rigorously consistent metaphysical treatise, it shouldn't be too surprising that sometimes the servant is spoken of as a group collectively, sometimes as an individual. The same holds true of Israel in general, by the way, throughout much of the literature. Sometimes Israel is spoken of in plural terms and sometimes as a single individual.

So in its original context it's likely that the servant refers to Israel herself. If the servant is Israel, then we can see how Second Isaiah is another response to the events of 587. And it's ultimately a positive interpretation, a positive response.

The punishment that Israel suffered even if excessive (remember Isaiah 40 claims that Israel has suffered double for her sins, so it's been an excessive punishment)--that punishment isn't meaningless. It will lead to redemption. Israel will be healed by her wounds. God's word will not be returned unfulfilled. In addition, suffering leads to a new role for Israel among the nations. Second Isaiah expresses a new self-awareness that is taking hold in the exile. Israel saw itself as the faithful servant of Yahweh, a servant whose loyalty to God in this dark time would serve to broadcast the knowledge of God throughout the nations.

So Israel was chosen from the womb to serve God's universal purpose. Israel suffered unobserved by others, but eventually this would make possible the recognition of God by those others. Where once God covenanted with David to lead his people, Israel, he now covenants with Israel to lead the nations of the world in God's way. It's an expansion of God's purpose, and this is an idea that appears in Isaiah 55:3-5:

Incline your ear and come to Me;  
Harken, and you shall be revived.  
And I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
The enduring loyalty promised to David. [The covenant and loyalty that was promised to David I'm now transferring to you.]  
As I made him a leader of peoples,  
A prince and commander of peoples,  
So you shall summon a nation who you did not know,  
And a nation that did not know you,  
Shall come running to you--  
For the sake of the LORD your God,  
The Holy One of Israel who has glorified you.

So God makes an eternal covenant with Israel, like that he once concluded with David. And the function of the institutions of the old order are transferred to the nation as a whole. What kings and priests, and prophets did for Israel, Israel will now do for the whole world. As the mediator between the only God and the nations of the world she is a light unto them, and all will ascend to her because from her will come Torah, instruction in the divine will and salvation. This is the idea of universal mission that comes out of Second Isaiah.

When we come back on Wednesday, we're going to take a look at what I think is probably the single most profound book in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Job. And again, I'll remind you that final paper information will be available on the Classes server tonight. I want you to have it in time to be able to ask questions of your TF or myself about the assignment. It's pretty detailed so sit and read through it carefully; it'll be there later tonight.

[end of transcript]

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 20 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** When Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned the temple and destroyed Jerusalem, the initial reaction was one of overwhelming grief and sadness, and that's represented primarily in the Book of Lamentations. It's a very short book of dirges that laments the loss of Jerusalem as the death of a beloved person. And it's traditionally attributed to Jeremiah. The Bible itself doesn't make this claim; it's an old tradition.

It may have arisen, however, because of all of the prophets, Jeremiah is the one who reveals the most to us about his personal suffering and grief, and because he was present as an eyewitness at the destruction. There's no real logical development of ideas in Lamentations primarily because it's structured by an artificial device. There are five chapters and four of the chapters are acrostic poems. This means that each verse, or sometimes a series of verses, begins with a letter of the alphabet in sequence. So in chapter 3 you have three verses per letter of the alphabet. But this kind of acrostic poetic formation gives the poem a kind of formal unity, at the same time that it has no logical unity or logical flow. And it's been pointed out that that form is particularly appropriate for an expression of grief that is too profound or too all encompassing to be logical.

The Lamentations over Jerusalem resemble very much David's lamentations over Saul. The mourner spends time contrasting the former splendor of the beloved to his or her present state. And we have lots of Ancient Near Eastern prototypes for this kind of lamentation--lamentations over destroyed cities which are understood as the result of the deity's decision to abandon the city.

In Lamentations we're given a very detailed picture of the great suffering that accompanied the final collapse. Lamentations 1:1:

"Alas!  
Lonely sits the city  
Once great with people!  
She that was great among nations  
Is become like a widow;  
The princess among states  
Is become a thrall."

Chapter 4:

Alas!  
The gold is dulled,  
Debased the finest gold,  
The sacred gems are spilled a  
At every street corner.  
The precious children of Zion;  
Once valued as gold--  
Alas, they are accounted as earthen pots,  
Work of a potter's hands!  
Even jackals offer the breast  
And suckle their young;  
But my poor people has turned cruel,  
Like ostriches of the desert.  
The tongue of the suckling cleaves

To its palate for thirst.  
Little children beg for bread;  
None give them a morsel.  
Those who feasted on dainties  
Lie famished in the streets;  
Those who were reared in purple  
Have embraced refuse heaps.  
The guilt of my poor people  
Exceeded the iniquity of Sodom,  
Which was overthrown in a moment,  
Without a hand striking it.  
Her elect were purer than snow,  
Whiter than milk;  
Their limbs were ruddier than coral,  
Their bodies were like sapphire.  
Again, the description of the physical beauty of the beloved,  
Now their faces are blacker than soot,  
They are not recognized in the streets;  
Their skin has shriveled on their bones,  
It has become dry as wood.  
Better off were the slain of the sword  
Than those slain by famine,  
Who pined away, [as though] wounded,  
For lack of the fruits of the field.  
With their own hands, tenderhearted women  
Have cooked their children;  
Such became their fare,  
In the disaster of my poor people.

The poet here, though, does adopt the standard Deuteronomistic interpretation of events which infers sin from suffering, and therefore, harps on the sin and the uncleanness of Jerusalem that brought on this calamity. Their guilt exceeded the iniquity of Sodom in the passage we just read, and this is a strategy that of course justifies God. The poet singles out the corrupt priests, the corrupt prophets for blame. He attacks the popular ideology of the inviolability of Zion. Israel's many sins are what caused Yahweh to pour out his wrath and destroy Jerusalem utterly.

The descriptions of Yahweh's wrath, anger, his consuming rage, these are some of the most powerful and most violent poetry in the Hebrew Bible. They tend to divert attention, in fact, from the people's guilt and focus attention on their suffering. Children crying for bread, children starving to death, women raped, men abused. In chapter 3, the poet switches into the first person so Jerusalem is speaking like one who is pursued and abused, beaten by an angry and violent master.

Chapter 3 [vv 1-11]:

I am the man who has known affliction  
Under the rod of His wrath;  
Me he drove on and on  
In unrelieved darkness;  
On none but me He brings down His hand  
Again and again, without cease.  
He has worn away my flesh and skin;  
He has shattered my bones.

All around me He has built  
Misery and hardship;  
He has made me dwell in darkness,  
Like those long dead.  
He has walled me in and I cannot break out;  
He has weighed me down with chains.  
And when I cry and plead,  
He shuts out my prayer;  
He has walled in my ways with hewn blocks,  
He has made my paths a maze.  
He is a lurking bear to me,  
A lion in hiding;  
He has forced me off my way and mangled me,  
He has left me numb.

A remarkably violent passage. And in another remarkable passage, the poet describes God as refusing to hear the prayers of Israel. He no longer can forgive. He simply has to punish. This is in chapter 3 as well, verses 42 to 45.

We have transgressed and rebelled,  
And You have not forgiven.  
You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us,  
You have slain without pity.  
You have screened Yourself off with a cloud  
That no prayer may pass through.  
You have made us filth and refuse  
In the midst of the peoples.

So God is simply refusing to even hear Israel's prayer. This is an emphasis not so much on Israel's guilt, but on Israel's tremendous suffering, God's hardheartedness.

The poem ends with a plea of reconciliation in 5:19-22.

But You, O Lord, are enthroned forever,  
Your throne endures through the ages.  
Why have you forgotten us utterly,  
Forsaken us for all time?  
Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself,  
And let us come back;  
Renew our days as of old!  
For truly, You have rejected us,  
Bitterly raged against us.  
Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself,  
And let us come back;  
Renew our days as of old!

Lamentations represents one response to the fall of Jerusalem. It's an overwhelming sense of loss, grief, misery, a sense

of shock too at God's treatment. And also a longing to return, a longing for renewal and reconciliation. The 200 years following the destruction would prove to be a time, a very critical time, of transition. And Israelite literature in this period reflects the Israelites' struggle with the philosophical and religious challenge of the destruction.

How could the disastrous events be explained? We've already seen the response of the Deuteronomistic School. Israel was collectively punished for idolatry. We've seen that history simply reflects justice on a national and international level in this view. We've also seen the response of Ezekiel. He promoted the idea of a continued relationship with God in exile and was awaiting a fantastic restoration, a redesign of human nature. We've seen the response of Second Isaiah which emphasizes the universal significance of Israel's suffering, a universal mission for Israel. For both Ezekiel and the author of Second Isaiah, Israel's suffering is serving a purpose in the divine plan. It's necessary. Israel needs purification and redemption and that will prepare her for a new role in world history.

But there are other responses as well and they're found in the material that's collected in the third section of the Hebrew Bible. That's the section referred to really as *Ketuvim*, which in Hebrew simply means writings, written things. It's sort of a miscellany, a catch-all phrase. And the final portion of the course is going to be devoted now to that third section. So Torah, *Neviim* or prophets, and *Ketuvim*, or writings.

Next time I'm going to discuss the problem of dating many of the works that are in this third section, the Writings. For now it'll suffice to say that while some of the books in this third section of the Bible may have pre-dated the exile, they became canonical, they became authoritative for the community in the post-exilic period and therefore served as a prism through which to view and come to grips with Israel's history.

So we're going to turn today, first of all, to an examination of the three books that represent the Wisdom tradition, what's referred to as the Wisdom literature, or Wisdom tradition in ancient Israel. The Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

Israelite Wisdom literature belongs to a much wider and broad Wisdom legacy or tradition in the Ancient Near East. There's very little in biblical Wisdom literature apart from its monotheism that lacks a parallel in the Wisdom literature of Egypt or Mesopotamia. So Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature is literature that's characterized by a praise of human intelligence, applied to understanding the ways of the world, the ways of society. It tends to contain traditional advice--advice that's been found to be tried and true. It tends to be very individually oriented, but at the same time, quite universal and humanistic in its orientation as well. In keeping with this style, Israelite Wisdom literature doesn't really speak to the particular historical condition of Israel. It speaks to the general human condition. It makes no claim to having been divinely revealed--no special claim to having been conveyed by a prophet or by Moses. It's simply observational wisdom; advice and counsel that can be weighed or confirmed or disputed by experience.

Again, if you were simply to open up the Book of Proverbs and read something in there, unless it had the word Yahweh, you wouldn't know that it didn't come from some Egyptian Wisdom literature, or Mesopotamian Wisdom literature. There are various types of Wisdom material. Scholars have classified the Wisdom material into three main categories.

The Hebrew word for wisdom--which is the word *hokhmah*--literally means skill and probably refers to the skill of living well or living properly. The three types of Wisdom literature that we find are what we could call (1) clan or family wisdom. These materials tend to be common sense aphorisms and observations, the kinds of things that are common to all cultures. They're scattered around the Hebrew Bible, but most of them are contained in the Book of Proverbs.

So, for example, Proverbs 15:17, "Better a meal of vegetables where there is love / Then a fattened ox where there is hate." It's the kind of thing you can imagine your grandmother saying. Chapter 20:14: "'Bad, bad,' says the buyer, / But having moved off, he congratulates himself." Or 26:14: "The door turns on its hinge, / And the lazy man on his bed," and neither of them really gets anywhere. 25:25: "Like cold water to a parched throat / Is good news from a distant land." Many of the Proverbs we classify as clan or family wisdom are parental. They tend to sound as if they're being said to a son, not so much a daughter, but to a son.

The second category of Wisdom literature is what we call court wisdom, and we have a lot of this from Egypt. A great deal of court wisdom came from Egypt to serve the needs of the court. It tends to be bureaucratic advice, administrative

advice, career advice, instruction on manners or tact, how to be diplomatic, how to live well and prosper--practical wisdom.

So, for example, Proverbs 24:27, "Put your external affairs in order, / Get ready what you have in the field, / Then build yourself a home." Or 21:23: "He who guards his mouth and tongue / Guards himself from trouble," [on] tact; 11:14, "For want of strategy an army falls, / But victory comes with much planning," or 12:1, "He who loves discipline loves knowledge; / He who spurns reproof is a brutish man."

Then the third category of Wisdom literature is what we might call more free-wheeling existential reflection or probing--a reflective probing into the critical problems of human existence, and I'm going to talk about that in much more detail as we get to the Book of Job.

Now as I mentioned before, all of these types of Wisdom literature tend to be very universalistic, humanistic, ahistorical. There's nothing particularly Israelite about them. There's no mention of the exodus, there's no mention of Sinai or Moses or covenant or any of the early narratives of the nation. And they [the Wisdom texts] are paralleled in great abundance in the writings of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Sometimes there's an attempt to connect wisdom specifically with belief in Yahweh. But biblical Wisdom like Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom generally grounds morality on non-specific notions of prudence and God-fearing in a sort of non-specific way, rather than on the historical covenant with Yahweh.

So let's look at the Book of Proverbs in a little more detail. Proverbs is the classic book of Wisdom. It contains some material of great antiquity. Even though the book probably reached its final form only in post-exilic times, surely a great deal of it is much older. There are many affinities between Proverbs and Egyptian and Canaanite Wisdom literature, so that suggests that Israel assimilated Wisdom material from the wider environment.

The chief aim of Proverbs seems to be the inculcation of wisdom as the means to social tranquility and a happy life. Young people should learn to master their impulses. They should lead productive and sensible lives. Many of the maxims are intended to educate sons, there's no mention of daughters here, and a good deal of the first nine chapters is formally pedagogical, clearly pedagogical, and can be compared quite productively with some Egyptian writings that we have from the third millennium--the Egyptian teaching of Amenemopet, or the Babylonian Counsels of Wisdom; tremendous parallels among these works. But these first nine chapters warn against the seductions of foreign women and they urge young men to pursue wisdom. And wisdom here is figured--almost hypostasized, an attribute or a characteristic that's almost put into a concrete human form, wisdom is figured as a virtuous woman who promises insight and counsel. This woman was created before all other created things. And wisdom again, figured as a woman, assisted Yahweh in the creation--in the ordering, I should say, the ordering of the universe. Wisdom was with God at that time.

Proverbs values hard work and diligence, and warns against excessive sleep and sex, and wine. Proverbs recommends honesty in your business affairs and kindness, and loyalty, impartiality, sobriety, and humility, restraint, and sincerity. Wealth is very nice, but it's not to be desired at the cost of calmness and peace.

The Wisdom sayings that appear in Proverbs are usually these short two-line sentences in which the second line runs parallel in some way to the first. Some scholars have classified the different kinds of parallelism you find in the book of Proverbs and I've written the three main forms up here.

An example of synonymous parallelism, where the second line is essentially synonymous with the first--that's found in Proverbs 22:1. It's a classic feature of biblical poetry in general. We'll see it in the Psalms. For an example, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches / And favor," parallel to a good name, "is better than silver and gold," parallel to great riches [RSV translation; see note 1]. So the two lines are somewhat synonymous.

In antithetic parallelism the two lines form a balanced pair of opposites, so in Proverbs 10:1, "A wise son makes a glad father / But a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother" [RSV translation].

When the second line seems to complete the thought of the first, it's called ascending parallelism. We find that in

Proverbs 11:22, "Like a gold ring in the snout of a pig / Is a beautiful woman bereft of sense." Another feature of Proverbs is that wisdom itself is established as a religious concept. It seems to have some religious value. Proverbs tries to link wisdom with reverence for God and obedience to God.

In Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord" or reverence, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [knowledge]. Fools despise wisdom and discipline," or chapter 3:5-8, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, / And do not rely on your own understanding." Wisdom guards one from evil, the wise person accepts the sufferings with which God is disciplining him. So in Proverbs 3:12, "For Yahweh reproveth," or disciplines, "him whom he loves / As a father, the son in whom he delights" [based on RSV translation].

Keep that in mind as we turn to Job, because I think the most important thing about the Book of Proverbs is its almost smug certainty that the righteous and the wicked of the world receive what they deserve in this life. There's a complacency here, an optimism. God's just providence and a moral world order, are presuppositions that it just doesn't seem to question. The wise person's deeds are good and will bring him happiness and success. The foolish person's deeds are evil and they are going to lead to failure and ruin. The key idea is that a truly wise person knows that the world is essentially coherent. It's ethically ordered. There are clear laws of reward and punishment that exist in the world.

Proverbs 26:27; "He who digs a pit will fall into it / and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling" [RSV translation]. Or 13:6: "Righteousness protects him whose way is blameless; Wickedness subverts the sinner." If the righteous suffer then they are being chastised or chastened by God just as a son is disciplined by his father. He shouldn't reject this reproof, he should welcome it.

This insistence, on the basic justice of the world, and the power of wisdom or fear of the Lord to guarantee success and security was one strand of ancient Israelite thought. It reaches crystallization in the Book of Proverbs. It was available as a response to or an explanation of the catastrophes that had befallen the nation. We've seen it at work in the Deuteronomistic school, unwilling to relinquish the idea of a moral God in control of history and preferring to infer the nation's sinfulness from its suffering and calamity. Better to blame the sufferer Israel and so keep God and the system of divine retributive justice intact.

But it's precisely this formulaic and conventional piety that is challenged by two other remarkable Wisdom books in the Bible: the Book of Job and the Book of Ecclesiastes. In Job we find the idea that suffering is not always punitive. It is not always a sign of wickedness. It's not always explicable. And this is the first of several subversions of fundamental biblical principles that we encounter in the Book of Job.

The Book of Job--we really don't know its date. It's probably no earlier than the sixth century BCE, but scholars disagree and there are portions of it that seem to reflect a very old and very ancient tradition. It's one of the hardest books of the Bible for moderns to read, and I think that's because its conclusions--to the degree that we can agree on what the conclusions might be--its conclusions seem to fly in the face of some basic religious convictions.

You have to allow yourself, I think, to be surprised, to open your mind, to allow yourself to take Job's charges against God seriously. After all, the narrator makes it clear that God does take them seriously. God nowhere denies Job's charges and, in fact, at one point the narrator has God say that Job has spoken truly. So no matter how uncomfortable Job may make you feel, you need to understand his claims and not condemn him.

Job is going to attack the optimistic conventional piety that is typified in the Book of Proverbs. He's going to challenge the assumption that there is a moral world order. The issues that are raised in this book are twofold: first, why God permits blatant injustice and undeserved suffering and evil to exist in the world, and second of all, whether people will be virtuous when they are afflicted and suffering. In other words, are people righteous only because God will reward them for it, or are they righteous because of the intrinsic and inherent value of righteousness? Those are the two issues.

Now literarily, the book contains two primary elements. First, we have a prose story and that provides a framework for the book, that's chapters 1 and 2 and then it returns in chapter 42 at the end of the book. Into this prose framework a large poetic section of dialogue and speeches has been inserted.

So there are two main literary components. Now the prose framework concerning a scrupulously righteous man named Job, afflicted by horrendous calamity, was probably a standard Ancient Near Eastern folktale of great antiquity. The story isn't set in Israel; it's not about an Israelite. It's set in Edom. Job is an eastern magnate who dwells in the country of Uz, not an Israelite. But the Israelite author has used this older Ancient Near Eastern legend about a man named Job for his own purposes.

The name Job, which in Hebrew is pronounced, *iyov*, is bivalent in meaning. It can mean "enemy" in Hebrew, by changing vowels around; but it's the root for enemy, *oyev*, or, if we take it in Aramaic, it can mean "one who repents," "a repentant one." And as we're going to see, the name will be appropriate in both senses as the story progresses.

There's a handout on the side of the room. I'm not sure everyone took one when they came in. I'm wondering if it could be distributed please. I'm sorry. It's going to help you chart what goes on in Job. But this handout contains an outline of the book's structure on one side--so it's mapped out on one side. On the other side, it has some important verses and terms.

But we'll see from the outline of the structure, chapters 1 and 2 have this prose prologue about the pious and prosperous Job and his devastation, which is the result of a challenge which is put to God. At the end of that prologue, at the end of chapter 2, he has three friends who come to sit with him in silence for seven days. The silence doesn't last very long because we move then into the large poetic section and that extends from chapter 3 all the way to chapter 42, verse 7. So you'll see that structure on the handout. There are many ways to map the structure of the Book of Job. Your handout charts, I think, one of the more common and clearer representations.

Looking now specifically at the poetic section: First, you have a dialogue between Job and his three friends that goes from chapter 3 to chapter 31, verse 40. And it can be divided into three cycles of speeches. Job opens each cycle--so the first speech in each cycle is by Job--and then his friends speak in a regular pattern. First, Eliphaz with Job responding and then Bildad with Job responding and then Zophar; and you have this pattern of six speeches. It occurs three times but in fact the third time the reply by Zophar is omitted and that deviation ensures that Job has the first and the last word. He has a summation speech in chapters 29 to 31.

At first, the friends seek to comfort Job and to explain his suffering but they become increasingly harsh, ultimately bearing a callous contempt for Job's condition. Now this section closes with the long speech by Job, as I said: 29 to 31. He's lamenting the loss of his past, pleasant life. He protests his innocence, he calls on God to answer.

But then Elihu, this previously unannounced fourth friend appears. He gives four speeches from chapters 32 to 37. He admonishes Job; he defends God's justice, and then this is followed by a poetic discourse between God who poses a series of rhetorical questions and Job who appears contrite. And that section also falls into four parts rather like Elihu's speech. You have two long speeches by Yahweh, two short ones by Job.

Finally, there's a concluding prose epilogue that vindicates Job. God criticizes Job's friends, and then in a rather unexpected happy ending, we have Job restored to his fortunes and finally experiencing a peaceful death.

So let's look at the contents in greater detail now that we've reviewed the structure. The story opens by introducing us to Job. He's said to be a blameless and upright man. He fears God and he shuns evil, that is chapter 1, verse 1. So the moral virtue and innocence of Job is established in the opening line as a narrative fact, a non-negotiable narrative fact. And yet this Job is to become the victim of a challenge issued by "the *satan*" in the heavenly counsel. I say "the *satan*" deliberately. *The* *satan*. The *satan* is certainly not the devil. There's no such notion in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase, "the *satan*," occurs four times in the Hebrew Bible, here and in Numbers 22 and in Zechariah 3.

"The *satan*" is simply a member of the divine counsel--one of God's minions whose function it is to investigate affairs on earth and to act as a kind of prosecuting attorney. He has to bring evildoers to justice. And it's only in later Jewish, and especially Christian thought, that the term loses the definite article--from "the *satan*" which means "the prosecutor" essentially, the prosecuting attorney--and becomes a proper name, Satan, for an enemy or opponent of God.

This later concept of Satan develops as a means of explaining evil without attributing it to God, but that isn't the function of the *satan* here. He works for God and when Yahweh boasts of his pious servant Job, the prosecuting angel

wonders, as his portfolio requires him to do, whether Job's piety is sincere. Perhaps he's motivated by self-interest. Since he's been blessed with such good fortune and prosperity he's naturally enough pious and righteous, but would his piety survive affliction and suffering? Deprived of his wealth wouldn't he curse God to his face? You have to notice as you're reading the euphemistic use of "bless God" instead of "curse God." The ancient writers did not want to write down "curse God" so they wrote "bless God," but we need to understand that's a euphemistic way of avoiding writing "curse God."

So wouldn't he curse God to his face? God is quite confident that Job's piety is not superficial, it's not driven by the desire for reward, and so he permits the *satan* to put Job to the test. Job's children are killed, his cattle are destroyed, his property is destroyed, but Job's response in chapter 1:21 is, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return; God gives and God takes away, may the name of the Lord be blessed [see note 2]."

The narrator then adds in verse 22, "In all this--," and if you flip over I've got some of these key verses on the back of your handout to help you keep track, "In all this Job did not sin or impute anything unsavory to God." And God again praises Job to the *satan*, saying, "And still he holds on to his integrity, so you incited me to destroy him for nothing." That's chapter 2:3. So the *satan* proposes increasing the suffering, and God agrees on the condition that Job's life be preserved.

So the *satan* strikes Job's body with these terrible painful sores, trying to crush his spirit and Job's wife rages, "Do you still hold on to your integrity? Bless God," curse God "and die," chapter 2:9. But still Job will not sin, he will not curse God, he insists on remaining virtuous and he responds, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil?" [RSV translation]

So at first glance it would appear that Job accepts his bitter fate. But note: after the first round of suffering, the narrator observed that "in all this Job did not sin with his lips or impute anything unsavory to God," but now he merely observes, "in all this Job did not sin with his lips." Not with his lips perhaps, but in his heart did he impute unsavory things to God?

If we were to move directly to the conclusion of the folktale in chapter 42, if we jump from this point just to the conclusion, in 42:7 is where the conclusion begins, we would find that Job is rewarded fully for his patience and steadfast loyalty and his household and his belongings are restored to him twice over. The folktale standing alone could be read as the story of an innocent man tested, who accepts his fate. He retains his faith, and he's rewarded.

Standing alone, the tale appears to reflect the values and the conventional piety of the Wisdom literature and of the Deuteronomistic school. But the folktale doesn't stand alone. The anonymous author of Job uses this earlier legend concerning the righteous man Job as a frame for his own purposes, and the hint at the end of the prologue that Job perhaps is beginning to impute unsavory things to God points forward to this extensive poetic dialogue that's following.

Here are Job's unsavory accusations against God. Here we have a most impatient and furious Job who will charge God with gross mismanagement of the world and eventually deny the existence of a moral order altogether. So reading the Book of Job is a fascinating exercise because the two types of material in the book, the prose frame and the poetic dialogue in the middle, they appear to be in tension. And yet interwoven, as they are now, they work together and the one shapes our reading of the other.

Our reception of the accusations of Job's friends in the poetic dialogue--our reception of those words is determined by the prose framework's assertion that Job is innocent. That's a non-negotiable narrative fact and because of the fact of Job's righteousness, we know Job's friends are lying when they say Job must be suffering for some hidden sin. And we know that Job's self-defense, that he hasn't deserved the suffering is correct.

We're going to rehearse some of the arguments that are advanced in the central core, the poetic core of the book, and here I think a helpful guide through the arguments--there are lots of commentaries on the Book of Job, but one commentary that I think is helpful in just sort of working through some of the arguments of the interlocutors is the analysis of Edwin Good [see note 3].

Although Job doesn't exactly curse God in his first speech, he does curse the day of his birth. And in a passage that

alludes repeatedly to creation, Job essentially curses all that God has accomplished as creator of the cosmos. He wishes he were dead, and at this point he doesn't even ask why this has happened to him, he only asks why he should be alive when he prefers death.

Eliphaz's reply is long and elaborate. He seems to offer comfort. He *seems* to offer comfort, until he injects a new element in the discussion and that's the element of justice. Job hasn't mentioned the issue of justice up to this point, but Eliphaz says, "Think now, what innocent man ever perished? / Where have the upright been destroyed? / As I have seen, those who plow evil / And sow mischief reap them," chapter 4:7-8.

So Eliphaz is handing Job the standard line of biblical Wisdom literature as exemplified by something like the book of Proverbs, belief in a system of divine retributive justice--that retribution is just. By definition there can be no undeserved suffering. The implication is that Job has deserved this suffering--a thought that apparently hadn't occurred to Job--and the question of undeserved suffering is now going to dominate the rest of the discussion.

Job's second speech is very disorderly. It's full of wildly contradictory images that may reflect the shock and the pain and the rage that now overwhelm him. He seems to be haunted by Eliphaz's connection of his suffering with some sin and so he turns to address God directly. He admits he's not perfect but surely, he objects, he doesn't deserve such affliction.

In chapter 8 we have Bildad's speech and it's tactless and unkind. He says, "Will God pervert the right? / Will the Almighty pervert justice? / If your sons sinned against Him, / He dispatched them for their transgressions," 8:3-4 [JPS translation]. In other words, God is perfectly just and ultimately all get what they deserve. Indeed, your children, Job, must have died because they sinned, so just search for God and ask for mercy.

The friends' speeches lead Job to the conclusion that God must be indifferent to moral status. God doesn't follow the rules that he demands of human beings. This is chapter 9:22, "He finishes off both perfect and wicked." When Job complains, "He wounds me much for nothing," chapter 9:17, he's echoing God's own words to the *satan* in the prologue. Remember when God says to the *satan* you have "incited me to destroy him for nothing," and we suspect by this verbal coincidence that Job is right.

Legal terms dominate, as Job calls for the charges against him to be published, and then he hurls countercharges in a suit against God. Charges of unworthy conduct, of spurning his creatures while smiling on the wicked, on scrutinizing Job even though he knows Job to be innocent, and this too is a subversion of a common prophetic literary genre that we've seen: the *riv* or the covenant lawsuit in which God through his prophets charges Israel with flagrant violation of the terms of the covenant and warns of inevitable punishment.

Here, in Job, it's a man who arraigns God and yet, Job asserts, since God is God and not a human adversary, there's really no fair way for the lawsuit between them to be tried or arbitrated. "Man cannot win a suit against God," chapter 9:2. Job is powerless in the face of this injustice.

These ideas all find expression in Job 10:1-7 [JPS translation]:

I am disgusted with life;  
I will give rein to my complaint,  
Speak in the bitterness of my soul.  
I say to God, "Do not condemn men;  
Let me know what You charge me with.  
Does it benefit You to defraud,  
To despise the toil of Your hands,  
While smiling on the counsel of the wicked?  
Do You have the eyes of flesh?  
Is Your vision that of mere men?  
Are Your days the days of a mortal?  
Are Your years the years of a man,  
That You seek my iniquity

And search out my sin?  
You know that I am not guilty,  
And that there is none to deliver from Your hand

Job repeats his wish to die, this time less because of his suffering and more because his worldview has collapsed. He sees that divine power is utterly divorced from justice and that's a second fundamental biblical assumption subverted.

But Job's words only seem to egg his interlocutors on. Eliphaz had implied that Job was a sinner. Bildad had baldly asserted that his sons had died for their sins and now Zophar's going to claim that actually Job is suffering less than he deserves. And Job isn't persuaded. He isn't persuaded that he has sinned or more precisely, that he has sinned in proportion to the punishment he is now suffering. God is simply unjust. The Job of this poetic dialogue portion of the book is hardly patient or pious. He is angry, he is violent, he argues, he complains and vehemently insists upon his innocence.

In the fourth speech by Job--now this is the speech that opens the second cycle of speeches--Job appeals to creation. God's controlling power is arbitrary and unprincipled. He interferes with the natural order, he interferes with the human order, and this is itself a subversion of the Genesis portrait of creation as a process whose goal and crown is humankind. Again, Job demands a trial. He demands a trial in the widely quoted and mistranslated verse--this is Job 13:15: "He may well slay me. I may have no hope-- but I must argue my case before Him." In other words, Job knows that he can't win but he still wants his day in court. He wants to make his accusation of God's mismanagement. He wants to voice his protest even though he knows it will gain him nothing.

In a pun on his name, *Iyyov*, Job asks God, "Why do You hide Your face, / And treat me like an enemy?" ,treat me like an *oyev*, 13:28 [correction: chapter 13:24; JPS translation]. In his second speech Job fully expects to be murdered, not executed, but murdered by God and hopes only that the evidence of his murder will not be concealed he says in 16:18, "Earth, do not cover my blood" [JPS translation].

Job's third speech reiterates this desire, the desire that the wrong against him not be forgotten. "Would that my words were written, would that they were engraved in an inscription, with an iron stylus and lead, forever in rock they were incised," 19:23-24.

Job's three speeches in the second cycle become increasingly emotional and for their part the speeches of his friends in this cycle become increasingly cruel. Their insistence that suffering is always a sure sign of sin seems to justify hostility towards and contempt for Job. He's now depicted as universally mocked and humiliated and despised and abused. One cannot help but see in this characterization of Job's so-called friends, an incisive commentary on the callous human propensity to blame the victim, and to do so lest our tidy and comfortable picture of a moral universe in which the righteous do not suffer, should come apart at the seams as Job's has.

Job opens the third cycle of speeches urging his friends to look, to really see his situation, because if they did they would be appalled. Job's situation looked at honestly requires the admission that God has done this for no reason and that the friends' understanding of the world is a lie. Job asserts baldly: there is no distributive justice, there's no coherent or orderly system of morality in this life or any other. There is no principle of afterlife, after all, in the Hebrew Bible.

Chapter 21:7-26 [JPS translation]:

Why do the wicked live on,  
Prosper and grow wealthy?  
Their children are with them always,  
And they see their children's children.  
Their homes are secure, without fear;  
They do not feel the rod of God.  
their children skip about.

They sing to the music of timbrel and lute,  
And revel to the tune of the pipe;  
They spend their days in happiness,  
And go down to Sheol in peace.  
â€”How seldom does the lamp of the wicked fail,  
Does the calamity they deserve befall them?  
â€”[You say,] "God is reserving his punishment for his sons";  
Let it be paid back to Him that He may feel it,  
...One man dies in robust health,  
All tranquil and untroubled;  
His pails are full of milk;  
The marrow of his bones is juicy.  
Another dies embittered,  
Never having tasted happiness.  
They both lie in the dust  
And are covered with worms.

But the friends can't look honestly at Job; they can't allow that, indeed, a righteous man suffers horribly.

By the end of the third cycle Job is ready and eager for his trial, but he can't find God. Job's final speech in the third cycle focuses on this theme of divine absence. God is irresponsibly absent from the world and the result is human wickedness. So from the idea that God is morally neutral or indifferent, Job has moved to the implicit charge that God is responsible for wickedness. He rewards wickedness; he causes wickedness by his absence, his failure to govern properly. He is both corrupt and a corrupter of others. "If it is not so, he says, who will prove me a liar and bring my words to nought."

Yet, even in the depths of his anguish, and even though he is now convinced that God does not enforce a moral law in the universe, Job clings to one value: righteousness is a virtue in and of itself, and even if it brings no reward Job will not give up his righteousness. Face to face with the shocking insight that good and evil are met with indifference by God, that righteousness brings no reward and wickedness no punishment, Job although bitter, refuses to succumb to a moral nihilism. Chapter 27:2-6:

By God who has deprived me of justice!  
By Shaddai who has embittered my life!  
As long as there is life in me,  
And God's breath is in my nostrils,  
My lips will speak no wrong,  
Nor my tongue utter deceit.  
Far be it for me to say that you are right;  
Until I die I will maintain my integrity.  
I persist in my righteousness and will not yield;  
I shall be free of reproach as long as I live.

These last lines recall the words of God and the *satan* in the prelude. The *satan* had said that a man will not hold on to virtue or to righteousness in the face of suffering. He'll give everything away for his life. So this narrative set-up guides or influences our interpretation of Job's statement here. Although he is losing his life, Job says he will not give anything away but he holds onto, he maintains his integrity just as God had scolded the *satan* in chapter 2:3 which reads, "Still he holds onto his integrity. You have incited me to destroy him for nothing."

So in his darkest, most bitter hour with all hope of reward gone, Job clings to the one thing he has--his own righteousness. In fact, when all hope of just reward is gone then righteousness becomes an intrinsic value. Yehezkel Kaufman writes of this moment, "the poet raises Job to the bleak summit of righteousness bereft of hope, bereft of faith in divine justice" [see note 4].

Or in the words of another scholar, Moshe Greenberg, we see here

..the sheer heroism of a naked man, forsaken by his God and his friends and bereft of a clue to understand his suffering, still maintaining faith in the value of his virtue and in the absolute duty of man to be virtuous. The universe has turned its back on him. We may add he believes God has turned his back on him--yet Job persists in the affirmation of his own worth and the transcendent worth of unrewarded good [Greenberg 1987, 285].

So in a way then, for all their differences in style and manner, the patient Job of the legend and the raging Job of the poetic dialogue, are basically the same man. Each ultimately remains firm in his moral character, clinging to righteousness because of its intrinsic value and not because it will be rewarded. Indeed, Job knows bitterly that it will not.

At the end of his outburst, Job sues God. He issues Him a summons and he demands that God reveal to him the reason for his suffering. Job pronounces a series of curses to clear himself from the accusations against him, specifying the sins he has not committed and ending, as he began, in chapter 3, with a curse on the day of his birth.

We expect to hear from God now but instead we hear from an unannounced stranger, Elihu. I'm going to have to give Elihu short shrift. He's the only one of the four interlocutors to refer to Job by name, address Job by name. He repeats many of the trite assertions of Job's friends. He does hint, however, that not all suffering is punitive. He also hints that contemplation of nature's elements can open the mind to a new awareness of God and in these two respects, Elihu's speech moves us towards God's answer from the storm.

So in the climatic moment, God answers Job in an extraordinary theophany, or self-manifestation. In chapter 38 God speaks out of the tempest or whirlwind, "Who is this who darkens counsel, speaking without knowledge," is he referring to Job, to Elihu, the three friends, all of them? God has heard enough, it's his turn to ask questions, the answers to which are clearly implied; these are rhetorical questions.

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?  
Speak if you have understanding.  
Do you know who fixed its dimensions  
Or who measured it with a line?"  
You did, God.  
â€œHave you ever commanded the day to break,  
Assigned the dawn its place,  
â€œHave you penetrated to the sources of the sea,  
Or walked in the recesses of the deep?

No, no human has. And God continues with these rhetorical questions, questions regarding the animals, their various powers and attributes, but one wonders what the purpose of all these questions is.

One senses that they are irrelevant. Job has posed some very specific challenges to God. Why am I suffering? Is there a pattern to existence? Is God's refusal to answer these challenges a way of saying there is no answer? Or is it God's way of saying that justice is beyond human understanding? Or is this theophany of God in nature and the focus on creation,

an implicit assault on the fundamental tenant of Israelite religion that God is known and made manifest through his interactions with humans, his rewards and punishments in historical time.

You'll recall that the monotheistic revolution is generally understood to have effected a break from mythological conceptions of the gods as indistinguishable from various natural forces, limited by meta-divine powers and forces of the cosmos.

The biblical God wasn't another Ancient Near Eastern or Canaanite nature God ultimately, but a wholly transcendent power--He was figured this way in many parts of the Bible--known not through the involuntary and recurring cycles of nature but through His freely willed and non-repeating actions in historical time. Such a view of God underwrites the whole system of divine retributive justice.

Only an essentially good God who transcends and is unconstrained by mechanistic natural forces can establish and administer a system of retributive justice, dealing out punishment and reward in response to the actions of humans in time.

Is the author of Job suggesting that history and the events that befall the just and the unjust are not the medium of revelation? Is God a god of nature after all, encountered in the repeating cycles of the natural world and not in the unpredictable and incoherent arena of human history and action? If so, then this is a third fundamental biblical assumption that has been radically subverted.

So we'll turn now to God's direct speech to Job in 40:8, 40, verse 8, excuse me. "Would you impugn my justice? / Would you condemn Me that you be right?" God, I think, is now getting at the heart of the matter: your friends Job were wrong, they condemned you. They attributed sin to you, so that they might be right. But you, too, have been wrong condemning Me, attributing wickedness to Me so that you might be right.

Job's friends erred because they assumed that there's a system of retributive justice at work in the world and that assumption led them to infer that all who suffer are sinful, and that's a blatant falsehood. But Job also errs; if he assumes that although there isn't a system of retributive justice, there really ought to be one. It's that assumption that leads him to infer that suffering is a sign of an indifferent or wicked God, and that is equally a falsehood. Job needs to move beyond the anthropocentrism that characterizes the rest of Scripture and the Genesis 1 account of creation, according to which humankind is the goal of the entire process of creation.

God's creation, the Book of Job seems to suggest, defies such teleological and rational categories. In a nutshell, God refuses to be seen as a moral accountant. The idea of God as a moral accountant is responsible for two major errors: the interpretation of suffering as an indicator of sin, or the ascription of injustice to God. In his final speech, Job confesses to a new firsthand knowledge of God that he lacked before, and as a result of this knowledge Job repents, "Therefore, I recant and relent, / Being but dust and ashes," 42:6.

Here we see the other meaning of Job's name, "one who repents," suddenly leap to the fore. What is he repenting of? Certainly not of sin; God has not upheld the accusations against Job. Indeed he states explicitly in a moment that the friends were wrong to say he had sinned. But he has indicated that guilt and innocence, reward and punishment are not what the game is all about, and while Job had long been disabused of the notion that the wicked and the righteous actually get what they deserve, he nevertheless had clung to the idea that ideally they should. And it's that mistaken idea--the idea that led him to ascribe wickedness to God--that Job now recants. With this new understanding of God, Job is liberated from what he would now see as a false expectation raised by the Deuteronomistic notion of a covenant relationship between God and humankind, enforced by a system of divine justice.

At the end of the story Job is fully restored to his fortunes. God asserts he did no evil and the conventional, impeccably Deuteronomistic view of the three friends is clearly denounced by God. He says of them, "They have not spoken of Me what is right as my servant Job has," 42:7. For some, the happy ending seems anticlimactic, a capitulation to the demand for a happy ending of just desserts that runs counter to the whole thrust of the book, and yet in a way I think the ending is superbly fitting. It's the last in a series of reversals that subverts our expectations. Suffering comes inexplicably, so does restoration; blessed be the name of the Lord.

God doesn't attempt to justify or explain Job's suffering and yet somehow by the end of the book, our grumbling, embittered, raging Job is satisfied. Perhaps he's realized that an automatic principle of reward and punishment would make it impossible for humans to do the good for purely disinterested motives. It's precisely when righteousness is seen to be absurd and meaningless that the choice to be righteous paradoxically becomes meaningful. God and Job, however we are to interpret their speeches, are reconciled.

The suffering and injustice that characterize the world have baffled humankind for millennia. And the Book of Job provides no answer in the sense of an explanation or a justification of suffering and injustice, but what it does offer is a stern warning to avoid the Scylla of blaspheming against the victims by assuming their wickedness, and the Charybdis of blaspheming against God by assuming his. Nor is moral nihilism an option, as our hero, yearning for, but ultimately renouncing divine order and justice, clings to his integrity and chooses virtue for nothing.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. Quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
2. Job excerpts from Good, Edwin Edwin M. *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation*. Copyright (c) 1990 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University. With the permission of Stanford University Press, <http://www.sup.org>
3. Ibid. This lecture is also deeply influenced by the wonderful essay on Job written by Moshe Greenberg. See reference below.
4. Y. Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. Moshe Greenberg, p. 335.

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## References

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations have been quoted from "Tanakh: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text." Copyright (c) 1985 by [The Jewish Publication Society](http://www.jps.org). Single copies of the JPS biblical citations cited within the transcripts can be reproduced for personal and non-commercial uses only.

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Greenberg, Moshe. 1987. "Job" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 295.

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 21 Transcript

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**Professor Christine Hayes:** Okay, so having studied Job, we've seen that the Bible is not a book with a single uniform style and message. It's an anthology of diverse works that may have different, conflicting points of view. So the conventional religious piety of Proverbs, the firm belief in a system of divine reward and punishment, that's so important to the Deuteronomist--this is challenged by the Book of Job. Job concludes that there is no justice--not in this world, not in any other world. Nevertheless, Job feels that he is not excused from the task of righteous living. And it's a wonderful and fortuitous fact of history that Jewish sages chose to include all of these dissonant voices in the canon of the Hebrew Bible without, for the most part, striving to reconcile the conflicts.

I mention this because I hope it will help you in writing your final paper. Careful exegesis of the biblical text--which is part of your task in these papers (I'll come back in a minute to the other part of your task)--careful exegesis of the biblical text requires you to set aside your presuppositions and to attend to the many, complex and often conflicting details of the text.

Some of the other presuppositions that you need to set aside when you write this paper are presuppositions that I mentioned at the very outset of the course, but it might be wise to mention a few of them again.

The first is, and I hope you've seen by now, that the Bible is not a set of stories about saints or pious people who always say and do what is right or exemplary. Even the Bible's heroes are human, they're not superhuman. Their behavior can be confused, it can be immoral; and if we try to vindicate biblical characters merely because their names appear in the Bible, we can miss the moral dilemma that's being set out by the writer. We can miss the psychological complexity of the stories. So when you do these papers, put yourself in the place of the character. In other words, humanize them. Think of them as acting in ways you might act. Think about their likely feelings, their likely motivations as human beings.

Secondly, remember that the Bible isn't a manual of religion. It's not a book of systematic theology. It doesn't set out certain dogmas about God, and you need to be careful not to impose upon the Bible, theological ideas and beliefs that arose centuries after the bulk of the Bible was written--for example, a belief in a heaven and a hell as a system of reward or punishment, or the belief in a God that doesn't change his mind. The character Yahweh in the Bible changes his mind; it's just a fact of the text.

If we wish to understand the Bible on its own terms and in its own context, then we have to be prepared to find ideas in it that may conflict with later theological notions that we hold dear. Don't assume you're going to agree with the Bible. Don't assume that the Bible will agree with itself.

So then, coming to your paper assignments--You've been asked, in the final paper assignment, to develop an interpretation of a passage, and the task of interpretation for the purposes of this class is not excavative. In other words, you're not asked to analyze sources or to account for how the text reached its final form, right? Source criticism.

You're to look at the final form of the text and give a plausible reading that makes the best sense that you can out of the details. Whether you like the meaning or not, whether you agree with the meaning or not, try to argue from the evidence in the text itself. So you're going to be doing what you're probably quite accustomed to doing in an English class. You're going to study the text's language, its vocabulary, its structure, its style, all of the clues. Look at the immediate context, the larger context, the way vocabulary is used elsewhere in the Bible, similar vocabulary, anything that might shed light on the passage's meaning or a character's motivation, and then you're going to weigh the evidence and present your reading.

As in an English class, you'll want to minimize any external assumptions that you bring to the text, anything that's not supported by the text. Often the text will be truly ambiguous, precisely because there are gaps of information or there are hints that pull in two different directions at times. That's part of the great artistry of the biblical text. That's what makes it so interpretable.

If that happens, then you may want to present various, dueling interpretations, various plausible interpretations of the passage based on the evidence in the text and say: these sorts of things would lead one to suppose that this is going on; but on the other hand, these textual clues lead to the following plausible interpretation of what's going on.

You'll find that the task of interpretation is easier if you keep in mind the following point: Not all statements in the Bible are equal. When a story is being told, information conveyed by the narrator is reliable. Speech attributed to God is reliable. The words of individual characters are not necessarily reliable. Characters can be wrong, they can be misguided, they have limited perspectives and sometimes the narrator hints as much. But the voice of the narrator is privileged and that's part of the game we play when we read works of literature; we accept facts that are established by the narrator as facts that guide our interpretation.

So it was with the story of Job. The narrator established, as a fact of the story, that Job is perfectly righteous. That's in the narrator's voice in the prose introduction. He states it explicitly; he bolsters his statement by attributing the same assertion to God. And the narrator also establishes as a fact of the story that Job is afflicted with horrendous suffering that he didn't deserve. It's not a punishment for sin. And then he leaves the characters to struggle with the implications.

Job's friends cling to the idea that God rewards and God punishes and so anyone who suffers must have sinned. We, as readers, know that they are wrong because of the narrative facts established at the beginning of the story. Job takes the other route. He knows, as we do, that he is innocent, that he is not being punished for sin and therefore he concludes that God doesn't punish and reward at all--and that's a radical idea. That God punishes the wicked and rewards the good in this life, even if a little delayed sometimes is a fundamental idea in much of the Bible that we have studied so far. It's going to get weaker in some of the books we'll be looking at. But Job denies this idea and in doing so, he arrives at a radical moral conclusion. The truly righteous man is righteous for its own sake even if his righteousness brings him nothing but suffering and pain in this life or in any other. Remember that at the end of the book the narrator has God state that Job is the one who has spoken rightly and not his friends.

So be sure to consider [this] point of view in your interpretation. You wouldn't want to go in and just lift something out of Bildad's mouth and say this is what the Bible thinks, right? Taking a verse right out of context that way. Don't assume that every character in the Bible is reliable, look to the surrounding framework as you evaluate their deeds, and their actions, and their speech, and their views.

Finally, don't be surprised if after carefully looking at all of those things a passage remains ambiguous. Again, in those cases you might want to detail the features that would support interpretation A, the features that would support interpretation B, or you might plump for one interpretation over the other. That's the first part of your task. It will help you enormously--if you do that right, it will help you enormously (and by "right" I mean thoroughly, I don't mean "correct")--I mean "right" in the sense that if you do it well and thoroughly then it will help you enormously in the second part of your task, which is to analyze a Jewish and a Christian, (*and* a Christian, not *or*; a Jewish *and* a Christian) interpretation of the passage particularly of whatever key ambiguous point you might have found in it, and try to understand how they are a reading of the text, a genuine effort to deal with, to grapple with, probably the very points of ambiguity that you yourself found when you really delved into the text.

And as much as their answers may not be answers that you would come up with, they are still genuine readings of the exact issues that bugged you when you analyzed the text closely. Try to give an account of that. What is it that this interpretation chooses to develop as it presents its interpretation? What is it suppressing? What is this interpretation suppressing? What is it picking up on and developing? You'll be sensitive to those things because you will have invested the time yourself in appreciating how complex the passage is.

So do understand that you need to do all of those things for any of the four questions. Develop your own interpretation; analyze a Jewish and a Christian interpretation of the same passage, okay?

Now, there is debate among scholars over the date of the Book of Job, as well as some of the other books of the *Ketuvim*. *Ketuvim* is a Hebrew word that simply means writings, and it's the label or the name that we use to refer now to the third section of the Bible. So we've talked about Torah, *Neviim* or prophets, and now we're moving into the Writings or we have already really moved into the Writings, the third section of the Bible.

Most scholars would concur that many of these books contain older material, but that the books reached their final form, their final written form, only later, in the post-exilic period. Now, if these books contain material that predates the exile, is it legitimate for us to speak of them and study them as a response to the national calamities, particularly the destruction and defeat and exile, 587/586.

In answer to this question, we'll consider a relatively recent approach to the study of the Bible. It's an approach known as canonical criticism. Canonical criticism grew out of a dissatisfaction with the scholarly focus on original historical meanings to the exclusion of a consideration of the function or meaning of biblical texts for believing communities in various times and places--a dissatisfaction with the focus on original context and original meaning to the exclusion of any interest in how the text would have served a given community at a later time, a community for which it was canonical. At what point did these stories and sources suddenly become canonical and have authority for communities? And when they did, how were they read and understood and interpreted?

So the historical, critical method was always primarily interested in what was really said and done by the original, biblical contributors. Canonical criticism assumes that biblical texts were generated, transmitted, reworked, and preserved in communities for whom they were authoritative, and that biblical criticism should include study of how these texts functioned in the believing communities that received and cherished them.

So emphasis is on the final received form of the text. [There's] much less interest in how it got to be what it is; more interest in what it is now rather than the stages in its development. There's a greater interest and emphasis in canonical criticism on the function of that final form of the text in the first communities to receive it and on the processes of adaptation by which that community and later communities would re-signify earlier tradition to function authoritatively in a new situation.

So a canonical critic might ask, for example: what meaning, authority, or value did a biblical writer seek in a tradition or story when he employed it in the final form of his text? What meaning, authority, or value would a community, would his community have found in it, and what meanings and values would later communities find in it when that text became canonical for them? How did they re-signify it to be meaningful for them? Why did religious communities accept what they did as canonical rather than setting certain things aside? Why was something chosen as canonical and meaningful for them when it came from an earlier time?

So I propose that we adopt this approach for many of the books in this third section of the Bible. We look at the Bible through the eyes of the post-exilic community, for whom they were canonical--at least in part. We won't do this for everything but I'm going to be coming back to this approach many times in the last few lectures, because in this way it becomes possible for us to understand these books as a response to the national history. Not in their genesis or origin (they weren't written necessarily as responses to the national history--some of them may even pre-date the exile) but in the fact that they were adopted or cherished as meaningful by the post-exilic community.

So whatever the circumstances of their origin and final redaction might have been, many of the books of the *ketuvim*, of the Writings, eventually would serve the post-exilic community as a prism through which to view Israel's history.

Interestingly, many of the books in this section of the Bible explore questions of suffering and evil, and challenge some of the ideas that we've seen as more fundamental in the Torah and in the Prophets. They explore the very questions that are raised by the events of Israel's history, and so they were appropriated by the community in its quest for meaning in the midst of suffering.

Let's turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes or *Qohelet*. The Hebrew name is Qohelet, Ecclesiastes. It's a second attack on the optimism and piety of conventional religion. The book is mostly in the first person. There's a third-person introduction and a little epilogue. The introduction reads "The words of Qohelet, Son of David, King in Jerusalem." Now, Qohelet may mean preacher and that's why the Greek translation [is] Ecclesiastes, which means preacher (it's hard to know): "one who assembles or gathers others." But tradition attributes the work to David's son Solomon, known for his wisdom. This attribution is fictive. The writer speaks of kings reigning before him. That implies there were many. But more important there are linguistic and literary features that suggest a later, probably or perhaps, a fourth-century date.

So, as such, the work can be understood as a post-destruction and a post-exilic work. It was available to Israelites who were struggling to make sense of their history and their God, even though no reference is made to that history at all. In fact, God is not referred to by his personal Israelite name Yahweh in the book at all; he's only referred to with the general term *Elohim*.

The prominent tone of the book is one of alienated cynicism and a weary melancholy; it's the prominent tone. The theme that's repeated throughout is the idea of the emptiness of human effort. All is vanity, which means futile, it's all for naught. Qohelet 1:1: "Utter futility!--said Kohelet--/ Utter futility! all is futile! / What real value is there for a man / In all the gains he makes beneath the sun? / One generation goes, another comes, / But the earth remains the same forever." and in verse 9, "Only that shall happen / Which has happened, / Only that occur / Which has occurred; / There is nothing new / Beneath the sun!" [See Note 1]

The endless repeated cycles of the natural world, the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the ebb and flow of the tides--this leads the speaker to the conclusion that nothing is permanent. All is fleeting, change constantly. We don't find in Qohelet the linear view of time or the sense of progress in history that scholars rightly or wrongly associate with the Hebrew Bible.

We find here instead the cyclic view of time which scholars, again rightly or wrongly, associate with myth. There are also the endlessly repeated cycles of the human world: birth and death, breaking down and building up, weeping and laughter, love and hate, killing and healing. In one of the most famous passages from this book, Qohelet expresses the idea that everything has its season or time with the consequence that the effort of humans to alter or affect anything is meaningless.

I'm going to be reading from the RSV translation, and in fact, many of the things I'll be reading today will be from the RSV, Revised Standard Version, because I think many of these passages will be familiar to you, and I'd rather read versions that will catch your ears as familiar, than the more accurate translations of the Jewish Publications Society, but which may not ring that familiar note for you.

So this is the RSV translation. But notice how in context it has a very different meaning from the meaning that's been granted it by folk singers [3:1-11]:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
a time to rend, and a time to sow;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Switching now to the JPS translation, "What value, then, can the man of affairs get from what he earns? I have observed the business that God gave man to be concerned with: He brings everything to pass precisely at its time;" In other words, everything comes to pass and returns in endless cycles, we add nothing by our efforts. It's not quite the comforting passage that it's often quoted to be.

So the writer has tried everything in his search for something that's permanent and not evanescent. Physical pleasure, he says, is unsatisfying. It's transient. Wealth just brings anxiety. Wisdom is better than power, but even knowledge brings great pain. 1:17 and 18: "And so I set my mind to appraise wisdom and to appraise madness and folly. And I learned--that this, too, was pursuit of wind: For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; / To increase learning is to increase heartache" (Don't believe him!) Even if we concede that wisdom is superior to ignorance, we must still face the fact that ultimately death obliterates everything. Death is the great equalizer.

Qohelet 2:13-17:

I found that  
Wisdom is superior to folly  
As light is superior to darkness;  
A wise man has his eyes in his head,  
Whereas a fool walks in darkness.

But I also realize that the same fate awaits them both. So I reflected: "The fate of the fool is also destined for me; to what advantage, then, have I been wise?" And I came to the conclusion that that too was futile, because the wise man, just like the fool, is not remembered forever; for, as the succeeding days roll by, both are forgotten. Alas, the wise man dies, just like the fool! And so I loathed life, For I was distressed by all that goes on under the sun, because everything is futile and pursuit of wind.

So even more explicitly than Job, Ecclesiastes attacks the principle of divine providence or distributive justice. There's no principle of reward or punishment; the wicked prosper while the innocent suffer. Even the principle of delayed punishment which is so important to the Deuteronomistic historian is attacked as unjust.

In Qohelet 8:10b to 14,

And here's another frustration: the fact that the sentence imposed for evil deeds is not executed swiftly, which is why men are emboldened to do evil--the fact that a sinner may do evil a hundred times and his [punishment] still be delayed--sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration.

In a more famous passage, chapter 9:11-12,

I have further observed under the sun that  
The race is not won by the swift,  
Nor the battle by the valiant;  
Nor is bread won by the wise,  
Nor wealth by the intelligent,  
Nor favor by the learned.  
For the time of mischance comes to all.  
And a man cannot even know his time.

Again, a passage which is often used as a comforting exhortation--the race is not won by the swift and so on--is here actually in context a lament of the great injustice of the way things occur.

But really for Qohelet it is the inexorable fact of death that makes life entirely meaningless, and that is in fact the starting point of modern schools of existentialist philosophy. Death is the bottom line; he rejects the idea of any life after death.

Chapter 9:2-6:

"For the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous, and for the wicked; for the good and pure, and for the impure; for him who sacrifices, and for him who does not; for him who is pleasing, and for him who is displeasing; and for him who swears, and for him who shuns oaths. That is the sad thing about all that goes on under the sun: that the same fate is in store for all. "For he who is reckoned among the living has something to look forward to" since the living know they will die." [That was ironic.] "But the dead know nothing; they have no more recompense, for even the memory of them has died. Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished; and they have no more share till the end of time and all that goes on under the sun."

Nevertheless, despite all of this despair and cynicism, there is a positive note in Qohelet. The writer, after all, doesn't recommend nihilism or suicide, despite the lack of purpose or meaning in life, and in fact he does quite the opposite. He states that every life does have its moments of happiness and these one should seize while one can.

Qohelet 9:7-10,

Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun--all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun. Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might. For there is no action, no reasoning, no learning, no wisdom in *Sheol*, where you are going.

Again, *Sheol* refers to this shadowy place beneath the soil, that the shades of the dead just inhabit. It's an ancient notion in Israel. It's not connected with the idea of a reward or a punishment after death.

A similar exhortation is in Qohelet 5:17, "Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot," [RSV translation, 5:18]. Or 3:13: "Whenever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God."

We have to be sure not to delude ourselves. There is no grand plan, there's no absolute value or meaning to our toil, Qohelet says. There's no life in the hereafter that we are working towards. Here he seems to be polemicizing, I think, against a belief in the afterlife, or reward or punishment, that was taking root at this time in some parts of the Jewish community under the influence of Greek thought.

But one can still find happiness and love, and with these, one should be content. Striving after anything more is a striving after wind that leaves one frustrated and weary, and bitter. Accept the reality of death and then enjoy what you can in the short time you have. Indeed, it's precisely the reality of death that makes life precious. Whatever it is in your power to do, do with all your might because you have only this one brief chance. Eternal, unlimited life with endless opportunities to act would make any one act meaningless. So given the fact of death and the limitations that it places upon us, taking pleasure in the ordinary activities and labors of life becomes not meaningless, but meaningful.

Qohelet is an unusual, if not subversive book, and its inclusion in the canon was apparently a matter of some

controversy. Its controversial character is reflected in the pious editorial postscript that appears at the end of the book. At the very end, chapter 12, verses 11-13 we read the following,

The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed in prodding sticks. They were given by one Shepherd. A further word: Against them, my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit / And much study is a wearying of the flesh. The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this applies to all mankind: that God will call every creature to account for everything unknown, be it good or bad.

To fear God and obey his commandments because he will reward the good and punish the evil is simply not the message of the Book of Qohelet and it's very likely (in my view; people will disagree) but it's very likely that this line comes from a later hand, which was disturbed by the theme of Qohelet's preaching.

So we have juxtaposed then two responses to the suffering and pain in the world, and specifically the tragedy that befell Israel. One, an assertion of God's providence and justice, urging obedience, and the other an assertion of the lack of justice and providence in the world, preaching simple existential pleasures as a source of life's meaning, and the frustration of trying to make sense out of what has happened. The richness of the Hebrew Bible derives precisely from its placement together of radically diverse points of view like these.

I'm going to turn now to the Book of Psalms, which we will probably not quite finish today. But the Book of Psalms contains the principle collection of religious lyric poetry in the Bible. It consists of 150 poems, most of which are prayers addressed to God.

In a very nice little essay on the Psalms, there's a woman, Margaret Anne Doody, who recounts a wonderful dialogue that takes place in Charlotte Bronte's novel, *Jane Eyre*. You have the ten-year-old Jane--she's a very honest, but mistreated child, and she's being interviewed by Brocklehurst, who is this very harsh schoolmaster. And Jane recounts the conversation like this:

"Do you read your Bible?"

"Sometimes."

"With pleasure? Are you fond of it?"

"I like Revelation, and the Book of Daniel, and Genesis and Samuel and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job, and Jonah."

"And the Psalms? I hope you like them?"

"No, sir."

"No? Oh, shocking! I have a little boy, younger than you, who knows six Psalms by heart; and when you ask him which he would rather have, a gingerbread-nut to eat, or a verse of a Psalm to learn he says: 'Oh! the verse of a Psalm! Angels sing psalms,' says he; 'I wish to be a little angel here below'; he then gets two nuts in recompense for his infant piety."

"Psalms are not interesting," I remarked.

"That proves you have a wicked heart." [Doody 1994]

Margaret Anne Doody has pointed out I think several interesting aspects to this dialogue. First, she points out the literary authority and individual taste that's exhibited by Jane. She likes prophetic books with dramatic apocalyptic imagery. She likes Revelation and Daniel which we'll see soon is very dramatic and apocalyptic; and then she likes rich, narrative texts and histories--Genesis, Samuel, parts of Exodus (I can probably pick out which parts!) Kings, Chronicles and then she likes the stories of the trials of great survivors of tribulation like Jane herself--Job and Jonah.

Brocklehurst is looking for evidence of her piety and instead he finds evidence of her distasteful love of drama and

story, and imagery and suffering, and he's quite shocked. A pious child would naturally love the Psalms which in Brocklehurst's mind are the songs of angels; they teach humility and reverence and his own pious child knows how to recite the Psalms. Jane's not impressed. She obviously sees through the son's little game even if Brocklehurst doesn't, and she says Psalms aren't interesting, and he's mortified.

Jane's lack of interest in the Psalms, her preference for what Doody calls the raw and the real, is proof of her wickedness. But Brocklehurst's perception of the Book of Psalms, which I think many people share, is not an entirely accurate one. If Jane were to look closely she would find plenty of emotion and drama and suffering in the Psalms as well.

The title Psalms derives from the Greek, *psalmoi*. It denotes religious songs that are performed to musical accompaniment; the musical accompaniment of the psalterion. That's a stringed musical instrument. So they imagined that these were performed to this accompaniment, hence *psalmoi*. And it's the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew title *tehillim*; the Hebrew title *tehillim* means "praises."

The Psalms were only collected into a large anthology in the post-exilic period. We can be pretty sure of that--the fifth or the fourth century. But many, many--particularly those that are attributed to professional temple musical guilds--are thought to have been used in the temple service. Many of them date from very early pre-exilic times.

The temple staff provided the Psalms with musical and liturgical notations. I don't mean musical notes but I mean words indicating some sort of musical or liturgical use, and those are preserved for us in the text. We don't, for the most part, really know what they mean. They're technical. Some superscriptions and notes seem to be telling us the tune or the kind of musical accompaniment for the Psalm, whether it was on stringed instruments, or flutes.

Most of the Psalms really tell us very little, however, about the time and circumstance of their composition. Several, it seems, were to be used at royal coronations which would mean that they were written when Davidic kings still ruled in Jerusalem. Psalm 45 is an example of a love song that's written in celebration of the king's marriage with a foreign bride, so this is also a pre-exilic date. So Psalm 45:11-18; this would have been sung probably at a royal wedding:

"Take heed, lass, and note,  
incline your ear:  
forget your people and your father's house,  
and let the king be aroused by your beauty;  
since he is your lord, bow to him.  
O Tyrian lass," [so she's from Tyre to the north],  
"the wealthiest people will court your favor with gifts,  
goods of all sorts.  
The royal princess,  
her dress embroidered with golden mountings  
is led inside to the king;  
maidens in her train, her companions,  
are presented to you.  
They are led in with joy and gladness;  
they enter the palace of the king.  
Your sons will succeed your ancestors;  
you will appoint them princes throughout the land.  
I commemorate your fame for all generations,  
so peoples will praise you forever and ever.

So clearly, some of the Psalms date to the period of the monarchy, and scholars divide the psalter into five main collections. Each of them concludes with a little doxology that indicates that it's the end of a section. So I've listed the sections down here--five books within the larger book of Psalms.

The latest of these--they probably go somewhat in chronological order. So we think number five, for example, is probably the latest of the group because it's the one where the manuscripts that were found at Qumran show the greatest variation, which suggests that they continued fluid for some time before being finally fixed.

The second book, Book Two (so about halfway through the Psalms; the end of number 72)--Book Two concludes with this postscript: "The prayers of David, the Son of Jesse, are ended." So at one time the Davidic Psalms were thought to end there. Almost all of the Psalms in Book One are prefaced with the phrase to, or of, David. The particle in Hebrew can be ambiguous; probably "of David." To this old First Temple nucleus, you had other collections then gravitating.

So, for example, all of the Psalms between 120 and 134, they all bear the same title: A Song of Ascents. They were songs that were probably sung by pilgrims on pilgrimage to Jerusalem because from any direction you go into Jerusalem, you have to go up, and so you go up to Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, tradition attributes the entire book of Psalms to King David and that attribution stems from the fact that 73 of the 150 Psalms are explicitly said to be psalms of David. And David is also in the historical books said to be a man of musical talent. The superscriptions, however, are in many cases late additions. So perhaps the Psalms can only be said to be of David or Davidic if by that term we mean that they are the result of a royal patronage of poetry by the House of David in general.

The biblical text itself lists other authors for some of the Psalms, so 72 is ascribed to Solomon. Number 90 is ascribed to Moses, others are ascribed to Assaf and the Sons of Korah. Korah is an ancestor of a priestly family. Some of them are clearly post-exilic. Number 74 laments the destruction of the temple. Number 137--"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept as we thought of Zion" is clearly from the perspective of the exile. So what we have is an anthology, an anthology of religious expressions deriving from many centuries of Israel's history. So despite the claim of religious tradition that the Psalms were penned by David, it's clear that they were not all penned by David.

Some of the Psalms are oriented toward community worship. Some of them are oriented more to individual worship. But in ancient Israel there really isn't always a sharp distinction between the two. The ancient Israelite in the temple prayed to God as a member of a larger community bound by a covenant and not as a lone individual. So in the words of Psalm 34:3 we read, "Exalt the Lord with me, let us extol His name together." So there was a communal aspect to much worship.

A good deal of form critical work has been done on the book of Psalms. We haven't spent a lot of time on form criticism. It's another tool, another approach that is used in studying the text. But the pioneer in this area was a man named Herman Gunkel (I think I've mentioned him before). His work, particularly in the book of Psalms, was forwarded by Sigmund Mowinckel.

Form critics look at the forms that are used in the construction of psalms, and they classify psalms according to their forms or their literary genre, if you will. And then they attempt to place these literary types or genres within the cultic setting or their *Sitz im Leben*: what would have been the circumstances under which such a psalm would have been written or performed. In general, the psalms can be categorized formally and thematically in a number of different ways and I've given you a handout which presents some broad classifications of form or genre. I've actually collapsed many of the main forms into several broader groupings, but the very serious form critics will give you upwards of 13, 14, 15 or more different forms for the psalms, and as I say, I've grouped many of them together, as you see on the sheet.

I'm going to go through each one of these and give you some examples and talk about some of the themes as well as the formal characteristics in the Psalms, so you'll see the variety that's contained in this anthology.

First looking at some hymns of praise--these include creation hymns praising God as the creator of the natural world: psalms of thanksgiving and psalms of trust. These are really the largest category of psalms and probably are what give Brocklehurst the impression that he has. Many of them celebrate God's majesty, God's wisdom, his power, such as this creation hymn. This is 8 (and by the way, the numbers are just giving you some examples. This is not exhaustive. I didn't go through and put [down] every one of the 150 Psalms. But to give you an idea of an example of each category I'll be drawing from these numbers).

So number 8:

O Lord, our Lord,  
How majestic is Your name throughout the earth,  
You who have covered the heavens with Your Splendor.  
â€œWhen I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
the moon and stars that You set in place,  
what is man that You have been mindful of him,  
mortal man that You have taken note of him,  
â€œand adorned him with glory and majesty;  
You have made him master over Your handiwork,  
laying the world at his feet,  
sheep and oxen, all of them,  
and wild beasts, too;  
the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea,  
whatever travels the paths of the seas.  
O Lord our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!

It's a tiny little Psalm, Psalm 117, that's just two verses long [that] contains really all of the classic formal elements of a Psalm of praise or thanksgiving. You have an opening invocation to worship, calling others to worship or praise God. Then you have a motive clause, which is giving the reason and then a recapitulation or a renewed call to praise. So all of Psalm 117 follows this form: "Praise the Lord all you nations, extol Him all you peoples." There's your invocation. "For great is His steadfast love toward us, the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever," there's your motive clause, "Hallelujah," *Hallelu* is a Hebrew imperative "praise *Yah*," short for Yahweh, God. So Hallelujah means "praise God." So it's a recapitulation of the call to praise, the imperative to praise God. It's a classic--tiny, little--but it has all of the elements of the form of a psalm of thanksgiving.

Psalm 136 punctuates a recitation of God's great deeds, the creation, the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land and so on with the phrase, "His steadfast love is eternal." It's an excellent illustration of how Israel's praise is inspired by remembering what Yahweh has done in history.

Still other Psalms extol God in His role as Creator; 104 is another of those and we've already seen one, or as law giver, so there are various reasons to praise God: creation, his role in history, his giving of the law. A striking characteristic of this category of Psalms is the variety of metaphors that are used to describe God: King, shield, stronghold, rock, refuge, shelter, many more metaphors as well.

The paradigmatic psalm of trust is contained in the 23rd Psalm. This is a Psalm that employs the metaphor of a shepherd to describe God guiding the individual in straight paths through a frightening valley. The speaker's trust creates a sense of tranquility even in the presence of enemies and here I'm going to use the RSV translation which will be more familiar to many of you.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want;  
he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil;  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff,  
they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever.

The short Psalm 131 is another psalm of trust that invokes the image of a mother and a child to express an even greater tranquility. Again, the RSV translation, "O God [Lord] my heart is not lifted up, / my eyes are not raised too high," that's a metaphor for arrogance in Hebrew. "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. / But I have calmed and quieted my soul, / like a child quieted at its mother's breast; / like a child that is quieted is my soul. / O Israel, hope in the Lord / from this time forth and for evermore." [RSV]

These and similar psalms contain some of the most personal depictions of biblical faith, of confidence or simple trust in God.

The second category I've got listed there for you are psalms of divine kingship or royal psalms. These are not quite the same; they're two distinct things. Enthronement or kingship psalms celebrate Yahweh as the enthroned ruler, the sovereign ruler of the heavens and as sovereign over foreign nations--so sovereign over nature, sovereign over the human world. And their descriptions of God employ the language and themes that are associated with deities of Ancient Near Eastern mythology, particularly, the language associated with Baal, the Canaanite storm god. Some even allude to the defeat of a sea monster as key to God's role as creator and enthroned king. In Psalm 29, the assembly of the gods praises Yahweh for defeating the water monster. And although some psalms fully personify nature at the time of creation, in others, the old Ancient Near Eastern combat creation myths are demythologized. So we see both of these tendencies within some of these psalms.

So, for example, Psalm 93, "The Lord is King, He is robed in grandeur," (most of these enthronement or divine kingship psalms will begin with "The Lord is King"):

The Lord is King,  
He is robed in grandeur;  
the Lord is robed,  
He is girded with strength.  
The world stands firm;  
it cannot be shaken.  
Your throne stands firm from of old;  
from eternity You have existed.  
The ocean sounds, O Lord,  
the ocean sounds its thunder,  
the ocean sounds its pounding.  
Above the thunder of the mighty waters,  
more majestic the than the breakers of the sea  
is the Lord, majestic on High.  
Your decrees are indeed enduring;  
holiness befits Your House,  
O Lord, for all times.

See here, the mention of the sea, the ocean pounding, but it's completely demythologized. It appears here as a natural entity and not a divine antagonist. By contrast there are psalms in which God is battling with the sea in the form of a monster.

Royal psalms are psalms that praise God's anointed King. Some scholars believe that these were coronation psalms. These would have been used at the time of the coronation of a Davidic King, for example. So Psalm 10, "Yahweh said to my lord," my Lord now meaning the king:

"Yahweh said to my lord,  
"Sit at My right hand  
while I make your enemies your footstool."  
The Lord will stretch forth from Zion your mighty scepter;  
hold sway over your enemies!  
Your people come forward willingly on your day of battle."  
[I guess that's what every king wishes for.]  
"Your people come forward willingly on your day of battle  
In majestic Holiness, from the womb,  
from the dawn, yours was the dew of youth.  
The Lord has sworn and will not relent,  
'You are a priest forever, a rightful king by My decree.'  
The Lord is at your right hand."  
[Yahweh is at your right hand.]  
"He crushes kings in the day of His anger."

But not all of the royal psalms were concerned primarily with military success or guaranteeing military success. Some seek to ensure that the king, the anointed king is bestowed with other qualities necessary for good stewardship. So we find in Psalm 72,

O God, endow the king with Your judgments,  
the king's son with Your righteousness;  
that He may judge your people rightly,  
Your lowly ones, justly.  
â€œLet him champion the lowly among the people,  
deliver the needy folk,  
and crush those who wrong them.  
Let them be like rain that falls on a mown field,  
like a downpour of rain on the ground,  
that the righteous may flourish in His time,  
and well-being abound, till the moon is no more.

A third category I've got listed for you are psalms of lament and petition and indebtedness, and these can be voiced in the plural (a communal supplication) or in the voice of the individual. Although individual laments may open with an invocation to or praise of God, some launch immediately into a desperate plea for deliverance from some suffering or crisis. It's often expressed metaphorically. Or they might launch into a plea for vengeance on one's enemies. After presenting his complaint, the psalmist will usually confess his trust in God, then ask for help or forgiveness and conclude with a vow that he will praise God again.

We sometimes even see an acknowledgement of a divine response, perhaps a thank-you in advance. Psalm 13 has many of these features,

How long, O Lord; will You ignore me forever?  
How long will You hide Your face from me?

How long will I have cares on my mind,  
grief in my heart all day?  
How long will my enemy have the upper hand?  
Look at me, answer me, O Lord, my God!  
Restore the luster to my eyes,  
lest I sleep the sleep of death;  
lest my enemy say, "I have overcome him,"  
my foes exult [when I totter.  
But I trust in Your faithfulness,  
My heart will exult] in Your deliverance.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
for He has been good to me.

Psalm 55[:13-23] asks for deliverance from the treachery of a deceitful friend:

It is not an enemy who reviles me  
-- I could bear that;  
it is not my foe who vaunts himself against me  
-- I could hide from him;  
but it is you, my equal,  
my companion, my friend;  
sweet was our fellowship;  
we walked together in God's house.  
Let Him incite death against them;  
may they go down alive into Sheol!  
For where they dwell,  
there evil is.  
â€œHe harmed his ally,  
he broke his pact.  
his talk was smoother than butter,  
yet his mind was on war; his words were more soothing than oil,  
yet they were drawn swords.  
Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you;  
He will never let the righteous man collapse.

Very personalized laments. Some laments are pleas for forgiveness of personal sins. This one is attributed in the psalm itself, [in] the superscription to the psalm; it's attributed to David after the prophet Nathan rebukes him for his illicit relationship with Bathsheba. Listen to the striking parallelism--you hear the poetic parallelism in this psalm, Psalm 51, again using the RSV translation:

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to Thy steadfast love;  
according to Thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,

and done that which is evil in thy sight,  
so that thou art justified in thy sentence  
and blameless in thy judgment.  
â€Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of thy salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

The communal laments, a lot of these are individual, but communal laments, bewail Israel's misfortunes and urge God's vengeance upon Israel's oppressors, sometimes reminding God of his historic relationship with Israel and his covenantal obligations.

Let me just finish by reading Psalm 74 as a case in point. It makes explicit reference to the destruction of the sanctuary so it's clearly post-exilic. And as a response to the catastrophe, it gives expression to despair and bewilderment and even anger that God has forgotten His obligations to Israel:

Why, O God, do You forever reject us,  
do You fume in anger at the flock that You tend?  
Remember the community You made Yours long ago,  
Your very own tribe that You redeemed,  
Mount Zion, where You dwell.  
Bestir Yourself because of the perpetual tumult,  
all the outrages of the enemy in the sanctuary.  
Your foes roar inside Your meeting place;  
they take their signs for true signs.  
It is like men wielding axes  
against a gnarled tree;  
with hatchet and pike  
they hacked away at its carved work.  
They made Your sanctuary go up in flames;  
they brought low in dishonor the dwelling place of Your presence.  
They resolved, "Let us destroy them altogether!"  
They burned all God's tabernacles in the land. No signs appear for us;  
there is no longer any prophet;  
no one among us who knows for how long.  
Till when, O God, â€will the enemy forever revile Your name?  
Why do You hold back Your hand, Your right hand?  
Draw it out of Your bosom!  
â€Do not deliver Your dove to the wild beast;  
do not ignore forever the band of Your lowly ones.  
Look to the covenant!  
â€Rise, O God, champion Your cause;

The psalmist is bewildered: why has this happened, why doesn't God act? There's no mention of Israel's sin; there's no indication that the destruction was just punishment. Psalm 44, which we'll start with next time, goes even further and states flatly that the people haven't sinned. It's God who's been faithless.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. The JPS translation transliterates as Kohelet with a "K" rather than Qohelet. The "Q" is more accurate so I use that, but when citing the JPS translation we need to keep the K--hence the discrepancy.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 22 Transcript

November 29, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** Last time we started looking at the psalms and a number of different genres or forms in which the psalms appear. We were just looking at a psalm last time which seems to explicitly reject the Deuteronomistic interpretation of the national history and the national tragedy, depicting Israel as innocent, and rebuking God for his inaction.

There's another psalm in this genre that I'd like to read from. This is Psalm 44, selective passages:

"...In God we glory at all times,  
and praise Your name unceasingly.  
Yet You have rejected and disgraced us;  
You do not go with our armies.  
...You let them devour us like sheep;  
You disperse us among the nations.  
You sell Your people for no fortune,  
You set no high price on them...  
All this has come upon us,  
yet we have not forgotten You,  
or been false to Your covenant." [Very different from what the prophets have been screaming!]  
"Our hearts have not gone astray,  
nor have our feet swerved from Your path,  
though You cast us, crushed, to where the sea monster is,  
and covered us over with deepest darkness.  
If we forgot the name of our God  
and spread forth our hands to a foreign god,  
God would surely search it out,  
for He knows the secrets of the heart.  
It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long,  
that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.  
Rouse Yourself; why do you sleep, O Lord?  
Awaken, do not reject us forever!  
Why do You hide Your face,  
ignoring our affliction and distress?  
We lie prostrate in the dust;  
our body clings to the ground.  
Arise and help us,  
redeem us, as befits Your faithfulness."

So here's a psalm full of anger that contains an explicit denial of the rhetorically inflamed charges against Israel that we read in many of the prophetic books. We have *not* forgotten You, we *haven't* been false to Your covenant, our hearts *haven't* gone astray, we *haven't* swerved from Your path. Why are You behaving this way?

This astonishing protestation of innocence that accuses God of sleeping on the job is reminiscent of Job. In a way, the two conflicting viewpoints that we see running through a lot of this literature--one in which: there is suffering, therefore there must be sin, Israel has sinned horribly: and the other: there is inexplicable suffering, we haven't done anything that would deserve this, anything at all--it really is reminiscent of Job. It seems to give us these two perspectives on Job's suffering as an individual. We see that now played out on the level of the nation. What we have here is a view that is

asserting God's negligence rather than Israel's guilt.

Then you can contrast psalms like 44, the one I've just read, and 74, which I read at the end of the last lecture, with Psalms 78 and 106. These psalms belong to the category of hymns, and some people call this category 'hymns in celebration of divine action in Israel's history'--the sort of historical reviews that praise God for all he has done for Israel; and they toe the Deuteronomistic line in their recapitulation of Israel's history. From the Creation, from the Exodus and on to the conquest of the Promised Land, they stress Israel's utter indebtedness to God. God has patiently endured Israel's constant faithlessness. So when you juxtapose these two types of psalms, they're just remarkably different.

[Psalm 78]

He performed marvels in the site of their fathers,  
in the land of Egypt, the plain of Zoan.  
He split the sea and took them through it;  
He made the waters stand like a wall.

It continues: "...He split rocks in the wilderness"--so it's a recounting of all the marvelous things that God has done,

But they went on sinning against Him,  
defying the most high in the parched land.  
To test God was in their mind  
when they demanded food for themselves.  
They spoke against God, saying,  
"Can God spread a feast in the wilderness?  
True, He struck the rock and waters flowed,  
streams gushed forth;  
but can He provide bread?  
Can He supply His people with meat?"

It's interesting that this is in the third person; *they* did all these terrible sinful things.

The psalm that I just read previously that protests Israel's innocence is in the first person. We have not strayed at all. We've been completely faithful to you, why are you treating us this way? So God's faithful actions, Israel's faithless responses are featured in the psalm that I just read and also in 106. They toe the Deuteronomistic line, and again we see this clear attempt to explain Israel's tragic end. Here again the tendency is to blame Israel and to justify God at all costs.

We move on now to the genre of psalms. Actually, these are two genres that I'm putting together, the genres of blessing and cursing. Obviously they're rather antithetical. But first of all, psalms of blessing are psalms that invoke God to bless the righteous. It might be the nation Israel or it might be the righteous within the nation, and to punish or afflict the wicked, and again, that can be enemy nations or it can be the wicked within Israel and other nations. And sometimes these psalms can be quite shocking in their violence and in their fury.

Psalm 137, "By the rivers of Babylon"--very rarely people read all the way to the end of that particular psalm. It's very poignant at the beginning, but at the very end it calls for vengeance on the Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem, verses 8 and 9, "Fair Babylon, you predator, / a blessing on him who repays you in kind / what you have inflicted on us; a blessing on him who seizes your babies / and dashes them against the rocks!"

Psalm 109 contains this very lengthy list of terrible afflictions that the psalmist is asking God to smite his foes with (that

was a poorly constructed sentence!), that the psalmist is asking God to, I don't want to say bestow, but inflict upon his foe. Verses 8 and 10: "May his days be few, may another take over his position. May his children be orphans, / his wife a widow"--that's a nice way of saying "may he die."

May his children wander from their hovels,  
begging in search of [bread].  
...May he be clothed in a curse like a garment,  
may it enter his body like water,  
his bones like oil.  
Let it be like the cloak he wraps around him,  
like the belt he always wears.  
May the Lord thus repay my accusers,  
all those who speak evil against me.

So again, it's hardly the simple piety that we often associate with the Book of Psalms.

The last category I just want to briefly mention is a category of psalms that have a reflective or meditative tone. These are psalms of wisdom, psalms in praise of instruction or Torah and meditation. They are somewhat proverbial in nature, many of them will begin with the sort of stock phrase, "Happy is the man who..." so we see that in Psalm 128:

Happy are all who fear the Lord,  
who follow His ways.  
You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors;  
you shall be happy and shall prosper.  
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house;  
your sons, like olive saplings around your table.  
So shall the man who fears the Lord be blessed."  
Or "reveres the Lord" – [that] is the sense of "fear" there.

Many psalms we've seen seem to presuppose worship in the temple, and can even have that antiphonal character, the call and response, or call and echo character. But there are three that, instead, have this theme of meditating upon or delighting in the Torah; that's Psalm 1, Psalm 19, and Psalm 119 (conveniently enough!).

119 is the longest psalm because it's written in acrostic form. There are different stanzas, a different stanza for each letter of the alphabet (22 letters) and there are eight lines in each stanza, all eight lines beginning with that letter of the alphabet, so it's a very, very long psalm.

The psalm represents Torah as an object of study and devotion. Studying Torah makes one wise and happy: Psalm 19, verses 8 through 11,

The teaching of the Lord is perfect,  
renewing life;  
the decrees of the Lord are enduring,  
making the simple wise;  
The precepts of the Lord are just,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the instruction of the Lord is lucid,  
making the eyes light up.  
The fear (or reverence) of the Lord is pure,

abiding forever;  
the judgments of the Lord are true,  
righteous altogether,  
more desirable than gold,  
than much fine gold;  
sweeter than honey,  
than drippings of the comb.

So this elevation of Torah reflects the shift that begins or starts to occur in the Second Temple Period, the late Second Temple Period, in which Torah is of growing importance. In about two minutes we're going to start to talk about this period and the importance and centrality of Torah--its centrality in terms of study --and the study of Torah as a form of worship.

So there are many different ways to categorize and classify the psalms. Many individual psalms seem to combine units that belong to different categories. So, for example, you have Psalm 22 which opens as a lament, "My God, My God why have You forsaken me?" That's the well-known RSV translation, and then it changes to a hymn of praise. It concludes with this--it goes on into a kind of confident triumph.

At least one psalm, Psalm 68, really defies any kind of rigid categorization, so we can't be too strict in trying to impose these forms. They are helpful guides to the interpretation of the Psalms, but again, we can't be too rigid about it.

But from the sampling that we've seen it should be apparent that the Psalms are a microcosm of the religious insights and convictions of ancient Israelites. Perhaps because so many of them lack historical specificity--some of them are quite historical; some of them in fact recount Israel's history in order to praise God, but many of them, very, very many of them lack any real historical specificity, and that is probably the reason that the Psalms have become a great source for personal spirituality in Western civilization.

Some of them were composed perhaps as many as 3000 years ago, and yet, they can be inspiring or they can feel relevant to contemporary readers. They can provide an opportunity to confess one's failings or to proclaim good intentions, or to rail against misfortune, or to cry out against injustice, or to request assistance, or to affirm trust in divine providence, or to simply express emotions of praise and joy, and wonder at creation, or reflect on human finitude in the face of divine infinitude.

I mentioned briefly the centrality of Torah--actually no--let me finish talking about Psalms and also move onto another major poetic work then we'll come back to talk about the Restoration period.

Another poetic book within the anthology of the Hebrew Bible is the little work known as the Song of Songs. And for many people this is perhaps the most surprising book to be included in the Hebrew canon. It's a beautiful and very erotic love song that celebrates human sexuality and physical passion.

The opening line seems to be a late superscription that attributes the book to Solomon, and it seems more likely however that these sensuous love lyrics are post-exilic. The attribution to Solomon was probably fueled by the fact that in 1 Kings 4, we read that Solomon--or there's a tradition there that Solomon uttered 3,000 Proverbs and 1,005 songs. So it seems natural to attribute this song to Israel's most prolific composer of songs and proverbs, according to tradition.

The speaker in the poem alternates, most often it is a woman. She seems to be addressing her beloved. Sometimes she addresses other women, the daughters of Jerusalem. At times the speaker is a man, but he's not identified as Solomon. Solomon's name is mentioned about six times, but Solomon is not said to be one of the speakers and for the most part the main speaker is female.

There's a pastoral setting for the book. The two young lovers express their passion through and amid the beauties of nature. There are frequent references to gardens, and vineyards, and fruit, and flowers, and perfumes, and doves, and

flocks of goats, and shorn ewes. There are very vivid descriptions of the physical beauty of the lovers. They are described in highly erotic passages. Translations of the Song of Songs vary tremendously as you might imagine, so I'm going to read one little section from the translation by someone named Walsh, C.E. Walsh, which I think captures the tremendous eroticism in some of the passages of Song of Songs:

I slept, but my heart was awake.  
Listen, my lover is knocking.  
"Open to me my sister, my love,  
my dove, my perfect one,  
for my head is wet with dew..."  
My lover thrusts his hand into the hole,  
and my insides yearned for him,  
I arose to open to my lover,  
and my hands dripped with myrrh,  
my fingers with liquid myrrh,  
upon the handles of the lock.  
I opened to my lover,  
but he was gone. [Walsh 2006, 111-12]

These poems are very unique. They give expression to the erotic feelings of a woman and, as I say, translations will vary tremendously. According to Jewish tradition, the ancient Rabbis debated over whether or not the Song of Songs should be included in the canon. And it was Rabbi Akiva, a late first- early second-century sage, whose view prevailed. He declared "the whole world was only created, so to speak, for the day on which the Song of Songs would be given to it. Why? Because all the writings are Holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

But for some religious authorities over the centuries, the candid descriptions of passionate love proved to be too much, and so the explicit content of the book (which contains no reference to God, by the way; God is not mentioned anywhere in the Song of Songs, so it seems to have been a completely secular poem originally)--the explicit content of the book has at times been interpreted away. So not only do we have translations that tone down a great deal of the eroticism, but we also have a tradition of interpretation that interprets away a lot of the explicit content of the text.

So we have trends within Jewish tradition that read the book as a metaphor or an expression of God's love for his chosen people, Israel. Christians have allegorized the song, seeing it as an expression of Christ's love for his bride who is the spiritual church. And I think some--I think all of the sections will be dealing with the Song of Songs this week, so you should have an interesting time looking at some of the interpretations of this text.

Now I want to move on a little bit more to the historical background of some of the books that we'll be looking at in today's lecture and then also the last couple of lectures.

We left the Israelites in exile in Babylon. And in 539 BCE the Babylonian Empire was itself defeated by the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus--Cyrus of Persia. In 539 he manages to establish the largest empire that's been seen in the Ancient Near East to date. It stretches from Egypt all the way north up to Asia Minor which is modern-day Turkey, and all the way over to Eastern Iran; a huge empire.

Unlike other ancient empires, the Persian Empire espoused a policy of cultural and religious independence for its conquered subjects. The famous Cyrus Cylinder--this is a nine inch long fired clay cylinder and it's covered in cuneiform writing--it tells of Cyrus' conquest of Babylon. The conquest is described as being at the command of Babylon's god, Marduk, so obviously the Babylonians' god Marduk wanted "our Cyrus of Persia" to be able to come in and conquer this nation. It tells of his conquest and it tells of Cyrus' policy of allowing captives to return to their homelands and to rebuild their temples and worship their gods. This is consistent; this archaeological find is consistent with the picture that's presented in the Bible.

According to the biblical text we'll be discussing soon, Cyrus in 538 gave the Judean exiles permission to return to Jerusalem and reconstruct their temple. The exiles did return; *many* of the exiles returned. They returned to what was now a Persian province: it's the province of Yehud; I don't think I wrote that up there. Yehud is the name now of Judea and Yehud is where we're going to get the word Jew. Yehudi is the word Jew; one who belongs to the province of Yehud. So many of the exiles returned to this now-Persian province Yehud, and they exercised a fair degree of self determination.

Now, periodization of Jewish history tends to center on these events, so the period from 586 to 538 or so--that's known as exilic period. Most scholars maintain that the traditions of the priestly source, the traditions of the Deuteronomistic source had pretty well reached their final form in those years. Obviously, older traditions go into the composition of those corpora, but they reach their final form for the most part in that period.

So the post-exilic period following is also known as the Persian period, at first, but of course the Persians won't rule for long. Alexander's going to come marching through the Ancient Near East, so after the Persians we'll have the Hellenistic Period. But the period after the exile is referred to as the Persian period, the period of the Restoration, [or] the post-exilic period. It's also called the Second Temple Period because by about 520 they will have reconstructed the temple; so it's not inaccurate really to refer to this time as the Second Temple Period. The second temple will stand until 70, the year 70 of the Common Era. So the period, of course, before the exile we think of as the First Temple Period (the temple is destroyed in 586), so the first temple period or pre-exilic period.

Now, the books of First and Second Chronicles provide a second account of the history of Israel. Genesis all the way through 2 Kings has given us one long account. FirstChronicles actually begins with Adam and it does go through--1 and 2 Chronicles do go up to the Babylonian exile. They echo a good deal of what we find in the Books of Samuel and Kings, but they have more of a priestly bias and they eliminate a lot of material that sheds a poor light on Israel's kings. So, for example, you won't find the story of David and Bathsheba when you're reading the Chronicles account of the reign of David.

So Chronicles is already an interpretation. It's an inner-biblical interpretation. It is the Bible interpreting itself. A later strand of tradition reflecting on earlier strands of tradition and re-presenting that material in a particular light. The Chronicler is less interested in David's political genius, for example; it doesn't go into his strategy and his political accomplishments nearly so much as it does go into his role in establishing Jerusalem as a religious capital, in planning a temple, in organizing the music for temple worship. These are the interests of the Chronicler.

The Book of 2 Chronicles concludes with the decree of Cyrus, permitting the Jewish captives to return to their homeland and build their temple. We have a second, fuller version of this decree, which as I said, seems to be consistent with what we know of Persian policies--the policy of tolerating and even encouraging local religious cults. So that fuller version appears in Ezra.

I'm going to read first from 2 Chronicles. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23,

And in the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing, as follows: "Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and has charged me with building Him a House in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any one of you of all of His people, the Lord His God be with him and let him go up.

Then in Ezra there is an addition. Ezra 1:3 and 4,

...let Him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah, and build the House of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem.

Notice that the decree at the very beginning in Chronicles--in the 2 Chronicles version--the decree is said to fulfill the word of the prophet Jeremiah. Now, you remember that Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian exile would last 70 years; he wrote a letter, he said settle down, this is going to last a while, plant plants and build homes. So he had prophesied 70 years for an exile. Well, from the time of the first departure of exiles in 597, maybe to the return in 538, 61 years--it's close. If you look from the destruction of the first temple perhaps in 586 to the completion of the second somewhere between 520, 515, we're not really sure, that's about 70 years. Either way, it seems that in the eyes of the Chronicler it was close enough. This seems to have been a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prediction. That it would be about 70 years before they would return.

So the books of Ezra and Nehemiah give an account of the return of the Babylonian exiles in the late sixth and fifth century. And Ezra and Nehemiah were regarded as a unit; those two books were regarded as a unit in the Hebrew Bible, until the Middle Ages. They may in fact have formed part of a larger historical work; Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

Ezra, and to a lesser degree, Nehemiah seem to have a good deal in common with Chronicles, and therefore may derive from the same author. So sometimes in secondary literature you will see references to the Chronicler, which refers to the hypothetical author of 1 and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and possibly Nehemiah.

The chapters report the initial return of the exiles, the rebuilding of the temple, the career of Ezra, and the career of Nehemiah. All four of the books were probably edited in the late fifth century BCE, maybe close to the fourth century--that's our best guess--when Judah was a small province still within the massive Persian Empire.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, however, contain conflicting information about the return, about the restoration, and as a result our knowledge of the timing of various events is quite poor. It's really not clear who returned first to help rebuild Jerusalem, whether it was Ezra a priest, or Nehemiah a scribe. He was a Persian--[correction]: not a scribe, he was a governor. Ezra was a priest and scribe, Nehemiah was a Persian appointed governor of Judah.

And even though the Chronicler dates events according to the year of the reign of the Persian king, the king is Artaxerxes, and unfortunately there are two kings named Artaxerxes in the fifth century and there's one in the fourth, so it's extremely difficult to figure out when these events happened. So keeping in mind that even the experts cannot agree at all on the sequence of events, we are simply going to look at the career of Ezra, the career of Nehemiah. I'm not going to claim priority for either of them.

Because the events are not presented in chronological order, even in the books, I'm going to skip fairly freely around, back and forth between the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

So the Book of Ezra opens with Cyrus' decree, which we've heard, and then provides a long list of the exiles who returned to Judah after 538. They're led by Sheshbazzar; and then among the exiles he says there was Yeshua who was a priest and Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was a grandson of King Jehoiakim who was the last Davidic king who had been kept in house arrest in Babylon. He had been among the exiles in 597, he eventually had been released from house arrest in Babylon, so now his grandson Zerubbabel, a Davidide, was returning to Jerusalem, and you can imagine that this would have stirred hope in the hearts of many.

Chapter 3 of Ezra describes the sacrifices offered on a rebuilt altar and the beginning of the process of rebuilding the temple, probably around 521 or so:

When the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, priests in their vestments with trumpets, and Levites sons of Asaph with cymbals were stationed to give praise to the Lord, as King David of Israel had ordained. They sang songs extolling and praising the Lord, "For He is good, His steadfast love for Israel is eternal." All the people raised a great shout extolling the Lord because the foundation of the House of the Lord had been laid. Many of the priests and Levites and chiefs of the clans, the old men who had seen the first house [=the first temple], wept loudly at the sight of the founding of this house. Many

others shouted joyously at the top of their voices. The people could not distinguish the shouts of joy from the people's weeping, for the people raised a great shout, the sound of which could be heard from afar.

So the older generations who remember the magnificence of the first temple of Solomon shed tears. The younger people are shouting for joy at the establishment of a new temple.

But the building doesn't proceed smoothly and that's due largely to the hostilities of the surrounding communities. These surrounding communities are referred to as adversaries, adversaries of Judah and Benjamin. In chapters 4, 5, and 6 these Samaritans in many cases, offer to assist in the project of reconstruction. Their offer is rejected, and as a result the Samaritans, insulted, persuade the Persians that this is a bad idea. Rebuilding a potentially rebellious city is a bad idea, and the Persians listen to them and they order the rebuilding stopped.

There are two prophets then, Haggai and Zechariah. So these are prophets now of the post-exilic period. As we go through our periodization of prophets you'll want to add this fourth category, post-exilic prophets.

They urge the continuation of the building. A Persian official objects, the Jews appeal to the new Persian Emperor Darius. And they ask him to search through the court records, look for the original authorization by Cyrus--we have been authorized to do this. According to the text, Cyrus' edict is found. Darius agrees not only to enforce it, but to honor his obligation to supply money for the rebuilding. This is under Persian imperial sponsorship, and he will honor the obligation to supply money for the rebuilding and to procure sacrifices as well. The temple is finally dedicated, we think, about 515 BCE and a Passover celebration is celebrated in the sanctuary.

There are other social tensions in the Restoration community, specifically friction between those who had remained behind in Judea during the exilic period and the returning exiles, who although they were few in number, enjoyed imperial support.

These self-styled children of the exile, they refer to themselves as sons of the exiled or children of the exile [and] they refer to the local people--the local Judeans--as "peoples of the land." This is a derogatory term that seems to cast aspersions on their very status as Jews. They're like the *other* nations or peoples of the land. They seem to be classifying even Judeans in that category of "other." As we will soon see, some radically different views of Jewish identity are going to emerge during this period.

So that's the initial Restoration, the process by which the temple was rebuilt. Let's jump now to (we think) somewhere in the mid-fifth century perhaps. Nehemiah--he's a Jewish subject of Persia--he's the official cup bearer to the Persian Emperor Artaxerxes in the court at Susa. This is a position that probably entailed his being a eunuch.

The Book of Nehemiah opens with a description of Nehemiah's grief. He hears these reports of the terrible conditions of his people in Jerusalem sometime around the mid-fifth century and, weeping, he asks for the consent of the emperor to go to Jerusalem and to help rebuild the city. So Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem, we think about 445 BCE, and he undertakes the refortifications of the city. And he meets with opposition. There's some internal opposition. There's a female prophetess, Noadiah, in Nehemiah 6:14, who seems to be opposed to this. There's some external opposition as well from Israel's neighbors: the Samaritans, the Ammonites, some Arabs. They resent this reconstruction and they see the reconstruction of the city's defensive walls as an affront to Persian rule.

But Nehemiah continues; he gives his workmen weapons so that they can protect themselves against enemy attack and the walls around the city are completed in record time. These refortifications help to establish Jerusalem as an urban center, and eventually Nehemiah is appointed governor of Judah [Yehud], under Persian domination.

The text says that he institutes various reforms: economic reforms, social reforms. He seems to be trying to improve the situation of the poor, and establish public order. We think that the governorship of Nehemiah overlapped to some degree with the mission of Ezra, and Ezra's activities are reported in both the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Some scholars believe that they didn't overlap, that that's an illusion created by our sources.

But chapter 7 of the book of Ezra introduces Ezra. He's a Babylonian Jew, he comes from a priestly family, but he's also described as a scribe who is expert in the Torah of Moses. In verse 10 of chapter 7 it's said that Ezra had dedicated himself to study the teaching of the Lord so as to observe it and to teach the laws and rules to Israel. So Ezra is commissioned by the Persian Emperor in a letter, the text of which is represented or reproduced in chapter 7:12-26. The Emperor commissions him to travel to Jerusalem, to supervise the temple, and to assess how well Mosaic standards are being implemented in the Judean province. He's charged with appointing scribes and judges to administer civil and moral order. He has the backing of the Persian empire to institute Mosaic Law as the standard and norm for the community in Jerusalem. This is standard operating procedure for the Persians--to find loyal subjects to regulate their own local cults according to ancestral traditions and Ezra's work needs to be understood in that light.

Chapter 7:[14-26, selections]:

"For you are commissioned by the king and his seven advisors to regulate Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your care,...And you, Ezra, by the divine wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to judge all the people of the province of Beyond the River" [Cis-Jordan] [See Note 1] "who know the laws of your God, and to teach those who do not know them. Let anyone who does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king be punished with dispatch," [so he has powers of enforcement] "whether by death, corporal punishment, confiscation of possessions, or imprisonment."

In addition, Ezra is appointed to bring treasures of silver and gold to the temple. The text says that Ezra brings with him a copy of the Mosaic Torah in order to regulate and unify Jewish life in the Restoration community, and together Ezra and Nehemiah bring about a revival.

Ezra's reforms are aimed at strengthening the religious identity of the Judahites. He wants to revitalize morale and he also wants to prevent the decline of Mosaic standards and to prevent the decline of biblical monotheism. His two most important acts are the dissolution of foreign marriages (this is a first) and his renewal of the covenant.

I'll say a little bit first about the dissolution of foreign marriages. Ezra is said to have been distressed when he arrived to discover that many of the returned exiles had married with, we think, non-Israelite women. It's not clear. Sometimes "peoples of the land" might refer to Judeans who had remained behind but who themselves had perhaps become lax, in Ezra's eyes, in their observance of Mosaic standards. But they had married women who seemed to follow pagan practices perhaps.

Chapters 9 and 10 describe his efforts to reverse this trend. He begs God to forgive the people for this violation of his law, and then at a great assembly, he calls upon all the people to divorce their foreign spouses. Now, this isn't in fact Pentateuchal law plainly read. The prohibition of marriage with any foreigner is a great innovation on Ezra's part, and it's one that, as we shall see, was not universally accepted at all.

The high incidence of intermarriage is perhaps indicated by the fact that it took several months to identify all those who had intermarried and to send away their spouses and their children. Even priests were among those who didn't view intermarriage per se as a violation of the covenant. In the next two lectures we'll see other perspectives on this question of integration of foreign groups within the community. So I raise it as an issue now: we're going to see many different attitudes as we move through the last section of the Bible.

The text of Ezra's prayer before God is a fascinating presentation of Ezra's interpretation of Israel's history and prior texts, and again, constitutes yet another response to the calamity that had befallen the nation; but [it] also constitutes another example of inner-biblical interpretation: later levels, or layers within the biblical text turning to older traditions and interpreting them, or reinterpreting them.

So listen to how Ezra understands biblical tradition and listen to how he interprets Israel's history. This is from Ezra 9, he's praying to God before the assembled people. [Vv. 7-12]

From the time of our fathers to this very day we have been deep in guilt. Because of our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to foreign kings, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to humiliation, as is now the case. But now, for a short while, there has been a reprieve from the Lord our God, who has granted us a surviving remnant...

remember the prophetic idea of a remnant that would survive?

...and given us a stake in His Holy place; our God has restored the luster to our eyes and furnished us with a little sustenance in our bondage... Now, what can we say in the face of this, O our God, for we have forsaken Your commandments, which You gave us through Your servants, the prophets when You said,

here he's quoting the Bible;

'The land that you are about to possess is a land unclean through the uncleanness of the peoples of the land, through their abhorrent practices with which they, in their impurity, have filled it from one end to the other. Now then, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or let their daughters marry your sons; do nothing for their well being or advantage, then you will be strong and enjoy the bounty of the land and bequeath it to your children forever.'

So he's quoting earlier tradition.

After all that has happened to us because of our evil deeds and our deep guilt--though You, our God, have been forbearing, [punishing us] less than our iniquity [deserves] in that You have granted us such a remnant as this-- shall we once again violate Your commandments by intermarrying with these people who follow such abhorrent practices? Will You not rage against us till we are destroyed without remnant or survivor?

So Ezra's argument is, first of all, following the Deuteronomistic line. History reflects God's judgment. Israel's tragic fate is because of her sins, and indeed, she's been given a mercy and a reprieve. She hasn't been punished as fully as she deserves. He also follows the prophetic line that this remnant has been saved and now restored. So the covenant hasn't been completely abrogated. But notice his identification of the sin for which Israel was punished. Israel has mixed--and this is the language that he uses elsewhere--Israel has mixed holy seed with common seed through marital unions with the peoples of the land, meaning foreigners certainly, but possibly also some of these Judeans who had remained in the land during the exile and who seem to have adopted some of the customs of their neighbors. And if history is any guide, he's warning, the community is placing itself at great risk by intermarrying again with those who will lead them into the worship of other gods and the performance of abhorrent practices.

Surely he says, this time God will not be so merciful as to spare even a remnant. So learn from history. We sinned once by intermarrying, that was the sin for which we have been exiled. If we do the same thing again, this time we will be punished without any hope of a remnant.

So his interpretation of Mosaic prescriptions about marriage is an expansive one. The Torah does prohibit intermarriage with the native Canaanites at the time of the conquest, the rationale being that they would lead Israelites into abhorrent pagan practices, child sacrifices, and so on. But of course it's actually not a completely--there is actually a legal

provision for how to go about marrying a captive Canaanite woman; so it's not a completely unqualified prohibition to begin with.

The Torah then also prohibits intermarriage with certain, very specific foreigners, Moabites and Ammonites, specifically because of their cruel treatment of the Israelites during their trek from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Egyptians are prohibited only to the third generation. But there's no prohibition against marriage with other foreigners--a Phoenician, an Arab--so long as they enter into the covenant of Yahweh, as long as they don't lead the Israelite partner into the worship of other gods. The rationale for intermarriage prohibitions in the Pentateuch are always behavioral, they're always moral. If this person will lead you astray to abhorrent practices that is prohibited. But marriage *into* the group is not prohibited.

Indeed, Israel's kings married foreign women regularly. Many of the kings of Israel were themselves offspring of these foreign women. They were still fully Israelite. Israelite identity passed through the male line. But Ezra who is protective of Israel's religious identity, is zealous for the Lord, is wary of God's wrath--he's interpreting and promulgating these prohibitions in such a way as to create a general ban on intermarriage of any kind. Israel mustn't make the same mistake twice. Israelite identity is now made contingent in Ezra's view on the status of both the mother and the father. One is only an Israelite if one has both an Israelite mother and an Israelite father. Both must be of the "holy seed." This is a phrase [holy seed] which is being coined now in Ezra's time and is now serving as a rationale for the ban on intermarriage. It's not that a person is prohibited because they will lead you astray to the worship of other gods. That's something that can be corrected if the person in fact enters into the religious community of Israel. The rationale is that they just simply are not of holy seed and there's nothing that you can do to change that, so this becomes a permanent and universal ban.

So that's the first very important thing that Ezra tries to do: the dissolution of marriage with foreign spouses and to establish a blanket universal ban on intermarriage, to make Israelite identity dependent on the native Israelite status of both mother and father.

His second deed is the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant. This act is reported in Nehemiah 8[:1-8]. There's an extended public reading of the Torah of Moses and that's followed then by a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant:

When the seventh month arrived--the Israelites being [settled] in their towns--the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the Lord had charged Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding. He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given to the scroll of the Teaching.

[the word here is Torah]

Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden tower made for the purpose...Ezra opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; as he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," with hands upraised...[The leaders] and the Levites explained the Teaching to the people, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.

Apparently the assembled people no longer understood the classical Hebrew of the Bible, if it was formulated in that. What he was actually--what is this scroll? This is the first time now that we're hearing about the Torah as a scroll and being read to people. So this is historically quite fascinating. But the people don't seem to be able to understand it. Ezra and his assistants are probably translating it into Aramaic which is now the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire, giving the sense of the text perhaps as it's being read. We really can't be certain what it is that Ezra was presenting as the Torah

of Moses. It may have been the Pentateuch basically in the form that we now have it. Both D and P are very strongly reflected in Ezra. He quotes from them, he refers to them, and then interprets and applies them in new and interesting ways.

In any event, this Torah was to become the basis and the standard--with a lot of good heavy Persian imperial support--for the Jewish community from that time forward. And at a festival celebration a few weeks later there was an additional public teaching of the law and a recital of Israel's history that once again laid special emphasis on Israel's obligations, what she owed to Yahweh.

The recitation of that history is found in Nehemiah 9, and again as an interpretation of the calamities that Israel had faced; it's consistent with the earlier prayer of Ezra that I read. God has withheld nothing from Israel, yet Israel has defied God, rebelled against Him, killed the prophets who had urged them to turn back to the covenant; and God tolerated Israel's sin as long as he possibly could but finally he had to punish her. But even so, in His great compassion God didn't abandon Israel completely.

Verse 33 of this prayer then turns and addresses God, "Surely you are in the right with respect to all that has come upon us, for You have acted faithfully and we have been wicked." So again, [we see] this justification of God and blaming of the Israelites for all that has befallen them and learning a lesson for that in the future--no intermarriage.

All of this is but a prelude then to the people's reaffirmation and renewed commitment to the covenant, and it's spelled out in great detail in Nehemiah 10. Chapter 10 opens, "In view of all this, we make this pledge and put it in writing," and then there follows a list of all the officials: the Levites, the priests, the heads of the people. And it says that all of these officials and leaders in conjunction join with the people, verse 30 and 31, they:

... join with their noble brothers, and take an oath with sanctions to follow the Teaching of God, given through Moses the servant of God, and to observe carefully all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, His rules and laws. Namely: We will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

So we then read the various obligations that the people are committing themselves to, and these include observance of the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year as well as supplying the needs of and the upkeep of the temple. But it's surely significant that the ban on intermarriage and the observance of the Sabbath top the list. We are going to commit ourselves again to God's teaching, his rules and laws; namely: we won't intermarry and we'll observe the Sabbath! So these are singled out at the top of the list, as central covenantal obligations.

Chapter 13 describes Nehemiah's efforts to see that the people live up to this pledge. And he scurries around Jerusalem--he's enforcing the cessation of work on the Sabbath, he's persuading individuals to give up their foreign wives.

Ezra and Nehemiah were zealous in their promotion of the renewed covenant, and in their view, the centerpiece of the covenant was the ban on intermarriage and the observance of the Sabbath. It is interesting that these two phenomena, in addition to circumcision, will emerge as the three identifying features of a Jew in the ancient world when you look at external literature: they are a circumcised people, there's one day of the week that they don't work, and they don't marry outside their group. Those are the kinds of themes that you start to see in writings of ancient Greeks and so on when they talk about this people.

Ezra and Nehemiah's reforms can be seen as a direct response to the events of Israel's history. What's happened before just cannot be allowed to happen again. And they view the tragic history as a cautionary tale. It's calling upon the people to make the necessary changes to avoid a repeat disaster. There's only one way to guarantee that Israel will never again be destroyed. She has to live up to the covenant she failed to honor in the past. She has to rededicate herself to the covenant and this time she has to be single-minded in her devotion to God, because history has shown that God will punish faithlessness and betrayal. Israel can't be led astray by the beliefs and practices of her neighbors, and so a strict policy of separation has to be enforced if Israel's going to finally be cured of the desire for idols.

Again, it's interesting that in Jewish tradition--the Jewish tradition is that the flirtation with idolatry, which had plagued Israel in the First Temple Period, ceased to exist in the Second Temple Period. So again, this is another area in which Jews earned for themselves a reputation in antiquity. They have a reputation for their strict monotheism, their scrupulous avoidance of foreign gods. They will not bow down to another god. There is this people that doesn't intermarry, they don't work one day a week, and they won't bow down to our kings or to other gods; these are the kinds of things [observations] you find in writings in this period.

So Ezra and Nehemiah, backed by Persian imperial authority, help to create and preserve--not just preserve--*create* and preserve, a national and religious identity for Jews at a precarious time. Their reforms were not universally welcomed. Already, even in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah which give a very sympathetic account of their work, obviously, we can see rumblings and discontent.

There are other works that are going to express opposition to the separatism of Ezra and Nehemiah. Isaiah 56:1-7, an interesting passage, it states quite explicitly that foreigners who have joined themselves to God are welcome. They are welcome in the temple; they are welcome even to minister before God. There is a good deal of historical evidence for the assimilation of foreigners within the Jewish community going on all the time. Non-Jews became Jews, they married Jews. We know of one family, the Tobiad family, quite influential--they were originally an Ammonite family. Now, that is a group that is explicitly prohibited from entering the congregation in Deuteronomy! But this is a family that adopted Jewish identity, became fully assimilated. So clearly there's great difference of opinion on this matter. In the last two lectures we're going to be focusing a lot on the diversity of approaches to the whole question of Israelite or Jewish identity, and the relationship to the Gentile world.

So, although under Ezra, the Torah became the official and authoritative norm for Israel, although under Ezra Judaism took the decisive step towards becoming a religion of Scripture, based on the scriptural text. This did not in itself result in a single uniform set of practices or beliefs. Adopting the Torah as a communal norm simply meant that practices and beliefs were deemed to be authentic, to the degree that they accorded with the sense of Scripture--and interpretation of Scripture varied dramatically. So that widely divergent groups now, in the Persian period and as we move into the Hellenistic period, widely divergent groups will claim biblical warrant for their specific practices and beliefs.

So in short, Ezra may have unified Israel around a common text, but he didn't unify them around a common *interpretation* of that text.

Alright, when we come back we'll be looking at about four more books, all of which set up very interesting and different views on some of these basic questions.

[end of transcript]

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## Notes

1. TransJordan refers to the land to the east of the Jordan while CisJordan refers to the land to the west of the Jordan but from the perspective of Persia the area is known as "Beyond the River."

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 23 Transcript

December 4, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** All right, let's go ahead and get started; there's a lot to cover. But I want to try to unite a lot of these disparate parts of the Bible, the many small books clustered here at the end that we'll be considering. I'm going to try to unite them by elaborating certain themes as we move through them. But as you can see, from this giant chart, there's quite a bit.

First, let's begin with the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth is set in the days of the Judges; that's the opening line of the book. It tells you that this happened in the days of Judges, but it was certainly written later, and whether it was post-exilic or pre-exilic is not certain, so we're going to be asking the questions of a canonical critic.

Whatever its origin, how did this book function for Second Temple Jews? As the story of a foreign woman, whose foreign status is continually emphasized throughout the book, (Ruth the Moabite, Ruth the Moabite)-- as a foreign woman who acts nobly and enters the community of Israel by choice, this story would have stood in opposition to the negative view of foreigners, the ban on intermarriage and the purely genealogical definition of Israelite identity that was promulgated by Ezra and Nehemiah in the post-exilic period.

So in the story you have a famine in Judah and that causes a Bethlehemite man, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, and their two children to leave Judah. They're going to reside in the country of Moab, where the Moabites live, and their two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.

You have to consider the effect that these opening verses would have had on an ancient Israelite listener or reader. Moab was a hostile neighbor on Israel's southeastern border. And the Moabites were hated for their ill-treatment of the Israelites when they were traveling to the Promised Land. Their lack of hospitality had already led to a prohibition of intermarriage in the Torah itself. So the Moabites and Ammonites are two foreign groups that are explicitly prohibited from entering the congregation in Deuteronomy 23.

The Israelites' low opinion of the Moabites is also expressed in Genesis in the very degrading story of Moab's descent from the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters, after the fall of Sodom. And yet here we read, in the opening lines of this story [of] a man from Bethlehem, who travels to Moab, and his two sons marry Moabite women!

Then in short order Elimelech and his two sons (who are appropriately named Sickness and Death, by the way, in Hebrew) they die. And the Israelite widow, Naomi, is left now with no blood relation, no blood male relation, only her two Moabite daughters-in-law. And Naomi weepily tells the girls that they should return to their father's home. She's poor, she'll never be able to support them as a poor widow, she has no further sons to give to them, and clearly they have no legal or moral obligation or tie to Naomi. And we'll pick up the story then in chapter 1:11:

But Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters! Why should you go with me? Have I any more sons in my body who might be husbands for you? Turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to be married. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I married tonight and I also bore sons, should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the Lord has struck out against me."

They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if even death parts me from you." When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her; and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

All of the names in this story are wonderfully symbolic. Sickness and Death – it's like they walk on the stage with a big sign saying "I'm in a bit part and I'm ready to die." Orpah's name means the back of the neck because she turns her back on her mother-in-law as well. It's a wonderful story with lots of name symbolisms.

But by the force of sheer conviction, Ruth joins herself to the people of her mother-in-law. Back in Judah, Ruth supports her mother-in-law and herself by gleaning the fallen sheaves behind the reapers in the field. Because according to the Pentateuch, the sheaves that fall behind the reapers must be left for the poor to collect; you don't go back and collect them. So Ruth gleanes, and she gleanes in the field of a kinsman named Boaz, and he's described as a man of substance and she's very diligent and she soon comes to his attention.

He's very kind to her, he looks out for her safety among the rough field workers. He provides water for her. He's heard of what Ruth has done for Naomi; how she left her home and left her family to come to a people that she really didn't know, and he blesses her. He says, "May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!" chapter 2:12.

He increases his generosity; he shares his meal with Ruth and gives her from the heaps of grain in addition to the gleanings that she's collecting. So Naomi is very delighted with Ruth's gleanings, they more than suffice for their needs. But she's even more pleased to learn that Ruth seems to have found favor in the eyes of Boaz. He's been very kind and generous, and she points out: you know he is among our redeeming kinsmen. Now the term here, the Hebrew term is *goel*. *Goel* means redeemer. In fact, in a lot of the Christian language later, this is the word they're using when they talk about "my redeemer liveth." It's simply this word *goel*, and the *goel* is a person who as the nearest relative or as a close relative, has certain legal obligations to another person.

Those obligations--the primary obligations are three: (1) To redeem the person or their property if they've been sold to a stranger due to poverty. So to redeem them from debt servitude essentially. So your *goel* should do that for you. (2) To marry a childless widow. So if a man dies and his wife is childless the *goel* is supposed to marry her, provide seed, and the firstborn son will be named after the name who is dead. So he's supposed to marry a childless widow and produce offspring for the deceased; usually, that falls first to the brother; And then (3) in the case of the blood redeemer, also the redeemer is supposed to avenge the blood of a kinsman. So if you are killed your redeemer is supposed to seek vengeance for you.

Boaz is a somewhat distant relative, but Naomi believes he's the answer to their dual problem of poverty on the one hand, and Ruth's widowhood on the other hand. So in chapter 3 she urges Ruth to make a visit to Boaz. He's winnowing barley on the threshing floor and Ruth is supposed to bathe herself, anoint herself, dress up and go out at night to the threshing floor.

You should know that biblically, threshing floors tend to be places of revelry at the end of the harvest time and they are often frequented by prostitutes. But Naomi seems to be planning Ruth's seduction of Boaz. She instructs Ruth not to reveal herself until Boaz has finished eating and drinking, and when he lies down, Ruth is to approach him and uncover his feet--this is possibly a sexual euphemism--and lie down, and he will tell her what she is to do.

So Ruth follows these instructions exactly. In 3:7-11:

Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grainpile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and pulled back--there was a woman lying at his feet! "Who are you?" he asked. And she replied, "I am your handmaid Ruth. Spread your robe over you handmaid, for you are a redeeming kinsman." [a *goel*] He exclaimed, "Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do in your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are."

So Ruth's request is that Boaz act as her redeemer and spread his robe over her, which is a formal act of protection and espousal. And Boaz assures her that he will redeem her. He then goes on to point out, however, that there is another kinsman who is actually a closer relation, and therefore has the first right of refusal, and Boaz will settle the matter legally in the morning. And we're left wondering what transpired in the night.

In chapter 4 we read the legal proceeding by which the other kinsman is freed of his obligation and his claim to Ruth and this then clears the way, enables Boaz to marry her. But the punchline to the whole story is yet to come and that occurs in chapter 4, verses 13-17,

So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed by the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel! He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons." Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother, and the women neighbors gave him a name saying, "A son is born to Naomi!" They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David.

So David, God's anointed king over Israel; David, with whom God covenanted that his house should reign forever; David, from whose line would come the messianic king to rule in the final age--This David is said to be the direct descendant, the great grandson of a foreign woman from a country of idol worshippers, and a Moabitess no less.

So it seems that this very short and very moving story represents a strand of thought that stood in opposition to the line of thinking found, for example, in Ezra's call for a ban on intermarriage as the only means of insuring faithfulness to Israel's God. Not only is Ruth, the Moabitess, not guilty of abominable practices, she is the ancestress of Yahweh's chosen monarch. And she's praised in the story by all who know her as a paragon of *hesed*, this quality of steadfast love and covenantal loyalty that binds the members of the covenant community to one another and to God. Ruth, the Moabitess, stood by an elderly widow to whom she had no real legal obligation and she was accepted into the covenant community.

The acceptance of foreigners is well documented in post-exilic Judaism, despite Ezra's polemical efforts to exclude foreigners from the community. It's important to remember that Ezra's reforms never became normative for the entire community. Post-exilic, and later rabbinic Judaism, never adopted the purely genealogical definition of Jewish identity. They allowed for the phenomenon of conversion and marriage into the covenant by persons of foreign birth who accepted the God of Israel; a possibility that Ezra completely forecloses.

Ezra's extreme views were popular among sectarian groups, so Ezra and exclusivism is championed, for example, in writings that are found at Qumran. It exerted some influence on early Christian bans on marriage, absolute bans on marriage between believers and unbelievers, but it's the Book of Ruth that features prominently in the Jewish conversion ceremony to this day.

We have a different kind of acceptance of foreigners that's voiced by prophets of the restoration period. So these are prophets, fifth century--late sixth and fifth century. We're going to look now briefly at some of the last prophetic books, and these are writings that date to the time of the first generations of returned exiles and on.

Earlier prophets in the pre-exilic period--the classical prophets we've already looked at--they had spoken of a remnant that would be restored and would be restored gloriously to its land, but the returned exiles faced a life of great hardship. The reality of poverty and the difficulties in rebuilding the temple, and the hostility of the Judeans who had remained behind, as well as the hostility of the surrounding peoples, the absence of any real political independence under a Davidic King--all of these things fell far short of the early prophets' glorious descriptions of this restored remnant.

So new prophets in the period of the Restoration have to address the community's disappointment. The short Book of

Haggai contains the words of the Prophet Haggai, spoken primarily to Zerubbabel, (Zerubbabel is the governor of Judea). Haggai prophesies around 520, and he declares that all of the difficulties the community was facing, the agricultural setbacks and the famines, these were all signs of God's displeasure that the temple hadn't been completed.

Zerubbabel is convinced by this, the people return to their task enthusiastically, and as we know, the temple is rebuilt as Haggai promised. He says it's a humble structure but soon it's going to be filled with treasures flowing in from all nations. And the promises of the Restoration that were made by the prophets of old are just around the corner.

So Haggai longed for a rebuilt temple. But not only that, also for the re-establishment of Judah's independence under a Davidic King. And he held out hope for Zerubbabel, the governor, who was, after all, a descendant of David, through the last king that went into exile. He hoped that he would serve as God's messiah, or appointed king. That hope is even stronger in the work of Haggai's contemporary, the prophet, Zechariah.

Zechariah is 14 chapters long, and the first eight chapters contain the prophecies of the historical Zechariah around 520 or so. The last chapters--chapters 9 through 14, this is known as Second Zechariah--these chapters contain obscure writings from a later hand and they are of a very different type or genre. They are written in the apocalyptic vein, so we won't talk about those now, we'll consider those momentarily. I'm going to be talking about apocalyptic for the last half of the lecture. So for right now I'm interested, however, in the first eight chapters which represent the oracles of the historical prophet Zechariah around 520.

He preached and prophesied for about two years. He urges in these chapters the rebuilding of the temple. The first six chapters contain a series of elaborate and symbolic visions, eight different visions that are revealed by an angel and/or a divine messenger. That's a mode of revelation that's going to be standard in apocalyptic literature, as we'll soon see. Earlier prophets received a word or a vision but as we move towards apocalyptic literature and later literature, prophets often receive messages from God through an angel or a messenger.

These visions focus hope on Zerubbabel, the governor, and on the priest Joshua, the high priest Joshua. And the idea is that they'll rule in a kind of diarchy as monarch and priest. At the same time, however, it seems that the Persians got rid of Zerubbabel. He was ousted perhaps because messianic hope was starting to gather around Zerubbabel. So Zechariah's prophecies seem to be adjusted to refer solely to Joshua. Although they originally referred to Zerubbabel, and although chapter 6 in particular seems to refer originally to Zerubbabel, it is altered so that it now depicts Joshua as a shoot or a branch from Jesse's stock--Jesse's stock, meaning a Davidide. (David's father was Jesse; so to say a root from Jesse's stock is to say a Davidide.) It says that Joshua will rebuild the sanctuary; he will wear the royal insignia, although he is the priest. The elevation, however, of the high priest is a feature of the post-exilic period. It's a feature of Judah in the post-exilic period, the high priest coming to take [on] some of the trappings of royal office.

Chapters 7 and 8, declare God's promise to turn and to do good things in Jerusalem and the House of Judah, so long as the people will turn from their unjust and evil ways. And Zechariah points forward to the glorious day when all the nations of the world will eagerly come to seek the Lord in Jerusalem and to entreat his favor.

So we read in Zechariah 8:23, "Thus said the Lord of Hosts: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold--they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you,'" and thus this Restoration period, you can see, features prophets who envision other nations joining Israel in the worship of Yahweh. They will come to rally around and join Israel in the worship of God in Jerusalem.

The last wave of prophetic writings that we have addresses the disappointment and the disillusionment of late sixth- and fifth-century Judeans. What was the message of these writings? The basic message was that the earlier prophets, their promises of future glory for the restored remnant--these were all true. The future just isn't now. It's only going to happen in the *eschaton*, the final day. Only then will the glory of Jerusalem and a messianic ruler be restored, and the hope that has to sustain the community through the bleak present is therefore an eschatological hope, a hope that focuses on an ideal account of the end, (eschatology = an account of the end). Because in the end of days everything will be set right. So as we move later into the period, we find increasingly the hope for the community is thrust off into the future, in an eschatology.

Parts of Third Isaiah depict the bitter reality of life in post-exilic Judah and advance in eschatology. You remember the

Book of Isaiah, which is 66 chapters, we divided into three parts: 1 through 39, which is the historical Isaiah; then we have Second Isaiah; and then Third Isaiah, we're dealing with now--that's chapters 56 to 66.

The anonymous prophetic author of these chapters denounces the failings of the exiles, but does hold out an eschatology; a doctrine of final things that depicts what's going to happen in the end of days. This kind of eschatology differs from the depiction of Zion's future glory that we had in the early classical prophets. The earlier prophetic pronouncements generally referred to a re-establishment of Judah's fortunes in historical time, but eschatological works like Third Isaiah look beyond historical time. They're looking to a time of a new heaven and a new earth, when Judah's sins will be forgotten. The land will become an earthly paradise transformed, and blessed with peace and prosperity and length of days.

This is from Isaiah 65:17-25,

For behold! I am creating  
A new heaven and a new earth;  
The former things shall not be remembered,  
They shall never come to mind.  
Be glad, then, and rejoice forever  
In what I am creating.  
For I shall create Jerusalem as a joy,  
And her people as a delight;

...

Never again shall be heard there  
The sounds of weeping and wailing.  
No more shall there be an infant or graybeard  
Who does not live out his days.  
He who dies at a hundred years  
Shall be reckoned a youth,  
And he who fails to reach a hundred  
Shall be reckoned accursed.  
â€œFor the days of My people shall be  
As long as the days of the tree,  
My chosen ones shall outlive  
The work of their hands.  
They shall not toil to no purpose;  
They shall not bear children for terror,  
But they shall be a people blessed by the Lord,  
And their offspring shall remain with them.  
Before they pray, I will answer;  
While they are still speaking, I will respond.  
The wolf and the lamb shall graze together,  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
And the serpent's food shall be earth. In all My sacred mount  
Nothing evil or vile shall be done--said the Lord.

See this interesting notion of a completely new, transformed heaven and earth. The lion is vegetarian again, the serpent no longer is--there's not this animosity between the serpent and humans as was decreed at the end of Genesis with the curse on the serpent. They're going to just be eating earth and there will be no danger.

Third Isaiah also sounds this theme of openness, reassuring foreigners and eunuchs who have joined themselves to Yahweh that they'll be welcome in the Holy Temple to serve God and to offer sacrifices. Now, this is significant. Again, remember that Deuteronomy 23 right in the heart of the Pentateuch, bans eunuchs specifically, and certain foreigners-- Moabites, Ammonites--from entering the congregation. Remember also that Ezekiel explicitly excluded foreigners from the restored temple in his visions at the end of the book. This is also clearly the policy of Ezra and Nehemiah. They had an Ammonite who had his lodgings or office or room in the temple--they had him thrown out of that area in the temple.

Third Isaiah seems to oppose such restrictions. Isaiah 56:3-7:

Let not the foreigner say,  
Who has attached himself to the Lord,  
"The Lord will keep me apart from his people";  
And let not the eunuchs say,  
"I am a withered tree."  
For thus said the Lord:  
"As for the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,  
Who have chosen what I desire  
And hold fast to My covenant--  
I will give them, in My House  
And within My walls,  
A monument and a name  
Better than sons or daughters.  
I will give them an everlasting name  
Which shall not perish.  
As for the foreigners  
Who attach themselves to the Lord,  
To minister to Him,  
And to love the name of the Lord,  
To be His servants--  
All who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it,  
And who hold fast to my covenant.

â€œI will bring them to My sacred mount  
And let them rejoice in My house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
Shall be welcome on My altar;  
For My House shall be called  
A house of prayer for all peoples."

So on this issue clearly the post-exilic community was quite divided.

Now, there's only one biblical book, which pretty much in its entirety, belongs to the genre of literature known as apocalyptic. Not in its entirety, but it is the most significant and through-going apocalyptic book in the Bible.

The term apocalyptic derives from the Greek word *apokalypsis*. An *apokalypsis* is a revealing, so something that's apocalyptic is a revealing. Apocalypse is a revelation of things to come, and as apocalypses generally predict the end of historical time and the beginning of a new world order, they are generally concerned with eschatology; so apocalyptic works tend to be eschatological.

That doesn't mean all eschatological work is apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature within the Bible, and then much more significantly outside the Hebrew Bible, is characterized by certain distinguishing features which I've thrown up in brief

note form over here. So apocalyptic literature is always eschatological, deals with the end of time. But to be apocalyptic a work has to have certain kinds of features and not all eschatologies have these features.

This is what they are. Most apocalyptic writings are pseudonymous. They're generally attributed to important figures of the past, Enoch or Abraham or someone. They tend to also feature a revelation by a heavenly messenger, an angel who comes in a vision or a dream to deliver some sort of message. In general, the message is highly symbolic. It's coded and often the symbolism is quite bizarre. You'll have surreal images of beasts and monsters and usually these depict foreign nations.

The visions tend to be chronological. They tend to be a systematic chronology of past, present and future events that represent the march of history, in coded form again, and so it tends to require interpretation. And that's usually given by the divine messenger, who reveals the symbolic chronological code.

Fourthly, apocalypses tend to predict a series of catastrophes. These are signs of the coming of the end, that final point in the march of history that's being laid out. You have motifs from ancient myths very often used to describe these catastrophes. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Apocalypses also tend to be what I call morally dualistic. They tend to divide humankind into two mutually exclusive groups; the righteous which is always a tiny minority, and the wicked, which is always the vast majority. There's going to be some final public judgment and the righteous will be saved and the wicked will be destroyed.

In this respect, especially later apocalypses show the influence of Persian thought. Persian thought is also quite dualist in nature, with oppositions of light and darkness, or good and evil, and life and death and so on. So there does seem to be some Persian influence and of course we're well into the Persian period at this point.

A sixth feature is that God generally appears in apocalyptic literature as an enthroned king. He brings all of history to a crashing end, and demonstrates his sovereignty. He confounds the wicked; he does all of these things at the same time. He confounds the wicked and establishes himself as the sovereign and enthroned king, in control.

Seventh, apocalyptic literature, as I briefly mentioned before, often incorporates mythological motifs and imagery, especially the motif of a battle between God and primordial, chaotic elements. And that will often be the imagery that's used in depicting the final battle with the godless or the wicked.

Apocalypses also generally depict a judgment of the individual dead, followed by everlasting life or punishment. So again, apocalypses develop quite substantially outside the writings of the Hebrew Bible; and in the Bible, we have a few scattered apocalyptic elements and then much of the Book of Daniel. And so we don't see the idea of life after death really in the Hebrew Bible until this very late apocalyptic book of Daniel.

The idea is very influential in the Dead Sea Scrolls (they are very dualist) and in the writings of the New Testament of course. So a belief in personal immortality, a belief in a general resurrection of the dead--these arise from a negative view of this world as a place where justice can be obtained. So apocalyptic writers examined the world they lived in; they drew the conclusion that reward and punishment were going to be made in an afterlife. They were certainly not doled out in this life, as Israel suffered.

This is a marked break from the general conviction of the Hebrew Bible that human life is limited to this world, and that the fundamental concern of humans and God is morality in this life and not immortality in another.

I think apocalyptic literature can be described as a literature of hope and despair. It's a literature of despair or pessimism because its basic premise is that this world holds out no promise for the righteous. It's a literature of hope or optimism because it affirms that God will intervene. He will intervene in human history, he'll set everything right, he'll interrupt the natural order, he's going to destroy this broken world as we know it, and he'll do so in order to rescue the righteous and humiliate the wicked, and if you've already died don't worry there will be a resurrection, it will all be made right. But this hope for supreme and ultimate vindication is thrust off into the future. So apocalyptic constitutes yet one more response to the traumatic events, the crises, and the disappointments of Israel's history.

In a second we'll get to Daniel, but there are a few apocalyptic passages of varying length in other post-exilic books. I'll just touch on them very quickly. Second Zechariah and, a little bit, the book of Joel, just to prepare us for Daniel.

Second Zechariah. Now, these are chapters 9 through 14. We talked about the historical Zechariah, chapters 1 through 8, so this is Second Zechariah, chapters 9 through 14, and it's a collection of diverse oracles, probably fifth-century or later, that contain these strange visions and predictions. Their meanings cannot always be fathomed, but they seem to focus on the Day of the Lord, and the restoration of Jerusalem, and the rise of a new and humble king who will reign in peace, really over a new world order.

Chapter 14 is a vision of this global battle that will bring history to an end. God is going to bring all the nations to Jerusalem where they will plunder the city, they will kill almost all of the inhabitants and then at the last moment when things look the most desperate, God will intervene and he'll fight for Israel and exact revenge on her enemies. And it's after this final battle that God will transform the earth into a paradise. So Israel's enemies will rage against one another, the surviving nations will pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Again, Jerusalem now is elevated above all cities, and these nations will come to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh at his temple, and Yahweh will be sovereign over the world.

Joel, a very short little book, probably the latest prophetic book, also contains apocalyptic material. The versification of Joel varies tremendously in different English translations, so I'm using the verse markings that are in the Bible you have. But if you consult another Bible some of them only have three chapters, some have four--it can be confusing.

But we can divide Joel into two parts. Up to chapter 2, verse 27--that's the first part, from 1:1 to 2:27 (or 1:2 really). And that contains a description of a military invasion. It's symbolized by an army of locusts. And this invasion--this army of locusts--is interpreted as a divine punishment that is necessary or that must come before the day of the Lord. The second part of Joel which begins in verse 28 of chapter 2 [=3:1] is a fully apocalyptic description of the final day of terror.

Reading from chapter 3:3-4,

Before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes,  
I will set portents in the sky and on earth:  
Blood and fire, and pillars of smoke;  
The sun shall be turned to darkness  
And the moon to blood.

Before the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes--but the righteous are going to survive. This is pointed out in chapter 3:5, "But everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall escape; for there shall be a remnant on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the Lord promised." As we move into chapter 4 of Joel, the Day of the Lord is envisaged as a judgment day for all peoples. So this is increasingly the view of the eschaton: a final battle and also a judgment day, and that judgment day will then issue in a new age. This is an idea that the book of Daniel will elaborate on in a minute, not to mention the apocalyptic writings that are outside of the Hebrew Bible.

In this judgment day, God will summon all of the godless nations to the valley of judgment, Jehosaphat which means "God will judge", so the Valley of Jehosaphat. And here the final battle between good and evil will take place, and after that God's people will be blessed and the Holy City will never again suffer shame. [4:1-2]:

For lo! in those days  
And in that time,  
When I restore the fortunes  
Of Judah and Jerusalem,  
I will gather all the nations  
And bring them down to the Valley of Jehosaphat,  
There I will contend with them

Over My very own people, Israel,  
Which they scattered among the nations.

Towards the end, then, of the book we read,

Let the nations rouse themselves and march up  
To the Valley of Jehosaphat;  
For there I will sit in judgment  
Over all the nations roundabout.  
Swing the sickle,  
For the crop is ripe;  
Come and tread,  
For the winepress is full,  
The vats are overflowing!  
For great is their wickedness.  
â€  
But the Lord will be a shelter to His people,  
A refuge to the children of Israel.  
â€  
And Jerusalem shall be holy;  
Nevermore shall strangers pass through it.  
And in that day,  
The mountains shall drip with wine,  
The hills shall flow with milk,  
And all the watercourses of Judah shall flow with water;  
A spring shall issue from the House of the Lord  
And shall water the Wadi of Acacias.  
â€  
But Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
And Jerusalem throughout the ages.

So we see a lot of eschatological features in the Book of Joel. You have, first of all, the series of disasters; they signal the impending wrath of God. You have a cosmic battle in which Yahweh triumphs over Israel's enemy. And we see in apocalyptic literature in general, a facile equation of the righteous and the wicked with Israel and other nations. Then also we have this outpouring of blessings on God's people, city, and land. And finally, God's continued protection and presence; and nations who are not Israel's enemies join in the worship of God in that final time.

Again, note the important difference between classical prophecy and the apocalyptic literature. Both of them speak about final things; both of them speak about an end-time. But the classical prophets did not in general expect that the course of human affairs would come to an end. Only that Israel's rebellion would end or that Israel would live under a perfect king anointed by God. In the apocalyptic imagination history itself is a closed process; it will end, and then a new age, a new world order would begin. And the present age and the new age are qualitatively distinct. The present age is under the dominion of evil powers. We see it particularly in the apocalyptic writings outside of the Bible and in the New Testament. That power that has dominion over the present age is Satan. Satan is the arch enemy of God. The age to come will be free of all evil, moral corruption, and death; Satan will be defeated. But God himself is the one who has to do this. God must intervene to bring the present age to a crashing halt and initiate this new world order.

So let's turn now to Daniel for a full apocalyptic work. Daniel also can be divided really into two parts and the first six

chapters have often been described as heroic fiction. They're a bit like the book of Esther that we'll be talking about on Wednesday. Just a good story. (Esther particularly has a lot of irony and is very, very funny.) But like the book of Esther, Daniel features a Jew who lives in a Gentile court and he's saved from disaster. I've listed the kings who are discussed in the Book of Daniel. These chapters tell of Daniel's adventures under two Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; the *text* says two Babylonian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; a Median king Darius who happens to be unknown to history, a Persian king Cyrus--that's a whole lot of years!

The historical inaccuracy of the work, right? You have the chronology of more than a century being telescoped here! There're other inaccuracies. Belshazzar was actually never a king; he was sort of a prince regent. He was defeated by Cyrus, not by Darius, so there are tremendous historical inaccuracies and this is a sign that this was written at a much later time, looking back when the history of a period 300 years ago was very confused. There's no clear historical knowledge of the Babylonian and Persian period. So the book, we know, was written quite late, perhaps the end of the third century, those first six chapters.

We have a better idea about the remainder of the book. Chapters 7 through 12 are fully apocalyptic in genre and they were composed between 167 and 164--I don't know if I wrote that up there, yeah, 167 and 164 BCE. This was a time when Jews were suffering intense persecution at the hands of the Seleucid King of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus IV. And so Daniel is the latest book of the Hebrew Bible.

It was chronologically the latest book, written between 167 and 164 BCE. But the author writes in code. He writes in code so that some hostile person would not be able to understand. The author disguises his references to contemporary historical events and personalities in these visions, these symbolic visions that are attributed to a remote era of the past.

Let's go back and look at the contents of these two sections. In chapters 1 through 6, Daniel is represented as a loyal Jew who's living in the exile in Babylonia, sixth-century exilic period among idol worshippers. He refuses to bow down to any other god. He observes the dietary laws and he prays facing Jerusalem. He seems to occupy a position of some honor in the court. He has the power to interpret dreams and to predict the future, and although he's severely tested he remains true to Yahweh and Yahweh aids him in more than one miraculous escape from danger. The main themes of this first section of the book of Daniel are Daniel's interpretations of the dreams of these kings (Nebuchadnezzar) and his allegiance to his God.

In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a huge statue. It has a head of gold, has a torso and arms of silver, the belly and the thighs are of bronze, the legs are of iron, and the feet are of mixed iron and clay. I've kind of given you a little grid and in a minute we're going to have another symbolic dream that's going to use animals to represent the same things that are being represented here by the metals.

So you have this statue with these metals and iron and clay feet. Then a great stone that's uncut by human hands flies from heaven and smashes the clay feet of the statue, and the statue crumbles and this stone becomes a mountain that fills all the earth. Daniel decodes the dream's symbolism; and it's a historical symbolism, the march of history. Each metal represents a kingdom that ruled the Ancient Near East. Daniel only explicitly mentions gold as Babylon, but we can figure out the rest. Silver is Media, bronze is Persia, and iron is Alexander's Greece, right, Macedonian Greece that conquered the Ancient Near East in the 330's, and brought Hellenism, and introduced the Hellenistic period into Ancient Near Eastern history.

After Alexander's death, his empire was divided into smaller Hellenistic kingdoms. The ones of greatest relevance to us are Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Syria because as you can imagine Palestine is caught between those two great powers. So it's going to be fought over by those two great powers.

So you have Egypt ruled by the Ptolemies; you have Syria ruled by the Seleucids; they're wrangling for control of the land of Israel that's lying between them. So the iron and clay feet of the statue in Daniel's dream represent these lesser Hellenistic kingdoms of Egypt and Syria that succeeded Alexander's empire and are a mix of Hellenistic and Eastern elements. The stone from heaven represents the future kingdom of God. It's going to come and destroy these godless kingdoms and fill all of the earth forever.

Chapter 3 tells the story of Daniel's three companions who refuse to worship a giant gold statue and they get themselves

thrown into a fiery furnace. When they emerge unscathed the king is greatly impressed and so he acknowledges the God of Israel.

In chapter 4 there's a second dream. It's interpreted by Daniel as a sign that Nebuchadnezzar will be struck down seven times. He's going to lose his reason, he's going to lose his throne, until he realizes that God is the source of all divine and human power. When this in fact comes to pass--Nebuchadnezzar seems to suffer a fit of insanity that drives him from society--the king then praises the God most high as the universal king.

In chapter 5, Daniel's enemies at court trick the Median king (now Darius, so we're moving to different kings). They trick him into issuing an edict against those who pray to anyone but the king. This is a problem for Daniel. Daniel violates the edict, of course, and he's arrested and he's thrown into a den of lions. But he emerges unharmed, and the result is, again, that the foreign king, in this case Darius now, recognizes the supremacy of Yahweh and orders all in his kingdom to revere the Jewish God.

There is, of course, no historical merit to these stories of Babylonian and Persian kings acknowledging or adopting the God of the Jews who lived in exile among them. These stories seem to give voice to the hope or the fantasy that a cruel and impious monarch might be taught humility by Yahweh. They also provide a model for life in the Diaspora. Jews can live in the Gentile world but they must never forget God and his laws.

Then we move into the second half of the Book of Daniel, chapters 7 to 12. As we move into this part of Daniel we switch from the third person into the first person, so Daniel 7 to 12 is written in the first person and it's fully apocalyptic. Here Daniel has a series of visions and dreams that are interpreted for him by an angel, and again, that's a classic feature of the apocalyptic genre. And these visions, again, survey Ancient Near Eastern history from the sixth to the second centuries.

Chapter 7 again represents the succession of kingdoms, the Babylonian, the Median, the Persian, the Macedonian Empires, but this time as beasts. So you have a lion, a bear, a winged leopard and an ogre. The ogre has horns and the horns of this ogre then represent these two lesser Hellenistic kingdoms, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. The boastful little horn is the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanies, himself.

In a second vision, the "ancient of days,"--this is the term that's used, it seems to be God in a white robe and a beard seated on a fiery chariot throne, but--"the ancient of days" confers glory and kingship on one like a Son of Man.

Now in Daniel, this phrase, the Son of Man--which generally means mortal as opposed to divine in the Bible, but--in Daniel the phrase seems to refer to a figure that's in human form, but more than a human. Probably an angel like Michael or Gabriel. (Both of them are represented as leaders against the forces of Persia and Greece.) And this figure establishes an everlasting kingdom to replace the bestial kingdoms that have preceded it.

So the Son of Man overwhelms the little horn Antiochus, who is said to be making war on saints (that's a code for loyal Jews), who is said to have been trying to change their law and abolish their religion--and we know that these were parts of the persecution in 167 to 164 by Antiochus. He tried to stop worship in the sanctuary and so on.

In a third vision then, the horn that represents Antiochus is said to trample the land of splendor (Israel), to challenge the army of heaven, to remove the perpetual sacrifice (Antiochus did halt the sacrificial service in the temple) and to set up an "abomination of desolation" on the sacrificial altar (and we know that Antiochus set up some kind of pagan altar on the sacrificial altar in the temple in Jerusalem and erected a statue of Zeus in the sanctuary). So this depiction of the persecution under Antiochus is presented here, but it's presented in veiled form for reasons of safety.

In chapter 9 we have a moving prayer for deliverance. The Angel Gabriel assures Daniel that the end is near, and that the end was even predicted by Jeremiah who had said that Jerusalem would lie desolate 70 years, you will recall.

Now, Jeremiah prophesied--I'm going to do some math now, so this is dangerous. Jeremiah prophesied in the early sixth century and the chapters of Daniel were written many centuries later, someone can figure it out, in the 160's. So was Jeremiah prophesying falsely when he said that God would deliver Israel from her enemies and establish a kingdom in Judah in 70 years? No, not according to the book of Daniel, because in the book of Daniel it's said that Jeremiah also

was speaking in a code. Jeremiah meant that 70 weeks of years, which is to say 490 years, would pass before the consummation of all things. And the last week was the reign Antiochus Epiphanes: we are in the last week of these years now.

So the writer is maintaining that he is living in the last days, in the final moments of the last week of years, and this is very typical of apocalyptic literature. The time is at hand, we are in the final stage, this is now all the birth pangs of the Messiah, these terrible things that are being visited upon us, and God is soon going to win victory through a mighty act and introduce the Messianic Age, ending Israel's long years of desolation.

So apocalyptic literature sees history as determined. It's a closed drama that must be played out, requiring no action on the part of humans except faithful waiting. God's kingdom will come solely by God's power, but it has to be preceded by this time of trouble. These troubles are nothing but the birth pangs of the Messianic Age and the faithful whose names are recorded in God's book will be rescued.

Chapter 12 imagines a resurrection of the dead as a compensation to those who died under the persecutions of Antiochus. It's a clear attempt to deal with the injustice that mars this world, and it's the only passage of the Bible to explicitly espouse the idea of an individual life after death, and as I say, breaks with a longer Israelite tradition that's vague or silent on this issue.

Not all Jews accepted the idea, but it would be essential to the rise of Christianity which is deeply indebted to apocalyptic thinking. And through Christianity, it came to have a very far-reaching impact on Western civilization.

The Book of Daniel is a response to specific historical circumstances. It's a response to the crisis of persecution and martyrdom that was going on in the second century. That was a new kind of crisis that led to a new kind of response, because the earlier crises of 722 and 586--they could be explained as punishment for sin and faithlessness. But now in the second century, Jews were dying not because they were faithless but precisely because they were *faithful*; because they refused to obey the decrees of Antiochus and to violate their law and covenant and *they* were dying. So this new phenomenon of martyrdom, really for the first time, required new responses and the book of Daniel provides a fully apocalyptic response. Remain faithful, wait, Daniel urges, know that this will all be set right by God, not in this world but in an ultimate and cataclysmic triumph of life and faith over death and evil, and it will be soon.

Daniel emphasizes God's firm control of history and so bolsters loyal Jews who are suffering indignities and torture and even death all around him because of their faith.

So we've seen the zealous fifth-century response of Ezra and Nehemiah to the fateful events of Israel's history. They believed Israel's rededication to God and the covenant involved as a first step, cessation of intimate relations with foreigners, separation from their abominable practices. We've seen very different views that would integrate foreigners in the worship of Yahweh. We've seen also the later emergence of apocalyptic as an expression of present despair and future hope that entailed the divinely orchestrated and cataclysmic defeat of the wicked enemies who persecuted Israel. And in the last lecture we're going to look at two books of the Hebrew Bible that take very different approaches, the Book of Esther and the Book of Jonah.

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## References

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# Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible): Lecture 24 Transcript

December 6, 2006 << [back](#)

**Professor Christine Hayes:** An interesting counterpoint to the apocalyptic literature and the apocalyptic reliance on God's cataclysmic consummation of history in order to dole out justice to the righteous and the wicked, is found in the Book of Esther. And this is a short novella. It's set in fifth-century Persia, it was probably written in the fourth century, we think, but it's set during the reign of Xerxes (and there's no x in the Hebrew alphabet--this is Ahasuerus, which is Xerxes), and he was a fifth-century Persian emperor from about 486 to 465.

It's another heroic fiction that features a Jew in the court of a gentile king, so it's like Daniel. The Jews of Persia are threatened with genocide, and they are saved not by divine intervention but entirely through their own efforts. Indeed, the Book of Esther does not mention God once.

The story revolves around Mordechai. Now, Mordechai is a pious Jew. He sits at the gate of the Persian king, Ahasuerus or Xerxes, and his beautiful niece is also central to the story of course--that's Esther--and he has adopted her as his own. There's a lot of comic irony in this story. It really is a fun read. Time is not going to permit me to go into the various subplots and the dramatic reversals, the ironies and twists, but I will just highlight a few of the most salient points that are relevant to the conversation we've been having.

When the Persian king divorces his wife, Vashti, because she refuses to appear in the royal diadem before his male courtiers--presumably in nothing but the royal diadem--Esther's great beauty commends her to the king and she becomes queen. Now, her uncle Mordechai advises her to be discreet about her Jewish identity for safety's sake.

In 2:10 and 11 it says,

Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordechai had told her not to reveal it. Every single day Mordechai would walk about in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was faring and what was happening to her.

So, a little while later the king promotes a certain Haman, Haman the Agagite, to the post of chief administrator. And everyone in the palace gate kneels down to Haman as the king has ordered, everyone that is except for Mordechai. Day after day he refuses, and finally the matter is told to Haman. This is chapter 3:4-6, and "When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them," speaking to Mordechai and he won't listen to them,

...they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordechai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordechai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordechai alone; having been told who Mordechai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordechai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

So Haman casts lots. The word for lots is *purim*; so he casts lots in order to determine the date of the massacre and then he offers the king a handsome bribe in return for permission to kill the Jews of the kingdom. This is chapter 3:8-11--and listen to the rationale that's proposed. He says to the king:

..."There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their

destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury." Thereupon the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of the Jews. And the king said, "The money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit."

So he provides a rationale. He also provides a good bribe along with it to get this edict. So this edict goes out to every province to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day. This is to be the thirteenth of the month of Adar. Jews everywhere begin to fast and weep and wail. They mourn, they wear sackcloth and ashes. And Esther sends to Mordechai for an explanation of the commotion. She's somewhat sealed off here in the harem and doesn't quite know what's going on. So he sends a message informing her of the decree. And he urges her to appeal to the king and to plead for her people. And Esther hesitates, partly because to appear unbidden before the king carries a penalty of death. And Mordechai responds with this message. This is Esther 4:13b to 16:

"Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis." Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordechai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan," [in Susa, in Persia] "and fast in my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law, and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"

So Mordechai went about the city and did just as Esther had commanded him. It's a very tense scene, Esther approaches the king and he--you get a signal: he raises his scepter or not, to accept you or not--and in this tense moment he permits her entry and he offers to grant her every request.

And so she asks that the king and Haman attend a banquet that she's preparing. And at Esther's banquet, the king offers to grant Esther any request that she might wish to make. And so her request is stated in the following terms, terms that show her loyalty to her people. Esther 7:3b-6:

..."If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish and my people as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen," [as slaves] "I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worth the king's trouble."

Thereupon King Ahasuerus demanded of Queen Esther, "Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?" "The adversary and enemy," replied Esther, "is this evil Haman!" And Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen.

So Esther boldly reveals her Jewish identity before the king. She expresses her solidarity in her speech with phrases like "we" and "my people and I." There's a real comedy of errors that follows. The king leaves the room in a rage and Haman falls prostrate on Esther's couch to beg for his life. So when the king reenters the room, he sees Haman in this compromising position and he declares, "Does he mean to ravish the queen in my own palace?" So he orders Haman to be impaled on the very stake that Haman had set up for Mordechai, and Mordechai in fact is then elevated in Haman's stead within the court.

But the Jews are still in danger because an edict of the king's cannot be revoked. Once a word has gone forth from the king, it is law. So the solution is a second edict in which Ahasuerus charges the Jews to arm and defend themselves.

And so then we have another of many reversals in this story. What was to be a day of defeat and massacre of the Jews becomes a day of triumph as the Jews who now have permission to arm themselves and fight, slay those who were bent on murdering them.

The victory celebration which is the festival of Purim is commemorated by Jews to this day. The very melodramatic story of this luxurious Persian court life and all of the attendant political intrigue that goes on in this story, it's recreated in annual *Purim* celebrations, very raucous, carnival-like dramatizations. According to the Talmud on Purim, it's a *mitzvah*, which can mean a commandment or a good deed, to get so drunk that you can't distinguish between Mordechai and Haman.

But for all of that there are some very important and striking themes in the story. First, there's the ethnic element of Jewish identity, rather than religious, that comes to the fore in the book of Esther. The presentation is secular, the Jews are described as a people, an ethnos. Esther is fully assimilated to her gentile environment. Unlike Daniel, who prays towards Jerusalem daily in the court of the king and observes the dietary laws in the court of the king, we hear nothing like this about Esther at all.

There's also a very human and very anti-apocalyptic message in this story. It gives expression to the conviction that solidarity and heroic resistance are necessary in the face of overwhelming anti-Jewish aggression to ensure Jewish survival. This, according to the book of Esther, so different from the book of Daniel, is the lesson to be learned from Israel's history.

If the book of Esther presents one alternative to the post-exilic eschatologies in which Yahweh's enemies are afflicted and consumed for their wickedness, then the book of Jonah offers another perspective.

The book of Jonah is actually found among the section of the Bible called the Prophets--the second section, the prophetic books of the Bible--and that's because in the book of Kings, 2 Kings 14:25, we have someone identified as Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet. This is considered the same Jonah, and so the book is considered to be among the books of the Prophets.

But it differs in significant ways from the other prophetic books. It is not, in fact, a collection of oracles. It's actually a story, a somewhat comic story, a comic tale about a reluctant prophet named Jonah. The second interesting or unusual thing about this book, is that Jonah is commissioned by Yahweh to carry a message to the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, not to the people of Israel.

The Israelite concept of divine mercy receives its full expression in the book of Jonah. In the first chapter, Jonah receives a call from Yahweh who instructs him to go to Nineveh, whose wickedness is great, and to proclaim God's judgment. Chapter 1, the first three verses: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim judgment upon it; for their wickedness has come before Me. Jonah, however, started out to flee to Tarshish from the Lord's service." [That's like saying he got up and went to Timbuktu. Tarshish was the extent, the farthest extent of the known world navigable through the Mediterranean. So it's rather comic: "go to Nineveh" and he got up and went the opposite direction as far as he could. He tried to flee from the Lord's service.] "...He went down to Joppa [Jaffa] and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to sail with the others to Tarshish, away from the service of the Lord."

So he does this immediate about-face in a very comic touch and sets sail for Spain, the other end of the Mediterranean. But of course, Jonah cannot escape from God, and God sends a storm which threatens to destroy the ship.

The non-Israelite sailors on board pray to their gods and then finally they cast lots in order to discover who it is who's brought this danger to the ship. And the lot falls to Jonah. So Jonah confesses that he's a Hebrew who worships the Lord who, as he now realizes, made both land and sea. And that is a fact that strikes great terror in the heart of the sailors when they hear this, that his God is Yahweh. Jonah further adds that he's trying to flee from God's service and the clear implication is that he is the cause of this terrible storm.

So Jonah proposes that he be thrown overboard to save the ship. The sailors strive mightily to battle the storm but finally in despair they pray to God, Yahweh, to forgive them for killing an innocent man. And they heave Jonah

overboard and save the ship.

Now, the sailors are said by the narrator to revere God. They offer a sacrifice to him. They make vows. In the meantime, God has appointed a huge fish to swallow Jonah and so preserve his life. And from the belly of this fish, Jonah prays to God. The prayer or the psalm is not entirely appropriate to the narrative context. It's probably an insertion in the story by a later writer. It's an insertion that was probably suggested by references within the prayer to drowning in the deep, to crying out to God from the "belly" of Sheol--and Jonah is in the "belly" of the fish, so that linguistic resonance may very well have been what prompted someone to insert this prayer here. In any event, in response to Jonah's prayer, God orders the fish to spew Jonah out onto dry land. In chapter 3, Jonah gets his second chance. God calls him again and in contrast to his first response, this time Jonah sets out for Nineveh at once. And he proclaims God's message: "In forty days Nineveh will be overthrown." And then comes the shocking element in the story.

Chapter 3:5-10:

The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast, and great and small alike put on sackcloth. And when the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he had the word cried through Nineveh: "By decree of the king and his nobles: No man or beast--of flock or herd--shall taste anything! They shall not graze, and they shall not drink water! They shall be covered with sackcloth--man and beast--and shall cry mightily to God. Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. Who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from his wrath, so that we do not perish."

God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out.

So idolatrous Nineveh believes God and humbles itself before God hoping to arouse his mercy. And in another humorous touch, we read that even the animals are wearing sackcloth--they're fasting and crying out to God. So from the greatest to the very least, the inhabitants of Nineveh turn back from their evil ways and God's mercy is in fact aroused.

The Assyrians are spared, and Jonah is furious. Chapter 4:1-4:

This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to the Lord, saying, "O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live." The Lord replied, "Are you that deeply grieved?"

Jonah doesn't respond; he just leaves the city to sulk. And his complaint seems to be twofold. If you're going to punish the wicked then just punish them. They deserve it. And if you're planning to spare them, then just spare them and don't waste my time with messages and oracles.

But the stronger problem for Jonah seems to be the lack of punishment for the wicked. Jonah is indignant that the Assyrians didn't get what they so richly deserved: didn't I say this would happen? You always forgive, you're this slow-to-anger, compassionate guy! You always repent, the wicked are never punished! I'm fed up with the way you do things, God. Your mercy perverts your justice. And some things ought not to be forgiven. People must be held to account for their evil actions. How can God not do justice?

Jonah sits in a little booth that he has constructed and God causes a leafy plant to grow over him, providing shade and

saving him from a good deal of discomfort. And the plant is to be the source of a final lesson for Jonah. Jonah 4:6-11:

...Jonah was very happy about the plant. But the next day at dawn God provided a worm, which attacked the plant so that it withered. And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, "I would rather die than live." Then God said to Jonah, "Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?" "Yes," he replied, "so deeply that I want to die."

Then the Lord said, "You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!"

How could Yahweh not be compassionate? For even the most evil of peoples are no less his creation that he has cared for, than precious Israel. And if they will only turn to Him in humility, he'll wipe the slate clean, he'll show compassion and forgive. It is only human to long for the punishment of the wicked. But God longs for their re-formation, their turning.

The date of the book of Jonah really can't be ascertained and you will hear arguments in both directions. Many scholars date it late; others suppose that the story is at least at base an old, old story. Nineveh appears as another Sodom, basically. It's a story that is in keeping with that older Torah tradition in which it's assumed that God punishes non-Israelites or other nations for immorality, but not necessarily for idolatry.

The gentile sailors even, who worship others, are not necessarily punished and in fact, it's said that they revere God and they're reluctant to throw this man overboard. Other nations are not obligated, in the view of this book as in the early traditions of Genesis, to accept monotheism. But they're bound by a certain basic moral law, maybe the moral law of the Noahide covenant, and it's for this that God has decreed punishment.

So the theme or the basic problem in this short book is the problem of God's justice verses his mercy. And Jonah is a champion of divine justice. He believes that sin should be punished, he's outraged at God's forgiveness. But Jonah learns that a change of heart is enough to obtain mercy, and that the true role of the prophet is perhaps to move people to reformation and turning.

What must have been the reception of this book in the post-exilic period? Again, not knowing exactly when it was written--We can imagine, however, in the manner of a canonical critic, how it might have been perceived by people in the post-exilic period for whom it would have become canonical.

The very idea of a prophet being sent to Nineveh--Nineveh the capital of the hated Assyrian empire, the home of the people who had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the ten tribes of Israel in 722, dispersing those ten tribes forever, the nation that had then laid siege to Jerusalem and exacted tribute from Judah for many years--this must have been startling. Ultimately then, this book would represent a strand of thought in post-exilic Judah that differed very much from the eschatological fervor that delighted in fantasies of the destruction of Israel's enemies, such as we found in Joel and as would be featured later in Daniel, and in post-biblical apocalyptic literature most notably the Christian book of Revelation.

The book of Jonah reminded Israel that the universal God is desirous of the reformation and the turning of all his creation, human and animal. And proposes that the Israelite prophet is called upon to carry a message of divine forgiveness to other nations, not just judgment. Even those that have humiliated and despised God's chosen. So wittingly or unwittingly, we may never know, the author of this little satire fostered the post-exilic sense of Israel as a light unto the nations. This is an idea that we've already seen in some of the late prophetic writings.

Just a few words of conclusion. The literature of the Hebrew Bible relates the odyssey of Israel from its earliest beginnings in the stories of individual Patriarchs worshipping a Canaanite deity to its maturity as a nation forced by

history to look beyond its own horizons and concerns.

The Israelites were lifted up to become something greater than they could ever have planned. They came to see themselves as God's servants to the world, at the same time that they struggled and argued with their God and criticized themselves for their very human weaknesses and failings.

From another vantage point, the Bible can be seen also as an anthology that struggles against great odds to sustain a peoples' covenantal relationship with God.

The contrast between reality and the religious-moral ideal that good prospers and evil is defeated was a distressing and perplexing problem that occupied the biblical writers. The existence of evil, the suffering of the righteous, the defeat of God's chosen, all this seemed basically incompatible with certain fundamental monotheistic intuitions; that God holds supreme power in the universe, that God is essentially good and just, and his providential care extends throughout creation. How can faith in such a God be upheld in the face of evil and suffering?

Although, all ancient cultures--and modern cultures--struggle with the problem of evil, it had particular poignancy for ancient Israel. In other Ancient Near Eastern literatures, we find doubt about the existence of a moral order, certainly. But only in Israel does the question of evil touch on the very essence of God and the very foundation of religious faith. Paganism posits the existence of primordial evil demons or gods, and thus the existence of evil and suffering does not impugn the good gods themselves.

Later religious systems that grow out of the Bible will in fact increasingly posit demons or a devil. Second Temple Judaism, later-rabbinic Judaism, and most especially Christianity, will posit some devil to account for evil in the world. Undeserved suffering, outrageous and frustrating as it might be, can then be explained at least by the jealousy or the caprice of the evil angels or gods or the demons or devil, who are indifferent to man's fate. But in biblical religion there is no independent evil principal. And so, undeserved suffering and rampant evil impugn the goodness and justice of God himself.

Biblical persons have no refuge from evil and suffering other than faith in God's justice. And if that justice is slow in coming, then despair and doubt threaten. For this reason, Israelite theodicy, I think, is charged with great pathos because the stakes are so high. If one loses faith in an essentially moral universe, one loses God. Or at least as we saw in the Book of Job, one loses a God who governs the world according to a clear moral standard.

But the biblical writers don't approach the problem as philosophers or theologians might. For the philosopher, theodicy, the problem of evil is primarily a logical problem, it's a contradiction. How can a just and good God allow evil and suffering to exist in the world? And like any other logical problem, it's best solved--according to the philosophers and theologians--through the careful construction of a systematic argument.

This is not the method or the approach of the biblical writers. For them, the problem is not philosophical; it is personal, it is psychological, it is spiritual. The burning question is really this, how can one sustain a commitment to Israel's God in the face of national catastrophe and personal suffering? How can one have the strength to embrace, to trust, to love this God knowing that unpredictable suffering and chaos have struck and may again strike at any moment?

And various writers from various periods add their voices to Israel's struggle to come to terms with the problem of sustaining faith in the midst of evil and suffering. The Bible's aim is not to solve the philosophical problem of theodicy, so much as it is to enable the relationship with God to survive all shocks, to make life in covenant with God a viable option, despite the evil and the suffering that are experienced by the faithful.

The Bible doesn't offer one single model of how to cope with this problem. A dynamic relationship with what is perceived to be a living personal God rather than the static God of the philosophers, is too complex to be captured in a single dimensional theology. Systematic theology could not do justice to the variegated experiences of the nation and of an individual life, and that's not the mode or genre chosen by the biblical writers.

And so various models are presented, not all consistent with one another, but each serving a particular segment of the community coping with a particular challenge at a particular time. Each is an attempt to sustain Israel's relationship with

God in the face of challenges to that continued relationship. Biblical writers tell stories and they interpret history in order to illustrate the many ways in which various individuals and the nation as a whole, have managed to make sense of the covenantal relationship with God. There's room for multiple models, multiple images of God and his relationship to Israel. And as modern readers of the Bible, we can only marvel at this unresolved polyphony in this ancient anthology. It's as if the rabbis who were later to canonize this collection saw the truth in the words of *Qohelet*, that to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. And so they included books with very different approaches to the fundamental problems that face the ancient Israelites as Israelites and as human beings.

So after 586 BCE, the Deuteronomist salvaged Yahwism from going the way of other defeated national religions by arguing that Israel had suffered not because God's promises weren't true but because they weren't believed. And this enabled the Israelites to continue faithful to their God, despite the destruction of his sanctuary, his chosen city and his ruler.

The prophets emphasized the moral and communal aspects of the covenant without which all sacrificial worship was anathema. And so they unwittingly prepared the way for a worship without sacrifice in the Diaspora, and in later Judaism. The Psalms give expression to the deepest emotions of the worshiper struggling with personal despair and anger or brimming over with joy and faith. Job gives vent to the outrage we feel over unjust suffering, while Ecclesiastes preaches existential pleasures as a solace for the vanity of all human endeavor.

Ezra and Nehemiah confront the very real problem of assimilation and identity with a call to Israel to close ranks, while Jonah and Ruth remind Jews of the universal providence of their God and the power of repentance. Esther and Daniel provide encouragement of radically different types for Jews under threat of persecution and massacre – one a plea for self-reliance and solidarity, and the other, a promise of divine intervention in an apocalypse.

Do all these books contradict each other? No more than I contradict myself when I say that today I feel happy, but yesterday I felt anxious. Israel's relationship with God has always been a dynamic and a complex one. To each of these books there was a time and a purpose in the past, and as countless readers of the Bible have discovered over the centuries these books offer continued teaching and inspiration in the shifting moments of every age.

Thank you very much for your attention this semester. Don't forget the review session that will be held here with me next week from 10:30-12:30. And you're early; you get to go home ten minutes early. Thank you.

[end of transcript]

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## References

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