

# ENCOUNTERING ANCIENT VOICES

A GUIDE TO READING THE OLD TESTAMENT  
SECOND EDITION

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS,  
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# INTRODUCTION FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

## WHY ANOTHER OLD TESTAMENT TEXTBOOK?

You may be asking yourself the same question I've been asking: do we really need another textbook for the Old Testament? And yet, every year when I wander through the book display at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, I find that many of the current textbooks have a similar format. They tend to be "passive" in nature, providing students with information that they are meant to read and recall. Many focus on the historical background of the text, while others simply retell the biblical texts, adding social and cultural information. Some focus on literary issues and others on theological matters.

The best textbooks out there are too difficult for my students, who are undergraduate students taking the course as part of their general requirements. The texts presume too much background and give too much detail. Rather than encouraging students to read the Bible on their own, the texts discourage students, who conclude that there is no way they'll ever know enough to understand the Bible on their own.

One of my primary goals as a teacher is to empower students to read the Bible. I hope that after they leave my class, they will not be afraid to open the Bible and read it on their own. I want them to feel confident about reading the text and seeking reliable resources of information when necessary. It's a simple goal, really, one less concerned with comprehensive coverage and more focused on reading strategies.



Therefore, in order to achieve my goal, I designed the textbook using five strategies:

- I wrote the book in such a way that the focus of the class will center on the text. I tried to avoid retelling the stories, as much as possible, in order to encourage students to read the Bible.
- I used active learning techniques wherever possible. This has been difficult, since most active learning occurs when the teacher gets out of the way of student learning. Here I have done that by providing questions that, when applied on a regular basis, help the student develop good reading skills.
- Each chapter includes materials that help students to learn about the social and cultural contexts out of which these texts were produced.
- Each chapter provides a legitimate variety of interpretations of the text, in order to encourage students to cultivate some ownership of their own interpretations.
- Each chapter actively acknowledges contemporary approaches to reading and interpretation. While classical methods, such as source criticism, are taught, the book also recognizes the postmodern context of our current students. It tries to respect where they are, because I have found that students are intensely interested in theological questions when teachers can connect those questions to the students' world.

Except for the first chapter, which deals with broader background issues, each chapter begins with introductory material. This material usually provides an overview of the book or genre in question and provides historical and cultural information that will aid the students' reading.

This introductory section is followed by guided close readings of key biblical texts. I would not expect these texts to be the only ones that a student would read in class, nor would I expect a teacher to assign all of the texts. However, the supplied texts provide representative examples of how to read material in that book or genre. These close readings have the following format:

- Each reading starts with a **brief introduction** to the passage that often poses a question or issue for students to think about.

- Then, a section called “**In Case You Were Wondering**” highlights unfamiliar words or customs.
- Next, students **read the biblical passage**.
- After the biblical passage, questions follow in a section titled “**Looking Closely at the Text**” that will help students focus on the important details of the text.
- Finally, there is a **discussion of the text**, either highlighting the issues students were to consider or suggesting ways they could address the questions posed.

At the end of each chapter, a summary pulls together information and major themes. In addition, there are study questions and a brief bibliography (“For Further Reading”) for those times when students need more information.

Each chapter also includes a number of sidebars. These recognize that instructors of introductory courses often have quite diverse backgrounds themselves. Some of us are biblical scholars, while others are systematic theologians, people with a religious studies background, ethicists, and so on. The sidebars allow different instructors to focus on different aspects of the text.

Every chapter has the following two sidebars:

- “**Focus on Method,**” which introduces a different method of biblical interpretation to the students. Instructors can pick and choose which methods to introduce. If you don’t like the order provided (I’ve tried to link them to texts where they work best), you can easily skip around, using them as self-contained units.
- “**The Bible in the Christian Tradition,**” which focuses on some prominent interpretive traditions within Christianity. These are tied to the content of the chapter and demonstrate how particular traditions of interpretation have developed. I hope that those instructors who are more versed in the Christian tradition will use these sidebars as a jumping-off place for larger hermeneutical discussions.

In addition to these two standard sidebars, others will appear that focus on the ancient near-eastern background of the biblical material. For those

instructors who want to provide a fuller treatment of a topic, such as the Gilgamesh epic, these sidebars can be used as a starting point. Other sidebars might address Jewish interpretation of texts, historical background in more detail, or the ways contemporary reading communities approach texts.

The order of the chapters reflects the way that I teach the course. I have experimented with different structures over the years, and each one has its advantages and challenges. I struggle with the best place to introduce poetry, where to put the wisdom material, and how to teach the creation narratives. Recognizing that we all use different structures, I have tried to write some of these units in a way that would make them self-standing. Instructors can feel comfortable moving the units around to fit their own course. You will occasionally see comments in the body of the textbook indicating material that can be more easily moved.

At the end of the textbook you will also find a glossary of key terms and an appendix with maps.

I have kept the writing style of the textbook informal. I hope that this narrative voice can serve as a model for students. Seeing the writer of the textbook struggling with some of the same interpretive issues that they do may help empower students to accept that struggle. It also allows me to be honest about my own presuppositions, a strategy that cuts against those of so many other textbooks where the narrator is the expert and the interpretation is “objective.”

I know that this is not a textbook that will suit every instructor; no textbook can do that. But I hope that if you, like me, teach our curious undergraduate students, few of whom will ever go on to do graduate work in theology, Scripture, or religion, you will find this book a useful tool to get your students to read the Bible.

# 7 THE POLITICS OF THE MONARCHY

*Indeed, Jerusalem and Judah so angered the LORD that he expelled them from his presence.  
(2 Kings 24:20)*

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter we will focus on the literary pattern of 1 and 2 Kings, the final books of the Deuteronomistic History. We will pay particular attention to what the kings did and how their actions affected the fate of the nation.

In the introductory material you will learn about the historical background of the time period and how the historian judges the kings of Israel. This information will help you understand the nonhistorical texts that we will examine in succeeding chapters.

We will concentrate on some representative “good” and “evil” kings. The narratives highlight the main ideological points of the Deuteronomistic Historian. Other important texts from Kings will be assigned in future chapters, where they will be used as background for nonhistorical texts. This chapter is designed to give you an overview of the themes, outline, and literary style of this material, without being exhaustive of the contents.

## THE NATION OF ISRAEL

### A BASIC OUTLINE

The period of the monarchy can be divided into three general periods: the United Monarchy (ca. 1020–920 BCE), when all of the tribes were unified under the rule of one king; the Divided Monarchy (920–722 BCE), when there were two kings, one in the north and one in the south; and the period of Judah alone (722–587 BCE), a period after the northern kingdom had fallen and only the southern kingdom remained.

The account of the United Monarchy is contained mostly in the books of Samuel, while the books of Kings tell us about the Divided Monarchy and Judah alone.

1 Samuel 13–31	Reign of Saul
2 Samuel 1:1—1 Kings 2:11	Reign of David
1 Kings 2:12—11:43	Reign of Solomon
1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17	Divided Monarchy
2 Kings 18–25	Judah alone

Certainly the most confusing part of this history is the period of the Divided Monarchy. At any given moment you have two different kings, one reigning in the north and one in the south. Some of these kings have long reigns, while others last only a few months. In addition, while one king rules one region, there may be four or more kings in the other.

Also, the way the Deuteronomistic History recounts the history of the Divided Monarchy is confusing. The history starts with the southern kingdom and speaks of the reign of its first king, Rehoboam. Next, it turns its attention to the north and tells of the king(s) who reigned at the same time. The account will stay focused on the north until the time of the death of the southern king; then it will switch to the south and tell about the southern king; then it will refocus on the north, and so on.

One reason it jumps around is because the redactors can assume that their Israelite audience is familiar with the history. The audience knows the difference between Samaria and Jerusalem, just as we know the difference between New York and Los Angeles. No one would have confused Ahab and Jehoshaphat, just as we would not confuse Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee.

## Kings and Prophets of the United Monarchy

Kings	Prophets
Saul 1020–1000	Samuel
David 1000–960	Nathan
Solomon 960–922	

## Kings and Prophets of the Divided Monarchy

Kings of Judah	Kings of Israel	Prophets	Ancient Near East
Rehoboam 922–915	Jeroboam I 922–901		<b>Egypt:</b> Shishak Invades Judah 918
Abijah 915–913			
Asa 913–873	Nadab 901–900 Baasha 900–877 Elah 877–876 Zimri 876 Tibni 876–?		<b>Syria:</b> Benhadad I 880–842
Jehoshaphat 873–849	Omri 876–869 Ahab 869–850 Ahaziah 850–849	Elijah Elisha	
Jehoram/Joram 849–842 Ahaziah 842 Athaliah 842–837	Jehoram 849–842		Hazael 842–806
Joash/Jehoash 837–800	Jehu 842–815		
Amaziah 800–783	Jehoahaz 815–801 Joash 801–786		Rezon 740–732
Uzziah 783–742			
Jotham 750–735	Jeroboam II 786–746 Zechariah 746–745	Amos (ca. 750) Hosea (ca. 745)	<b>Assyria:</b> Tiglath-Pileser 745–727
Ahaz 735–715	Shallum 745 Menahem 745–736	Isaiah (ca. 740)	
Syro-Ephraimitic War 734	Pekahiah 736–735 Pekah 735–732 Hoshea 732–722	Micah (ca. 730)	Damascus Falls to Assyrians in 732
	Samaria Falls to Assyrians 722		Shalmaneser V 727–722 Sargon II 722–705

## Kings and Prophets of Judah Alone

Kings of Judah	Prophets	Ancient Near East
Ahaz 735–715	Isaiah	<b>Assyria:</b>
Hezekiah 715–687	Isaiah	Sennacherib 705–681 <i>* Siege of Jerusaem 701</i>
Manasseh 687–642	Jeremiah	Esarhaddon 681–669
Amon 642–640	Zephaniah	Ashurbanipal 669–633?
Josiah 640–609	Habakkuk?	Ashuretilani 633–629? Sinsharishkun 629–612 <i>* Fall of Nineveh to Babylon 612</i>
<i>* Battle of Megiddo 609</i>	Nahum	<b>Egypt:</b> Necho 609–593
Jehoahaz 609		
Jehoiakim 609–598	Jeremiah	<b>Babylon:</b> Nebuchadnezzar
Jehoiakin 598–597 (in Jerusalem)		605–562
<i>* First Deportation 597</i>	Ezekiel	<i>* Battle of Carchemish 605</i>
Zedekiah 597–587		
<i>* Fall of Jerusalem to Babylon 587</i>		

We will see, however, that in the history, as well as in the psalms and the prophets, certain elements of the two kingdoms are referred to more often than others. This chart provides the bare bones of the Divided Monarchy.

### CHART OF THE TWO NATIONS

	South	North
<b>Name of the country</b>	Judah	Israel
<b>Number of tribes</b>	2	10
<b>Capital city</b>	Jerusalem	Samaria (most often)
<b>Location(s) of the national temple(s)</b>	Jerusalem (also referred to as "Zion")	Dan and Bethel
<b>Royal family</b>	Davidides	Various families; the most prominent were the Omrides
<b>Year the nation fell</b>	587	722
<b>To whom it fell</b>	Babylonians	Assyrians

Notice that the word *Israel* is ambiguous. On the one hand, *Israel* means the whole nation, including all twelve tribes. On the other hand, *Israel* can also refer solely to the northern kingdom. In addition, there were temples to Yahweh at various Israelite cities throughout the period of the Divided Monarchy.

The final thing to notice is that Israel, the northern kingdom, was the larger and more prosperous nation, because it was so fertile. Although you might conclude that it should have lasted longer, you can see that it fell almost two hundred fifty years before the south. Part of the north's problem was that it was more unstable than the south. It suffered many internal wars, as its throne passed from one family to another. It had no fixed capital and no single national shrine. Therefore, remaining unified was more difficult for Israel. In addition, the fertility of the land and the presence of good roads made this area attractive to foreign conquerors.

## SIGNPOSTS OF THE DEUTERONOMIST

You know that the Deuteronomistic redactors used sources in composing this history. These sources included lists of tribal holdings, stories of individual judges, and David's Court History. In the book of Kings, the redactors state that they used royal annals (none of which have survived). They also probably used some prophetic tales, especially those about Elijah.

But even with these sources, the historian's hand is seen most clearly in the book of Kings. The Deuteronomistic redactors begin and end the account of each king in a similar way. Each account starts with how old the king was when he came to the throne, what year he came to the throne, and often who his mother was. Each account ends with how long he reigned and whether he was a good or a bad king.

These assessments of each monarch use a consistent set of criteria. The kings who are evil do a number of similar things:

- They worship other gods.
- They allow for temples to Yahweh outside of Jerusalem.
- They maintain certain religious objects in the temple of Jerusalem that the Deuteronomists do not like.
- They do not listen to the prophets of Yahweh.
- They participate in religious rituals that the Deuteronomists consider illegitimate.



Notice that the kings are judged solely on their religious policies.

It is not hard to read between the lines: most of the kings of Judah and all of the kings of Israel do not meet the Deuteronomists' standards. And yet there were not religious revolts against this status quo. What should this tell you? While the Deuteronomists might say that it means that Israel was always evil, a contemporary historian would say that the Deuteronomists' view of Israelite religion was a minority position; it was not the official religion of Israel or Judah throughout most of their histories.

The Deuteronomists' portrayal of the consistent religious failures of the two kingdoms helps the audience accept the fall of the two nations as God's just judgment on a sinful people.

## GENERAL HISTORY OF THE FERTILE CRESCENT

While this is a complex time in Israel's history, I want to present those elements of its history that had the greatest impact on the nation of Israel. A fair amount of archaeological evidence exists for this period of Israel's history, since much of the relevant data comes from outside of Jerusalem. This evidence includes architectural, inscriptional, and religious remains.

### A POWER VACUUM

Within the Fertile Crescent, two areas had enough fresh water to support larger kingdoms: the Nile River Valley in northern Africa and Mesopotamia in the east. Israel arose as a nation when the countries that controlled these areas were busy fighting wars elsewhere. In fact, the nation of Israel was at its height under David, when there was a significant power vacuum in the Levant.

### ASSYRIAN ADVANCE

The situation was quite different two hundred years later. By then, the Egyptians were no longer at the peak of their power, although they had attained some stability in their royal succession. Assyria, located in the upper part of Mesopotamia, was a rising power; its two main cities were Ashur and Nineveh. After defeating the Babylonians to the southeast, the Assyrians gained control over all of Mesopotamia. Knowing that Egypt was not as powerful as it had once been, and that Egypt was a rich and fertile country, the Assyrians set their sights to their west and south. In between Assyria and Egypt lay the smaller countries of the Levant, countries such as Phoenicia, Syria, Philistia, and Israel.

## Focus on METHOD

### Historical Criticism and New Historicism

The phrase “historical criticism” can be confusing. On the one hand, it refers to all methods focused on the ancient meaning and context of the text, including source criticism, redaction criticism, text criticism, and so on. On the other hand, it is sometimes used to refer to the effort to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel. In this more narrow sense, the text is used as evidence for the historical reconstruction.

Historians use all evidence available to them. This includes archaeological evidence, texts found outside the Bible, music, art, and so on. Historians know that their reconstructions are imperfect, but their goal is to account for the widest variety of evidence.

The use of biblical texts in historical reconstructions has always been a tricky matter. For some people, the Bible’s sacred character makes it *de facto* a reliable source for Israelite history. For them, the account of the reign of Ahab, for instance, is a direct window into that history. For others, the fact that this material has an obvious point of view or ideology makes it worthless for deriving an accurate view of history. Sometimes people who assume the general reliability of the biblical text are called “maximalists,” while those who are skeptical about its historical value are called “minimalists.” Most historians of the biblical period fall between these two extremes.

One question that arises with reference to the biblical text is what are these texts evidence for? Given that they were written sometime in the ancient period, they do provide some evidence for the issues facing Israelites in the period in which they were written. Let me give you a modern example. If you were writing a paper for your U.S. history class about the lives of women in the South during the Civil War, you would probably get a bad grade if your only source was Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*. However, if you were writing a paper about southern women in the early 1930s, you could

use the novel as evidence of the issues and struggles that appealed to women of that era. The biblical texts *do* provide evidence of ancient history; the question is, what aspects of that history are they evidence for?

Historians of ancient Israel use the biblical texts more as evidence for issues facing the community at the time they were written than they do as direct evidence of the contents of that history. In addition, if we can isolate earlier sources that a redactor used, we can also use these sources as evidence for issues in the period of their composition. This is why biblical scholars invest so much effort in debating the date of various biblical texts. The Deuteronomistic History tells us more about Israelites in the late monarchy and early exile than it does about the historical David.

The latest development in historical criticism is called *New Historicism*, a term used for approaches that are more consciously aware of the literary and ideological nature of textual evidence. Rather than searching for nonbiased sources, it notes that all evidence has an ideology. Even an annal that records events is the result of someone deciding which events warrant recording. The solution for historical reconstruction is to embrace and explore the ideology rather than try to neutralize it.

New Historicism applies this approach to all historical evidence: iconography inscribes its ideology in its pictorial record. Architecture embodies spatial hierarchy. Art serves the interests of some patron. New Historicism asks whose interests are served by each piece of historical evidence.

New Historicism also focuses on the ideology of the historian. There is no neutral historical reconstruction. It is always undertaken to serve some purpose. Again New Historicism does not seek to neutralize the historian’s bias; objectivity cannot be a goal because it does not exist. Instead, new historians advocate making the purpose for historical research explicit.

In the 700s BCE, the Assyrians waged an assault on the Levant. Egypt, wishing to keep war away from its own country, sent troops to the area in an effort to stop the Assyrian advance.

### THE BRUTALITY OF ASSYRIAN WARFARE

The Assyrians were known throughout the Fertile Crescent for their brutality. In fact, the Assyrian kings loved to display their violent victories on large monuments. Israelite texts reflect their fear and hatred of the Assyrians.

One of the most common techniques for warfare in ancient times was siege warfare. Understanding what it involved can help to clarify some biblical texts, and even some biblical poetry and prophecies that we will later consider. To review, siege warfare refers to the process by which an invading army surrounds a *fortified city* (that is, a city that has high walls around it) for the purpose of cutting off the city's food and water supplies. The invading army hopes to "starve out" the people inside. They also try to break down the gates of the city or make holes in the walls. In addition, they try to convince the people inside to surrender. Siege warfare was a practice often used by the Assyrians.

The Israelites knew this, and so they prepared their cities in advance. They stored up enough food to last at least a year. They stored up water and wine. In Jerusalem, one of the kings built a tunnel to an underground spring so that the city would have a fresh water supply.

The reality of a siege is pretty grim. Imagine a city of several thousand people slowly starving to death. As starvation grips the population, the very old and the very young are among the first to die. People become more susceptible to disease; even a common cold or flu bug could wipe out a large segment of the population. Food and water supplies eventually become contaminated. The grain starts to mold, making already weak people susceptible to food poisoning. Ancient near-eastern texts describe people drinking their own urine to keep from dying of thirst and eating the newly dead to keep from starving.

The people within the city would try to hold out as long as they could, hoping that something would happen to their enemies to cause them to give up. For instance, the enemy army might run out of money, or they might be attacked by one of the city's allies. Or there might be a revolution back at the enemy's capital, or a disease might strike the enemy camp. Again, ancient evidence suggests that all of these things could happen.

When an army, such as the Assyrians, actually managed to conquer a city, they would loot the city, taking anything of value, raiding businesses, temples, private homes, and the palace. They would kill those who fought against them, imprison important citizens, and sexually assault their captives. The Assyrians would "depopulate" the cities that they conquered, forcing the elite classes to move to

some other location within the Assyrian empire, usually quite far away. They would scatter these powerful citizens in different cities so that they could not band together and fight.

When the Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 BCE, they dispersed the upper classes of the ten tribes of Israel all over the ancient Near East. Sometimes you hear references to the “lost tribes of Israel.” That phrase refers to this event. The practice of depopulation is more commonly called *exile*. As the Assyrians conquered and exiled other nations, they would settle some of those foreign groups in Samaria and Israel.

### THE ATTACK ON JERUSALEM

The Assyrians did not stop at Samaria. They advanced into Judah, attacking cities such as Lachish and Jerusalem. The Assyrian reliefs depicting the attack on Lachish have survived, providing historians with a unique glimpse into ancient war propaganda.

In addition to reliefs, we also have scattered annals and inscriptions from Assyria and Babylon that cover these final centuries of Israel and Judah’s existence. In many ways, these annals fill out the biblical picture, although at times they contradict the biblical account. While modern scholars refer to these documents as “annals,” they are no less ideological than any other ancient texts.

The biblical record and the Assyrian annals all attest to a siege of Jerusalem and a subjugation of its king, Hezekiah. They also agree that the city of Jerusalem did not fall in the siege, although they disagree as to why the city was spared. For our purposes, the reason is irrelevant.

What is relevant is that the people of Judah interpreted their survival as a great miracle. The city was saved by Yahweh, the divine warrior, and this belief affected the way some Judean leaders approached the Babylonian siege, more than a century later.

### THE REVENGE OF THE BABYLONIANS

Babylonia was located south and east of Assyria, and remained Assyria’s bitter enemy. Although the two countries worshipped the same gods and had similar ethnic backgrounds, the Babylonians hated the Assyrians for destroying their city and taking the symbols of their gods back to Assyria. As the Assyrian empire expanded, its home rule became increasingly unstable. Civil wars became more common, until eventually Babylonia was able to defeat Assyria (614–612).

## Annals, Inscriptions, and Other Political Propaganda

There is a large quantity of written evidence from Mesopotamia during the Iron Age period. Some of it is in the form of contracts, letters, and other material not meant to render a lasting legacy. This evidence is invaluable for reconstructing daily life because it is not focused on influencing a public audience. Historians would judge the bias of this material as “neutral.”

On the flip side, texts meant to glorify a particular king or temple have an obvious point of view. This material helps historians explore the ideology of various ancient social institutions.

In Mesopotamia these public documents came in a variety of forms, including the following:

**Annals.** These records provided a chronological listing of a king’s achievements. Although many modern annals attempt to be free of bias, merely recording events, ancient annals were not as historically reliable. They tended to record only successes and downplay defeat.

**Inscriptions.** These came in many forms. Sometimes they were very public, such as victory stele celebrating a king’s military campaigns. Sometimes they were literally buried, such as the inscribed foundation stones of public buildings. These burials were public events, however, which probably included a public declaration of the building inscription.

**Iconography.** This term refers to the visual elements of public works. The Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish are examples of iconography.

**Prophetic records.** We will read more about prophecy in future chapters. We do have records of prophetic oracles and dream visions from Mesopotamia. The ones from the Iron Age, such as the “Marduk Prophecy,” provided explanations for turning points in Mesopotamian national history.

These materials are important for historians, because they present the view of the monarchy and its relationship to the divine world that was operative in this society.

Babylonian power, however, did not differ much from Assyrian power. The Babylonians also wanted an empire, and they saw the defeat of Egypt as an important step. Once again war came to the Levant, as the Babylonians and Egypt went head to head. Although they also practiced siege warfare, at least their memorials did not glorify their violence. The Babylonians tried to control the peoples they conquered by setting up native-born kings who were sympathetic to them, or they would exile the elite classes to Babylon, stripping an area of its population. The Babylonians, however, kept national groups together.

The fate of Judah was linked to the whims of the Babylonians and the Egyptians. After 609 BCE, every king of Judah was put on the throne by either Egypt or Babylon. Judah may have looked like an independent nation throughout this time, but in reality it could do nothing without the support of one or the other of these superpowers.

When at last Judah tried to rebel against Babylonian control, the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, ordered the destruction of the city. This destruction came at the end of an eighteen-month siege, which was notable for the vast destruction that resulted. The city was burned, the temple torn down to its very foundations, and anyone with power was exiled to Babylon. Judah was not “lost,” however, because these exiles lived together and maintained a sense of national and religious identity.

### SUMMARY

To recap, the history of the nation of Israel was linked to the history of the Fertile Crescent. When Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon were waging war elsewhere, Israel could thrive. When any of these nations turned their sights on Israel, however, this small nation did not have the military power necessary to resist them. Israel’s rise and fall depended on the fortunes of these three nations.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEMPLE

One of the most important social institutions in the monarchy was the national temple at Jerusalem. Solomon, the son of David, built the temple of Jerusalem. As you may remember from the chapter on Israelite law, the Israelites marked places that they felt were “holy” by building a temple. For the Israelites, a location was holy because it was chosen by God as a place where people could feel closer to God. The most common way for the Israelites to express this idea was to call the temple the “house” of Yahweh. In fact, there is no separate word for *temple* in Hebrew; the word we translate as *temple* is the word for *house* in Hebrew.

A temple was literally God’s house. Although Christians sometimes also refer to a church as God’s house, the Israelites expressed this metaphor in a broad variety of ways. For example, the architecture of the temple mirrored the architecture of rich palaces, with the main building representing the residence itself, surrounded by courtyards, areas for cooking, store-rooms, and so on. The priests who served at the temple were sometimes called God’s servants, and their jobs paralleled the duties servants had in rich houses. Some were cooks; some were guards, musicians, butchers, tailors, and so on. The sacrifices that took place at the temple often mirrored lavish banquets, with large quantities of meat, breads, fruits, vegetables, wine, and oil offered to the divine resident. When a community gathered around the temple, they gathered around the house of the divine resident.

The focal point of the temple liturgies was within the interior of the temple complex, even if the liturgies could not be seen because of the courtyard walls. People prayed facing toward the temple, as if speaking to God there, just as many Christians pray facing the altar in a church, and Muslims pray facing the holy city of Mecca. Worship services used music as a central feature, just as ancient banquets featured music.

It may sound “primitive” or naive to say that the Israelites believed God lived in the temple, but the idea is common in the ancient Near East. Israel-

## Israelite Temples outside of Jerusalem

The Deuteronomistic Historian is so rhetorically effective that readers of the Bible even today are often convinced that his record of Israelite history is accurate. One example of this is the myth of the single temple.

Since the historian advocates having a single legitimate temple to Yahweh, many people assume that there was only one. However, it does not take much reading between the lines to realize that throughout most (if not all) of the monarchy there were temples to Yahweh outside of Jerusalem. After all, if there hadn’t been, why would Josiah have been praised for closing them?

Obviously, there were Yahweh temples in the northern kingdom while it existed. But even in Judah, there were temples outside of Jerusalem. The most obvious example is one found in the southern border fortress of Arad. This would have been a government-sponsored temple. The altar found there corresponds to the law of the altar found in Exodus.

Some historians claim that Josiah successfully consolidated the worship of Yahweh in a single temple. However, there is a wide variety of evidence of the existence of other temples after this time frame. The most famous of these is a temple in southern Egypt (Elephantine) where Jews had lived for centuries. Thus, archaeological remains of temples outside of Jerusalem are widespread both in terms of chronology and geography.

ites did not believe that the temple contained God fully. Instead, they talked about the temple housing one aspect of God. Most often this aspect was called “God’s glory,” although other texts call it “God’s name.” This idea is meant to convey the theological notion that God was really present in the temple, even though God is not fully contained there. God still resides in heaven, even while in the temple.

## THE LAYOUT OF THE TEMPLE

Several texts in the Bible strive to provide a description of the layout of the temple. These temple descriptions are not archives of actual plans, but rather ideal plans for the perfect temple. The temple descriptions do not completely agree with each other.

This genre of temple description is foreign to us; we do not usually think of church plans as theological revelations, so it is difficult for us to appreciate these kinds of texts. Two major theological issues are addressed in these plans: the presence of God and the proper order of human society. Let me consider each in turn.

# The Bible in the **CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

## Jesus’ Presence in the Eucharist

Don’t worry; I’m not going to rehash the arguments concerning consubstantiation and transubstantiation. However, the Christian belief that Christ is present in the Eucharist can give some Christians a way to think about the ancient view that God was present in the temple.

Many Christian denominations, including Catholics, believe that Christ is really and actually present in consecrated hosts. For them, the words, “This is my body; this is my blood” are not just metaphors. There is a real change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. These Christians do not believe that Christ is fully contained in the hosts, but rather that some aspect of Christ is contained there.

In Catholicism, this belief is manifested in a variety of rituals and practices. For instance, consecrated hosts are stored in something called a “tabernacle” (notice that it

is named for the portable “temple” or tent shrine used by the Israelites in the wilderness). A special candle is lit in the church to indicate that consecrated hosts (and, therefore, Christ) are present. Catholics cannot just put the host in their pocket to eat later. Leftover wine cannot be poured down a sink, where the liquids end up in a sewer; it must be drunk. (Similarly, holy water and water used to wash dishes used in Mass have to be poured down a special sink that goes directly into the ground, rather than one attached to the sewer system.)

These brief examples show that some Christian denominations, just like ancient Israelites, viewed the real presence of their god as so central to their worship that many aspects of their rituals reflect this theological tenet.

Because the temple housed the real presence of a god, ancient near-eastern texts reflecting on divine absence in times of national disaster sometimes portray this situation as the god's abandonment of the temple. We will see that Israelite texts do the same thing.

Temple plans also had clearly marked spheres of holiness. Whatever was closest to the place where the divinity resided was holiest. Access to different spheres was increasingly limited, then, and these gradations of access demonstrated the Israelites' view of social organization. This aspect of the temple changes in Israelite texts. For example, some plans allow foreigners who worship Yahweh to be in the same area as Israelites, but others exclude them. The separation of men and women is a very late development, not reflected in the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

## THE POLITICS OF THE MONARCHY: READING THE BOOKS OF KINGS

### I KINGS 3:3–28: A WISE KING

As 1 Kings opens, David, on his deathbed, must decide which of his remaining sons will rule after him. He picks Solomon, although Solomon is neither the oldest son nor the son of an important wife. He is crowned king before David dies. After David dies, Solomon kills or banishes his opponents. At the beginning of chapter 3, the text notes that he marries the Pharaoh's daughter, a sign of how powerful Solomon has become.

One of the most important attributes that a king needed in the ancient world was wisdom. This was because the king's primary duty was to maintain justice in his realm, and the ability to judge what was just was part of being wise. This text tells us how Solomon acquired his great wisdom.

#### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**Gibeon.** A city that was north of Jerusalem in the territory belonging to Benjamin. It is not clear why this was the main shrine at the time, since the Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem. Perhaps the altar associated with the ark was too small for the "1000 burnt offerings" made at Gibeon.

**A dream vision.** Israelites believed that God could speak to prophets (and others) through dream visions.

**"I do not know how to go out or come in."** This phrase means that the person does not know right from wrong.



## LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. This text describes the source of Solomon's wisdom. Why does God grant it to him? What else is he given?
2. How is the story of the two mothers related to the account of Solomon's wisdom?

## SOLOMON, THE WISE

Here's a story that would have made perfect sense to an ancient audience, but that strikes us as a bit odd today. The story presumes that you know that the most important thing a king needs to be great is wisdom. There are many tales from Mesopotamia and the Levant of wise kings. The kings were the "chief justices" of their day, the final court of appeal. You will recall that the court system of the elders, which was in place before the monarchy, only served landowners. Royal courts also served the poor.

A judge needed "wisdom" to make just decisions. While this is still true today, it was even truer in an era that had no DNA testing and no access to fingerprints or other scientific methods of investigation. In cases where people were lying, it was the judge's responsibility to "discern" who was telling the truth. Wisdom, kingship, and justice are so closely intertwined, that even texts that praise Yahweh as king note God's wisdom and justice.

This text relates how Solomon attained his wisdom. He is depicted as a pious man, making many sacrifices to Yahweh. A few "irregularities" occur in this text. First, he acts like a priest, making sacrifices, and sleeping in the temple. While Saul was punished for making sacrifices, Solomon seems to be rewarded. Second, he acts like a prophet when God appears to him in a dream. He is the only king who receives such a prophetic revelation.

We do not know what motivates God to offer Solomon anything that he wants. Instead, the text focuses on Solomon: what will he do with this opportunity? The text suggests that it was a test. Will Solomon ask for something selfish or foolish? He passes the test by asking for wisdom.

Solomon's speech is marked by its elevated rhetoric. He speaks as a humble servant. When he states that he is only a child, we are supposed to understand this as a metaphor. He's an adult, who has already married the Pharaoh's daughter and "taken care of" his opposition. The metaphor of a child matches Solomon's request. A child is someone who not is able to make his or her own decisions, someone an adult must speak for. Solomon uses the

metaphor to suggest his assessment of his faults: his inability to discern what is right and wrong.

The second half of the chapter follows the first quite naturally. The account of the two women illustrates Solomon's great wisdom. He must judge a case between two poor people. He has no evidence to rely on to make a judgment: there are no witnesses to the alleged crime and no physical evidence available in ancient times to determine the real mother. Solomon must discern who is telling the truth; that is, he must reach a decision on the basis of his wisdom. While we might be horrified that he first proposes to cut the surviving child in half, we soon realize that he never intended to carry through his proposition. Solomon knew that the real mother would not allow him to do this. That is how he decides the truth in this case.

The text ends with the public acknowledgement of Solomon's wisdom. The people realize that he has "God's wisdom," and so they know that he can make just judgments and rule as a great king.

## 1 KINGS 6:1–38: SOLOMON BUILDS THE TEMPLE

According to the account in Kings, Solomon's greatest achievement was building the temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem. This passage describes the construction of the main part of the temple, the divine residence.

### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**The main parts of the temple.** Another name for *vestibule* is "porch." The *nave* was the central room in the building. The *inner sanctuary* was also called the "Holy of Holies." It was the place where the ark was located. Because the ark was there, God's presence was there as well.

**Cherubim.** These were composite beings who served God in heaven. The Israelites pictured a cherub with a human body, multiple wings, and a head with two or more faces. One of the faces was human, but the others were usually animals.

### LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. Why does the text provide so much detail about the materials used to build the temple?
2. How are the cherubim similar to and different from the cherubim described in Exodus 25:17–22?

### THE GLORY OF THE TEMPLE

This text shows the importance of every element of the temple for the ancient Israelites. This chapter carefully describes the sanctuary building, which would have corresponded to a king's personal living quarters in a royal palace. A courtyard, where the animal sacrifices were burned, surrounds this "house," just as a palace had courtyards. The following chapter describes the parts of the courtyard, as well as some of the items used inside the sanctuary.

The descriptions are so detailed that people today can make models of the temple from them. When the descriptions are precisely followed, it is clear that the materials used reflect the holiness of different areas of the temple. The closer to the center, or Holy of Holies, the more expensive are the materials used. The details about the building materials express this belief in spheres of increasing holiness.

We presume that the temple rituals generally follow the descriptions of the ritual calendars in the Pentateuch. According to the descriptions, a variety of sacrifices were conducted by the priests on behalf of the people. These would include daily offerings; offerings on the Sabbath, New Moons, and high holy days; sin offerings; thank offerings; peace offerings; and so on. These offerings were accompanied by prayers, music, and processions. We will look at the temple music, known now as "the psalms," in chapter 8. At some point in Israel's history, access to the inner court of the temple was strictly limited to the priests; it is debated when this practice developed.

The Babylonians destroyed this temple in 587 BCE, when they destroyed Jerusalem. A second temple was built at the same spot after the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile, and this temple lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE. Both temples started out modestly but were expanded by later rulers. Judean kings added courtyards to the first temple. King Herod sponsored a massive expansion of the second temple in the years just prior to Jesus' birth. All that stands of the temple today is a retaining wall Herod had built to increase the size of the courts around the sanctuary. Today this wall is called the "Wailing Wall" or "Western Wall" where Jews gather to both pray and mourn the loss of the temple.

### I KINGS 8:1–11 AND 22–30: PRAYING TOWARD GOD

After the description of the temple, the story in Kings speaks of the dedication of the temple. The main part of this ritual was the procession and placement of the ark into the sanctuary, marking God's entrance into the house. Solomon then offers a long prayer on behalf of the nation.

The first passage describes the entrance of the ark into the temple, which represents God's entrance into the sanctuary. The second passage is part of Solomon's prayer after the ark was installed, in which he talks about the temple's connection to prayer.

#### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**Horeb.** This is the Deuteronomist's name for Sinai.

**God's glory.** One way of describing God's presence is to speak of "God's glory." This "glory" is sometimes described as a light, other times as a cloud. While we think of these as two different things, the Israelites probably meant something that obscured the view of all else, such as glare in fog. The Deuteronomist usually refers to God's presence, however, as "God's name."

#### LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. When does God's glory appear to the crowd?
2. In 1 Kings 8:24, what covenant does Solomon mention?

#### THE TEMPLE AND PRAYER

The first part of the reading describes the entrance of the ark into the temple. Notice the solemnity that surrounds this procession: Levites carry the ark, while Solomon makes a huge number of sacrifices. Although the passage connects the ark to the days of Moses, what is really important is that it symbolized God's presence in the temple. That presence is manifested in the glorious cloud that shines from the building after the Levites exit.

The second passage comes from a long prayer that Solomon utters after the ark is installed. The part that I had you read describes the theology of God's presence. The first thing to notice is the connection between the temple and the Davidic monarchy, made explicit by the reference to the covenant with David in 1 Kings 8:24. The temple symbolizes God's approval of this dynasty. The temple and the monarchy go hand in hand.

The prayer of Solomon makes clear that the Israelites did not believe that God was actually "contained" in the temple or physically located there. As Solomon states, "Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Solomon is not denying that some real aspect of God's presence is in the temple. He expresses this a bit further on when he quotes God saying, "My name shall be there" (1 Kings 8:29).

These two lines recognize that God is present everywhere, yet experienced as more present in certain holy places.

What is most interesting about Solomon's prayer is the connection that it makes between the temple and prayer. In reality, most of the rituals that took place in the temple were unobserved by the outside world. The priests alone made the daily sacrifices in the courtyard. Later temple plans forbade Israelites from entering this inner courtyard where animal sacrifice was carried out. This seems to leave no place for most Israelites to worship Yahweh. Yet, we know that people did gather on holy days in the outer courts of the temple to pray as the sacrifices were carried out. They also gathered at times of national crisis to pray to God to come to their aid.

Solomon's prayer states that prayer directed toward any aspect of God's presence is heard by the one whose "eyes (are) open night and day" (1 Kings 8:29). Remember that the Deuteronomistic History, of which this is a part, was completed after the Babylonians had destroyed the temple. This text confirmed to the audience of kings living in exile, who had seen the temple destroyed, that prayer to God was still effective. God's presence in the temple was not what was most important, since the temple could not contain God anyway; people can pray to God anywhere.

## I KINGS 21:1–29: THE EVIL THAT KINGS DO

Following the narratives that concern the temple, the accounts turn to all the evil things that Solomon was doing: he had too many wives, overtaxed the people, ignored tribal boundaries, and built temples to gods other than Yahweh. After his reign, the kingdom of Israel split into two separate countries: Judah and Israel. The Deuteronomist depicts this split as a result of the sinful economic policies of Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

At this point, the history jumps back and forth, telling us about every king of these two countries. As part of that description, the redactors judge whether the king is good or evil. The remaining texts will examine some examples of each of these types.

We start with a northern king, Ahab, from around 873–853 BCE, who is greedy and misuses royal power. He was from a powerful family, and reigned when Israel was a prominent nation. One sign of his position is that he married a princess from Phoenicia named Jezebel. Several stories about Ahab appear in Kings, none of them good; we will read a few more when



*This cast of a royal seal is inscribed “Shema, servant of Jeroboam.” The seal was found in Megiddo, and likely refers to Jeroboam II, King of Israel in the ninth century BCE.*

we study the prophet Elijah. In this story you will see that all of his wealth and position did not satisfy his personal greed.

#### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**Jezeel.** This is a fertile valley in Israel.

**Ancestral land.** The Israelites believed that most of the land was given by God to certain tribes and families. Their inheritance laws were strict because the land needed to stay within that family.

**The royal seal.** This was an official stamp put on documents, which was supposed to be used only by the king. It guaranteed the authenticity of a given document.

**Elijah the Tishbite.** He was the most famous prophet of his day. We will read more about Elijah when we look at prophecy.

**A bad death.** Certain types of death were considered more shameful than others. For the Israelites, burial of the body was important, so it was bad to die in such a way that dogs ultimately ate your body.

**Torn clothes, sackcloth, and ashes.** These are all signs of repentance, as well as mourning. In this case, Ahab is repenting.

## LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. Why does Ahab want Naboth's land? How does Ahab eventually come to own it?
2. What will be the four punishments for Ahab?
3. How is the oracle modified in response to Ahab's repentance?

## AHAB AND JEZEBEL

Compared to Ahab, the sins of David and Solomon look mild. Ahab has no redeeming qualities and is rarely shown in a positive light. His biggest problem seems to be his wife. Ahab is a weak pawn in the hands of wicked Jezebel. In this story, Ahab acts like a spoiled child. He offers to buy Naboth's vineyard for a fair price, but when Naboth refuses, Ahab goes home and sulks. At this point, he seems petty but not dangerous. When Jezebel offers to get the vineyard for him, he does not ask her how she'll do it.

Like David plotting to kill Uriah, Jezebel conceives a plan to get rid of Naboth without being accused of murder. By sending word in the name of Ahab, the elders of the city assume that the plan is a command from the king himself. At the feast, the two men sitting on either side of Naboth are the only ones who can hear him. Israelite law stated that two witnesses were needed to convict someone of a capital offense. The two men can claim they heard him blaspheme God ("curse God") and speak treason ("curse the king"), even though he did no such thing. There are no other witnesses, so Naboth has no way to refute the charge. He is immediately stoned to death.

Why Ahab is then able to take possession of Naboth's land is unclear. We would have expected it to go to the oldest living male relative. Perhaps the text assumes that we know that Naboth was the last male in his line. Or perhaps land belonging to executed criminals was confiscated by the crown. What is clear is that taking Naboth's land was an act of pure indulgence. Ahab had no need for the vineyard; he simply wanted a vegetable garden near his house. Jezebel had no compelling reason to send the message, except she wanted to indulge her sulking husband. Naboth dies for no good reason.

While the crime is hidden from the people, God reveals it to Elijah. Notice that in the text Ahab is ultimately held responsible for Naboth's murder, even though he had no knowledge of Jezebel's actions. For the author, a good king should have known what was happening.

The oracle against Ahab represents a typical cursing formula. It starts out bad enough (dogs will lick your blood), and then escalates at every step in the curse: you'll have no dynasty; dogs will devour your wife's body; in fact, dogs will eat your whole family. And, by the way, in case that's not enough, even if your family dies away from the city, birds will eat their carcasses. This oracle is typical cursing "overkill." It suggests that what Ahab has done is completely unacceptable.

Ahab, however, does one redeeming thing: he repents. God responds to his repentance, but it is small comfort. Okay, God says, I won't do this to you. I'll do it to your son! If you read further into the book of Kings you will see some of these prophecies fulfilled. Ahab dies on the battlefield in the Jezreel valley, and dogs lick his blood (1 Kings 22:29–38). The widowed Jezebel is thrown from a window, and no one buries her. Instead, dogs eat her body, so that all that is left are her skull, hands, and feet (2 Kings 9:30–37).

## 2 KINGS 22:3—23:3: JOSIAH, THE PIOUS KING

The northern kingdom falls to the Assyrians in 722 BCE, but the south is saved when good king Hezekiah prays to God. We will read about Hezekiah in connection with the prophet Isaiah. The next two kings we will consider reigned over Judah alone. Manasseh, whom we will look at last, reigned from 698 to 643, and Josiah from 640 to 609. They are the last two kings under whom there was some political stability. In Josiah we have an account of a good king. In fact, the Deuteronomistic Historian says he was the best king ever. Notice the role religion plays in this account. After the death of Josiah, the reigns of the kings are short-lived and are all determined by outside forces. The southern kingdom falls less than twenty-five years after the death of Josiah.

### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**Another batch of names.** Don't worry about all these names and positions. Just remember Josiah. These other names show how complex ancient government was.

**"Inquire of the Lord."** This means that Josiah wants them to consult a prophet so Josiah will know what he needs to do.

**"The king stood by the pillar."** There were two large pillars in the Jerusalem temple. The king read the law to the people while he stood by one of these pillars in the temple courtyard.



## LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. In verses 4–7, what has Josiah commanded his workers to do?
2. What does the high priest find?
3. How does the king react when the law is read to him?
4. Who tells the king what the law means?
5. What does the oracle say?
6. What does Josiah do after hearing the oracle?

## THE BOOK OF THE LAW

Although this passage is repetitive, it shows what the redactors liked in a king. They wanted him to be pious, faithful to Yahweh, and willing to repent when confronted with his own or his people's sins. When Josiah dies, the text says, "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 23:25). Notice how similar this verse is to the material we read in Deuteronomy 6:5. This may have marked the original ending of the earlier version of this history; it glorifies Josiah as the pious king, forming an *inclusio* with the first book of the Deuteronomistic History.

Josiah serves as the model of the perfect king for the Deuteronomistic Historian. Unlike even David, he remains upright and faithful throughout his life. When he realizes that his country has not been following God's law properly, he immediately responds: first by repenting and then by implementing nationwide reforms to bring his country into conformity with the law.

Biblical scholars have wondered what this "book of the law" was that Josiah found. After the book is found, 2 Kings 23 describes a series of religious reforms that Josiah implemented in response to the law. When we look at the reforms that Josiah enacted, and we look at the legal texts in the Bible, it becomes clear that Josiah is observing the laws set out in the book of Deuteronomy. Some scholars conclude that "the book of law" that Josiah found was the law that is now contained in the book of Deuteronomy.

A large part of this law included shutting down all temples, shrines, and altars to Yahweh outside of Jerusalem. Remember that Solomon had built the temple to Yahweh, but he had not made it the only temple. There were still temples to Yahweh throughout Israel, and there were even temples to other gods built by kings such as Solomon.

This multiplicity of temples did not sit well with Josiah, for under him Jerusalem would reach its zenith. First, Josiah shut down all the temples to other gods throughout the land. Second, and equally significant, he made Jerusalem the only city where sacrifices to Yahweh could be offered, the only place where God “dwelled.” Third, he cleared the temple of items that the authors of the text did not like, such as the “image of Asherah” (23:6) and “the chariots of the sun” (23:11). For the Deuteronomistic Historian, Josiah’s insistence on only one temple was correct theology. Yahweh alone was Israel’s God. Yahweh alone chose where to dwell. Jerusalem alone was the place for this temple.

The reign of Josiah, however, posed a small problem for this history. According to Deuteronomy, God rewards good actions and punishes evil actions. We have seen this principle at work in the oracles against David and Ahab. Josiah, as the most pious king, should have lived a long and blessed life. However, he dies on the battlefield at a relatively young age, around thirty-nine or forty. Furthermore, as I noted earlier, Jerusalem, the temple, and the whole nation are completely destroyed by the Babylonians less than twenty-five years later, in fulfillment of the oracle that the prophet speaks when she reads the law. How can this be? Why was God so cruel to Josiah?

## 2 KINGS 21:1–18: THE SINS OF MANASSEH

The Deuteronomistic Historian believed that Josiah and the nation suffered as punishment for the many sins of Manasseh. While the previous text told us what the best king was like, this one shows us the most evil one.

This story actually comes before the last one. We are reading it last because, more than any other story, it demonstrates that the whole point of Deuteronomistic History is to explain why the nation fell and why not even the glory of David nor the piety of Josiah could save it.

### IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

**Worship of other gods.** In describing the sins of Manasseh, the history focuses on his worship of other gods. Baal and Asherah were gods of the Canaanites, and the “host of heaven” referred to the pantheon of polytheistic nations such as Assyria.

**“He made his son pass through the fire.”** This means he performed child sacrifice.

**Your ears will tingle.** This biblical expression means you have heard something shocking.

**A measuring line and a plummet.** These were builders' tools, which gauged whether a structure was sound. If not, it was destroyed. God is going to "measure up" Judah. The presumption is that it will not be "straight" and God will have to destroy it.

**The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah.** This is one of the sources that the Deuteronomistic Historian used to write this history. It did not survive; all we know about it is its title.

#### LOOKING CLOSELY AT THE TEXT

1. Name at least three evil things that Manasseh did, according to 2 Kings 21:3–7.
2. What will be the punishment for all of this evil?

#### THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

The text is clear: Manasseh is evil, and because of him Judah and Jerusalem will be destroyed. Notice the religious focus of this account. He is not accused of greed, oppressing the poor, or sexual misconduct. Manasseh's sins are religious sins. Except for verse 16, which states that he killed many innocent people, all his sins had to do with religion: the worship of other gods and the improper worship of Yahweh. In fact, the oracle of punishment comes before verse 16; Manasseh and Judah are condemned for religious violations, not because of violence and bloodshed.

The burning indictment against Manasseh reminds us that this is not a purely political history. Politically and economically, Manasseh was quite successful. He had a long reign (fifty-five years) and lived a long life, dying at the ripe age of sixty-six. Judah was at peace throughout his whole reign, and, in fact, grew under his leadership. Other biblical texts do not judge Manasseh so harshly, and there is even a whole separate text entitled "The Prayer of Manasseh" that is considered canonical by Eastern Orthodox Christians.

For the Deuteronomistic Historian, Manasseh's reign leads to Judah's death sentence. Although the enactment of this punishment does not occur until three generations later, not even the piety of Josiah can turn it back. The Deuteronomists believed that God could and did punish sin up to three generations after the sin had been committed. Many biblical texts disagree with the history on this point. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Chronicles, for instance, all insist that God does not mete out punishment on succeeding generations. Here, however, the end of this history shows the principle of intergenerational punishment at work. Judah falls because of the sins of Manasseh.

## The Third Generation after Manasseh

It may be hard to follow how the Deuteronomist determines that the sin of Manasseh is punished within three generations, since there are six kings that fol-

low him. However, this chart shows you how each king is related to Manasseh:

Manasseh	Sinful king responsible for the fall of Jerusalem	Generation 0
Amon	Son of Manasseh	First subsequent generation
Josiah	Son of Amon, grandson of Manasseh	Second generation
Jehoahaz	Son of Josiah, great-grandson of Manasseh	Third generation
Eliakim/Jehoiakim	Son of Josiah, great-grandson of Manasseh	Third generation
Jehoiachin	Son of Jehoiakim, great-great-grandson of Manasseh; exiled to Babylon	Fourth generation
Zedekiah/Mattaniah	Uncle of Jehoiachin, therefore a great-grandson of Manasseh; the city falls during his reign	Third generation

You see, then, that Zedekiah is part of the third generation after Manasseh; punishment for Manasseh's sins occurs within that generation.

What about Jehoiachin? Isn't he also punished, even though he's part of the fourth generation? Look at the end of the history, 2 Kings 25:27–30. The book ends with a notice of the release of Jehoiachin. Scholars debate the meaning of this ending for understanding the purpose of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole. Some people see this as a late, secondary ad-

dition. Others view it as a note of hope, and some even say that the whole history leads to an exaltation of Jehoiachin. I think the answer is much simpler. I think it merely cleans up the Deuteronomist's historical schema. By including these lines, he can maintain that the fall of the city was the result of the sins of Manasseh, while still holding that God's punishment only lasts three generations.

We are meant to read the final edition of the Deuteronomistic History through this lens. As we read about Israel's corruption under the judges, David's sins with Bathsheba, and Ahab's childish greed, we read an explanation. It is an explanation why the glorious temple of Yahweh, God's own and only dwelling place, was looted, burned, and torn down by the defiling hands of the Babylonians. How could this happen? How could God have stood by and watched as the evil ones celebrated on the rubble of the house of the LORD? For the Deuteronomist, it was Israel's just punishment for a history of sin, greed, and corruption.

## SUMMARY: A FAILED HISTORY REVISITED

Unless we understand the primary purpose of this history, we can easily forget that it is calling the audience to examine its own sin and guilt. It is so easy to

read this history and think, “Why were *they* always sinning? Why didn’t *they* just do what they were supposed to do?” But this is not about some other evil “them.” This was written by Israelites for Israelites.

The accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah ask the audience to look at themselves in this history of sin and failure. The Deuteronomistic Historian is a skilled author. The questions the history poses still resonate in the modern world. What is the relationship between power and responsibility? Are there limits to human authority? Does an individual’s power render her or him above the law? What motivates people who have power, money, and prestige to continue to take what is not theirs? And, finally, if a person is blessed with success, does that mean that he or she is a moral person and in God’s graces?

### FOR REVIEW

1. What are the three periods of the Monarchy?
2. Why is the word *Israel* ambiguous?
3. During the Divided Monarchy, which country was larger and more prosperous, although less stable?
4. What is siege warfare?
5. How did the policies of exile differ between Assyria and Babylon?
6. What is the general layout of the temple, and what two issues do temple plans address?

### FOR FURTHER READING

This is a good place to delve into the question of the double redaction of the Deuteronomistic History. One of the most influential books on this topic is by Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). For contemporary discussions of the issue, see *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies in the Deuteronomistic History*, edited by Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000) and *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research*, edited by Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi (JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000).

There are many books that deal with recent developments in the historical critical method. One that surveys some of the current debates in biblical history is *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age*, by John J.

Collins (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For a book that surveys the political reality of ancient Israel, see *The Politics of Ancient Israel*, by Norman K. Gottwald (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

There have been several good discussions of the ideology of Solomon's temple. From the perspective of archaeology, see Elizabeth Bloch Smith's essays, "Who Is the King of Glory?' Solomon's Temple and Its Symbolism," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, edited by Michael D. Coogan et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pages 18–31, and "Solomon's Temple: The Politics of Ritual Space," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, edited by Barry M. Gittlen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pages 83–94. For the royal ideology behind the account in 1 Kings, see Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup 115; JSOT/ ASOR monograph 5; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

A variety of studies of Israelite religion during the period of the monarchy have challenged the Deuteronomistic depiction of the period. Many of these are written for specialists in the field.

# GLOSSARY

**Abrahamic covenant.** God's promise to Abraham that he would become a great nation in the land of the southern Levant. This promise was inherited by Abraham's descendants.

**allegory.** A literary device in which the literal meaning on the page is a set of symbols for another concept or subject. For example, the characterization of Jacob may be a symbol set for the characteristics of the nation of Israel.

**altar.** A structure on which sacrifices were made. Although there were incense altars, most mentions of altars in the Bible refer to the place where meat offered to a deity would be burned.

**amen.** The Hebrew word for "it is true" or "so be it." It is used as a liturgical response in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The word has the same Hebrew root as "faith" and is also connected with a word meaning "truth."

**Anat.** An important Canaanite goddess, who was known primarily for her warrior attributes.

**annal.** A list of national or royal events catalogued by year.

**anoint.** A ritual action in which oil is poured or smeared on someone's head. This ritual marks the transition into a particular office or position. It is used as a central part of the coronation of a king and for designating a high priest.

**apocalyptic literature.** Coming from the Greek word meaning "a revelation," apocalyptic literature contains a secret revelation, often to a mythic figure from the past, using mythological symbolism. It often has a dualistic worldview, and looks for some resolution for unjust suffering by a righteous group.

