PART I

The Pre-Modern Origins of Western Historical Thought

CHAPTER ONE

Historiography in Ancient Israel

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Historiography, as reflected in the Old Testament, is a form of narrative that makes reference to past events in the history of the nation in a chronological sequence from the time of human and national origins to the historical period of the author. The purpose of such narratives is to articulate the people's corporate identity, to account for the nature of their present plight and to suggest their ultimate destiny. Although in form, as a narration of the past, it resembles modern historiography, it is fundamentally different in certain important respects. First, Israelite historiography is not critical of its sources of information about the past, which may include myths and legends about origins, however much it reshapes them for its own presentation. In this use of sources it did not yet share the skepticism of folk traditions that one finds within the classical historiography of Herodotus and Thucydides. Second, biblical history strongly reflects the view that Israel's deity plays an active role in the affairs of humanity and in the destiny of the people of Israel in particular; and this deity is the primary cause for historical events. While this religious belief stands in marked contrast with the secularized and humanistic modes of modern historical thought, it still shares much with the many teleological forms of historical thought that have arisen out of biblical historiography. More generally, the widespread modern belief that history is meaningful, that specific events have a reason or purpose, and that history is moving in an important direction can all be linked to themes in biblical historical writings.

Israelite historiography stands in even more marked contrast with the surrounding civilizations of the Near East, the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Hittites and the Egyptians. While these other cultures produced many monumental inscriptions and other forms of written records to memorialize the deeds of kings and to render an account of their actions to the gods, they did not produce narratives of the nation's past to articulate corporate identity. By contrast, the deeds of kings and leaders are rarely celebrated in Israel's history

and more is said about their failures than their achievements. Nevertheless, some formal similarities between Near Eastern and Israelite historical genres may be observed at a number of points. One such example lies in the development of a chronology of the past by means of the construction of king-lists, consisting of the sequence of rulers of a nation and the length of each reign, sometimes correlated with that of a neighboring state. However, while such lists may serve the ideological purpose of legitimating the royal authority of a state or serve the practical purpose of facilitating record keeping in other Near Eastern states, in Israelite historiography it became the chronological framework for the ordering and narrating of historical events. Some formal similarities may also be observed between royal annals and chronicles of Near Eastern states and their imitation by Israelite historians in the presentation of events in their histories. This has led some scholars to conjecture the existence of such annals and chronicles within the Israelite and Judean courts. In most cases, however, it is more likely a case of Israelite historians imitating a literary style that is used for quite different purposes in the biblical context. Consequently, the genres of historical writing in other ancient civilizations of the Near East are of only limited assistance in helping us to understand the nature of historical thought in Ancient Israel.

The biblical history of the people of Israel that is contained in the Old Testament from Genesis to 2 Kings and that stretches chronologically from the time of creation to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE is not the work of a single historian or period of time. Rather, it represents the work of three major historians, writing in succession with the later ones supplementing the work of the earlier. There are also some literary additions of more limited scope. I will not present the critical basis for such a literary analysis here; instead I will focus upon the contributions that each of these historians made to Israelite historical thought.

The scope of this aggregate historical work has, in the past, often been obscured by the traditional division between the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and the historical books (Joshua to 2 Kings). This has led to a quite different approach to the compositional history of the Pentateuch from that of the historical books and to a lively debate about the literary limits of each historian's work and when and by whom the sections of the Old Testament were actually written. The view that has now won broad acceptance is that Deuteronomy belongs to the following historical books (Joshua to 2 Kings) as a kind of ideological introduction to what is called "the Deuteronomistic History" (DtrH),[1] and its author the Deuteronomist (Dtr). This leaves a Tetrateuch (Genesis to Numbers) which is a combination of two basic "documents", one lay or non-priestly (the so-called Yahwist or J) and one priestly (P). How these relate to each other and how the two together relate to Deuteronomy and DtrH is still a matter of scholarly dispute. For the purpose of this essay I will follow my own solution to these issues which is to propose

that DtrH is the earliest of these histories, that it was supplemented by J in Genesis to Numbers and that this was further augmented by P.[2] In what follows, I will treat these three anonymous historians in this order, and refer to them with the abbreviated letter by which they are known in modern scholarship. Finally, I will also note the historical tradition of the biblical books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah which challenges and revises at least part of the earlier historical narratives in the Hebrew Bible.

The Deuteronomistic History (DtrH)

This earliest Israelite historical narrative presents the whole history of the people from their origin in the wilderness under Moses through the successive stages of conquest of the promised land, settlement and life under the "judges," and the monarchy down to the demise of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The history is treated as an object lesson in obedience and disobedience to the law of Moses and the consequences that result from both. The historical work originated in a religious reform movement in the time of King Josiah of Judah (late 7th century BCE) that was based upon the "discovery" of a "book of the law" (2 Kings 22–23). This lawbook has been identified by scholars as the code of laws in Deuteronomy (Deut. 12–26), together with a prologue of admonitions (chs. 6–8) and a concluding series of blessings and curses (ch. 28). The historian (Dtr) in the early 6th century BCE took up this lawbook, expanded it with historical reflections upon the wilderness period and the circumstances in which the law was given by the god YAHWEH through Moses, and established a link to the conquest and settlement of the promised land through the appointment of Joshua to be the successor of Moses after his death.

Deuteronomy thus served as an exposition on the origin of the nation as a people under a solemn covenant with their god YAHWEH, the terms of which were set forth in the laws of the Decalogue and the Mosaic code. The deity was thereby bound to his promise to give the people of Israel "the land of the Amorites" – the land of the aboriginal population – and to maintain them in it and insure their prosperity in return for obedience to the law. In this way Josiah's reform program was construed as the constitutional basis of the nation beginning with the lawgiver, Moses. What follows in Joshua to 2 Kings is the way that the people and their leaders complied with these laws and the consequences of their obedience or lack of it through the various periods of their history.

The time of Joshua represents a kind of historical golden age in which the people are completely successful in gaining the promised land and at the same time remain faithful to the covenant throughout the lifetime of Joshua (Josh. 1–11). The period ends with a warning about breaking covenant loyalty with

YAHWEH and foreboding about the future (Josh. 23). The period of the Judges that follows illustrates the consequences of not heeding this admonition. The historian has taken up a number of stories about popular local heroes who achieved fame for some brave act of defiance against a tribal enemy or an occasion of charismatic leadership that rallied limited forces and achieved unusual victory over the superior forces of an oppressor (Judg. 3–16). These stories Dtr has put into the conceptual framework of a repetitive pattern with an ideological introduction (Judg. 2:6–3:6) to support his philosophy of history – a philosophy that stresses patterns of human virtues and human failings. Dtr suggests that after the generation of Joshua and his contemporaries the next generation forgot the deeds of YAHWEH and "did what was evil in his sight," namely serving other gods. As a consequence, YAHWEH gave them in submission to their enemies who oppressed them. Only then would they appeal to YAHWEH for help and he would then send them a deliverer who would rescue them. They would remain faithful for that generation only to fall back into their evil ways with the death of the deliverer. The highly diverse and independent stories are made to fit this scheme by assigning a generation of 40 years to each "judge" as the heroes are called, and the story about their act of deliverance is construed as the divine response to the people's repentance and cry for help. Instead of being merely local stories of no fixed date they are fitted into a generational succession of 40 years each and applied to the people as a whole. Thus Dtr has created a "period of the Judges" between the time of the conquest and the rise of the monarchy; and the history of every generation in this period has been given a clear religious meaning.

The account of the rise of the monarchy and the story of the first three kings of a United Monarchy over the whole people of Israel represents the next major phase of this history (1 Sam. 8–1 Kings 11). At the very outset of the monarchy Dtr expresses a deep ambivalence, through Samuel as spokesman for the deity, about this institution that can only succeed to the degree that the king is obedient to YAHWEH's laws and faithful to his covenant. This is in stark contrast to the other major powers of the Near East, where the monarchy seems to represent the only viable form of government instituted by the gods, and all the major historiographic texts of Mesopotamia and Egypt are intended to show how the king is the agent or embodiment of the divine will on earth.

Saul, the first king, begins well as the god's anointed leader to deliver the people from the Philistines, but as a result of disobedience to a divine command his dynasty is rejected and another one, "a person after god's own heart," – David – arises within Saul's own entourage as champion against the Philistines. After Saul's ignominious defeat at the hands of the Philistines, David replaces him and becomes king of the whole land. He is quite successful in subduing all his enemies and bringing peace to the land as well as establishing Jerusalem as the capital city. For Dtr, David is the one exemplary

monarch throughout his whole life who completely obeyed the god's laws, as Dtr never tires of repeating. As a reward for this obedience the god promises that his descendants will always sit on the throne in Jerusalem. David, who wishes to build a temple of cedar for the ark, will not do so but his son (Solomon) who will succeed him will do it.

Solomon fulfils David's wish and the god's promise by building the temple for the ark. At the same time the story of Solomon's temple brings to the fore another major Dtr principle, that the temple in Jerusalem should be the one place chosen by YAHWEH to place his Name, and his presence there in the symbolism of the ark makes it the only legitimate sanctuary. This claim was part of Josiah's reform movement in ca. 625 BCE, so that it is entirely anachronistic for the time of Solomon. There were, of course, many YAHWEH temples throughout Israel and Judah until their abolition by Josiah. Furthermore, the temple that Dtr describes as built by Solomon is also largely an ideological construct. It may be reminiscent of the temple at the end of the monarchy, but it has become highly idealized. Furthermore, one would expect from the language of the early prophets and Psalms that the object of veneration in the inner sanctuary is a seated figure of YAHWEH as Israel's divine king, not unlike other Near Eastern temples. Instead, in Dtr's presentation the divine presence is represented by the ark, a box that contains the laws of the covenant as presented in Deuteronomy. It is this constitution, expressing the will of the deity, that is enshrined at the center of the state. In short, Dtr wrote the history of Solomon's temple to establish the historical legitimacy of certain religious themes in the reform movement of a later time (a familiar pattern in the historical literature of most later cultures).

The rest of Dtr's history (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25) describes successive violations of the covenant and their fateful consequences. This begins with Solomon who, in violation of Deuteronomy, married many foreign princesses who encouraged the worship of foreign gods in Jerusalem. The deity therefore gave the northern ten tribes to Jeroboam after Solomon's death. If Jeroboam had followed the Davidic example of obedience to the law he could have established his dynasty in perpetuity over the Northern Kingdom. But he failed by setting up rival sanctuaries in the north with images of the deity in the form of "calves." Thus his dynasty is doomed, and since all the northern kings followed his bad example the Northern Kingdom itself is likewise doomed. The same fate befell the Kingdom of Judah in the south, in spite of a temporary reprieve for the sake of Josiah, who had reformed the kingdom on the basis of Deuteronomy. The accumulation of guilt, however, eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, harking back to the divine warning at the time the temple was built.

Some general remarks about this history are in order. This is a national history spanning the whole period from the time of Israel's origin in the wilderness to the end of the two monarchies. There is nothing comparable in

Near Eastern historiography that presents the life of a nation in this kind of linear narrative about the moral meaning of historical events. It is true that Dtr can sometimes take up an older Near Eastern form or genre and use it within his work. Thus the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua imitates the accounts of the wars of conquest by the Assyrians, even borrowing some quite specific motifs and language. Likewise, the two king-lists of Judah and Israel, similar to those used in Mesopotamia, can be used for the chronological framework of the history of the monarchy. However, neither in Egypt nor in Mesopotamia nor among the Hittites is there a history of the people that goes beyond the records of the deeds of kings or the chronological succession of their reigns. The virtues or failures of the people within these other nations are never mentioned.

The DtrH also articulates a strong and coherent sense of national and corporate identity. The criteria and limits of this identity are the shared history from origin to the end of Israel's national life, its common customs, laws and institutions and what should be avoided as foreign and intrusive, and its religious foundation in a covenant with the one national deity, YAHWEH. The relationship to the land as YAHWEH's land, promised and given as an "inheritance" to the people, is also basic to this sense of identity. Yet it is not just a geographic determination, as when a person from a certain region is known as a "man from x." The land becomes part of the whole ideological construct, so that to step outside of the religious and cultural boundaries of the Israelite identity is to forfeit any right to the land. A major legacy of biblical historiography is the fact that the ideology of identity becomes a fundamental aspect of its narrative structure and presentation of the people's past. There is nothing comparable to this in the rest of Near Eastern historiography,[3] but the creation of a people's identity by an appeal to their past is an aspect of historiography that reappears often in national histories of modern times.

We have noted above in our survey of the DtrH that divine intervention in the affairs of the nations is a major component in the historian's understanding of causality. In this respect biblical historiography is said to differ significantly from the later classical historians, though it is similar to the perspective of many Near Eastern historical texts. Yet this observation needs some qualification. The biblical historian could make a distinction between immediate and apparent causes of events and the final cause in the will or purpose of the deity. Thus the immediate cause of the breakup of the northern and southern tribes into two kingdoms is presented as the foolish decision of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, but it is said at the same time to have been "a turn of events brought about by YAHWEH" as a consequence of Solomon's sin in the matter of his mixed marriages and in conformity with a prophetic judgment on Solomon. The will of YAHWEH is the final cause determined long before the event itself. This distinction between short-term and long-term levels of causation is not limited to this passage alone, so that the divine intervention

in biblical historical narratives may be a little more sophisticated than it is often presented. At the same time classical historians such as Herodotus could also hint at divine intervention in human affairs in a manner not so different from that suggested here.[4]

Prophecy also plays a significant role in Dtr's historiography, especially in the books of Kings. This is not surprising, given the importance of the institution of prophecy during the time of the monarchy. One also finds that the king's consultation of prophets and omens before important military events or the building of temples was a common feature of Mesopotamian court life and historical texts. In Greek historiography, Herodotus likewise uses the warnings of wise counselors, the predictions of mantics, and the consultation of oracles as important structural devices throughout his history. In the biblical book of Kings, the pattern of prophecy and fulfillment always at the instigation of the one deity YAHWEH creates a strong sense of the divine control of events. When a prophecy and its fulfillment embraces several generations rather than simply the evaluation and immediate consequences of a particular event, it may suggest the notion of a larger divine plan and destiny. History as a whole can then be understood as a prophecy or omen that can disclose the future. In later times, as a consequence, prophets were thought of as historians and historians as prophets, so that the biblical history from Joshua to 2 Kings became known as the Former Prophets.

A brief word should also be said about the so-called Court History of David which is a later narrative that was added to Dtr's history of David (2 Sam 2:8–4:12; 8–20; 1 Kings 1–2). In the past some leading historians and biblical scholars regarded this composition as the work of a near contemporary of David or Solomon, based upon his own observations of the court and a piece of historiography rivaling that of Herodotus centuries before his time.[5] However, this cannot be the case because it is clearly dependent upon the information about David supplied by DtrH. It must be a later addition and therefore fiction.[6]

The presentation of David in the Court History is in stark contrast with the idealization of David in DtrH. It is in the Court History that David has an affair with Bathsheba and then has her husband, Uriah, his loyal warrior, murdered to cover up the affair when Bathsheba finds that she is pregnant. Amnon, David's eldest son, rapes his half sister and when David does nothing about it, the girl's full brother Absalom murders Amnon in revenge. Later Absalom leads a rebellion against his father's rule and takes the throne only to be defeated in a final showdown between his own and his father's forces. In the end Solomon, the younger surviving son of David, gains the throne by a palace intrigue and by the murder of his older brother and his other enemies at court.

The Court History, generally regarded as the finest prose in the Hebrew Bible, is pseudo-historiography embedded within the DtrH in the Persian period (5th or 4th century BCE). Many in this period hoped for a revival of

the Judean monarchy, a continuation of the house of David. In my view, the object of the Court History was to present an anti-monarchic view of the house of David to discourage any hope of such a revival. It presents David as one who is no better than Ahab and Jeroboam, the most notorious of the kings of Israel. He is one who does "what is evil in the eyes of YAHWEH" and "despises the word of YAHWEH," and his sons are likewise morally corrupt. Solomon was not the true heir to the throne and the fulfillment of divine promise, but became king through the deception of the queen, Solomon's mother, and the prophet Nathan over the claim of the elder brother. The portrayal of this oriental monarchy is much like one finds in Herodotus' presentation of the Persian kings. What the Court History shares with the DtrH, however, is an emphasis on the actions of specific historical figures and a strong desire to draw moral or political lessons from past events.

The Yahwist's History (J)

As indicated above, the Yahwist (J), who wrote his work in the mid-6th century BCE among the exiled Jews in Babylon, supplemented the DtrH by adding his narrative of Genesis – Numbers to Deuteronomy as a historical prologue.[7] By extending the national history of DtrH back into primeval times and the origins of humanity, J transformed the national tradition into universal history. The only way that this could be done was by using myths of origins that were set within a framework of genealogies, creating a temporal sequence down to "historical" times. J shares such origin myths with other peoples of antiquity, from whom some were directly or indirectly adopted. These include accounts of creation, the origins and invention of culture, the age of semi-divine heroes, the great flood, and the building of the first cities. Yet the way in which he orders these materials in his historical scheme of things has great significance for his articulation of universal history.

Mesopotamia had a number of creation traditions which recounted the origins of the cosmos and of humanity to account for the peoples of what is now southern Iraq, their way of life and institutions, and their cities and temples. This primeval age was separated from "historical" time by means of a great flood which resulted in the destruction of this earlier population and a second, more defective, creation of different types of peoples to populate the world. A connection was made between the flood and later times by means of a list of kings beginning with the descent of kingship from heaven and the fiction of one continuous series of dynasties that ruled from various centers in Mesopotamia from the time of the flood to contemporary history. The degree of universality in the Mesopotamian prehistory is limited to etiological explanation for the origins of life in Babylonia (Sumer-Akkad) and the legitimation of the institution of kingship in this area.[8]

By contrast, the Greeks' traditions of primeval times recognize the multiple origins of the various families of peoples within the Greek world and beyond, which are then reflected in parallel genealogies from their heroic and ancestral beginnings to later times. The great divide for them is the Trojan war which brought to an end the heroic age.[9] The continuity with historical times is portrayed by means of aristocratic genealogies from heroes to the leading families of various city states.

In the book of Genesis, J takes up the notion of a single creation of humanity, as in Mesopotamia, but he restricts it to one human pair from whom the rest of humanity is derived and establishes a direct genealogical connection to the time of the flood. Even when this disaster results in a new beginning, as in Mesopotamia, it is not a new creation but the continuation of one family whose members are then presented as the progenitors of all the families of the earth. It is only at several generations removed from this beginning, and in one of the branches of the genealogical tree, that the ancestors of the Israelite people come into focus. This creates quite a remarkable conceptual unity for an understanding of universal history that is entirely lacking in the other origin traditions of antiquity and it has a very powerful influence on later notions of universal history.

To support this universalistic perspective, J has identified the national god of the Israelites, YAHWEH, as the creator god and the only god in control of the affairs of humans and the world. This suggests a common moral order in the world to which all are responsible and a common human experience beyond the peculiar customs and institutions of the one people, Israel. The universal moral order, in the form of stories about crimes and punishment, is the fundamental theme of the primeval history. The universal judgment of the flood, in particular, gives this history an enduring moral, teleological, understanding of the world that supports notions about the end or goal of history. If the DtrH is concerned with the history of one nation whose destiny is determined by a national law code under the aegis of a national god, then J presents a universal moral order under the blessing or judgment of a universal deity.

The stories of the people's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's twelve sons (and one daughter),[10] make up the larger part of Genesis (12–50). For the purpose of filling out this period of the nation's pre-history, the historian J has taken up a body of local traditions about ancestors and has arranged them into a genealogical structure of successive generations and by means of an itinerary associated them with the whole region of the land of Israel. In a manner similar to early Greek tradition, the ancestors are set forth in four generations from Abraham to the twelve sons of Jacob and thereby encompass not only the forefathers of the tribes of Israel (= Jacob), but also the closely related neighboring peoples of Aram (Syria), Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Arabs. The Phoenician/Canaanite peoples are viewed as part of the older indigenous population.

According to J, already during the time of the ancestors the destiny of their offspring was determined by the deity's promises of nationhood, land, and prosperity to the forefathers. These promises are repeated and transmitted to each successive generation, so that they now give historical meaning to the period as a whole and the episodes within it. It is in this way that J has created an important new dimension to the Israelite-Jewish sense of identity, because J adds to Dtr's criteria for national identity that of an ethnic identity based upon the myth of generic descent from a common set of ancestors to whom the deity YAHWEH has given an unconditional promise of peoplehood. Even after the demise of the state and the loss of a land, the people in exile and diaspora (J's own social context) could maintain a sense of identity through their connection to Abraham and the aspirations of the patriarchal promises.

This articulation of ethnic identity in the patriarchal age is tied, by means of the Joseph story and the sojourn in Egypt, to the originally quite separate tradition of the people's origin in Egypt. It is in this period that the group of ancestors grows into a nation within a nation and constitutes a threat that leads to their expulsion. The story of their oppression in Egypt, their deliverance and exodus, their wilderness wanderings and their arrival on the borders of the "promised" land, is construed as a biography of Moses.[11] In almost every episode in J's presentation of the story, Moses plays a dominant role. This is a quite remarkable development of a historiographic form that has no real precedent, except in a limited way in the Babylonian legend of Sargon.[12] The whole of the historical period that forms the "constitutional age" of the people is set within the limits of the lifetime of Moses, the founder and lawgiver. Not only does this allow J to subsume DtrH's prologue – Deuteronomy – within this presentation as a recapitulation, but it gives him the opportunity of modifying and qualifying his understanding of this period and its principles in his own way. Yet this time of Moses, from its beginning (when the god of the forefathers delivers his people from the hands of the Egyptians) to its end (when Moses views from Mount Nebo the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), is bound up with the identity and destiny of a people who have descended from a patriarchal history.

The Priestly History (P)

The Priestly historian (P), writing in the period of reconstruction in Judah in the late 5th century BCE, has expanded and modified the earlier history of J in a number of significant ways. To J's primeval history P has added, as a prologue, a cosmology that includes the origins not only of human, animal and plant life as in J, but also the rest of the cosmos. This is done in a series of pronouncements by the one deity distributed over the course of six days. When this basic order has been established and confirmed as "very good," the

seventh day is consecrated as a holy day of rest in imitation of the creator's rest.

It has long been observed that P's presentation of creation is greatly at variance with that of J in Gen. 2:4b–3:24, both in the manner of presentation and also in the ordering of the individual acts of creation. This is largely due to the fact that P has taken up the cosmogonic myth of origins and demythologized or rationalized various features of it, so that dividing the waters of the abyss is no longer the mythical slaying of the demonic monster; the word that empowers "earth" to bring forth her fruit is a pale reflection of the great mother goddess; the sun and moon who "rule" the day and night have, in P, become great lamps in place of gods. Thus, the "genealogy of heaven and earth" (2:4) follows the fixed succession of events that one finds in theogonies, but in a rationalized form to make it conform to the monotheistic theology of the P tradition.

P's prologue in this universal history begins with the creation of time itself by virtue of the god's creation of light that makes possible the first day. This creation of time is then used as the temporal measurement for the rest of the days of creation. Furthermore, the primary function of the heavenly bodies is to regulate times and seasons, months, and years. The sacred days, especially the Sabbath, are reckoned as part of this cosmic order. Of course, this legitimizes and upholds the role of the priests as the guardians of this cosmic order. Once this ideological foundation for precise chronology has been established, P attempts to order the rest of the history into a strict chronological scheme.

In the Babylonian antiquarian tradition, the chronology of the world was fixed by the descent of kingship from heaven at the beginning of time, its renewal after the flood and its strict chronological succession to historical times. A later variant of this tradition tells of the creation of the king as a special human being to rule over the rest of ordinary humanity by the transmission of divine attributes from the various deities to equip him for the task of governance. P has taken over this myth, even retaining the hint of the divine council: "Let us make humans in our image and after our likeness and let them have dominion. . . ." Yet the myth has been democratized to apply to all humanity and its relationship to the rest of creation. So universal history is no longer determined by the chronology of a line of Babylonian kings, but by humanity from Adam to his offspring. It is a single history of one humanity under a single unnamed deity who controls the whole of the cosmos.

Moreover, P takes over J's rudimentary scheme of genealogical chronology of seven generations for the antediluvian period from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham and increases these to ten generations each. With these he combines the strict chronological succession of the Babylonian king-lists, but instead of the length of a king's reign he gives the total life-span of the ancestors and their age at the time of the birth of the eldest son to yield a precise chronology. The Babylonian tradition that the antediluvian kings ruled for very

long periods, even thousands of years, is reflected in the very long lives of the antediluvian ancestors of Genesis 5. The chronology of the flood story is also modified to make the flood one year in length and fitted into the larger absolute chronology within the life of Noah. The lives of the patriarchs are likewise supplied with a precise chronology for the principal events in their lives, especially as they relate to births and deaths.[13]

Another important aspect of P's historiography is his attempt to periodize history into certain eras. This was already suggested to some extent by J's major divisions, but P heightens these in particular ways. The first period begins with the first human pair to whom the god extends his blessing of fruitfulness and an injunction to rule the earth. Humanity is also given the fruits of the earth to eat, but not meat, and is thus vegetarian. This era extends to the time of the flood. After the flood, the god renews his blessing of fruitfulness to the survivors but now permits them to eat meat. Yet they are under new laws regarding homicide, the violence that led to the flood, and laws concerning the non-consumption of blood with meat. An "eternal" covenant is established with humanity in the form of a divine promise, confirmed by the sign of the rainbow, not to bring another flood on the earth. In both of these periods the term for deity is simply the generic term *Elohim*, "god."

Abraham, at the end of the tenth generation after the flood, begins a new era with a new "eternal covenant" for his descendants. The sign of this covenant is the rite of circumcision for all males, which is an obligation for all those who wish to remain within this covenant. To them are extended the promises of nationhood and land as with J, as well as the blessing of fruitfulness from creation. To Abraham is revealed the divine name of "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) and all the patriarchs know the deity by this name and share this covenant.

The time of Moses begins yet another period. To Moses the deity reveals the sacred name of YAHWEH, the name of the god of Israel. Yet P affirms through the words of the deity that this is the same god as El Shaddai of the patriarchs and the covenantal promises to them are assured to the descendants whom he will rescue from Egypt. With Moses there is also an extended body of laws to mark this era. Yet in contrast to both Deuteronomy and J, little is said explicitly about a Sinai covenant and some have denied that there is one in P. However, since I view P as essentially a supplement to both DtrH and J, it seems to me justified to assume that P takes over the notion of such a covenant. He even suggests that the sign of this covenant is the observance of the Sabbath (Exod. 31).

The largest addition that P makes to the prior history of J has to do with priestly matters of temple worship, purity laws, sacrifices, and festival regulations. This is directly related to the reestablishment of the priestly cultus in the Second Temple period. This is in sharp contrast to J (in the Babylonian

exile) who lays down a bare minimum of such observances without the need for any priesthood. Thus in J the "tent of meeting" is merely an oracular tent where Moses receives revelations from the deity but it has no priests and no cult and only a lay person, Joshua, associated with it. By contrast, this "tent of meeting" or "tabernacle" in P has become an elaborate portable temple with a large priesthood and cult and forms the center of the people's life. The constitutional understanding of the people is revised again into that of a "theocracy"[14] in which there is a diarchy of a secular leader and a high priest. In the beginning Moses is preeminent over Aaron, the high priest, because he is the medium of divine revelation of the whole system, but after Moses his successors, like Joshua, must take their direction from the high priest. There are various orders of priests and orders of laymen such that the whole community of the people, known as the "congregation of Israel," is an elaborate organism. The social order and the cultic order belong to the cosmic order and the rule of god, all of which means that P's historical narrative gives priests an essential role in all spheres of social life. This is his historical legitimation of the roles of governor and high priest in the Jerusalem temple-community of the Second Temple period.

P, too, adds another dimension to corporate identity beyond that in DtrH and J. Identity not only embraces the national identity of people and land with absolute commitment to YAHWEH as in DtrH and ethnic identity through the forefathers as in J. For P, identity also includes commitment to certain observances, such as circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath and festivals and the food laws by all Jews, as well as the maintenance of the theocratic structures of the cult. This makes particular allowance for the diaspora Jews who can in this way maintain an identity as a people quite apart from life in the land of Palestine. It is now P's history that ensures the survival of this identity, no matter where Jews may live.

The Chronicler as Historian

Along side of the Primary History in Genesis to 2 Kings is another historical tradition that both supplements and rivals it, the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles (late 4th century BCE). While much is taken over verbatim from the older history, especially from Samuel–Kings, much is omitted or altered, many stories and new information are added and the whole perspective of the earlier history is radically changed. These changes are so blatantly dominated by ideological and theological concerns that many scholars regard the work as pseudo-history or "midrash."[15] Yet the Chronicler (Chr), by his imitation of the earlier history and his frequent citation of sources, presents his work in a form that is clearly intended to be taken as history, and it was so regarded by later generations. To this issue we will return.

The book of 1 Chronicles begins with Adam, the first human, and extends its history to the time of Cyrus and the end of the Babylonian exile of the Jews (538 BCE). The primeval history from the origins of humanity to the time of David is spanned by means of genealogies that have been gleaned largely from the Pentateuch, especially P, but some also from the earlier DtrH. These establish a continuity with humanity in general and then with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the sons of Jacob, the tribal ancestors, with special attention to Judah, as well as to the royal house of David and the Levitical priesthood. In the case of these two institutions, the genealogies are carried beyond the time-frame of the books of Chronicles well into the Persian period. Within the genealogies are anecdotal remarks about the land settlement of the Israelite tribes so that they legitimate a territorial claim far beyond the bounds of the small province of Judah in the time of the historian.

This form of genealogical history is well attested within the classical antiquarian tradition. The Chronicler (Chr) claims to have derived the genealogical history of chapters 1–8 from a "Book of the Kings of Israel" although this does not correspond with any extant biblical book. The function of such genealogies is to fortify ethnic identity, support territorial claims on ancestral lands and legitimate basic social institutions, both political and religious. To support these aims the older genealogies are greatly augmented with names from the families of the post-exilic period. The genealogical series ends with the names of families and of the temple personnel (priests, Levites and others) who returned from exile (ch. 9).

The history proper begins with an account of the death of Saul as a lead up to David and his reign (1 Chron 10–29). All the previous history is omitted, or rather assumed, whereas David is made into the founder of the nation together with its basic political and religious institutions as a kind of second Moses. For this purpose Chr excises from the prior tradition all those elements that might reflect negatively on David's character, in particular virtually the whole of the Court History. Instead, he gives to David the establishing of the whole system of worship outlined by the Priestly Writer within the context of the new state and its capital in Jerusalem, along with all of the later developments of cult personnel and practice of the Second Temple period which he ascribes anachronistically to David. The fact that the first temple did not yet exist in David's time and was only built by his son Solomon leads Chr to suggest that David spent much of his time and effort making preparation for the future temple, setting out the divinely revealed plan and gathering the materials, so that it was left to Solomon merely to execute the plan. The account of Solomon's reign is likewise idealized by the omission of anything derogatory. The result is that with the combined rule of David and Solomon the theocracy of P is embedded in a "Kingdom of God" with a son of David at its head. For Chr there can be only one legitimate kingdom and state cen-

tered in Jerusalem under a son of David, just as there can be only one temple of YAHWEH in Jerusalem.

This leads him to focus his entire history on the kingdom of Judah and to regard the Northern Kingdom of Israel as illegitimate and foreign from the start. He omits from his record the fact that the biblical books of Kings represent the inauguration of the Northern Kingdom as an act of YAHWEH through his prophet Ahijah and open to the same possibility of divine approval as the dynasty of David. For Chr all the kings of the north and the people who submit to them are religious rebels, whereas the true Israelites are those who are willing to leave their homeland in the north and settle in Judah. This includes all the true priests and Levites of YAHWEH, so that there are no members of the true religion left in the north. This, of course, contradicts much of the witness of the books of Kings and the prophetic books, which are therefore simply ignored. The term "Israel" does not refer to a political entity in Chronicles but is intended as a religious designation that can be applied to Judah and its kings. Thus Israel may indeed include members of all the twelve tribes, as in the initial genealogy, but only those who have given their allegiance to Jerusalem and abandoned any religious and political claim to a center in the north, including Samaria and the Samaritans of Mount Gerazim. It is this crucial issue of identity in the Persian and Hellenistic periods to which Chr speaks.

This redefinition of Israelite identity comes to the fore most clearly in Chr's treatment of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29–32). The fall of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom, which receives important attention from Dtr in Kings (2 Kings 17), is ignored by Chr. Instead, Hezekiah, the contemporary Judean king,[16] is presented as a kind of second David who completely purifies and restores the temple worship after a period of neglect by the apostate Ahaz, his father, and then Hezekiah reunites the whole region of Israel from Beersheba to Dan under his control and in common worship at the Jerusalem temple, in a great Passover celebration and in an extensive reform of both Judah and Israel. Chr completely ignores the existence of any other political or religious authority for the north, which had become an Assyrian province. Instead, Hezekiah is seen as reestablishing the Davidic–Solomonic precedent of a unified Israel and building a continuity with the priestly ideology of the Persian period. The portrayal of Hezekiah's reform is an imitation of the Josiah reform in Kings, which is also repeated in Chronicles but on a lesser scale. Yet both reforms in Chronicles are divorced from any connection with the discovery of the book of the law. For Chr the Mosaic law in its most extensive form (including P) was known and in force from the time of David onward, even if it was not always observed by some of the apostate kings. This is a radical departure from the whole ideology and perspective of the books of Kings.

Basic to understanding Chr's historiography is an appraisal of his use of sources. His most important source, if not his only source, for the whole period

of the monarchy is the extant books of Samuel–Kings, which was a single work. Large parts of it are cited verbatim, especially as they have to do with David, Solomon, and the kings of Judah. The Northern Kingdom is ignored unless it directly involves a king of Judah. Yet when Chr treats this material from Samuel–Kings, he refers not to a single source but to a large number of different sources by various names. He also cites as sources twelve books that he attributes to prophets, most of whom are mentioned in Samuel–Kings. These books are so obviously spurious (prophets did not actually write books of any kind much before the exilic period) that scholars have dismissed those citations as a quirk of Chr's literary style.

I understand these references to multiple sources in a quite different way. Chr has only one source for the monarchy, Samuel–Kings, as most acknowledge, which he plagiarizes freely. However, to obscure this fact and to justify his radical departures from his source and his numerous fictions he invents multiple sources, viz, numerous histories that did not exist and writings of inspired persons whose authority cannot be questioned. This legitimates the ideology of his history and its political and religious use for his own day. One other term that he uses for his sources is also instructive: he refers to the "Midrash of the Book of Kings." The Hebrew term *midrash* means "investigation" or "inquiry," from the verb *drš* "to search," and as such *midrash* is the direct equivalent of the Greek term *historia*, "history." As Herodotus uses the term, it includes not merely historical narrative but wonders and marvels and colorful stories of past events. This fits very well a feature of Chronicles, which abounds in miraculous events and edifying tales.

All of this – the plagiarism, the use of spurious sources, and the embellishment with stories for entertainment or edification – points strongly to the influence of Hellenistic historiography. It is a kind of bad history against which historians like Polybius protested,[17] but it was still highly influential and very popular. The work became part of the canonical collection as history and, as such, it played an important role in shaping Jewish and Christian historical thought.

A major literary extension to the national historical tradition appears in the book of Ezra–Nehemiah, which carries the history from the edict of Cyrus in 538 BCE, marking the end of the exile, to the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, down to the reforms of Ezra the scribe and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah, the Jewish governor appointed by Artaxerxes I, in the mid 5th century BCE. Both Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles are to be dated to a century later in the late Persian, or more likely, early Hellenistic period, but there is much debate about whether Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles belong to the same author or "school". At the very least a knowledge of and dependence upon Ezra–Nehemiah by the Chronicler may be safely assumed. They share much of the same ideological perspective.

The book of Ezra–Nehemiah, which should be treated as a single work, begins with the decree of Cyrus in 538 BCE that brings to an end the enforced exile of the Jews in Babylon and inaugurates the Persian period of rule over their homeland in Judah. The restoration of the temple under Zerubbabel and the walls of the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah with the accompanying reforms are attributed to the initiatives of the leaders from the diaspora and the returning exiles. Much is made of the lists of names of the returnees, both lay and priests, as the nucleus of the real people of Israel and their claim to the land. The work reflects an intolerance toward those who reside in the land, but who do not share their form of exclusivist Yahwism and who fraternize with other communities of the region, especially those of the northern region of Samaria. This is similar to the perspective of Chronicles and one reason why they are closely associated.

Unlike Chronicles however, Ezra–Nehemiah appears to be made up of several separate documents and not based upon a prior history. These consist of "official" Aramaic documents – royal edicts and official letters and communications (whether genuine of spurious), numerous lists of priests and lay persons for various purposes, so-called memoirs of Nehemiah and Ezra, and some other possible documents. These have all been combined and set within a narrative by an editor whose style and language is similar to Chr. The documents are used as the basis of authority and validation both of actions within the history and of the historical narrative itself, showing a new consciousness about the importance of historical sources. Nehemiah's memoirs are written for public display to legitimate his actions. Ezra the scribe brings from Babylon the book of the law of Moses which he is authorized to enforce and from which he reads and instructs the people. The royal edicts and official letters, the legal documents and lists of persons and property all carry authority and the legitimation of rights and privileges. Even in the matter of the divorce and expulsion of foreign wives with their children, a list must be compiled of the offenders. The history is thus primarily the presentation and interpretation of these documents, whether real or spurious. They are essential for the identity of the community and for the identity of those who are excluded.

The principal focus of the history is the reestablishment of the temple and the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, and the series of events that make Jerusalem the defining center of the community of Israel. The centralization and purification of the temple cultus in Jerusalem according to Deuteronomic principles was already a major theme within the DtrH, especially in Samuel–Kings. This became the case even more so for Chr in his treatment of the Judean monarchy. Ezra–Nehemiah adds to this theme the inauguration of the Second Temple and the restored city after the radical rupture of the Babylonian exile. The fate of the temple and the city becomes the defining theme of Jewish history, as one sees in the later works of Josephus as well. The sacred

place offers a religious and historical center for the identity of the Jewish people.

Conclusion

This biblical historiography that I have described was the product of a small state on the periphery of larger civilizations, and it was produced during that period in its history when this state was under foreign subjection by the great powers.[18] Yet there is no evidence that it borrowed its historiography from the Assyrians, Babylonians or Egyptians, even if the biblical historians adopted some of the literary forms from these other ancient civilizations. Hebrew historiography has much more in common with the classical world of the eastern Mediterranean, and yet the historiography of the one is not directly derived from the other; any direct interaction comes about perhaps only with the rise of Hellenism. There may have been important intermediaries, such as the Phoenicians (= biblical Canaanites), but we have few extant Phoenician literary texts to confirm this hypothesis.

As our survey has attempted to show, biblical historiography articulated various understandings of corporate identity for a people in crisis, trying to maintain their cultural and religious heritage by a narration of the past. It established certain themes and perspectives having to do with absolute loyalty to a single national deity expressed in law and covenant, customs and cultic practice, festivals and rites of initiation. It tied identity to a "promised" land and the myth of ethnic descent from primordial ancestors. It created the notion of an absolute center in Jerusalem and the temple, even for those in the diaspora. All of this was supported by a narrative of origins and succession of events in the life of the people of Israel. The several historians that contributed to this narrative often expressed their understanding of the identity of Israel in somewhat different ways, but all became part of a canonical corpus that was the foundation for later Jewish and Christian identities and their subsequent histories. And they initiated a historical literature that emphasized the importance of both specific events and universal principles in the history of human communities.

NOTES

1 This is the thesis advocated by M. Noth. See his *The Deuteronomistic Historian* (JSOTSup. 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

2 These issues are treated more extensively in John Van Seters, *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). Compare also J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

3 See the new comprehensive study by K. L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and their expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998).
4 See the battle of Artemisium, Herod. 8.8–13.
5 So G. von Rad, in "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel" (1944), in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, translated by E. W. T. Dicken (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), pp. 166–204.
6 For details of the debate see J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 277–91.
7 For an extensive discussion of the Yahwist as historian see my books, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), and *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).
8 For fuller discussion see John Van Seters, *Prologue to History*, pp. 47–77.
9 See ibid., pp. 86–99.
10 The daughter plays no role as an ancestress of a tribe.
11 For a more extensive discussion of J's treatment of this period see my *Life of Moses*.
12 This is a fictional autobiography about how the Babylonian king, Sargon the Great, was rescued from the Euphrates River as an infant in a basket to become the ruler of an empire.
13 It was this precise chronology of P that permitted Bishop James Ussher in the mid-century to date the creation of the world to 4004 BCE.
14 This is a term invented by the Jewish historian Josephus to describe this priestly law.
15 The term was coined by J. Wellhausen (*Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [1883], New York: Meridian Books, 1957, p. 227) on the model of later Jewish writings to mean the embellishment of biblical writings by means of moralistic and miraculous stories.
16 It is only in Chr's source in 2 Kings 18:1 that this correlation of dating for Hezekiah's reign is noted since Chr snub's any reference to the Northern Kingdom. Yet the correlation is clearly assumed in what follows.
17 Polybius, *Histories*, 9.2.
18 It was once thought by many scholars, including H. Gunkel and G. von Rad, that history writing arose in Israel during the time of David and Solomon as a reflection of historical consciousness at the beginning of its statehood. This view can no longer be supported and is largely abandoned. For a discussion of this see Van Seters, *In Search of History*, pp. 209–48.

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