

OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP AND THE MAN IN THE STREET: WHENCE AND WHITHER?*

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes to address three interwoven topics: (1) the Bible—specifically the Old Testament—and the media; (2) OT scholarship and the general public; and (3) the obligation and mission of evangelical scholarship vis-à-vis the public at large, the church, and the academy.

Until recently, the arcane topics of OT scholarship were of only marginal interest to persons outside the guild of specialists in the field. This is no longer the case. Best-selling books, articles in popular magazines, television specials, and screen scripts appear bent on slaking the seeming never-ending thirst for matters pertinent to the Bible.¹ At times these productions are transparent diatribes against the Scriptures, undertaken, one suspects, with the iconoclastic agenda of challenging belief systems alien to the epistemological and cultural mindset typical of much of the entertainment industry. More positively, sociologists report an increasing trend toward individual spirituality and religious interest in the abstract despite a corresponding disinterest in the church and institutional religion.² Media attention to the OT as part of the broader spectrum of a revival of fascination with religion and spirituality should thus not be surprising.

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¹ Martha Smith Tatarnic, "The Mass Media and Faith: The Potentialities and Problems for the Church in Culture," *ATR* 87 (2005) 447–65; Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); *Faith, Film and Philosophy: Big Ideas on the Big Screen* (ed. R. Douglas Geivett and James S. Spiegel; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007); Quentin J. Schultze, "American Evangelicals and the Mass Media," in *Keeping the Faith: American Evangelicals and the Media* (ed. Quentin J. Schultze; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 23–45.

² John T. Pless, "Contemporary Spirituality and the Emerging Church," *CTQ* 71 (2007) 347–63; Gordon Lewis, "The Church and the New Spirituality," *JETS* 36 (1993) 433–44; Kate Hunt, "Understanding the Spirituality of People Who Do Not Go to Church," in *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (ed. Grace Davie, Paul Heelas, and Linda Woodhead; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 159–69; David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 179–87.

II. RELEVANCE

Much popular preoccupation with the OT obviously springs from its audacious claim to be a revelation from God, a belief, cherished by both Jews and Christians, that it is an authoritative text for instruction and behavior. But even apart from parochial considerations there exists a broad consensus in secular America that the OT is one of the important foundation stones supporting the superstructure of Western civilization, its absence of religious authority in the popular as well as academic imagination notwithstanding. Indeed, the assertion that the OT has profoundly shaped the history, culture, politics, and mores of both religious and secular institutions in American life is readily acknowledged.³

Quite clearly, mutual interaction between the media and the public is at work here. Print and electronic outlets, sensing an upturn in religious and spiritual interest, provide grist that generates and perpetuates unprecedented public media attention.⁴ Shows like “Nightline” and programming by PBS, the Discovery Channel, and the History Channel regularly feature topics relevant to religion in general but particularly to subtopics such as Jesus scholarship and OT history and culture, the latter often illuminated by ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian contexts and connections. The Iran hostage crisis, the 9/11 attack on New York, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the long-standing and intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict have ironically drawn attention to sites of biblical significance as, for example, has the upsurge of DNA technologies currently employed to establish the antiquity and identities of Egyptian mummies.⁵

III. OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP: HOW WE GOT HERE

Modern approaches to OT issues cannot be understood fully without at least brief acquaintance with the history of OT scholarship, a survey for convenience divided here into the pre-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, and post-Enlightenment periods.⁶ The first of these refers to a time when the OT was taken largely at face value as the revealed word of God, infallible and authoritative in all it had to say. This included miracle stories and other “incredible” events and ideas that no longer find currency in the modern intellectual world.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the first rays of the rising sun of the Enlightenment penetrated the darkness of the “naïve ignorance” of the church. Rationalism and the scientific method ascended, relegating the Bible to the status of a purely theological treatise at best or a hopelessly irrelevant collection of myths, legends, and folk tales at worst. First on the horizon was

³ *The Bible and the American People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Religion Research Center, 2001) 48–49.

⁴ Mark Ellingsen, *A Common Sense Theology: The Bible, Faith, and American Society* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995) 67–77.

⁵ “King Tut’s Family Secrets,” *National Geographic* 218/3 (2010) 34–59.

⁶ R. E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (Guildford: Lutterworth, 1976); J. W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

the documentary hypothesis and its denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Instead, Torah was deemed to be a collection of originally independent oral traditions composed and constantly redacted to its present form no earlier than the post-exilic period.⁷ In the wake of the hypothesis, a continuing spirit of skepticism discounted the possibility of miracles, predictive prophecy, and propositional revelation. This eviscerated the OT in particular of any claim to scientific or historical credibility except among those derisively labeled “Fundamentalists.”

The first stirrings of archaeological research in the Middle East were concomitant with the emergence of the so-called “historical critical” method just described.⁸ Two rivulets thus began to feed into modern assessments of the Bible in mainstream biblical scholarship, the one being modern and post-modern versions of the older criticisms and the other a disciplined and rigorous practice of archaeology, the so-called “New Archaeology,” now refined to a level of near-exact science. A third stream is the “New Literary Criticism” that is content to work with the text as an artifact without passing judgment on its pre-history or even its religious claims. While these streams at times commingle and coincide, they are also frequently at loggerheads.⁹ Skeptics summon archaeological research to put to rest biblical claims to historical authenticity and just as often, or even more so, conservative scholars invoke it when to them it supports the biblical tradition. Worse still is the proclivity of both sides to realign Scripture to bring it into coherence with the assured results of literary-critical and archaeological method.¹⁰

IV. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

In an increasingly naturalistic and materialistic age, the authoritative relevance of the Bible to the general populace has diminished almost to the vanishing point. Indeed, even atheism has gained a foothold unprecedented in American life thanks to the publications of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and a few lesser lights.¹¹ This is due not only to the pervasive influence of democratized pluralism and inclusiveness that mark the modern

⁷ For a popular rendition of the hypothesis, see Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987).

⁸ Don C. Benjamin, *Stones and Stories: An Introduction to Archaeology and the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

⁹ See especially William G. Dever, “Archaeology, Ideology, and the Quest for an ‘Ancient’ or ‘Biblical’ Israel,” *NEA* 61 (1998) 39–52; idem, “Excavating the Hebrew Bible, or Burying It Again?” *BASOR* 322 (2001) 67–77; idem, “Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up? Archaeology and Israelite Historiography,” *BASOR* 297 (1995) 61–80; idem, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). See also David Merling, “The Relationship Between Archaeology and the Bible,” *JATS* 9 (1998) 230–42; Steven M. Ortiz, “Quest or Quagmire: Recent Trends in Archaeology and Biblical Studies,” *IBR Library Review* 8 (2010) 1–19; Ziony Zevit “Three Debates about Bible and Archaeology,” *Bib* 83 (2002) 1–27.

¹⁰ Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 84–85.

¹¹ Richard Dawkins, *The Ancestor’s Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007). For a recent recounting of this upsurge, see “Atheist Groups Promote a Holiday Message: Join Us,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2010.

cultural ethos, but to academic and societal establishmentarianism that regards religion in general and the Bible in particular as vestiges of medieval superstition unworthy of serious consideration as necessary constituents of a well-ordered society. More at blame perhaps has been a general lapsing of religionists to unbelief and, in particular, of self-described “Bible believers” who have succumbed to a broadminded world view that jettisons the narrowness of evangelical epistemology and practice.¹² No longer is it fashionable in the intellectual world to view the Bible as magisterially relevant literature. In fact, even popular culture with its systemic and abysmal ignorance and disregard of history and tradition in general has understandably and logically consigned the Bible to benign neglect in terms of its practical moral and ethical relevance.

Yet, ironically enough and as already noted, contemporary media have never been more attracted to the Bible as an object of public exploitation. Twentieth-century Hollywood, followed by television and other entertainment vehicles, has produced over the years a number of blockbuster films devoted to biblical subjects including “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” “The Ten Commandments,” and “Ben Hur.” No letup is in sight on the present scene as is evident from the proliferation of productions such as C. S. Lewis’s “The Chronicles of Narnia,” Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ,” and Scott Derickson’s “The Exorcism of Emily Rose.” Whether these kinds of products have generated popular interest in biblical themes or media producers have capitalized on deeply-embedded American religiosity is difficult to discern. Sadly, the subject matter of much of the media output has all too often turned from straight-forward renditions of biblical or Bible-related narratives to creative reconstructions of the sacred texts in demeaning and even blasphemous ways. “The DaVinci Code,”¹³ “The Fifth Element,” and “John Q” come to mind as typical examples. Iconoclasm and shock value still sell; thus, when the Bible and the Church have lost their magisterial standing even within their own constituencies, there remains but a short step toward exploitation of hitherto out-of-bounds areas of sacredness in the interest of financial gain and, in the extreme, conscious and deliberate desecration.

V. COMPETING CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES

1. *The Old Testament and the state.* Following the conversion of Constantine and Rome to Christianity in the early fourth century, European states joined others in the Middle East as “Christian” nations, in distinction from those embracing other religious and cultural traditions. A religious offspring of “Christian” Europe is, of course, the United States. Though vigorous disagreement on the matter of the Christian roots of the American experiment has come to the fore in recent years, the general consensus of historians of early America is that the Continental Congress that drew up the articles of American federation consisted largely of Christians who

¹² See Drew Dyck, “The Leavers,” *CT* 54/11 (Nov. 2010) 40–44.

¹³ For an excellent review, see the May 19, 2006, posting in *CT* by Peter T. Chattaway.

undertook their task as Founders with conscious attention to political, legal, moral, and social principles derived from Scripture.¹⁴ The very language of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution puts this beyond doubt.

At the same time, it is clear that the United States was not intended to be a “Christian” nation in the European sense. Though “biblical” in its orientation, America by law and design was obliged to hold to a position antithetic to the European model in which an established church was governed by quasi-political ecclesiastics and supported by tax-paying citizens. Thus, in the American experiment there must be a separation of church and state with respect to mutual interference though certainly not in terms of religious suppression by political power or undue influence on the political process by established religion.¹⁵ However, waves of immigration for over 200 years have radically changed the American political and religious landscape. Diversity and pluralism now challenge the notion of any particular brand of religious culturalism and with them has come a decreasing role of the institutional church in political affairs. The upshot of this manifests itself in an uneasy tension between church and state, one that naturally encompasses within it the thorny question of the role of the Bible in political and public life. Presidents may swear their oath of office with hands on a Bible but this symbolic act rarely translates into intentional public policy.

2. *The Old Testament Bible and the schools.* Early Colonial American education lay in the province of the home and local community.¹⁶ The state was little involved and thus had little or nothing to do with curriculum and other aspects of local education of children. Moreover, the very notion of absolute separation of church and state was unthinkable. In fact, religion, particularly the Christian faith, was not only permitted in the school but mandatory. The Bible was the textbook that provided instruction in faith and morals and in reading and writing as well. This is clear from the universal use of the New England Primer which, among other things, wisely advised that

He who ne'er learns his A, B, C,
Forever will a Blockhead be;
But he to his Book's inclin'd,
Will soon a golden Treasure find.¹⁷

The establishment of the nation as a confederation of states, coupled with an increasingly diverse immigrant population, the industrial revolution, and the settlement of the West, brought an end to the concept of truly local education and the beginning of centralized standardization of every aspect of non-collegiate education. People flocked to the cities for work and in their

¹⁴ *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present* (ed. Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow; New York: Oxford, 2007) 23–120.

¹⁵ James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provezano Jr., *History of Education and Culture in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989) 18–31.

¹⁷ William M. French, *America's Educational Tradition: An Interpretive History* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1964) 2–5.

busyness surrendered control of their children's instruction to public schools that increasingly usurped parental authority and abandoned religion and the Bible in the interest of pluralism.¹⁸ Well before the end of the twentieth century, American educational policy mandated that public schools be off limits to formal and (later) informal displays of organized or even personal religious expression, to say nothing of the inclusion of the Bible as a vital part of a well-rounded education.

This trend was exacerbated by increasing emphases in the public school curricula on the social and "hard" sciences, particularly by secularism in the former case and life sciences in the latter. Secularism fostered a spirit of humanism, the notion that the universe is anthropocentric rather than theocentric. This being the case, all religions grounded in the metaphysically transcendent (which include virtually all) were barred from the classroom. Biological evolution, perceived as being irrefutable and irreconcilable to standard interpretations of the OT account of origins and development, forced the biblical narratives to fall into the realm of the mythical or imaginary and thus, like theism, to be quickly shown the door.¹⁹ A reaction from the Christian community was predictable. In place of schools where their children were taught values and concepts contrary to the Bible and the Christian faith, evangelicals in particular created Christian schools or resorted to homeschooling, both of which options have grown exponentially.²⁰

3. *The Old Testament and the church.* Most ironic of all, the Bible, especially the OT, has come to be scorned in some quarters of the church itself.²¹ Theological liberalism, of course, plays a significant role in this diminution of interest in the Scriptures with a corollary disregard of any of its claims to authority. A holy book of uncertain origins and unreliable transmission can hardly become the bedrock of a viable faith. But the matter cannot rest there. At one time, the OT, though regarded widely as less relevant than the NT for Christian faith, was still useful for lessons on morality and proper private and public behavior. Besides, its Psalms were a source of blessing and comfort and its stories alive with examples of men and women who triumphed as they trusted their God. However, compared to the Gospels and Epistles the OT seemed dull and dry, the relic of a religion long past its prime and with little or no practical relevance to the modern world. Preachers avoided employing its texts and laity despaired of ever understanding the ins and outs of its mysterious practices. Thus, three quarters of the Bible was benignly allowed to die, buried by its own obscurity. The OT has fared hardly better in many evangelical churches, either because of its relative density or

¹⁸ V. T. Thayer, *Formative Ideas in American Education* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965) 63–84; John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2005).

¹⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, repr. 1995) 124–25.

²⁰ James C. Carper and Thomas C. Hunt, *The Dissenting Tradition in American Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007) 199–216.

²¹ Ellen F. Davis, "Losing a Friend: the Loss of the Old Testament to the Church," *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 83–96.

a theology that relegates it to virtual non-canoncity by perceiving it as a book of law as opposed to the NT's status as a book of grace. It is acceptable as moralistic Sunday school material but not as a text to be proclaimed as the Word of God to the church.²²

VI. RECENT TRENDS IN OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

1. *In the media.* Nothing comparable to the sensationalism and controversy attendant to the Jesus Seminar, the James Ossuary, the Shroud of Turin, and other NT topics has yet developed with regard to media handling of the OT at the popular level. On occasion the odd story of the discovery of inscriptions, building foundations, and mummified human and animal remains appears but generally with little fanfare or controversy. Greater interest accrues to political events surrounding modern Israel and its claims to territory based to a great extent on OT promises. These range from the fundamental right of Israel to exist, to the occupation and settlement of the West Bank, to preparations by the Temple Institute of plans and procedures to construct the Third Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque.²³ To those committed to these ideals, the OT has never ceased to provide sufficient justification for any course of action that brings to pass the fulfillment of its prophetic texts. On the other hand, those who have a lesser view of its authority and who deem its pre-exilic history to be but myth and legend eschew any use of the OT for political purposes as misguided at best.²⁴

2. *On the field.* In almost inverse proportion to their coverage in the popular media are the number and significance of archaeological finds in the last 30 years that have enormous bearing on both the understanding of the OT and its shoring up as a reliable historical account. The following list (in no particular order of importance) is illustrative of a much larger corpus.²⁵

Tall edh-Dabah. Since the 1970s, the Austrian scholar Manfred Bietak has focused his time and energy on a site in the northeast Delta of Egypt that he

²² For a healthy exception, see Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); see also Timothy M. Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise: An Old Testament Theology of Worship* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008).

²³ Chaim Richman, *A House of Prayer for All People: The Holy Temple of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Temple Institute, 1997); Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2009).

²⁴ This view is associated with the so-called "Copenhagen School." See Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Volkmar Fritz, *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Niels Pieter Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998). For related perspectives see Neil Asher Silberman, *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Israel Finkelstein, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Emanuel Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2009).

²⁵ For popular overviews of archaeology and the Bible, see Alfred Hoerth, *Archaeology & the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Don C. Benjamin, *Stones and Stories: An Introduction to Archaeology and the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

has concluded is none other than Avaris (Ramesses), the capital of the foreign dynasty of the Hyksos who ruled Egypt from ca. 1730–1580 BC.²⁶ The Hyksos, a Semitic people loosely related to the Israelites, were perhaps the people referred to in Exod 1:10 as Pharaoh's enemies with whom he feared that Israel might join in rebellion. If so, this could place an identifiable Israel in Egypt in the Late Bronze or New Kingdom Egypt period. However, much remains to be done at Tall edh-Dabah before this assertion can be put beyond doubt.

*The 'Ain Dara Temple (1980).*²⁷ In an earlier era, the reality of a portable shrine like the Israelite tabernacle was debunked because nothing similar was known from the ancient Near East.²⁸ A similar claim was made regarding the existence of the Solomonic Temple as described in the Bible. However, in 'Ain Dara (and earlier in Tall Ta'yinat), Syria, a temple from the tenth century came to light that resembled in its layout a remarkable similarity to the Temple of Jerusalem. The size is approximately the same; it consists of two chambers, the Holy Place and Most Holy Place; and it clearly accommodated cultic features like those described in the Bible. Thus, the notion that Israel had a temple in the tenth century is, by analogy at least, on very firm ground.

*Tel Dan (1993).*²⁹ Nearly 20 years ago, Avraham Biran and his team of Israeli excavators were wrapping up a day's work when one of them noticed the faint outline of characters incised on a rock surface embedded in a defensive wall. Careful analysis showed it to be an Aramaic text from about 830 BC, the substance of which was the account of an Aramaean king of his military operations against certain enemies, notably the "house of David." This (along with a possible example in the Mesha inscription of the same date)³⁰ is the only reference to David so far in any extrabiblical text. This puts the historical existence of David beyond doubt and furthermore shows him to be so powerful a figure that the nation Israel was named for him.

*Kuntillet 'Ajrud (1978).*³¹ This site, near Arad in the northern Negev, was most certainly an Israelite worship center in mid-ninth-century Judah. The most remarkable thing about it was not the presence of pagan altars and other religious paraphernalia but an inscription that speaks of "YHWH and his Asherah." The formula implies that Israel's God had a consort, that is, a

²⁶ Manfred Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse: Archaeological Exploration in the Eastern Nile Delta* (London: British Academy, 1986).

²⁷ John Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple. Closest Solomonic Parallel," *BAR* 26 (2000) 20–35, 67.

²⁸ Thus Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Cleveland, OH: World, 1965 [1878]) 39: "Hebrew tradition, even from the time of the judges and the first kings, for which the Mosaic tabernacle was strictly speaking intended, knows nothing at all about it." For an early rebuttal, see Frank M. Cross, "The Priestly Tabernacle," *BA* 10/3 (1947) 45–68.

²⁹ Among the more important studies see Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81–98; Victor Sasson, "The Old Aramaic Inscription from Tell Dan: Philological, Literary, and Historical Aspects," *JSS* 40 (1995) 11–30; Aaron Demsky, "On Reading Ancient Inscriptions: The Monumental Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *JANES* 23 (1995) 29–35.

³⁰ Thus Andre Lemaire, "House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20 (1994) 30–37.

³¹ J. A. Emerton, "Yahweh and His Asherah': the Goddess or Her Symbol?" *VT* 49 (1999) 315–37; Baruch Margalit, "Some Observations on the Inscription and Drawing from Khirbet el-Qom," *VT* 39 (1989) 371–78; Philip Johnston, "Figuring Out Figurines," *TynBul* 54/2 (2003) 81–104.

divine female counterpart. Asherah is mentioned dozens of times in the OT as a Canaanite goddess, usually in connection with Baal. The cult of Asherah was of the basest, most immoral kind, involving ritual prostitution and other behaviors designed to promote fertility in the land. Clearly the association of YHWH with Asherah at this place (and nearby Arad as well) was contrary to normative Israelite faith as articulated by Torah and promoted vigorously by the prophets. What it shows is that Israel in late times had syncretized its monotheism to such an extent that it had, for all practical purposes, become polytheistic, a picture that emerges from the OT as well. This find therefore confirms the biblical picture of religious life prior to the exile and provides insight into the awesome words of judgment from God's true prophets.

*Wadi el-Hol (1993).*³² Just west of Abydos in southern Egypt, this site yielded an alphabetic inscription carelessly carved on the under-face of a ledge. It resembled in its paleographic form a similar text found at Serabit al-Khadem in the Sinai Peninsula, the latter dating to ca. 1600 BC and thought previously to be the earliest alphabet ever found. However, the Wadi Hol example is at least 200 years older, dating to the period in which Jacob and his sons lived in Egypt. The argument of former times that Moses (if he existed at all) could not have written the Torah in alphabetic form that early (ca. 1400 BC) thus has no basis.

*Ketef Hinnom (1979).*³³ Excavation of a tomb overlooking the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem brought to light a small silver scroll wrapped so tightly that months were required for its unrolling. Amazingly, it contained a tiny inscription bearing the words of the priestly benediction of Num 6:24–26. Not only does this shed light on Hebrew orthography and morphology, its date (ca. seventh century BC) long precedes the composition of the P document of historical-critical scholarship (450 BC). To this degree at least the documentary hypothesis must be reexamined.

*Kh. Qeiyafa (2008).*³⁴ This strategically located fortress overlooks the Valley of Elah where the famous battle between David and Goliath took place. The date of an inscription found there is ca. 1000 BC, precisely within the parameters of David's reign. Though the name of the great king or of any other identifiable individual is lacking in the text, it does seem to mention a "ruler" of Gath (Goliath's town) and possibly the *seren* ("governor") of Gaza. Thus, it fits squarely both historically and geographically the narratives about David and his troubles with the Philistines.

³² Seth L. Sanders, "What Was the Alphabet For? Vernaculars and the Making of Israelite National Literature," *MAARAV* 11 (2004) 25–56; John and Deborah Darnell, "New Inscriptions of the Late First Intermediate Period from the Theban Western Desert and the Beginnings of the Northern Expansion of the Eleventh Dynasty," *JNES* 56/4 (1997) 241–58.

³³ Gabriel Barkay, *Ketef Hinnom: A Treasure Facing Jerusalem's Walls* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1986); Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaughn, Bruce Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *BASOR* 334 (2004) 41–71; Erik Waaler, "A Revised Date for Pentateuchal Texts? Evidence from Ketef Hinnom," *TynBul* 53/1 (2002) 29–55.

³⁴ Josef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, "Khirbet Qeiyafa, 2007–2008," *IEJ* 58 (2008) 243–48; Yosef Garfinkel, Saar Ganor, Michael G. Hasel, Guy Stiebel, "Khirbet Qeiyafa, 2009," *IEJ* 59 (2009) 214–20.

City of David (current).³⁵ For most of this decade Eilat Mazar, the daughter and granddaughter of famous Israeli archaeologists, has been excavating a large site just south and east of the south wall of the Temple Mount. She has uncovered massive building stones and other features that suggest to her by dating and location that David's palace or some other official structure existed at that site in the time of the United Monarchy (1000–950 BC). It is too early to come to that conclusion with certainty but the evidence clearly points in that direction. This would have serious consequences for minimalists (see below) who deny that David was anything more than a chieftain of a petty jurisdiction.

Kh. al-Maqatir (1995–present).³⁶ Located just 16 kilometers north of Jerusalem and a kilometer southeast of Bethel, this small locale is of special interest to this writer who has been part of the excavation team since 1997. Having searched the biblical accounts carefully and having examined other nearby sites, the evangelical archaeologist Bryant Wood is reasonably confident that he has found the correct location of OT Ai, a military outpost that first inflicted casualties on Joshua and his troops but then was destroyed by Israel and burned to the ground (Joshua 6–8). Pottery finds attest to occupation in the Late Bronze age and the walls and gate are in line with the biblical description as is the tiny size of the place. If this is the correct identification, et-Tell, the place currently favored, would have to be rejected. The principal relevance is the date of the exodus and conquest, Maqatir favoring the early date and et-Tell the late.

3. *In the academy.* By “academy” here is meant the guild of OT scholarship across the board—Jewish and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, liberal and fundamentalist, with special focus on evangelicalism. Among a multitude of issues that could be addressed relative to the academy and particularly to evangelicalism are the following five.

Erosion of biblical authority. Though the documentary hypothesis and other regnant twentieth-century methods of accounting for the composition and collection of the texts of the OT have been largely abandoned, there has been no corresponding return to the Bible as the source and basis of historical factuality by the ideological successors of those who previously held to these now discounted approaches.³⁷ In fact, skepticism has never been more

³⁵ Eilat Mazar, *Excavations in the South of the Temple Mount: The Ophel of Biblical Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989); “Excavate King David’s Palace,” *BAR* 23 (1997) 50–57, 74; *The Palace of King David: Excavations at the Summit of the City of David. Preliminary Report of Seasons 2005–2007* (Jerusalem: Shoham Academic Research, 2009).

³⁶ Joseph A. Callaway, Kermit Schoonover, William W. Ellinger, *The Early Bronze Age Citadel and Lower City at Ai (et-Tell)* (Cambridge, MA: ASOR, 1980); Bryant G. Wood, “Khirbet el-Maqatir, 1995–1998,” *IEJ* 50/1–2 (2000) 123–30; “From Ramesses to Shiloh: Archaeological Discoveries Bearing on the Exodus-Judges Period,” in *Giving the Sense. Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David M. Howard Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003) 264–68.

³⁷ John Van Seters, “The Pentateuch,” *The Hebrew Bible Today. An Introduction to Critical Issues* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 12–13.

rampant than today, particularly in the realm of biblical history.³⁸ Ordinary readings of narratives based on traditional historical-grammatical exegesis have been rejected as overly naïve and misleading in the light of modern historiographical method. The social sciences too have been employed in reinterpreting OT religious and social customs to alleviate them of their alleged homophobic, anti-feminist, and militaristic overtones.³⁹ Only a Bible deconstructed in such a way as to rid itself of these embarrassments may be said to have value in the postmodern world.

Creation and evolution. Mainstream religious traditions for more than a century have embraced evolution rather than creationism as an explanation for the origin and diversity of life.⁴⁰ However, it is becoming fashionable lately for evangelical scholars also to distance themselves from adherence to so-called “young earth” creationism and to be uncomfortable with the notion that God created everything precisely as the Genesis account describes it, in “six days and six nights.”⁴¹ Alleviation of the tension between science and Scripture has been sought in various ways including the “Gap Theory,” the supposition of a period of unknown length between Gen 1:1 and 2.⁴² More in vogue today amongst evangelical scholars is so-called “Theistic Evolution,” the view that God created all original matter and then, through the processes of natural evolution, brought all things to pass as they now exist.⁴³ Another option is to suppose that the Genesis narratives of creation and the flood are mythical in the sense in which such accounts were perceived in the ancient Near East.⁴⁴ An extreme trend now is to negate even fiat creation and to suppose that the Big Bang or some other non-theistic mechanism is responsible for origins.⁴⁵ The BioLogos Foundation founded by Francis Collins is sympathetic to this

³⁸ Thus Giovanni Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York: Crossroad, 1988): “The Old Testament has set out a sacred history of universal value, but it is not very reliable as evidence of a secular history of the kind that the Hebrew people actually experienced” (p. 18).

³⁹ Danna Nolan Fewell, “Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 268–82; Fernando F. Segovia, “Reading the Bible Ideologically: Socioeconomic Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 283–306.

⁴⁰ Stephen C. Barton, ed., *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

⁴¹ For various evangelical perspectives see R. J. Berry, ed., *Darwin, Creation, and the Fall: The Evangelical Challenges* (Nottingham: Apollon, 2010).

⁴² Arthur C. Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, ON: self published, 1970). For a detailed history and rebuttal of this view, see Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976) 51–146.

⁴³ Ted Peters, *Can You Believe in God and Evolution? A Guide for the Perplexed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

⁴⁴ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 40–41. For an incisive review of Enns and his position, see G. K. Beale, “Myth, History, and Inspiration: A Review Article of *Inspiration and Incarnation* by Peter Enns,” *JETS* 49 (2006) 287–312; G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2008) 68–83. The matter of mythology and biblical history receives incisive treatment in John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁴⁵ A. R. Peacocke, *Evolution, the Disguised Friend of Faith?* (London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004).

approach, one finding favor with a number of evangelical theologians in at least its insistence on an evolutionary mechanism.⁴⁶

Historical minimalism. The historicity of the OT has been in serious question since the days of Hegel and Ewald 200 years ago, but not to the degree that has become current in the past 25 years. In its most extreme form, minimalism asserts that no reliable account of Israel's history exists prior to the post-exilic period (530 BC or later). The narratives purporting to recount history are no more than political propaganda pamphlets designed to justify Jewish occupation of the land in immediately pre-Christian times. Remarkably, this interpretation is being employed today, even by some Israeli scholars, with the unintended (or intended?) consequence of bolstering Palestinian claims to the same land. Thus, the antiquity of the patriarchal promises, channeled through the prophets, is without substantiality since they lack genuine historical grounding. Again, many evangelicals are quite willing to play down biblical history's importance as though theology and history can be viewed as parallel universes.

Canonical redaction (or reduction). Brevard Childs popularized the terms "canonical criticism" and "canonical theology," meaning in both cases that all that can be known for certain about the OT and its development is what can be found in its final post-exilic canonical form.⁴⁷ This appears to rid the scholar of the need to quarrel over method in constructing models to account for the origins and processes of biblical tradition. The whole can be dismissed by maintaining that the canonical shape is the last layer of reshaping and reinterpreting biblical texts so as to make them meaningfully authoritative to every generation that embraced them as God's word. Once more, evangelicals in some instances are finding comfort in this approach because it delivers them from the burden of always having to argue for or "prove" some point or other as regards authorship, dating, text transmission, and the like.

Evangelical trends towards accommodation. These have been hinted at in the previous list of issues as evidences of the point being made here, namely, that evangelical scholars find it increasingly tempting to forego the framework that marked them as such and provided them methodological and substantive boundaries. Reasons for this could be multiplied, but the following suggestions must suffice: (a) a genuine desire to be in touch with the latest and best scholarship in order to employ it in the service of Christ and the Kingdom; (b) an attempt to "baptize" critical scholarly methodologies in such a manner that evangelical truth commitment remains at the core though dressed

⁴⁶ Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). For Collins's impact on evangelicalism, see *inter alia* Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 202; but cf. p. 184 where Waltke argues for literal days of 24 hours. Theistic evolution and six literal days are clearly mutually exclusive.

⁴⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 6–16. For a recent assessment of the method, see Chen Xun, *Theological Exegesis in the Canonical Context: Brevard Springs Childs's Methodology of Biblical Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). See also John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism* (London: T & T Clark, 2003).

in foreign garb; (c) a desire for recognition by the guild so as to avoid the scandal of appearing to be “pre-critical,” uninformed, naïve, or, worst of all, fundamentalist.⁴⁸

VII. CONCLUSION

Today’s fads are tomorrow’s *de rigeurs*, and today’s tentative issues in scholarship are likely to become tomorrow’s solidified givens. This has been the story of the church and the academy since their beginnings; hence the need for unending introspection and reassessment lest the ancient moorings be cut loose and the vessel of truth and authority be scuttled. This paper has not been designed or intended to do more than to suggest some major issues confronting OT scholarship. Since its author is a committed evangelical, there should be no surprise that it contains a subtext of warning and exhortation directed toward his evangelical colleagues but not to them alone.

⁴⁸ Wells, *Courage to be Protestant* 91.