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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer. (1 Chron. 29:29)

The Levites . . . instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. (Neh. 8:7–8)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man [or woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

A fabulously rich world of discovery awaits the readers of the OT's historical narratives. It is here that many of the Bible's most famous characters reside: Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel, David, Esther. It is here that many of the Bible's most famous events are found: the arrival in the "Promised Land," the sun standing still, Samson killing the Philistines or David killing Goliath. It is here that God's gracious promises to His people are given, affirmed, and reaffirmed: God's covenant with Abraham, His promises to David, His faithfulness to His loyal remnants in Israel.

Readers with historical interests will naturally gravitate to the OT historical narratives for information about life in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. Readers who delight in well-told tales will also enjoy these historical narratives, since they are richly endowed with complex and appealing literary characteristics.

This book is an invitation to *read* the OT historical narratives. It is intended to kindle an interest in the OT's historical books for those who have never read them seriously and to serve as a guide to their contents and messages. It also is intended to serve as a teacher of a method of reading and studying. As the contents and messages of the individual books are elucidated in the following chapters, the hope is that readers with little experience in close and careful reading of the Bible will learn to pay equal attention to microscopic details and macroscopic structures. It is in the details, as well as in the large-scale sweeps, that we learn about the messages of the biblical books and, ultimately, about God.

This book is most emphatically *not* intended to serve as a substitute for reading the historical narrative books themselves. If readers of this book believe that it will neatly summarize for them the biblical books so that they won't have to read for themselves—with a sort of "Masterplots" or "Cliffs Notes" mentality—they will be disappointed and will have cheated themselves. This book pales into nothingness alongside the grandeur and importance of the biblical books under consideration. *They* are the proper focus of study. The present book merely intends to whet the appetite for, and point the way into, the biblical books.

The biblical quotations at the beginning of this chapter point to the importance of reading, writing, and interpreting. The OT's historical books came together in many and various ways, and they stand ready for our serious scrutiny—our serious reading—as history and literature of the utmost importance. They stand ready to be read, ultimately, as life-giving and sacred *Scriptures*.

This chapter introduces the literary and historical genre of "historical narrative." It begins at the most general level, considering it as prose, then moves on to consider it first as history and then as literature.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AS PROSE: CONTRAST WITH POETRY

Definitions

A glance at any page of Psalms or Proverbs, followed by a perusal of almost any page in any of the historical books, will immediately reveal some differences in form: most modern English Bibles print Psalms and Proverbs as poetry, with relatively short, parallel lines whose text leaves wide margins; the historical books are printed as prose narratives, with full paragraphs whose text extends from margin to margin.

What is prose? In its broadest sense, it is any expression that is not poetry, which is defined as having a regular rhythmic pattern.[1] Historical narrative is a type of literature written in prose, not poetry. Not all writings in prose are historical narrative, but all historical narratives are in prose form.[2]

Among prose forms the distinctive of historical narrative is that it attempts to give an account of past events.[3] In its broadest sense, historical narrative may have any number of purposes,[4] but in the Bible, it tells its story for the purposes of edification and instruction (see 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

A more careful perusal of the historical books will reveal that they are not composed entirely of historical narrative written in prose form. One finds many other literary types embedded in them, such as poems, lists of various kinds—genealogies, census lists, materials lists, and so forth—proverbs, songs, and many others. Yet, the overall structure

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1. C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, s.v. "Prose"; Northrop Frye, "Verse and Prose," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 885; M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, s.v. "Prose."

2. The presence of poetic "narratives," such as found in some "historical psalms"—Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136—does not obviate this conclusion. The historical psalms, while telling a story of God's involvement in the past, nevertheless do so within a poetic—not a prose—framework.

3. In the field of literary study, it is one of four types of composition that are generally distinguished: argumentation, description, and exposition are the others. See Holman, *Handbook to Literature*, s.v. "Narration."

4. Holman, *Handbook to Literature*, s.v. "Narration"; Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, s.v. "Narrative."

found in the historical books reveals their intent to be *historical narratives*, that is, accounts of past events with the purpose of edification and instruction.[5] A helpful way to begin a study of historical narrative is to study it as prose in contrast to poetry. This can be done both in terms of form and of content.

Form

Many formal features help us distinguish between poetry and prose.

Line length. Fundamental to poetry is a constriction of the length of the lines: they cannot be infinitely long, nor, in most poetry, can the line length vary radically from line to line. That is the most basic distinction between prose and poetry. Many theorists speak of the presence or absence of meter, although that is not as prominent in Hebrew poetry as it is in poetry of other languages.

In Hebrew poetry, the average line length is three to four words, each having one beat (in a metrical system), consisting of eight to nine syllables. Thus, Psalm 1:1 reads as follows (author's translation):

> Happy (is) the-man who
> > does-not-walk in-the-counsel of-wicked-ones,
> > and-in-the-way of-sinners does-not-stand,
> > and-in-the-seat of-scoffers does-not-sit.

The units connected by the dashes represent one metrical unit in Hebrew (in most cases, one word); thus, each line after the introductory phrase consists of three metrical units. The syllable count for these three lines in the MT is 9, 10, 9.[6]

Contrast this with the following verse from a prose text:

> At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in

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5. See also John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 25.

6. A reconstruction of the language as it was probably pronounced during the time when the text was written yields a count of 8, 9, 9.

the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. (Est. 8:9)

This verse—the longest in the Bible—is one long, extended sentence in Hebrew, which has been broken up in the NIV into three English sentences. The immediate point here is that the length of the sense units are in no way restricted in this prose passage.

Parallelism of members. A second feature of poetry—one that has long been considered the defining characteristic of Hebrew poetry—is called "parallelism of members" (i.e., equivalencies of parallel words, thoughts, or sense units). This can be seen easily in Psalm 1:1, where the second, third, and fourth lines of the verse all have a verb of bodily motion (walking, standing, sitting), a prepositional phrase with "in," and a word for God's enemies (wicked ones, sinners, scoffers). By contrast, the prose passage in Esther 8:9 has nothing like this.

To be sure, Hebrew prose often is characterized by repetition, such as we see in Joshua 3:6: "And Joshua said unto the priests, 'Lift up the ark of the covenant and pass before the people.' So they lifted up the ark of the covenant and walked before the people."[7] However, in such cases—which are legion in the OT historical books—repetition is not parallelism; it is usually exact repetition of words, not the parallels of near-synonyms found in poetry. Furthermore, none of the other features of poetry is found in such prose narrative texts.

Literary devices. A third feature of Hebrew poetry is that it tends to use more literary devices than does prose. Poetry makes frequent use of such devices as alphabetic acrostics, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, paranomasia, chiasms, and more.[8]

Psalm 1:1 features alliteration/assonance in the first three words: *ʾašrê haʾîš ʾăšher*. We also see a chiastic arrangement in the parallel elements in the second through fourth lines:

$$A - B - C$$
$$B' - C' - A'$$
$$B'' - C'' - A''$$

7. Author's translation, rendered in a rather wooden fashion to bring out the repetitions between the halves of the verse better; NIV's translation obscures these exact repetitions.

8. For catalogues and explanations of poetic devices, see C. H. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, 31–38.

Again, no such patterns are discernible in the prose text of Esther 8:9. Hebrew prose does make rich use of literary and rhetorical devices, but they are of different types, and they are not usually packed as "densely" into prose narratives as they are into poetic texts.

Content

Selectivity. Because of the constrictions associated with short line lengths, poets tend to be more highly selective with their words than writers of prose narratives. A glance at two parallel passages, Exodus 14 and 15, confirms this. Exodus 14 is the prose account of the Israelites' coming to and crossing the Red Sea, whereas Exodus 15 contains a hymnic reflection on the same events. Exodus 14 goes to some lengths to emphasize the fact that the Israelites crossed on dry ground (see vv. 16, 21, 22, 29). However, upon close inspection, we find that dry ground is never once mentioned in the poetic text that tells of this event. The poem in 15:1–18 is much more selective in its details—it is almost "impressionistic" in terms of the way it retells the story. The reason for this, of course, is that the poem is not concerned at all to give a coherent account of how Israel crossed the Red Sea; the details of the story are only incidental to the purpose of the poetic text, which is to glorify God for His great deliverance.[9]

Figurative language. As a generalization, figurative language finds a home more readily in poetic expression than in prose. Poetry—in any language—is more often the conveyor of deep emotions, and it breaks more easily into figurative expression. Compare the following two texts that describe situations of great distress:

> David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. (2 Sam. 12:16)

> Save me, O God,
> for the waters have come up to my neck.
> I sink in the miry depths,
> where there is no foothold.

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9. We will make the point below that narrative texts also are selective. However, when the two are compared, especially in parallel passages such as Exodus 14 and 15, or Judges 4 and 5, the point made here holds: poetry is more selective than prose.

> I have come into deep waters;
>
> the floods engulf me.
>
> > Psalm 69:1–2 [MT 2–3]

The prose passage is straightforward, telling of David's activity of mourning. The poetic text is emotive and impressionistic, conveying the psalmist's great emotion. However, we do not literally imagine the psalmist standing—or worse, treading water!—in floodwaters up to his neck, pen and parchment in hand, composing this psalm. Because of the nature of poetry, we instinctively understand the language in the psalm to be figurative.

The stage. The stage on which events unfold in prose is usually limited to earthly events on an earthly stage.[10] Poetry reaches into the heavenlies more often. Compare the following two texts:

> On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him. (Judg. 4:23–24)

> O Lord, when you went out from Seir,
>
> when you marched from the land of Edom,
>
> the earth shook, the heavens poured,
>
> the clouds poured down water.
>
> The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai,
>
> before the Lord, the God of Israel. . . .
>
> From the heavens the stars fought,
>
> from their courses they fought against Sisera.
>
> > Judges 5:4–5, 20

The prose text is more "prosaic," i.e., more straightforward, and it tells of the Israelites' victory in a matter-of-fact manner. The poetic text reflects upon that victory and speaks of God's involvement from the heavenly perspective.

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10. A major exception is the prologue to Job (chaps. 1–2), which tells of God's and Satan's conversations about Job.

Time frame. Prose narrative is usually written from a past time perspective. Indeed, as we have noted, that is its nature: it attempts to give an account of the past for the purposes of instruction. Poetry is not so limited. It ranges from past to present to future time frames. In the books of the prophets, for example, the large majority of prophetic texts that tell of God's future intentions and activities are written in poetic, not prose, form.

Conclusion

Poetry differs from prose narrative in both form and content.[11] That does not mean that poetry and prose cannot be found together, however. A number of major poems are found in the historical books: in Judges 5; 1 Samuel 2; 2 Samuel 1; 2 Samuel 22; 2 Samuel 23; 2 Kings 19; and 1 Chronicles 16. Norman Gottwald has observed that only seven OT books contain no poetry: Leviticus, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, and Malachi.[12] Conversely, only nine OT books contain no prose: Psalms,[13] Proverbs, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Thus, at least twenty-three OT books combine the two. Actually, one-half to two-thirds of the OT is prose, but not all prose is historical narrative. (For example, outside the historical books, we find large bodies of laws that are prose.) Nevertheless, the historical narrative component of the OT is a large and important part of that portion of Scripture.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AS HISTORY

The term *history* has at least three general uses in English. First, it can refer to the "facts," i.e., the events, the happenings of history. Second, it can refer to the *record* or *account* of the facts. Third, it can refer to the *study* of the facts or, more precisely, the study of the accounts of the facts. In the discussion below, we will consider all three categories, but we will focus primarily on the second category (the record of the

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11. We could also attempt to distinguish the two in terms of purpose—i.e., prose narrative intends to inform as part of its task, whereas, say, hymns intend to praise and glorify God—but this is a more difficult endeavor, since, ultimately, all Scripture intends to instruct us (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

12. Norman Gottwald, "Poetry, Hebrew," *IDB* 3, 829.

13. But we do find brief prose snippets in the historical titles to fourteen psalms (e.g., at Psalms 3, 18, or 51).

facts), and we will consider how the Bible's historical books fit into general discussions of "history" in this sense.

Definitions

Historians have offered many and various definitions of history as they have reflected upon the historian's task. Indeed, many do not even attempt a definition, or do so with only minimal precision or clarity.[14] Following are four representative definitions that define the second meaning of history:

> [History is] the science which first investigates and then records, in their causal relations and development, such past human activities as are (a) definite in time and space, (b) social in nature, and (c) socially significant.[15]

> [History is] the story of experiences of men living in civilized societies.[16]

> History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of the past.[17]

> History is the undertaking of rendering an account of a particular, significant, and coherent sequence of past human events.[18]

Almost every definition here speaks of history as a societal endeavor —one that records (mainly or only) those events that are *socially*

14. M. Eisenberg cheerfully acknowledges this fact, and he refuses to define it himself, noting the many conflicting definitions in the process. See his section entitled "A Nondefinition," in Michael T. Eisenberg, *Puzzles of the Past: An Introduction to Thinking about History*, 3–5.

15. Gilbert J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method* (New York: Fordham Univ., 1946), 10. Garraghan exegetes this definition on pp. 7–10.

16. Gustaaf Johannes Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (1950; Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ., 1982), 38. He unpacks this definition on pp. 33–39.

17. Johan Huizinga, "A Definition of the Concept of History," in R. Klibansky and H. J. Paton, eds., *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1936), 1–10 (quote from p. 9). The citation here of this oft-quoted definition comes from K. L. Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 26.

18. Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History*, 6.

significant. In this sense not every event that ever occurred anywhere belongs in a "history" (even though they certainly did happen). A "history" records events that are significant to the author and to the group for or about which he or she is writing.

The fourth definition limits the genre significantly as well, since *any* account of the past is not "history" (such as an accounts book or a list). Rather, only that account is "history" that attempts to impose some coherence on the past. This limitation, though not expressed in the same way, is assumed in the first three definitions as well.

An important element in understanding "history" in the sense here is its *intent*. Written histories intend to be accurate, true accounts of the past, as well as coherent ones. As Baruch Halpern states, "Histories purport to be true, or probable, representations of events and relationships in the past."[19] Meir Sternberg makes the point even more strongly. In distinguishing between history and fiction, he argues that the truth claims of the two are different.[20] Both indeed have truth "value," but only history "claims" to be historically accurate. This does not mean that, if a single historical error is found in a work, it is then automatically relegated to "fiction" as a literary category. Many historians are proven wrong in one or more of their facts, but their works are still "histories." Rather, it means that we must treat histories on their own terms, in terms of what they claim to do, what their intent is.

At the same time, histories are selective: "Historiography cannot—and should not—be infinitely detailed. All history is at best an abridgement—better or worse—of an originally fuller reality. . . . History is always the study of one thing, or several things, and the exclusion of many others."[21]

History as "The Facts"

The first use of "history" refers to the events, the happenings of history. This is "what people have done and suffered," i.e., the "historical process"[22] or "past actuality."[23]

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19. Ibid., 6–8; the quote is from p. 6.

20. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 24–26.

21. Halpern, *The First Historians*, 7.

22. David W. Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian View*, 1.

23. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT POETIC BOOKS

REVISED AND EXPANDED

C. HASSELL BULLOCK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament books considered in this volume contain some of the most potent literature of human history, and the ideas they treat are among the most cogent that the human heart has entertained.

These books are not historically oriented. In fact, with the exception of the Psalms, they are relatively devoid of historical allusions. But while they do not reflect upon historical events, they are alive with the spirit of history. They grasp for and grapple with those essential concepts that set the Hebrew faith apart from that of its neighbors and ensure its survival in a pantheistic, power-greedy world.

Reflecting the essential theology of the Pentateuch, these books in general do not seek to convey directly God's word to man, as do the Prophets (e.g., "thus says the Lord"), but they entertain the questions that arise in the presence of the divine imperative. In part, the spokesmen in these five books speak for man to God (esp. in Job and many of the psalms), in contrast to the Prophets, who normally speak for God to man. Yet the book of Ecclesiastes is more a human monologue than a dialogue between man and God, whereas the Song of Songs is even more anthropocentric.

Moreover, they breathe a certain universality. The problem of suffering, the conscience marred by sin, the transience of human life, and the passionate love of woman and man, to mention only a few of the matters dealt with in these books, cut across national and ethnic lines to include all of the human race. The spokesmen in these books formulate

questions that have lain in man's subconscious mind, often without his having had courage to bring them to the surface.

The courageous spirit of Job, Ecclesiastes, and many of the psalms, therefore, is another characteristic of this literature. It is marked frequently by a mood of challenge and skepticism, saying things that are rooted deeply in man's being. These books focus on man's reflections on God and His response rather than on God's search for man.

Yet the divine Spirit hovers over man's effort to understand, to figure out his world, to fathom the meaning of his relationship to God. The theological orientation toward creation in wisdom literature is not coincidental. For to unravel the meaning of human life will lead one all the way back to its beginning. The individual and personal nature of the books that we undertake to study is evidence of the attention given in the Old Testament to the importance of the individual to God. He began the race with an individual, and His love continues to be applied personally as well as corporately. One might read the Pentateuch and see only a faint shadow of himself reflected there. The historical books may overwhelm him with facts and events. The Prophets, by some mere chance, may pass him by with their deep convictions and concerns about their own societies and world. But the poetic books will find him wherever he is.

THE POETIC BOOKS

The five books known as the Poetic Books are found in the third division of the Hebrew Bible, which is called the "Writings," or *Kethubim*.[1] The Greek language has given this division the title *Hagiographa* (sacred writings). The term "Poetic Books" obviously points to the poetic nature of the contents, even though Ecclesiastes is included and is written in an elevated prosaic style that only at times has a metrical pattern (e.g., 11:7–12:8).

The Masoretes of the Medieval Age grouped Job, Proverbs, and Psalms together by giving a special system of poetic accentuation to these three books, mnemonically called "The Book of Truth" because in Hebrew the first letter of each of these books taken together spelled

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1. The Hebrew Bible has these three divisions: I. Torah (Pentateuch); II. Prophets, including (A.) Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and (B.) Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve Prophets); and III. Writings

'emeth (truth). The other two books of the five, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, were included in a special sub-group of the Writings called the *Five Megilloth* ("scrolls"), namely, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. The purpose of this grouping was liturgical, for each book was read at an important Jewish festival, a practice that continues to this day.

The order of the Five Megilloth follows the order of the festivals to which they are assigned: Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Pentecost), Lamentations (Fast of the Ninth of Ab, commemorating the destruction of both Temples), Ecclesiastes (Feast of Tabernacles), and Esther (Purim). The reading of the Song of Songs during the Passover celebration alludes to the spiritual interpretation of the book that was normative in ancient Judaism, and that emphasized the love between the Lord and Israel. Since the Passover commemorated the formalization of that special relationship, the Song seemed appropriate. The reading of the book of Ecclesiastes on the Festival of Tabernacles, however, seems inconsistent with the great joy of that feast. On this matter Victor Reichert remarks:

> The juxtaposition of piety and scepticism, irreconcilable as they may appear, seems to belong to the whole paradox of the Jewish mind. Faith and Reason write one upon the other in the palimpsest of our past. Perhaps it was to strike the balance of sanity that the Fathers of the Synagogue chose the recital of Ecclesiastes, with its melancholy refrain *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*, on the Festival of Tabernacles when the Jew is commanded to rejoice. At all events, it is hard to escape the judgment that the major emphasis of Jewish thinking has indeed been that of setting our shoulders joyously to the world's wheel. That we have spared ourselves some unhappiness by, beforehand, slipping the Book of Ecclesiastes beneath our arm, seems likewise true.[2]

The Greek Septuagint placed all the poetic books after the historical writings and before the Prophets in the following order: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job. The Latin Vulgate set Job at the head of the list rather than at the end, thus giving an order that the English versions have followed. This order evidently was dictated

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2. Victor E. Reichert and A. Cohen, "Ecclesiastes," *The Five Megilloth*, The Soncino Books of the Bible (London: Soncino, 1952), 105.

by chronological considerations. Since Job was considered to have lived in the patriarchal times, the book of Job would precede Psalms, which was written largely by David several centuries after the Patriarchal Age. The last three books follow the Psalms by virtue of their association with David's son Solomon. Thus Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs have been grouped together as a Solomonic collection.

We must keep in mind as we approach the study of these books that the present order of the biblical books does not necessarily carry the authority of divine inspiration. Divine inspiration applies to content only. Rather, the order is the work of various editors in the history of transmission, as the varying arrangements of the versions and manuscripts testify.

Three of the five Poetic Books constitute the wisdom literature of the Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. While most of the book of Psalms and possibly the Song of Songs cannot be strictly classified as "wisdom" in the technical sense, they certainly have affinities with it. As our subsequent discussion will show, several of the psalms may be classified as wisdom psalms, and the Song of Songs shares the didactic nature of wisdom literature as well as its literary form (i.e., a song). Therefore, we are no more inaccurate referring to this collection of five books as "wisdom literature" than we are by attributing to it the title "Poetic Books." Indeed the bulk of the material truly belongs in the category of wisdom. Thus we may better understand all these books in the context of the wisdom movement and literature in ancient Israel and the Near East.

WISDOM AS A PERSONAL DYNAMIC

Biblical wisdom was a dynamic in ancient Israel that operated in three dimensions: the personal, universal, and literary. The personal dimension was characterized by both theological and practical categories. The universal dimension dealt with the ultimate categories of theology, explaining wisdom as an attribute of God Himself. The literary dimension was merely the vehicle of the wisdom movement, inscripturating the propositions and precepts of wisdom for posterity. We shall further explain this three-dimensional nature of wisdom.

In Personal Skills

An examination of those passages in the Old Testament that use the noun "wisdom" (*hochmāh*) and the adjective "wise" (*hāchām*) reveals that

they were used even in reference to practical arts and skills. These terms were applied to those artisans who designed and constructed the Tabernacle: Bezalel, the architect of the Tabernacle (Ex. 35:30–36:1), the craftsmen who made Aaron's priestly garments (Ex. 28:3), and the women weavers (Ex. 35:25–26). Of Bezalel and Oholiab it is said that the Lord "filled them with skill [lit., *hochmāh* of heart] to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer" (Ex. 35:35). The application of these terms to the practical arts is even broader than the Tabernacle narrative. Goldsmiths (Jer. 10:9), sailors (Ps. 107:27; Ezek. 27:8), women skilled in lamentation (Jer. 9:17), magicians and soothsayers (Gen. 41:8; Isa. 44:25), and military strategists and statesmen (Isa. 10:13; 29:14; Jer. 49:7) share these terms to designate their particular skills. Moreover, wisdom is closely associated with the musical arts in 1 Kings 4:32, for the product of God's gift of wisdom to Solomon included songs as well as proverbs.

In Personal Philosophy

Yet this use of the terms "wisdom" and "wise" does not get to the heart of the personal dimension of wisdom. The nature of language is to develop a broad spectrum of meaning for a single word, and the above examples illustrate the use of our terms for the technical arts and skills without actually opening up the essential meaning of wisdom as it is used in the wisdom literature of the Bible. As one reads through that material, one quickly recognizes that wisdom was a *personal life dynamic* that enabled one to assimilate, sort, and categorize the elements and issues of life so as to provide a meaningful synthesis. Its wide span encompasses the struggle of a righteous man to understand his suffering and the limp efforts of a lazy man to overcome his sloth. We might begin with examples out of Proverbs regarding the basic relationships within the family unit, which are frequently the subject of this literature, both from the standpoint of the parents' responsibility to their children (Prov. 13:22, 24; 22:6) and the children's to their parents (1:8–9; 15:5). The stability of the family is further assured by admonitions that highly esteem marriage (12:4; 19:14; 31:10–31) and warn against adultery and sexual promiscuity (5:1–14).

Yet the scope of wisdom reaches outside the family unit to regulate personal and social behavior that builds a stable and productive community. Moral virtues such as self-discipline (10:17; 13:13), temperate speech (10:19; 11:12), and honesty (15:27; 16:11), and vices

such as slander (10:18; 19:5), envy (23:17–18), and gluttony (23:1–3), are subjects of wisdom's regulatory function. The scope broadens to include advice for the people's relationship to the king (25:67) and the king's to the people (14:28; 25:4–5), and justice in the courts (24:23). This list could be greatly extended.

While these principles and regulations describe the horizontal scale of ancient Israelite life, wisdom admonished her patrons on the vertical aspect of their lives as well. The Lord's sovereign will was uppermost in the world, and the individual was the object of His careful guidance:

> The mind of man plans his way,
> But the Lord directs his steps.
>
> (Prov. 16:9)

> Many are the plans in a man's heart,
> But the counsel of the Lord, it will stand.
>
> (Prov. 19:21)

Human ingenuity has its place, but only God can assure success in life:

> Commit your works to the Lord,
> And your plans will be established.
>
> (Prov. 16:3)

> Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
> And do not lean on your own understanding.
> In all your ways acknowledge Him,
> And He will make your paths straight.
>
> (Prov. 3:5–6)

Indeed, the undergirding notion of the wisdom-controlled life is the "fear of the Lord." It is a phrase that has layers of meaning. The ground layer may be understood as a *personal attitude* or *disposition* toward the Lord, illustrated by the analogy of one's fear of the king:

My son, fear the Lord and the king;
Do not associate with those who are given to change;
For their calamity will rise suddenly,
And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?

(Prov. 24:21–22)

At the risk of confusing the issue by modern use (or abuse) of theological terminology, the "fear of the Lord" denotes piety in the most positive sense of the word, a spiritual disposition that may be described as a proper relationship to God and one's neighbor. It is wisdom's comprehensive term for religion.[3]

A second layer, not unrelated to the first, is that of moral virtue or appropriate behavior. Job is described in these terms as one who was "blameless, upright, fearing God, and *turning away from evil*" (Job 1:1, emphasis added; cf. also Prov. 8:13). "Fearing God" and "turning away from evil" are parallel expressions, the second expanding on the first. The book of Proverbs, as seen above, provides ample proof that moral virtues are an important part of the personal portrait of one who feared the Lord. Admittedly the revelation at Sinai is not consciously wisdom's mode of communicating the will of God, but the theological/moral principles of the books of Proverbs and Job are those of the Decalogue, which calls for sexual purity, honor of parents, integrity toward one's neighbor, and so on.[4]

A third layer intermeshes with the second. The knowledge of human frailty and divine strength is endemic to the fear of the Lord (Prov. 3:5–7). It is a balanced perspective on God and man.

It would not be inaccurate to say that comprehensively the fear of the Lord is a worldview that attempts to synthesize the elements of human life and work. It is an "educational standard" (compare our objective standard of research) that gives balance to the individual as he relates both to his world and God.

Henri Blocher contends that all three wisdom books as they have come to us are a witness to the theological premise that the fear of the Lord is the principle of wisdom. The "fear of the Lord" forms a literary

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3. Bernard Bamberger, "Fear and Love of God in the Old Testament," HUCA 6 (1929): 43–47.

4. Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 64.

inclusion in Proverbs, for the book opens with the statement that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7a), and concludes with the portrait of the virtuous woman who personifies the fear of the Lord (31:30). Moreover, the author of Job begins the book by describing his hero as the paragon of wisdom in terms of his fear of the Lord (1:1) and underscores that character portrait with God's affirmation at the end of the poem on wisdom (chap. 28, note v. 28). Likewise Ecclesiastes' assessment of human responsibility is to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccles. 12:13).[5]

WISDOM AS A UNIVERSAL DYNAMIC

In addition to being a personal dynamic, wisdom is also a universal dynamic. This second dimension of wisdom is readily seen in Proverbs 8:22–31. Some scholars believe that this passage presents wisdom as a hypostasis, having an existence distinct from God though expressing His nature, much like wisdom in the apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* (Wisd. of Sol. 1:6–7; 6:12–24; 7:1–8:18) or the Logos in John's gospel. The critical word is *qānāh* (Prov. 8:22), which generally means "to acquire," or "to possess," but in fewer instances has the sense of "create" (Deut. 32:6; Ps. 139:13). The sense of "possess" is preferable in the context because the Lord is the Creator and wisdom is merely present with Him prior to and during His work of creation.[6]

It is my opinion that Solomon seeks to personify a divine attribute. Yet, in this way he asserts that wisdom is an emanation of the divine life, much as one would understand love to be an emanation of the life of God. Whereas law and prophecy admonished Israel to turn to *God* for life, wisdom personified admonished individuals to turn to *her* and receive life. This further supports the view that wisdom was a symbol of a divine attribute. The Hebrew mind would not entertain a dualism between *God* as source-of-life versus *wisdom* as source-of-life. The effect of this argument is to connect wisdom both to God and to the created world in a way that unites God, people, and the world in an inseverable bond.

God addressed Israel through the law by commandment and precept,

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5. Henri Blocher, "The Fear of the Lord as the 'Principle' of Wisdom," *The Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977): 3–4.

6. R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 71–72.

through the prophets by His word, and through the sages by wisdom. As a principle of revelation, wisdom was the "rationale of the cosmos,"[7] imparting understanding to mankind. Without it the world and human life would be devoid of meaning. Wisdom is the all-pervasive presence of God that permeates the physical universe and human social order (Prov. 2:1–15; 8:22). It is God's communicative word written in nature and human experience.

While redemptive history is not a conscious rubric of wisdom literature in the Bible, the sovereign control of God in the universe nevertheless lies behind the literature, and this inevitably involves history, for God is the originator of the dynamic force that moves history and nature (Job 9:4; 11:6; 12:13; 32:8; 37:16; Prov. 2:6; 8:22–31). This implicit concept came to fruition in the Wisdom of Solomon where wisdom is depicted as the driving force of history (Wisd. of Sol. 10–19). So critical is God's revelation through wisdom that the individual's posture toward her determines his destiny (Prov. 8:32–36). Just as in the Pentateuch one's response to the law, or in the Prophets one's response to the prophetic word, so in wisdom literature one's response to wisdom, the medium of divine revelation, determines one's happiness and well-being.

WISDOM AS A LITERARY DYNAMIC

The three wisdom books of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes), the wisdom elements of the Psalms,[8] and other wisdom fragments distributed throughout the Old Testament testify to the importance of the wisdom movement in ancient Israel. The literary legacy is as rich in its variety of genres as prophetic literature. In the Old Testament the term *māshāl* is used rather broadly to include a proverb, riddle, or longer composition involving comparisons and analogies. The term itself comes from the verb that means "to be like, compare."

Wisdom Genres

More specifically the literary form of the *proverb* was a favorite genre of wisdom literature. It was short and pithy, its effectiveness depending in part upon the concise, witty manner of expressing an idea or truth.

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7. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament,* trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:89.

8. See p. 160 (on wisdom psalms).

It provided the mind with an easily accessible entry into the truth expressed. With only a few words one might recall a truth that could effervesce and effect a change of mind or attitude in a given situation:

> A good name is to be more desired than great riches,
> Favor is better than silver and gold.
>
> (Prov. 22:1)

This proverb might raise to a level of consciousness a truth that could otherwise be smothered in circumstances where one's action easily endangered one's reputation. Thus one would be diverted from a wrong course. Moreover, the terms of comparison—great riches, silver and gold—further highlight the precious value of one's reputation. Thus both mental accessibility and the impact of the literary form contribute to the effectiveness of the proverb.

The *riddle* was the more enigmatic form of wisdom literature. Its method was to disguise an idea so that the hearers might be confused or challenged to search for its meaning. Samson used this form with the Philistines (Judg. 14:14), and the Queen of Sheba came to investigate the degree of Solomon's wisdom by testing him with riddles (1 Kings 10:1). Proverbs 1:6 equates riddle and proverb, but no riddle of the classical type found in Judges 14:14 has survived in biblical wisdom literature. Yet Crenshaw makes the interesting suggestion that disintegrated riddles lie behind some of the proverbs.[9]

One clear example of *allegory* can be seen in Ecclesiastes 12:1–7, where old age is described, at least in part, as a deteriorating estate. Elsewhere in the Old Testament the allegory is found in Judges 9:8–15 and Ezekiel 17:2–10.

The *dialogue* is represented *par excellence* by the book of Job. Elsewhere in canonical wisdom literature, however, dialogue is not prominent.

Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:16 takes the form of an *autobiographical narrative* in which the narrator relates his own personal experience.

The *prophetic address* twice becomes the literary form of wisdom's message in Proverbs (1:20–33; 8:1–36). She speaks through the lips

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9. In this regard, James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom," *Old Testament Wisdom*, ed. John H. Hayes (San Antonio: Trinity Univ., 1974), 242, draws attention to Proverbs 5:1–6, 15–23; 6:23–24; 16:15; 20:27; 23:27, 29–35; 25:2–3; 27:20. See his helpful discussion of wisdom genres on pp. 229–62.

of the prophetess. As already suggested, this implies that wisdom and prophecy were not basically antagonistic.

The Addressees of Wisdom

Since wisdom literature was addressed to the individual rather than to corporate society, national interests fell into the background. In this respect the literature is quite different from the Law and the Prophets. Because of this aspect of wisdom, history was not one of the foci of the canonical wisdom writers, although we should not assume that they had no interest in history. Their concern for the past was more philosophical than historical—how does one view the past? They had little concern for writing about historical events. Thus, while the corporate concern of wisdom was in no way primary, it was nevertheless served by pointing the individual in the direction of the good life, which in the long run contributed to the good society.

One of the purposes of wisdom literature was to instruct the young on how to achieve the good life and serve the social order well. In Proverbs the addressees were often the upper-class youth who were potential future leaders. Ecclesiastes addressed itself to the issues that were of concern to the upper class as well—the futility of wealth and pleasure, yet their proper use for life's enjoyment. So the teachers had the responsibility of transferring to their students the moral and cultured life, which involved manners before royalty, personal honor, morality, and many other matters. They sought to equip them for decision making and a life of responsible leadership.

Yet wisdom was not limited to the upper class. The book of Job, whose main character is wealthy and a leader in his community, nevertheless deals with timeless issues that cut across social structures. Injustice knows no class boundaries. Unmerited suffering is nondiscriminatory.

Ecclesiastes lamented the social oppression of that age, a matter that anyone, indiscriminate of social boundaries, could identify with. The book of Proverbs issued folk proverbs and moral instruction that encompassed the shared experience and concern of people in general. The practicality of wisdom literature in the Old Testament leads us to believe that the common people were attracted to it, even though the wisdom activities of the royal court may have had an elite character not accessible to the commoner. We are left with the impression that Solomon's court was buzzing with wisdom activity (1 Kings 4:29–34). In fact, his reputation for wisdom was the one thing that attracted the

Queen of Sheba to make her state visit (1 Kings 10:1–9). Her reaction to what she observed prompted her to speak of the privilege of those who were permanent members of the court: "How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom" (1 Kings 10:8).

During the time of Hezekiah, the Judean court was quite alive with wisdom activity as well, for this king was the benefactor who gave inducement to his "men" (evidently a technical term that refers to scholastics; cf. "your men" in the above passage) to collect and edit the Solomonic proverbs (Prov. 25:1).

In view of the emphasis upon marriage, the home, child rearing, and domestic stability and responsibility, it is quite conceivable that wisdom was popularly employed in the family as part of the home educational process.

Life Setting of Wisdom

With the development of form criticism in the last century came an interest in the real-life situation out of which certain genres of literature arose. This method provided both a way to understand the literature better and to peer through literary peepholes into the sociological structure of the society. From our discussion above, it would naturally follow that the life situation of wisdom was diverse. Granted that the court was at times the place where wisdom thought was sustained and nurtured, wisdom was still not limited to royal circles. We would infer from the down-to-earth nature of wisdom and its interest in the family that the home was one of the life situations where proverbial wisdom was born and nurtured.

The Scribe

It is believed by some scholars that in the monarchical period the "scribe" was an official in the king's court. That he was a very important person is verified by the following texts: 2 Samuel 8:17; 20:25; 2 Kings 12:10; 18:18; 1 Chronicles 27:32; Jeremiah 36:12; 37:15. Quite obviously in a world where the art of writing was not generally shared by all, those who could read and write had vistas of opportunity open to them that were not available to those without those skills. Thus in the monarchical period it is quite possible that scribes and wise men were very closely associated and were sometimes identical. During the postexilic era the scribes were definitely the teachers of wisdom.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
OLD TESTAMENT
PROPHETIC
BOOKS

C. HASSELL BULLOCK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is the latter prophets, as they are known in the Jewish canon, or the major and minor prophets, as they have come to be called in the Christian canon.

The plan of this book is to follow a historical line through the literary prophets, to the degree that it is visible to modern scholarship. Of course, all scholars do not agree on such fundamental issues as the date, authorship, and literary integrity of the books and their component parts. Those matters will be discussed in some detail in the chapters that follow. My attempt to line the prophets and their books up on a time line rather than treating them in the canonical order carries an element of risk, but it seems worth the venture in order to see the cultural, theological, and historical interrelationships that existed among the canonical prophets. This perspective is not easily appreciated by either the beginner in prophetic studies or the advanced student who concentrates on the prophets book by book and never sees the broad picture, with the individual prophets in their historical and theological niches.

Though the prophets were not given to quoting one another by name, they did draw upon one another, some more than others. Once that dependence is recognized, a new view of the prophetic movement emerges. They were not lone individualists who knew nothing and cared nothing for what others who bore the name "prophet" had said. Rather, they saw themselves in a line of succession and were aware of the tradition they had received from their predecessors.

THREE ERAS OF PROPHETS

The prophets spoke to Israel in times of crisis. In fact, historical and moral crisis, if the list of canonical prophets is any indication, called them forth. Had there been no crisis, there would have been little need for the prophets. When the list of literary prophets is posted, it will be noted that they are clustered around critical historical events or eras.

The historical continuum of Israel's history from the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C. can be sketched, even if roughly, in the literary prophets. Three centers, corresponding to the three international eras, bring them into sharp focus. Or, it might as accurately be said that the literary prophets bring three historical centers into sharp focus.

The first category includes those of the *Neo-Assyrian* period, whose attention fell upon the circumstances leading up to and the conditions following the fall of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 B.C. The constellation of prophets who assessed the moral and theological climate that led to the end of Israel was constituted by Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. In varying ways but with sympathetic insight, they saw the end of Israel and its implications for Judah. The critical nature of this era had much to do with the preservation of the prophetic oracles as sacred literature. Although Jonah was not preoccupied with that event and obviously belongs on the periphery of this era, it might be said that the judgment he reluctantly saw submerged in Yahweh's compassionate nature reemerged in the era of this prophetic constellation.

The second group of prophets is composed of those of the *Neo-Babylonian* era, whose focus marked out the attendant circumstances and succeeding conditions of the fall of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in 586 B.C. At the end of the Assyrian period, when the shifting lines of international domination blurred and then cleared again with the rise of the Chaldean-inspired Babylonian empire, some of the most powerful and discerning voices of history addressed the developing crisis. Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Nahum, Ezekiel, and Obadiah contributed their distinctive insights to their contemporaries and delivered their message from the Lord to Judah. The tragic model of Israel and her adamant persistence in idolatry was like a dark, foreboding cloud that settled over Judah. With the passing of time historical memory faded; the tragedy of 722 diminished as a moral example, and Judah stood on the same treacherous precipice as had her sister Israel. This group of prophets, with irresistible compulsion, tried to coax Judah

away from the edge of the abyss and announced the bad news of what would happen if she did not move back into the safety zone of covenantal observance. Yet thankfully the news was not all bad, for the fall of Jerusalem, at a certain point as inevitable as Samaria's fall, carried a message of hope that Judah would miraculously revive.

After the Exile, during the *Persian* period, the third group of prophets built upon that hope. They set forth Yahweh's new order as Babylonian austerity passed into Persian indulgence. With a new landlord, Judah's fortunes, partly smothered in the long exile but kept alive by religious enthusiasts, took a turn for the better. The decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. marked the beginning of that era. The first faint flurry of hope might even be traced to the release of Jehoiachin from prison after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, and Malachi in their respective ways articulated the hope and implicated the changing conditions of the first hundred years of postexilic life in Judah. The ebbing tide of history had fallen to its lowest mark in the fall of Jerusalem, a disaster once popularly thought to be impossible. The rise of Cyrus after the Exile represented the incoming tide of Judean history.

THE PRELIMINARY STAGES

The roots of prophecy are deeply imbedded in Israel's history and in the culture of the ancient Near East. From patriarchal times eminent leaders gave guidance to the people of God. The patriarchal mode of leadership developed in a later era into the charismatic guidance of Moses and Joshua and the judges. When such leaders led Israel, the need for prophets was minimal, although the prophetic phenomenon was known even during those eras (Num. 11:24–30; Deut. 18:15–22). However, from the closing phase of the period of the judges to the end of the biblical period as it is recorded in the Old Testament (OT), the word of the prophet is one of the most distinctive traits of Israelite culture and religion.

Four terms were applied to individuals, both men and women, who demonstrated prophetic traits: "man of God" (*'îsh hā-elōhîm*), "seer" (*rō'eh*), "visionary" (*hozeh*), and "prophet" (*nābî'*). The word "diviner" or "soothsayer" (*qōsēm*) is used of those who practiced formal divination, perhaps using lots or other methods of discerning the will of the deity, but that term was not applied to those prophets who receive legitimate sanction in the OT. The terms "seer" and "visionary" (*rō'eh*

and *ḥōzeh*) are descriptive of the individual's experience, the first emphasizing the extraordinary insight that came to the prophets, and the second the method of reception by means of visions or dreams. The terms "seer" and "man of God" are both attested in the case of Samuel (1 Sam. 9:9), the former term being the older of the two. The implication of the phrase "man of God" is that the person was possessed by God for special service. In the transition period between the nonliterary (those whose words have not been preserved in books that carry their names) and literary prophets (those whose words have been preserved in written form under their respective names), little distinction can be detected between the terms "man of God" and "prophet" (*nābî'*).[1] With the dawn of literary prophecy, however, the Hebrew term *nābî'* became the common name for the prophet. Some scholars believe the word came into disrepute in the time of Amos, inciting him to protest the allegation that he was a *nābî'*. His protestation, however, was more likely provoked by the motives that the priest Amaziah attributed to his ministry in Bethel—that he was there to earn his bread. The reply of Amos in which he explains his real occupation supports that interpretation (Amos 7:14–15).

A bygone generation of scholars deprecated the predictive or "foretelling" element in the prophets in favor of the "forthtelling" role.[2] The Septuagint (LXX) translation of the word *nābî'* as *prophētēs* (one who speaks for, in behalf of) has been cited as evidence that the prophets were "forthtellers" rather than "foretellers." Yet that word is quite a general term and does not capture the entire function of the *nābî'* in itself. Although it can accurately be said that the prophets were basically preachers—that is, that they spoke to their own times and situations, interpreting current events of history in light of God's will for Israel—the predictive element was a distinctive part of their message (Amos

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1. T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), 147, cites *nābî'* as coming from a common Akkadian root, not found in Hebrew, meaning "to speak," thus "speaker." William F. Albright disagrees with that etymology and relates it to the Akkadian word *nabu* ("to call"), thus "one who is called (by God)" (*From the Stone Age to Christianity,* 2d ed. [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957], 303). Klaus Koch's interpretation of the term as referring to one who is "entrusted with a message" is very close to that explanation (*The Prophets,* trans. Margaret Kohl [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 1:16).

2. E.g., Meek, *Hebrew Origins,* 148.

3:7). Subtract that and, as Alfred Guillaume has said, they would become preachers and not prophets.[3]

Origins of Prophecy

The origins of Hebrew prophecy have been variously traced to Canaanite, Egyptian, and Arabic sources, but more recently attention has shifted to Mesopotamia, especially the ancient city of Mari,[4] for enlightenment on the phenomenon of Hebrew prophecy. The Mari texts, dating from the first half of the second millennium B.C., are particularly interesting in their exposure of a group of prophets, both men and women, who practiced intuitive divination. That is, they were not practitioners in the standard techniques of divination but were dependent upon inspiration for their oracles, much in the same way as the Hebrew prophets.[5] Found in administrative records, their oracles were short and limited to materials relating to the reign of King Zimrilim. As a consequence of the nature of those texts and their direct relation to the royal court, we do not get as full a picture of the Mari prophets as we do of the Hebrew prophets. Further, the documents of Mari were most likely preserved within the royal court, whereas those of the Hebrew literary prophets were for the most part preserved apart from the court, thus exercising a kind of independence from the kings.

The evidence is still insufficient to draw any confident conclusion regarding the origins of Hebrew prophecy. The one thing that can be said confidently is that prophecy, like temple and sacrifice, was a general phenomenon in the ancient world of the Bible. The attempt to trace its origins to any one culture outside of Israel is no more possible than it would be to trace Mari or Canaanite prophecy to its derivation. So far as the OT generally and the prophets particularly were concerned,

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3. Alfred Guillaume, *Prophecy and Divination* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 111–12.

4. See John H. Hayes, "Prophetism at Mari and Old Testament Parallels," ATR 49 (1967): 397–409; William L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," Bib 50 (1969): 15–56; John F. Craghan, "Mari and Its Prophets: The Contributions of Mari to the Understanding of Biblical Prophecy," BTB 5 (1975): 32–55; Abraham Malamat, "Prophecy in the Mari Documents," El 4 (1956): 74–84; Abraham Malamat, "Prophetic Revelations in New Documents from Mari and the Bible," Suppl. VT 15 (1966): 207–27.

5. Malamat, "Prophetic Revelations," 208.

prophecy had its origins in the call of Yahweh. Through the prophets He revealed His will for Israel and spoke His Word of judgment and salvation. To be sure, it was not a unique phenomenon. Yet although the study of parallels may produce useful results, the question of origins remains unanswered. The best and most illuminating sources for understanding Hebrew prophecy are found in the OT itself.

Nonliterary Prophecy

Running parallel to literary prophecy in its earlier phase was the preliterary or nonliterary prophetic movement, so called because it did not leave a literary legacy, except as it impinged upon the history and fortunes of the monarchy (as found in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles). Judging from OT literature, the prophets did not become a significant factor in religious history until the rise of the monarchy. Samuel was both a transitional and foundational figure in that process. The records of nonliterary prophecy are not entirely lost to us, for they are interwoven into the histories of Israel as they are told in the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

In fact, the author of Kings viewed the prophetic movement as the only hope of reformation in the Northern Kingdom, particularly in view of the religious apostasy and moral corruption of the northern monarchy for which Jeroboam I established the determining and insurmountable precedent. The religious reforms that were instigated in the north were the direct result of such courageous prophets as Elijah and Elisha. But in the view of the writer of Kings, virtually no reforming elements originated with the northern kings themselves. In stark contrast, the religious and social reforms in the Southern Kingdom, ruled by the Davidic dynasty whose beginnings and continued existence were tied directly to prophetic authority, originated with the kings. That is especially evident in the religious revivals initiated by Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. The only literary prophets mentioned by the author of the book of Kings are Jonah and Isaiah. Thus not even honorable mention of the majority of the literary prophets is part of the plan of that writer. That silence is an enigma. Its explanation, however, is probably to be found in the purpose of the book, especially its deep respect for the legitimacy of the Davidic dynasty, which came into being through the instrumentality of the prophets, particularly Samuel and Nathan. The author's main interest lay in the Judean monarchy and its internal power to survive and revive. Perhaps the author wrote his his-

tory as a record of hope that David's house would rise again. The release of Jehoiachin from prison, with which the book ends, implies that hope.

The main sources of our knowledge about the nonliterary prophets, the books of Samuel and Kings, disclose the public life of those individuals. But like their literary successors (sometimes called the classical prophets), they had their private lives too. They maintained private domiciles, where they were on occasion consulted (1 Kings 14:4; also 13:18). However, their understudies, the "sons of the prophets," maintained some kind of communal existence. We see them involved in a unified effort to move their residence to the Jordan River during the time of Elisha (2 Kings 6:1–7). Yet, in light of 2 Kings 4:1 it seems safe to assume that they led a life with the ingredients of that of a private citizen. Here the wife of one of the sons of the prophets appeals to Elisha on behalf of her two children, whom her dead husband's creditor threatens to enslave.

Some evidence points to the receipt of fees for prophetic services. That was certainly true of the court prophets, and in some cases it may have been true of others. In 1 Samuel 9:8 Saul's servant had money to pay for the services of Samuel to locate the asses of Kish. So also Jeroboam sent a gift by his wife when she went to inquire of Ahijah (1 Kings 14:3). Such a practice was even known by Ben-hadad of Syria, for he sent Elisha a gift by Hazael when he wanted to know whether he would recover from his sickness (2 Kings 8:8). Yet we should also note that these prophets could not be manipulated by remuneration. Elisha refused to accept the gift that Namaan brought him when he requested healing of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:16),[6] and his servant Gehazi was struck with leprosy when he accepted the gift (vv. 24–27).

The psychological orientation of the nonliterary prophets reveals that they sometimes had ecstatic experiences, especially in association with the bands of prophets (1 Sam. 10:5–13). They were given to dreams, visions, ecstasy, and divining. The word of Yahweh to Micaiah ben Imlah took the form of a vision (1 Kings 22:13–23), and Yahweh's word to Nathan regarding the construction of the Temple was described as "in accordance with all these words and all this vision" (2 Sam. 7:17). The visions often occurred at night.[7]

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6. Norman H. Snaith, *The First and Second Books of Kings, The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 3:210, evaluates the gift at about eighty thousand dollars.

7. To Samuel (1 Sam. 15:16); to Solomon, although he was not a prophet (2 Chron. 1:7; 7:12); to Nathan (2 Sam. 7:4; 1 Chron. 17:3).

Generally these prophets were not concerned with moral issues as such, except as they had a direct bearing upon the destiny and welfare of Israel. So although they spoke to individuals rather than the nation, their fundamental concern was national destiny. In that sense the literary or classical prophets were truly their spiritual successors. The non-literary prophets were a kind of conscience to the king, admonishing him to faithfulness to Yahweh. There was no set pattern of consultation. Kings called on prophets, and prophets called on kings.

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR CULTURE

We cannot ignore the basic fact that the prophets found their legitimacy and valid credentials first of all in Yahweh's call. The prophetic call is the frontispiece of several of the prophetic books (Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), and Amos and Isaiah record their calls later in the collection of their oracles (Amos 7; Isa. 6). The book of Jonah is a treatise on the call and execution of the prophetic office. Even where the prophetic call is never formally recorded, it is nevertheless imbedded in the books in the form of the reception formulas, which fix the prophet's word as the Word of the Lord ("Thus says the Lord" and others). The importance of Yahweh's call of the prophet cannot be exaggerated. Even when a record of the formal call has not survived among a given prophet's oracles, we must nevertheless assume that his audience was somehow assured of his credentials.

It has been said that history makes the man, and that was true with the prophets. Of course, the man also makes history, and that was true of the prophets as well. Which perspective was more important is impossible to determine. They are complementary perspectives. I will discuss four of the forces working within the culture that shaped the prophets and were shaped by them: historical events, the monarchy, idolatry, and social oppression.[8]

Of History and Prophets

History was intimate with the prophets, an intimacy that partially stemmed from their deep relationship to the Lord of history. Yahweh had entered into the historical process to protect His vital interests in

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8. See K. A. Kitchen's excellent discussion of prophecy in *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 373–420.

the world He created. Israel was at once the end and means of His actions, and the prophets were the witnesses of His vital concerns. Unlike the nature religion of Canaan, Yahweh's revelation came through historical events. The prophets were patrons of that conviction, and their insistent preaching, even if it did not turn the nation to repentance, fortified the faith against the naturalism of the Baal cult. In the long run they preserved this vital element, which has been passed on to Judaism and Christianity.

Vying for the helm of Israel's spiritual craft, the prophets frequently positioned themselves against the power structures of priesthood and monarchy. They attempted to steer Israel through the narrow straits of political uncertainty and moral inexactitude. One only wonders what horrible thing might have happened to Israel that did not in fact happen—perish the thought!—if the prophets had not guided the nation through much historical change.

Assyria, buzzing like a swarm of bees, alighted upon Israel in the eighth century and left the Northern Kingdom stunned beyond recovery and the Southern Kingdom put on notice that her future hinged only on the contingency of spiritual change. That was the message of history as read by the eighth-century prophets. The two groups that stood to benefit most from the disaster of 722 B.C., the Jerusalem priests and Judean kings, still were not the major initiators of change that evoked God's mercy. Hezekiah's reform that followed this catastrophe, it might be admitted, temporarily staved off a like disaster for Judah. But his despicable son, Manasseh, reversed his father's policies and put the nation in jeopardy again. Yet the prophets were stabilizers of national destiny, or so they sought to be. They were present and speaking when kings clammed up and shut their eyes to the signs of the times.

Perhaps we should not overrate the prophets' objectivity, because they had their special interests. But life viewed through Yahweh's covenantal demands was, from a theological point of view, as objective as one could be. So the prophets spoke not theirs but Yahweh's Word. They were in line for no political advantage and sought no permanent institutional power. Through divine revelation they foresaw the crisis of 722 B.C. and sought to steer the survivors through it. Amos announced the awful day and its unavoidable consequences, "as when a man flees from a lion, / And a bear meets him" (Amos 5:19). Hosea, caught between divine judgment and incomparable love, declared the

severance of Israel's covenantal status but reaffirmed the hope of a future with Yahweh.

The Babylonians, the greedy successors of international dominance, played their role against Judah as meticulously as Assyria had done against Israel. Zephaniah, standing in the position that Amos had occupied in the Assyrian era, announced the Day of the Lord for Judah, and proponents of that message were found also in Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel. With their unstoppable army the Babylonians marched against Judah. Pawns of Yahweh's wrath and instruments of His irresistible power, in 586 those pagans reiterated the disaster of 722 on a more southerly latitude and again proved that the prophets were justified in their spiritual discernment.

Yet the hope that had from the beginning of literary prophecy been irrepressible began to take a more distinct form in the message of Ezekiel and later in the visions of Daniel and Zechariah and the oracles of Haggai, Joel, and Malachi. Now that the Day of the Lord had come for Judah as well as for Israel, when would its counterpart arrive for the nations and the unadulterated blessings of the new order be showered upon the Lord's remnant? The question was renewed and the answer formulated afresh in the postexilic era when Cyrus, the Lord's shepherd, aroused new hopes that the anticipated era of restoration had dawned. Indeed it had, but not to the extent that Isaiah had described it. In fact, the horrible thought of the Day of the Lord was reintroduced by Joel to remind the reforming nation that moral demands were still part of God's program for Israel and that judgment always loomed when moral obedience and cultic purity were not observed. The Persian era was one of hope.

The prophets were pawns of no power structures and represented no vested interests—except the irresistible power of God and the vital interests that He had vested in Israel through the Sinai covenant. "The Lord took me from following the flock" (Amos 7:15), and "The Lord God has spoken! / Who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8b)—these were the trademarks of that irresistible force that moved the prophets. "Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire / Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, / And I cannot endure it" (Jer. 20:9) was Jeremiah's expression of the same inner compulsion. His reluctance that preceded his response was the reversal of Isaiah's response that preceded his reluctance: "Here am I. Send me!" and "Lord, how long?" (Isa. 6:8, 11).

No figure was out of the prophets' speaking range. Amos's words

reached to the defiant ears of King Jeroboam, Isaiah's challenge to the impious Ahaz, and Jeremiah's words of doom to the impervious Jehoiakim. Even the kings of foreign nations, at least theoretically, came within earshot of the prophets' oracles.

The symbolic actions of the prophets were a sign of their involvement in the historical process. Isaiah's naked promenade, Hosea's marriage to a harlot, Jeremiah's wearing of an ox's yoke, and Ezekiel's extended repose all fall in that category. The prophets could no more extricate themselves from history than the Lord Himself could. They blended into the brocade. Just how effective they were in turning the course of history is a matter of debate. Certainly they did not achieve the goal of bringing Israel to repentance and thus averting the national disasters of 722 and 586. But in the long range of history they were proved right and their opponents wrong. History became their vindicator.

The prophets' interest in the future grew out of deep theological conviction. They believed the ideal for society was laid down in covenantal legislation of the past. Justice and righteousness, which the law prescribed as the pillars of a theocratic society, were to be the order of every age. The present found its anchorage and preshadowing in the past. As has been observed, psychologically and terminologically the OT has its face to the past and its back to the future. Society should perpetually reflect the ideals set forth in the law, a law that was itself imparted by the prophet Moses: "But by a prophet the Lord brought Israel from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept" (Hos. 12:13). In Hosea's view, law and prophecy were forever united in Moses. Rejection of the law was tantamount to rejection of prophecy, and so exactly did he see the prophets as representatives of the covenantal position that the opposite could also be said—rejection of prophecy signaled rejection of the law. Yet it was the quality of that legislation, not its quantity, that Israel had rejected; "Though I wrote for him ten thousand precepts of My law, they are regarded as a strange thing" (Hos. 8:12).

The detached relationship to the law, exhibited in a continuous chain of legal violation and moral transgression, was Jeremiah's concern when he analyzed his society and predicted the day when the law would be written on tablets of flesh rather than tablets of stone (Jer. 31:31–34). Therefore, when society deviated from the covenantal norm, the prophets called Israel back to it and anticipated a reformed order in the future.

Their corrective program called for the establishment of justice up

and down the social ladder, especially to widows and orphans and the socially oppressed. Through a reformation of the legal system, corrupted by greed and bribery, a new order of justice could come. That was not bare social reform divested of religious underpinnings. The prophets had no such concept. The new age would begin with the reforming forces of moral change in the present and climax with the dramatic new day of peace, justice, righteousness, and holiness, with Israelite political and religious domination of the world. Repentance, which the prophets demanded in unalloyed genuineness, could effect a drastic turn in Israel's fortunes and redirect the forces of history for the shaping of the new order. That order would be geographically located in this world with Jerusalem as the religious center. To her the nations would turn in order to acquire a knowledge of the Lord.

Not historians in the technical sense, the prophets displayed an interest in future events that was tied to the concerns of the present. It is erroneous to assume, as was done by an earlier generation of scholars, that the predictive element was extraneous to prophetic preaching. On the contrary, the future was a vital part of prophetic theology. Yet repentance did not occur in broad enough proportions to alter Yahweh's plans for judgment. Therefore, judgment was unavoidable. It was both punitive and rehabilitative. In the absence of general repentance, the prophets expected divine intervention on a scale like that of the Exodus to put the society back in order. The new day would come no less as a result of God's self-initiated action than the deliverance from Egypt. Thus, although built upon the present order, the future would be drastically different from it.

Furthermore, the prophetic future was both immediate and remote. The depth of their view is not readily discernible because the prophets merged the present and future so unpretentiously in their descriptions of time. The line of division is faint, and the time elements of the prophetic books—that is, whether a statement applies to the past, present, or future—is a critical hermeneutical issue. It is my opinion that there was a remote future involved in prophetic eschatology. Thus statements with future implications did not always involve events just around the next bend in the road. When that future had come to pass, it would definitely have similarities to the present order.

The trophy of prophetic preaching was not the decline and fall of the Israelite and Judean states. That was a message they reluctantly proclaimed; they hoped against hope that it would not happen. Rather, their

triumph was the survival of the people of God in the Exile and the restoration of the Judean state in the postexilic period. Whereas the Assyrian and Babylonian disasters proved their message of woe to be well founded, the turn of events in the Persian era proved their message of weal also to be motivated in the divine will. Most of the preexilic prophets had a major interest in the era of restoration.

Of Kings and Prophets

Within Israelite society the strongest power structure with which the prophets had to deal was the monarchy, first of the United Kingdom (Saul, David, and Solomon) and then of the separate monarchies of Israel and Judah.

The kingship came into being through the intermediate agency of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 8); Saul, the nation's first king, participated in the ecstatic practices of the prophets of his day (1 Sam. 10:1–13). The importance of Samuel as a transition figure is strongly emphasized in the first book of Samuel, and his precedent-setting role of making the kingly office responsive to the prophet should be noted well. The model can be seen in the reign of David with Nathan's transmission of Yahweh's master plan for building the Temple (2 Sam. 7) and his aggressive role in putting Solomon on the throne (1 Kings 1:22–48).

Amid the uncertainties that marked the end of Solomon's reign, Ahijah of Shiloh fanned the fire of secession and offered Jeroboam a five-sixths share of tribal loyalty (1 Kings 11:29–40). When civil war threatened to deepen the schism after Solomon's death, Shemaiah, the man of God, sued for peace and averted Rehoboam's plans for war against the north (12:21–24).

Jeroboam's religious apostasy, centralized in Dan and Bethel, brought the anonymous man of God from Judah to announce that a Judean king would bring an end to the apostate priesthood (1 Kings 13:1–10).

The interaction of prophets and kings in the preliterary stage came to a climax in the relations between Elijah and Elisha and the Israelite kings. Especially did Elijah's zealous ministry for Yahwism concentrate upon restoring national loyalty to the ancient God of Israel. With unprecedented success against Baalism, aided by the reform movement of the Rechabite Jehonadab (2 Kings 10:15–17), Elijah dealt a devastating blow to the alliance between the northern monarchy and Baalism. Sadly, however, it did not endure.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
OLD TESTAMENT
PENTATEUCH

HERBERT WOLF

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The five books of the Pentateuch are foundational to all of Scripture and rank as one of the most important sections in God's Word. Just as a knowledge of the four gospels is essential for understanding the New Testament, so the content of the Pentateuch is crucial to the rest of the Old Testament and for that matter the whole Bible.[1] The four gospels tell us about the incarnation as the Son of God came to dwell among men. In Exodus 40:34–38 the glory of God fills the tabernacle as the Lord dwelled among Israel to speak to them and to guide them in their travels. Even though we usually think of the wrath and power of God in connection with the Old Testament, Moses told Israel that God was near them whenever the people prayed to Him (Deut. 4:7). The Lord marvelously protected them from danger and revealed to them His laws and decrees, and even the pagan prophet Balaam had to admit that

> The Lord their God is with them;
> the shout of the King is among them.
>   (Num. 23:21)

God worked in a wonderful way in the family of Abraham, not only to make of that people "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6)

1. Samuel J. Schultz, *The Gospel of Moses* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 1.

but also so that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Ultimately that blessing came in the person of Jesus Christ, who was the mediator of a better covenant than the one established by Moses, so that salvation might come to the whole world.

THE FIVEFOLD DIVISION
OF THE PENTATEUCH

The first five books of the Bible are commonly referred to as the "Pentateuch," a word derived from the Greek *penta* ("five") and *teuchos* (a case for carrying papyrus rolls but in later usage the scroll itself). The five-volume book corresponds to the Jewish description of the "five fifths of the Law" found in the Talmud.[2] This division of Moses' writings into five separate books may owe its origin to a practical consideration. No scroll could hold all of the words, whereas the five leather scrolls could be handled quite easily. Such an explanation also fits the division of the book of Psalms into five sections, since the 150 separate hymns likewise took up too much space.

The fivefold division of the law is also attested in the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint, both of which have five names for Moses' writings. The Jewish historian Josephus also spoke of the five books of the law in the first century A.D. Origen was the first to use the word *Pentateuch* in his commentary on John, and he was followed by Tertullian in his disputes with the Marcionites.[3]

Scripture itself refers to Moses' writings as "the Book of the Law" (Josh. 1:8; 8:34), "the Book of the Law of Moses" (Josh. 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kings 14:6), "the Law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3), "the Book of Moses" (Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Mark 2:26), "the Law of God" (Neh. 10:28, 29), "the Law of the Lord" (Luke 2:23, 24), "the Law" (Ezra 10:3; Luke 10:26), or simply "Moses" in the phrase "Moses and the Prophets" (Luke 16:29; 24:27).[4]

To the Jews the single word *Torah* best described this part of Scripture. Torah means not only "law" but also "teaching" or "instruction."

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2. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 495.

3. Ibid., citing *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Migne, II, col. 282.

4. E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 39; W. LaSor, F. Bush, D. Hubbard, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 62.

These five books contain God's teaching about the origin of the world and of Israel and explain how a sinful people can meet with a holy God. For the Jew the Pentateuch contained an authority that the rest of the Old Testament—the prophets and the writings—did not seem to match, just as the importance of Moses exceeded that of any other Old Testament figure. When the Jews were driven from their homeland to take up residence in exile, it was the books of Moses that were read most frequently in the synagogues. It was common to read through the Pentateuch every three years, whereas other books were covered less systematically.

THE UNITY OF THE PENTATEUCH

The books of Genesis through Deuteronomy present a coherent picture of the origins of mankind and the birth and development of Israel as a nation. Except for the book of Genesis, these volumes focus upon the life and ministry of Moses, a man called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Shortly after their release from slavery—a release predicted in Genesis 15:14—the people stopped at Mount Sinai, where God revealed to them His law and the principles of holy living. This important encounter lasted almost a year and is described in Exodus 19–40, the whole book of Leviticus, and Numbers 1–10. From Mount Sinai the Israelites journeyed to Kadesh Barnea, where they wavered in unbelief and refused to trust God to bring them safely into Canaan. The rest of Numbers quickly covers the forty years of wandering in the desert prior to the arrival of the Israelites at the plains of Moab in Numbers 22:1. There they barely survive the machinations of Balaam and Balak and were given instructions by Moses about life in the Promised Land. While situated there on the eastern banks of the Jordan River, Moses delivered his final addresses to the people, summarizing God's work on their behalf and encouraging them to be faithful to the Lord in the coming years. These final messages given by the great leader constitute the book of Deuteronomy, which ends with the account of Moses' death.

John Sailhamer has noted that the main narrative sections of the Pentateuch are concluded by poetic material sometimes followed by an epilogue. For example, at the close of the patriarchal narratives stands the poetic blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49 and an epilogue in chapter 50. The Exodus narratives are concluded by the song of Moses in Exodus 15, whereas the wilderness wanderings are followed by Balaam's

oracles in Numbers 23–24. At the end of the Pentateuch we find the double poetic section containing Moses' song of witness and blessing on the twelve tribes in Deuteronomy 32–33 and then the epilogue in chapter 34.[5]

Along with the overall continuity in the narrative, we can also point to the grammatical features that underscore the unity of the Pentateuch. For some reason these five books fail to distinguish between the third person pronouns, "he" and "she." Instead of using *hû* and *hî* like the rest of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch uses only the masculine form. The same is true of the words for "boy" and "girl." "Girl is normally written *na'arâ*, but the Pentateuch uses *na'ar* without the feminine ending."[6]

In spite of strong arguments in favor of the unity of the Pentateuch, a number of scholars support the idea of a hexateuch or a tetrateuch. Julius Wellhausen thought that Joshua should be combined with the first five books to form a "hexateuch."[7] Going in the opposite direction, Martin Noth spoke of a "tetrateuch" ending with Numbers, and he placed Deuteronomy at the head of a history that included the historical books through 2 Kings. The "deuteronomic work," as he called it, was composed during the exile, and Deuteronomy 1–3 functioned as an introduction to the entire corpus.[8] Although it is true that Deuteronomy is closely connected with Joshua, even the first chapter of Joshua distinguishes between the "Book of the Law" and other materials (v. 8). The law was given by Moses, and the unity of the five books is strongly supported by Jewish tradition and by internal considerations.

THE IMPACT OF THE PENTATEUCH ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

Rather than disturbing the unity of the Pentateuch by detaching Deuteronomy from the other four books, we should recognize that Deuteronomy and the rest of the Pentateuch greatly influenced the entire Old Testament. The law of Moses was intended as a guide both to the nation and to individuals within the nation, so it is little wonder that

5. John Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 1:7.

6. Gesenius, Kautzsch, and Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 107.

7. Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* (1876–77).

8. Martin Noth, *Uberlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (1943 reprint; Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1957), 9.

subsequent writers wrote under the shadow of the Pentateuch. The impact of the Pentateuch was greatest upon the prophetic writers, but as we shall see, it influenced the poets and historians as well.

On the Historical Books

Joshua served many years as Moses' chief aide and commanding general, and the book that bears his name reflects their close association. Three chapters in particular emphasize the book of the law given by Moses (Josh. l, 8, 23), for Joshua was to urge the people to obey the teachings of his great predecessor. If they responded, God would bless the nation abundantly, but if they rebelled, the curses of the law would afflict them (Josh. 8:34; 23:6–13). Judges and part of Samuel recount how these curses did in fact fall upon the nation, but the rule of King David brought a return to godliness and blessing. The promise that David's son would build a house for God's name (2 Sam. 7:13) ties in with the words of Deuteronomy 12:5 that God would choose a place to put His name.

David's final words to Solomon stressed the commands and requirements written in the law of Moses (1 Kings 2:3). In subsequent centuries the godly kings Hezekiah and Josiah followed the Lord with all their hearts and all their strength, according to the commands given through Moses (2 Kings 18:6; 23:25). References to the Mosaic requirements and especially "the Book of Moses" are more frequent in 1 and 2 Chronicles (see 1 Chron. 5:15; 22:13; 2 Chron. 8:13; 25:4; 35:12). Ezra and Nehemiah also refer several times to Moses and his writings, probably because Ezra was a scribe by occupation.

On the Prophetic Books

Both the major and minor prophets contain important links with the books of Moses. Isaiah begins his majestic prophecy by calling on heaven and earth as witnesses, an allusion to the solemn call of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:19 and 32:1. Moses warned that disobedience would bring judgment, and Isaiah is about to announce the disaster soon to come. The God who will judge is called "the Mighty One of Israel" (or "Jacob") in Isaiah 1:24; 49:26; and 60:16—a title drawn from Genesis 49:24. Isaiah also calls God the "Rock" and "Savior" (17:10), names found together in Deuteronomy 32:15. God is the Creator as well as the Redeemer. Just as Israel had been rescued from Egypt, so will the remnant be delivered from Babylon. Isaiah 12:2 quotes those great

lines celebrating the victory won over Egypt at the Red Sea (cf. Ex. 15:2).

Jeremiah is heavily indebted to the book of Deuteronomy for some of its concepts. The stubbornness of the people's hearts—mentioned in 9:14; 13:10; 23:17; and elsewhere—confirms the evaluation of their condition in Deuteronomy 9:27. Moses had said that an idolater was like a root that produced "bitterness" and "poison" (Deut. 29:18 [HB 29:17]). These two words—*rō'š* and *la'anâ*—occur together in Jeremiah 9:14; 23:15 and in Amos 6:12. The fruit had been borne, and judgment was soon to follow. Repeatedly Jeremiah, who derives his wording from Deuteronomy 28:37, notes that Judah will be devastated and become an object of scorn and ridicule (25:9, 11; 29:18; etc.).

A sizable number of the curses found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–29 are cited in the prophetic books, an indication that these chapters were among the best-known in the Old Testament. For example, the blight and mildew threatened in Deuteronomy 28:22 do ruin the crops in Amos 4:9 and Haggai 2:17. Droughts and insects also ravage fields and vineyards (Hag. 1:10–11; Joel 1:4), in accord with the predictions of Deuteronomy 28:23, 38–39.

On the Poetic Books

The influence of the Pentateuch is not as pervasive in the poetic books, where even the word *torah* can mean "teaching" or "instruction" rather than the "Law" of Moses (cf. Prov. 1:8). Much of the poetic materials deal with either reflective or practical wisdom, concentrating on the meaning of life (as Job or Ecclesiastes) or on the importance of hard work and controlling the tongue (as Proverbs). Nevertheless, the book of Psalms begins where Joshua did, encouraging meditation upon "the law of the Lord . . . day and night" (cf. Ps. l:2; cf. Josh. 1:8). Psalms 19 and 119 also extol the law with its precepts and statutes. Since the priests did much of the teaching in Israel it is likely that "the strands of reflective and practical wisdom and the Temple and priests were closely associated."[9]

THE IMPACT OF THE PENTATEUCH ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

The ministry of Jesus and the apostles took place in a century when the Jews were keenly interested in the law of Moses, so it is not

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9. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 26.

surprising that there are numerous references to the Pentateuch in the New Testament.

Quotations

Except for Psalms and Isaiah, the books of the Pentateuch are the most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Deuteronomy is a close third over all, followed by Exodus, Genesis, and Leviticus.[10] Only Numbers with its three quotations lags behind. The chapters most frequently cited are Genesis 2, 12, and 15, Exodus 3 and 20, Leviticus 19, and Deuteronomy 5, 6, and 32. Leviticus 19:18 is quoted some nine times in the synoptic gospels (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27) as well as Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8. The whole law could be summed up in the one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Likewise the crucial doctrine of justification by faith is firmly rooted in Genesis 15:6 (cf. Rom. 4:3, 9, 22; Gal. 3:6). When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, He quoted three verses from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13, 16; cf. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10).

Typology

The experiences of the patriarchs and of the children of Israel are often used as "examples" or "types" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11) to illustrate spiritual truths.[11] Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, enabled the writer of Hebrews to speak of Christ as a priest "in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:1–17). The rivalry between Hagar and Sarah and their offspring in Genesis 16–21 was used by Paul to illustrate slavery and freedom, bondage to the law versus freedom in Christ (Gal. 4:24–31).

Israel's wandering in the wilderness formed the background to Paul's reference to drinking "from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:3). The episode at Mount Horeb where Moses struck the rock emphasized the satisfaction of physical

10. This comparison uses the index in the 3d edition of *The Greek New Testament*, ed. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo Martini et al. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 897–900.

11. Because of the fanciful interpretation of some commentators, typology was largely ignored for many years. In recent times it is making a comeback, however, partly due to the influence of Gerhard von Rad in his *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:363–87.

thirst (Ex. 17:6). Similarly the manna God sent to sustain Israel during those forty years led Jesus to refer to Himself as the "bread from heaven" and the "bread of Life" (John 6:32, 35). The bread was Jesus' flesh, which He would "give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Finally those who looked in faith at Moses' bronze snake and recovered from the bites of poisonous snakes (Num. 21:9) were like those who look to Jesus for deliverance from eternal death (John 3:14–15).

Christ's death is also compared in some detail to the ministry of the high priest in Moses' tabernacle. On the day of atonement the high priest had to enter the most holy place to sprinkle blood on the cover of the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:15–17). Hebrews 9:12 says that Christ "entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." The "manmade sanctuary . . . was only a copy of the true one"; Jesus "entered heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24–25).

Through His death, Christ became the mediator of the new covenant, a covenant far superior to the old one made at Mount Sinai. The new covenant "is founded on better promises" (Heb. 8:6) and associated with joy, not the darkness and terror of Mount Sinai (Heb. 12:18–22).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PENTATEUCH

Almost from start to finish the Pentateuch contains a rich store of theological truth, touching virtually every major area of theology. We learn about God's power and transcendence, but at the same time we see Him walking in the garden of Eden or fellowshiping with Moses on Mount Sinai. God is the sovereign Creator unlike any other god, but He reveals Himself by word and deed to individuals and to His covenant people Israel. Even the Egyptians learned that Yahweh was God.

Although man was made in the image of God, Genesis quickly tells us of man's sin and graphically describes the judgment of God. Yet in the midst of a fallen world, God graciously reached down to bring people back to Himself. Sacrifices can be offered to make atonement for sin, and Leviticus in particular describes how a sinful people can approach a holy God. The slaying of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 and the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 wonderfully portray the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. In His loving dealing with mankind, God forgives sin and calls for the wholehearted obedience

of His people. In spite of His righteous anger that repeatedly brought down judgment on sinners, the Lord is the "compassionate and gracious God . . . abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). Nowhere are these qualities seen more clearly than in the Pentateuch.

God

God as Creator. The Pentateuch begins with a description of God as Creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1), and it ends with a reference to God as the Father and Creator of Israel (Deut. 32:6, 15). The verb *create* (*bārā'*) occurs five times in Genesis 1 (vv. 21, 27) and another five times between Genesis 2:4 and 6:7. God is always the subject of the verb, and there is never a reference to any material used in creating. The verb translated "Creator" in Deuteronomy 32:6 is *qānâ*, which can also mean "to possess," "to buy," or "to bring forth" (Gen. 4:1; but see Ps. 139:13). This verb also appears in Genesis 14:19, 22, where Melchizedek calls on "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth." In Genesis 1 the climax of God's creative activity is the creation of man—both male and female—in verse 27. A more detailed account of the making of Adam in 2:7 states that God "formed man from the dust of the ground." *Formed* (*yāṣar*) is the verb used of a potter as he fashions the clay (cf. Isa. 45:9, 11).

God as Creator is separate from and prior to the material world, whereas according to a Babylonian creation epic, the universe was made from the body of the slain Tiamat, and man was created from the blood of another god named Kingu.[12] God's separateness from nature is also evident in that the sun and the moon, commonly worshiped as gods throughout the ancient Near East, are mentioned only as "the greater light" and "the lesser light" (Gen. 1:16). The same verse includes the creation of the stars almost as an afterthought. The great creatures of the sea, likewise feared by the ancients, are fully under God's control (v. 21). God alone is the sovereign one, the God whom all must worship.

God as Redeemer. A second major portrait of God is His work as Redeemer. This is directly linked to the rescue of the nation of Israel from the land of Egypt, the greatest example of salvation in the Old Testament. The word *redeem* (*gā'al*) is explained most fully in Leviticus 25, a chapter that describes how property and personal freedom may be recovered. Land that was sold could be repurchased by the original

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12. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1951), 118.

owner or by a relative of his (vv. 25–27). If a man became poor and had to sell himself into slavery, he or a relative had the right to purchase his freedom. This, too, is referred to as being "redeemed" (vv. 47–49). Another important use of "redeem" occurs in Numbers 35, a passage dealing with murder and accidental homicide. When a man was killed, it was up to a relative to put the murderer to death. This relative was called "a redeemer of blood" (*gō 'ēl dam*), translated as "a blood avenger," or "avenger of blood" (v. 19). If the killing was accidental, the individual was protected from the avenger of blood as long as he stayed in one of the cities of refuge (vv. 25–27).

God's work as Redeemer blends together the concepts of purchasing freedom and also avenging mistreatment. During the four hundred years in Egypt, the Israelites were oppressed and badly beaten as the slave drivers "worked them ruthlessly" (Ex. 1:12–13; 5:14). When the Pentateuch mentions the redemption of Israel, it usually links it with freedom from slavery (Ex. 6:6). Deuteronomy states repeatedly that God "redeemed you from the land of slavery" (7:8; 13:5). In the song of victory commemorating the triumph over Pharaoh at the Red Sea, Israel is referred to as "the people you [God] have redeemed" (Ex. 15:13). Moses connects the redemption from Egypt with the fulfillment of God's promises to the patriarchs (Deut. 7:8). Since God is faithful to His word, the people are urged to love Him and to follow His commands and decrees.

As a title for God, "Redeemer" is developed most fully by the prophet Isaiah. Between 41:14 and 63:16 the word occurs thirteen times, and other forms of the verb are also used. Isaiah argues that the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt will be able to rescue them from Babylon: a new "exodus" is in the offing. Because of His great love for Israel, God will ransom His people as He takes vengeance on the Babylonians. Israel's release is called "the year of my redemption" in Isaiah 63:4, and in 52:9 the prophet speaks of the songs of joy that will accompany freedom from Babylon.[13] Just as a kinsman-redeemer bought back the land of a relative, so Israel's Redeemer will restore the nation to her homeland and even enlarge her borders (54:1–8).

The attributes of God. Although the work of God as Creator and Redeemer is emphasized in the Pentateuch, other aspects of His character and work are also given due attention. For example, the holiness of God is especially seen in Leviticus, where the nation of Israel is

13. See Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 214.

commanded to "be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (19:2). A holy God could only be worshiped in a sanctuary set apart from the community at large and under the supervision of a priesthood consecrated to Him. Yet the entire nation was to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" to demonstrate to the whole world the difference between their God and lifeless idols (Ex. 19:5). As God revealed Himself to the people at Mount Sinai, the whole mountain became holy ground, just as it had been for Moses a year earlier (Ex. 3:5; 19:11–13).

The holy and awe-inspiring God was clearly sovereign over His creation, fully able to take a Noah and an Abraham and through them to bring blessing to a cursed earth. When it appeared that God's purposes were being thwarted with the sale of Joseph to Egypt, God turned the intended harm into blessing for his brothers and for many surrounding nations as well (cf. Gen. 45:7; 50:20). When the Egyptians conveniently forgot all about Joseph and subjected the Israelites to cruel punishment, God taught Pharaoh through the plagues and the destruction at the Red Sea that He alone was Lord (cf. Ex. 15:11). As if to prove His sovereignty Yahweh "made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people" (Ex. 11:3) so that as they left the country they in effect "plundered" the people who had oppressed them (Ex. 12:36).

Throughout the Pentateuch we also learn that this powerful God is a God of love. He is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6)—a description repeated in part in Numbers 14:18; Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:13; and Jonah 4:2. In spite of the stubbornness of the Israelites and their apostasy in the golden calf incident, Yahweh had mercy on them in response to Moses' intercession. Israel was indeed punished for their sins, but Yahweh would keep His "covenant of love to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9; cf. Ex. 20:6). When the people were groaning because of their slavery, God "remembered his covenant with Abraham" (Ex. 2:24), just as He had "remembered Noah" in the midst of the flood (Gen. 8:1). Even during the predicted exile, God would take delight in His people and bring them back to the Promised Land (Deut. 30:9).

Although we prefer to emphasize God's love and compassion, it is equally clear that His holiness and justice demand that sinners be punished. In Genesis God's wrath was poured out on a corrupt world through the waters of the flood, and Noah's descendants were themselves punished for trying to build the tower of Babel. In Canaan the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed for their sexual immorality, even though

Abraham begged "the Judge of all the earth" to do right and spare the righteous who lived there (Gen. 18:25). The awesome power of God was displayed in the plagues that ravaged Egypt and humiliated Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea.

After the exodus it was Israel's turn to feel the wrath of God as thousands died at Mount Sinai and on the plains of Moab for their idolatry (Ex. 32:28; Num. 25:9). Aaron's two oldest sons perished for offering "unauthorized fire before the Lord" (Lev. 10:1–2), and the earth swallowed up Korah and his followers for rebelling against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:31–33). Those who complained about conditions in the wilderness were struck down by fire or fiery snakes (Num. 11:1; 21:6). Finally Yahweh warned the Israelites that, even after they entered the Promised Land, if they disobeyed His commands He would be angry with them and drive them into exile in humiliation and disgrace (Lev. 26:27–32; Deut. 28:58–64). The diseases and plagues of Egypt would be sent to ruin them as they had destroyed Pharaoh.

The names of God. The Pentateuch contains almost all the major names for God. God reveals Himself to the patriarchs and to Moses through His actions and also through His names. Since a person's name expresses his nature and his very essence, great importance must be attached to the various designations for deity.

God. The Hebrew for "God" is *'elōhîm*, the generic word for "God" equivalent to Ugaritic *el* or Akkadian *ilu*. Elohim is the word used throughout Genesis 1, where it stresses God's work as Creator (see above). The Hebrew form is a plural, but it is consistently used with a singular verb. Scholars have explained this as a plural of majesty or of respect,[14] although W. F. Albright points also to the use of "Ashtoroth" (the Ashtoreths) and suggests that this connotes a deity's "totality of manifestations."[15] It is wrong to argue that the plural proves the doctrine of the Trinity, but it does allow for its later development.[16]

Elohim is often used in conjunction with the personal name "Yahweh," which precedes Elohim. The compound name, usually translated "LORD God," first occurs in Genesis 2:4. In Genesis 24 Elohim is "the God of heaven and the God of earth" (v. 3) and the "God of my master

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14. R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: U. of Toronto, 1976), 6.

15. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U., 1957), 213.

16. Jack Scott, *TWOT*, ed. Laird Harris et al. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:44.

Abraham" (vv. 12, 26, 43). He is called the God of Abraham and Isaac (28:13) and "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6).

LORD (Yahweh). The personal name for God, whose meaning was explained most fully to Moses, was "Yahweh," better known as "Jehovah." The exact pronunciation of this name is not clear; only the four consonants—YHWH —are given in the Hebrew Bible. In scholarly discussion the intriguing name is sometimes called the tetragrammaton, the Greek word for "four letters." The vowels are not indicated because the Jews eventually refused to pronounce the name, not wanting to take the name of Yahweh in vain (Ex. 20:7) and perhaps to prevent pagan people from misusing it. When this sacred name appeared in a verse the Jews pronounced it "Adonay," the other word for "Lord" (see below). The vowels of "Adonay" were merged with YHWH to produce "Yehowah" (=Jehovah). The correct pronunciation was probably closer to "Yahweh," whose first syllable is preserved in "Hallelujah"—that is, "Praise Yah"— "Yah" being a shortened form of "Yahweh." Most modern translations avoid the problem by using "LORD" to render this name.

When Moses asked God what name he should use when the Israelites inquired as to who sent him to lead the nation from Egypt, God said to tell them that "I AM has sent me to you" (Ex. 3:14). Since "I AM" is a word spelled almost like "YHWH," we are quite sure that it holds the key to the meaning of this most intimate name for God. In verse 12 God says, "I will be with you," and this is likely the way "I AM" is also to be understood: "I am he who is there (for you)—really and truly present, ready to help and to act," especially in a time of crisis.[17] Just as Immanuel means "God with us" (Isa. 7:14), so "Yahweh" indicated that the God of Abraham had not forgotten His promises. The patriarchs were familiar with this name, but they did not know the full dimensions of its meaning (cf. Ex. 6:3). When Israel experienced God's redemption from Egypt (6:6–7), the people would understand Yahweh's gracious provision more fully.

Because the words "I AM" are ambiguous, some interpreters connect them with God's role as Creator, the One who exists eternally or who brings into being. Although these meanings make excellent sense in the light of

17. LaSor et al., *Survey*, 136. Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 150–51; Gleason Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 128; J. B. Payne, in *TWOT*, 1:210–12.

Genesis 1 and similar passages about creation, the contexts in which the name is used indicate otherwise. Yahweh first appears in Genesis 2 in connection with the garden of Eden and God's instructions to Adam. The name is often used in a covenant context since it indicates God's desire to fellowship with man. This is especially evident in the passages that describe the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1–9; 15:1–19). Similarly, when God entered into a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the name "Yahweh" appeared frequently (Ex. 19:7–10; 20:2; 24:1–18). Moses warns the people that if they disregard the covenant, Yahweh will send plagues and disasters against them. Therefore, they must "revere this glorious and awesome name—the LORD your God" (Deut. 28:58–59). When Jesus claimed the name "I AM" in John 8:58, He clearly identified Himself with the God of the Old Testament and in doing so was nearly stoned for blasphemy. The Israelite who "blasphemed the Name" and was stoned to death at Moses' command probably was guilty of cursing the sacred name of Yahweh (Lev. 24:11, 16).

Lord (Adonay). The other word for "Lord," *'adōnay*, has the basic idea of "Lord" or "master." Pharaoh is referred to as "their master, the king of Egypt" (Gen. 40:1), and Sarah refers to Abraham as "my master" (Gen. 18:12; cf. 1 Pet. 3:6). Abraham uses the same word to address his heavenly visitors in Genesis 18:3, although it is not clear that he was aware of their supernatural character (cf. 19:2). When applied to God Himself, "Adonay" is usually combined with "Yahweh" and is rendered "Sovereign LORD" in the NIV (Gen. 15:2, 8). Both verses in Genesis 15 and the two in Deuteronomy (3:24; 9:26) employ "Sovereign LORD" in a context of prayer. Abraham pleads with the Lord for an heir, whereas Moses begs the Lord not to destroy His people and later prays that he might be allowed to see the Promised Land. In Deuteronomy 10:17 Yahweh is called "God of gods and Lord of lords."

God Most High. The name *El Elyon* (*'ēl `elyôn*) is composed of the shorter equivalent of Elohim, plus the adjective/substantive *'elyôn*, which means "high, most high." It occurs four times in Genesis 14:18–22 and once in Numbers 24:16 and Deuteronomy 32:8. In Genesis, Melchizedek is introduced as "priest of God Most High." Twice the name is coupled with "Creator of heaven and earth" (vv. 19, 22). Both names are associated with Canaanite deities also, although this does not mean Melchizedek worshiped false gods. The Ugaritic equivalent of Elyon, *'ly,* is an epithet of the god Baal in the Keret epic.[18]

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18. See *Ugaritic Textbook* 19, no. 1855: 3:6–9; G. Lloyd Carr, *TWOT*, 2:668–70.