"Provocative . . . Friedman has gone much further than other scholars in analyzing the identity of the biblical authors."—U.S News and World Report

WHO WR()TE BIBLE?



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WITH A NEW PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION

Who Wrote the Bible?

PEOPLE have been reading the Bible for nearly two thousand years. They have taken it literally, figuratively, or symbolically. They have regarded it as divinely dictated, revealed, or inspired, or as a human creation. They have acquired more copies of it than of any other book. It is quoted (and misquoted) more often than other books. It is translated (and mistranslated) more than the others as well. It is called a great work of literature, the first work of history. It is at the heart of Christianity and Judaism. Ministers, priests, and rabbis preach it. Scholars spend their lives studying and teaching it in universities and seminaries. People read it, study it, admire it, disdain it, write about it, argue about it, and love it. People have lived by it and died for it. And we do not know who wrote it.

It is a strange fact that we have never known with certainty who produced the book that has played such a central role in our civilization. There are traditions concerning who wrote each of the biblical books—the Five Books of Moses are supposed to be by Moses, the book of Lamentations by the prophet Jeremiah, half of the Psalms by King David—but how is one to know if these traditional ascriptions are correct?

Investigators have been working on the solution to this mystery for nearly a thousand years, and particularly in the last two centuries they have made extraordinary discoveries. Some of these discoveries challenge traditional beliefs. Still, this investigation did not develop as a controversy of religion versus science or religion versus the secular. On the contrary, most of the investigators were trained in religious traditions and knew the Bible as well as those who accepted only the traditional answers. Indeed, from the outset to the present day, a significant proportion of critical biblical scholars, perhaps the majority, have been, at the same time, members of the clergy. Rather, the effort to discover who wrote the Bible began and con-

tinued because the answer had significant implications for both the traditional and the critical study of the Bible.

It was the Bible, after all. Its influence on Western civilization—and subsequently on Eastern civilization—has been so pervasive that it has hardly been possible to recognize its impact, much less to accept its authority, without caring from where it came. If we think that the Bible is a great work of literature, then who were the artists? If we think of it as a source to be examined in the study of history, then whose reports are we examining? Who wrote its laws? Who fashioned the book out of a diverse collection of stories, poetry, and laws into a single work? If we encounter an author when we read a work, to whatever degree and be it fiction or nonfiction, then whom do we encounter when we read the Bible?

For most readers, it makes a difference, whether their interest in the book is religious, moral, literary, or historical. When a book is studied in a high school or university class, one usually learns something of the author's life, and generally this contributes to the understanding of the book. Apart from fairly advanced theoretical literary considerations, most readers seem to find it significant to be able to see connections between the author's life and the world that the author depicts in his or her work. In the case of fiction, most would find it relevant that Dostovevsky was Russian, was of the nineteenth century, was an orthodox Christian of originally revolutionary opinions, and was epileptic and that epilepsy figures in important ways in The Idiot and in The Brothers Karamazov; or that Dashiell Hammett was a detective; or that George Eliot was a woman. Similarly in nonfiction, there appears to be no limit to the fascination people have with Freud the man and the degree to which his own experience is reflected in his writings; or with Nietzsche, where everything from his insanity to his relationship with Lou Salomé to his sometimes uncanny bond with Dostoyevsky figures in readings of his works.

The more obvious this seems, the more striking is the fact that this information has been largely lacking in the case of the Bible. Often the text cannot be understood without it. Did the author of a particular biblical story live in the eighth century B.C. or the fifth?—and thus when the author uses a particular expression do we understand it according to what it meant in the eighth century or the fifth? Did the author witness the events in the story? If not, how did the author come to have an idea of what happened? Was it through

written sources, old family stories, divine revelation, completely fictional composition, or some other means? How much did the events of the author's own day affect the way in which the author told the story? Did the author write the work with the intent that it should become a sacred, authoritative text?

Such questions are important to understanding what the text meant in the biblical world itself. But they also offer an opportunity for producing a new and richer understanding of the book today, for both the religious and the nonreligious reader, once we come to know the persons and forces that produced it.

The Five Books of Moses

It is one of the oldest puzzles in the world. Investigators have been wrestling with it practically since the Bible was completed. As it happens, it did not start as an investigation into the authorship of the Bible. It simply began with individuals raising questions about problems that they observed in the biblical text itself. It proceeded like a detective story spread across centuries, with investigators uncovering clues to the Bible's origin one by one.

It began with questions about the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are known as the Pentateuch (from Greek, meaning "five scrolls") or the Torah (from Hebrew, meaning "instruction"). They are also known as the Five Books of Moses. Moses is the major figure through most of these books, and early Jewish and Christian tradition held that Moses himself wrote them, though nowhere in the Five Books of Moses themselves does the text say that he was the author. But the tradition that one person, Moses, alone wrote these books presented problems. People observed contradictions in the text. It would report events in a particular order, and later it would say that those same events happened in a different order. It would say that there were fourteen of that same thing. It would say that the Moabites did something, and later it would say that it was the Mi-

dianites who did it. It would describe Moses as going to a Tabernacle in a chapter before Moses builds the Tabernacle.

People also noticed that the Five Books of Moses included things that Moses could not have known or was not likely to have said. The text, after all, gave an account of Moses' death. It also said that Moses was the humblest man on earth; and normally one would not expect the humblest man on earth to point out that he is the humblest man on earth.

At first the arguments of those who questioned Mosaic authorship were rejected. In the third century A.D. the Christian scholar Origen responded to those who raised objections to the unity and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The rabbis of the centuries that followed the completion of the Hebrew Bible (also known as the Old Testament or the Holy Scriptures) likewise explained the problems and contradictions within the boundaries of the tradition: contradictions were only apparent contradictions. They could be explained through interpretation-often very elaborate interpretation—or through the introduction of additional narrative details that did not appear in the biblical text. As for Moses' references to things that should have been unknown to him, they were explained as owing to the fact that Moses was a prophet. These tradition-oriented responses to the problems in the text prevailed into medieval times. The medieval biblical commentators, such as Rashi in France and Nachmanides in Spain, were especially skillful at seeking explanations to reconcile each of the contradictions. But, also in the medieval period, investigators began to give a new kind of answer to the old questions.

Six Hundred Years of Investigation

At the first stage, investigators still accepted the tradition that Moses wrote the Five Books, but they suggested that a few lines were added here or there. In the eleventh century, Isaac ibn Yashush, a Jewish court physician of a ruler in Muslim Spain, pointed out that a list of Edomite kings that appears in Genesis 36 named kings who lived long after Moses was dead. Ibn Yashush suggested that the list

was written by someone who lived after Moses. The response to his conclusion was that he was called "Isaac the blunderer."

The man who labeled him Isaac the blunderer was Abraham ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century Spanish rabbi. Ibn Ezra added, "His book deserves to be burned." But, ironically, ibn Ezra himself included several enigmatic comments in his own writings that hint that he had doubts of his own. He alluded to several biblical passages that appeared not to be from Moses' own hand: passages that referred to Moses in the third person, used terms that Moses would not have known, described places where Moses had never been, and used language that reflected another time and locale from those of Moses. Nonetheless, ibn Ezra apparently was not willing to say outright that Moses was not the author of the Five Books. He simply wrote, "And if you understand, then you will recognize the truth." And in another reference to one of these contradictory passages, he wrote, "And he who understands will keep silent."

In the fourteenth century, in Damascus, the scholar Bonfils accepted ibn Ezra's evidence but not his advice to keep silent. Referring to the difficult passages, Bonfils wrote explicitly, "And this is evidence that this verse was written in the Torah later, and Moses did not write it; rather one of the later prophets wrote it." Bonfils was not denying the revealed character of the text. He still thought that the passages in question were written by "one of the later prophets." He was only concluding that they were not written by Moses. Still, three and a half centuries later, his work was reprinted with the references to this subject deleted.

In the fifteenth century, Tostatus, bishop of Avila, also stated that certain passages, notably the account of Moses' death, could not have been written by Moses. There was an old tradition that Moses' successor Joshua wrote this account. But in the sixteenth century, Carlstadt, a contemporary of Luther, commented that the account of Moses' death is written in the same style as texts that precede it. This makes it difficult to claim that Joshua or anyone else merely added a few lines to an otherwise Mosaic manuscript. It also raises further questions about what exactly was Mosaic and what was added by someone else.

In a second stage of the process, investigators suggested that Moses wrote the Five Books but that editors went over them later, adding an occasional word or phrase of their own. In the sixteenth century, Andreas van Maes, who was a Flemish Catholic, and two

Jesuit scholars, Benedict Pereira and Jacques Bonfrere, thus pictured an original text from the hand of Moses upon which later writers expanded. Van Maes suggested that a later editor inserted phrases or changed the name of a place to its more current name so that readers would understand it better. Van Maes' book was placed on the Catholic Index of Prohibited Books.

In the third stage of the investigation, investigators concluded outright that Moses did not write the majority of the Pentateuch. The first to say it was the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century. Hobbes collected numerous cases of facts and statements through the course of the Five Books that were inconsistent with Mosaic authorship. For example, the text sometimes states that something is the case "to this day." "To this day" is not the phrase of someone describing a contemporary situation. It is rather the phrase of a later writer who is describing something that has endured.

Four years later, Isaac de la Peyrère, a French Calvinist, also wrote explicitly that Moses was not the author of the first books of the Bible. He, too, noted problems running through the text, including, for example, the words "across the Jordan" in the first verse of Deuteronomy. That verse says, "These are the words that Moses spoke to the children of Israel across the Jordan..." The problem with the phrase "across the Jordan" is that it refers to someone who is on the other side of the Jordan river from the writer. The verse thus appears to be the words of someone in Israel, west of the Jordan, referring to what Moses did on the east side of the Jordan. But Moses himself was never supposed to have been in Israel in his life. De la Peyrère's book was banned and burned. He was arrested and informed that in order to be released he would have to become Catholic and recant his views to the Pope. He did.

About the same time, in Holland, the philosopher Spinoza published a unified critical analysis, likewise demonstrating that the problematic passages were not a few isolated cases that could be explained away one by one. Rather, they were pervasive through the entire Five Books of Moses. There were the third-person accounts of Moses, the statements that Moses was unlikely to have made (e.g., "humblest man on earth"), the report of Moses' death, the expression "to this day," the references to geographical locales by names that they acquired after Moses' lifetime, the treatment of matters that were subsequent to Moses (e.g., the list of Edomite kings), and

various contradictions and problems in the text of the sort that earlier investigators had observed. He also noted that the text says in Deuteronomy 34, "There never arose another prophet in Israel like Moses..." Spinoza remarked that these sound like the words of someone who lived a a long time after Moses and had the opportunity to see other prophets and thus make the comparison. (They also do not sound like the words of the humblest man on earth.) Spinoza wrote, "It is...clearer than the sun at noon that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived long after Moses." Spinoza had been excommunicated from Judaism. Now his work was condemned by Catholics and Protestants as well. His book was placed on the Catholic Index, within six years thirty-seven edicts were issued against it, and an attempt was made on his life.

A short time later, in France, Richard Simon, a convert from Protestantism who had become a Catholic priest, wrote a work that he intended to be critical of Spinoza. He said that the core of the Pentateuch (the laws) was Mosaic but that there were some additions. The additions, he said, were by scribes who collected, arranged, and elaborated upon the old texts. These scribes, according to Simon, were prophets, guided by the divine spirit, and so he regarded his work as a defense of the sanctity of the biblical text. His contemporaries, however, apparently were not ready for a work that said that any part of the Five Books was not Mosaic. Simon was attacked by other Catholic clergy and expelled from his order. His books were placed on the Index. Forty refutations of his work were written by Protestants. Of the thirteen hundred copies printed of his book, all but six were burned. An English version of the book came out, translated by John Hampden, but Hampden later recanted. The understated report by the scholar Edward Gray in his account of the events tells it best: Hampden "repudiated the opinions he had held in common with Simon... in 1688, probably shortly before his release from the tower."

The Sources

Simon's idea that the biblical writers had assembled their narrative out of old sources at their disposal was an important step on the way to discovering who wrote the Bible. Any competent historian knows the importance of sources in writing an ongoing narrative of events. The hypothesis that the Five Books of Moses were the result of such a combining of several older sources by different authors was exceptionally important because it prepared the way to deal with a new item of evidence that was developed by three investigators in the following century: the doublet.

A doublet is a case of the same story being told twice. Even in translation it is easy to observe that biblical stories often appear with variations of detail in two different places in the Bible. There are two different stories of the creation of the world. There are two stories of the covenant between God and the patriarch Abraham, two stories of the naming of Abraham's son Isaac, two stories of Abraham's claiming to a foreign king that his wife Sarah is his sister, two stories of Isaac's son Jacob making a journey to Mesopotamia, two stories of a revelation to Jacob at Beth-El, two stories of God's changing Jacob's name to Israel, two stories of Moses' getting water from a rock at a place called Meribah, and more.

Those who defended the traditional belief in Mosaic authorship argued that the doublets were always complementary, not repetitive, and that they did not contradict each other, but came to teach us a lesson by their "apparent" contradiction. But another clue was discovered that undermined this traditional response. Investigators found that in most cases one of the two versions of a doublet story would refer to the deity by the divine name, Yahweh (formerly mispronounced Jehovah), and the other version of the story would refer to the deity simply as "God." That is, the doublets lined up into two groups of parallel versions of stories. Each group was almost always consistent about the name of the deity that it used. Moreover, the investigators found that it was not only the names of the deity that lined up. They found various other terms and characteristics that

regularly appeared in one or the other group. This tended to support the hypothesis that someone had taken two different old source documents, cut them up, and woven them together to form the continuous story in the Five Books of Moses.

And so the next stage of the investigation was the process of separating the strands of the two old source documents. In the eighteenth century, three independent investigators arrived at similar conclusions based on such studies: a German minister (H. B. Witter), a French medical doctor (Jean Astruc), and a German professor (J. G. Eichhorn). At first it was thought that one of the two versions of the stories in the book of Genesis was an ancient text that Moses used as a source and that the other version of the stories was Moses' own writing, describing these things in his own words. Later, it was thought that both versions of the stories were old source documents that Moses had used in fashioning his work. But ultimately it was concluded that both of the two sources had to be from writers who lived after Moses. Each step of the process was attributing less and less to Moses himself.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the two-source hypothesis was expanded. Scholars found evidence that there were not two major source documents in the Pentateuch after all—there were four! Two scholars found that in the first four books of the Bible there were not only doublets, but a number of triplets of stories. This converged with other evidence, involving contradictions and characteristic language, that persuaded them that they had found another source within the Pentateuch. And then a young German scholar, W. M. L. De Wette, observed in his doctoral dissertation that the fifth of the Five Books of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy, was strikingly different in its language from the four books that preceded it. None of the three old source documents appeared to continue into this book. De Wette hypothesized that Deuteronomy was a separate, fourth source.

Thus from the work of a great many persons, and at personal cost for some of them, the mystery of the Bible's origins had come to be addressed openly, and a working hypothesis had been formed. It was a remarkable stage in the Bible's history. Scholars could open the book of Genesis and identify the writing of two or even three authors on the same page. And there was also the work of the editor, the person who had cut up and combined the source documents into a single story; and so as many as four different persons could have

contributed to producing a single page of the Bible. Investigators were now able to see that a puzzle existed and what the basic character of the puzzle was. But they still did not know who the authors of any of the four old source documents were, when they lived, or why they wrote. And they had no idea who the mysterious editor was who had combined them, nor did they have any idea why this person had combined them in this complex way.

The Hypothesis

To state it as succinctly as possible, the puzzle was as follows:

There was evidence that the Five Books of Moses had been composed by combining four different source documents into one continuous history. For working purposes, the four documents were identified by alphabetic symbols. The document that was associated with the divine name Yahweh/Jehovah was called J. The document that was identified as referring to the deity as God (in Hebrew, Elohim) was called E. The third document, by far the largest, included most of the legal sections and concentrated a great deal on matters having to do with priests, and so it was called P. And the source that was found only in the book of Deuteronomy was called D. The question was how to uncover the history of these four documents not only who wrote them, but why four different versions of the story were written, what their relationship to each other was, whether any of the authors were aware of the existence of the others' texts, when in history each was produced, how they were preserved and combined, and a host of other questions.

The first step was to try to determine the relative order in which they were written. The idea was to try to see if each version reflected a particular stage in the development of religion in biblical Israel. This approach reflected the influence in nineteenth-century Germany of Hegelian notions of historical development of civilization. Two nineteenth-century figures stand out. They approached the problem in very different ways, but they arrived at complementary findings. One of them, Karl Heinrich Graf, worked on deducing from references in the various biblical texts which of the texts logi-

cally must have preceded or followed others. The other investigator, Wilhelm Vatke, sought to trace the history of the development of ancient Israelite religion by examining texts for clues as to whether they reflected early or late stages of the religion.

Graf concluded that the J and E documents were the oldest versions of the biblical stories, for they (and other early biblical writings) were unaware of matters that were treated in other documents. D was later than J and E, for it showed acquaintance with developments in a later period of history. And P, the priestly version of the story, was the latest of all, for it referred to a variety of matters that were unknown in all of the earlier portions of the Bible such as the books of the prophets. Vatke meanwhile concluded that J and E reflected a very early stage in the development of Israelite religion, when it was essentially a nature/fertility religion. He concluded that D reflected a middle stage of religious development, when the faith of Israel was a spiritual/ethical religion; in short, the age of the great Israelite prophets. And he regarded the P document as reflecting the latest stage of Israelite religion, the stage of priestly religion, based on priests, sacrifices, ritual, and law.

Vatke's attempt to reconstruct the development of the religion of Israel and Graf's attempt to reconstruct the development of the sources of the Pentateuch pointed in the same direction. Namely, the great majority of the laws and much of the narrative of the Pentateuch were not a part of life in the days of Moses—much less were they written by Moses—nor even of life in the days of the kings and prophets of Israel. Rather, they were written by someone who lived toward the end of the biblical period.

There were a variety of responses to this idea. The negative responses came from both traditional and critical scholars. Even De Wette, who had identified the D source, would not accept the idea that so much of the law was so late. He said that this view "suspended the beginnings of Hebrew history not upon the grand creations of Moses, but upon airy nothings." And traditional scholars pointed out that this view pictured biblical Israel as a nation not governed by law for its first six centuries. Graf's and Vatke's ideas, nonetheless, came to dominate the field of biblical studies for a hundred years primarily because of the work of one man: Wellhausen.

Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) stands out as a powerful figure in the investigation into the authorship of the Bible and in the history of biblical scholarship in general. It is difficult to pinpoint any one person as the "founder," "father," or "first to" of this enterprise, because a number of persons made contributions that brought the search to some new stage. Indeed, books and articles on the field of biblical scholarship attribute these titles variously to Hobbes, Spinoza, Simon, Astruc, Eichhorn, Graf, or Wellhausen. Wellhausen himself applies such a term to De Wette. But Wellhausen occupies a special place in the history of this enterprise. His contribution does not so much constitute a beginning as a culmination in that history. Much of what Wellhausen had to say was taken from those who preceded him, but Wellhausen's contribution was to bring all of these components together, along with considerable research and argumentation of his own, into a clear, organized synthesis.

Wellhausen accepted Vatke's picture of the religion of Israel as having developed in three stages, and he accepted Graf's picture of the documents as having been written in three distinct periods. He then simply put the two pictures together. He examined the biblical stories and laws that appear in I and E, and he argued that they reflected the way of life of the nature/fertility stage of religion. He argued that the stories and laws of Deuteronomy (D) reflected the life of the spiritual/ethical stage. And he argued that P derived from the priestly/legal stage. He traced the characteristics of each stage and period meticulously through the text of each document, examining the way in which the document reflected each of several fundamental aspects of religion: the character of the clergy, the types of sacrifices, the places of worship, and the religious holidays. He drew on both the legal and the narrative sections, through all five books of the Pentateuch, and through other historical and prophetic books of the Bible. His presentation was sensible, articulate, and extremely influential. His was a powerful construction, above all, because it did more than just divide the sources by the usual criteria (doublets, contradictions, etc.). It tied the source documents to history. It provided a believable framework in which they could have developed. Thus the Wellhausen model began to answer the question of why the different sources existed. The first real acceptance of this field of study, then, came when historical and literary analyses were first successfully merged. This model of the combination of the source documents came to be known as the Documentary Hypothesis. It has dominated the field ever since. To this day, if you want to disagree, you disagree with Wellhausen. If you want to pose a new model, you compare its merits with those of Wellhausen's model.

The Present State

Religious opposition to the new investigation persisted during the nineteenth century. The Documentary Hypothesis became known in English-speaking countries in large part because of the work of William Robertson Smith, a professor of Old Testament in the Free Church of Scotland college at Aberdeen and editor of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He wrote articles in the encyclopedia and published articles by Wellhausen there as well. He was put on trial before the church. Though he was cleared of the charge of heresy, he was expelled from his chair. Also in the nineteenth century, in South Africa, John Colenso, an Anglican bishop, published similar conclusions, and within twenty years three hundred responses were written. He was called "the wicked bishop."

Things began to change, though, in the twentieth century. There had been considerable opposition to this investigation in the Catholic Church for centuries, but a major turning point was the encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu of Pope Pius XII in 1943. It has been called "a Magna Carta for biblical progress." The Pope encouraged scholars to pursue knowledge about the biblical writers, for those writers were "the living and reasonable instrument of the Holy Spirit..." He concluded:

Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed.

As to the results of the Pope's encouragement, the Catholic Jerome Biblical Commentary, which appeared in 1968, began with this statement by the editors:

It is no secret that the last fifteen or twenty years have seen almost a revolution in Catholic biblical studies—a revolution encouraged by authority, for its Magna Carta was the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pope Pius XII. The principles of literary and historical criticism, so long regarded with suspicion, are now, at last, accepted and applied by Catholic exegetes. The results have been many: a new and vital interest in the Bible throughout the Church; a greater contribution of biblical studies to modern theology; a community of effort and understanding among Catholic and non-Catholic scholars.

Opposition to the critical examination of the Bible has also diminished among Protestants. The Bible has come to be studied and taught by critical scholars, in leading Protestant institutions of Europe and Great Britain. In the United States as well, critical scholars teach at major Protestant institutions such as Harvard Divinity School, Yale Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and a great many others. Critical examination of the text and its authors also has become accepted at leading Jewish institutions, particularly Hebrew Union College, which is the Reform rabbinical school, and the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Conservative rabbinical school. It is also taught at major universities around the world.

Until the past generation there were orthodox Christian and Jewish scholars who contested the Documentary Hypothesis in scholarly circles. At present, however, there is hardly a biblical scholar in the world actively working on the problem who would claim that the Five Books of Moses were written by Moses—or by any one person.² Scholars argue about the number of different authors who wrote any given biblical book. They argue about when the various documents were written and about whether a particular verse belongs to this or that document. They express varying degrees of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the usefulness of the hypothesis for literary or historical purposes. But the hypothesis itself continues to be the starting point of research, no serious student of the Bible can fail to study it, and no other explanation of the evidence has come close to challenging it.

The critical analysis of authorship has also extended beyond the Five Books of Moses and has touched every book of the Bible. For example, the book of Isaiah was traditionally ascribed to the prophet Isaiah, who lived in the eighth century B.C. Most of the first half of the book fits with such a tradition. But chapters 40 through 66 of the book of Isaiah appear to be by someone living about two centuries later. Even the book of Obadiah, which is only one page long, has been thought to be a combination of pieces by two authors.

In our own day, new tools and new methods have produced important contributions. New methods of linguistic analysis, developed largely within the last fifteen years, have made it possible to establish relative chronology of portions of the Bible and to measure and describe characteristics of biblical Hebrew in various periods. In the simplest terms, Moses was further from the language of much of the Five Books than Shakespeare was from modern English. Also since Wellhausen's days there has been an archeological revolution, which has yielded important discoveries that must now figure in any research into the Bible's authors. I shall discuss the relevant archeological finds in the course of this book.

Still, the simple fact is that, in large part, the puzzle remains unsolved. And the elusiveness of the solution continues to frustrate our work on a variety of other questions about the Bible. My own experience is a case in point. When I was introduced to this area of biblical studies in my college years, I responded that it just did not matter very much to me, that my interest was in what the text said and what its relevance was today—not in who wrote it. But as I worked more and more with the text through my graduate years, I found that, no matter what question I addressed, it always came back to this problem.

If I worked on a literary question, I wanted to know why the text told the story this way and not another way. For example, consider the story of the golden calf. In the book of Exodus, God speaks the Ten Commandments out loud to the Israelites from the heavens over the mountain of God. Moses then climbs the mountain alone to receive a carved set of the commandments on stone tablets. When Moses delays to return, the people make a golden calf and sacrifice in front of it. Their leader, the man who personally makes the golden calf, is Moses' own spokesman, Aaron. When Moses returns and sees the calf, he throws down and smashes the tablets in his anger. He destroys the golden calf. He asks Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you brought a great sin on them?" Aaron

answers that the people asked him to make gods, that he threw their gold into the fire, "and out came this calf!"

The question was, what would make someone write a story like this? What was happening in this writer's world that would make him's tell a story in which his own people commit heresy only forty days after hearing God speak from the sky? Why did he picture a golden calf, and not a bronze sheep, a silver snake, or anything else? Why did he picture Aaron, traditionally the first high priest of Israel, as a leader of a heresy? Is it simply that it happened that way, and the writer was just telling the story as he knew it? Or were there other issues and events happening in the writer's world that motivated him when he was fashioning the story?

If I worked on a moral question, I wanted to know why the text said, "Behave this way and not that way." For example, there are laws of war in the book of Deuteronomy that have important moral implications. One law exempts from military conscription any man who is afraid. Another law forbids the rape of a captured woman. The women of the group that has been defeated must be given time to mourn any lost family members, and then they may be taken as wives, or else they must be set free. In this case it seemed important to me to understand what gave birth to such laws. How did the biblical standard of conduct come to include these particular practices and prohibitions? What was happening in the biblical world that prompted someone to conceive of such laws and that led a community to adopt them?

If it was a theological question, I wanted to know why the text pictured the deity as it does. For example, the Bible often pictures the deity as torn between divine justice and divine mercy. There is a recurring tension through the Bible between the forces that say "punish" and the forces that say "forgive." What events and what different conceptions of the character of God at various times and places in the biblical world played a part in forging this powerful and bewildering notion of divine-human relations?

Perhaps most serious were historical questions. If one is interested in the historicity of the biblical accounts, then one must inquire into when the writer lived. Was the writer a witness to the events he described? If not, what were his sources? What were his interests? Was the writer a priest or a lay person, a man or a woman, someone associated with the court or a commoner? Whom did he favor,

whom did he oppose, from where did he come? And so on.

My teacher was Professor Frank Moore Cross at Harvard University. In my second year of studies there, there was a discussion in a seminar of the Department of Near Eastern languages and Civilizations one day in which Professor Cross referred to another seminar in which he had participated many years earlier. In that earlier seminar, the participants had decided to work through the text of the Pentateuch from the beginning, without assuming the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis or any other hypothesis, to see, through fresh, careful study of the text themselves, where the evidence would take them. Later that day I had an appointment with Professor Cross at which I asked him for a supervised study course under his direction. He proposed that we do what his seminar had done years earlier, and so I found myself at last taking on the ever-present problem of the formation of the biblical text. We started from the beginning, working through the text of the Pentateuch, not assuming the correctness of the hypothesis, but weighing the evidence as we went. I have been intrigued by the problem ever since.

I hope to advance the process of solution with my contributions here. To a large extent, I defend the model that has developed as the consensus of investigators in the last few centuries. I shall present new evidence that I believe supports the model. Where I differ with past scholars, including, occasionally, my own teachers, I shall make that clear and give my evidence. Specifically, what is new here is:

—I mean to be more specific about who the writers of the Bible were: not only when they lived, but where they resided, the groups to which they belonged, their relationships to major persons and events of their historical moment, whom they liked, whom they opposed, and their political and religious purposes in writing their works.

—I mean to shed light on the relationship among the various authors. Did any of them know any of the others' works? As it happens, they did. And this, in some unexpected ways, affected the way in which the Bible came out.

—I mean to shed more light on the chain of events that brought all of the documents together into one work. This will also reveal something about how that work came to be accepted as the Bible.

- —In at least one case, I mean to challenge the majority view of who one of the authors of the Bible was, when he lived, and why he wrote.
- —When dealing with biblical stories, I mean to show why each story came out in the particular way it did and what its relationship was to the history of the period in which it was written.

It is, of course, impossible to cover all of the books of the Bible in this one volume. I shall deal with the books that tell the core story out of which the rest of the Bible grew (eleven books) and refer to many of the other books, and I shall discuss the implications of these discoveries for the Bible as a whole.

The way to begin, it seems to me, is to reconstruct a picture of the biblical world to the best extent possible based on archeological evidence and the most cautious possible reading of the historical books of the Bible, aiming to identify what portions of the biblical report are historically trustworthy for each period. The next step is to locate the biblical authors who wrote in each respective period and to see to what extent the persons and events of that moment in history affected the way in which the Bible came out. In the end we can turn back to what mattered to me so much in the first place: the implications of these findings for the way in which people understand, value, and use the Bible today.

CHAPTER 1

The World That Produced the Bible: 1200–722 B.C.

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The Setting

THE land in which the Bible was born was about the size of a large North American county. It was located along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, a natural meeting point of Africa, Asia, and Europe. It had a fabulous variety of climate, flora and fauna, and topographic characteristics. In the northeast was a beautiful freshwater lake, the Sea of Galilee. It flowed into the Jordan River to the south. The river flowed in a straight line south and emptied into the Dead Sea, which was as unlike the Galilee as two bodies of water can possibly be. It was thick with salt. It was surrounded by hot wilderness. According to the traditions of that region the Dead Sea area had once been a pleasant, fertile place, but the people who lived there were so corrupt that God rained brimstone and fire on the place until it was left hardly fit for occupation.

The northern part of the country was fertile, with plains, small hills and valleys. The center of the country had beaches and low-lands along the Mediterranean coast on the west, and hills and mountains on the east. The southern part of the country was largely

desert. It was hot and humid along the coast, especially in summer. It was drier in the hills, still drier in the desert. It was cold enough to snow occasionally on the hills in winter. It was beautiful. The people could see the beauty of the sea, the beauty of lake, flowers, and fields, and the beauty of desert all within a few miles of each other.

As striking as the variety of the land itself was the variety of its people. The Bible refers to peoples from numerous backgrounds who mixed there: Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Girgashites, Jebusites. There were also the Philistines, who stood out as different from the others, apparently having come across the Mediterranean from the Greek islands. There was also a circle of people around the borders of the land. To the north were the Phoenicians, who are usually credited with having introduced writing in that region. Along the eastern borders were Syria in the north, then Ammon, then Moab, then Edom to the south. Then of course there were the Israelites, the most numerous people within the boundaries of the land from the twelfth century B.C. on, the people about whom most of the biblical stories are told. The land lay along the route of travel between Africa and Asia, and so there were the influences—and interests—of Egypt and Mesopotamia in the region as well.

The population was both urban and rural; it is difficult to say in what proportion. Certainly the percentage of city residents was large. There were times of considerable economic prosperity and times of hardship. There were times of great political strength and influence, and there were periods of domination by foreign powers. And, of course, there were times of peace and times of war.

The dominant religion across the ancient Near East was pagan religion. Pagan religion was not idol worship, as formerly it was thought to be. The archeological revolution of the past hundred years has opened up that world to us and given us, among other revelations, a new understanding and appreciation of the pagan religious worldview. At Nineveh alone—the greatest archeological discovery of all time—were found fifty thousand tablets, the library of the emperor of Assyria. At the Canaanite city of Ugarit, three thousand more tablets were found. We can read the pagan hymns, prayers, and myths; we can see the places where they worshiped; and we can see how they depicted their gods in art.

Pagan religion was close to nature. People worshiped the most powerful forces in the universe: the sky, the storm wind, the sun, the sea, fertility, death. The statues that they erected were like the icons in a church. The statues depicted the god or goddess, reminded the worshiper of the deity's presence, showed the humans' respect for their gods, and perhaps made the humans feel closer to their gods. But, as a Babylonian text points out, the statue was not the god.

The chief pagan god in the region that was to become Israel was El. El was male, patriarchal, a ruler. Unlike the other major god of the region, Haddu (the storm wind¹), El was not identified with any particular force in nature. He sat at the head of the council of the gods and pronounced the council's decisions.

The God of Israel was Yahweh.² He, too, was male, patriarchal, a ruler, and not identified with any one force in nature. Rather than describing him in terms of nature or myths, the people of Israel spoke of Yahweh in terms of his acts in history—as we shall see.

The people of Israel spoke Hebrew. Other languages of the area were similar to Hebrew: Phoenician, Canaanite (Ugaritic), Aramaic, and Moabite are all in the Semitic family of languages. Hebrew and these other languages each had an alphabet. People wrote documents on papyrus and sealed them with stamps pressed in wet clay. They also wrote texts on leather and on clay tablets and occasionally carved them in stone or wrote them on plaster. They wrote shorter notes on pieces of broken pottery.

People lived in one- and two-story homes, mostly of stone. In cities the houses were built close together. Some of the cities had impressive water systems, including long underground tunnels and huge cisterns. Some houses had indoor plumbing. Cities were surrounded by walls. People ate beef, lamb, fowl, bread, vegetables, fruits, and dairy products. They made wine and beer. They made pots and jars of all sizes out of clay. Their metals were bronze, iron, silver, and gold. They had wind, string, and percussion musical instruments. Contrary to every Bible movie ever made, they did not wear kaffiyehs (Arab headdress).

There are traditions about the prehistory of the Israelites: their patriarchs, their experiences as slaves in Egypt, and their wandering in the Sinai wilderness. Unfortunately, we have little historical information about this from archeology or other ancient sources. The first point at which we actually have sufficient evidence to begin to picture the life of the biblical community is the twelfth century

B.C., the period when the Israelites became established in this region.

The Israelites' political life in their early years was organized around tribes. According to biblical tradition there were thirteen tribes, with considerable differences in size and population from the smallest to the largest. Twelve of the tribes each had a distinct geographical territory. The thirteenth, the tribe of Levi, was identified as a priestly group. Its members lived in cities in the other tribes' territories. Each tribe had its own chosen leaders. (See map, p. 301.)

There were also individuals who acquired authority in individual tribes or over groups of tribes by virtue of their position in society or their personal qualities. These persons were either judges or priests. The office of judge did not involve only hearing legal cases. It included military leadership. In times of military threat to a tribe or group of tribes, therefore, a judge could acquire considerable power and authority. A judge could be male or female. Priests had to be male. Usually priests had to be from Levi. Their office was hereditary. They served at religious sites, presiding over religious ceremonies, which meant, above all, performing sacrifices. In return for their services, they received a portion of the sacrificed animal or produce.

One other type of person figured in a special way in the leadership of the community: the prophet. Being a prophet was not an office or profession like judge or priest. A person from any occupation could come to be a prophet. The prophet Ezekiel was a priest; the prophet Amos was a cowboy. The word in Hebrew for prophet is nābî', which is understood to mean "called." The Israelite prophets were men or women who were regarded as having been called by the deity to perform a special task with regard to the people. The task might be to encourage or to criticize. It might be in the realm of politics, ethics, or ritual. The prophet generally would deliver his or her message in poetry or in a combination of poetry and prose.

The Rise of the Monarchy

The age of the judges' leadership culminated in Samuel, a man who was all three: a judge, a priest, and a prophet. The last of the judges, he wielded much political and religious authority. He lived at Shiloh, a city in the northern part of the land, which was a major religious center at the time. A tabernacle was located there which, according to a biblical account, housed the ark containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments; and a distinguished priestly family functioned there, a family which some scholars identify as descendants of Moses.

When the Philistines' domination in the area became too strong for any one or two tribes to oppose, the people sought a leader who could unite and lead all of the tribes. In other words, they wanted a king. It was Samuel who, somewhat reluctantly, anointed the first king of Israel, King Saul. That was the end of the period of the judges and the beginning of the period of the monarchy. Though there were to be no more judges, there still continued to be priests and prophets. And so Israel developed a political structure in which the king was by no means an absolute ruler. On the contrary, the king's power was checked and balanced by the powers of the tribal leaders, the chief priests, and, above all, the prophets.

This had a profound effect on both the political and the religious life of Israel. In order to become king and to maintain a stable rule, a man had to have the tribal leaders' acceptance, and he had to be designated by a prophet. He also needed a supportive priesthood. This was partly because the priests, prophets, and tribal leaders held well-established positions by the time of the creation of the monarchy, and it was partly because of ongoing political realities. The king needed the tribes because the tribal musters of troops provided the king with his army, without which he was virtually powerless. The king needed prophetic designation and priestly support because religion not only was not separated from state in that world, it was hardly separated from anything. As introductions to the Bible often point out, there was no word in the Hebrew language of that period

for "religion." Religion was not a separate, identifiable category of beliefs and activities. It was an inseparable, pervasive part of life. A king could not have political legitimacy without religious legitimacy. A king who lost the support of his prophets and priests was in for trouble. And that is what happened to Saul.

Saul had a falling-out with Samuel, the priest-prophet who had designated him as king. The book of 1 Samuel gives two different accounts of the events that precipitated the break (from two different authors?), but the common element of the two stories is that both portray Saul as stepping over the boundary of his powers into the prerogatives of the priesthood. Samuel's response, apparently, was to designate another king: David.

The Rise of David

David was a well-known hero from the tribe of Judah. For a while he was a member of Saul's retinue, and he married one of Saul's daughters. Saul came to perceive David as a threat to his throne—quite correctly—and they became rivals. When David received the support of the priests of Shiloh,³ Saul had them all massacred—except one who escaped.

Saul reigned until his death in battle against the Philistines. After his death the kingdom was split between his son Ishbaal and David. Ishbaal ruled in the northern portion of the country; David ruled in his own tribe, Judah, which was the largest of the tribes, almost the size of all the other tribes together, encompassing the southern portion of the country. Ishbaal was assassinated, and then David became king over the entire country, north and south.

Already at this early stage of Israelite history, then, we can see conflicts between king and priest, and between king and king. These political dynamics would one day play a decisive role in the formation of the Bible.

David stands out as a major figure in the Hebrew Bible, really the only one who comes close to the level of Moses in impact. There are several reasons for this. First, we simply have a larger amount of source material on him in the Bible than on other figures. We have

the lengthy text known as the Court History of David (in the book of 2 Samuel), a work which is both beautifully written and a remarkable example of history-writing, remarkable because it openly criticizes its heroes, a practice that is all but unknown among ancient Near Eastern kings.

Second, David stands out because if even half of what the Bible says about him is true he lived an extraordinary life—by which I mean both his personal life and his political life. (The two are hardly separable in any case.)

The third reason for the singular place that David holds among biblical figures is that David established an enduring line of kings descended from him. The Davidic dynasty was in fact one of the longest-lasting ruling families of any country in the history of the world. Hence the powerful endurance of the messiah tradition in Judaism and Christianity—the trust that there would always be a descendant of David at hand in an hour of distress.

David's Empire

One of the things that may have made Saul an attractive candidate to be the first king of Israel was that he came from the tribe of Benjamin, which was a geographically small tribe. There was therefore little threat that he and his tribe would be able to dominate the other tribes through his position. David, on the other hand, coming from Judah, the largest tribe, epitomized that danger. David was a sensible and able politician, though, and he took a series of actions that enhanced his kingdom's unity.

First, he moved his capital from Hebron, which was the principal city of Judah, to Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been a Jebusite city, but David captured it, perhaps by a stratagem in which some of his men climbed the nearly vertical shaft of a water tunnel under the city. The tunnel, now known as Warren's Shaft, was cleared in the City of David excavations of biblical Jerusalem and opened to the public in 1985. Since Jerusalem had been occupied by the Jebusites prior to David's capture of it, it was not affiliated with any one of the tribes of Israel. David's selection of Jerusalem as the capital therefore of

fended no tribe and minimized any impression that he intended to favor Judah—much in the same way that Washington, D.C., was attractive as the capital of the United States because it was carved out and no longer regarded as part of any one of the states. Jerusalem, further, was fairly centrally located between the north and south of the country.

David's second action that facilitated the representation of both north and south in his new united kingdom was to appoint two chief priests in Jerusalem, one from the north and one from the south. Not unlike the presence of two chief rabbis in modern Israel, one from the Sephardic and one from the Ashkenazic community, David's two chief priests were a means of satisfying two formerly separate, now united, constituencies. David's northern priest was Abiathar, who was the one priest who had escaped Saul's massacre of the priests of Shiloh. David's southern priest was Zadok, who came from David's former capital in Judah, the city of Hebron. Zadok and the priests of Hebron apparently were regarded as descendants of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. David's dual chief priesthood may therefore have been not only a compromise with respect to north and south. It may also have been a compromise with respect to two old, distinguished, and politically important priestly families: the family of Moses and the family of Aaron.

As strong as any other cement for holding the kingdom together was David's record of marriages. He married women who came from several regions of political importance, which could only strengthen the social bond between each of those regions and the royal family.

Most practical of David's policies was his establishment of a standing professional army. This military force included foreigners (Cheretites, Peletites, Hittites) and was responsible to David and his personally appointed general. David was therefore no longer dependent on the individual tribes to muster (i.e., draft) their men into service in times of crisis. David had solved the main part of the problem of dependence on the tribes.

By one military success after another, David brought Edom, Moab, Ammon, Syria, and perhaps Phoenicia under his dominion. He built an empire that extended from the river of Egypt (the wadi El Arish, not the Nile) to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia. He made Jerusalem both the religious and the political center of his empire, bringing the most sacred object, the ark, there and estab-

lishing both of his chief priests there. It was a politically significant empire in that world.

The Royal Family

In order to see how the life, events, and individual persons of that world produced the Bible, one must also look into the story of the royal family. Their relationships, conflicts, and political alignments affected the course of history and, with that, the character of the Bible.

David's having many wives meant that he also had very many children who were half brothers and half sisters to each other. David's oldest son and likely heir was Amnon. According to the Court History of David, in one of the classically male-sexist depictions of all time, Amnon first raped and then rejected his half sister Tamar. Tamar was the daughter of David and a Geshurite princess. Tamar's full brother Absalom killed Amnon in revenge. The elimination of Amnon accomplished more for Absalom, though, than revenge for his wronged sister—it also placed him in contention for the throne. So it is in monarchic politics: family relations and political relations are inseparable. Absalom later rebelled against his father. The tribal musters of troops supported Absalom, the professional army was with David. The professionals won. Absalom was killed.

In David's old age, two more of his sons contended for the succession to his throne: Adonijah, who was one of the oldest sons, and Solomon, who was the son of David's favorite wife, Bathsheba. Each son had his party of supporters in the palace. Adonijah apparently had the support of the other princes. He also had the general who was over the tribal musters. Solomon had the support of the prophet Nathan and of his mother, Bathsheba, both of whom were extremely influential with David, and Solomon also had the general of the professional army.

Two other men took sides in these palace alignments, and their participation ultimately had crucial consequences for Israelite history

and for the Bible. They were the two chief priests. Abiathar, the northern priest, from the old priesthood of Shiloh, and possibly a descendant of Moses, supported Adonijah. Zadok, the southern priest, from Hebron in the tribe of Judah, and possibly a descendant of Aaron, supported Solomon.

David chose Solomon. With the professional army behind him, Solomon won without an actual fight.

After David's death, Solomon ordered the execution of his half brother Adonijah and of Adonijah's general, Joab. Solomon could not so easily eliminate the priest Abiathar, however. The king could not just execute a chief priest. Still, he could not tolerate the continued presence in power of those who opposed his succession to the throne. Solomon therefore expelled Abiathar from the Jerusalem priesthood and from Jerusalem. He banished him to an estate in Anathoth, a small village located a few miles outside the capital.

Solomon's Empire

King Solomon is famous for his wisdom. The biblical picture of him is that he maintained a strong, prosperous kingdom and that he accomplished this through diplomatic and economic skill rather than on the battlefields as his father David had done. He outdid his father in marriage diplomacy. The biblical record asserts that he had seven hundred daughters of kings as wives (and three hundred concubines). Even if we take that as an exaggeration, it indicates that political marriages were a major part of his policy. He carried on trade in Africa and Asia, taking advantage of Israel's geographical location. He amassed enormous quantities of gold and silver. He built a Temple in Jerusalem, in which he placed the ark. This especially strengthened the image of Jerusalem as the nation's religious center as well as its capital.

The Temple was not impressive in size. It was only sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. A cubit is the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the second knuckle of the hand, about eighteen inches. Size was not really important, though, because no one was ever allowed to go inside the Israelite Temple except the priests. The

ceremonies and sacrifices were performed in the courtyard at the entrance to the Temple. The impressive qualities of the Temple were rather its physical characteristics and its contents. Its walls were paneled in cedar. Its interior was divided into two rooms, an outer room called the Holy and an inner sanctum called the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies was a perfect cube, twenty cubits long, wide, and high. In it were two tremendous statues, the cherubs. Cherubs in that world were not the angelic little boys of later art who shoot arrows and make people fall in love. A cherub was a sphinx, usually with the body of a four-legged animal, the head of a human, and the wings of a bird. The Temple cherubs were carved out of olive wood and plated with gold. They were not idols. They were rather the throne platform of Yahweh, who was invisibly enthroned on them. Under their wings, in the middle of the room, was Israel's most sacred object, the ark, the golden box containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments.

Besides the Temple, Solomon had numerous other building projects. He built a great palace for himself, which was bigger than the Temple. He also constructed military fortifications around the country.

Thus the Bible pictures King Solomon as a great monarch of the ancient Near East. To look into that world and especially to feel the political issues of life then, first one must have a good knowledge of the geography of the land. Then one must have a real sensitivity to political and economic forces. And then one must read carefully what most people would consider to be among the most boring passages in the Bible: lists of territories, building projects, and notations of political developments in neighboring countries. The best analysis of all of this, in my judgment, is by an American biblical scholar, Baruch Halpern. I reached some of my conclusions concerning who wrote the Bible on several important points by applying his insights into political history to the Bible. What is also impressive about Halpern's analysis of Solomon's political world is that he wrote it when he was only twenty years old and an undergraduate at Harvard in 1972. He demonstrated that Solomon's domestic and foreign policies threatened the country's unity.

From One Country to Two

We must keep in mind that the country had once been two separate kingdoms, one in the north and one in the south, and that the northern kingdom had itself been composed of individual tribes. The old tribal divisions had not ceased to exist under David and Solomon, nor had the memory of a once independent north. Many of Solomon's policies, nonetheless, alienated the northerners instead of encouraging their support.

For one thing, he had removed the northern community's chief priest, Abiathar. For another example, there were, of course, taxes to be paid by everyone, north and south, but, as Halpern pointed out, the record of Solomon's building projects shows that he spent the tax revenues disproportionately on military defenses in the south. He was providing his own tribe, Judah, with protection from the military threat of Egypt. But Syria had broken away from his empire during this period, yet Solomon did not give the northern tribes equal protection from the very real threat of Syria there. The people of the north were paying for the security of the south.

As another example of Solomon's policy toward northern Israel, Solomon received help in building the Temple and the palace from Hiram of Tyre, king of the Phoenicians, who was Solomon's fatherin-law. (Actually, nearly every king in the ancient Near East must have been Solomon's father-in-law.) Hiram provided the cedars of Lebanon and 120 talents of gold. In return, Solomon ceded to the Phoenician king a tract of *northern* Israelite territory containing twenty cities. In this action, too, Solomon was building up his own capital solely at the expense of the north.

One of Solomon's policies in particular cut into the very structure of the tribal system. Solomon established twelve administrative districts, each of which was to provide food for the court in Jerusalem for one month of the year. The boundaries of these twelve new districts did not correspond to the existing boundaries of the twelve tribes. Solomon personally appointed the heads of each administrative district. This is like gerrymandering, squared. It would be as if the president of the United States established fifty new taxation

districts which did not correspond to the existing fifty states and within which each would have a politically appointed administrator instead of its own elected governor and legislators. Solomon's redistricting, to make matters even worse, was only of the north. The twelve new districts did not include the territory of Judah.

If all of this did not convince the populace that their king meant to exercise powerful centralized control from Jerusalem, Solomon established one more economic policy that could leave no doubt. He instituted the missîm. The term missîm in Hebrew refers to a sort of tax, not of money but of physical labor. Citizens owed a month of required work to the government each year. Given that we are talking about Israel, a nation that had a tradition that they had once been slaves in Egypt and now were free, a law of required labor must have been a bitter pill to swallow.

We have two pieces of evidence of just how bitter it was. The first is that one of the writers of the book of Exodus later described the Egyptian supervisers of the Israelite slaves not by the usual term "taskmasters," but rather as "officers of missîm." I shall identify the man who wrote those words in the next chapter. He was no friend of the royal family.

The second piece of evidence is an incident that took place shortly after Solomon died. Despite any dissatisfaction that the northern tribes had felt over his policies, Solomon had been strong enough to hold the nation together, and the northern tribes did not secede during his reign. However, when Solomon died, his son, King Rehoboam, lacked whatever was needed to hold on to the united kingdom. Rehoboam went to Shechem, a major city in the north, for coronation. The northern leaders asked him there if he intended to continue his father's policies. Rehoboam said that he did. The northern tribes seceded. An indicator of what was bothering them is the incident to which I have referred: the first act of rebellion was their stoning one of Rehoboam's officials to death. The man they stoned was the chief of the missîm.

And so Rehoboam ruled only Judah (and Benjamin, which Judah dominated). The rest of Israel chose a man named Jeroboam as king. David's empire now became two countries: Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. We need to look into the life, especially the religious life, of the two kingdoms, and then we shall be ready to identify two of the writers of the Bible.

Israel and Judah

The similarity of the two kings' names, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, is no coincidence. Both names in Hebrew can mean that the people should become numerous or widespread. Each king apparently chose a throne name that suggested his interest in the expansion of his portion of the once-united nation. Rehoboam ruled from Jerusalem, the City of David. Jeroboam made Shechem the capital of the new northern kingdom.

The political division of the country into two had enormous implications for the religion. Religion was not separate from state. Jerusalem had been both the political capital and the religious center of the country, Jeroboam, king of Israel, therefore was in an extremely difficult position. Israel and Judah might have become two separate countries, but they still shared a common religion. Both worshiped the God Yahweh. Both held beliefs and traditions about the patriarchs, the slavery and exodus from Egypt, and experiences at a mountain in the Sinai wilderness. The Temple, the ark, and the chief priest of that religion were all located in lerusalem. This meant that at least on holidays, and on various other occasions as well, masses of Jeroboam's population would cross the border into Judah, taking a sizable portion of the country's livestock and produce with them for sacrifices. They would go to the City of David, pray and sacrifice at the Temple of Solomon, and see King Rehoboam in the center of the activities. This scenario could hardly have filled leroboam's heart with feelings of stability.

Jeroboam could not just make up a new religion to keep the people from going to Jerusalem. He could, however, establish for his new kingdom its own national version of the common religion.

And so the kingdom of Israel, like the kingdom of Judah, continued to worship Yahweh, but Jeroboam established new religious centers, new holidays, new priests, and new symbols of the religion. The new religious centers that were to substitute for Jerusalem were the cities of Dan and Beth-El. Dan was the northernmost city in Israel, and Beth-El was one of the farthest south. Beth-El was in fact

only a short distance north of Jerusalem on the Israel-Judah border, and so any Israelites who might have thought of worshiping in Jerusalem would be inclined to stop at Beth-El rather than make the additional travel—uphill—to Jerusalem.

Jeroboam's new national religious holiday was celebrated in the fall, one month after the major fall holiday of Judah. His new symbols of the religion, instead of the two golden cherubs in Jerusalem, were two molten golden calves. The word "calves," which appears in most translations, is, by the way, misleading. The word in the Hebrew text means a young bull, which is a symbol of strength, rather than the weaker images that the word "calf" usually connotes. The calf, or young bull, was often associated with the god El, the chief god of the Canaanites, who was in fact referred to as "Bull El." We therefore have some reason to believe that Jeroboam's version of the religion somehow identified Yahweh with El. The idea that Yahweh and El were one would have the added value of further uniting the Israelite population with the still large Canaanite population in Jeroboam's kingdom.

Jeroboam set up one of the golden calves in Beth-El and one in Dan. This was impressive because the calves, like the cherubs were not statues of gods, but only the pedestal of the invisible God Yahweh. Thus God may have been pictured in Israel as enthroned over the entire kingdom, from the northern border to the southern, rather than as enthroned only in the Temple as in Judah.

King Jeroboam's Priests

Jeroboam's choice of priests for the new kingdom was crucial. The northern Levites had suffered badly under Solomon. Many had been residents of the twenty cities that Solomon gave to Hiram, the Phoenician king. Those who came from Shiloh suffered the most. In the days of the judges, Shiloh had been the location of the Tabernacle and ark, the people's central shrine. The priest-prophet-judge of Shiloh, Samuel, had designated and anointed the first two kings, Saul and David. Abiathar, from the priests of Shiloh, had been one of the two chief priests under David. Then Solomon expelled

Abiathar for supporting the losing brother in the fight for the succession, and the priests of Shiloh were out of power in Jerusalem. These members of the old priestly establishment of Israel had as much reason as anyone, or more, to feel betrayed and excluded by the royal house in Jerusalem. It is therefore interesting and hardly surprising that the prophet who instigated the secession and designated Jeroboam as king was a man called Ahijah of Shiloh.

The priests from Shiloh soon felt betrayed and excluded again. Jeroboam did not appoint them either at Dan or Beth-El. At Dan there was an old, established priesthood, founded by Moses' grandson according to the book of Judges. It probably continued to function there. At Beth-El, Jeroboam was appointing new faces, including individuals who were not Levites, to function at the altar of the golden calf. According to one biblical text, the new criterion for appointment to the priesthood under Jeroboam was not whether one was a Levite, but whether one would "fill his hand" with a young bull and seven rams.

The priests from Shiloh had no place in Jeroboam's new religious structure. They condemned the golden calves, which were the symbols of the religion, as heresy. Ahijah of Shiloh, the same prophet who is credited with having designated Jeroboam as king, is said later to have prophesied the fall of Jeroboam's family on account of the heresy. Since the tribe of Levi had no territory of its own as the other tribes had, the Levites of Shiloh and elsewhere in Israel had only two choices: they could move to Judah and try to find a place in the priestly hierarchy there, or they could remain in Israel and make whatever living they could, perhaps performing various religious services outside of the two major religious centers, perhaps depending on others' generosity. If the priests of Shiloh were indeed descendants of Moses, their present status, or lack of status, in both kingdoms must have been bitter for them. They had fallen from leadership of the nation to poor, landless dependency.

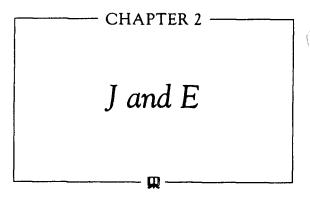
The Fall of Israel

The nation itself was now two nations, related but divided. They had a common language, a shared treasury of traditions, and similar but not identical forms of religious expression. The total area that the two kingdoms occupied was still quite small. The other areas that they controlled diminished considerably. Syria and Phoenicia had already broken free of the empire in Solomon's time. After the division of the kingdom, Judah controlled Edom, on its eastern border, for about a century, and then Edom rebelled and broke free. Israel controlled Moab for about the same length of time, and then Moab, too, rebelled and became independent. Israel and Judah were left as two small kingdoms, vulnerable to powerful nations like Egypt and Assyria. (See the map, p. 302.)

In Israel the monarchy was unstable. No family of kings ever held on to the throne for more than a few generations. The kingdom lasted two hundred years. Then the Assyrian empire conquered it in 722 B.C. and ended its existence as a nation. The population was dispersed. The Assyrians deported many Israelites into exile in various sections of the Assyrian empire. The exiled Israelites have come to be known as the ten lost tribes of Israel. Presumably there were also great numbers of refugees who fled from Israel south to Judah to escape the approaching Assyrian forces.

In Judah the monarchy was extremely stable, one of the longestreigning dynasties in history. Judah survived for over a hundred years past the destruction of Israel.

During the two hundred years that these two kingdoms existed side by side, there lived two of the writers we are seeking. Each composed a version of the people's story. Both versions became part of the Bible. With this picture of the early years of the biblical world, we are now ready to identify these two of the writers of the Bible.



Two Clues Converge

Two and a half thousand years after the events that I described in the last chapter took place, three investigators of who wrote the Bible each independently made the same discovery. One was a minister, one was a physician, and one was a professor. The discovery that they all made ultimately came down to the combination of two pieces of evidence: doublets and the names of God. They saw that there were apparently two versions each of a large number of biblical stories: two accounts of the creation, two accounts of each of several stories about the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, and so on. Then they noticed that, quite often, one of the two versions of a story would refer to God by one name and the other version would refer to God by a different name.

In the case of the creation, for example, the first chapter of the Bible tells one version of how the world came to be created, and the second chapter of the Bible starts over with a different version of what happened. In many ways they duplicate each other, and on several points they contradict each other. For example, they de-

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scribe the same events in different order. In the first version, God creates plants first, then animals, then man and woman. In the second version, God creates man first. Then he creates plants. Then, so that the man should not be alone, God creates animals. And last, after the man does not find a satisfactory mate among the animals, God creates woman. And so we have:

Genesis 1	Genesis 2
plants	man
animals	plants
man & woman	animals
	woman

The two stories have two different pictures of what happened. Now, the three investigators noticed that the first version of the creation story always refers to the creator as God—thirty-five times. The second version always refers to him by his name, Yahweh God—eleven times. The first version never calls him Yahweh; the second version never calls him God.

Later comes the story of the great flood and Noah's ark, and it, too, can be separated into two complete versions that sometimes duplicate each other and sometimes contradict each other.² And, again, one version always calls the deity God, and the other version always calls him Yahweh. There are two versions of the story of the convenant between the deity and Abraham.³ And, once again, in one the deity introduces himself as Yahweh, and in one he introduces himself as God. And so on. The investigators saw that they were not simply dealing with a book that repeated itself a great deal, and they were not dealing with a loose collection of somewhat similar stories. They had discovered two separate works that someone had cut up and combined into one.

The Discovery of the Sources

The first of the three persons who made this discovery was a German minister, Henning Bernhard Witter, in 1711. His book made very little impact and was in fact forgotten until it was rediscovered two centuries later, in 1924.

The second person to see it was Jean Astruc, a French professor of medicine and court physician to Louis XV. He published his findings at the age of seventy, anonymously in Brussels and secretly in Paris in 1753. His book, too, made very little impression on anyone. Some belittled it, perhaps partly because it was by a medical doctor and not by a scholar.

But when a third person, who was a scholar, made the same discovery and published it in 1780, the world could no longer ignore it. The third person was Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, a known and respected scholar in Germany and the son of a pastor. He called the group of biblical stories that referred to the deity as God "E," because the Hebrew word for God is El or Elohim. He called the group of stories that referred to the deity as Yahweh "J" (which in German is pronounced like English Y).

The idea that the Bible's early history was a combination of two originally separate works by two different people lasted only eighteen years. Practically before anyone had a chance to consider the implications of this idea for the Bible and religion, investigators discovered that the first five books of the Bible were not, in fact, even by two writers—they were by four.

They discovered that E was not one but two sources. The two had looked like only one because they both called the deity Elohim, not Yahweh. But the investigators now noticed that within the group of stories that called the deity Elohim there were still doublets. There were also differences of style, differences of language, and differences of interests. In short, the same kinds of evidence that had led to the discovery of J and E now led to the discovery of a third source that had been hidden within E. The differences of interests were intriguing. This third set of stories seemed to be particularly intersted in priests. It contained stories about priests, laws about priests, matters

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of ritual, sacrifice, incense-burning, and purity, and concern with dates, numbers, and measurements. This source therefore came to be known as the Priestly source—for short, P.

The sources J, E, and P were found to flow through the first four of the five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. However, there was hardly a trace of them in the fifth book, Deuteronomy, except for a few lines in the last chapters. Deuteronomy is written in an entirely different style from those of the other four books. The differences are obvious even in translation. The vocabulary is different. There are different recurring expressions and favorite phrases. There are doublets of whole sections of the first four books. There are blatant contradictions of detail between it and the others. Even part of the wording of the Ten Commandments is different. Deuteronomy appeared to be independent, a fourth source. It was called D.

The discovery that the Torah of Moses was really four works that had once been separate was not necessarily a crisis in itself. After all, the New Testament also began with four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—each of which told the story in its own way. Why then was there such a hostile reaction, among Christians and Jews, to the idea that the Old Testament (or Hebrew Bible) might begin with four "gospels" as well? The difference was that the Hebrew Bible's four sources had been combined so intricately and accepted as Moses' own writing for so long, about two thousand years; the new discoveries were flying in the face of an old, accepted, sacred tradition. The biblical investigators were unraveling a finely woven garment, and no one knew where these new investigations would lead.

The Story of Noah—Twice

These first books of the Bible had as extraordinary a manner of composition as any book on earth. Imagine assigning four different people to write a book on the same subject, then taking their four different versions and cutting them up and combining them into one long, continuous account, then claiming that the account was all by

one person. Then imagine giving the book to detectives and leaving them to figure out (1) that the book was not by one person, (2) that it was by four, (3) who the four were, and (4) who combined them.

For those readers who want to get a better sense of how this looks, I have translated the biblical story of Noah's ark, as it appears in Genesis, with its two sources printed in two different kinds of type. The flood story is a combination of the J source and the P source. J is printed here in regular type, and P is printed in boldface capitals. If you read either source from beginning to end, and then go back and read the other one, you will be able to see for yourself two complete, continuous accounts, each with its own vocabulary and concerns:

The Flood—Genesis 6:5-8:22

(Priestly text in boldface capitals, J text in regular type)

GENESIS 6:

- 5 And Yahweh saw that the evil of humans was great in the earth, and all the inclination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil all the day.
- 6 And Yahweh regretted that he had made humans in the earth, and he was grieved to his heart.
- 7 And Yahweh said, "I shall wipe out the humans which I have created from the face of the earth, from human to beast to creeping thing to bird of the heavens, for I regret that I have made them."
- 8 But Noah found favor in Yahweh's eyes.
- 9 These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.
- 10 And Noah sired three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.
- 11 AND THE EARTH WAS CORRUPTED BEFORE GOD, AND THE EARTH WAS FILLED WITH VIOLENCE.
- 12 And God saw the earth, and here it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way on the earth.

- 13 AND GOD SAID TO NOAH, "THE END OF ALL FLESH HAS COME BEFORE ME, FOR THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH VIOLENCE BECAUSE OF THEM, AND HERE I AM GOING TO DESTROY THEM WITH THE EARTH.
- 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood, make rooms with the ark, and pitch it outside and inside with pitch.
- 15 And this is how you shall make it: Three hundred cubits the length of the ark, fifty cubits its width, and thirty cubits its height.
- 16 You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from the top, and you shall make an entrance to the ark in its side. You shall make lower, second, and third stories for it.
- 17 And here I am bringing the flood, water over the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under the heavens. Everything which is on the land will die.
- 18 And I shall establish my covenant with you. And you shall come to the ark, you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you.
- 19 And of all the living, of all flesh, you shall bring two to the ark to keep alive with you, they shall be male and female.
- 20 OF THE BIRDS ACCORDING TO THEIR KIND, AND OF THE BEASTS ACCORDING TO THEIR KIND, AND OF ALL THE CREEPING THINGS OF THE EARTH ACCORDING TO THEIR KIND, TWO OF EACH WILL COME TO YOU TO KEEP ALIVE.
- 21 And you, take for yourself of all food which will be eaten and gather it to you, and it will be for you and for them for food."
- 22 AND NOAH DID ACCORDING TO ALL THAT GOD COMMANDED HIM—SO HE DID.

GENESIS 7:

- 1 And Yahweh said to Noah, "Come, you and all your household, to the ark, for I have seen you as righteous before me in this generation.
- 2 Of all the clean beasts, take yourself seven pairs, man and his

woman; and of the beasts which are not clean, two, man and his woman.

- 3 Also of the birds of the heavens seven pairs, male and female, to keep alive seed on the face of the earth.
- 4 For in seven more days I shall rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I shall wipe out all the substance that I have made from upon the face of the earth."
- 5 And Noah did according to all that Yahweh had commanded him.
- 6 AND NOAH WAS SIX HUNDRED YEARS OLD, AND THE FLOOD WAS ON THE EARTH.
- 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him came to the ark from before the waters of the flood.
- 8 Of the clean beasts and of the beasts which were not clean, and of the birds and of all those which creep upon the earth,
- 9 Two of each came to Noah to the ark, male and female, as God had commanded Noah.
- 10 And seven days later the waters of the flood were on the earth.
- 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, in the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of the heavens were opened.
- 12 And there was rain on the earth, forty days and forty nights.
- 13 In this very day, Noah and Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and his sons' three wives with them came to the ark.
- 14 They and all the living things according to their kind, and all the beasts according to their kind, and all the creeping things that creep on the Earth according to their kind, and all the birds according to their kind, and every winged bird.
- 15 And they came to Noah to the ark, two of each, of all flesh in which is the breath of life.
- 16 And those which came were male and female, some of all flesh came, as God had commanded him. And Yahweh closed it for him.

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- 17 And the flood was on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and the waters multiplied and raised the ark, and it was lifted from the earth.
- 18 And the waters grew strong and multiplied greatly on the earth, and the ark went on the surface of the waters.
- 19 And the waters grew very very strong on the earth, and they covered all the high mountains that are under all the heavens.
- 20 Fifteen cubits above, the waters grew stronger, and they covered the mountains.
- 21 And all flesh, those that creep on the earth, the birds, the beasts, and the wild animals, and all the swarming things that swarm on the earth, and all the humans expired.
- 22 Everything that had the breathing spirit of life in its nostrils, everything that was on the dry ground, died.
- And he wiped out all the substance that was on the face of the earth, from human to beast, to creeping thing, and to bird of the heavens, and they were wiped out from the earth, and only Noah and those who were with him in the ark were left.
- 24 AND THE WATERS GREW STRONG ON THE EARTH A HUNDRED FIFTY DAYS.

GENESIS 8:

- 1 AND GOD REMEMBERED NOAH AND ALL THE LIVING, AND ALL THE BEASTS THAT WERE WITH HIM IN THE ARK, AND GOD PASSED A WIND OVER THE EARTH. AND THE WATERS WERE DECREASED.
- 2 AND THE FOUNTAINS OF THE DEEP AND THE WINDOWS OF THE HEAVENS WERE SHUT, and the rain was restrained from the heavens.
- 3 And the waters receded from the earth continually, AND THE WATERS WERE ABATED AT THE END OF A HUNDRED FIFTY DAYS.
- 4 And the ark rested, in the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.
- 5 And the waters continued receding until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.
- 6 And it was at the end of forty days, and Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made.

- 7 And he sent out a raven, and it went back and forth until the waters dried up from the earth.
- 8 And he sent out a dove from him to see whether the waters had eased from the face of the earth.
- 9 And the dove did not find a resting place for its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for waters were on the face of the earth, and he put out his hand and took it and brought it to him to the ark.
- 10 And he waited seven more days, and he again sent out a dove from the ark.
- 11 And the dove came to him at evening time, and here was an olive leaf torn off in its mouth, and Noah knew that the waters had eased from the earth.
- 12 And he waited seven more days, and he sent out a dove, and it did not return to him ever again.
- AND IT WAS IN THE SIX HUNDRED AND FIRST YEAR, IN THE FIRST MONTH, ON THE FIRST OF THE MONTH, THE WATERS DRIED FROM THE EARTH. And Noah turned back the covering of the ark and looked, and here the face of the earth had dried.
- 14 And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth dried up.
- 15 And God spoke to Noah, saying,
- 16 "GO OUT FROM THE ARK, YOU AND YOUR WIFE AND YOUR SONS' WIVES WITH YOU.
- 17 All the living things that are with you, of all flesh, of the birds, and of the beasts, and of all the creeping things that creep on the earth, that go out with you, shall swarm in the earth and be fruitful and multiply in the earth."
- 18 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went out.
- 19 All the living things, all the creeping things and all the birds, all that creep on the earth, by their families, they went out of the ark.
- 20 And Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and he took some of each of the clean beasts and of each of the clean birds, and he offered sacrifices on the altar.

- And Yahweh smelled the pleasant smell, and Yahweh said to his heart, "I shall not again curse the ground on man's account, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from their youth, and I shall not again strike all the living as I have done.
- 22 All the rest of the days of the earth, seed and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

Each in Its Own Words

The very fact that it is possible to separate out two continuous stories like this is remarkable itself, and it is strong evidence for the hypothesis. One need only try to do the same thing with any other book to see how impressive this phenomenon is.

But it is not only that it is possible to carve out two stories. What makes the case so powerful is that each story consistently uses its own language. The P story (the one in boldface) consistently refers to the deity as God. The J story always uses the name Yahweh. P refers to the sex of the animals with the words "male and female" (Gen 6:19; 7:9,16). J uses the terms "man and his woman" (7:2) as well as male and female. P says that everything "expired" (6:17; 7:21). J says that everything "died" (7:22).

The two versions do not just differ on terminology. They differ on actual details of the story. P has one pair of each kind of animal. J has seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals. ("Clean" means fit for sacrifice. Sheep are clean; lions are unclean.) P pictures the flood as lasting a year (370 days). J says it was forty days and forty nights. P has Noah send out a raven. J says a dove. P obviously has a concern for ages, dates, and measurements in cubits. J does not.

Probably the most remarkable difference of all between the two is their different ways of picturing God. It is not just that they call the deity by different names. J pictures a deity who can regret things that he has done (6:6,7), which raises interesting theological questions, such as whether an all-powerful, all-knowing being would ever regret past actions. It pictures a deity who can be "grieved to his

heart" (6:6), who personally closes the ark (7:16) and smells Noah's sacrifice (8:21). This anthropomorphic quality of J is virtually entirely lacking in P. There God is regarded more as a transcendent controller of the universe.

The two flood stories are separable and complete. Each has its own language, its own details, and even its own conception of God. And even that is not the whole picture. The J flood story's language, details, and conception of God are consistent with the language, details, and conception of God in other J stories. The P flood story is consistent with other P stories. And so on. The investigators found each of the sources to be a consistent collection of stories, poems, and laws.

The Doorstep

The discovery that there were four separate, internally consistent documents came to be known as the Documentary Hypothesis. The process was also called "Higher Criticism." What had begun as an idea by three men of the eighteenth century came to dominate investigations of the Bible by the end of the nineteenth century.

It had taken centuries of collecting clues to arrive at this stage which one could regard as fairly advanced or really quite minimal, depending on one's point of view. On the one hand, for centuries no one could easily challenge the accepted tradition that Moses was the author of the Five Books, and now people of acknowledged piety could say and write openly that he was not. They were able to identify at least four hands writing in the first five books of the Bible. Also, there was the hand of an extremely skillful collector known as a redactor, someone who was capable of combining and organizing these separate documents into a single work that was united enough to be readable as a continuous narrative.

On the other hand, what these detectives of biblical origins had arrived at was only the doorstep. They were able to see that a puzzle existed, and they were able to begin to get an idea of how complex the puzzle was going to be. True, they could identify four documents and a redactor, but who wrote those documents? When did they

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live? What was their purpose? Did they know each other's work? Did any of them know that they were writing a *Bible*, a work to be held as sacred and authoritative? And the mysterious redactor: was it one person, or were there several? Who were they? Why did they combine the documents in this complex way? The answers were buried in the pages of the Bible and in the soil of the Middle East. By digging into both, my predecessors and I found out how the stories in those pages were connected with that world.

Two Countries, Two Writers

The first two sources, J and E, were written by two persons who lived during the period that I described in the last chapter. They were tied to the life of that period, its major events, its politics, its religion, and its catastrophes. In this chapter I intend to demonstrate this and to identify the persons who wrote them.

First, the author of J came from Judah and the author of E came from Israel. A number of biblical scholars before me have suggested this, but what is new here is that I mean to present a stronger collection of evidence for this than has been made known before, I mean to be more specific about who the two writers were, and I mean to show more specifically how the biblical stories actually related to these two men and to the events of their world.

The mere fact that different stories in the first books of the Bible call God by different names of course proves nothing in itself. Someone could write about the queen of England and sometimes call her the queen and sometimes call her Elizabeth II. But, as I have said, there was something more suspicious about the way the different names of the deity lined up in the first few books of the Bible. The two different names, Yahweh and Elohim, seemed to line up consistently in each of the two versions of the same stories in the doublets. If we separate the Elohim (E) stories from the Yahweh (J) stories, we get a consistent series of clues that the E stories were written by someone concerned with Israel and the J stories by someone concerned with Judah.⁵

J from Judah, E from Israel

First, there is the matter of the settings of the stories. In Genesis, in stories that call God Yahweh, the patriarch Abraham lives in Hebron. Hebron was the principal city of Judah, the capital of Judah under King David, the city from which David's Judean chief priest, Zadok, came.

In the covenant that Yahweh makes with Abraham, he promises that Abraham's descendants will have the land "from the river of Egypt to the...river Euphrates." These were the nation's boundaries under King David, the founder of Judah's royal family.

But in a story that calls God *Elohim*, Abraham's grandson Jacob has a face-to-face fight with someone who turns out to be God (or perhaps an angel), and Jacob names the place where it happens Peni-El (which means "Face-of-God"). Peni-El was a city that King Jeroboam built in Israel.⁸

Both sources, J and E, tell stories about the city of Beth-El, and both kingdoms, Judah and Israel, made political *claims* on Beth-El, which was on the border between them.⁹

Both sources, I and E, tell stories about the city of Shechem, which Jeroboam built and made the capital of Israel. But the two stories are very different. According to the I story, a man named Shechem, who is the original prince of that city, loves Jacob's daughter Dinah and sleeps with her. He then asks for her hand in marriage. Jacob's sons reply that they could not contemplate this or any intermarriage with the people of Shechem because the Shechemites are not circumcised and the sons of Jacob are. The prince of Shechem and his father Hamor therefore persuade all the men of Shechem to undergo circumcision. While the men are immobile from the pain of the surgery, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, enter the city, kill all of the men, and take back their sister Dinah. Their father lacob criticizes them for doing this, but they answer, "Should he treat our sister like a whore?" And that is the end of the story. 10 This I story of how Israel acquired its capital city is not a very pleasant one. The E story, meanwhile, tells it this way:

And [Jacob] bought the portion of the field where he pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, father of Shechem, for a hundred gesita.¹¹

How did Israel acquire Shechem? The E author says they bought it. The J author says they massacred it.

The Origins of the Tribes

In the stories of the birth of Jacob's sons and grandsons—each of whom becomes the ancestor of a tribe—there is usually a reference to the deity as they name the child. The group of stories that invoke *Elohim* are the stories of:

Dan Naphtali Gad Asher Issachar Zebulon Ephraim Manasseh Benjamin¹²

In short, the *Elohim* group includes the names of all of the tribes of *Israel*. The group of stories that invoke the name of *Yahweh* are the stories of:

Reuben Simeon Levi Judah

The first three of the four names on this list are the names of tribes who lost their territory and merged into the other tribes. The only

name of a tribe with existing territory in the Yahweh narrative is Judah.¹⁴

The J story goes even further to justify the ascendancy of Judah. According to the story, Reuben is the firstborn son, Simeon is the second, Levi the third, and Judah the fourth. In the ancient Near East, birth order was extremely important, because the firstborn son was entitled to the birthright, which meant the largest portion of the father's inheritance (generally double the other brothers' inheritances). We should therefore have expected Reuben, the oldest son, to have the birthright. But there is a story that reports that Reuben sleeps with one of his father's concubines, and his father finds out. The next two sons in line for the birthright would be Simeon and Levi. But in the J Shechem story they are the ones who massacre the city and are criticized by their father. And so, in J, the birthright comes to the fourth son: Judah! In Jacob's poetic deathbed blessing of his sons, here is what he says about Reuben:

Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My strength and the beginning of my power,
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent of might.
Unstable as water, you shall not be preeminent
Because you went up to your father's bed. 15

And here is what he says about Simeon and Levi:

Simeon and Levi are brothers, Implements of destruction are their tools of trade. . . . In their anger they killed a man, And by their will they houghed a bull. Cursed is their anger, for it is fierce, And their wrath, for it is harsh. I shall divide them in Jacob, And I shall scatter them in Israel. 16

But he says about Judah:

Judah, you are the one your brothers will praise . . . Your father's sons will bow down to you. 17

Judah gets the birthright in J.

Who gets it in E? In the E version of Jacob's deathbed scene, Jacob bequeathes the double portion to Joseph, announcing that each of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, will receive a full portion, equivalent to the portions of Reuben, Simeon, and the others. Why did the author of E favor Joseph and his sons? The answer lies in one more detail of E's story. When Jacob is giving his deathbed blessing to Joseph and his sons, Joseph sets his sons in front of Jacob in such a way that Jacob will put his right hand on the head of Manasseh, the older son. The right hand is the sign of preeminence. But Jacob crosses his arms, so his right hand is on Ephraim's head. Joseph protests the reversal, but Jacob insists that Ephraim will become greater. 18 What is it about Ephraim? Why does the author of E develop the hierarchy to culminate not in any of lacob's sons, but in one of his grandsons who is not even a firstborn? Was there anything historically significant about the tribe of Ephraim in the writer's age? Answer: Ephraim was King Jeroboam's tribe. Jeroboam's capital city, Shechem, was located in the hills of Ephraim. 19 Ephraim, in fact, was used as another name for the kingdom of Israel 20

Evidence from the Stories

The J stories fit the cities and territory of Judah. The E stories fit the cities and territory of Israel. I found that other details of the stories consistently fit this picture as well:

Both J and E have versions of the story of Joseph. In both, Joseph's brothers are jealous of him and plan to kill him, but one of the brothers saves him. In E it is Reuben, the oldest, who saves him. ²¹ But in J it is *Judah* who saves him. ²²

The E story of Jacob's deathbed testament has a pun in the Hebrew. In creating portions for Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob tells Joseph, "I have given you one portion more than your brothers." The Hebrew word that is translated here as "portion" is šekem, or as we pronounce it in English, Shechem. Telling the father of Ephraim that he is getting an extra Shechem is like telling the governor of

Michigan, "I have given the other states some trees, but I have given you an arbor."

The J stories meanwhile seem to be punning on the name of the first king of Judah after the division: Rehoboam. The Hebrew root of the name Rehoboam (*r-h-b*) occurs six times in the J stories, usually suggesting, as does the king's name, the expanse of the country.²⁴ The root never occurs in E.

According to an E story, Joseph makes a deathbed request in Egypt that someday his bones should be carried back to his homeland for burial.²⁵ At the end of the E story of the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites do carry his bones back with them.²⁶ This concern for the burial of Joseph only occurs in E. Where was the traditional location of the tomb of Joseph? In Shechem, capital of Israel.²⁷

Both J and E have stories of the enslavement of the people in Egypt. The J source usually refers to the Egyptians who oversee the slaves as "taskmasters," but in a passage that appears to be E they are called "officers of missîm." Recall that missîm was the term for King Solomon's forced-labor policy, a policy that was one of the main reasons for the secession of the northern tribes of Israel. The E wording appears to be an insult to Judah and its royal family.

The insult may be a double one, because the most prominent of Solomon's wives was the daughter of the pharaoh of that period. The book of 1 Kings lists her first among his wives. ²⁹ Such a marriage would have been a notable one, further, because the kings of Egypt disdained marrying their daughters to foreigners. There is no other case recorded in the ancient Near East of a marriage of an Egyptian princess to a foreign ruler.

In E, Moses' faithful assistant is Joshua. Joshua leads the people in battle against the Amalekites; he serves as watchman inside the Tent of Meeting whenever Moses is not meeting with the deity there; he is the only Israelite who is not involved in the golden calf incident; and he seeks to prevent the misuse of prophecy. In J, on the other hand, Joshua plays no role. Why the special treatment of Joshua in E but not in J? Joshua was a northern hero. He is identified as coming from the tribe of Ephraim, Jeroboam's tribe; Joshua's tomb is in the territory of Ephraim, and, according to the last chapter of the book of Joshua, Joshua's work culminates in a covenant ceremony at Shechem.

According to a J story, Moses sends a group of spies from the wilderness into the promised land. All but one of the spies report

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that the land is impregnable because its inhabitants are so huge and fierce. The one spy who challenges this report and encourages the people to have faith is Caleb. In the story, the spies travel through the Negev (the southern desert of the land), the hill country, as far as Hebron, then to the Wadi Eshkol. All of these places are in Judah's territory. In J, the spies only see Judah. 32 As for the hero of the story, Caleb, he is the eponymous ancestor of the Calebites. The Calebites held territory in the hill country of Judah. The Calebite territory in fact included Hebron, Judah's capital. 33

The cumulative, consistent conclusion from all of this evidence, it seems to me, is: (1) the early investigators were right about the existence of the two sources, J and E; (2) the person who wrote J was particularly concerned with the kingdom of Judah, and the person who wrote E was particularly interested in the kingdom of Israel.

Still, as I said in the introduction we are interested in more than the authors' real estate preferences. The question is, why did they write these stories? What was happening in their world that prompted them to write these things?

The Twins

Take, for example, the biblical stories about the twins Jacob and Esau. In these stories, Abraham's son, Isaac, marries Rebekah, and she gives birth to twin sons. The first to come out of his mother's womb is Esau. The secondborn is Jacob. While they are still in Rebekah's womb, Yahweh tells Rebekah:

Two nations are in your womb, And two peoples will be separated from inside you; And one people will be stronger than the other people, And the greater will serve the younger.³⁴

The boys grow. On one occasion, Esau comes back from the field famished. His brother, Jacob, is making red lentil stew. Jacob tells Esau that he will give him some of the food only if Esau swears to give him his birthright in return. Esau capitulates.³⁵

More time passes. Their father, Isaac, intends to give his deathbed blessing to Esau. Rebekah, however, encourages Jacob to pose as his elder brother and thus deceive his weak-eyed father into giving him the blessing instead. Jacob does it. He wears his brother's clothing, and he puts goat skins on his arms because his brother is "an hairy man." Isaac gives Jacob the blessing, which includes dominion over his brother. When Esau arrives, Isaac tells him that the blessing has already gone to Jacob. Esau asks for a blessing as well. His father gives him the following:

By your sword you will live And you will serve your brother. And it will be, when you are brought down, That you will break his yoke from your shoulders.³⁶

Why did someone write these stories, with these details? The answers are tied to the life of the writer's world.

Why red lentil stew? Because, the story says, Esau became known after that as "Red." The word for "red" in Hebrew is *Edom*. That is, Esau is traditionally regarded as the father of the Edomites.

Why twin brothers? Because the people of Israel-Judah regarded the Edomites as kin, as related to them ethnically and/or linguistically (as opposed to, say, Egyptians or Philistines, who were regarded as "outsiders").

Why the revelation to Rebekah that her younger son's descendants would dominate her older son's? Because the young kingdom of Israel-Judah, under King David, defeated the older kingdom of Edom and dominated it for two hundred years.

Why does Jacob get the birthright (a double portion) and the blessing (prosperity and dominion)? Because Israel-Judah became larger and more prosperous than Edom and dominated it.

Why does Esau/Edom get a blessing that "you will break his yoke from your shoulders"? Because Edom finally broke free and achieved its independence during the reign of the Judean King Jehoram (848–842 B.C.).³⁷

These stories all refer to the deity as Yahweh or show other signs of being part of J. Why do stories about relations with Esau/Edom occur in J and not in E? J is from Judah. Judah bordered Edom, Israel did not.

On each point, the details of the stories correspond to the histori-

cal record. The J author composed the stories of his people's ancestors with an eye to explaining and justifying the world situation in which he lived.

Sunday school versions of this story often try to vindicate Jacob. With slight changes or reinterpretations, they make Jacob the good son and Esau the bad one. But the J writer was more sophisticated then his later interpreters. He told a story in which Jacob was courageous and clever, but also dishonest. He did not make his heroes perfect (any more than the Court History of David made David perfect). His task was rather to compose a story that reflected and explained the political and social realities of the world that he knew. Anyone who reads the stories of Jacob and Esau can see how well he succeeded.

CHAPTER 3

Two Kingdoms, Two Writers

THE Bible's stories have proved to be a chain of clues to the identity of their authors, and at the same time they have proved to be windows into that ancient world. The J stories reflect conditions in the time and place in which their author lived, and they show where some of this writer's interests lay.

The E stories reveal more about their author's identity than the J stories do about theirs.

The Golden Calf

The most revealing of all is the E story of the golden calf, which I summarized briefly in the Introduction. While Moses is getting the Ten Commandments on the mountain of God, Aaron makes a

golden calf for the people. They say, "These are your gods, Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." Aaron says, "A holiday to Yahweh tomorrow!" The people sacrifice and celebrate wildly. Meanwhile, God tells Moses what is happening below, and God says that he will destroy the people and start a new people descended from Moses. Moses pleads with God to be merciful, and God relents. Moses comes down from the mountain with his assistant Joshua. When he sees the calf and the condition of the people, he smashes the tablets in anger. Then the tribe of Levi gather around Moses and carry out a bloody purge among the people. Moses makes a plea to God to forgive the people's offense and not destroy them.²

The story is all questions. Why did the person who wrote this story depict his people as rebellious at the very time of their liberation and their receiving the covenant? Why did he picture Aaron as leader of the heresy? Why does Aaron not suffer any punishment for it in the end? Why did the author picture a golden calf? Why do the people say "These are your gods, Israel...," when there is only one calf there? And why do they say "... that brought you up from the land of Egypt" when the calf obviously was not made until after they were out of Egypt? Why does Aaron say "A holiday to Yahweh tomorrow" when he is presenting the calf as a rival to Yahweh? Why is the calf treated as a god in this story, when the calf was not a god in the ancient Near East? Why did the writer picture Moses as smashing the tablets of the Ten Commandments? Why picture the Levites as acting in bloody zeal? Why include Joshua in the story? Why depict Joshua as dissociated from the golden calf event?

We already have enough information from our acquaintances with the world that produced the Bible to answer all of these questions. We have already seen considerable evidence that the author of J was from Judah and the author of E from Israel. We have also seen evidence that suggests that the Israelite author of E had a particular interest in matters that related to King Jeroboam and his policies. E deals with cities that Jeroboam rebuilt: Shechem, Penuel, Beth-El. E justifies the ascendancy of his home tribe, Ephraim. E disdains the Judean policy of missîm. E gives special attention to the matter of the burial of Joseph, whose traditional gravesite was in Jeroboam's capital, Shechem. Further, E is a source which particularly emphasizes Moses as its hero, much more than J does. In this story, it is Moses' intercession with God that saves the people from destruction. E also especially develops Moses' personal role in the liberation

from slavery, in a way that J does not. In E there is less material on the patriarchs than on Moses; in J there is more on the patriarchs.

Let us consider the possibility that the person who wrote E was a Levitical priest, probably from Shiloh, and therefore possibly descended from Moses. Such a person would have an interest in developing these things: the oppressive Judean economic policies, the establishment of an independent kingdom under Jeroboam, and the superior status of Moses. If this is true, that the author of E was a Shiloh Levite possibly descended from Moses, then this answers every one of the questions about the golden calf story.

Recall that the priests of Shiloh suffered the loss of their place in the priestly hierarchy under King Solomon. Their chief, Abiathar, was expelled from Jerusalem. The other chief priest, Zadok, who was regarded as a descendant of Aaron, meanwhile remained in power. Northern Levites' lands were given to the Phoenicians. The Shiloh prophet Ahijah instigated the northern tribes' secession, and he designated Jeroboam as the northern king. The Shiloh priests' hopes for the new kingdom, however, were frustrated when Jeroboam established the golden calf religious centers at Dan and Beth-El, and he did not appoint them as priests there. For this old family of priests. what should have been a time of liberation had been turned into a time of religious betrayal. The symbol of their exclusion in Israel was the golden calves. The symbol of their exclusion in Judah was Aaron. Someone from that family, the author of E. wrote a story that said that soon after the Israelite's liberation from slavery, they committed heresy. What was the heresy? They worshiped a golden calf! Who made the golden calf! Aaron!

The details of the story fall into place. Why does Aaron not suffer any punishment in the story? Because no matter how much antipathy the author may have felt toward Aaron's descendants, that author could not change the entire historical recollection of his people. They had a tradition that Aaron was an ancient high priest. The high priest cannot be pictured as suffering any hurt from God because in such a case he could not have continued to serve as high priest. Any sort of blemish on the high priest would have disqualified him from service. The author could not just make up a story that the high priest had become disqualified at this early stage.

Why does Aaron say "A holiday to Yahweh tomorrow" when he is presenting the calf as a rival to Yahweh? Because the calf is not in fact a rival god. The calf, or young bull, is only the throne platform

or symbol of the deity, not a deity itself. Why is the calf treated as a god in this story? Presumably because the story is polemical; the writer means to cast the golden calves of the kingdom of Israel in the worst light possible. In fact, we shall see other cases in which biblical writers use the word "gods" to include the golden calves and the golden cherubs; and in those cases, too, the text is polemical.

Why do the people say "These are your gods, Israel..." when there is only one calf? Why do they say "... that brought you up from the land of Egypt" when the calf was not made until they were out of Egypt? The answer seems to lie in the account of King Jeroboam in the book of 1 Kings. It states there that when Jeroboam made his two golden calves he declared to his people, "Here are your gods, Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." The people's words in Exodus are identical to Jeroboam's words in 1 Kings. It would be difficult for us to trace the textual history of these two passages now, but at minimum we can say that the writer of the golden calf account in Exodus seems to have taken the words that were traditionally ascribed to Jeroboam and placed them in the mouths of the people. This made the connection between his golden calf story and the golden calves of the kingdom of Israel crystal clear to his readers.

Why did the writer of E picture the Levites as acting in bloody zeal? He was a Levite. He wrote that Aaron had acted rebelliously while the other Levites alone acted loyally. Moses tells the Levites there that they have earned blessing by their actions. The story thus denigrates the ancestory of the Jerusalem priests while praising the rest of the Levites.

What is Joshua doing in this story, and why is he singled out as being dissociated from the heresy? Because, as we know, Joshua was a northern hero. His home tribe was the same as King Jeroboam's: Ephraim. His gravesite, like Joseph's, was in Ephraim. He is credited with having led a national covenant ceremony at Shechem, the place that was later to become Jeroboam's capital. The E writer therefore was adding to the golden calf story an element of praise for a northern hero who was associated in the tradition with the capital city and the preeminent tribe. The dissociation of Joshua from the golden calf heresy also explained why Joshua later becomes Moses' successor.

Why did the writer picture Moses as smashing the tablets of the Ten Commandments? Possibly because this raised doubts about Judah's central religious shrine. The Temple in Judah housed the ark that was supposed to contain the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. According to the E story of the golden calf, Moses smashes the tablets. That means that according to the E source the ark down south in the Temple in Jerusalem either contains unauthentic tablets or no tablets at all.⁴

The author of E, in fashioning the golden calf story, attacked both the Israelite and the Judean religious establishments. Both had excluded his group. One might ask, why, then, was this writer so favorable to Jeroboam's kingdom in other stories? Why did he favor the cities of Shechem, Penuel, and especially Beth-El? Why did he favor the tribe of Ephraim? First, because Shiloh was in Ephraim, and its great priest Samuel was from Ephraim.5 Second, presumably because the kingdom of Israel remained his only hope politically. He could look forward to a day when the illegitimate, non-Levite priests of Beth-El would be rejected, and his Levite group would be reinstated. Judah and Jerusalem offered no such hope at that time. The priests of the family of Aaron had been firmly established there since King Solomon's time. They were Levites and therefore no less legitimate than the priests of Shiloh. They were closely tied by bonds of politics and marriage to the royal family.6 The only realistic hope for the Shiloh priests was in the northern kingdom. The E source therefore favored that kingdom's political structure while attacking its religious establishment.

Symbols of Faith

The golden calf story is not the only instance in which the author of E may have been criticizing both the northern and southern religious establishments.

In the J version of the commandments that God gives to Moses on Mount Sinai, there is a prohibition against making statues (idols). The wording of the J commandment is:

You shall not make for yourself molten gods.7

The J command here forbids only *molten* statues. The golden calves of Jeroboam in the north were molten. The golden cherubs of Solomon in the south were not molten. They were made of olive wood and then gold-plated. The J text thus fits the iconography of Judah. It may imply that the golden calves of northern Israel are inappropriate, even though they are not actually statues of a god; but it does not leave itself open to the countercharge that Judah's golden cherubs are inappropriate as well.

Meanwhile, the E source's formulation of this prohibition reads:

You shall not make with me gods of silver and gods of gold. You shall not make them for yourselves.⁸

Perhaps this command refers only to actual statues of gods, but if it casts doubt on the throne-platform icons as well then it casts doubt on *both* the molten golden calves and the plated golden cherubs.

The relationship between the J and E sources and the religious symbols of Judah and Israel respectively is evident elsewhere as well. In a J text at the beginning of the book of Numbers the people set out from Sinai/Horeb on their journey to the promised land. According to the description of their departure, the ark is carried in front of the people as they travel. Another J text also mentions the ark as important to the people's success in the wilderness. It in fact suggests that it is impossible to be militarily successful without it. The ark, as we know, was regarded as the central object of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that it is treated with such importance in J, but it is never mentioned in E.

E rather attributes much importance to the Tent of Meeting as the symbol of the presence of God among the people.¹¹ The Tent of Meeting (or Tabernacle), according to the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, was a primary site of the nation's worship until Solomon replaced the tent shrine with the Temple. The Tabernacle, moreover, was associated originally with the city of Shiloh. Given the other evidence for connecting the author of E with the priesthood of Shiloh, it should come as no surprise, therefore, that the Tent of Meeting has such importance in E, but it is never mentioned in J.

The ark does not appear in E. The Tabernacle does not appear in J. This is no coincidence. The stories in the sources treat the religious symbols of the respective communities from which they came.

Now we can also turn back to the beginning of the book of Genesis and appreciate the fact that at the conclusion of the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, which is a J narrative, Yahweh sets cherubs as the guardians of the path to the tree of life. Since cherubs were in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple, it is only natural that an advocate of Judah's religious traditions should picture cherubs as the guardians of something valuable and sacred.

The golden calf story reveals more about its author than probably any other story in J or E. In addition to all that it tells us about its author's background and about its author's skill in fashioning a story, it conveys how deep his anger was toward those who had displaced his group in Judah and in Israel. He could picture Aaron, ancestor of the Jerusalem priesthood, as committing heresy and dishonesty. He could picture the national symbols of Israelite religion as objects of idolatry. He could picture the nation who accepted these symbols as deserving a bloody purge. What he pictured Moses doing to the golden calf was what he himself might have liked to do to the calves of Dan and Beth-El: burn them with fire, grind them thin as dust.

Snow-White Miriam

There is another story in E that reflects the depth of the antagonism between the priests who identified with Moses (either as their founder or as their ancestor) and those who identified with Aaron. In this story, Aaron and his sister Miriam speak against Moses with regard to Moses' wife, and God personally reprimands them. It is worth reading this short, unusual story as it appears in the book of Numbers. It is usually left out of the Sunday school curriculum:

Snow-White Miriam, Numbers 12 E text in italics

- 1 And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses on account of the Cushite wife he had taken, for he had taken a Cushite wife.
- 2 And they said, "Has Yahweh indeed only spoken through Moses? Has he not also spoken through us?" And Yahweh heard.
- 3 And the man Moses was very humble, more than any human on the face of the earth.
- 4 And Yahweh¹³ said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, "Go out, the three of you, to the Tent of Meeting." And the three of them went out.
- 5 And Yahweh went down in a column of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent, and he called Aaron and Miriam, and the two of them went out.
- 6 And he said, "Hear my words. If there will be a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, shall make myself known to him in a vision; in a dream I shall speak through him.
- 7 Not so my servant Moses, most faithful in all my house.
- 8 Mouth to mouth I shall speak through him, and vision, and not in enigmas, and he will see the form of Yahweh. And why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"
- 9 And Yahweh's anger burnt against them, and he went.
- 10 And the cloud turned back from on the tent, and here Miriam was leprous as snow And Aaron turned to Miriam, and here she was leprous.
- 11 And Aaron said to Moses, "In me, my Lord, do not lay upon us the sin that we have done foolishly and that we have sinned.
- 12 Let her not be like someone who is half dead, whose flesh is half eaten when he comes out of his mother's womb."
- 13 And Moses cried out to Yahweh, saying, "God [El], heal her."
- 14 And Yahweh said to Moses, "And if her father had spit in her face, would she not be shamed for seven days? Let her be shut away for seven days outside the camp, and afterwards she will be restored."

15 And Miriam was shut away outside the camp seven days, and the people did not travel until Miriam was gathered back.

Aaron and Miriam speak because of Moses' wife. What is it about Moses' wife that bothers them? The text does not say. It only states that she is Cushite. Since Cush is understood to mean Ethiopia in the Bible, the issue may be that Moses' wife is black. The difficulty is that there is also a place called Cushan in the Bible, which is a region of Midian; and Moses' wife Zipporah has already been identified as Midianite. It is therefore uncertain whether the text here refers to Zipporah or to a second wife. In either case, the most likely reading of the text is that Miriam's and Aaron's opposition is based on Moses' wife being different, whether that difference be racial or ethnic. It is also psychologically interesting that their actual complaint never refers to the wife. That is, they do not complain out loud about the thing that is really bothering them. Rather, they direct their criticism at Moses himself. They question whether Moses has any status beyond their own with regard to revelation. ("Has Yahweh indeed only spoken through Moses? Has he not also spoken through us?")

This proves to be an error. Yahweh informs them that Moses does indeed stand out from all other prophets in the degree of his intimacy with the divine. All other prophets only have visions, but Moses actually sees God. The deity is described as angry at Aaron and Miriam, and Miriam is stricken with a kind of leprosy in which all the pigmentation of the skin disappears, leaving her "snowwhite." If the issue here is that Moses' wife is black, then the punishment to suit the crime in this case is singularly suitable.

As in the golden calf episode, Aaron does not suffer any punishment. Aaron had come to be known in the tradition as a priest, and a person who has had leprosy is disqualified for the priestly function thereafter. The writer therefore could not portray Aaron as sharing his sister's punishment. Still, it remains clear in the story that Aaron has offended, that God is angry at Aaron (verse 9), and that God states explicitly that Moses' experience of God is superior to Aaron's. This, too, fits the E interest in belittling the Aaronid priesthood in Judah. Also, both here and in the golden calf story Aaron respectfully addresses Moses as "my lord," acknowledging Moses as his superior.

A story of a rebellion is a particularly useful means of making a point. The writer portrays a person or group as attacking the rightful authority or as being flagrantly disobedient—and then he portrays that person's or group's demise. The E stories of the golden calf and of snow-white Miriam accomplish this.

Reverence for Moses

We have covered a large amount of territory in this pursuit of two of the authors of the Bible. In story after story, we have been able to find clues connecting the story, the writer, and the writer's world. I have drawn on so many stories and pointed out all of these clues, first, simply to familiarize readers with the J and E sequence of stories. Second, it was important to demonstrate the strength of the cumulative argument. Any one of these examples might have been interesting and worth discussing, but not necessarily a compelling proof of anything in itself. The extent to which so many aspects of so many narratives converge and point in a common direction, however, is a compelling support of the multi-author hypothesis in general, and of this identification of the authors of J and E in particular. The more one reads these stories, the more one gets a sense of their authors, each in his world, and the more this explains.

When we identify the author of E as a Shiloh priest who possibly thought of Moses as his own ancestor, we are not just saying something about his pedigree. We are pursuing an understanding of why he wrote what he wrote. It helps us to understand why the E stories offer more development of Moses' personality than those of J—and not just more development, but more sympathetic development. There is nothing in J to compare with Moses' speech to God in an E account in Numbers 11. There the people complain that there is no meat for them to eat in the wilderness, and they speak nostalgically of the good food they had in Egypt, temporarily disregarding the fact that they had to work as slaves for that food. At this point, Moses apparently can no longer bear the burden that God has given him, to manage this entire community singlehanded. His plea to Yahweh is extraordinary for its anguish and for its intimacy with the deity. He says:

Why have you injured your servant, and why have I not found favor in your eyes, to put the burden of this entire people on me? Did I conceive this entire people? Did I give birth to it, that you say to me, "Carry it in your bosom," the way a nurse carries a suckling, to the land that you swore to its fathers? From where do I have meat to give to this entire people, that they cry to me, saying, "Give us meat, and let us eat"? I am not able, myself, to carry all of this people, for it is too heavy for me. And if this is how you treat me, then kill me, if I have found favor in your eyes, and let me not see my suffering. 14

E here is more than a source. It is a powerful composition reflecting a special interest, sympathy, and affection for Moses. The E writer emphasizes the Mosaic covenant at Horeb and never refers to the Abrahamic covenant. The E story of the exodus from Egypt places more emphasis on the extent to which Moses himself is acting to free the people, while the J version focuses more on God as bringing the liberation about. In J, Yahweh says:

And I am coming down to save them from Egypt's hand and to bring them up. . . . 15

In E, he says:

And now, go, and I shall send you to Pharaoh. Take my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. 16

There is a difference of emphasis between these two. The E writer is focusing on Moses' crucial personal role. This is consistent with this writer's treatment of Moses throughout his work. For him, the arrival of Moses is the great moment of history, the time of the covenant, the time of the birth of the nation, the time of the Levites' first act of loyal service to God.

And it is the time of the world's first acquaintance with God by name.

The Name of God

I have pointed out two places where the name Yahweh occurs in E stories. Until now, I have said that the name of God was a key distinction between J and E. Now let me be more specific. In J, the deity is called Yahweh from beginning to end. The J writer never refers to him as Elohim in narration. ¹⁷ In E, the deity is called Elohim until the arrival of Moses. From the first time that Moses meets God, this changes. In the famous E story of the day that Moses meets God—the story of the burning bush—Moses does not know God's name, and so he asks.

And Moses said to God [Elohim], "Here I am coming to the children of Israel, and I say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they will say to me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" 18

The deity first gives the famous response "I am what I am." (The Hebrew root of these words is the same as the root of the name Yahweh.) And then he answers:

Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name forever: By this I shall be remembered from generation to generation. 19

In E, Yahweh reveals his name for the first time to Moses. Prior to this scene in Exodus, he is called El or Elohim.

Why did the writer of E do this? That is controversial. Some think that this story reflects the religious system in the northern kingdom of Israel. In choosing the golden calves (young bulls) as the throne platform, King Jeroboam was perhaps identifying Yahweh with the chief Canaanite god, El. El was associated with bulls and was known as Bull El. Jeroboam was thus saying that Yahweh and El were different names for the same God. The E story would then

serve this merger of the deities. It would explain why the deity had the two different names: he was called El at first, and then he revealed his personal name Yahweh to Moses. This explanation of the name change in E is attractive in that it shows another logical tie between E and the kingdom of Israel. This fits with all the other clues we have seen that E was from Israel.

However, there is a problem with this. In Judah, King Solomon used golden cherubs as the throne platform. And the god El was not only associated with bulls, but with cherubs as well. The statues that each kingdom used, therefore, do not make good evidence for explaining why E has the name revelation to Moses. Besides, all the other evidence we have seen indicates that the author of E was against the religious system that Jeroboam started in Israel. The E author depicted Moses destroying the golden calf. It is difficult, therefore, to argue that this author followed that religious system's theology on the identity of God.

Some investigators doing research on early Israelite history have concluded that, historically, only a small portion of the ancient Israelites were actually slaves in Egypt. Perhaps it was only the Levites. It is among the Levites, after all, that we find people with Egyptian names. The Levite names Moses, Hophni, and Phinehas are all Egyptian, not Hebrew. And the Levites did not occupy any territory in the land like the other tribes. These investigators suggest that the group that was in Egypt and then in Sinai worshiped the God Yahweh. Then they arrived in Israel, where they met Israelite tribes who worshiped the God El. Instead of fighting over whose God was the true God, the two groups accepted the belief that Yahweh and El were the same God. The Levites became the official priests of the united religion, perhaps by force or perhaps by influence. Or perhaps that was their compensation for not having any territory. Instead of land, they received, as priests, 10 percent of the sacrificed animals and produce.

This hypothesis, too, fits with the idea that the author of E was an Israelite Levite. His story of the revelation of the name Yahweh to Moses would reflect this history: the God that the tribes worshiped in the land was El. They had traditions about the God El and their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then the Levites arrived with their traditions about Moses, the exodus from Egypt, and the God Yahweh. The treatment of the divine names in E explains why the name Yahweh was not part of the nation's earliest tradition.

This is in the realm of hypothesis, and we must be very cautious about it. The important thing for our present purpose is that, for E, Moses has a significance far beyond what he has in J. In E, Moses is a turning point in history. E has much less than J about the world before Moses. E has no creation story, no flood story, and relatively less on the patriarchs. But E has more than J on Moses.

This is perfectly understandable from a Levitical priest. Also consistent with the priestly origin of E is the fact that E contains three chapters of law. ⁷⁰ J does not. Legal material elsewhere in the Bible is by priests—as we shall see.

The overall picture of the E stories is that they are a consistent group, with a definite perspective and set of interests, and that they are profoundly tied to their author's world.

Likewise with the author of I, the more we read his stories the more we can see their unity and their relationship to his world. We can understand, for example, why he did not develop the distinction between the names of God before and after Moses. For him, something extremely important had happened before Moses. This writer was concerned with the ruling family of Judah, David's family. He therefore emphasized the significance of God's covenant with the patriarchs. It was tied to the city of Hebron, David's first capital. It promised inheritance of the land from river to river. In other words, it promised what was realized under King David. For this purpose, the revelation to Abraham was itself a turning point in history. It was not to be regarded as inferior to the revelation to Moses or to the people at Sinai. To depict the Sinai revelation as the first covenant sealed with the name of God would be to diminish the importance of the covenant between God and the patriarchs. I therefore uses the name Yahweh throughout.

The Similarity of J and E

The question remains as to why so many similarities exist between J and E. They often tell similar stories. They deal largely with the same characters. They share much terminology. Their styles are suf-

ficiently similar that it has never been possible to separate them on stylistic grounds alone.

One possible explanation of this is that one of them is based on the other. Perhaps J, for example, was the Judean court account of the sacred national traditions, and so the northern Levites felt that it was necessary to produce their own national account because a legitimate kingdom should not be without such a document. Alternatively, the E document may have existed first, and the Judean court felt that it was necessary to produce its own version because the E treatment of Aaron, for example, was unsatisfactory. The point is that the E stories could hardly have been welcome in Judah on any one of a number of points; and the J stories, favoring Judah as they did, would hardly have been Israel's cup of tea either. The existence of either version in either kingdom would be likely to encourage the production of an alternative version in the other kingdom.

The two versions, nonetheless, would be just that: versions, not completely unrelated works. They would still be drawing upon a common treasury of history and tradition because Israel and Judah had once been one united people, and in many ways they still were. They shared traditions of a divine promise to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They shared traditions of having been slaves in Egypt, of an exodus from Egypt led by a man named Moses, of an extraordinary revelation at a mountain in the wilderness, and of years of wandering before settling in the promised land. Neither author was free to make up—or interested in making up—a completely new, fictional portrayal of history.

In style as well, once one version was established as a document bearing sacred national traditions, the author of the second, alternate version might well have consciously (or perhaps even unconsciously) decided to imitate its style. If the style of the first had come to be accepted in people's minds as the proper, formal, familiar language of recounting sacred tradition in that period, it would be in the second version's interest to preserve that manner of expression. In the same way, the language and style of the United States Constitution are often imitated in the constitutions of the individual states because that language is understood to be the accepted, proper form in which to compose such a document.

Another possible explanation for the stylistic similarity of J and E is that, rather than J's being based on E or E's being based on J, both

may have been based on a common source that was prior to them. That is, there may have been an old, traditional cycle of stories about the patriarchs, exodus, etc. which both the authors of J and E used as a basis for their works. Such an original cycle would have been either written or an orally passed-down collection. In either case, once the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were established, the authors of E and J each adapted the collection to their respective concerns and purposes.

How Many Authors?

We can still be more specific about who these two persons were and when they lived. First there is the question of whether they really were only two persons. I have spoken of only one author of E and one author of J. Some scholars see J and E as each having been produced by groups, not individuals. They speak of J1, J2, J3, etc., or they speak of a I school and an E school. I do not see how the evidence compels us to this analysis. On the contrary, I and E each appear to me to be unified and consistent in the texts as we have just reviewed them. Certainly an editor may have added a word or phrase or verse here or there, and the J or the E author may have inserted a received text occasionally. The author of I, for example, may not have written the deathbed Blessing of Jacob poem in Genesis 49. This author may simply have learned it, judged it to be suitable for the purpose, and inserted it into the I work. The overall I and E narratives, nonetheless, do not appear to me to require subdivision into even smaller units.

The Sex of the Authors

The author of E was almost certainly a male. We have seen how strong its connection is to the Levite priests of Shiloh. In ancient Israel the priesthood was strictly male. It is perhaps possible that a

against molten gods sound like polemic against the kingdom of Israel. That means composition after the division of the kingdoms. Also, the J stories of Jacob and Esau reflect Edom's independence from Judah ("You shall break his yoke from your shoulders"). That occurred during the reign of the Judean king Jehoram, 848–842 B.C.²² This would put the author of J between 848 and 722. The author of E composed in Israel, which stood from 922 to 722 B.C. It is difficult to narrow it much further within this period.²³

The most important point is that both J and E were written before the Assyrians destroyed Israel. At that time, the Assyrians carried out a deportation of the Israelite population. Also, there would of course have been many Israelites who fled south to Judah as refugees. The City of David archeological excavations in Jerusalem confirm that the population of Jerusalem grew substantially in this period. The likely historical scenario is that the E text came to Judah in this flow of people and events. Levites fleeing the Assyrians would hardly leave their valuable documents behind.

The assimilation of recently arrived Israelites into the Judean population after 722 B.C. need not have presented insurmountable difficulties in itself. The Israelites and the Judeans were kin. They spoke the same language: Hebrew. They worshiped the same God: Yahweh. They shared ancestral traditions of the patriarchs and historical traditions of exodus and wilderness. But what were they to do with two documents, each purporting to recount sacred national traditions, but emphasizing different persons and events—and occasionally contradicting each other? The solution, apparently, was to combine them.

The Combination of J and E

One might ask why the person or persons responsible for this did not simply exclude one or the other. Why not just make E, or more probably J, the accepted text and reject or ignore the other version? A common answer to this question is that the biblical community had too great a respect for the written word to ignore a received document that bore the stamp of antiquity. The problem with this

Levite wife or daughter could have shared these interests and written about them, but the dominantly male perspective and the concentration on male characters still suggests the likelihood of male authorship. Also, given that it was a patriarchal society and a male priesthood, it is doubtful that a document that was to have formal, sacred status would have been either commissioned or accepted at the hand of a woman.

The case is much harder to judge with regard to J. Originating at—or at least reflecting the interests of—the Judean court, it came from a circle in which both men and women had a certain status. That is, even in a male-led society, women of the noble class may have more power, privileges, and education than males of a lower class. The possibility of J's being by a woman is thus much more likely than with E. More important, the J stories are, on the whole, much more concerned with women and much more sensitive to women than are the E stories. There really is nothing in E to compare with the J story of Tamar in Genesis 38. It is not just that the woman Tamar figures in an important way in the story. It is that the story is sympathetic to a wrong done to this woman, it focuses on her plan to combat the injustice, and it concludes with the man in the story (Judah) acknowledging her rights and his own fault.

This does not make the author a woman. But it does mean that we cannot by any means be quick to think of this writer as a man. The weight of the evidence is still that the scribal profession in ancient Israel was male, true, but that does not exclude the possibility that a woman might have composed a work that came to be loved and valued in that land.

When Did They Live?

When did these two people live and write? Since the J narrative refers to the dispersion of Simeon and Levi but not to the dispersion of the other tribes, its author almost certainly wrote it before the Assyrians destroyed and exiled Israel in 722 B.C. It might conceivably have been written as early as the reign of David or Solomon, but the emphasis on the importance of the ark and the command

view is that neither J nor E is complete in the text as we have it anyway. The editor(s) clearly were not averse to applying scissors and paste to their received texts. It is therefore difficult to argue that they retained texts that they did not want simply out of reverence for documents that had been passed down.

A more probable reason why both J and E were retained is that both of them may have become sufficiently well known that one simply could not get away with excluding one or the other. One could not tell the story of the events at Sinai without referring to the golden calf incident, for example, because someone in the audience (especially a former northerner) would remember the story and protest. One could not tell the story of Abraham without telling the story of the events at Hebron, because someone else in the audience (especially someone from Hebron) would object. To whatever extent J and E narratives had become known by this time, to that extent it was necessary to preserve both.

One may ask then: why combine them at all? Why not just preserve both J and E separately? Why were they cut and combined in the manner that we observed in, for example, the flood story? Presumably, because preserving J and E separately would challenge the authenticity of both. If both were to be kept side by side on the same shelf, that would be a reminder of the dual history that produced two alternate versions. And that would diminish the authoritative quality of each of them.

In short, the editing of the two works into one was as much tied to the political and social realities of its day as the writing of the two had been in their days. The uniting of the two works reflected the uniting (better: the reuniting) of the two communities after two hundred years of division.

There is still much to be discovered about who wrote J and E. We do not know the precise dates when they lived, and we do not know their names. I think that what we do know is more important. We know something about their world and about how that world produced these stories that still delight and teach us. Still, we may be dissatisfied until we can be more specific about the writers. So let me turn to source D. We can know even more about the person who assembled it than about those who wrote J and E—perhaps even his name.