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**From Conquest to Emergence: An Appraisal of
the Debate over the Historical Origins of
Ancient Israel.**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Theology by
Research in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of
Glasgow, September 2004.

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Abbreviations

ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
EA	El Amarna Letters
Exod.	Book of Exodus
Gen.	Book of Genesis
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
Josh.	Book of Joshua
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
Num.	Numbers
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
VT	Vetus Testamentum

Preface

The motivation for this dissertation arose when I was an undergraduate studying at Stirling University. Although I studied many different religions at Stirling, I found that the unit that fascinated me most was one entitled 'The Social World of Ancient Israel.' To me, the most interesting part of the course was a section about the historical origins of ancient Israel, I had not realised that there had been, and still was, such an intense debate over Israel's early history. I was extremely familiar with the biblical account of Israel's origins, as I regularly attended Sunday school classes and Bible Studies as a child, but I was unaware that there were so many problems with the Bible's version of Israel's arrival into history. At that time, I decided that I would like to study the historical origins of ancient Israel at a higher level.

My purpose in writing this dissertation, is to give a general introduction to the background of the history of the 'origins' debate that would be of use to someone who is relatively new to the subject. With the limited word count that I had to work with, I have selected the features of the debate that I deemed the most important for the newcomer. This did cause a few headaches with what I had to leave out, the Amorite hypothesis and Noth's amphyctiony are just two of the casualties, but I believe that what is included will give the reader good background knowledge of the subject.

The main focus of this dissertation is the relationship between the biblical account and what is known from archaeology. Although comparative anthropology is also

a major factor, I have not focussed as much on that side of the debate. I have included certain anthropological arguments, but I have not gone into any great detail about the construction of anthropological models, again, this is mainly due to the limited word count.

The scope of the dissertation has been limited to cover from the period of the patriarchs through to the establishment of the United Monarchy. I decided to end the investigation at the United Monarchy, as I believe that this is the moment in time where we can start to talk of an Israel as a self-governing sovereign nation. It is at this point that I believe we can start to talk of Israel entering into real history.

Writing up this particular paper has also shown me just how many people a student becomes indebted to, and I would like to thank a few of these people.

I would like to thank the librarians at Glasgow University Library, Stirling University Library, Falkirk and District Library, and the Mitchell Library in Glasgow for all their help.

I also would like to thank Dr. John Drane of Aberdeen University for his reference and Prof. Keith Whitelam of Sheffield University for all his help and advice. Most of all, I would like to thank Dr. Alastair Hunter for all his help, patience and excellent advice.

Introduction

It is safe to say that Ancient Israel's history is better known to a wider audience than most other ancient nations (Isserlin: 7). This is due to a variety of reasons, such as Sunday school, Bible Classes, the teaching of Religious Education in schools, and even Hollywood movies have contributed to the distribution of ancient Israelite history. William Dever believes that the Bible stories are so familiar to those steeped in the Western cultural tradition that it would seem that they need little explanation (Dever 2001: 1). I would agree with Dever if he was writing in the 1960's or 70's, but my own experience of teaching Religious Education leads me to conclude that these stories are not as well known as they were a generation ago. However, the Bible continues to be the most influential, the most published, the most widely read book of all time. It naturally follows that one of the main reasons why people, scholars and laypersons alike, are so interested in Israel is because it is the setting for the development of the Old and New Testaments (Whitelam: 49).

Although followers of the Bible should not require evidence to support their beliefs (Hebrews 11:1), and indeed the Bible informs us that faith may be more desirable than physical evidence (John 20:29), but if we are to find the origins of ancient Israel, we need more than faith, we need evidence that can be scrutinised, and presented to support whatever theory is put forward. It is important that we discover the events in history that gave rise to and influenced the biblical tradition, so important in fact that this has been the dominant interest of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic (Thompson 1999: 13). All the information collected

by these scholars serves to establish that Israel was a historical reality with its own historical period and therefore it can be adequately understood by historical research (Noth 1983: 1).

Unfortunately, it seems that the interest in Israel by the rest of the world in the 20th and 21st centuries is more political than religious. To be sure, there are many Christians who are interested in Israel as this is to be the area where they believe that their messiah will appear upon his return to Earth. But, there is so much military activity over the establishment and re-establishment of borders in the region that the religious aspect does not appear to be as predominant as it once was.

The debate over the historical origins of ancient Israel has existed for centuries and it does not look like slowing down. Although there are many aspects of the debate that are no longer adhered to, when these features fall away they are quickly replaced by other factors. The debate over the historical origins of ancient Israel is an intensely interesting one, and the many twists and turns that the debate has experienced over the centuries make it a compelling subject. As the establishment of ancient Israel in Palestine is claimed to be a genuine historical reality, I think that the most suitable way to begin is to look at what 'history' actually is.

What is History?

From personal experience of teaching history at various high schools, there appears to be a common misconception that the word 'history' is synonymous with the word 'past'. Students, and I dare say a great many of the general public, invariably equate history with the past, but this is an overly simple definition. The quest to provide a satisfactory generic definition of history is a search that, despite some noble efforts, still continues today. The definitions proposed by historians are extremely varied and complex, and there appears to be as many different definitions of the word 'history' as there are historians, which demonstrates how difficult it is to find a working definition of the word 'history' that can be applied to the Hebrew Bible's 'historical' narratives.

Historians cannot directly examine the past, as the past itself has gone forever, even when we remember past events this is a memory formed in the present, and as such, is not identical to the past (Knauf: 27). Thus, historians can only examine the remains of the past, and these remains need to be placed into a context before they take on any significance. The context that an artefact or a text is placed in is only given meaning and significance by the historian's own interpretation of the data. However, meaning and significance are not inherent features of the material under examination, meaning and significance only exist in the human mind, therefore, and we can assume that "every history is the creation of the human mind" (*ibid*: 27).

Essentially, history is not what actually happened in the past, it is what a historian reports that happened in the past. Thus, we have a good working definition for

the word 'history' that we can apply to the Bible's historical narratives, we can define history as a narrative about the past that is created in the historian's mind and presented as a written record.

Working from this definition, we can conclude that history as a written record of the past created in the historian's mind can be completely fictional. For example, an oppressive government can publish histories that portray that government in a positive way, thus they do provide a 'history', but the 'facts' in the reports are false. If we relate this to the origins of Ancient Israel, we could conclude that the narratives concerning the conquest of Canaan are entirely false, but these narratives are still history in as much as they are a narrative about the past. So we need to separate 'history' from the 'past' and keep in mind that history is a narrative about a past event, whether the account is true or not does not affect whether it is history or not. This then means that all the histories about a certain event are plausible histories, but it is then up to the individual to decide which one of these histories is the most likely to be accurate for them. This, of course, is where the personal preconceptions of the researcher will come into play, as different people will place a greater degree of significance on different pieces of evidence.

The researcher's own biases have a great influence on the history that they produce, and these biases determine what they will accept as being a plausible historical event. For example, humanist historians will avoid any speculation about the intervention of supernatural beings in human affairs. Humanist historians prefer to limit their investigations to the natural world (Noll 2001: 37).

In regard to the history of Ancient Israel, a humanist historian would not rule out the possibility that the Reed Sea parted before the Israelites, however, they would prefer to explain that particular 'miracle' in terms of a natural phenomenon such as a tidal wave or volcanic eruption.

When a historian is researching a subject, they regularly consult the work that other historians in the same field have produced. When consulting other works, the historian needs to be aware of the reasons why the historian decided to produce this report, as this will sometimes reveal the particular biases of the author. For instance, there have been many different histories written about Jesus, and there are many different reasons for writing a history book about Jesus. Historians could write a history that 'proves' Jesus was indeed the Son of God, they could write a history book that 'proves' Jesus was not the Son of God, or write a history book that 'proves' Jesus was a revolutionary leader, or nothing more than a wandering magician. These books would more than likely use the same sources as their core evidence, but, because of the biases of the writers, they can present a vastly different history for their readers.

I put the word 'proves' in inverted commas, because history is never proven. True history is really a matter of degree, the truth or accuracy of a history is not whether it contains facts or not, it is in how the historian uses these facts. If we look at the story in the Bible of Joshua and his conquest of Jericho, we can see that there may indeed be some facts in this story, for example Jericho does show signs of being destroyed in a fiery conflagration (Shanks 1992: 16). But, when other claims are looked at, the biblical story of Joshua's conquest of Jericho may

be nothing more than the equivalent of the historical novel. The events attributed to Joshua and his army look as if they have been glamorised, and the supernatural aspects of the narrative would lead many historians to conclude that the *prima facie* biblical account itself appears unlikely. This doesn't mean that the armies of Joshua did not conquer the city of Jericho; it just means that it may not have happened exactly as described in the biblical text.

A competent historian should never state that what they have presented is absolute historical truth, because a historian should know that their presentation of a particular history will be their interpretation of the evidence, they may believe that they have presented accurate history, but they should know that they could be wrong. It is then the duty of the researcher to keep in mind that the narrative they are reading will always match the interpretational assumptions of the author, so it is important to be aware of what particular stance the narrator is known for. For example, if I picked up a book by William Albright, John Bright, or Nahum Sarna, then I should know beforehand that the book will more than likely present a narrative that favours the Hebrew Bible as much as possible, but if I pick up a book by Thomas Thompson, Philip Davies, or Niels Peter Lemche, I should know beforehand that these scholars would not place as great an emphasis on the biblical texts.

Here we come to a very important point. The scholars named above obviously have their own particular stances when it comes to examining the historical narratives of the Hebrew Bible, so it is perfectly logical to assume that the actual authors of the historical narratives of the Hebrew Bible also had their own

particular biases. Therefore, we should not expect to find a critical, objective report on the historical origins of ancient Israel in the Hebrew Bible, we should expect to find a report that reflects the biases of the authors. But, these reports are historical, inasmuch as they are narratives about the past that were created in the authors' mind and presented as a written record. It is now the task of the modern day historian to determine to which degree the information in the Bible is historically reliable.

John Van Seters believes he has isolated five criteria that indicate whether a text can be identified as 'historical.'

1. History writing is a specific form of tradition in its own right. Any explanation of the genre as merely the accidental accumulation of traditional material is inadequate.
2. History writing is not primarily the accurate reporting of past events. It also considers the reason for recalling the past and the significance given to past events.
3. History writing examines the causes of present conditions and circumstances. In antiquity these causes were primarily moral – who is responsible for a certain state of affairs? (It goes without saying, of course, that modern scientific theories about causation or laws of evidence cannot be applied to the ancient writer.
4. History writing is national or corporate in character. Therefore, merely reporting the deeds of the king may be only biographical unless they are viewed as part of the national history.
5. History writing is part of the literary tradition and plays a significant role in the corporate tradition of the people
(Van Seters: 4-5)

Van Seters believes that the above criteria can be applied to the 'historical' narratives of the Hebrew Bible, and if we keep these five criteria in mind when

studying the biblical narratives, we can find alternative reasons why the biblical narratives are written in the way that they are. Hoffmeier is particularly perplexed by Van Seters' fourth point, he objects on the grounds that he does not understand how the modern day scholar knows what motivated the ancient writer to record history (Hoffmeier: 10). This is perfectly true; however, surely it is fair to say that we can have a very good educated guess. There are only so many reasons why an author would record an alleged 'historical' event. We would not, for example, expect the author of the Book of Joshua to record the loyalty of Caleb in an attempt to discredit him. Caleb's loyalty is obviously recorded to have a positive effect, and I would say that Caleb's loyalty fits perfectly into Van Setters' point number two. It does not really matter if the Caleb narrative is true as the story illustrates the justness of God. Caleb's loyalty to God results in Caleb's reward of being allowed to enter Palestine. Recalling the loyalty of Caleb also serves as a reminder to all Israel that God rewards the faithful and punishes those without true faith. This is only one example, and I think that even such a simple example demonstrates that Hoffmeier is being a little hypercritical of Van Seters's work.

The majority of modern day historians do take a critical approach to the writing of history. But the ancients did not employ the modern-day techniques; they were not recording a critical history of anything, as a critical approach to history writing had not been formulated. The modern day historian sifts through the various sources and selects what they believe to be the most plausible scenarios based on what they have examined. This critical approach to history writing is a

relatively new development, and is the result of a long drawn out process spanning more than two millennia.

Concerning the origins of Ancient Israel, as described in the Hebrew Bible, it is only fairly recently that its historical narratives have been subjected to the same intense scrutiny as all other historical sources. To understand the reasons behind this, and to understand how the debate over the origins of Ancient Israel has developed, it is important to have a look at the development of historical writing.

The Beginnings of Critical History Writing

The origins of formal history writing can be traced to 6th century BCE Greece. It was only with some radical changes in the unique cultural background of Greece that a more formal approach to history writing could have taken place. The growing interest in critical writing within the intellectual environment, the critical rejection of the existing Greek mythologies, and the growing interest in social origins and institutions, all contributed to providing an audience more open to critical history writing.

Hecataeus (550-475 BCE)

The first historian to employ a critical approach to history writing was Hecataeus of Miletus. There is no extant text dated before Hecataeus that claims to have taken a critical approach to the recording of an historical event. Hecataeus wrote:

'What I write here is the account which I considered to be true: for the stories of the Greeks are numerous, and in my opinion ridiculous'
(Fitzsimons: 9)

Here we have the first example of a critical approach to recording history, for the first time that we are aware of, a historian sifted through his material and excluded claims that he considered too fantastic to be true.

Hecataeus was not, of course, the first person to have written about the past, but any writings that we know about before his time were not written in a critical way. There are many writings that claim to report historical realities, such as the Babylonian king lists, or even descriptions of Egyptian battles on various temple walls at Karnak, but these were not critical histories. In fact, before Hecataeus there is no extant text that declares that it was written by an author who sifted through the sources, who made critical judgements about the contents of his sources, or who described what he had rejected as being ridiculous. What Hecataeus had done was to invent the genre of history in the way that modern historians see it (Noll 2001: 58).

Herodotus (484-425 BCE)

The first comprehensive and systematic historical work was written by Herodotus and was an account of Greco-Asiatic relations from Croesus of Lydia to the defeat of the Persian invaders by Greece in 478 BCE. Herodotus was interested in all areas of society; he was not only interested in what was considered to be the civilised people he was also interested in the uncivilised as well (Lateiner: 12).

Herodotus was a tireless traveller whose desire to see and know led him to Egypt, Asia and almost all of Greece, Sicily and Italy. Herodotus' greatest contribution to the writing of history was his determination to spread the breadth of his

enquiries to as wide a range as he could. He not only questioned eyewitnesses to alleged events, he also took into consideration monuments, customs, laws, politics, religions, and in regard to the authenticity and importance of these, he tried to adopt and maintain an unprejudiced approach. In fact, Herodotus' determination not to allow his patriotic bias to influence his judgement brought criticism from his Greek readers when he praised the valour of the Persians in his *History* (Fitzsimons: 33).

Herodotus is best known for being the first constructive historian; his narratives were both informative and absorbing and stimulated the imaginations of his audiences. More importantly, however, Herodotus was the first writer to propose that the historian's mission was to differentiate between popular tales and try to present history as it actually happened and not by simply emphasising the parts that would please the potential audience.

Thucydides (c. 456-396 BCE)

A contemporary of Herodotus', Thucydides deserted the entertaining story-telling technique he employed in favour of clear-headed and serious commentaries of history as he recognised it. Although Herodotus had echoed Hecataeus' mantra of criticising sources, he, and for that matter Hecataeus as well, did not exactly write accounts free from myths and legends. Herodotus frequently meandered off his main themes to provide detailed accounts of myths and legends from many cultures but Thucydides separated history from epic poetry and supernaturalism in his approach towards historical causation (Hunter: 14).

Thucydides' chief contribution to historiography lay in the areas of criticism and methodology. He stressed that the long-term value of a historical work depends far more upon the accuracy of its claims than the entertainment value of a narrative thus laying the foundation of scientific historical enquiry, specifically that accuracy of information must be the basis of true historical writing (Barnes: 29). Not everyone is convinced that Thucydides practised what he preached, with one scholar, Virginia Hunter, highlighting that Thucydides often presented facts that he had no evidence for (103). So, while Thucydides may have presented what he considered to be the true principles of history writing, he didn't exactly follow these principles himself. This should alert us to the fact that no matter how objective we think a historian appears, we should always double check their arguments for accuracy.

However, when we add some of Thucydides' other principles for history writing, the relevance and consistency of material, the insistence on the sifting of sources, and the awareness of the practical value of producing accurate history it is easy to appreciate why Thucydides has been considered the originator of critical history writing (Barnes: 30).

Polybius (c. 198-117 BCE)

The last eminent Greek historian was Polybius. From the viewpoint of productivity and understanding, Polybius' work was superior to that of Herodotus and Thucydides, however, his laborious style of writing made his work far less popular with the public than that of his two renowned predecessors. For example, Polybius' *History* was an ambitious narrative spanning forty books that dealt with

the growth and constitutional development of the Roman Empire to 146 BCE. Polybius insisted, as did Thucydides, that a qualified historian must be a distinguished man of affairs, preferably a general or statesman of some description (Sacks: 8).

Polybius came closer to the idyllic stance of objectivity in his treatment of Greek and Roman history than any other ancient historian. His enduring belief was that the main value of history lay in the provision of accurate historical facts which may help to guide the administration of public affairs in present and future societies (Barnes: 33). He was fascinated by the problems associated with causation and in regard to this he surpassed Herodotus and Thucydides in depth of analysis. Polybius realised how interdependent history is, he displayed an intimate knowledge of the interaction of nations, and he also considered geography, constitutions of states, laws and customs, economic and military organisation as he defined the continuity of human life. To him, everything was interdependent, and everything had a cause that could be identified and explained to the reader.

In his twelfth book Polybius wrote that:

'The science of history is threefold: first, the dealing with written documents and the arrangement of the material thus obtained; second, topography, the appearance of cities and localities, the description of rivers and harbours, and speaking generally, the peculiar features of the seas and countries and their relative distances; thirdly, political affairs.... The special province of history is, first to ascertain what the actual words used were; and secondly, to learn why it was that a particular policy or arrangement was failed or succeeded. For a bare statement of an occurrence is interesting indeed, but not instructive; but when this is supplemented by a statement of cause, the study of history becomes fruitful. For it is by applying analogies to our own circumstances that we get the means and basis for calculating the future; and for learning from the past

when to act with caution, and when with greater boldness, in the present' (quoted in Barnes: 34)

Polybius was quite convinced that lessons could be learned from past events and proposed that, if the past events could be verified as accurate, they must be taken into consideration when making decisions about the present.

A New Approach

The advancements in critical history writing by the Greeks was to eventually come up against a formidable barrier in the form of a new faith, Christianity. Christianity's eventual victory over paganism brought with it cataclysmic consequences for the writing of critical history. The historical writings of inspirational personalities such as Hecataeus, Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius, were now viewed as not only inferior to the Old Testament; they had also actually come to be seen as a product of the devil (Barnes: 41). Faith, and an innocent naivety, had taken the place of reason as the main intellectual virtue for the writing of history and this had a devastating effect. The history written in the Old Testament was certainly inferior to the works of the leading Greek historians, but the Old Testament was seen as the first part of the life story of Christ and therefore everything in it had to be true and all other histories were thus viewed as false.

The only history of importance to the Christian was that which justified his faith, and it all lay within the sacred writings of the Jews. So, as the vision of the judgement day became fainter and the Church began to settle itself in time and not in eternity, it looked back to a different past from that which lay beyond the pagan world. The sacred scriptures of the Jews had replaced that literature of antiquity. A revolution was taking place in the history of History. Homer and Thucydides, Polybius and Livy, the glory of the old regime, shared a common fate. The scientific output of the most luminous minds the world had known was classed with the legends

that had grown up by the campfires of primitive barbarians. All was pagan, which meant that all was delusive and unreliable except where it could be tested in the light of the new religion or where it forced itself by the needs of life into the world of common experience' (Shotwell: 284)

Early Christian Philosophy of History

The initial work of the early Christian historians was to present an impressive and formidable historical background for the Christian faith, and to create the importance and antiquity of a sacred history, which, for them, would be Jewish and Christian history. The historical development of the Jews and Christians was now the fundamental principle in the entire history of the past, the historical events recorded by the pagan historians were viewed as incidental against the vastly more important background of Jewish and Christian history. In reality, the Christian histories were greatly inferior in quality to those produced by the pagan historians. When the sparse texts of the sayings and actions of Jesus were first being formed into something representing what we now recognise as the New Testament, there was no Christian writer anywhere near the quality of Herodotus, Thucydides, or Polybius. In fact, the Christian historians departed greatly from the standards founded by these groundbreaking scholars, their immense prejudice against everything pagan made it impossible for them to use the same critical approach to their sources as the pagan historians had championed. The Christian historians could not criticise the Hebrew myths in the same way that Hecataeus criticised Greck mythology because this would have been impious and sinful. The documents being examined by the Christian historians were said to be the inspired word of God, and as such were not open to criticism.

A very effective way of averting mistrust and of attracting converts to a movement is the ability to point to a glorious past. The early Christians wholeheartedly believed this and after adopting the Jewish Scriptures as the official record of their faith's past history, they were immediately faced with the urgent need to give the ancient Hebrew history a prestige that it had been denied in the works of the pagan writers. The pagan writers had barely acknowledged the history of the Jewish people as their rather ordinary political history commanded very little attention in their books. The two major world histories already in existence, those authored by Diodorus Siculus and Pompeius Trogus, were completely incompatible to the needs of Christian propaganda. The general Jewish history of Josephus was of no use either, for, while it greatly embellished the part played by the Jews in world history, it virtually ignored Christianity. Consequently, the Christian intelligentsia focussed their efforts on producing a history that would give due respect to the past glories of the Hebrews as written in the Old Testament, and at the same time demonstrate why the Jews were no longer deserving of their heritage. As a result, the Jewish nation had now lost its birthright by rejecting the Son of God; their past glories were now being revised and claimed by the Christians.

'It was, therefore, a calamity for historiography, that the new standards won the day. The authority of a revealed religion sanctioned but one scheme of history through the vast and intricate evolution of the antique world. A well nigh insurmountable obstacle was erected to scientific enquiry, one which has taken at least nineteen centuries to surmount.' (Shotwell: 286)

Although early Christian historians were working from a position of faith rather than reason, this does not mean that Christian historians just blindly accepted that

the Bible contained a perfect testimony to past events. They acknowledged that the Bible did in fact contain outlandish and far-fetched statements. However, since the inspired text of the Bible could not be untrue, then where a clearly ridiculous claim was presented there must be some hidden meaning behind the text.

To support this conviction, frankness and critical analysis were substituted with allegory and symbolism as the foundations of historical methodology. The allegorical means of interpreting the Old Testament had previously been suggested by Philo Judaeus, but the main exponent of this approach was the Church Father Origen (186-255 CE).

When faced with an apparent difficulty in the text, Origen proposed that:

“Whenever we meet with such useless, nay impossible, incidents and precepts as these, we must discard a literal interpretation and consider of what moral interpretation they are capable of, with what higher and mysterious meaning they are fraught, what deeper truths they were intended symbolically and in allegory to shadow forth. The divine wisdom has of set purpose contrived these little traps and stumbling blocks in order to cry halt to our slavish historical understanding of the text, by inserting in its midst sundry things that are impossible and unsuitable. The Holy Spirit so waylays us in order that we may be driven by passages which, taken in the prima facie sense cannot be true or useful, to search for the ulterior truth, and seek in the Scriptures which we believe to be inspired by God a meaning worthy of him” (Conybeare: 14-15)

What has to be remembered is, although Christianity promoted a denial of the material world, the main scholars had been educated in the ways of the pagans. They found it difficult to totally reject their training, and they did, in a sense, criticise the biblical text. They would never say that any claim in the Bible was

untrue; they would say that when there is a clear absurdity the inspired text is telling the enquirer that something else is going on. Origen was particularly adamant about looking for hidden meanings behind the text. He acknowledged that some of the biblical text was not intended to be taken literally.

“Who will be found idiot enough to believe that God planted trees in Paradise like any husbandman; that he set up in it visible and palpable tree-trunks, labelled the one ‘Tree of Life’ and the other ‘Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil’ both bearing real fruit that might be masticated with corporeal teeth; that he went and walked about that garden; that Adam hid under a tree; that Cain fled from the face of God?” (Conybeare: 10)

Historical Thought in the Middle Ages

To fully appreciate how the approach to studying the past has changed, it is necessary to be aware of how medieval writers and scholars viewed the past. It would be impossible here to cover every aspect of the changes of approach made in historical enquiry between the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance, but Peter Burke has identified three factors which he believes highlights the way in which people’s ‘sense of the past’ began to move towards a more critical approach.

The first identifiable factor is a sense of anachronism. During the thousand years before the Renaissance, scholars never really displayed a genuine sense of historical context. They appear not to have fully understood what the past actually was, they knew there were differences between the past and the present but they were not preoccupied with these differences. For example, in *Florentine History* by Ricardino Malespini, the hero of the piece, Catiline is found attending Mass twenty years before the birth of Jesus! (Burke: 47).

Burke's second element is that of an awareness of evidence. There was now a critical approach being taken towards evidence, whereas medieval writers accepted almost anything without question. They worked from the premise that if something was written in a book, then it must be true (I think a great many people still hold this premise). Also, because the mindset of the medieval public, it was perfectly possible to invent myths that could be passed off as history. There are many examples of this from pre-Renaissance historical writings, including the belief by the Florentines that Florence was founded by Caesar, the British believed that Britain had been colonised by the Trojan Brutus, and the Spaniards believed that St. James had appeared in the ninth century to help them defeat the Moors (*ibid*: 7). That these myths were accepted as factual for so long demonstrates that pre-renaissance populations did not enquire into history in the same way that modern day historians do. But, the Renaissance saw the beginnings of a methodology of historical enquiry that would relegate many of these 'historical' events to the category of fable.

Burke's third element, is defined as 'an interest in causation', an interest in motives and causes of a said event (*ibid*: 13). Of course, there was an interest in motives and causes in the Middle Ages, but they weren't subjected to the same sort of scrutiny in medieval thought, causes simply weren't seen as problematic, or in need of any substantiation. The Ptolemaic-Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition, which thrived in the great universities of Padua, Bologna and Paris, firmly supported the belief in causality, with Pomponazzi's efforts to rationalise astrology being a prime example (Ralph: 236). The interest in how and why things happen permeated throughout the arts, but, although Renaissance scholars

did show more awareness in the mechanisms of nature than the scholars of the Middle Ages, science did not undergo any great radical revolution. In general, scholars were now beginning to question whether certain events could possibly be explained by rational causes.

This increased awareness of evidence during the Renaissance saw the growth in popularity of a relatively new discipline called documentary criticism. This was going to have a tremendous impact on the way the Bible was perceived as a reliable historical source. Evidence of documentary criticism can be found as early as 1355 when, in a letter to Charles IV, Petrarch provided evidence that a document exempting Austria from imperial jurisdiction was clearly a forgery.

The value of documentary criticism was evident again when, in 1439 when Lorenzo Valla famously exposed the Donation of Constantine as a very poor forgery (Ralph: 135). Although doubts about the Donation of Constantine had been raised before, by Nicholas of Cusa for example, it was Valla's "most elaborate and systematic criticism...based both on internal and external evidence" (Burke: 55) that really demonstrated how closely philology and historical contexts are interconnected.

For the time being, at least, the Bible was excused from this type of close critical scrutiny. However, the humanists who had deconstructed many of the legends surrounding the saints were soon to subject the Bible to the same type of examination as that of other ancient texts.

The Impact of the Reformation on the Writing of History

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, which in many ways represents merely a radical and religious application of Renaissance principles and aims, made some significant contributions that were ultimately of great importance in the study of Hebrew historiography.

First of all, in emphasising that the Bible is the rule and norm of faith, the reformers put emphasis on a literal interpretation of the scriptures. '*Sola Scriptura*' became the significant teaching of the Reformation. Luther wrote that:

"The Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth, and therefore His words cannot have more than one, and that the very simplest, sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense." (Quote in Kummel: 20)

This emphasis upon a literal reading of the scriptures did not produce any immediate critical-historical approach to the Bible. The idea of the divine inspiration of scripture or the Bible as the word of God actually stopped the reformers from having an overly critical approach to the biblical texts, but Luther did relegate Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation to an appendix in his New Testament translation.

A second contribution of the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation can be seen in the fact that the history of the church became a dominant issue in the struggles within the church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historical accuracy was a powerful weapon used by both sides. Protestants argued that the teachings of Jesus, and the faith of the primitive church, had

become distorted by the hierarchy of the church, and the Catholics sought to prove that the church at the time was the true successor of primitive Christianity, and that the church was basically unchanged.

Historians on both sides concentrated on the intensive study and use of documents to argue their stances. In some cases, this study of documents was even more intense than that of many humanist historians. As a result of this use of historiography as a support for a particular viewpoint, ecclesiastical history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries displayed a greater sophistication, a more thorough analysis of sources, and a more historiographic complexity than secular history. Unfortunately for us, none of this vigour and insight was applied to the study of the origins of Ancient Israel, but these contentions between historians established history as an important element in religious controversy. These discussions demonstrated that history could be used to verify and support a scholar's hypothesis about a religious dispute, the sense of history was still in its early stages, but the understanding of the historical past was to improve over the next century or so.

A feature of the Reformation that contributed to the eventual criticism of the biblical text was the religious freedom promoted by the movement. With the rejection of authoritarianism in tradition, priesthood, and an increased appeal to private judgment, people were now more at liberty to question the accuracy of the biblical texts. The humanists and reformers insistence on a return to the sources, and a literal reading of the text, had been based on the conviction that they could find there unspoiled faith, piety, and history.

In the eighteenth century, and for the first time in Western history, a diversity of philosophical-theological systems with scholarly respectability competed in the intellectual market-place. This meant that Christianity, and the Bible, were subjected to an unprecedented and severe examination which led to a criticism of the text that the Bible would never fully recover from. The cause of this commotion was deism.

The Deists and the Bible

A new group entered the debate in the mid 17th century. The deists were to subject the Bible to an unparalleled criticism in their quest to remove the supernatural, the miraculous, and, what was for them, the absolutely outrageous claims made in the Bible. The deists were not interested in undermining the God of the Bible; they were of the thinking that if the fantastic could be removed from the Bible it would then leave a pure and reasonable faith.

In my opinion the deists did not only bring a new criticism to the study of the Bible, they brought a caustic attitude with them as well. The tone used by the deists whilst giving their opinions about some of the biblical events leaves a lot to be desired, and while it may be entertaining to read for the modern reader, it is easy to imagine the controversies that ensued after their theories were published.

To understand the impact that the deists had on biblical studies and societies attitude towards the Bible, it is necessary to only look at two of the leading figures of the movement. I would say that it is difficult to find anyone who has a more scathing attitude towards religion, and the bible in particular, than Voltaire. One of the attractions of Voltaire's work is his use of wit and irony when highlighting

what he believes are logical inconsistencies in the Bible. He seemed particularly aggressive towards the divine authorship of the Bible and writes that:

“To claim that God was its author was to make of God a bad geographer, a bad chronologist, [and] a bad physicist.” (Appelgate: 26)

Voltaire makes some comments that have a direct bearing on the debate over the origins of Ancient Israel when he claims that to make Moses the author of the Pentateuch was to claim that Moses was little more than a fool. Voltaire even went as far as to question whether Moses was actually a real person:

“If there only were some honest and natural deeds in the myth of Moses. One could believe fully that such a personage did exist.” (Appelgate: 102)

Voltaire's work was important because it popularised many of the issues that most of the general public had been unaware of before he was published. Many of these issues, such as the divine authorship of the Bible, had previously been discussed only in the arena of intellectual scholars. Voltaire's approach to the historical events of the Bible, and to the Bible itself, went beyond the critical analysis stage. His criticisms appear to be aimed at destroying the Bible, and most of what it stands for.

Reason and common sense were also high on the list of priorities for another deist who tried to rationalise the supernatural and the miraculous out of the Bible. Hermann Reimarus wrote with a similar style to Voltaire, but was slightly less discourteous than the Frenchman, and his work had a great impact in Germany when it was published posthumously by the philosopher Gotthold Lessing.

Lessing anonymously released a series of Reimarus' writings, entitled the '*Wolfenbützel Fragments*' from 1774-1778 and some writings are relevant to our topic.

In a '*Fragment*' published in 1778, Reimarus turned his attention to the crossing of the Reed Sea by the Israelites:

'In reading the history of Moses and the succeeding times, we have already seen that it cost the writer neither intellect, skill, nor trouble to concoct miracles, and that the reader requires still less intellect to believe them. The historian kills all Pharaoh's cattle three times running. Each time not a single beast is left alive, but in his fertile imagination there are always fresh ones ready to be demolished again. Where they all came from is quite immaterial to him. He makes the Israelites take all their cattle away with them, not leaving a single hoof behind, and yet when he wants to perform miracles, they are every moment suffering from hunger, so that meat - must needs rain from heaven. In three hours and on a very dark night he brings three million men with women and babes, aged and sick, lame and blind, tents and furniture, wagons and harnesses, three hundred thousand oxen, six hundred thousand sheep, safe and sound over the bottom of a sea which at the very least must have been a German mile in breadth; a bottom which on account of weed and mud in one place, sand and coral branches in another, rocks here and islets there, is impassable. He does not trouble himself to reflect whether the thing is possible. Enough! He imagines and writes them safe across in a single night-watch!' (Reimarus: 75)

Of course, the importance of the deist movement and the enlightenment of the 18th century were not specifically in the subject of historiography, but their discussions of the Bible and the rationality of its alleged historical events were important because it brought these issues of biblical criticism to the general public. Equally important, was the fact that their devastating attacks on the literal reading of the Bible meant that it would never again be so easy to defend a factual, literal biblical text. This is particularly germane to the debate of Ancient Israel's

origins, as the biblical accounts of their origins rely almost entirely on the supernatural, and what looks like implausible events.

At the same time as the deists were attempting to demythologise the Bible, the German Pastor Henning Bernhard Witter and the French Physician Jean Astruc were laying down the foundations of documentary criticism. Documentary criticism was to seriously undermine one of the oldest beliefs that people held about the authorship of the Bible, namely the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Astruc and Eichhorn noticed some inconsistencies in the Pentateuchal texts that suggested that there might be more than one author at work. For example, it was noticed that there is the interchanging use of different names for God, there are different varieties of language and style, and there are contradictions, repetitions and duplications.

In the late 19th century a hypothesis was presented that offered an explanation for these apparent difficulties. Julius Wellhausen was a German scholar who argued through what is known as the 'Documentary Hypothesis', that the first five books of the Bible, which are usually attributed to Moses, are essentially comprised of four different strands, coming from four different authors. Wellhausen allocated these four different strands the titles of J (Yahwist) dating from the 9th century BCE, E (Elohist) dating to the 8th century BCE, D (Deuteronomist) dating to the 7th century BCE, and P (Priestly) dating to the 5th century BCE (Hoffmeier: 7-8). As can be imagined, this was very disturbing to the adherents of the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

Even although there may well be at least four different authors of the Pentateuch, this does not mean that the narratives are automatically unhistorical. The Bible contains written accounts of what the authors would like us to believe happened in the past, therefore this qualifies as history, as these are narratives about the past that were created in the historian's mind and presented as a written record.

But, historians do come up against other problem when using the Hebrew Bible for reconstructing history, and I would now like to give a brief summary of what I believe are the main obstacles to taking the biblical narratives at face value.

The Hebrew Bible as History

The main source that scholars have used in their attempts to reconstruct the historical origins of Ancient Israel is the Hebrew Bible. Although the Hebrew Bible itself is not a primary source (Lemche: 24), it is the principal source of information regarding the historical origins of Ancient Israel. Even though certain parts of the Hebrew Bible are extremely old, for example, elements of 'The Song of Miriam' have been dated by textual similarities in Ugaritic poetry to the 13th century BCE (Cross and Freedman: 237-250), the texts, as we have them, appear to be a product of a society that existed long after the time that the primary history of Ancient Israel was believed to have taken place. We have to remember that the earliest extant biblical texts we have, the Dead Sea Scrolls, were not written "in early Israel" (Coote 1990: 2), this means that we have a gap of as much as a thousand years between our primary and secondary sources (Thompson: 1).

Since the Hebrew Bible is such a central part of many peoples' faith, and thus a central part of many scholars' faith, we find that the most controversial disagreements in the debate certainly centre on the reliability of the Hebrew Bible as an accurate historical source. The scholars involved in the debate often disagree over the interpretation of archaeological data, but it is the disagreement over the reliability of the Hebrew Bible's 'historical' narratives that have caused the most controversy. The high profile scholars of the early to mid 20th century were mainly of the opinion that the history in the Hebrew Bible was "generally reliable" (Glueck: 1959: 31). Then scholars, such as Davies, Thompson, and Lemche, who were more critical of the biblical texts, pointed out that this stance

might have an internal problem. They argued that the Hebrew Bible should be treated like any other ancient text, and that the Hebrew Bible, like all other texts, was a product of socio-political realities and could only be fully understood by taking these realities into consideration (McNutt: 4). The problem they saw was if we rely too much on the Hebrew Bible for accurate historical information, as Albright and Glueck initially did, we might employ a type of circular reasoning, or "tail chasing" (Davies 1992: 36). What Albright, Glueck *et al* had appeared to have done, was to have constructed a historical reality by using the Bible text and then went on to appreciate the Bible text from the reality that they had actually created from the Bible itself!

But, despite a rather vehement tirade by William Dever (2001: 28-44) against scholars who take what is known as a 'minimalist' or 'revisionist' stance in regard to the Hebrew Bible, none of these scholars advocate a total abandonment of the Hebrew Bible as a source for reconstructing Israel's past, they just do not put as great an emphasis on the reliability of its contents that people such as William Dever, Nahum Sarna, or Baruch Halpern.

The scholars involved in the debate have three choices when it comes to the Hebrew Bible's version of Ancient Israel's origins. They can either fully accept it at face value, or completely reject it, or adopt a compromise position somewhere between the two extremes. In the debate today, there are very few scholars who assume one of the two extreme positions, so it naturally follows that if almost all modern-day scholars fall somewhere between these two extremes, then there must be reasons why the Hebrew Bible is not taken as 100% reliable and, equally, why

it isn't totally rejected. Therefore, it is important to have a look at the reasons why the majority of scholars take the middle path regarding the Hebrew Bible's reliability as an historical source.

Modern-day historians quite openly admit that it isn't possible to be totally objective when investigating any historical claims. However, there are some claims made in the Hebrew Bible that are met with scepticism not because the researcher is biased for or against the Bible, it is because many claims in the Hebrew Bible simply do not sound credible to modern day observers. The following is by no means a conclusive list of areas where the Bible presents difficulties for modern historians, but it is suffice to prove why the Bible no longer stands "unchallenged at the centre of intellectual and religious life of the western world" (Moorey 1991: 1).

Artificial or Schematic Chronologies

Some scholars view the inclusion of what looks like systematic or schematic chronologies as a good reason to be cautious about the accuracy of the biblical texts. Essentially, some scholars think that certain time frames show too many signs of order to be actual literal time spans. For example, the recurring use of numbers such as 12 and 40 suggest that these are not literal periods of time, but are schematic numbers. Jeremy Hughes highlights some common schematic numbers:

"12 and 40 are common schematic numbers: there are 12 tribes of Israel, Israel wanders for 40 years in the wilderness, Moses spends 40 days on Mount Sinai etc. 40 years was considered to be the typical duration of adult life (Num. 32:13), and is therefore used as

an ideal figure for periods of ministry or rule. Moses was a prophet for 40 years, David and Solomon reigned for 40 years each, and so on. Schematic Biblical numbers typically fall into one (or more) of two categories. Some numbers (10, 100, 1000, and multiples) are simply round decimal numbers. Others (such as 12 and 7) have calendrical associations: 12 is the number of months in the year and 7 is the number of days in the week. 365 (the number of days in a solar year) is occasionally used as a schematic number: Enoch lives for 365 years and there are also 365 years from the flood to Abraham's migration. Similarly 52 (the number of weeks in a solar year) is used as a schematic figure in post biblical literature." (Hughes 37)

As well as referring to David and Solomon both reigning for forty years (2 Sam. 5:4 & 1 Kings. 11:41), Hughes could have also included the reign of Joash that also lasted forty years (2 Kings 12:1) and that Eli judged Israel for forty years (1 Sam. 4:18). Also, even although 1 Sam 13:1 is unclear about how long Saul was king Acts 13:21 informs us that he too reigned for forty years.

We also find that Moses' life is neatly packaged into three groups of forty years. He was forty years old when he decided to visit his fellow Israelites (Acts 7:23), he lived with the Midianites for forty years, as he was eighty when he first spoke to pharaoh (Ex. 7:7), and he led the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years (Ex. 16:35) before he died aged 120. Modern historians believe that examples such as these are just a little too well organised, life, as we know it, doesn't really work out as systematically as this.

Implausible Scenarios

Some narratives in the Hebrew Bible also appear to be beyond the realms of possibility, and at face value many accounts seem to be more the product of an over active imagination rather than an accurate historical record. There are many

instances where events described appear to have been greatly exaggerated or are logically dubious. An example of this is the generally accepted number of people included in the Exodus group. There are references to the number of Israelite men of fighting age who were included in the Exodus group, this figure is given as about 600 000 (Exodus 12:37). John Bright writes that "counting women and children and old men there would be 2-3 million Israelites in the Exodus group" (130). Many scholars take the middle figure here, and work from a group of two and a half million people. But, if we start to dissect this claim then huge problems of credibility come into view.

To begin with, the Bible informs us that just 430 years earlier (Exodus 12:40) the seventy members of Joseph's family entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27), therefore, we have to examine the population growth rate required to discover if it is feasible for seventy people to grow into a population of two and a half million in 430 years. A. Lucas (164-68) working with official population figures from *Annuaire Statistique 1937-8*, informs us that between 1907 and 1937 the average annual rate of population increase per 1000 people was 11.69%. When he applied this growth rate to the 70 Israelites over a period of 430 years he arrived at a total population of 10 363, a number drastically at odds with the biblical figure.

Lucas also explains that:

"The population of the whole of the Administrative Division or Province, of Sinai, from the Mediterranean Sea on the north to the apex of the peninsula on the south, was only 15,058 in 1927, and only 29 951 in 1937, and there could not possibly have been either water or food sufficient for the number of Israelites given." (167-168)

These figures cast serious doubts on the credibility of the Bible in regard to the numbers involved in the Exodus, not only do they make the population growth a physical impossibility, they also make it particularly unlikely for a group this size to survive off the land's resources.

Lucas' population growth of 11.69% for the Israelites is put into perspective when we look at an actual estimate for world population growth before the birth of Christ. The population growth rate is calculated from the remains of cities, villages, other settlements, and the extension of cultivated land (Livi-Bacci: 30).

In the 10,000 years prior to the birth of Christ, during which Neolithic civilization spread from the Near East and Upper Egypt, the rate increased to 0.4 per 1,000 (which implies a doubling in less than 2,000 years) and population grew from several million to about 0.25 billion. This rate of increase, in spite of important cycles of growth and decline, was reinforced during the subsequent 17 and a half centuries. The population tripled to about 0.75 billion on the eve of the Industrial Revolution (an overall rate of growth of 0.6 per 1,000). It was, however, the Industrial Revolution which initiated a period of decisive and sustained growth. During the following two centuries population increased about tenfold, at an annual growth rate of 6 per 1,000 (doubling time 118 years). This process of growth was the result of a rapid accumulation of resources, control of the environment, and mortality decline, and has culminated in the second half of the current century. (*ibid*: 32)

We can see then that a more realistic growth rate was only 0.4% per 1000, much lower than the 20th century figure employed by Lucas. But, if the Israelites had grown from a group of seventy to a group of several million in 430 years, it would be no surprise to discover that the pharaoh was concerned about them! Also, a

group of the population size given in the Hebrew Bible would not require any divine assistance to overcome their 'task masters', they certainly would have greatly out-numbered them:

“Such a number would have, indeed, caused Egypt's Pharaoh consternation, for not only would there have been very little room for them in Egypt, but a group of this size could likely have taken over Egypt with or without weapons they would hardly have had to fear Pharaoh's army, which was probably at most about 20,000 men.”
(Mendenhall 1958: 64-65)

On the surface, these statistics may be entertaining to read, but what they really ought to do is to alert us to the fact that we need to alter the way in which we are reading the biblical texts.

Conflicting Narratives

Another problem with taking the Hebrew Bible at face value is the presence of what seems to be conflicting information. For example, the Bible claims that all the livestock belonging to the Egyptians were destroyed by God (Exod. 9:3-6), and for some reason had to be destroyed again in Exodus 18-21, this should make the reader think twice about the historical accuracy of these claims, it should also leave them wondering what the Egyptians used to pull their chariots as they pursued the fleeing Exodus group.

In relation to the conquest narratives, the books of Joshua and Judges contain some long argued over conflicts. The first account of the conquest tells of how Joshua and his armies carried out a lightning military campaign that resulted in “the whole land” and “all their kings” being conquered (Joshua 10:40). Then

after this comprehensive victory, the land to the west of the Jordan was divided between the Israelite tribes. However, in the account given in the Book of Judges we are told that the division of the land between the tribes came first, and it is only after the allotment that the Israelites attempt to conquer Canaan by means of a military campaign.

Even more confusing is the list of 'conquered' cities that are named in Joshua 12:7-24. In this text we are told that Jerusalem, Gezer, Taanach, Megiddo and Dor were defeated by Joshua and the Israelites, but in Judges Chapter One we mysteriously find these places in a list of cities that the Israelites had failed to overcome.

There are usually explanations to remove any apparent errors and apologists perform wonderful contortions to explain these errors away. However, as far as the critical historian is concerned, the accounts as given are of little use unless they are qualified in some way. They may all be explainable, but that involves adding to the text or appealing to different interpretations, but that does mean that the texts are not taken as being 100% accurate as we see them on the page (Miller and Hayes: 61).

Composite Accounts

For the more conservative Bible follower it is accepted that Moses wrote the five books that make up the Pentateuch, there is no problem for these people to accept that it was the work of one man, despite having recorded his death and frequently slipping into the third person narrative. Now, I don't think that proverbial 'man in

the street' has heard of Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, but the modern Bible scholar seems to accept that there were at least four authors at work in writing the Pentateuch as we have it today. The Bible clearly shows signs of being a composite work that's draws together many different types of literature, and has been reworked to show a certain degree of harmony.

By reading through the text with a critical eye, some signs can be found of the bringing together of different traditions. For example, we read that at the start of the Exodus, the Hebrews fled Egypt without pharaoh knowing about it, they left in a desperate hurry and totally unprepared (Exodus. 12:39; 14:5), but read a bit more carefully and you realise that they weren't unprepared, they were very well organised, they took their time in departing, and even had time to get some valuable items from the Egyptians (Exodus. 11:1-2; 12:35-36; 13:18-19).

One important point that the bringing together of a range of traditions into what looks like the one narrative, is that it allows the textual critic to sometimes be able to roughly calculate when the texts themselves were written, or at least the earliest plausible date. An example of this can be found in the stories about Joseph's adventures in Egypt where he rose from obscurity to a position of high authority. By Bible chronology, Joseph's activities occurred about the same time as the Hyksos period, c. 1674-1567 BCE (McCarter: 26). If we then look at some of the information given in the Joseph narratives, we find that the details suggest a much later time frame for these events.

Joseph is known for his ability to interpret dreams, and it was the ability to interpret the pharaoh's dreams that enabled Joseph to climb the ladder of success. There is a problem here though as the king of Egypt was never referred to as a pharaoh before the reign of Thutmosis III (1490-1213 BCE) (McCarter: 27). McCarter also lists some other problematic information:

Some of the personal names in the story are Egyptian. Joseph's wife is called Asenath (Genesis 41:45), a name with parallels beginning in the middle of the 20th Dynasty (about 1184-1070 B.C.), thus about 1100 B.C. The name of Asenath's father is Potiphera (Genesis 41:45), and this name has been found on an Egyptian stele dating to the 21st Dynasty (about 1070-945) or later. The name of Joseph's Egyptian master Potiphar (Genesis 37:36) is probably a shorter version of the name Potiphera. Joseph's own Egyptian name, Zaphenath-paneah (Genesis 41:45) has no exact parallel in extant Egyptian records, but names with a similar structure are attested to from the 21st Dynasty (about 1070-945 B.C.) and later. (27)

The information contained in these texts suggests that the Joseph stories were written after 1000 BCE, which is into the period of the United Monarchy. The late construction of the texts means that, if a historian is going to find any authentic history in the Joseph story, then they will have to filter the text considerably to discover it. The late composition of a text also detracts from its value as a reliable historical source, as all written histories are influenced to some degree by the interests of the society in which they were written (Knauf: 26). This could lead to the possibility that the history under scrutiny is entirely false, and was produced to give some sort of validation for an action, or to explain why certain laws were initiated, or even to explain why certain groups should always be considered enemies. This does not mean that a late authorship totally undermines the value of a text it just means that it is possible that certain parts of a narrative may have been embellished with the passing of time. There are many other reasons for not

taking the Bible text at face value, the outrageously long life-spans of many characters, the common folk-tale motifs, the concept of a Golden Age, the continual intervention by God into the narratives, all suggest that much of the Bible was written to present an ideological rather than an historically accurate account (Miller and Hayes: 58-62). Of paramount importance for the historian, is to remember that the authors of the Hebrew Bible did not record history in the same way that modern-day historians do, as we saw earlier, this critical approach to history writing only came about as the result of a long process lasting about 1900 years.

If we return to the three choices that the historian has when considering the Bible as a historical source, we can see that the first option of accepting the biblical narratives at face value would require the historian to ignore the problems suggested above, which in turn would mean that they would have to accept, amongst other things, a 6000 year old universe, a worldwide flood that is invisible in the archaeological record, and that the sun can 'stand still' in the sky.

The second option would be to completely reject the information in the Bible as being wholly unreliable. However, this option ignores the fact that the Bible does contain some plausible historical information, the migration of nomadic groups into Egypt's eastern delta during times of famine for example, or the possibility of a foreigner achieving a position of great power in Egypt. More importantly, the Bible, as with any ancient text, must hold some important information for the historian, even if the information is highly incredulous, this still provides information about how the society that the text developed in thought about their

past. There is also the possibility that within the ancient poems and songs there may be information that could aid the historian to at least fill in some of the background of early Israelite history.

The third option, and the most popular, is to adopt a stance somewhere between the two previous positions. Any hypothesis proposed from this stance will obviously include references to the biblical narrative, but to what degree the biblical narratives are considered reliable will always depend on what the historians deems as being credible evidence. Therefore, within this category there are a whole range of 'histories' of ancient Israel that place varying degrees of emphasis on the biblical texts.

Also in this category, the historian will compare the biblical texts to the available external data from archaeology and the information provided in ancient texts, which enables them to adjust, or reinterpret, the biblical texts to fit the known historical situations much better than they would do at face value. For example, as we shall see later on in the paper, a 13th century BCE date for the Exodus from Egypt fits much better with the archaeological and non-biblical textual information than the 15th century date suggested by the Bible. Thus, many scholars have reinterpreted certain biblical passages, such as 1 Kings 6:1, in an attempt to bring the biblical information more into line with what is known from non-biblical sources. Any hypothesis suggested by the historian in this category is going to present a history of Israel that will always include some of the biblical information.

In the second half of the 18th century, it seemed as if a lifeline had been thrown to the fundamentalists who believed that the biblical account of Israel's origins were completely accurate. In the near east, explorers were discovering artefacts in the ruins of the Holy Land that some scholars thought supported many of the biblical narratives. In these early days, from which the discipline of archaeology emerged, it seemed that everything that an adventurer could get their hands on from an ancient tell, supported the biblical account. Archaeology is such an important part of the origins debate that it is necessary to look at the history of archaeology in the near east to understand just how vital a role this discipline has played in the debate.

Archaeology and the Origins Debate

There is no doubt that the vast majority of the archaeological work carried out in Palestine is done with the assumption that archaeological discoveries can have a bearing upon the interpretation and appreciation of the Bible. For the first half of the 20th century archaeological evidence from Palestine was almost exclusively interpreted by comparing the data to biblical places, events and characters. To be fair to the majority of scholars and archaeologists who have worked there, they have not really tried to disguise their bias. G. E. Wright gives a typical example of the motivation behind the 'biblical archaeologists' agenda when he states that biblical archaeology's:

"chief concern is not with strata or pots or methodology. Its central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the scriptures." (quoted in Dever 1985: 55)

This was essentially the mindset of the biblical archaeologists in the early days of the excavations in Palestine. This is verified by even a cursory look through the literature, and if you pick any of the writings of any biblical archaeologist from the early 20th century you will find that their agenda is plain to see. For example, the great William Albright reports to his readers that:

"Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the Bible as a source of history" (1949: 128)

Even relatively recently some Israeli archaeologists still appeared to work from this viewpoint.

Yigael Yadin wrote concerning the conquest narratives in the Bible:

"The fact is that excavation results from the last 50 years or so support in a most amazing way, except in some cases, the basic historicity of the Biblical account" (18).

The optimism displayed by statements such as these, are perfect examples of what Niels Peter Lemche of Copenhagen University has called:

"the pervasive mania within certain archaeological circles for correlating text with excavation before either the text or the excavation has had an opportunity to speak for itself" (Lemche 1985: 388).

The highly optimistic view exhibited by the aforementioned biblical archaeologists of what archaeology can do for biblical studies, is now all but absent except for the most conservative of archaeologists and Bible historians. The contemporary view of the majority of archaeologists is that the purpose of archaeology is not to prove the Bible true in any sense of the word (Dever 1990: 26).

Some scholars, particularly William Dever, have called for the abandonment of the term 'biblical archaeologist' and have suggested that it be replaced by terms such as 'Near Eastern Archaeology', 'the Archaeology of the Southern Levant' and more frequently 'Syro-Palestinian Archaeology'. Dever has argued for the change of name for various reasons:

"Elsewhere I have written extensively on the history of the 'biblical archaeology' movement. I have argued that it was more an aspect of theological studies than a deliberate 'school of archaeology' properly speaking, and that it was largely an American phenomenon. A brief look at the actual development of excavations in general in Palestine in the era 1900-1950 will confirm the first point. The majority of American digs (and many others) were at sites identified with biblical places, staffed almost exclusively by seminary professors and clerics, funded largely by religious institutions, and having as their primary aim the elucidation of problems in biblical history, not

least of all the perennial 'faith-and-history' issue. The exceptions, such as the Chicago excavations at Megiddo and the Pennsylvania work at Beth-shan, only proved the rule. American archaeology in Palestine was 'biblical archaeology,' whether of the more respectable type epitomised by Albright or the Fundamentalist, 'prove the bible' type all too common among his less enlightened (or conscientious) imitators" (Dever 2001: 61)

Regardless of the wishes of Dever, there will always be people who will view any archaeological discovery in Palestine first and foremost in a biblical context, and it is difficult to imagine a time when archaeological discoveries in Palestine will be viewed completely independent of the Bible. There is one over-riding reason why the two disciplines will always be intertwined, and that is because:

'Archaeology prevents the Bible from being mythological by keeping it in the realm of history. Archaeology provides the geographical and chronological context of biblical people and events. Archaeology recovers the empirical evidence necessary for clarifying the biblical text. Archaeology illuminates the daily life of biblical people by recovering their pottery, utensils, weapons, seals, ostraca, and architecture.' (King: 11)

Since the Bible holds such a special place in the hearts and minds of so many people, it is only natural that any archaeological find that may possibly throw some light onto its passages will attract the attention professional scholars and laypeople. For this reason, I believe that archaeological excavations in Palestine will continue to be intertwined with biblical stories, although future finds may not be met with quite the same enthusiasm that was shown in the early 20th century, I really do not see the term 'biblical archaeology' being completely abandoned. The German archaeologist Volkmar Fritz also believes that the term 'biblical archaeology is here to stay:

"From a scholarly point of view there is no reason to abandon the term 'Biblical archaeology' since a relationship between the two disciplines is justified. At any rate the term, when used, can refer only to the archaeology of the whole region throughout all periods and not to a

study of antiquities that is exclusively related to biblical texts" (Fritz: 12).

Archaeology, therefore, is an integral part of biblical studies and it certainly does confirm the existence of many characters and places mentioned on the Bible, but it doesn't necessarily follow that the claims made by the Bible about these people and places are true. For example, archaeologists could find a very large boat in the mountains of Ararat that has the name 'Noah' emblazoned on its side, but this doesn't mean that the entire Flood narrative is true. All that this discovery would prove is that once upon a time there existed a boat that has the name Noah on it. That Noah built the boat, loaded it with animals and that God flooded the Earth and killed all its inhabitants apart from the boat passengers is a non sequitur.

This approach applies to any archaeological find, whether related to the Bible or not. People need to keep in mind that just because there may be an inscription that mentions an Israelite king or there is evidence of the destruction of a city in the way the Bible describes, it really doesn't follow that every single aspect of the biblical account is therefore true and verified. When this is realised, it may be difficult to imagine exactly what archaeology can do for biblical studies. Nevertheless, to fully understand the value of archaeology as a source for reconstructing the origins of Ancient Israel, we need to ask the fundamental question of what is the purpose of archaeology in the first place.

What is Archaeology?

It is probably best to start an examination of archaeology and Ancient Israel by acknowledging what archaeology does not do. We have to realise that archaeologists do not dig up history, whether biblical or anything else. The only things that the archaeologist discovers from the past are artefacts, and these are specifically the material remains left by human and/or natural activities (Laughlin: 32).

Since the 1970s, with the rise of the 'New Archaeology', there has been a dramatic increase in not only the amount of archaeological data being recovered from ancient near eastern sites, there has also been a dramatic rise in the different kinds of artefact data being produced. This is due mainly to the employment of multidisciplinary staff, which has resulted in the recovery of a wider assortment of material concerning the total setting of ancient sites including their natural environment. But despite the increase in sophisticated recovery techniques as well as in the overall complexity of contemporary digs, the most important challenge facing the archaeologist is still "the development of reliable means for inference justification" (Binford 1989: 3). What this ultimately means is that any statement made by an archaeologist about the past is only as good as the justifications offered for the inference that the archaeologist makes. An archaeologist may well infer that the walls of Jericho fell down as described in the Bible, but unless they can justify this inference by presenting supporting evidence then the claim is meaningless.

Interpretation of data is an essential part of the archaeologist's work, as an archaeologist can only examine the material reality of the past. Any

interpretation of this recovered material data is an addition to the material remains themselves. The problem, of course, is that artifacts, even if they include inscriptions or texts, do not interpret themselves and are usually open to more than one meaning, so it is no surprise that archaeologists often have differences of opinion about the same artefact.

A Short History of 'Biblical Archaeology'

Archaeology in the near east has gone through many changes in the last century or so. These changes have undoubtedly been for the better because with every new improved technique that becomes available the fewer gaps there are in our knowledge of the ancient near east. With that said, I would now like to give a brief summary of archaeology in the near east.

The Formative Period: Layard to Petrie

Although it could be argued that archaeological activity in Palestine, in the broadest sense of the word, can be traced back to the early centuries CE, it was only with Edward Robinson's visits to Palestine in 1838 and 1852 that anything resembling the modern discipline began to take shape (Dever: 2001: 54). But, the early days of archaeological exploration in Palestine are typified by a cavalier approach to the recovery of ancient artefacts. This can be seen in the accusations levelled against people such as Henry Layard that have branded them treasure hunters rather than archaeologists. It is claimed that Layard did not care what damage he caused to a site and that he didn't even understand the basics of archaeology, Moorey writes:

Layard is representative of many of the pioneer excavators in the near east, well-educated but not a specialist, courageous and enterprising, widely experienced in dealing with Arabs and Turks. Like Botta before him, Layard dug as inclination directed wholly ignorant of the complex structures of ancient mounds, always seeking stone monuments and only recovering the most obvious and spectacular of small finds. Where stone sculptures lined mudbrick walls he was able to plan structures. When only mudbrick and mudbrick debris survived he was baffled. (Moorey 8-9)

So it seems that Layard was only on the look out for anything that seemed valuable or at least looked as if it was explicitly shaped by the hand of man. But, this may be a little harsh on Layard, as he was essentially working the same way as everyone else, and this period was long before anything that remotely resembled archaeology as a scientific discipline had begun to take shape. So, it should perhaps be kept in mind that Layard did not have access to the technology or the methodological procedures that later archaeologists did.

Layard's assistant on a dig at Nineveh in 1853, Hormuzd Rassam, uncovered a find that later illustrated how valuable archaeology could be in illuminating the mysteries of the Bible. Rassam had started secretly digging on an area of the site that had originally been allocated to the French by Sir Henry Rawlinson. After a few days of digging he broke through into what was later identified as the library of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal. The crucial thing regarding this find was that Rassam claimed the site for the British museum, apparently, at the time;

“it was an established rule that whenever one discovered a new palace, no one else could meddle with it” (Laughlin: 3)

Rassam, who was working for the British Museum, secured the site for them, but the significance of this claiming of the find for the British Museum only came to fruition about two decades later when a cataloguer at the museum, George Smith, was given the job of piecing together the broken fragments found in Ashurbanipal's library.

Smith's diligent work in piecing together these fragments soon paid dividends as from the fragments there appeared a non-biblical flood story, which shared certain similarities with the account given in the Hebrew Bible.

“Commencing a steady search amongst these fragments, I soon found half of a curious tablet which had evidently contained originally six columns.... On looking down the third column, my eye caught the statement that the ship rested on the mountains of Nizir, followed by the account of the sending forth of the dove, and its finding no resting place and returning. I saw at once that I had here discovered a portion at least of the Chaldean account of the Deluge” (quoted in Lloyd: 165)

The full potential of what some people hoped that archaeology could do for Bible historiography was now realised, a non-biblical flood story that resembles the Bible's Noah tale not only gives support to the historical accuracy of the Bible, but also stimulates the imagination into contemplating what else could be found in the ruins of Palestine that may confirm other biblical narratives. One possibility that appears to be ignored is that the Bible actually supplements the Chaldean Flood myth and not vice versa.

Anyway, as knowledge of Smith's discovery became known, it became apparent that the Bible belonged to a much wider historical context than had previously

been supposed. Therefore an awareness of what archaeological discoveries might do for biblical studies began to emerge.

While the so-called 'treasure hunters' continued working in Assyria, the knowledge of the topography of Palestine was revolutionised by Edward Robinson. He was accompanied on his travels by one of his former students, Eli Smith, a missionary who was fluent in Arabic. Smith's knowledge of Arabic soon proved invaluable, since at that time most of the population of Palestine was Arabic, and the key to the geographical identification of ancient biblical sites would prove to be the modern Arabic place names.

Although Robinson was not an archaeologist, without his accomplishments later archaeologists would have had a far more difficult time in identifying ancient sites. During his two aforementioned visits he correctly identified more than 100 sites, and so thorough was his work that a contemporary Swiss topographer said of him: "The works of Robinson and Smith alone surpass the total of all previous contributions to Palestinian geography from the time of Eusebius and Jerome to the early nineteenth century" (Albright 1949: 25).

Probably the most significant figure to appear during this formative period was Flinders Petrie, whose pioneering work laid the foundations for all subsequent archaeological fieldwork and research (Dever 2001: 55). Petrie introduced into archaeological field techniques two of its most important concepts, pottery typology and stratification. Up until his time most of the dating of artefacts was made through inscriptions, and as a result, little or no attention was paid to small, characterless remains, and this was especially true of the thousands of pieces of

unpainted pottery sherds found on a typical site in Israel and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Petrie recognised that a Tell was composed of different layers or strata of occupation. Thus he created a system called 'sequence dating', which, while not allowing him to give absolute dates, allowed him to arrange his materials into what he believed were natural groupings, separating what belonged to one family, based on shape, decoration, form, and so on, from another group. Each sequence could then be related to a stratum on the site (Laughlin: 6). However, when it came to actually putting his ideas into practice, Petrie often failed to fully utilise his new techniques. In these early days of archaeology in Palestine, Petrie's best-known excavation was at Tell el-Hesi in 1890. But, his work there was just as significant for its errors as it was for its triumphs. When Petrie returned to Egypt, the people who were left in charge at Tell el-Hesi were too inexperienced to recognise the importance of maintaining a detailed record of everything recovered from the Tell. Also, Petrie's recording system was essentially useless for a project of this size. It was more suited to what it was created for, the recording of finds from single period settlements and cemeteries. One of Petrie's critics in this area, Mortimer Wheeler, who compares Petrie's work to that of Pitt Rivers, chastises Petrie's lack of vigilance, but this may be a bit unkind, as no one, including Wheeler, has ever attained the ideal that Rivers had foreseen (Moorey: 27). Anyhow, these errors highlighted how important it was to keep the detailed records that Pitt Rivers had promoted, and they also demonstrated that archaeologists desperately needed to improve their excavation techniques. But, even although Petrie may have had a too simplistic understanding of the formation

of strata (Dever 1980: 42), he nevertheless transformed archaeology in the Holy Land from 'treasure hunting' to at least the beginnings of a serious scientific discipline.

From Petrie to World War 1

Petrie's work at Tell El Hesi prompted William Dever to describe this era as a 'Golden Age' of excavation in Palestine (Dever 1980: 42). Some of the better-known excavations include the work of R. A. S. Macalister at Gezer (1902-9), and the German excavations at Jericho (1907-9) and Megiddo (beginning in 1903). The Americans excavated at Samaria under D. G. Lyon and G. A. Reisner (1908-10), and F. W. Bliss continued the work Petrie had begun at Tell el-Hesi (Dever: 1985: 98).

The latter third of the 19th century saw the appearance of several national societies of archaeology such as the Palestine Exploration Fund (British, 1865); the American Palestine Society (1870); the German Palestine Society (1878); and the French School of Bible and Archaeology (Ecole Biblique, 1890).

But, despite this flurry of archaeological activity and the errors of Petrie at Tell el-Hesi, many mistakes were still being made in both method and dating. For example, the lack of proper stratigraphical techniques meant that Macalister was only able to identify eight out of twenty-six strata at Gezer, and his dating at Gezer was out by over 800 years! The lack of improved methods and understanding of Tell structure is clearly reflected in the publications of this period, which contain "vast treasure houses of intriguing, but often useless infor-

mation" (Dever 1980: 42). However, given the hardships these early pioneers had to overcome, or learn to live with, their achievements were nonetheless immense.

Between the World Wars

This era has been termed 'the Golden Age of Archaeology' by Roger Moorey (54) because this period saw the emergence of many major developments and influential people in the field of archaeology. These developments, and scholars, made some everlasting impressions upon archaeology in the Middle East and in Israel in particular. Politically the British took control of Palestine and established a Department of Antiquities, known today as the Israel Antiquities Authority), which provided some stability and control over the excavations in the region. Major excavations were carried out by several of the national schools: Beth Shan (1921-23) and Megiddo (1929-39) by the Americans, Jericho (1929-36) and Samaria (1931-35) by the British. The excavation at Samaria is especially important because it introduced Kathleen Kenyon to archaeology in Israel. Her meticulous application of stratigraphic analysis would almost single-handedly lead to what Dever called his "third revolution" (1980: 44).

It is not that surprising that this period produced what looked like a huge amount of support for the biblical narratives, when we consider that the majority of excavations were at biblical sites and the staff were virtually all Protestant seminarians and clergy (Dever 2001: 57) it was inevitable. If we also consider the fact that most of the excavations were funded by money from church circles, we should expect the finds to reflect the personal faith of the benefactors and staff. Archaeology in the Holy Land actually benefited greatly from the two periods of

serious global unemployment and recession because this meant that there was a large drop in the wage rate for Jewish labourers and *fellahin* (Silberman: 16).

But the most prominent scholar of this period was William. F. Albright. Albright's contribution to the debate over Ancient Israel's origins has been immense, anyone who is even remotely interested in the debate knows how influential Albright has been, and through many of his students, such as Glueck, Mendenhall, Wright and Bright, or even 'grandstudents' (Dever in particular) his influence continues.

It was Albright's work at Tell Beit Mirsim between 1926 and 1932 that was instrumental in his achievement of becoming an expert in pottery analysis and typology. When combined with his stratigraphical understanding of near eastern sites, Albright transformed the chronological framework of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Albright's students include Nelson Glueck who established his reputation exploring the regions of the Transjordan (Moorey: 75-7). G. E. Wright, who founded the periodical 'The Biblical Archaeologist' in 1938, was the greatest promoter of Albright's views and he passed these views on to a new generation of archaeologists at Shechem.

1948-70

Obviously by this time the Second World War was over and archaeological excavations were once more begun with renewed vigour as well as controversy. The Arab-Israeli War of 1948, and the subsequent division of the Holy Land

between Jordan and Israel, made it almost impossible for any direct cooperation to occur between archaeologists situated in each nation. The Department of Antiquities continued in Jordan and the West Bank until 1956 when the director Gerald Harding was forced out of office during a time of increasing nationalism. The possibility of cross border cooperation all but ended with this event, as from 1956 onwards the Jordanian Department of antiquities was now to be directed only by Jordanian nationals (Silberman: 18).

In Israel, however, archaeological excavations increased rapidly. In July 1948 the Department of Antiquities was initiated as a branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the first ever Israeli dig was carried out under the direction of Benjamin Mazar at Tel Qasile. An event that perhaps had an even bigger influence on 'biblical archaeology' was when the Israel Exploration Society became a national organisation. This resulted in the synchronising of public and academic bodies who were involved in excavating the Tells of Israel, and it also promoted the use of volunteers from other countries in many of the important digs. As more excavations were carried out, more and more people became involved in excavations, it was almost a national ritual for Israeli schoolchildren, pensioners, and soldiers to participate in excavations (*ibid*: 19). The many important finds that were linked to the Hebrew Bible narratives, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, resulted in a surge in nationalism in Israel that could only have been dreamed of. When find after find was compared to the biblical texts and shown to confirm them, it becomes easy to see why so many people thought that the origins of ancient Israel must have happened as the Bible claims. After all, if the Bible claims that Joshua destroyed cities such as Jericho and Hazor, then the

destruction levels found at these sites simply had to be as a result of ancient Israelite military activity.

But, a new archaeological technique was to revolutionise archaeological methodology all over the world, a technique that, when implemented, cast great shadows over the dating of destructions levels of biblical cities. This technique was introduced by Kathleen Kenyon and the most valuable feature of here technique was that it meant less exposure of a site (Moorey: 94-9). She used this complex stratigraphic technique at Jericho (1952-58) and essentially jettisoned both the Bible's and Garstang's date for the destruction of the city. Many of the Israeli archaeologists, who started digs at some of the largest tells in Israel, such as Yadin at Hazor and Biran at Dan, were not too keen on entirely applying Kenyon's method. They were mainly concerned with the exposure of the architectural remains of the sites (Dever 1980: 45). However, it is only fair to point out that, while there may still be no agreement among all Israeli archaeologists on field methodology, they all draw stratigraphic sections today (Laughlin: 9).

1970 to the present

Since about 1970, archaeology in every part of the world was undergoing a major reshaping in methodology. The most important change was that archaeologists could no longer simply provide descriptions of changes in material culture at a site they now had to provide explanations for these changes. So, in a way, archaeologists were becoming more anthropologically orientated in their approach and were no longer just focussing on particular aspects of material culture. They

were now required to be more focussed on the study of culture and cultural change when providing explanation of their theories (Dever: 1981).

Subsequently, the natural result of this shift in approach was the emphasis on multidisciplinary staff. To all intents and purposes, this now meant that no single character, such as a Petric or an Albright, can run a dig and expect to answer all the questions now being raised. Scientists from many disciplines, such as geology, botany and zoology, were now beginning to make priceless contributions to the overall knowledge of an excavation (Moorey, 114-75).

This bringing together of interdisciplinary staff has brought with it a huge variety of newer techniques for analysing excavated materials (Dever 2001: 59). It is not possible to go into great detail on every technique, but some of the more commonly used techniques are: Radiocarbon dating, potassium-argon dating, fission-track dating, thermoluminescence dating of pottery, obsidian hydration dating, and dendrochronology.

Carbon-14 is easily the most commonly used dating method used by archaeologists. There is such a demand for laboratories to date samples that university laboratories now have to compete with commercial dating labs (Michels: 148). The basic principle of this method is that all living organic matter is in equilibrium with cosmic radiation, thus, all radiocarbon atoms that disintegrate in living matter are replaced by carbon-14 entering the food chain by photosynthesis. However, at the time of death, the body can no longer take in any more carbon-14, when this happens the carbon-14 begins to decay. The age of a particular sample can then only be worked out from the day that sample died.

Carbon-14 has a half-life of 5730 years (plus or minus 40 years), so the labs can date dead organic matter fairly accurately (*ibid.*: 149).

This new era also welcomed in more cooperation between American and Israeli archaeologists, and now (Mazar: 112-14) every dig had its own computer technician, who was frequently to be found in the field, recording daily the activities of the dig. However, there is no systematic unity among archaeologists with regard to computer programming. It is to be hoped that it will soon be possible for computer information from all digs, past and present, to be readily accessed so that research and study can be conducted in the most comprehensive way possible (Laughlin: 10).

The Bible Accounts and External Evidence

Now that we know what the boundaries of our sources are, we can now look at what bearing they have had on some of the events related to the origins of ancient Israel as written in the Hebrew Bible. The biblical narratives outline the early history of Israel in chronological order, from the patriarchal age to the settlement in Egypt and the oppression by an unnamed pharaoh, then the Exodus itself, the wanderings in the wilderness, the military conquest of Canaan, the period of the Judges, all the way through to the institution of the united Monarchy and beyond. The first stage, in the quest for locating ancient Israel, begins with the search for the patriarchs.

The Patriarchs

There has been quite a substantial disagreement between scholars over the dating of the patriarchal age. Albright (1961: 49-52) and Glueck (1959 68-76) for example, place Abraham in the period from 2000-1700 BCE, Rowley (113-114) places Abraham firmly in the 18th century BCE, and Gordon (57) believes that the 14th century BCE is the most suitable date. So, we have a very wide time frame, which suggests that it may not be possible at all to assign an absolute date for the patriarchal age.

In their attempts to date the patriarchal age, scholars have employed three different lines of enquiry. First of all, they attempt to find external points of contact between the alleged historical events of the patriarchal narratives and known non-biblical events. Secondly, datable evidence of aspects of the biblical

texts, such as personal names and legal features have been examined to discover the most suitable period for their use, and thirdly, chronological links between the patriarchs and later biblical periods are compared in an attempt to establish a reliable overall chronology (Kitchen 1966: 42).

Regarding contact points with known non-biblical events, the first problem we encounter in this enquiry is the severe limitations of the sources. Apart from the Hebrew Bible, we have absolutely no direct evidence of any of the patriarchs. This really should not be surprising as the information given about the patriarchs describes a family history, primarily focussed on theological rather than historical matters. But, much of the general information in the patriarchal narratives is completely plausible, and has been supported to some extent from external sources. For example, in the Hebrew Bible we are told that there were various occasions when the patriarchs entered Egypt during times of famine. For example, Abraham moved to Egypt during a severe famine (Gen. 12:10) and Jacob's entire family moved there during a particularly prolonged famine (Gen. 41:50). This is entirely compatible with the information we have from Egyptian sources such as Papyrus Anastasi VI, where a report from a frontier official talks of permitting:

“the Bedouin tribes of Edom (to) pass the Fortress of Mer-ne-ptah.
which is in Tjeku...to the pools of Per-Atum...where are (in) Tjeku,
to keep them alive and to keep their cattle alive. (ANET: 258)

Tjeku is the Egyptian name for the biblical 'Land of Goshen' (Shanks 1992: 109 *n* 12) and Per-Atum may be the name of the biblical Pithom. Therefore, we know,

albeit from a later source, that the Egyptians did allow people during times of famine to live in the very areas mentioned in the Bible.

There is a more significant event that we may expect to have left some record in the non-biblical sources, this is the war described in Gen.14 between the allied forces of the five Cities of the Plain and the four king alliance led by king Chedorlaomer. It has been argued that the names of the four eastern kings suggest that the best period for this war would be 2000-1700 BCE. The name Arioch (king of Ellasar) can be compared to 'Arriyuk' or 'Arriwuk' found in the Mari texts of the 18th century BCE, Tidal is a form of 'Tudkhalia', a Hittite name known to exist from the 19th century BCE. Chedorlaomer is another form of 'Elamite' known from the Old Babylonian period of 2000-1700 BCE, but the name Amraphel is uncertain. Although these names suggest that 2000-1700 BCE would be the most suitable time in which to place this war, it really is not as simple as that. The name 'Arioch' is not exclusive to the 18th century BCE; it also appears in a different form 'Ariukki' in the 15th century BCE Nuzi texts. Tidal is similarly not uniquely bound to the 19th century, as a Hittite king living as late as the 13th century BCE had the name (Kitchen 43-44). A fairly surprising feature of this war is that no one has actually been able to identify any of the nine kings in any extant external source (McCarter: 2). Therefore, the use of the names of the eastern kings to try and date the age of the patriarchs cannot be used war with any real degree of certainty.

In truth, the search for contact points between the so-called historical events in the patriarchal narratives and known external history has resulted in a complete blank,

it is such an emphatic dead end that there has never been a single named character in all of the Genesis narratives that has been identified in any non-biblical source (Bright: 74). Now, if all of the kings, and other characters, are invisible in the archaeological data, we should not really be surprised that we cannot find a single external reference to any of the patriarchs.

Given that the patriarchal narratives have no historical connections with any known historical figures or events in general history, it is simply not possible to place the patriarchs into a historical time frame by attempting to establish links between the patriarchal narratives and known ancient near eastern history.

Scholars have argued that there are aspects of the patriarchal narratives that provide clues to when these events were meant to have happened. For example, the personal names of the patriarchs have been compared with external texts to discover if there are any identical or similar names and, if so, the time when they were most commonly used would be a good indication of where to place the patriarchs in history. Thus:

“.. one may compare the name Abram with Aba(m)rama in tablets from Dilbat, Abraham with Aburahana (execration texts), Jacob with Ya'qub-il (Chagar-Bazar, etc), Zebulon with Zabilanu (Egyptian and Babylonian sources) Asher with Ashra etc. The (Mare-) Yamina of the Mari texts may be semantically parallel in name to the Hebrew Benjamin. All these parallels fit well into the nineteenth to seventeenth centuries BC.” (Kitchen 1966: 48-49)

It appears then, that the personal names of the patriarchs and their families can possibly be used to narrow down the search to roughly the 19th to 17th centuries

BCE, a date that is at least plausible to harmonise with some of the personal names of the eastern kings of Genesis 14. Again, though, there are some real problems with this hypothesis, as it is no longer possible to argue that the names of the Patriarchs and their kin fit best into the first half of the second millennium BCE. It seems that Kitchen's comparison of Abram and Abraham with early second millennium external texts is now considered uncertain (McCarter: 11), and other forms of 'Abraham', such as 'Abram' and 'Abiram' are found in texts dated to the late Bronze Age (1550-1200) and later (Van Seters 1975: 40-42). Furthermore, names from the same root are known from almost all time periods. The Bible itself testifies to this, when we read in 1 Kings 16:34 that Hiel the Bethlelite, who founded the Israelite Jericho in the 9th century BCE, had a son called 'Abiram' (McCarter: 238 *n* 20).

Also, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph belong to the same name type, but these cannot be restricted to any one period either, as Canaanite forms of this name has been found in the Late Bronze Age sources from Ugarit and Amarna. Although the name Jacob is very common in the MBA, related names have been found in much later sources such as a 5th century BCE inscription from Elephantine, and also in Palmyrene sources dated to as late as the third century CE (*ibid*: 11). It appears then, that we cannot use the names of the patriarchs, or their relatives, to date the patriarchal period with any confidence.

Another feature of the patriarchal narratives that has been presented as a possible way to date the era is the similarity between some of the social customs and legal practices mentioned in the texts and those from non-biblical sources. This lent

support to several of the incidents in the life of Abraham. For example, in regard to an apparent legal practice, in Gen. 16:1-4, Abraham's wife, Sarah, gave her slave Hagar to him as a concubine. This tradition is reflected in the texts from MBA Nuzi, Babylonia and Assyria, where a marriage contract compelled a childless wife to supply a surrogate for her husband to try and reproduce with. If a son is forthcoming, it was then forbidden for the surrogate and her child to be sent away from the household, which also parallels the information in Gen. 21:10 that tells us of Abraham's unwillingness to send Hagar and Ishmael away (Bright: 78). Again, however, this legal practice has been shown to exist after the MBA period where it can be found in a 12th century Egyptian text and a 7th century marriage contract from Nimrud (Van Seters 1975: 68-71).

One aspect of the Patriarchal narratives that always stimulates much discussion is the recurring 'wife/sister' motif of Gen. 12:10-20, 20:10-18, and 26:6-11. It is often argued that these three narratives may simply be different version of the same event, but Albert Speiser believed that this custom could be used to help date the patriarchal age. Speiser, working from the Nuzi tablets, argued that a wife enjoyed a special status and protection in Hurrian society when the law recognised her concurrently as her husband's sister (Speiser: 11). It was believed that this practice best fitted the period from 2000-1500 BCE, and there was no evidence that the custom existed in later periods. But, on closer inspection of the Nuzi texts, used by Speiser and others, it really does not look as if the parallel between them and the biblical 'wife/sister' narratives is all that obvious. In the texts cited by Speiser, the man claiming that someone was his sister did not normally become the future husband of the woman (Van Seters 1975: 71-76), so

the parallel is not really there at all. Furthermore, if we pay careful attention to the biblical texts, the patriarchs claimed that their wives were their sisters in order to protect themselves from foreigners whom they thought may kill them. In the biblical texts, there is actually no allusion at all to any legal contract between the patriarchs and their wives that would bestow some sort of special status on their wives.

The legal practices and social customs presented in the patriarchal narratives cannot, after all, aid us on the quest to date the patriarchal age. The examples show that many of the so-called customs that were thought to be unique to the MBA can be found in use in much later periods. Of course, this does not mean that these events did not happen, as we have seen these names and customs can be found in texts from the MBA, so it is entirely plausible that they could have happened. But, the fact that they also occur in much later time periods means that the MBA is not the only possible option. If certain names or customs in the biblical texts were unique to the MBA, then that would provide a much stronger case for the supporters of a MBA patriarchal era. However, since nothing in the texts has been shown to be unique to any particular time period, we cannot use personal names and customs as an argument for dating the Patriarchal period with any certainty.

Finally, attempts have been made to find chronological links between the patriarchal narratives and later biblical events. The premise here is that if we can date any event in the Hebrew Bible from a later period, then we should be able to work our way back through the genealogical information given in the Bible to a

date where we could possibly place the patriarchs. However, the main difficulty here is the actual chronological information in the Book of Genesis. If we were to take the chronological data at face value, then it would place Abraham's departure from Canaan around the beginning of the 21st century BCE. But, this would mean that we have to take the impossibly long life spans of the patriarchs literally, and it is difficult to believe that Abraham lived to 175 years of age and his son Isaac lived to 180 years when nowadays, with vastly superior medical care, diets and sanitation, it is considered a major achievement to reach the age of 100 years. Yet, we are asked to believe 4000 years ago, in an area known for its severe famines, plagues and wars that people regularly lived to these great ages. These long life spans are also difficult to take literally when we consider that archaeological information from thousands of ancient tombs, some of them dated to long before the Patriarchs, suggest that the average life span in ancient times was normally less than fifty years (Laughlin: 74).

There are also problems with what appears to be some internal inconsistencies in the text. We are informed that the Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt (Exod. 12:40) but the genealogy in Exod. 6:14-25 declares there was only four generations from Levi to Moses. Even with the dubiously high life spans this genealogy it is totally at odds with the 430 years in Egypt. Also, Exod. 7:7 tells us that Moses was 80 years old when he first confronted the Pharaoh, and this happened in the final year that the Israelites were enslaved. This means that there are only 350 years left for the remaining three generations, this is stretching the credibility of these narratives a bit too far. Maybe we could convince ourselves that three generations are possible if Levi was 40 when he arrived in Egypt, and

that Levi, Kohath and Amram all became fathers at the age of 130. This might be acceptable to a fundamentalist, but to the historian these chronologies look as if they are artificial. If the fundamentalist thinks the 3 x 130 years explains the discrepancy then they will have to find yet another apologetic when they read Gen. 46:11 that includes Kohath among the children who first entered Egypt! This only leaves two generations to span 350 years, which is completely unfeasible (Hughes: 120).

This all suggests that the Bible's own chronological information fails to provide satisfactory information about the time periods between the patriarchs and other periods mentioned in the Bible. The confusing chronologies and the complete absence of any contact points with known history, imply that the information about the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis is unsuitable for reconstructing a reliable historical time period for the patriarchs. These problems imply that the narratives have to be interpreted on the basis of when they were written down, and what theological and ideological purpose they were written for.

Israelites in Egypt

If there was an Israelite Exodus out of Egypt, then there has to be a time when they lived there. However, it can be stated categorically that there is no direct non-biblical evidence whatsoever of Israel in Egypt when the Hebrew Bible claims that the Israelites were enslaved there (Malamat: 17). But, we do have some circumstantial evidence, although this does not explicitly provide proof that Israel was in Egypt it does provide enough detail to make the claim quite plausible. One such indirect source can be found in Exodus 1:11

“So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.”

Although, many scholars over the years have treated the reference to the store cities of Pithom and Rameses as anachronistic, there exists a non-biblical source that provides some evidence that there may have been Israelites working on the building of Pi-Rameses. In Papyrus Leiden 348, we find this reference:

“Distribute grain rations to the soldiers and to the ‘Apiru who drag stone for the great pylon of Rameses.” (*Ibid*: 18)

Many scholars have argued for a linguistic connection between the terms Hebrew and ‘Apiru, and if the Israelites were indeed covered in the term ‘Apiru, then it is possible that they were amongst the workers who were employed to build the city of Rameses. Of course, like everything else in this debate, not all scholars are convinced of the connection. The ‘Hebrew/Habiru/‘Apiru’ equation appears as if it will always be a part of the debate over the origins of Ancient Israel, and it is such a crucial component of many proposed models for Israel’s appearance in history, that anyone entering the debate will need to be familiar with the discussion.

The original assertion was that the word Habiru simply equalled Hebrew. However, a problem arose with the discovery of the ‘ha-bi-ru’ in the letters of king IR-Heba of Jerusalem in the Amarna archives. The publication of the clay tablets from the Hittite capital Hattusa produced proof that the Sumeriogram sa.gaz that means ‘robbers’ (habbatu) , is to be read in the Akkadian and Hittite texts as ‘hab/piru’ (Wieppert: 64).

In 1939 it became clear that the consonantal element of the word 'ha-bi-ru', 'had to be recognised as 'p-r, which meant that all etymologies dependent on the root HBR were excluded, and corresponding attempts with 'BR and the 'ibrim became uncertain. The word 'Apiru itself is not of Hebrew origin, and, of course, the Hebrew word for 'Hebrew' is ibrim. The origin of the word itself is not known for certain as "there is no certainty as to the language (NW Semitic, Hurrian, etc.) or the verbal root from which the sociopolitical technical term ('Apiru) was originally drawn" (Gottwald: 401).

Although the term 'outlaw' seems to be the most apt term to define the 'Apiru, it tends to miss out many of the categories of society in which the 'Apiru are said to have existed. While the 'Apiru were distinctly recognisable from the population of the existing society that they happened to be involved with, they normally relied on that society for their livelihood. They were often employed by members of a society either as individual "contract labourers" or as hired groups of soldiers, agricultural labourers, or construction gangs (*Ibid*: 402).

The general characteristic of the 'Apiru turns out to be sociopolitical rather than ethnic or economic. They cannot be characterised as ethnically homogeneous in any one location, nor are they tied to any single economic activity throughout the near east. In short, an 'Apiru could have been a Hittite, Hurrian, Phoenician, or any other nationality of the ancient near east, as they were not identified by their ethnicity, in other words the term 'Apiru denotes a social stratum.

Since the term 'Apiru has been shown to refer to a social stratum, the equation of the term with the Hebrews is untenable as the Hebrews are said to be an ethnic

group. More problematic for the equation is the fact that the Bible suggests that the whole of 'Israel' came out of Egypt. However, the 'Apiru are now attested to in a large variety of sources from different times and places. For example,

1. In Mesopotamia, they are in evidence through the periods of Ur III, 1 Babylon, and after; in the Nuzi texts (fifteenth century) they play an especially prominent role.
2. Documents from Mari (eighteenth century) and Alalakh (seventeenth and fifteenth centuries) attest their presence in Upper Mesopotamia throughout the patriarchal age.
3. In Anatolia, the Cappadocian texts (nineteenth century) knew them, as did those of Boghazkoy (fourteenth century).
4. They are also mentioned in the Ras Shamra texts (fourteenth century).
5. Egyptian documents of the Empire period (fifteenth to twelfth century) refer to them, both as foes and rebels in Asia and as bondsmen in Egypt.
6. The Amarna letters (fourteenth century), where they appear in Palestine and adjoining areas as disturbers of the peace, are the best witness to them of all. (Bright: 92)

John Bright goes on to conclude that "obviously, a people found all over western Asia from the end of the third millennium to about the eleventh century cannot lightly be identified with the ancestors of Israel!" (Ibid: 92).

The connection between the Israelites has not been completely broken. Since the term 'Apiru has been shown to be a social stratum rather than an ethnic group, it has been proposed that since the Israelites were employed as slaves in Egypt, and as 'slave' is a social rather than an ethnic term, then the term 'Apiru could indeed be applied to the Israelites. In effect, the claim is that not all 'Apiru were Israelites, but where there were mentions of 'Apiru, it is possible that an Israelite

component may have been present. However, this is certainly not proof that the Israelites were employed in building the City of Rameses. Although the connection is plausible, it has never been convincingly argued, and remains extremely questionable.

Another piece of circumstantial evidence can be found in Papyrus Anastasi V, which dates to the end of the 13th century BCE. This papyrus contains a reference to two runaway slaves from the City of Rameses, the very city that the Bible claims the Israelites helped to build.

“When my letter reaches you, write to me about all that has happened to [them]. Who found their tracks? Which watch found their tracks? What people are after them? Write to me about all that has happened to them and how many people you send after them.”
(ANET: 259)

There are some obvious parallels between this text and the events presented in the Hebrew Bible. We have slaves and Israelites escaping from the same city, the Egyptians pursue both the slaves and the Israelites, the escape route is very similar in both accounts, and both escapes happened after dark.

The sceptic could argue that this papyrus could actually be a very good argument against the biblical Exodus, as the Egyptians appear to be vigilant enough to record the escape of two slaves, yet lax enough to fail to record the escape of two million! Perhaps the Egyptians simply did not want to record an embarrassing defeat by a group of slaves, or perhaps a record does exist and has not been found yet, but this papyrus does attest to the fact that slaves were used at Pi-Rameses, and that the escape route mentioned in the Hebrew Bible has external historical

support. But, as far as evidence for Israelites in Egypt, I am afraid that these few pieces of circumstantial evidence are "the utter limit for the historian of the Exodus; he can go no further" (Malamat: 18).

The Exodus from Egypt

Edwin Thiele informs us that

"Chronology is the backbone of history. Absolute chronology is the fixed central core around which the events of nations must be correctly grouped before they may assume their exact positions in history and before their mutual relationships may be properly understood." (Thiele: 137)

An absolute chronology for the date of the Exodus therefore becomes an extremely significant matter as so many other events in the Bible are related to it. Whatever date is accepted for the Exodus will have a direct bearing on the dating of other important events. For example, we are told that immediately after the Exodus, the Israelites wandered for forty years in the wilderness before they entered Canaan. Thus, according to the biblical texts, whatever date we adopt for the Exodus has to be forty years previous to the Conquest of Canaan by Joshua's armies. The dating of the Exodus does not only affect the dating of later events the events before the Exodus, such as the settlement of Jacob and family into Egypt, are similarly affected. What a historian has to do, when a date for any biblical event is proposed, is to compare that date to what is already known from history in an attempt to discover if the dating is plausible. A very good example of this can be found when the information from Exod. 1:11 is compared to what

is already known about near eastern history from the period that this verse suggests.

“In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.”

The date of Solomon's reign is worked out by synchronising certain characters mentioned in the Assyrian and Babylonian king lists (Dever 1997a: 69), and, when synchronised, we get the 4th year of Solomon's reign placed at around 966 BCE, this obviously then puts the Bible's date of the Exodus at 1446 BCE.

The first thing that this date can tell us is the elusive name of the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. This date would place the Exodus firmly in the reign of pharaoh Thutmose III (1479-1425 BCE) (Hoffmeier: 87). The name of the pharaoh is a very important piece of information, as it allows us to examine what we already know about this pharaoh, and discover if the claims for the Exodus at this time can be justified.

From what we know of Thutmose III, it seems extremely unlikely that the Exodus could have taken place during his reign. The Egyptian Empire was at the peak of her power at this time and Thutmose III had made over a dozen campaigns into Palestine that had succeeded in extending Egypt's empire from roughly the Euphrates to the mouth of the Orontes in the north, all the way to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in Nubia in the south (Bright: 106). This means that Palestine was essentially a province of Egypt, and this makes the biblical dating of the Exodus highly unlikely as:

“Joshua’s Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey, the promised land of the Bible, was part of the Egyptian Empire! Moses led his people out of Egypt and they wandered for 40 years in a part of Egypt (the Negev and Transjordan), then Joshua brought the Israelites across the Jordan back into another part of Egypt! This cannot be correct, as not a single biblical author expresses any awareness that there had ever been an Egyptian Empire in Palestine.” (Noll 2001: 78)

This information certainly suggests that the mid 15th century Exodus was highly unlikely; the Exodus group would simply have nowhere to go. But, we may be looking in the wrong place as the Bible also suggests another date for the Exodus from Egypt.

In the previous section we read that the Israelites had been employed in the building of the cities of Pithom and Rameses. Rameses is the city ‘Pi-Rameses’ that was founded by Sethos I and mainly built by Rameses II (Kitchen: 58). The building of this city cannot have been before 1304 BCE, as Rameses II’s birth has been dated astronomically, by a reference in Papyrus Leiden I 350, to either 1304 or 1290 BCE (Schmidt: 2). Consequently, “unless we deny the historical character of Exodus 1:11, the date of the Exodus is definitely fixed” (Sayce A.H, quoted in Bimson: 37), in the 13th century BCE.

Some scholars actually have denied the historical character of this verse, and they suggest that the references to both Rameses and Pithom in Exodus 1:11 are anachronistic (Bimson: 42). I suggest that the main reason for claiming this is to maintain the fundamentalist position that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and that 1 Kings 6:1 must then be accurate. Other reasons have been given, such as attempting to align the Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos, but nowadays

only a few fundamentalist scholars, such as Nahum Sarna (Dever 1997a: 69), John Bimson, and Bryant Wood (Weinstein: 93) adhere to the 15th century Exodus date.

Yet, even if the reference to Rameses is accurate, we still have a possible anachronism in the shape of the store-city of Pithom. Pithom means 'the house of Atum' and was only used as the name of a city in the Saite period (7th century BCE), although the name was known before the Saite period as the name of temples and temple estates, the name was never had any connection with cities (Lemche 1999: 398). Thus, the archaeological evidence does not support the two cities in Exodus 1:11 as ever being occupied, or even existing, at the same time, with one part of the reference appearing to belong to the 2nd millennium BCE and another one to the 1st Millenium BCE (Millar and Hayes: 68).

But, just because there looks as if there is at least one anachronism in Exodus 1:11, this does not mean that the information itself is unhistorical, as we saw in the discussion regarding the Hebrew Bible as an historical source, a possible anachronism may just be an indication of when the text was finally written down. It is perfectly plausible, that the Israelites were employed at Rameses and Pithom when they were known by another name.

It is another feature of the composition of the Hebrew Bible that can allow us to actually harmonise these two conflicting dates from 1 Kings 6:1 and Exodus 1:11. The Hebrew Bible, as commented on earlier, contains what appear to be systematic or schematic chronologies. In this instance, the 480 years in 1 Kings 6:1 has been identified as 12 times the 40 years that symbolise a generation, but it has been suggested that a generation is closer to 25 years (Rowley: 79). There is

non-biblical support for the designation of 25 years as a generation, for example there are four generations in the Ur III dynasty that covers 109 years, and there are ten generations in the First Dynasty of Babylon spanning 286 years (Rendsburg: 14 *n.*39). This would then give us a period of 12 times 25 years, or 300 years before the fourth year of Solomon's reign, i.e. 1266 BCE., a time more in keeping with the reference to the City of Rameses.

Another reason why the figure of 480 years is taken as symbolic rather than literal, is the information in the Book Of Kings that states it was also 480 years from the building of the Temple to the end of the Babylonian Exile, the author appears as if he was intent on placing the building of the Temple at the centre of Israelite history. Since schematic chronologies are indicative of fictional history, I believe that the more reasonable date based on the 25 year generation should be taken as the more likely, and this would fit in fairly well with the reign of Rameses II.

The Wilderness Years

As we already know, there is no direct evidence whatsoever for a group in Egypt that could be identified with what became known as Israel. But, scholars have not limited their search for ancient Israel to Egypt. Scholars have also investigated many different areas of the near east in an attempt to find evidence of some sort that may be linked to the Exodus group. Fortunately, the Hebrew Bible contains a fairly detailed itinerary of the Exodus group in the Book of Numbers chapter 33, and, since the location of the city of Rameses was already known, the logical step

was to look in that area for the sites that the Exodus group visited immediately after leaving Rameses.

There was an incident that took place before the Israelites entered the wilderness that really should have helped to narrow down the search for these missing locations. When the Israelites had left Rameses, there was one final obstacle that they had to overcome, namely, the armies of the Egyptian pharaoh. The Bible informs us that the pharaoh regretted allowing the Israelites to leave Egypt, and when he had this change of heart he decided to go after them. It appeared as if the pharaoh and his armies had the Exodus group trapped on the shore the Red Sea, but God intervened and divided the waters, which allowed the Israelites to walk through the midst of the sea. When the Israelites had all safely reached the opposite shore, God then closed the waters on the pursuing Egyptian armies, drowning them all, and the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptians was complete.

The location of the crossing of the Red Sea by the fleeing Israelites cannot be identified with any certainty. The problem of the location began when the authors of the Septuagint rendered '*yam suph*' as Red Sea, and since early English translations were largely dependant on the Septuagint, the error has continued to exist. Many Bibles continue to translate '*yam suph*' as the 'Red Sea', however, the 1962 edition of The Torah published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, has corrected this to read 'Sea of Reeds'.

Now, this correction that informs us that the sea crossing was actually at the Sea of Reeds provides the investigator with one major problem, because:

“Initially, the Red Sea can be ruled out, both because the Red Sea has no reeds, and because the lengthy route along the Gulf of Suez would have enabled the pursuing Egyptians to overtake the fleeing Hebrews.” (Eakin: 379)

As far as geography is concerned, the main objection to locating the sea crossing with the Red Sea is that those places named in the Exodus itinerary previous to arrival at the ‘*yam suph*’ would appear to be located in the eastern delta region of Egypt (Batto: 28) and, therefore, the crossing would have occurred before the Exodus group arrives at the Red Sea. The location of the sea crossing in Egypt is supported by the majority of scholars who consider that ‘*suph*’ is a loan word from Egyptian (Freedman: 636). The main argument is that ‘*yam suph*’ should be translated as ‘Sea of Papyrus’ or ‘Sea of Reeds’ because etymologically speaking ‘*suph*’ is a loan word from Egyptian ‘*twf(y)*’ which means ‘papyrus/reeds’ (Ward: 340). There is an excellent Egyptian source that supports the biblical narrative on this point. The Papyrus Anastasi III, 2, 11-12 claims that “The papyrus-marshes come to it with papyrus reeds and the Waters of Horus with rushes” (Gardiner: 74). This is referring to the area close to the city of Rameses, the exact place where the Bible claims the Israelites began their journey. However, this mistranslation removes perhaps the strongest clue as to where we should be looking for evidence of the Exodus group, at least in the early stages of their wanderings, but scholars have produced many different hypotheses of where the ‘Sea of Reeds’ may be located, none of which have stood the test of time.

After the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, the Israelites were to eventually wander the wilderness for 40 years because they had not followed God "wholeheartedly" (Numbers 32:11). If taken at face value, there should have been a group of over two million Israelites wandering around Sinai for forty years, making campsites, burying their dead, and perhaps even interacting with known peoples from the area they were wandering. It is not unreasonable to expect to find some sort of evidence, a fingerprint in the archaeological record that these people did indeed wander around the ancient near east. However, of the remaining sites listed in Num.33, there have only been two identified with any confidence, these are Kadesh-Barnea (Ein el-Qudeirat) and Ezion-Geber, a town midway between Eilat and Aqabah (Finkelstein 2002: 63).

After the Israelites left Mount Sinai, they journeyed across the wilderness toward the hill country of the Amalekites and settled in Kadesh-Barnea. The parallel passage in Numbers 13:26 informs us that it was from Kadesh-Barnea that spies were sent to Canaan and were to bring back a report about the strength of the Canaanites. When the spies returned they reported that the inhabitants of Canaan were very powerful and that they lived in large fortified cities. The Israelites began to have second thoughts about entering Canaan, and only Joshua and Caleb are said to have kept their faith in God's promise. As a punishment for this doubt, there was a divine decree that the entire generation would perish in the wilderness and only their children would inherit the land promised by God.

It is not certain how long this sojourn in Kadesh lasted. The whole series of chapters from Numbers 13 to 15 has no mention of any removal, and chapter 20 finds them still in Kadesh, so that it might

be inferred from them that almost the entire period of the wilderness sojourn was spent there. (Buttrick: 176)

Thus, according to the biblical narrative, we have a very large group living in an area that can be confidently identified for the best part of forty years. It is very reasonable to assume that archaeologists should expect to find some evidence of this event, a massive group such as this, living in the same area for a long time should leave some evidence of their stay. Kadesh-barnea, which has been identified as Ein el-Quiderat, was discovered by Moshe Dothan in 1956, and since then has been excavated to virgin soil by Rudolph Cohen (Dever 1997a: 72-73). Cohen did not uncover any evidence of occupation at Kadesh-Barnea before the tenth century BCE, and after that date he found evidence of three successive 'Israelite' forts dating from the 10th century to the 6th century BCE. This evidence clearly implies that it is impossible for the Israelites to have lived at Kadesh-Barnea before the 10th century BCE., and even more confusing, during the 10th century BCE, the Israelites we supposed to be living in Palestine during the period of the United Monarchy and not living on the border of Palestine planning their military campaign.

When we turn our attention from specific places to specific peoples that the Israelites were to meet on their wilderness sojourn, the available evidence again appears to deny any Exodus before the 13th century. We are told in the Bible that before entering Palestine, that the Israelites requested permission from the kings of Edom and Moab to cross their lands. The king of Edom met this request with a threat to march out and attack Israel with the sword (Num. 20:18). The king of Moab, Balak, similarly denied the Israelites passage through his land and even

attempted to have a curse placed on them. However, the American Rabbi Nelson Glueck conducted many surface explorations in the areas of the Transjordan where we would expect to find evidence of the Edomite and Moabite kingdoms. However, Glueck concluded that from around 1900-1300 BCE. These regions did not have any established settlements; they only displayed signs of nomadic or semi-nomadic occupation (Bimson: 67). There was certainly nothing at all that resembled established kingdoms. Glueck had to concede that:

“Had the Exodus through the southern Transjordan taken place before the thirteenth century B.C.E., the Israelites would have found neither Edomites and Moabites who would have given or withheld permission to traverse their territories.” (Glueck 1940: 146)

All things considered, the evidence that has been provided by archaeology almost universally points to the 13th century BCE, as the most likely date for the Exodus from Egypt, the 15th century BCE date is difficult to defend. The biblical texts and the archaeological data combine to make it impossible for the Exodus to have happened before this date, as not only was there no pharaoh Rameses before the 13th century BCE, there was also no kingdom of Edom or Moab.

The Military Conquest of Canaan

The military conquest of Canaan is, in my opinion, the most argued over period in the entire debate. As it became clear that the evidence for Israelites living in Egypt and for an Exodus from Egypt is wholly lacking, scholars tended to focus on the entrance into Canaan by Joshua and his armies in an attempt to establish an overall chronology of Ancient Israel's history.

The Hebrew Bible states that the Exodus and the Conquest are chronologically linked, set apart by a period of forty years. Apparently, the Conquest is the "last of a three part redemptive action by God, Exodus-Wanderings-Conquest" (Dillard: 1995: 45). Therefore, if archaeology could provide evidence of substantial military destruction at the sites mentioned in Joshua's conquest narratives, scholars could subtract around forty years from this period to roughly estimate the date of the Exodus.

Scholars have traditionally posited two different dates for the conquest of Canaan, and both dates are supported by two extremely important non-biblical sources. The supporters of the 15th century BCE biblical date have used the archives uncovered at Tell el-Amarna to support their date, and proponents of the 13th century BCE date invariably present information in the Merneptah Stele as an argument for their date.

The Amarna Letters date from 1400-1350 BCE and the information in the letters have helped to greatly illuminate the political situation in the near east during the Late Bronze II. These tablets, which are mostly written in Akkadian, were found in the ruins of a site built by Akhenaton (Amenophis IV) sometime during the first half of the 14th century BCE. No one knows for sure how many tablets were actually found since it has been suggested that some were subsequently lost or destroyed. Today there are 382 tablets housed in museums, of these tablets, 350 are letters of correspondence between various kings and vassals to the pharaoh.

Although some of these letters are from near eastern powers independent of Egypt (Babylonia, Mittani, Alasia, Assyria, Arzawa and Hatti, most are from vassal chiefs or rulers living in Syria-Palestine. Some 150 of the letters are actually from Palestine proper (Laughlin: 84-86). By Bible chronology, these letters were written just after the Exodus from Egypt and the military conquest of Palestine by Joshua's armies. If, as the Bible suggests, the conquest began forty years after the Exodus from Egypt, and the Exodus occurred in 1446 BCE, then the dating of the Amarna Letters is within a reasonable time frame for this date.

The Amarna Letters describe Palestine as being in a state of turmoil, and one of the major causes of this turmoil was the 'Apiru. Early hypotheses argued that the 'Apiru of the Amarna Letters were an external invading force, and that this essentially was reflected in the biblical narratives. Canaan, during the Amarna period, can be summed up as being a collection of city-states ruled by local vassals of Egypt. Some of these local 'kings' were trying to liberate themselves from Egyptian control and were also attempting to increase the size of their own territories by taking land from their neighbours. To help achieve these aims, they hired troops and mercenaries, and the Amarna letters identify these mercenaries as 'Apiru.

However, it appears that the scholars who presented this claim, H. Zimmern for example (Bimson: 241), were viewing the Amarna tablets from an erroneous preconceived stance. Believing that the 'Apiru were in some way connected to the Israelites meant that these scholars were expecting the 'Apiru to be an invading force, just as Joshua's armies were an invading force, and this is what

they found. But, the equation of the turmoil in Palestine at the beginning to mid 14th century BCE cannot be put down to an invading force at all.

The Amarna Letters cover a period of around fifty years, and sometimes the fighting was on such a small scale that a unit of fifty Egyptian soldiers would have been enough to quell it (Finkelstein 2002: 60). This does not really resemble the biblical account at all. Firstly, Israel was said to be able to muster 600 000 men of fighting age, and it is difficult to imagine that fifty Egyptian soldiers could pacify that extremely large amount of men. Secondly, the fifty year period that the letters cover is far longer than the time scale given for Joshua's conquest to be complete.

The Conquest of Canaan appears to have been achieved in a fairly short period of time. Josephus writes in *Antiquities of the Jews* Book 5 Chapter 1 Verse 19: "The fifth year was now past, and there was not one of the Canaanites remained any longer, excepting some that had retired to places of great strength." This five year period is given support in the Hebrew Bible where we can use the references to Caleb's age in Num. 14:7 and 14:10 to arrive at a figure of five years for the entire military campaign of Joshua. This is incompatible with the picture that is painted by the information in the Amarna Letters.

Another fact that undermines this claim is that Joshua's Palestine is presented as having many more city-states than are indicated in the Amarna Letters, suggesting that Joshua's invasion was much later (Kitchen 1966: 70). The equating of the turmoil in Amarna age Palestine with the Israelites is no longer clung to by any of the scholars involved in the debate, it is a good example however, of how

scholarly bias can often present a conclusion that suits their preconceptions, only for the entire theory to be completely rejected by further examination of the evidence. In fact, the ultra conservative Christian scholar John Bimson wrote in 1978 that:

“Study of the Amarna correspondence itself shows that the role of the ‘Apiru in the Amarna period does not resemble the activities of the invading Hebrews during the Conquest as presented in the biblical traditions.” (243)

The supporters of a 13th century conquest seem to have a stronger case than their 15th century counterparts when it comes to external evidence. The Merneptah Stele appears to signify that Israel was in Palestine at the end of the 13th century BCE, but as they were not a settled group, they could have been in the early stages of their military conquest of Canaan, a date that fits very well with the mid 12th century Exodus from Egypt during the reign of Rameses II.

The Merneptah Stele is undoubtedly a vital piece of evidence in the whole origins debate. Although the name ‘Israel’ can be found in an earlier text from Ugarit (Davies 1992: 60-61), that particular reference is to an individual warrior and no connection between him and the biblical Israel has been proposed. The importance of the Merneptah Stele lies in the fact that this is the first mention of an ‘Israel’ as a group in a non-biblical source. However, a little caution is advised before simply equating this ‘Israel’ with the Israel of the Hebrew Bible.

The inscription reads as follows:

The princes are prostrate, saying: ‘Mercy!’
Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows.

Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified;
 Plundered is Canaan with every evil;
 Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer;
 Yanoam is made as that which does not exist;
 Israel is laid waste, his seed is not;
 Hurru has become a widow for Egypt;
 All Lands are together, they are pacified;
 Everyone, who was restless, he has been bound. (ANET: 376-78)

The Stele was discovered by Flinders Petrie in 1896, in the ruins of western Thebes and commemorates the victory of the Pharaoh Merneptah in a campaign in Palestine in c. 121 BCE; the Stele itself is dated five years later at 1205 BCE (Shanks 1992: 19).

As can be imagined, this discovery was taken as being concrete evidence that supported the biblical Israel occupying Palestine at the end of the 13th century BCE. But, the Merneptah Stele only bears witness to the fact that an entity called 'Israel' was present in western Asia at the end of the 13th century BCE, anything other than this is pure speculation and is in addition to the evidence. There is no way to know for sure that Merneptah's 'Israel' is the same Israel of the Hebrew Bible, the stele does not provide any information at all to make that link possible. In fact, it is reasonable to say that there is no way to link the 'Israel' in the stele to any form of religious worship or even if this 'Israel' is related to the 'Israel' that emerged under David and Solomon some 200 years later (Freedman 1992: 95).

But, if there is some connection between the two, then certain information in the Stele can have some bearing on the biblical account of Israel's military conquest of Canaan. Perhaps the most significant thing about the mention of 'Israel' in the

Merneptah Stele is that it stands out from the rest of the names there because it is prefixed by the hieroglyphic symbol that denotes a 'foreign people'. Canaan is prefixed by the hieroglyphic that denotes a foreign land, Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yano'am are all prefixed with a hieroglyph that identifies them as cities (Shanks 1992: 19). This then suggests that the 'Israel' of the Stele was not a settled ethnic group inside Palestine, which could mean that the 'Israel' referred to, was in fact, the biblical Israelites before they conquered Canaan. This could support a 13th century date for the Exodus as we would expect to find Israel settled in Palestine if the Exodus had occurred in the 15th century BCE.

In an sincere attempt at objectivity regarding the inscription, and how it can aid our investigation into the origins of Ancient Israel, we have to be honest and admit that there is nothing at all in the inscription that suggests that Merneptah's 'Israel' was ever in Egypt, the only way we can link the two is by employing the biblical text. Without the biblical text however, all that can realistically be taken from the inscription is that at the end of the 13th century BCE there was a group of people in Canaan who were collectively known as 'Israel'. The stele tells us nothing more, it does not inform us which God or gods they worshipped, it gives no indication of how the people were organised, and in relation to the Exodus from Egypt the information contained in the Merneptah Stele is utterly irrelevant.

The Merneptah stela, then, provides us with evidence that some entity called Israel existed in the latter part of the thirteenth century B.C.E. but at present it provides no clear answer to the question of what that entity was, what its size or internal organization was, what the sources and socioeconomic status of its members were, or how, or even if, this "Israel" is related to the Israel depicted in the stories in the Pentateuch or the books of Joshua and Judges. (McNutt: 44-45)

Having said that we do not know for certain if there is a link between Merneptah's Israel and the biblical Israel, it is fair to say that the majority of scholars do believe there is some connection between the two, no scholar nowadays outright denies that there is any connection, they may be tentative, but they do not completely reject the possibility. There have been attempts in the past however, to try and dissociate the two. One particularly embarrassing attempt was by Otto Eissfeldt, who attempted to read the name 'Israel' in the Stele as '*Jezreel*' (Hoffmeier: 30). However, according to Kitchen, this was an "incredible howler" by Eissfeldt as the Hebrew 'z' appears as a 'd' or a 't' in Egyptian, so the translation to '*Jezreel*' is impossible (Kitchen 1966: 59 *n* 12).

Regarding the origins debate, the Merneptah Stele undoubtedly tells us that there was an entity called Israel in Palestine at the end of the 13th century BCE, an entity that was deemed important enough to be listed on a pharaoh's victory stele. If we follow the geographical locations of the defeated lands in the stele, the 'Israel' in the stele is located in the area where we should expect to find the biblical Israclites. I think that there is some connection between the two 'Israels', but I also think that the Merneptah Stele undermines the biblical account of the conquest of Canaan, as it not only nullifies the 15th century BCE biblical Exodus date, the information in the stele also conflicts with the claim of a universal conquest of Canaan by Israel.

As we have already discussed, it looks as if the majority of the evidence that is available points to a mid 13th century BCE date for the Exodus. If this date is

correct, then there should be archaeological evidence from the sites mentioned in the Conquest narratives of extensive destruction at the end of the 13th century BCE.

The Conquest of Canaan, in the biblical texts, appears to have been achieved in a fairly short period of time, five years or so according to Josephus and the biblical text. Common sense dictates that the cities that Joshua's armies were said to have conquered should display massive destruction levels that can be covered by this five year period. However, when we look at the dating of the destruction levels at many of the major cities mentioned in the conquest narratives, there appears to be some difficulty in sustaining the accuracy of the biblical account. The major stumbling block for a unified military conquest of Palestine by Joshua's armies is the evidence from the excavated remains of the cities of Jericho and Ai.

Jericho has been identified as Tel es-Sultan and during the 1930's John Garstang excavated the city and concluded that there was indeed evidence of "collapsed mudbrick walls under the ruins of houses that he identified as evidence of the destruction by the Israelites" (Calloway: 61) But, from 1952-58 Kathleen Kenyon extensively excavated Jericho and by using improved techniques she discovered that Garstang's wall, which he dated to c. 1400 BCE should actually be dated to around 2300 BCE. (*ibid*: 62). Kenyon had discovered many instances of collapsed walls dating from 3200-2300 BCE, which she mainly put down to seismic activity in the region. Kenyon also found evidence of a city wall, which she dated to c. 1560 BCE. But it can be stated categorically that Jericho was unoccupied and 'unwalled' after c.1560 BCE, until c.1200 BCE. At this moment

in time, the evidence of destruction from Jericho does not fit with either the 15th or the 13th the century date for the Exodus.

A former apprentice of William Albright's, Judith Marquet-Krause, excavated Ai (et-Tell) from 1933-35 and she concluded that Ai was unoccupied between 2400 BCE and c.1200 BCE. Joseph Calloway led nine seasons of extensive excavations at Ai 1964-76 and essentially confirmed what Marquet-Krause had earlier said. Calloway added that there was no walled city at Ai after c. 2400 BCE and the only evidence of any occupation after this date was of a small-unfortified village dating from 1200 BCE until the site was abandoned around 1050 BCE.

But, these two sites are not the only ones that cause difficulties for the biblical account. Hazor is also a problem as Yigael Yadin's 1230 BCE date for the city's destruction (Yadin: 17) has now been pushed back to 1250 BCE, a bit too early for Joshua's armies (Dever 1992: 31). Another terminal blow for the conquest model comes in the shape of the city of Lachish. This city has a destruction level that was originally dated to around 1220 BCE by J. L. Starkey (Yeivin: 52), but recently this destruction level has been dated to 1150 BCE or later by the discovery of scarabs of later Ramesside pharaohs (Dever 1992: 32). It is surely impossible for Joshua to have led armies against these cities when they appear to have a century between these destructions.

This pattern of incompatible levels of destruction and of unoccupied sites, is repeated across Palestine, and the archaeological evidence quite clearly falsifies the unified military conquest of Canaan as described in the Hebrew Bible, it simply did not happen. Dever has the last word on the conquest of Canaan:

“The conquest model is not subscribed to by most biblical scholars today, certainly no one in the mainstream of scholarship, and that’s been true for some time. Moreover, there isn’t a single reputable professional archaeologist in the world who espouses the conquest model in Israel, Europe or America. We don’t have to say anymore on the conquest model.” (Dever: 1992: 29)

The United Monarchy

The United Monarchy was the defining moment in Israel’s history, a time where Israel’s prehistory is left behind, and she enters history proper (Soggin, quoted in Whitelam: 127). Fairly recently, there has been a piece of evidence that has come to light that may be a directly connected to the United Monarchy. The Tel Dan Stele, which is actually more than one inscription, is presented as one Stele but is made up of various fragments found on two separate occasions. The first part was found at Tel Dan, which is in the north of the Huleh Valley, in 1993. Other fragments, that are alleged to belong to the same inscription, were discovered two years later. It is still hotly disputed whether these fragments all belong to the same inscription or not, Niels Peter Lemche is one scholar who has reservations over this:

“...the fragments belong to two different inscriptions is obvious when the two inscriptions are compared. First of all, it is clear that the lines in the two fragments do not match each other. Second, the style of writing is different from one fragment to the next, although the fragments were probably written at the same time. (Lemche 1998: 39)

The person who found the inscription, Avraham Biran, along with his epigrapher Joseph Naveh, dated the inscription to the mid 9th century BCE. They claimed

that the inscription celebrates the victory of an unknown Aramaean king over the allied forces of Israel and House of David ('Beth David') (Biran 1993). Biran and Naveh wrote a second article, which claims that they had identified the Israelite and Judaeen kings who were killed by the author of the inscription as Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah (Biran 1995).

This inscription has initiated an extremely heated debate, as the reference to 'BytDwd' may not be as clear as it looks. Kenneth Kitchen explains that opinions differ, and readings of the inscription include '*bayt-dawid*' (House of David), '*House of Dod*' (deity) and '*House of Vessel(s)*' (1996: 30). Philip Davies argues that 'bytdwd' might actually refer to a place or it may be the name of a building. Davies says that the study of Knauf, de Pury and Romer suggests that the '*dwd*' should be read as the name of a deity, and that the '*r'l dwd*' of the Mesha Stele fits in well with this (1994: 23). They argue that the Mesha inscription may refer to a movable object belonging to the cult of the god whose epithet was '*dwd*'. These arguments show that Biran's apparently straightforward translation of '*Bytdwd*' as 'House of David' is not universally accepted.

A major problem with Biran's translation of '*bytdwd*', is that in biblical references to the 'House of David' it is always written as two words '*bit Dwd*', as are contemporary names of dynasties in Syria and Mesopotamia, such as '*Bit Adina*', or '*Bit Gusi*'. When '*bytdwd*' is written in one word, as in the Tel Dan Stele, this is identical to how a place name would be written, Bethel, Bethlehem, Beth-Shean, so the 'House of David' could be a reference to a place known as 'House of David' just as Bethel is known as 'House of God'.

Noll (1998: 9) agrees that the inscription does indeed read 'House of David' but he has reservations over the two royal names on Fragment B2. He is concerned because Biran and Naveh interpret '... *ram Bar*' and '*iah Bar*' in Fragment B2 as '*[Jeho]ram Bar [Ahab]*' and '*[ahaz]iah Bar [Jeroham]*'. Noll agrees that these readings are 'possible' but by no means 'unequivocal'. He claims that '*The astounding term 'unequivocal' is employed by Biran and Naveh (n 19)*'. He gives a good alternative example for the '*ram Bar*' broken text. Noll thinks that it could just as easily read '*[Hi]ram Bar [X, King of Tyre]*'. He then says that the '*iah Bar*' does not need to be Ahaziah Bar Ahab. The '*iah Bar*' is only one possibility as there is little doubt that non-Israelite Syro Palestinians sometimes bore Yahwistic names.

I personally feel that Dever (2001: 29) is correct when he states that the case for the Tel Dan Stele being a reference to the dynastic 'House of David' is the obvious meaning of the inscription. However, when we consider the other archaeological data, the 'House of David' certainly did not occupy the large areas claimed for it in the Hebrew Bible.

The Bible claims that David became a general in King Saul's army, but Saul takes a dislike to David and he is forced to flee into the Judean hills. Whilst there, David gathered around him some outlaws and eventually joined with the Philistines to fight against Saul. The story ends with David becoming the king of Judah, and later king of Judah and Israel (2 Sam. 1-5). David then conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. Jerusalem was an ideal location for a capital as it stood midway between Israel to the north and Judah to the south, and these two

distinct entities became united under the one king. The Bible consequently presents David's kingdom as a united monarchy, which passed to his son Solomon upon David's death.

Most historians agree that at least parts of the Books of Samuel and Kings are based on real events, and that Saul, David and Solomon were real historical people (Noll 2001: 173). However, the majority of the stories of these characters are seen as being greatly exaggerated, or works of fiction based upon real historical people. Noll explains that the Bible's King David and the legendary King Arthur are similar inasmuch that both are based on real people but legends about these kings have taken on a life of their own (*ibid*: 173).

There is some evidence that at the end of the 10th century BCE the beginning of a move towards a centralised socio-political structure was taking place. This evidence includes the construction of a number of fortresses, production of agricultural surpluses, and some evidence of a build up of wealth (McNutt: 108).

A strong argument for the beginning of political unity in 10th century Canaan is the evidence of a marked shift from mostly small rural villages to larger urban settings, a feature that is more often than not a precondition to state formation (Dever 1997b: 249-50). Almost all of the Iron Age I villages of the highlands were gradually abandoned and were replaced by over a score of large towns, cities and many smaller villages. Although, many of the cities were already occupied, some new ones appeared that produced a more collective urban society than before (Noll 2001: 180). Most archaeologists interpret this data to mean that

Palestine had developed into a centralised polity stable enough to encourage monumental buildings and defence systems, with its political centre based at Jerusalem (McNutt: 108).

Another feature to support a 10th century BCE centralised polity is the evidence of an increased international trade during the century. There is evidence that supports Canaan being a centre of trade at the end of the 10th century BCE, through which goods from the south passed on their way to Egypt and other countries (Kitchen 1997b: 134-135). Copper was transported through Canaan from the Negev; spices from western Yemen; precious stones, gold, ivory and ebony from Africa, all made their way through Canaan and on to Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia (Noll 2001: 181).

An essential part of an international trade network is its dependence on a powerful bureaucratic and military infrastructure, and this can be supported in 10th century Canaan in the fortifications that emerge during this period. It is generally agreed that the 'burnt-out ruin heaps' (Holladay: 371) of Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo were remodelled into fortified administration centres, with casemate walls, six chambered gateways, and a palace complex (*ibid*: 371).

Thus, there does appear to be some solid evidence that a centralised polity was taking shape during the 10th century BCE in the region where the Bible claims the United Monarchy was centred. However, there is no way we can say for certain that this emergence of what looks like a centralised government was the United Monarchy of the Hebrew Bible. The evidence that was presented to support the

biblical accounts now seems doubtful. For example, the alleged Solomonic six-chambered gates at Gezer, Hazor and Megiddo may not be all that similar after all (Herzog: 231-46), and Megiddo may not have even had a casemate wall (Ussishkin: 1-18). More problematic is the suggestion that the fortifications at these cities look more like they belong to the 9th century BCE (Dever 1990b: 121-130).

The evidence we do have however, suggest that this entity was not a huge empire as described in the biblical texts.

Apparently the trend that was begun under David toward an autocratic, Jerusalem based monarchy reached full development under Solomon. Solomon was probably an unusually wealthy and powerful ruler by the standards of Early Iron Age Palestine. Yet viewed in the broader context of the ancient Middle East, he is to be regarded more as a local ruler over an expanded city-state than as a world class emperor. (Miller and Hayes: 199)

That the Bible presents the United Monarchy as an Empire covering almost all of Palestine, is not a great problem when we consider that embellishment of accounts was the order of the day for ancient scribes. There is ample evidence that a centralised polity was forming in 10th century Canaan, if the Tel Dan Stele is reliable then it is entirely plausible that this was David's empire, albeit a shadow of what the Bible claims it was.

Alternative Models of the Origins of Ancient Israel

When it became apparent that the Bible's version of ancient Israel's origins were looking more and more unlikely, scholars have searched for alternative explanations of how ancient Israel came to be settled in Palestine. The new explanations were all still reliant on the Bible to some degree, but socio-scientific/archaeological approaches were now viewed as the best way forward. As I said in the preface, I am not going to go into any great detail about anthropological models and systems, but a few words are merited.

As soon as archaeology was beginning to form into an academic discipline, archaeologists made use of anthropology to support their hypotheses, yet many modern day archaeologists have only a superficial idea of what anthropology actually is. This is not meant as an insult, in fact, it is to be expected as anthropologists themselves are not in total agreement over an exact definition of their subject. But, they are in general agreement that it includes "the description and analysis of primitive societies which are both non-literate and non-industrial and which are organised on a small scale compared to the complexities of the modern industrialised world" (Orme: 1). However, anthropologists do not limit their work to small-scale societies, they also work among literate and urbanised peoples and in societies that are far from small-scale in their organisation, but the heart of the discipline is still the small-scale society.

In order to study other cultures outside their own, anthropologists try to get as close as possible to their subject of research. The foremost way to do this is to

learn the language of the people, live among them for an extended period of time, and join in their everyday activities. Anthropologists call this method of research is 'participant observation'.

"The term 'observation' implies that the scholar should actually witness what he or she is writing about rather than rely on second-hand information received from travellers or untrained native informants" (Lang: 2).

During his 'participant observation' among the Nuer in 1930-36, the famous British anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard wrote:

'I learnt more about the nature of God and our human predicament from the Nuer than I ever learnt at home' (1977: 245).

Evans-Pritchard lived with the Nuer, he learned their language, studied their way of life, and became an expert on their rituals as well as their view of the world. Nuer religion, in his opinion, shared many features with biblical religion, including a possible monotheistic belief system, animal sacrifices, and prophets as prominent religious figures. Therefore, he claims, Nuer religion could provide the scholar with insights into his own Judeo-Christian tradition. Speaking about his experiences while living amongst the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard observed that both the missionary and the anthropologist felt as if they were "living in Old Testament times" (1956: vii). How many of Evans-Pritchard's observations were directly influenced by his personal beliefs is difficult to say, but the cynic could argue that the connections made by him between the Nuer and Judeo-Christian traditions are simply as a result of a type of self fulfilling prophecy, in other words, he saw the connections because he expected to.

Anyone who uses archaeological literature for investigating the origins of Ancient Israel, will frequently come across the term 'ethnography', this term is essentially just another word for anthropology and is a term that is now becoming out-dated. Ethnography initially helped to differentiate between descriptive fieldwork and the subsequent analyses and interpretation that constituted social anthropology. Therefore:

A study of the Australian Aborigines would be ethnography, whereas a study of kinship systems, which might well include much information from the Australian work, would be social anthropology. Today, the distinction is beginning to fall out of use (Orme: 1).

As stated in my introduction, I am not going to go into any great detail of how and why scholars constructed their different anthropological models, but some of the major anthropological works of the 20th century which are worthwhile studying for our subject are Bronislaw Malinowski's study of the Trobrianders in Melanesia, Franz Boas' work on the Kwakiutl in British Columbia, Robert Redfield's Mexican peasants, Edmund Leach's analysis of the Kachin in Burma and, as we have seen, Evans-Pritchards with the Nuer in Africa. All of these major anthropologists went and lived with the groups that they have written about.

One of the reasons why I have decided not to go into great detail over the mechanisms proposed by the social sciences is that very few modern day scholars involved in the debate actually discuss the methodologies employed by anthropologists. Modern day scholars certainly do use comparative anthropology to try and strengthen their arguments, Albright frequently referred to the *Sutu* for example, but this is usually restricted to comparisons of certain aspects rather than

a detailed analysis of each anthropological model. Since certain scholars, such as Evans-Pritchard, saw similarities between particular nomadic groups and the everyday activities of the Israelites in the Hebrew Bible, it occurred to the scholars of the early 20th century that if these groups shared similarities in everyday activities, then perhaps studying the way in which they became settled could throw some light on the origins of Ancient Israel. It is significant for the debate on Israel's origins that, although true pastoralists are mobile (Orme: 260), most pastoral groups follow a pattern of movement that allows them to establish a permanent home base, and in many cases, this leads to the group abandoning their nomadic lifestyles and settling in a hospitable area. This type of settlement was central to Albright's theory of Israel's origins whereby he suggested that the Israelites had always had some sort of settlement in the central hill country of Palestine, while many of them continued to drive their flocks between recognised areas of good pasturage.

As we will discover, comparative anthropology is employed by all the scholars who present alternative theories of the origins of ancient Israel. In the following reconstructions, the most important thing to demonstrate was not that new settlements had sprung up in Palestine during the Late Bronze/Early Iron Ages, but that a new people had entered the scene. New settlements that could be identified with having been built by the indigenous population were of no use to the scholars who wished to follow the biblical narratives as closely as possible, as the biblical narrative dictates that the Israelites arrived from outside of Palestine. That there was a fairly dramatic increase in the number of villages in the central hill country is not disputed, for example Israel Finkelstein records a near ten-fold

increase in the number of settlements after the start of Iron Age I (1988: 121-122). But, what was required was to determine if the occupants of these villages saw themselves as 'Israelite' and if they did, what evidence was there that identified the occupiers of these villages as 'Israelite'?

In the past the archaeologists were inclined to assign ethnic identity at a particular site on the basis of biblical references, the presence of certain types of pottery, and structural designs. But, it is now clear that neither occasional literary references nor isolated archaeological discoveries are conclusive evidence for identifying the ethnicity of a population (Moorcy 202-9). For example, in the Hebrew Bible the Canaanites and the Israelites are two distinctly different groups but archaeology has struggled to find material culture that will distinguish which is which in the archaeological record.

One way, in which anthropologists and archaeologists can ascertain ownership of certain ruins, and other artefacts, is to look for evidence of features that are unique to a particular group. For example, Manfred Bietak was able to determine that the inhabitants of the city of Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a) in Egypt were not Egyptian because the ruined residences there are identifiable with the architectural types "Mittelsaalhaus" and "Breitraumhaus" from the Northern Syria in the late fourth millennium BCE (Bietak: 12).

There were two types of archaeological remains that were thought to be evidence for attaching the ethnic label 'Israelite' to the new settlements in the hill country. The first is the so-called 'four-room' or 'pillared' house, (Shiloh 180-190).

However, the 'four-roomed' house type has been found in areas not associated with the Israelites and antecedents can be found in earlier Canaanite sites (Shanks 1992: 12). The second 'type' was the 'collared-rim' store jar (Ibrahim 1962: 25), thought by Albright to be indisputably Israelite (Albright 1949: 118). Again though, this pottery type has been shown not to be unique to the Israelites. For example, the same type of pottery was found at Megiddo, which had remained Canaanite until at least the 10th century BCE (Wieppert: 134). Thus, both are now recognised as types that are also found at many sites outside of the central highlands, in regions associated with the Canaanites and Philistines in the biblical literature, and in Transjordan and cannot be taken as an indication that a site was definitely Israelite.

More complex factors are now thought to underlie the presence or absence of certain types of material remains at these sites, and some of the differences are now attributed to social and economic complexity rather than ethnicity, for example, urban sites have different types of assemblages than rural sites. From this viewpoint, the pillared house and collared-rim type storage jars are widespread features of Iron Age I material culture in Palestine, their significance is not so much as ethnic characteristics, but for their practicality. Those features of Iron Age I highland material culture that differ from the urban assemblages are, therefore, best explained as socioeconomic adaptations to agricultural village life in the highlands, as differences between the socioeconomic lifestyles of urban and rural Palestine, not as ethnic differences.

Some archaeologists still argue that it is possible to identify a new ethnic group in

the material remains (Dever 1995: 200-213). For them, the question is whether this group can be labelled 'Israelite' and, if so, on what basis. Even if the unique character of the Iron Age I material culture from hill country sites indicate the functional differences between urban and rural 'lifestyles', these scholars believe that this can also express substantial information about the development of distinctive lifestyles in different population groups and therefore about the real dimensions of the behaviour associated with ethnic boundary marking.

Israel Finkelstein argues that the only material clue for ethnic affiliation in Iron Age I Palestine appears in the evidence for food consumption. He claims that pig bones are absent in the faunal assemblages of Iron Age I hill country sites, but are present in Late Bronze Age sites in this area and at Iron Age I sites in both the lowlands and Transjordan (Finkelstein 1995: 365).

Before the discipline of archaeology had developed, The Hebrew Bible's description of Israel's origins, including the miraculous deliverance from Egypt and the military conquest of Palestine, was, in general, accepted by biblical scholars as reasonably historically accurate. Yet, once archaeology became a well-established subject and archaeologists began trying to compare their discoveries with the events described in the biblical texts, belief in the Bible as a reliable historical source for understanding Israel's origins began to depreciate. Suspicions were being raised about many aspects of the Hebrew Bible's version of events. For example, why is there more or less a complete lack of archaeological evidence for a major event such as the Exodus from Egypt, or why is there a lack of occupation at major Late Bronze Age occupation sites such as

Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon, and, if the biblical record is accurate, why is there is there an abundance of consistent evidence of cultural continuity between the with Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age Canaanite society?

To gain good background knowledge of the dominant theories of how Ancient Israel came to settle in Palestine, it is necessary to study what has become known as the three classic theories or models of the origins of Ancient Israel. These three models are by no means exclusive, in fact there is a plethora of models out there, but each of these three models were hugely important when they were presented, and some elements of each one still provide the basis for many of the newer models.

The one feature shared by the following three models is that they all rely on biblical information as containing accurate information to varying degrees. As seen before, the Hebrew Bible's version of the occupation of Palestine was generally accepted by most scholars in the late 19th - early 20th centuries, and the first major challenge to that stance came from an essay that utilised anthropological and socio-scientific data namely, Albrecht Alt's ground-breaking '*Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palastina*', published in 1925. An English version of this essay, 'The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine' translated by R. A. Wilson, can be found in the 1966 Book 'Essays on Old Testament History and Religion'.

The Peaceful Infiltration Model

Alt's theory is know as the 'peaceful infiltration model' and suggests that the

picture painted by the narratives of Judges chapter one contains information that is more reliable and more compatible with the evidence than that outlined by the military conquest narratives of Josh.1-12.

Alt did not claim that Josh. 1-12 was entirely inaccurate he only suggests that there are parts of the texts that have to be corrected. For example, the unified military campaigns by the twelve tribes of Israel, outlined in the Book of Joshua, cannot be accurate as, according to Alt, there was no such tribal confederacy in existence until a fairly long time after those who entered Palestine became known as Israel. Alt claimed that, rather than a great military campaign, it was more accurate to presume that individual clans, or a small group of clans, that lived a nomadic lifestyle, gradually penetrated deeper and deeper into the more desirable pastures of Palestine and then came to some sort of agreement with the land owners about using these areas for a part of the year. Eventually, these clans gradually began to settle in the sparsely populated areas of the hill country where they were relatively unexposed to the attention both the Canaanite city-states and to Egyptian sovereignty. Once these clans had established a foothold in the hill country, they began to turn these areas into arable land and eventually settled into living an agricultural lifestyle. Alt saw this as a peaceful development because the use of this marginal land would not have threatened the well-being of the landowners and consequently the clans would have settled into to a sedentary life.

He contended that it was only during the second stage of settlement, when these clans gradually spread into the more fertile plains and valleys, which had long been the property of packed groups of Canaanite city-states, that some

isolated military encounters took place. In these encounters the clans did not always win, but they did have intermittent success where they drove away, or massacred the inhabitants, then they took over the cultivation of the fertile land. Alt named this second stage of 'Israelite' settlement 'territorial expansion'.

The foundation of Alt's model is the theoretical method of 'history of territorial divisions' which suggests that the territorial divisions in a country are always conservative (Weippert: 7), so that any alterations in political and economic relationships can only make minor alterations to the larger or smaller territorial units. When this theory is employed to explain the origins of Ancient Israel, it means that the territorial relationships in Palestine has to be examined before and after the period claimed for the 'Israelite' settlement, which in Alt's view the opportune time for this would be after the collapse of Egyptian domination in the Ramesside period.

In contrast to those scholars that preceded him, who had all started with the Hebrew Bible's version of the conquest and settlement of Israel in Palestine and then went looking for any connections that could be found in external data, Alt began by looking at records that could unquestionably be called original and which explicitly mentioned the territorial relationships in Palestine. From this starting point, Alt also aimed to discover the purpose of the different accounts of the settlement in the Hebrew Bible.

According to Alt, the main feature of the political organisation of Palestine in the pre-Israelite period was the well accounted for system of city-states mentioned in ancient texts from as long ago as the beginning of the second

millennium BCE. Alt's 'system of city-states' proposes that Palestine was divided up into quite a large number of small areas, each surrounding a fortified city which was usually home to a ruler with the title 'king'. This is not pure speculation, as the city-state system can plainly be seen, for example, in the rather extensive body of evidence for the Asiatic campaigns of Thutmosis III. The most significant source of information, are the letters from the city princes of Syria-Palestine in the archives of Egyptian kings in the region of Tel el Amarna. These letters show that the 'system of city-states' was unaltered by the shifting of the balance of power from one Egyptian dynasty to another.

By analysing the Egyptian sources, such as the Egyptian Execration Texts, and the city lists of Thutmosis III, Alt established that there was a considerable difference in political structure between the plain and the hill country. While the majority of the city-states were located in the plain, the hill country contained only a small, and declining, number of city-states. Indeed, the Amarna letters testify to the fact that there is no evidence, with the exception of Shechem, of a single city-state for the entire hill country.

After the collapse of Egyptian domination, Alt's sources depicted a very different view of the territorial divisions of Palestine. He noticed that the territories to the east and west of the Jordan was now divided up into several larger states, quite different from the earlier city-state system whose basic feature was the centralised city government. A crucial characteristic of these emerging larger states was their tribal or ethnic names. States, such as Edom and Moab, had never featured in the history of Palestine before this time, suggesting to Alt that the old city-state

system was in rapid decline and would soon cease to exist.

If Alt's model was to have any credibility, then he would have to deal with the problem of the military conquest narratives of Joshua 1-12 that disagree with his portrayal of a peaceful infiltration of Palestine by the Israelite clans.

Alt explained his solution to this apparent problem in a lecture at Gottingen in 1936 (Weippert: 20). He essentially solved the problem, at least as far as he was concerned, by pointing out that the conquest texts in Joshua 2-11 are a compilation of distinct narratives whose nature is not indicative of a genuine historical reality. He went on to show that these narratives do not even claim that Israel occupied the whole of Palestine, they only record occupation of a strip of territory from Jericho to Gibeon with the texts that give the first complete outline of Israelite territory not appearing until Joshua 13-19.

Alt's approach to these texts was to remove the verses that could be accredited to the hand of the later Deuteronomistic historian. When this task was complete, what was left did not indicate that there was any unified military conquest nor were there any claims of an absolute occupation of Palestine by the Israelites. Of course, the texts that were left still had to be examined individually, but this still supported Alt's model as these remaining texts did not portray Joshua as the all-conquering hero at the head of the all-victorious Israelite armies. Instead, the texts that put Joshua on a pedestal, for example Josh. 4:14 and 6:27, are shown to be latter additions to the text.

One of the more obvious clues to the reworking of these narratives can be found

in verses such as Josh. 4:9 where Joshua set up the twelve stones that are still 'there to this day'. Other verses (e.g. Josh. 6:25, 8:28, 9:27) also conclude with the words 'to this day' indicating that these are plainly aetiologies inserted at a later date to explain the origins of important contemporary phenomenon. Aetiologies regularly explain local phenomenon and, Alt points out, Josh. 2-9 only ever mention places associated with the Benjaminites so it is perfectly reasonable to attribute these events to Benjaminite traditions. The reason that these stories came to be applied to the nation of Israel was because of the role Gilgal played as a sanctuary for the Israelite amphictyony (Alt. 193).

At the time, Alt's theory was very credible, as we have seen in Orme's outline a feature of pastoralism is the establishment of new settlements in areas that others view as marginal, and in the situation that Alt's outlined it is quite plausible that the Israelite tribes settled in the marginal hill country of Palestine. In this area, the Israelites would have had the opportunity to settle peacefully in Palestine, they may have met with some minimal resistance but this resistance was not worth mentioning.

As can be imagined, Alt's theory caused quite a stir amongst scholars involved in the 'origins' debate, and it was no surprise that Alt's model came in for some heavy criticism from those who believed that the military conquest narratives were reasonably accurate.

William Albright almost immediately set about deconstructing and falsifying Alt's model, finding what he thought were some fatal flaws in the methodological approach taken by Alt. Albright's main arguments were that Alt had not paid

enough attention to the results of the huge number of archaeological excavations that had been performed after the end of World War One, and that his overdependence on the literary sources placed extremely restricted conclusions on his model. Albright illustrated how this approach can be problematic in coming to accurate conclusions about alleged historical events:

‘No historian of Israel can neglect the epoch-making significance of the work of Alt and his students in this field. However, in the enthusiasm of discovery Alt’s students (and to some extent Alt himself) have made the analysis of oral and written literary forms carry more than its just historical weight. Since all ancient literary composition had to conform to fixed patterns of oral delivery and formal styles of writing – a fact which cannot be doubted by anyone who is familiar with the literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia – the ultimate historicity of a given datum is never conclusively established nor disproved by the literary framework in which it is embedded: there must always be external evidence. (Albright 1939: 12)

Albright acknowledged the importance of aetiologies and their significance for explaining particular aspects of established traditions, using the Tower of Babel myth and the aetiological story about how the village of *Jifna* got its name from the belief that one of St. George’s eyelashes (*jafneh*) was preserved at a church there, to make his point.

However, he goes on to claim that we cannot categorise any narrative that contains an apparently aetiological element as being wholly untrue, as this would be placing too much emphasis on the aetiology and lessening the importance of the various other sources.

It is therefore, a priori impossible to say whether a given ‘aetiological’ statement is based on authentic tradition or is the result of a combination ad hoc. Only when there is definitive external

evidence can we be sure of our ground. Moreover, it is very important to remember that in early Israel as at Dura, traditions were subject to some control by written documents, so it is *prima facie* improbable that the record of important events was seriously falsified by tradition. (*ibid*: 13)

What was important for Albright was the external evidence, it was the external evidence that could prove if an aetiological tale was completely fictitious or not. The narratives about the military conquest of Palestine may have been partially rejected by Alt, who would place these in a secondary stage of Israelite expansion, but Albright thought these narratives were for the most part accurate recollections of past events. Granted, they may aetiological in nature, but for Albright the main thing that gave these aetiologies credibility was the evidence from external sources that in essence backed up the military conquest narratives. Albright was convinced that the growing body of archaeological evidence supported the accuracy of the conquest narratives in Josh. 2-11.

This brings us then to the second 'classic' model of the origins of Ancient Israel, the 'Conquest Model' or what is sometime called 'The Archaeological Solution'.

The 'Conquest Model'

As mentioned previously, Albright's principle factor for deciding the accuracy of traditional narratives was the existence of external evidence. Of course the external evidence did not solely consist of the information from archaeological excavations, Albright also used many texts from the ancient near east, including Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Palestinian documents.

Albright evaluated the evidence and concluded that there was indeed a sequence

of sites that clearly show signs of overwhelming destruction and sudden breakdowns in culture in the transition period of the Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age. In his opinion, such sites as Debir, Lachish, Bethel and Hazor were all destroyed during the 13th century BCE, with each site showing obvious conflagration levels, small burnt objects and pieces of charcoal (Albright 1935: 10-13).

After these apparently violent events, the resettling, either immediately or after a period of time would take the form of very basic buildings and inferior quality domestic utensils. This is perfectly plausible, and the fact that Albright could provide support from the archaeological record that these sites all showed this type of evidence in the 13th century BCE, and as we saw earlier the 13th century is the most widely accepted date for a military conquest, then he appeared to be putting together a very sound model of Ancient Israel's origins.

However, there were two major stumbling blocks for Albright's theory, namely, the cities of Jericho and Ai. Jericho (Tell es-sultan) was excavated by Ernst Sellin in 1907-1909, however, because of poor excavation techniques and the poor state of Palestinian pottery chronology, he did not produce a very reliable date for the destruction of Jericho by Joshua and his armies (*ibid*: 10). But the evidence unearthed by John Garstang in the early 1930's, using superior techniques, appeared to have produced two very difficult problems for Albright's theory. Garstang had discovered that in the Late Bronze Age there was no sign of the city wall that had been such a feature of Josh. 6, and he also maintained that there was really no evidence of a settlement at Jericho at this time. The only evidence of

anything relating to the Late Bronze Age was the Middle Palace, which he dated by using pottery found there.

Albright demonstrated that the Middle Palace pottery matches pottery from Bethshan and the Lachish Fosse Temple, therefore the pottery dates to the 14th century BCE. Since the series of names of Egyptian kings attested on scarabs found there breaks off at Amenophis III, the period of the latter's reign is to be regarded as the *terminus post quem* for the destruction of the Late Bronze city. In addition to this, the discovery of Mycenaean potsherds, albeit outside a stratigraphic context, as well as a few local imitations of Mycenaean pottery types excludes, according to Albright, a date before the middle of the fourteenth century and after the middle of the thirteenth. In a paper published in 1939, Albright concluded that Late Bronze Age Jericho must have fallen between c. 1375 and 1300 BCE, therefore he claimed that an occupation of Jericho in the 13th century cannot be proven. The review of Garstang's excavations by G. E. Wright, combined with the results of more recent excavations by Kathleen Kenyon, indicated to Albright that there was a city at Jericho in the 13th century BCE, however the remnants of it had all but disappeared as a direct result of erosion in the long gap in occupation between the destruction by Joshua and the rebuilding by Hiel in the time of Ahab of Israel (I Kings 16.34.)

Albright believed he had solved the problem of the city of Ai as well. The clear disagreement between the archaeological evidence and the biblical narrative in Josh. 7 was explained by relocating the conquest tradition from nearby Bethel, which was already shown to have been destroyed in the 13th century BCE, to Ai.

This would maintain the record of a military conquest by Joshua and at the same time illustrate how the aetiological narratives in Josh. 7 have a historical foundation to them.

Albright did agree with some of Alt's conclusions, for example he shared Alt's view that there were two stages to Israel's conquest of Palestine, but explained these two phases quite differently. Albright argued that the settlement of Israel in Palestine had actually begun in the age of the Patriarchs, and that Abraham had been a part of a group known as the 'Apiru, a semi-nomadic people who were well attested to in various sources during the 15th and 14th centuries BCE. Some of the 'Israelite' element in the 'Apiru settled in the marginal land of the hill country, and when their countrymen returned from Egypt in the Exodus, they then joined together and mounted a military campaign across the whole of Palestine. Albright also explains that this was why the later traditions could no longer differentiate the various groups.

There is no doubt that there was some evidence of destruction at some sites in the Late Bronze Age, but Albright's model was continually undermined as more and more contradictory evidence came to light through further excavation and revaluation of the evidence from sites originally believed to support the theory. Although the dating of destruction layers in Late Bronze Age urban centres is still controversial and constantly being revised, archaeologists have, for example, pushed the date of Hazor's destruction back to c. 1220 BCE (Yadin), a date that is earlier than the conquest is supposed to have occurred according to Albright's model. Also, Lachish's destruction has now been dated to c. 1150 BCE.

At the site of Lachish in the south, an earlier dig dated a destruction level to about 1220 B.C.E., which would fit the Joshua account. But recently scarabs of the later Ramesside pharaohs have been found that require us to bring that destruction level down to about 1150 B.C.E. or a little later. Now, clearly it is not possible for Joshua to have led the Israelite troops against Hazor in 1250 B.C.E. unless he was carried out onto the battlefield on a stretcher. Neither of these destructions can be attributed with confidence to the Israelites (Dever 1992: 32)

Dever could have gone further and stressed that there are no destruction layers in the 13th century BCE at any ruin in the whole of Palestine that can be attributed with any confidence to Joshua and his armies.

These two models continued to vie for popularity for about 30 years and the debate had, to large extent, become a little stagnant. This changed in the early 1960's when George Mendenhall (1952: 25) presented a model called the 'peasant revolt' hypothesis. This model has been considerably reworked and expanded by Norman Gottwald in his tome called 'The Tribes of Yahweh'

The Peasant Revolt Model

Although they vary extensively in their arguments and approaches, the basic foundation they shared was that early Israel was composed primarily of peoples from the local Canaanite population who became dissatisfied with their oppressed situation in the Canaanite city-state system, which led to them revolting and then moving to the marginal area of the central high lands. In contrast to Alt and Albright, who maintained that the residents of the new Iron Age I highland villages were composed of sedentary nomads from outside Palestine, Mendenhall assert that the vast majority of the population of these villages came from within

Palestine. Mendenhall suggested that the reason why the restless population finally revolted was the arrival of the Exodus group, complete with their new religion found religion of Yahwism.

Mendenhall's counter argument to the existing settlement theories hangs on one decisive feature, the identification of the 'Apiru with the Israelites. But if Mendenhall's equation is correct, then we can jettison the idea that the Israelites were 'nomads or 'semi-nomads' before they settled in Palestine, as the 'Apiru according to the undisputed testimony of all the texts in which they appear, were not a population of 'nomadic' or 'semi-nomadic' peoples. Mendenhall consequently believed that the two previous models, for which the nomadic origins of 'Israel' are vital, can be rejected.

In the Late Bronze Age, according to Mendenhall, there were certainly genuine nomads, for example, the Sutu, but, like the present-day Bedouin, they did not have an important role either politically or socially (*ibid*: 69). The shepherds who moved around in the border regions between desert and cultivated land in the course of transhumance must be clearly identified as separate from proper nomads. They belong with the farmers of the cultivated land and are essentially village-dwellers who, on account of the limited extent of cultivable land, have had to take to raising cattle.

It is also a mistake to consider the Israelite tribal organisation, along with its genealogical system, as an indication of nomadic origins, this is in actual fact a widespread characteristic of non-city cultures (*ibid*: 69) Also, Mendenhall

considers a Bronze Age 'tribe' very difficult to define. His final description regards it as 'a larger unit of society which transcended the immediate environment of an individual, normally a village, upon which the village could rely for aid against attack too strong for it to cope with unaided', (*ibid*: 70) a unit, therefore, which was held together not by the fact of its descent from a common, and perhaps fictitious, ancestor but by a complex of social feelings nourished by the experiences of the individual in childhood and adulthood.

Mendenhall saw the tribal identity thus achieved as called in question and neutralised by the process of urbanisation, so that the sharp contrast is not between the farmer and the shepherd, as the older models suggested, but between the city-dweller and the country-dweller. This claim is essential to Mendenhall's perception of the 'settlement' of the Israclites.

Just as Alt and Albright used the books of Joshua and Judges as a foundation for their models, Gottwald similarly used these and argued that when they were properly evaluated, they did contain trustworthy sociological information (1979: 25-29). Gottwald saw within the texts of Joshua and Judges certain clues that provided evidence for him that there was fairly widespread peasant disorder among different but unified peoples who ultimately became Israel.

Gottwald depended a great deal on the stream of sociological scholarship associated most closely with Karl Marx, which many critics find suspect because it rests so heavily on ideological assumptions unacceptable to them. He also uses both structural-functional and cultural-materialist models to assist his reconstruction.

Although he relies on Mendenhall's earlier proposal of a peasant rebellion against the oppressive Canaanite city-state system, Gottwald differs significantly from Mendenhall in arguing that the forces underlying historical change are economic and social rather than Mendenhall's ideological reasons.

Gottwald also recognised religion in materialist terms, and concluded that Israelite social and economic relations were more significant in initiating the society than the Yahwist religion as Yahwism only functioned as a kind of legitimising device.

Gottwald outlines his main conclusions as:

1. that early Israel was an eclectic formation of marginal and depressed Canaanite people, including "feudalized" peasants (hupshu), 'Apiru mercenaries and adventurers, transhumant pastoralists, tribally organized farmers and pastoral nomads (shorn), and probably also itinerant craftsmen and disaffected priests;
2. that Israel was emergent from and a fundamental breach within Canaanite society and not an invasion or an immigration from without;
3. that Israel's social structure was a deliberate and highly conscious "retribalization" process rather than an unreflective unilinear carry-over from pastoral nomadic tribalism;
4. that the religion of Yahweh was a crucial societal instrument for cementing and motivating the peculiar constellation of unifying and decentralizing sociocultural patterns necessary to the optimal functioning of the social system and, in extremis, to the sheer survival of the system; and
5. that a sociology of Israel's religion, rooted in an historical cultural-material understanding of religious symbols and praxis, accounts for all those "distinctive s" of Israelite religion that the biblical theology movement tried to accentuate and characterize, but with imprecise and muddled results. (*ibid* xxiii)

Gottwald contends that this depiction is supported by the Amarna letters, which reveal social unrest and rebellion within city-states, and consequently this was the first earlier stage in the process of civil disorder from which Gottwald sees Israel

as having emerged (*ibid*: 406). When the exodus group arrived in Palestine, the social rebellion finally began. The religion of the Exodus group, with its emphasis on the god who delivers, Yahweh, became the socioreligious ideology and organisational framework that helped to form the rebellious groups into a successful revolutionary movement. The newly arrived religion also allowed these groups to launch a very simple egalitarian tribal system of free peasant agriculturalists instead of the hierarchical and oppressive system they had rebelled against (*ibid* p.408). In contrast to other Canaanite farmers, who were subjected to taxation and debt payments, the early Israelites had become free agrarians with complete control over, among other things, their own grain surpluses, defences, and laws.

Gottwald has since altered his model in various ways but he still supports the idea of a social revolution although he now admits that cultic unity in premonarchic Israel can no longer be regarded as definite. In response to a symposium speech by William Dever, Gottwald explains why he has discarded the use of such terms as 'peasant revolt' and 'egalitarian society':

A major reason for Dever's lapse at the point of developing a covering theory is that he seems uninformed about recent developments in social-critical theory concerning early Israel. For example, he apparently does not realize that since 1985 I have abandoned the terms "peasant revolt" and "egalitarian society" as imprecise and misleading explanatory categories for early Israel, or that I have replaced them with constructs of "agrarian social revolution" and "communitarian mode of production." The result is that Dever's comments on my modeling of early Israel have as much currency as would an attempt on my part to assess Dever's archaeological interpretations based exclusively on his work prior to 1985. (Shanks 1992: 71)

Gottwald's interpretations of the archaeological and biblical material are still viewed as controversial. Many argue, for example, that there is no archaeological or biblical basis for his proposition of conflict between peasants and urban elites in Palestine during the Late Bronze Age. Another of his claims, namely that irrigation agriculture was an important factor in the settlement and that the knowledge of how to build these terraces was the principal feature have also been soundly refuted, particularly by Israel Finkelstein. (1988: 306-14). His study is nevertheless important, and signifies a turning point in the development of social-scientific approaches to understanding the history of ancient Israel.

The enduring feature of both Mendenhall and Gottwald's models is the agreement between modern-day scholars that the origin of most of the inhabitants of the new Iron Age I villages in the central hill country were indeed original to Palestine. New improved methods of socio-scientific enquiry suggests that there was no large influx of people from outside Palestine, but that the continuity in the material culture across the whole of Palestine is indicative of an indigenous movement of people from the busy urban centres to the marginal areas of the central hill country.

It is not possible to discuss every single model that has been proposed to explain Ancient Israel's appearance in Palestine, but I feel that there are two models proposed in recent years that merit a brief discussion here. The two models are referred to as the "peaceful transition" or "transformation" model proposed by Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam (1987) and Israel Finkelstein's (1988) version

of the "symbiotic" or "internal nomadic settlement" model.

The 'Peaceful Transition' Model

Coote and Whitelam approached their study mainly on anthropological and social scientific theories and models and on analysis of settlement patterns because in their opinion settlement patterns are 'precisely the best historical evidence we are in possession of with respect to the emergence of Israel' (1987: 18).

Coote and Whitelam also the question of how ancient Israel emerged has been influenced too much by interpretations based on the biblical texts. The emphasis in this model is on gradual evolution and cultural continuity rather than "destruction" or "collapse," with the transition manifest in the Iron Age I highland settlements being viewed as a process, probably lasting at least half a century if not more, that can only be understood as part of longer-term trends in the history of the region. From this perspective, the increase in highland rural settlements is regarded as having been similar to shifts in other areas of the eastern Mediterranean during a long series of growth, stagnation, decline, and regeneration in Palestine's history, and not as a unique event.

Coote and Whitelam's model makes extensive use of Braudel's 'La Longue Duree' hypothesis. Braudel suggests that history's epic events, or 'surface events' (23) should be understood as being part of a more permanent, regular and less emphasised background, and that these epics cannot be fully comprehended without taking background information into consideration. As far as our enquiry about the origins of Ancient Israel is concerned, Coote and Whitelam suggest that:

The emergence of Israel, dated to about 1250-920 BCE, is, to use concepts popularised by Braudel, a surface event understandable only in terms of the wider, slower movement of much longer duration, what Braudel styles '*la longue duree*'. Human beings in history are constrained by climate, topography, vegetation, animal population, agricultural potentialities, and the like. Surface events, primarily those events which are most often the focal point of traditional political histories, are played out around more permanent elements such as urban sites, trade routes, harbours, and climate. The realisations of the various potentialities of Palestine have been governed through out its agrarian history by the presence (or more rarely absence) of outside powers and the complex interaction of external world events. (1987: 23)

For Coote and Whitlam, understanding the type of social change that occurred in this period of transition involves investigation and comparison of settlement patterns and demography over long periods of time. The continued rule over this region by external political powers is taken to be an enduring feature of Palestinian history, and to have had a direct effect on settlement patterns. This is related to Palestine's geography mainly because of its key position in the Eastern Mediterranean trade routes; this made it especially susceptible to any disruption or decline in the major centres.

In this model, Israelite origins are explained as a pattern of settlement and agriculture in the highlands that is comparable to the cyclical settlement history of the region. The major settlement phases are shown to have occurred in the Early Bronze I-III, Middle Bronze II, Iron I, and the Roman-Byzantine periods, with the early Bronze IV and the Late Bronze Age being presented as periods of major decline (*ibid*: 71-75). These cycles were influenced by a variety of factors that include urbanisation, interregional political and economic relations, and local sociopolitical structure, i.e. Palestine's condition in relation to wider economic

and political systems and the dynamics of the economic, social, and political interrelationships with city and urban elites, bandits, and nomads (*ibid* 89-95). The city and urban elites, pastoralists, and bandits are vital because they were more closely connected with external political powers and trade, and the pastoralists and bandits because they defined the boundaries of state power. In periods of political stability high levels of trade and external investment inspired dense settlement in the highlands, while a collapse of these conditions had the opposite effect. According to Coote and Whitelam, the Iron Age I settlement of the highlands does not fit this pattern, because it occurred after the decline of the Late Bronze Age imperial world order. Although Late Bronze Age Canaan was characterised by urbanism, external political control, and trade in coastal areas, the non-urban highland region was unstable. Instead of supporting a large peasant population, as in Middle Bronze II, the highland population consisted largely of bandits and pastoralists whose well-being depended on urban elites and trade.

The root cause of the shift in settlement patterns during Iron Age I, in Coote and Whitelam's model, was the general disruption in international trade at the end of the Late Bronze Age was not a result of either a social conflict brought about by neither class struggle nor external infiltration. Therefore, we should understand that the increase in number of settlements in the highlands was as a result of economic urban decline.

The decline of the trade and economy that had sustained the power structures of the Palestinian city-states, were essential to the economic, political, and social transformations in Iron Age I Palestine. The urban elite and their means to sustain

their power were negatively affected, thus creating the conditions that led to the establishment of new settlements in the highlands and marginal areas of Palestine. Rural groups, nomads, bandits, and, peasants who were also economically and politically dependent on trade, could no longer maintain profitable relations with the cities, and out of necessity turned to local production in areas that had previously been part of a general pattern of seasonal transhumance, where they established agricultural village settlements and became more politically independent. The normal interregional social divisions were replaced by an interregional class distinction opposed to urban elites and state authority, whose resulting lack of control in these areas would have contributed to the increasing political independence (*ibid*:128-129).

The outcome of this was an 'Israel' in the form of a segmentary society, consisting of a loose federation of highland villages and towns, pastoral nomadic groups, and previous bandits. But rapid population growth, uneven productivity of agricultural land, regional intensification of production, and revival of international trade soon led to the reintroduction of centralised power.

Characteristic of this model is a rejection of models that propose massive population withdrawal from Canaanite urban centres and internal nomadic movement as explanations in and of themselves, even though such factors are acknowledged as having been involved. The settlement in the hill country and the consequent increase in population are attributed to the demise of urban life in the lowlands, which permitted greater expansion and population growth within the villages naturally over a period of several generations.

The 'Symbiosis' Model

The final model that I would like to look at is the 'symbiosis' or 'internal nomadic settlement' model (Finkelstein: 1988). This model is similar to Alt's as it stresses a nomadic origin for the Iron Age I settlers, but a significant divergence is that the early Israelites are viewed as having been descended from the local pastoral nomadic population, and not from foreign nomadic groups that migrated into Palestine.

In his reconstruction, Finkelstein calls attention to similarities with the settlement patterns of early 20th century Arab villages and modern pastoral nomads in the process of sedentarisation. He claims that the process of settlement was closely connected with the environment, the landscape, the climate, and the land's economic potential were all factors that contributed to the settlement of 'Israel' in Palestine (*ibid*: 20-21) Finkelstein further declares that anthropological studies of the situation in Palestine during the period of Turkish rule suggests that sedentary peoples tended to become nomads in times of upheaval, but were often forced later to settle down again as a result of crises in the production of agricultural goods (*ibid* 342-346).

As in Coote and Whitelam's model, Finkelstein's model examines the evidence in a broad historical context, centring on the central highlands areas associated in the biblical texts with the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. The pastoralist 'Israelites' had lived in close proximity to and in symbiosis with, villages and cities. The origins of these pastoralists are traced to a period of urban collapse at the end of

the Middle Bronze Age when they migrated to the highlands and a substantial element of the population subsequently became "retribalised" throughout the Late Bronze Age, living on the margins of the settled areas or perhaps even in their midst. As the Late Bronze Age urban centres declined, these highland pastoral nomads lost the trading market on which they had depended for agricultural products. The pastoralism built around symbiosis with the Late Bronze Age urban settlement systems became impossible, and, out of necessity, they became sedentary farmers and established villages throughout the late 13th and 12th centuries BCE. This occurred in the central hill country because the more desirable areas became overcrowded (*ibid*: 336-51).

The majority of Finkelstein's study is a re-examination of the archaeological evidence. In support of his argument for a pastoral background, he lists the following evidence:

1. Survey data which suggest that the earliest stage of the settlement was most dense in regions suitable to cereal crops and pasturage and relatively sparse in areas appropriate to horticulture and mixed agriculture
2. The 'oval courtyard' layout of settlements in the earliest stratum which, he argues, corresponds with the way in which the modern Bedouin sometimes arrange their tents in encampments to protect their flocks
3. the form of the 'four-room' pillared house, which he compares to the living arrangement of a typical Bedouin tent, the pillars being a later development related to the structural requirements of hill-country sites, and
4. the lack of variety in the early highland assemblages (*ibid*: 274)

On the basis of survey data that suggests a pattern of movement from the eastern

desert fringes toward the forested slopes of the west, the spread of this new culture into the highlands is interpreted as having occurred at a gradual pace. Finkelstein points to his Ephraim survey, which indicates an original concentration of settlement sites in the eastern part of the hill country, an area that is suitable for a mix of limited dry farming and animal husbandry, followed by a slow spread of occupation westward into the foothills. The spread of settlement to the southern slopes of Ephraim, a region suitable for horticulture, occurred only later in Iron Age I and in Iron Age II (*ibid* 336-51). This demographic shift is cited as evidence that in the early stages of the settlement the population was still in transition between pastoral nomadism and sedentary life, as is his interpretation that the circular layout found at earlier sites no longer occurs in later phases, where there is also an increase in the number of silos, indicating that the inhabitants had become fully settled by that time. The geographical and economic expansion involved a gradual shift from regions adapted for an economy based on growing grain and herding to one that was based primarily on horticulture a shift that also brought about significant sociopolitical change. The argument relies partly on the supposition that settlement in areas suitable for horticulture assumes a sedentary population prepared to wait a number of years before harvesting the fruits of its labour, whereas a subsistence base of cereals and pastoralism did not require year-round occupation at permanent sites.

Arguing against the hypothesis that the Iron Age I settlers were of urban 'Canaanite' origin. Finkelstein asserts that the ceramics from the earliest stratum are completely different from the Late Bronze Age Canaanite repertoire and thus can be identified as early 'Israelite'. While he acknowledges some connection

with Canaanite types, Finkelstein explains this by arguing that these ancient pastoral nomads incorporated Canaanite ceramic traditions, just as modern pastoral nomads do when they settle down and become farmers. The signs of continuity with late Bronze Age traditions indicate nothing more than some influence from Iron Age I lowland sites. Both the continuity and the discontinuity are interpreted as indicating environmental and socioeconomic conditions rather than direct roots in the Late Bronze Age lowlands.

In contrast to Coote and Whitelam's broad-ranging study, Finkelstein's 1988 study focuses mainly on a particular region and very close examination of the archaeological evidence. However, he pays little attention to evaluating the place of the lowland urban communities and the wider interregional forces involved in the transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I. In a later publication, however, he considers these forces more directly, arguing that regionalism played an essential part in Iron Age I cultural and demographic developments, but that each region was also influenced to some extent by either proximity to or isolation from the various urban cultures of the lowlands (Finkelstein 1995: 352).

Finkelstein's hypothesis remains controversial, particularly in relation to the way in which he interprets the data in his arguments for lack of continuity with Canaanite culture and for pastoral nomadic origins. Many archaeologists see a marked continuity in material culture between the highland settlements and longer-settled 'Canaanite' sites from the very beginning of the expanded settlement, and the evidence from *'Izbet Sartah* and other sites is interpreted by others as indicating that the people who had settled there were not pastoral

nomads, but experienced stockbreeders and efficient farmers, able to produce significant surpluses, as is indicated by the presence of silos and storage pits. Finkelstein's model has also been faulted for concentrating too much on the sedentarisation of pastoral nomads. He has neglected to consider that there must have been other groups involved in the process.

Most of the recent 'socio-scientific' models, share certain basic outlooks both in their approaches and in their interpretations. Normally, there is more dependence in these models on archaeological information than on the biblical traditions. But, there is now more willingness to using models from anthropology as a way of enlightening the information from ancient sources than there was in the early 20th century. The highlands are now generally viewed as an area that was very responsive to any change in circumstances and as a result, any variation in social or economic factors would have an effect on the region. A long-term historical perspective is an important element in the most recent models, and there is general agreement that the majority of the Iron Age I highland population was indigenous and diverse. It is looking almost certain that the Israelites must have emerged from within Palestine itself, and there is no longer need to look for evidence of an Exodus for Egypt, or to look for any external group settling in Palestine that may have become what we now know as Israel.

Conclusion

The debate over the origins of ancient Israel has been a long and torrid one, stretching back centuries to a time when virtually no one would dare to question the authenticity of the biblical traditions. Thankfully, these days are behind us now and freedom of religion and freedom of speech has allowed people to freely examine and criticise whatever texts they wish to.

Archaeology is such an important part of this debate that anyone wishing to enter the debate really needs to have good background knowledge of archaeology and what it can and cannot tell us. Ideally, I would suggest that some sort of formal qualification in archaeology would be desirable as it really does benefit the researcher to be aware of how and why archaeologists come to their conclusions. One of the main protests that gets levelled at some of the critics of the biblical accounts of Israel's origins is that they are not archaeologists, although this is really just a device for trying to undermine their arguments, I do think that a qualification in archaeology should be sought after.

Archaeology itself cannot prove anything for certain, but it is extremely good at disproving something. It seems that the one version of ancient Israel's origins that archaeology has helped to falsify completely is the biblical one; none of the main players in the debate now adhere to a literal reading of the biblical text and I see this as a good thing. I am not trying to undermine anyone's beliefs, and I certainly believe that the Bible is a wonderful collection of ancient literature, but I feel that belief in the biblical narratives have actually held back this debate for a

long time. The scholars who believe in the biblical narratives appear to have found it difficult to stand back from their faith when investigating the biblical claims and this, in my opinion, has resulted in the misinterpretation of a great many of the artefacts recovered from the near east. This has far reaching consequences, as effectively these scholars may have claimed another people's history for Israel.

There are a great many things in the debate over the origins of ancient Israel that I have found extremely surprising, and I am sure that anyone that is relatively new to the debate would find the same. I suppose the greatest surprise is that the stories that I grew up with have all but entered the realm of myth and legend. The epic stories of the Exodus and Conquest that so many of us immersed ourselves in at Sunday School and Bible Classes, can no longer be taken as historical, there may well be some historical elements in these stories but these kernels appear to be too well buried at the moment. There is more to this than shattering childhood memories of course, the modern day State of Israel makes its claim to the land based on these narratives, and this is so much more important. But, as these stories are not supported by the external evidence then perhaps it is time for the Israeli's and Palestinians to gather round the negotiating table again and discuss the way forward for peace in the region. I cannot envisage this happening in the near future, as anyone who dares to suggest that perhaps Israel may not have the right to the land after all, and that the biblical accounts are unhistorical, runs the risk of being labelled an anti-Semite.

In regard to this name calling, this is a part of the debate that I have purposely tried to avoid mentioning, but it is now becoming such common place that any newcomer really has to be aware of what they are letting themselves in for if they wish to become part of it. I personally find the name calling and claims of poor scholarship between the leading figures in the debate hard to believe. We have a group of extremely intelligent and hard working scholars who have become involved in actions more suited to a school playground than academia. The strange thing is all the protagonists agree that the best way forward is to work together and stop the childish antics, but when it comes to putting this into practice it all falls apart. I acknowledge that it is difficult not to retaliate when someone makes personal comments about you, but to reply just keeps this going and detracts from the real issues in the debate. Hopefully, the leading scholars can settle their differences and everyone can work together to try and establish the historical origins of ancient Israel once and for all.

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