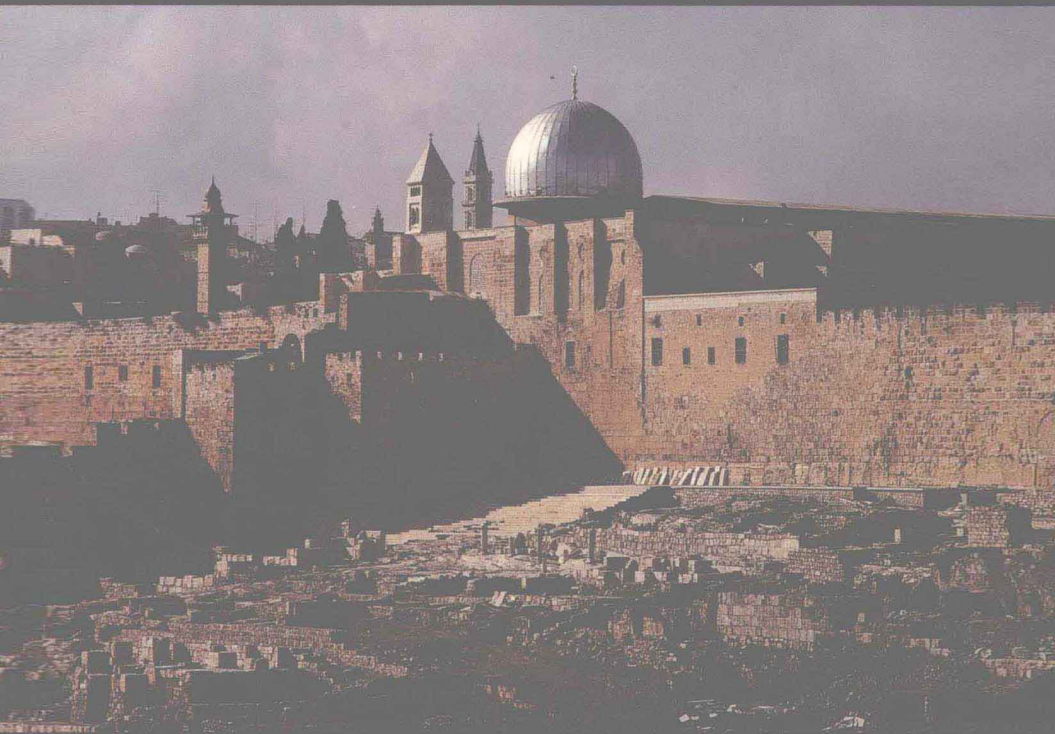


ANCIENT ISRAEL

A Short History
from Abraham
to the Roman
Destruction of
the Temple



P. Kyle McCarter, Jr.

Nahum M. Sarna

Joseph A. Callaway

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Edited by
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PRENTICE
HALL

PRENTICE-HALL
ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, NEW JERSEY

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ancient Israel : a short history from Abraham to the Roman destruction
of the Temple / edited by Hershel Shanks.

p. cm.

Includes index.

Contents: The Patriarchal Age / P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. -- Israel in
Egypt / Nahum M. Sarna -- The settlement in Canaan / Joseph A.
Callaway -- The united monarchy / André Lemaire -- The divided
monarchy / Siegfried H. Horn -- Exile and return / James D. Purvis -
- The Age of Hellenism / Lee I. A. Levine -- Roman domination /
Shaye J.D. Cohen.

ISBN 0-13-036435-5 (pbk.) : \$15.00

I. Jews--History--To 70 A.D. I. Shanks, Hershel. II. Biblical

Archaeology Society.

DS117.A66 1988b

933--dc19

88-22583

CIP

Copyright by the Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988

Co-published by: Biblical Archaeology Society

3000 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20008

and

Prentice-Hall

A Division of Simon & Schuster

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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Printed in the United States of America

Design by Auras Design, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-42996

ISBN #0-9613089-4-X (clothbound)

ISBN #013-036435-5 (paperbound)

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*

Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*

Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*

Prentice-Hall Hispanoamerican, S.A., *Mexico*

Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*

Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*

Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*

Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

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On the cover: The silver dome of the Al-Aqsa mosque on Jerusalem's Temple Mount overlooks extensive excavations of the ancient remains along the Old City's southern wall. *Photo by Garo Nalbandian.*

Introducing the Authors . . .

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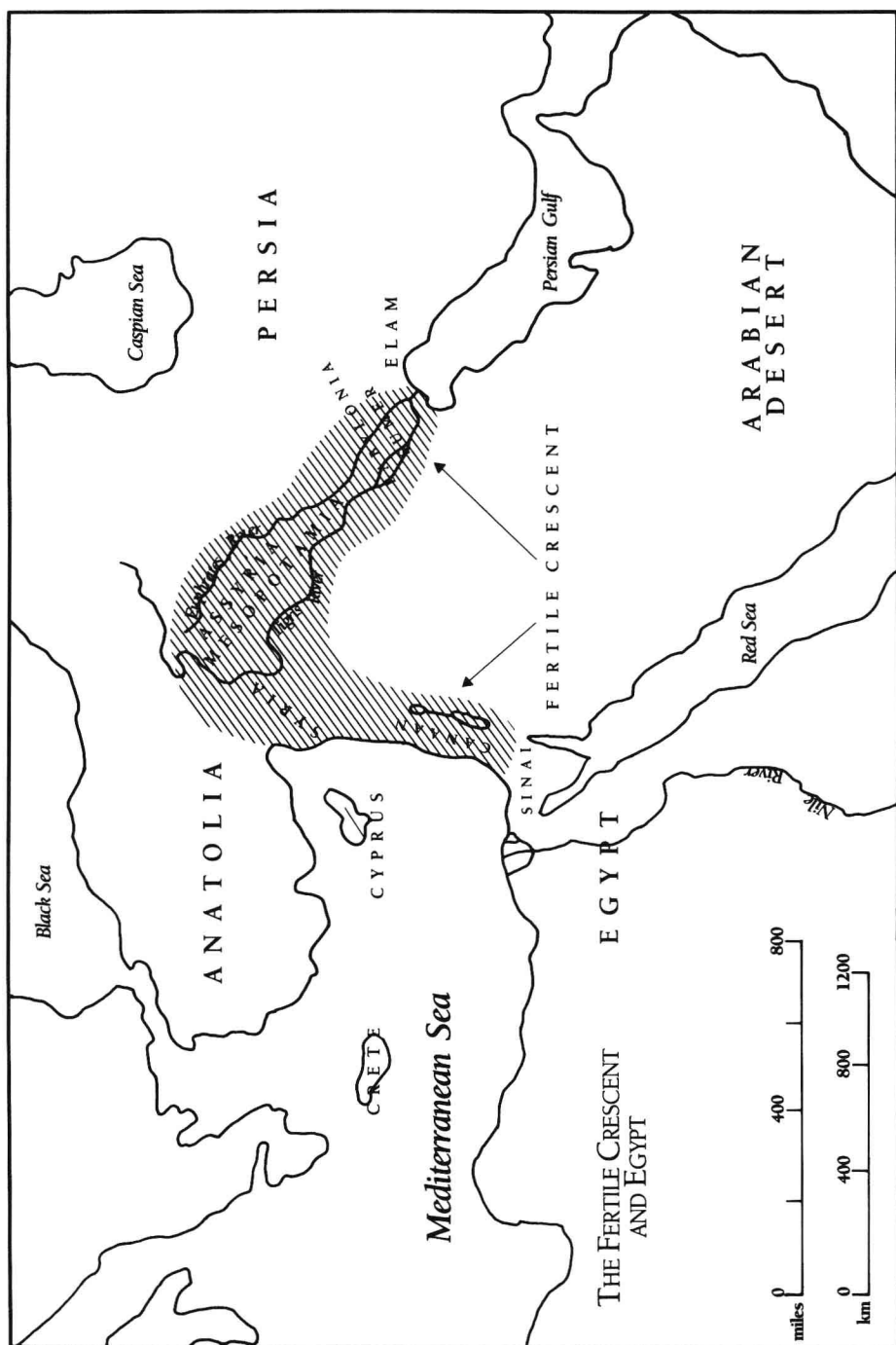
SIEGFRIED H. HORN directed the excavation of Hesban from 1968 to 1973 after having dug at Shechem for four seasons in the 1960s. Now dean and professor emeritus at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, Horn was honored in 1978 when the university's archaeological museum was renamed for him. The author of 12 books and more than 800 articles, Horn is a former director of the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan.

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Abbreviations

AJS	Association for Jewish Studies	4 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962; supp. vol., 1976)
ANEP	<i>Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> , James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954; 2nd ed., 1969)	IEJ <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i> , ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 3rd ed., 1969)	IES Israel Exploration Society
Antiq.	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>	JAAR <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
Apion	Josephus, <i>Contra Apion</i>	JAOS <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i>	JBL <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research	JCS <i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>	JEA <i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>	JJS <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>	JNES <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
BAS	Biblical Archaeology Society	JNSL <i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>	JQR <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>	JR <i>Journal of Religion</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>	JSJ <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>	JSOT <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
BS	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>	JSS <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
BZAW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>	MDOG <i>Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i> , ed. I.E. Edwards (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981)	NTS <i>New Testament Studies</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>	PAAJR <i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
CHJ	<i>Cambridge History of Judaism</i> , ed. W.D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984)	PEQ <i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
EAEHL	<i>Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> , 4 vols., ed. Michael Avi-Yonah and Ephraim Stern (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975)	RB <i>Revue Biblique</i>
HDB	James Hastings, ed., <i>Dictionary of the Bible</i> (New York: Scribners, 1963)	REJ <i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>	SBL <i>Society of Biblical Literature</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>	THB <i>Tyndale House Bulletin</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> ,	TDOT <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 5 vols., ed. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978)
		VT <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
		War Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i>
		ZAW <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
		ZDPV <i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, our gratitude goes to the eight authors of the chapters in this book. Each of them is a great scholar absorbed in a dozen different tasks. Each took time out to synthesize and summarize, to speak to the layperson about a particular period in ancient Israelite history in a way that could be easily understood. Each willingly worked with the editor to polish and clarify, to enhance understanding without sacrificing detail or accuracy.

The beautiful color pictures that enhance the text could not be included within the strictures of commercial publishing. To bridge this gap, so that we could have a colorful book as well as a readable text, several foundations and individuals stepped forward. We are deeply grateful to them:

The Joseph Meyerhoff Foundation

The Leopold and Clara M. Fellner Charitable Foundation, Frederick L. Simmons, Trustee

Kathe Weiss Schwartzberg

Milton Gottesman, Esq.

Arnold J. and Amalie M. Flegenheimer

The staff of the Biblical Archaeology Society worked unstintingly, as usual, to make this book a superior product: Wendy Miller copy-edited the text with great care, wrote the captions and prepared the map material; Carol Andrews undertook the painstaking task of editing the endnotes; Susan Laden coordinated the entire production; Robert Sugar designed the book and its cover with the immeasurable assistance of Karol A. Keane.

Thanks also to Barry J. Beitzel, author of *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, who consulted on the maps; Donald Wigal, who prepared the index; and our printer, Alvin Shultzberg of Townhouse Press.

Finally, we thank the staff at Prentice-Hall for their guidance and support: Joseph Heider, Religion Editor, Simon and Schuster Higher Education Group; and Linda Albelli, his assistant.

Hershel Shanks



Introduction

HERSHEL SHANKS

This is a unique history of ancient Israel. Obviously, there are many other histories of ancient Israel, some of them recent, but none like this one. These are the features that make this one unique:

- It is short. The text itself—from Abraham to the Roman destruction of the Temple—is only 235 pages, including pictures, charts and maps.
- The scholarship is absolutely first rate. This is because each of its eight chapters has been written by a world-famous scholar treating his specialty.
- This history reflects the most recent developments and the latest archaeological discoveries. While thinking about producing this book, I asked experts in the field to name a first-rate short history of ancient Israel, and they invariably came up with something 25 or 30 years old and therefore necessarily out-of-date.
- This book is intended for people of all faiths—and for skeptics, too. It reflects no particular religious commitments—nor is it anti-religious. The authors include Protestants, Catholics and Jews. They live in Israel, France and the United States.
- This history of ancient Israel spans the centuries from her patriarchal beginnings to 70 A.D., when the Romans burned Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. Almost all other histories of ancient Israel either begin later (for example, with the settlement period) or end earlier (for example, with the return to Jerusalem of the Babylonian exiles). By contrast, here the reader will face the full impact of an unparalleled historical sweep.
- This text is highly readable—written to be understood, as we say at

the Biblical Archaeology Society. It has been carefully edited, so that the words of the text are an enticement, not an obstacle. All arcane academese has been purged. I must add that the eminent scholars who wrote the text have been most cooperative during the sometimes arduous editing process; their aim, like the editor's, has been maximum clarity and maximum readability consistent with accuracy.

- Although it is short and readable, the text is fully annotated, so that the interested student has the references with which to explore in greater detail any matter of particular interest. Moreover, despite the brevity of the text, we have tried to give the evidence, or at least examples of the evidence, that lies behind the historical judgments. We hope we have avoided the unsupported assertion: "Trust me; I know the answer." There is enough evidence here to let the reader make his or her own judgment.

- Finally, the text is festooned with beautiful pictures—many of them in full color—that enhance and illuminate the text.

For these reasons, I believe this is the best book available for all those who are taking their first serious look at the history of ancient Israel—religious school students, college students, seminary students, adult study groups and the intellectually curious of all ages. This book also provides a short, but comprehensive and up-to-date refresher course for those who have been here before.

There are many ways to use this book—as many ways as there are teachers, students and interested readers. But for all, I would suggest an initial quick-through reading. Read it like a novel from beginning to end. If you begin to bog down in too many details for this kind of reading, then skip—but keep going.

It is important to get the sweep of things, the big picture. This is a remarkable story, an immensely moving passage through time—about 2,000 years of it, ending nearly 2,000 years ago. I don't mean to suggest that reading this book is like attending a Cecil B. DeMille saga. This is a serious study. But beneath the details is a panorama of historical movement that is spiritually elevating as well as intellectually stimulating. No reader should miss this scope.

Moreover, a quick reading should make the reader comfortable with the overarching structure of ancient Israel's history. The major segments in that history—patriarchal wanderings, the Egyptian sojourn and the Exodus, the settlement of Canaan in the time of the Judges, the institution and development of the monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon, the split-up of the kingdom, the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the southern kingdom by the Babylonians, exile in Babylonia and Egypt, the return to the land, the rise of a new Jewish state under the Maccabees, the Hellenization of the Jewish world, the tensions of Roman domination in the Herodian period and, finally, the burning of Jerusalem and destruction of the Second Temple that effectively ended the Jewish revolt against Rome—will be firmly fixed in mind. Then details can be filled in on a slower, more intensive second reading.

A word of explanation may be appropriate to explain why we begin and end where we do. Why we begin with Abraham is simple. According to the Bible, he was the first Hebrew. The first 11 chapters of Genesis, before the introduction of Abraham, are referred to as the Primeval History. They do not purport to cover Israelite history.

Moreover, the first 11 chapters of the Bible, in the judgment of modern critical scholars, are mythic, not historic. This does not diminish the power or meaning of these stories, but it does mean that from a factual viewpoint we must approach them differently. Of course, this judgment sometimes collides with the religious faith of people who are committed to the literal truth of Scripture. This issue, however, need not detain us here because even in the Bible's own terms, the history of Israel begins only with Abraham, the first Hebrew.

For many scholars, the more difficult question will be why we begin so early, rather than so late—with the patriarchs rather than, say, with the Israelite settlement in Canaan. Some scholars will question whether there is any discoverable history in the Bible's stories about the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is obviously a historiographic problem here, to which we shall return. Suffice it to say at this point that the fact that the Bible recites the stories of the patriarchs as the earliest chapters of Israelite history is enough to require a consideration of the extent to which, if at all, these stories reflect or contain history of one sort or another. We are not, *a priori*, committed to an answer, but we are committed to asking the question.

At the other end of the time continuum, many scholars will question our decision to end with the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. In discussing this project with scholars, I was told several times that it would be more appropriate to continue the story to 135 A.D., when the Romans finally suppressed the second Jewish Revolt, the so-called Bar-Kokhba Revolt.

There is substance to this contention. I nevertheless rejected it for several reasons. First, any cut-off is to some extent arbitrary. The world always goes on, or at least it has until now. And past events always influence the future. Second, the final destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was such a cataclysmic event that it can lay claim to marking a historic termination and a new beginning. Third, the book was already long enough, especially as a short history. Fourth, and perhaps decisive, we hope to produce a subsequent volume tracing the parallel developments of Christianity and Judaism during the early centuries of the Common Era; in that book, we will cover the events both leading up to and following the Bar-Kokhba revolt.

I have mentioned the sweep of the story and the overarching structure of the historical development. The reader will also notice another development as the story moves along. This development relates to the *nature* and *reliability* of the sources from which this history is constructed.

Let us consider the kinds of sources on which the recovery of our history depends. From the patriarchal period through the Exile (chapters

I through VI), the primary source is the Bible. The biblical account is supplemented by what we loosely call archaeological discoveries. (They may or may not have been recovered in a scientifically controlled excavation.) These archaeological artifacts are of two kinds—the “word” kind and the “non-word” kind. The “word” kind includes inscriptions and texts. The “non-word” kind includes anything from a pollen sample, to a pottery sherd, to the wall of an ancient palace. In addition to the Bible and archaeological discoveries, we occasionally have a late copy of an earlier book whose author refers to or makes use of ancient sources now lost. But this last category is relatively rare.

The reader will notice that archaeological discoveries are more helpful in uncovering the past as we move down the time line. They are least helpful and least specific in the patriarchal period. Gradually they become more helpful and more specific.

There is another kind of development—a development on the continuum of reliability. We are least sure of what happened in the patriarchal period. Gradually, we become more confident of the history we are recounting as time moves on. Where we are least sure of what happened, we are most reliant on the biblical text. This might be thought to lead to the conclusion that archaeological discoveries are what really give reliability to the biblical text. But this is not true. As between the biblical text and archaeological discoveries, the biblical text is overwhelmingly more important than the archaeological discoveries. We would pretty much know what happened from the biblical text even without the archaeological discoveries. The reverse is not at all true.

Why then is the early history of ancient Israel less reliable than the later history? The answer relates not to the illumination archaeology provides but to the nature of the biblical text. The traditional, etiological stories of the patriarchal period present far different historiographic problems than the account of, for example, the Divided Kingdom, which the biblical writers took largely from royal annals.

As a result, the reader will notice another kind of development. In the early chapters of this book, the authors devote major attention to the reliability of the biblical account and to the ways they can penetrate the text to discover what in fact happened. In the earlier periods, we are more concerned with how to deal with the biblical text than with how to interpret the history recounted. Gradually, the emphasis shifts. By the time we reach the Divided Kingdom, we can pretty much rely on the facts given in the Bible, and the historian’s task is chiefly to present and interpret those facts to create a modern history. By contrast, in the patriarchal age we confront a basic question of biblical historicity: Were the patriarchs real people who lived at a particular time in history?

In the period of the Egyptian sojourn and the Exodus, we are still at an early time when we must ask whether there was an Egyptian enslavement and an Exodus, but it seems relatively clear that something like that in fact occurred. We are more concerned with placing events in a particular period and with assessing the reliability of details.

By the time we reach the period of the settlement and the Judges, we are on firm, datable historical ground. But here we are faced with a fundamental question. Did the Israelites possess the land by military conquest, by peaceful infiltration into uninhabited areas, or was there perhaps an internal revolt of the underclass that led to Israel's emergence in Canaan? This is obviously a different kind of historiographic problem than the authors of the previous chapters were required to face.

In the period of the United Kingdom, the question of factual historicity begins to fade into the background. The major historical problem is to redress the biases reflected in the text, so that we can arrive at a more objective history of the period.

When we deal with the period of the Divided Kingdom, and the Babylonian Exile and return, less attention is paid to historiography or the question of reliability, although these questions never disappear.

For the history recounted in the last two chapters of the book, dealing with the Hasmonean period and Roman rule, only a few late books of the Bible are relevant. Equally, if not more important, is a host of classical authors, especially the first-century Jewish historian Josephus. So-called intertestamental texts, pseudepigrapha and apocrypha, such as Maccabees, as well as later rabbinic writings and the New Testament also provide evidence. The amount of archaeological materials that shed light on this period is enormous. Pride of place, of course, goes to the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, many of which are only now becoming available to scholars. But scholars must also absorb a host of other religious and non-religious texts, as well as archaeological artifacts ranging from buildings to coins.

Another contrast: In the earlier period described in this book the relevant evidence is sparse, and we must squeeze it in a dozen different ways to get what we reliably can from it. In the later periods, on the other hand, the amount of evidence is truly overwhelming, beyond the capacity of any human being to command. Here the task is to find meaningful strands, overarching trends in a sea of material.

The differences in the various chapters of the book reflect the differences outlined above—in the nature and reliability of the sources; in the historiographic problems; in the light archaeology sheds on the particular period and in the sheer quantity of material that must be taken into account. The result is a fascinating variety. Reading this story will be a richer experience if these differences are kept in mind.

Ancient Israel was, in the end, defeated; but it was not destroyed. It survived. And it continued to shape the world, as the Bible says, "to this day." To understand this history is to discern why its influence endured. And only in terms of this history can we truly appreciate the scriptural treasures it left us. It is a history that is at once intellectually penetrating and spiritually uplifting. Now, in the words attributed to the great first-century sage Hillel, "Go and study!"

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