

Why the Bible Began 6

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—the National Narrative

- ***“When the Queen of Sheba witnessed Solomon’s wisdom, the house [the Temple] that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers...she was breathless...”*** (1Kings 10:4-5)
- ***“From this point, it is all downhill.*** The forced to watch as the sovereignty that David had established and the opulence that Solomon enjoyed are gradually forfeited to foreign powers...Instead of seeking glory on the battlefield, members of this defeated community must carve out a new existence while bearing the yoke of empires...***[In] the formation of the National Narrative, ..we begin with the book of Judges, which serves as a bridge between the tumultuous monarchic epoch and a pre-monarchic past...Finally, we will examine... [how the scribes employed] the office of the prophet, the relationship with the national deity [Yhwh], and the Ark of the covenant to tie together its many chapters.”*** [302-303]



- Picture Source: Pin on ***Ethiopia.***
www.pintersest.jp

Connecting Competing Accounts

- “The *National Narrative has competing climaxes*: on one side, there is divine liberation from a tyrannical ruler in Egypt, and on the other side, a monarchic liberation from the nation’s foes in their homeland...”
- Here are a listing of the competing accounts:
- “Genesis presents *a positive image of Egypt in the Family Story*.”
- In Exodus 1 a *bridge narrative...tells how Israel now suffers in Egypt after ‘a new king arose who did not know Joseph.’ This chapter creates ‘The People’s History (Genesis-Joshua)*.”
- In Exodus 2-Joshua/Judges [we have] ‘the Exodus Conquest Account,’ which concludes with Israel in control of the Promised Land.
- *In Judges [there is] a narrative bridge that tells how the nation loses control of the Promised Land after a ‘new generation arose that did not know Yhwh.’ This book creates ‘the National Narrative’ (Genesis-Kings)*.
- *In Samuel-Kings the ‘Palace History’ begins with the nation facing oppression from neighbors in the Promised Land.” [304-305]*
- “*The older Palace History presents war as a natural political phenomenon and as an inescapable condition of Israel’s existence in its land...*”

The book of Judges demolishes this ideological foundation for the monarchy by identifying a deeper reason for the wars...In each episode, the narrator declares that ‘Israel again did what was evil in the sight of Yhwh,’ and the deity proceeds to punish the nation by allowing enemies to assault it...If Israel brought war upon itself by failing to follow Yhwh, then its decision to establish a monarchy was gratuitous...The People’s History...presents Yhwh saving the nation personally and directly from the Egyptians, without a king as his representative...The making of this narrative [Judges] must be appreciated as an intellectual (and historiographical) effort to imagine a national past without the palace...”

- “The final chapters of Judges describe military conflict...the narrator repeatedly punctuates the episodes with a refrain ‘*in those days there was no king in Israel,*’ which sometimes continues with ‘*everyone did what was right in their own eyes.*’...Their presence [these statements] affirms, implicitly, that the king’s duty is not to accumulate political capital on the battlefield..., but rather to defend the oppressed and establish justice in the land....Similarly, the Deuteronomic code discharges the office [of king] of all military responsibilities, with *his single duty being to make a copy of the Torah and ‘read it all the days of his life.’* (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)”

Prophet, the deity (Yhwh), the Ark, the Covenant [Heb.:Brit]

- “Those who curated the National Narrative [the scribes] not only consolidated a diverse people by connecting rival traditions and groups, but also constructed continuities from their own time to a prehistoric past. These lines of narrative continuity include the office of the prophet, the deity in whose name these prophets speak, the Ark as the symbol of this deity’s presence, and the covenant that the nation ends up breaking...***Prophets guide the nation long before kings [i.e., Moses]. They warn the nation about the monarchy’s pernicious influence on society.*** They call kings to account for the suffering they repeatedly inflict upon the nation. And last but not least, they survive the monarchy’s demise...[Such sacred objects as the Ark of the Covenant also is used by the scribes to connect the People’s History to the Palace History.] Built at Sinai, ***this icon and war palladium [protective image] accompanies the nation as it migrates to the Promised Land, both at the center of their camp and in battle against their foes along the way. Later David brings it up to Jerusalem after he captures the city and prepares to build the temple*** (2Samuell 6)...The Ark thread in the National Narrative ties [Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (Jerusalem)] together by telling how ***Moses deposited the tablets of the Torah in the Ark, and then how later Solomon deposited the Ark containing these tablets in the temple*** (1Kings 8).

The Ark represents the divine presence, and more than anything else it is Yhwh who unifies the National Narrative. [Jacob Wright’s approach blends two scholars viewpoints, that of Jack Miles, “God: A Biography” (1995), and Ilana Pardes, “The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible” (2002)]. Whereas the former reads the Bible as a biography of God, the latter reads it as a biography of Israel. {***Wright reads] the Bible as the story of a relationship—a tumultuous love affair—between Yhwh and Israel...***In contrast to other deities, ***what curbs Yhwh’s caprice are the terms of the covenant, which are ratified at the nation’s birth, inscribed in stone, and deposited in the Ark...The covenant constrains Yhwh’s personality and pathos [sympathy, it]*** emerged from prophetic declarations of doom, and it [paves] the way for the canonical demarcation of the Pentateuch from the Former Prophets (Joshua-Kings) that follow it.” [***The division of the Tanach into Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim, The Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings began in the period of Persian occupation and the Hellenistic period which follows it.***][309-312]

Truth-telling and Myth-making

- ***“Fictions are often what unite us as communities,*** as the philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah demonstrates in “The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity” (2018)...***What is morally determinative is that we are honest about our pasts while at the same time finding ways—through stories, music, art, and film—to imagine unifying and liberating futures. Mythos are crucial parts of healthy identities (both individual and collective), and the National Narrative achieves a successful balance between truth-telling and myth-making.***
Whereas the People’s

History constructs a mythic past that affirms the unity of the nation, the Palace History scrutinizes the dynasties that tentatively united but ultimately divided this nation...

The ***National Narrative*** is a truly remarkable phenomenon...this ***monumental achievement of historiography devotes a disproportionate amount [of] space to a pre-monarchic past, and then it recounts...how a nation makes a conscious decision to embrace the institution of the monarchy*** and the centralized statehood that it represents.” [314-316]

Jonah and the Whale: The Prophets as Survival Literature

- The irony of the story of Jonah is that a reluctant prophet, forced by Yhwh to prophecy to an enemy empire, is proved right that God would show mercy to even a repentant military empire, and is suitably upset that his prophecy comes true. ***“All along he had been reluctant to fulfill his commission because he knew that Yhwh is ‘gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in mercy, and will repent from evil.’ (Jonah 4:2). The droll account of a messenger who fears that his message will be heard presents a profound paradox: if the Assyrians had not begged for divine mercy, then they would not have been able, years later, to inflict suffering on Israel and Judah...”*** [318]. In 612 BCE the city of Nineveh was sacked and burned by the allied forces of the Persians, Medes, Babylonians, and others who then divided the region between them
- Picture Source: Wikipedia, John Martin, “The Fall of Nineveh” (1829). English Romantic poet [Edwin Atherstone](#) (1788-1872) wrote an epic titled [The Fall of Nineveh \(1828-1868\)](#). ***The work tells of an uprising against king Sardanapalus by all the nations that were dominated by the Assyrian Empire. He is a great criminal who had one hundred prisoners of war executed. After a long struggle, the town is conquered by Median and Babylonian troops, led by prince Arbaces and priest Belesis. The king then sets his own palace on fire and dies inside together with all his concubines. Atherstone's friend, artist [John Martin](#) (1789-1854), created a painting of the same name inspired by the poem.***



The purpose of Hebrew prophets

- “[*The book of Jonah*] is an outlier in both form and content. The prophets elsewhere announce that Yhwh had already resolved to punish his people...***The first and primary purpose of the prophets was not to avert a future disaster, but to explain devastating trauma in the nation’s past—the fall of the Northern and Southern Kingdom. The prophetic writings are works of theodicy: they provide elaborate justifications for the judgment that Yhwh had meted out to his people...***Pronouncement of unconditional judgment prompted a deeper question: Why? What have we done to deserve destruction? To justify the divine decree, the authors of our books augmented older oracles to show how the nation had long persisted in its way, testing Yhwh’s patience and provoking his wrath...***...The biblical books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on are system transcendent [they work outside a longstanding political-theological framework of monarchic statehood]. By pronouncing the end of Yhwh’s relationship with his people, these writings declare the demise of statehood along with its ancient ideological foundation...***
- ***...Something completely new emerges after this rupture: history becomes relevant and important.*** The relationship between the nation and its deity is now said to have been established at a particular point in the past, in a formal way, and with written terms clearly defining the terms of the partnership. This is the pact [brit] people ratify with Yhwh after their exodus from Egypt, and its terms are found in the laws of the Pentateuch ...
- One of the ***foundational insights of modern biblical criticism*** [beginning in the nineteenth century] is summed up in the Latin expression ***lex post prophetas, meaning that Pentateuchal law postdates the Prophets...Thus Jeremiah calls Judeans to account for their transgressions,*** which include stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and swearing falsely (Jeremiah 7:9). ***Traditional interpreters had long assumed that the prophet is quoting the Ten Commandments [found in Exodus (20:2-17) and Deuteronomy (5:6-21; & 34:11-26)]. However, it is more probable that this text (and others like it) informed the formation of laws in the Pentateuch...***[318, 322-324]

Surviving Trauma—the survival-literature genre

- ***“Being a survivor is about bearing witness to the past, not consigning it to oblivion. The testimony is painful for those living in a new age. It is easier if it is forgotten. Yet new generations need to see their experiences as chapters in an ongoing story, even if that story is one of pain and suffering. Only by being honest about their past and confronting it with courage is it possible to chart a new and more sustainable future.*** Primo Levi was an Italian-Jewish chemist and writer who lived through the death camps of Nazi Germany...***Those who escape destruction are obligated, Levi insisted, to remember it...***The close relationship between survival and testimony is reflected in many works of art and literature. Thus ***Herman Melville told the story of Moby Dick from the perspective of a survivor: ‘Call me Ishmael.’ Ilana Paredes [“Melville’s Bibles” 2008] calls [Moby Dick] ‘the Bible of American culture.’*** [Ishmael is saved by another whaling ship Rachel, whose captain is searching for his drowned son. Melville alludes to the bereaved Jewish matriarch Rachel in the prophet Jeremiah: ***‘Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted, because they are no more.’ (31:15) Here Rachel is metaphorically mourning the destruction of Judah***]. ***“The entire National Narrative, stretching from Genesis to Kings, is an extraordinarily sophisticated exemplar of the survival-literature genre.*** [327-329]
- Rockwell Kent (1882-1971) provided 300 illustrations for an 1930 edition of Herman Melville’s (1819-1891) 1851 novel Moby Dick Picture, that is narrated by the sole survivor of a whaling ship rammed by a harpooned white whale. Source: ebay-- **Rockwell Kent - Deep Water (1931).**



"Deep Water"

Rockwell Kent

Yhwh and His People; Codes, Covenant and Kinship

- “Southern scribes embraced the people’s History and made it their own. Combining it with the Palace History, they declare that a pact Yhwh had made with the entire nation at Sinai is more foundational and determinative than the promise Yhwh made later to David and his dynastic line [now, post-Destruction, an aspiration for the distant future]...Southern scribes not only copied and transmitted the Exodus-Conquest Account, but also amplified it, developing the Yhwh-people partnership in the realm of both narrative and law. ***The assertion that establishes the trajectory of the new narrative is a simple yet powerful one: ‘Hear O Israel, Yhwh is our God, Yhwh is One.’ (Deuteronomy 6:4)...To unify both North and South under the name Israel, they realized that they first had to unify competing deities, each of whom laid claim to the name Yhwh.[335-337]***
- ***“What is distinctive about biblical law is that multiple—and often contradictory—codes stand next to each other in [a] single public document, and all are understood to be equally binding...We would expect new codes of law to have replaced earlier ones. But such is not the case.*** We witnessed how the biblical writings consolidate rival populations and regions by connecting their heroes and traditions in a single narrative. The Pentateuch does the same with its multiple codes, making them equally authoritative. ***A collection of competing law codes is the antithesis of a dogmatic unitary doctrine, and it represents an effort of compromise...Much is left of interpretation, and nothing is possible without careful reflection by critical readers.”[338]***

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26)

- The Holiness Code [likely from both the Priestly Source and the Deuteronomistic Code, according to the Documentary Hypothesis] calls members of the nation to mimic Yhwh, according to the principle of imitation dei: ‘Be you holy, for I am holy.’ (Leviticus 19:2)... ***The Holiness Code transforms priestly rules of conduct into an ethical system governing all members of society...To quote an excerpt: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yhwh.’ (Deuteronomy 19:18) [The text is fused with the sense of kinship, and it spells out the implications of an ethos of solidarity]...***
- Instead of freedom from external restraint, the biblical authors promoted what the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin [“Four Essays on Liberty,” 1969] called ***‘positive liberty,’ a form of freedom that presupposes a just social order...Freedom is to be proclaimed to all the land’s inhabitants [hence the words from Leviticus engraved on the American Liberty Bell in Philadelphia]..A society that fails to care for the socio-economic conditions of its members, and does not establish an equitable system of justice cannot endure, let alone be free.*** [340-341]

The replacement of the king with the deity in the Tanach

Picture source: www.muzebileteri.com. Louvre Museum, Paris, France, originally from Sippar, Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) and found in 1901 in Susa, Iran. It had been taken by Persia as plunder 600 years after its creation (1755-1750 BCE). The top of the basalt stele (over 7 ft. high) features *an image in relief of Hammurabi [sixth king of the first dynasty of Babylonia, with [Shamash](#), the Babylonian [sun god](#) and god of justice*. Below the relief are about 4,130 lines of Akkadian [cuneiform](#) text.

*“Deuteronomy’s law for the king begins by stipulating that he be one of ‘your kin’ and that he not lift himself above other Israelites [Deut. 17:14-15]. His only job is to study the law [given by Yhwh]: ‘...He shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall remain with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life...’ (Deut. 17:18-20)... The **replacement of the king by the deity** parallels the development of the biblical ethos of equality under law... At a time when the nation was defeated and dispersed... **the law could** demarcate communal boundaries and, perhaps more importantly, **provide unifying a political vision.**” [342-344]*



Covenant

- “The biblical accounts of covenant-making consistently underscore the aspect of choice. By entering into the covenant, the nation of Israel makes a voluntary decision to abide by Yhwh’s will as revealed in the laws, precepts, and statutes published in the Pentateuch. ***What distinguishes the Mosaic covenant is this volitional and conditional character.*** The nation chooses at a specific time and place to make Yhwh their God. ‘Choose this day whom you will serve...but for me and my house, we will serve Yhwh’ (Joshua 24:15)...
- Instead of being forced upon them, the nation enters this covenant freely and without coercion, recognizing that its stipulations are liberating and life-sustaining...***What happens to a narrative when it is expanded with divinely revealed law [which now is the obligation of the covenanted community who agreed to it]? The answer is that it becomes holy.*** It is no longer merely an account of the past, but a sacred, authoritative instruction for the present and future. ***What was once descriptive is now also prescriptive.*** [346-347]

Kinship

“In ‘Bridge of Spies’, James Donovan (played by Tom Hanks) is a famous lawyer called to defend Rudolf Abel, a man accused of spying against the United States. Everyone is convinced [of] Abel’s guilt. When Donovan’s colleague insists that he make the trial easy for the state, which lacked reliable evidence of Abel’s wrongdoing, **Donovan retorts: ‘You are Italian. I am Irish. But what makes us Americans? It’s the rule book. And when we don’t follow it, we are not Americans.’** [Bridge of Spies (2015), Steven Spielberg, dir. Picture Source: amblin.com].

Biblical kinship is not primarily genetic or ethnic but rather voluntary and consensual, formed by a body of shared laws and framed by a covenantal relationship...The National Narrative fosters kinship by portraying a people evolving from an extended family, with others joining them as ‘fellow travelers’ along the way...**National identities are shaped by shared experiences from which flow mutual obligations...The law means little if it is not embedded in a meaningful story. Law is about the present and the future, while kinship is about the past.** Kinship often involves no genealogical ties, but it is always suffused with a shared history, even if that history is imagined.” [349-350]



The Matriarch—Women and the Biblical Agenda

- The National Narrative consistently pays tribute to the key contributions that women make alongside those of their male counterparts...It makes ***the home, not the war camp, the center stage of collective life. It also de-genders the domestic domain so that it is no longer a place principally for women.*** And with regard to ***combat zones, it expands this space to include the conventional confines of women, as when Jael invites an enemy general into her tent and slays him while he sleeps.*** [The numerous stories of women involved in the survival of the people of Israel in the National Narrative is the scribes way of introducing] their (male) audience to a new way of being in the world...[Wright points out that throughout the narrative] ***women introduce the major epochs and their central themes: Eve at [the] beginning of an existence east of Eden; Sarah and Hagar at the genesis of the nation; midwives and Miriam at the beginning of the Exodus; Rahab at the start [of] the conquest of Canaan; Achsah at the period of the Judges; Hannah at the birth of the Monarchy; Bathsheba and Abishag at ‘the beginning of the end.’*** [357-358]

- Picture Source: Wikipedia. *Jael shows Sisera lying dead to Barak*, [James Tissot](#), (1896–1902). **Jael** ([/ˈdʒeɪəl/](#)) or **Yael** is a heroine (a Kenite/Midianite) of the [Battle of Mount Tabor](#), described in [chapters 4 and 5](#) of the [Book of Judges](#). In the account, she delivers the [Israelites](#) from the army of King [Jabin](#) of the city of [Hazor](#) in [Canaan](#).



The mother contending for her child is co-creator of the nation

- “Yhwh instructs [Abraham]: **‘Whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says.’** (Genesis 21:12). From the vantage point of the intended audience, the maternal maneuvering of this aged matriarch on her child’s [Isaac’s] behalf made possible their own existence...[Abraham’s] sons are not equally heirs of the covenant; only the one born to Sarah will bear the promise. **Her role as co-creator of the nation is critical, and the reader figures this out long before Abraham...** Throughout Genesis, the Family Story affirms a basic principle; **it is proper that a mother contends for her child, just as one should be devoted to the welfare of his or her people.** Buttressing this point, the authors awarded Hagar and her son, for whom she endured much grief and suffering, a story of promise and redemption that parallels Israel’s narrative...
- The four matriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah—are not only bearers of children and thus mothers of the nation, but are also **lauded for the ways they, like Hagar, define their children’s destinies and thereby shape their people’s collective future. It is their acuity, judgment, and sheer gumption that bring the divine promises to fulfillment.** The book of Ruth pays tribute to Rachel and Leah as those ‘who together built the house of Israel.’..Throughout the Family Story, mothers are more than mere vessels of male heirs. **While men supply the seed, women create and nurture the children, and then determine their direction and destiny. As such, they are partners with the divine,** a partnership that already Eve recognizes after the birth of her first son: ‘I created a man with Yhwh.’” [359-362]

Power resides in the inner workings of the family

- ***“The project of creating a nation is, as these stories show, both a collaborative and a competitive effort, and the ones who sustain it are first and foremost women.*** J. Cheryl Exum [“Mother in Israel’: A Familiar Figure Reconsidered” in Letty M. Russell (ed.), “Feminist Interpretations of the Bible, 1985] notes ***the striking paradox*** that characterizes biblical literature: ***‘Whereas the important events in Israelite tradition are experienced by men, they are often set in motions and determined by women.’*** [363-364]
- ***...It is Hannah, not her husband, who determines [Samuel’s] future: she brings him to the temple, separating him from his father.*** There, in the service of the high priest, he becomes a leader of the nation, bringing down the mighty and raising up the downtrodden, in keeping with the vision that his mother had expressed in her majestic prayer that inaugurates the monarchy. ***The choice to place household stories at the beginning of a nation’s narratives is a bold statement that power resides in the inner workings of the family.*** [363-364]