Torah or Not Torah



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The God Behind the God, the Law, and the Zabūr

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Whether It's Nobler in the Mind to Suffer Stoning and Sacrifice of Outrageous Fortune

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A companion to Finding Injil: What Were the Ṣaḥīḥ Hadith of the Messiah?

An argument about the bull in the room

Aaron organized a splendid ceremony for a god made yesterday. The gold had come from the people's own hands, the animal from a mold, and the occasion was announced as a feast to YHWH. Exodus 32 gives its idol the right divine name and a respectable priest. By the time the music begins, the old question about whether a statue can be God has become a sharper question about the power of men who claim to speak for him.

I began this inquiry because a remarkable quantity of religious cruelty can survive the destruction of religious images. A law may be inscribed in God's name, preserved by generations of sincere worshippers, and defended with arguments whose antiquity is beyond doubt. Its actual origin remains a question. So does the authority of the person explaining what it requires of us.

This matters most at the difficult places in scripture. Deuteronomy and Joshua depict the destruction of enemy populations under divine orders. Exodus 32 makes the

guardians of a violated covenant kill members of their own community. Samuel preserves a command concerning Amalek that reaches children. Other texts demand protection for the stranger, the poor, and the widow; Abraham pleads with God for a righteous minority in a threatened city; prophets condemn rulers whose religious competence has left the vulnerable unprotected. These writers inherited the same sacred language, and they used it to make markedly different claims.

An old and important Muslim argument says the Torah has been corrupted. The Qur'an makes a more exacting inquiry possible. It acknowledges a Torah containing guidance, names judgments available to Jewish readers in its own time, and also accuses some people of distorting words, concealing testimony, or attributing their own writing to God. Qur'an 5:45 even quotes the principle of retaliation as written for Israel. A general accusation cannot settle which line of the Pentateuch is authentic. Every case must be made on its evidence.

That is the job of this book. We begin amid the gods of the Levant and the temple politics of Israel. We follow the texts through the kingdoms, conquest stories, prophetic disputes, Persian restoration, and the documentary histories of scripture. The investigation closes before the first century BCE. John, Jesus, the Essenes, and later religious esotericism belong to *Finding Injil*. The Qur'an and the classical Muslim legal schools enter here as later witnesses and interpreters of the Hebrew inheritance.

When I say that an ancient author attributes a command to God, I mean exactly that. When I suggest that an editor may have changed a passage, the surviving witnesses must sustain the

inference. The theological judgment about whether God *really commanded it* has its own work to do. The reader deserves to know when we have crossed from one kind of claim to another.

I also have no interest in making Jewish history serve as a simple morality play about the arrival of another religion. The protests against sacrifice, royal violence, and corrupted law appear inside Jewish scripture itself. Jewish interpreters continued to reason about them. The Quranic reader inherits a responsibility to examine his own traditions with the same suspicion of convenient authority.

A broken idol can teach an enduring lesson. The next step is harder. We have to learn what to do when the idol has learned to quote scripture.

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Epilogue: The Book That Cannot Testify for Itself

How to read this edition

This reading text follows the literary chapters. The large chapter-by-chapter research dossiers and the 83-case legal register belong to the separate critical archive. Notes retained in the prose identify ancient witnesses and scholarship where the distinction matters most. The law and Zabūr audits at the end classify Qur'anic attestation, literary genre, textual plurality,

and Muslim legal interpretation separately. Their categories indicate degrees of direct textual support, not numerical probabilities of revelation.

The historical narrative ends in the Persian and early Second Temple period. Later sources are introduced only when their interpretation helps test claims made about earlier texts.

PART I · NAMES, IMAGES, AND THE MOST HIGH

Prologue

Aaron chose the following day for a feast to YHWH. There was an altar, a crowd, gold gathered from the people, and a young bull fashioned by human hands. The unsettling detail in Exodus 32 is the divine name attached to the celebration. Aaron had proclaimed a feast to the God of the Exodus while a manufactured animal stood in front of him. The narrative lets the reader hear a worshipper utter the right name before the wrong object.

We are accustomed to imagining idolatry as a kind of religious mistake made by someone else. A pagan mistakes the carved thing for a god. A monotheist learns to distinguish the creator from the creature. The story at Sinai resists that comfortable geography. The people have recently escaped Egypt. Their leader has gone into the mountain and has remained there longer than they expected. They want a visible power to go

ahead of them. Aaron supplies one that can be seen, displayed, and celebrated. The artifact carries the memory of liberation even as it displaces the liberator.

A sophisticated defense of the worshippers would say that the calf served as a symbol. In the ancient Near East, a bull could embody divine strength or serve as an emblem associated with a god. The narrative itself does not spell out every worshipper's intention. Its charge is severe because the distinction between an invisible God and a manageable sacred object has collapsed. The form of the calf may be less important than its new authority. It stands where the people expect to meet the power that brought them out of bondage.

This book begins at that point of substitution.

The idol can remain after its metal has gone. A nation can smash the calf, abolish its shrines, and forbid any carved likeness of its deity. It may then speak of the one God through a priesthood whose judgments admit no appeal, a canon treated as though every sentence arrived by the same historical means, or a legal sentence that makes a human death seem an ordinary price of obedience. These are possibilities to test in the surviving traditions. They become idolatry in the sense used here when a finite human mediation of God claims the unlimited authority of God himself.

The distinction is delicate because religion necessarily uses mediations. A word spoken by a prophet, a remembered command, a sacred rite, even the word *God* is delivered through language and history. The question concerns the moment when the mediation demands that the worshipper cease judging its human features. An interpreted instruction comes to be treated

as an unmediated divine voice. Its interpreter becomes incapable of error in the very act of claiming to defend transcendence.

The Hebrew Bible has already placed the counterargument inside itself. In Deuteronomy 4, the Israelites are reminded that at Horeb they heard a voice and saw no form. The warning extends from carved human figures to the animals of earth and the bodies of the heavens. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon's dedication of the Temple contains an admission that the heavens themselves cannot contain God. The iconographic and architectural claims of the sanctuary must live alongside the confession that God exceeds the sanctuary. These texts offer resources for criticizing an idol built from religious certainty, although they do not by themselves teach this book's whole philosophical thesis.

Then comes a more difficult piece of evidence. The same Torah that forbids the calf narrates the Levites killing about three thousand people after Moses orders them, in YHWH's name, to pass through the camp with swords. The story gives us a destroyer of idols acting under a claim of revelation. It also gives us Moses interceding for the people before the violence and pleading to be erased from God's book rather than abandon them afterward. Within a single chapter the reader meets a terrifyingly punitive account of loyalty and a prophet who stakes himself on mercy.

I do not know how to make that tension harmless by an appeal to the age in which it was written. It demands the labor of interpretation. We must ask what the account was written to authorize, how its sources may have developed, and what moral obligations a reader inherits when the canon preserves both the

sword and the intercession. Treating the chapter as an eyewitness transcript of a recoverable Bronze Age incident would bypass the historical difficulty. Treating the sword as a transparent revelation would bypass the theological one.

The prophets deepen the fracture. Hosea prizes covenantal loyalty and knowledge of God above slaughtered animals. Isaiah depicts God recoiling from assemblies at which the powerful have failed the vulnerable. Jeremiah's Temple discourse asks its audience to look at conduct before trusting the sanctuary. In Ezekiel, a startling oracle speaks of statutes that were not good and connects them with the offering of firstborn children. These texts differ in date, context, and rhetorical aim. Their argument with the cult is itself an inheritance of Israel. The criticism that later appears in the ministry of Jesus did not have to cross a frontier into Judaism. It could be spoken in the language of Jewish prophecy.

The surviving prophetic and restoration texts take this argument further. Jeremiah can criticize confidence in the Temple and promise a law inscribed in the heart. Ezekiel can condemn faithless shepherds while envisioning a new sanctuary with offerings and priestly boundaries. Isaiah gives the name of God's anointed to Cyrus, a foreign ruler who does not know that God. Ezra and Nehemiah then present a community seeking to reconstruct sacred order through law, kinship and the restored city. These texts have different histories, and together they leave a difficult question about which institutions legitimately interpret the covenant.

The book's final inquiry therefore returns to the words of the law. If God truly commanded justice, protection of vulnerable

people and truthfulness, what evidence establishes that a disputed penalty or priestly ordinance carries the same authority? The Qur'an confirms Torah as a source of guidance, names particular earlier restrictions, and also describes itself as a criterion over earlier scripture. The comparison asks how much of the received law those statements establish. A Jewish interpreter may defend the continuity of the covenant through another account of authority; that disagreement belongs inside the test.

The answer must be given in individual cases. Blood, prohibited animals, retaliation, offerings, marriage, slavery, stoning, and the command of destruction belong to different evidentiary categories. Psalmic prayer, divine-council poetry, and royal victory hymns need a corresponding audit of voice, genre, and scriptural attribution. The reader should be able to see which conclusion comes directly from scripture, which depends upon Sunnah as understood by a school of law, and which survives only as a historical hypothesis.

The central question will recur whenever a ritual claims a life, a sentence claims God's authorship, or a custodian of tradition asks for submission. What makes the voice divine? By what means can the faithful tell its difference from the calf that has learned to speak?

The Calf Called by God's Name

A feast announced in the right name

The first peculiarity of the golden calf episode is often missed because the story is so familiar. Exodus 32 introduces a frightened crowd and an absent mediator. Moses has delayed on the mountain. The people approach Aaron to demand a god who will proceed before them, invoking uncertainty about the leader who brought them out of Egypt. Aaron gathers the people's gold and makes a calf. The crowd declares that the figure is responsible for the Exodus. Aaron builds an altar and announces a festival to YHWH. The next day includes offerings and a communal meal. [TNT-01]

The divine name matters. One can debate whether the calf was understood as another god, an embodiment of YHWH, the throne or pedestal of an invisible deity, or an intentionally ambiguous icon. The story's narrative voices may preserve more than one conception. Aaron's proclamation nevertheless prevents the reader from dismissing the entire scene as a foreign religion introduced from beyond Israel. The object is being folded into the memory and language of Israel's deliverance.

The worshippers demand what religion can most easily provide: availability. Moses has disappeared beyond the cloud. The voice at Sinai cannot be summoned for a question after dinner. A god cast in gold stands at a known address. It can be carried in procession, made the center of a festival, and shown to children. Anxious people acquire a visible continuity of leadership when their chosen mediator seems to have abandoned them.

Gold is a useful material for the story because it concentrates that exchange. Wealth worn on bodies becomes a public symbol of divine power. Aaron, a human authority who expects to speak for the people before God, oversees the manufacturing process. The crowd receives a thing it can recognize and praise. In the act of calling the work of their hands the deliverer from Egypt, they turn the logic of deliverance backward. Their liberty is credited to something that depends on them for its existence.

I use *idol* in a wider sense than a cult statue, yet the widening needs discipline. Every use of an object in worship is not idolatry by definition. Neither a Torah scroll nor an icon automatically functions as the calf in this chapter. The decisive question is the authority assigned to the object. When a worshipper treats a made thing as the ultimate origin of a gift, the object has taken a place it cannot occupy. When an interpreter attributes his own bounded judgment to God without remaining answerable to the claims of truth, justice, and other human beings, the same displacement can occur without any gold at all.

The northern calves and the southern book

The golden calf appears again in the biblical history of the divided monarchy. In 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam fears that pilgrimages to Jerusalem will restore the political allegiance of his northern subjects to the house of David. He establishes royal sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan, associated with two golden calves. His explanation to the people repeats the Exodus formula identifying the images with the deity who brought Israel out of Egypt. [TNT-02]

The narrative joins politics to worship. A ruler who fears losing his subjects creates an alternative geography of holiness. The throne can survive because pilgrimage routes can be redirected. The story is a Judean account deeply hostile to northern cultic practices, and its judgments must be read with that provenance in mind. The northern sanctuaries may have understood their bovine symbols differently from the accusation preserved by their critics. The account remains a remarkably clear illustration of how a political system can install a visible religious emblem as a guarantee of loyalty.

The correspondence between Exodus 32 and 1 Kings 12 also raises a literary question. Why do the speeches resemble each other so closely? One possibility is that the wilderness calf narrative was shaped in conversation with the northern royal cults and the memory of their condemnation. Scholars differ over the directions and stages of dependence. The biblical chronology places Aaron centuries before Jeroboam; a historical-critical inquiry cannot use that narrated sequence by itself to date the composition of either account. The shared formula is evidence for a relationship between literary traditions, while the precise history of that relationship remains disputed.

The result is a useful reversal of perspective. We may be reading an accusation against a later monarchy projected into the wilderness origin of Israel's covenant. In that case Exodus 32 does more than retell an ancient lapse. It establishes a paradigm by which rival religious institutions can be condemned. The southern Temple claims normative proximity to the liberating God; the northern sanctuaries become heirs of Aaron's

disobedience. Ancient theology and political rivalry have found a common language.

An honest analysis must then direct the same questions toward the southern authors. What made Jerusalem's authority reliable? What protected its central sanctuary from being used as an instrument of royal control? The historical record gives us reasons to ask. Royal reforms, priestly interests, written law, and centralized worship all appear in the biblical accounts of Judah's history. The book of Kings judges the northern calves with severity while also recording corruption within Judah and Jerusalem. A critic of cultic idolatry has to examine every throne that appoints itself guardian of the unseen.

The first image and the forbidden image

Deuteronomy 4 approaches the problem from an unusual angle. Its speaker recalls the revelation at Horeb by distinguishing a voice that was heard from a form that was never seen. The prohibition against images is extended through the visible world. Neither the shape of a man nor a woman, an animal, a bird, a creeping thing, or a creature in the waters can contain the deity disclosed in the fire. [TNT-03]

The argument begins with the form of the event itself. The people experienced speech without a visible model from which an image could legitimately be copied. God gives a command while withholding the kind of appearance an artisan might imitate. An image made afterward would present an invention as though it were a memory of revelation.

This is a strong form of anti-idolatry. A prohibition against rival gods could leave room for an authorized statue of the one God.

Deuteronomy's warning reaches the manufacture of any divine likeness. The voice cannot be reduced to one of the shapes within the creation that hears it.

Still, the biblical library speaks in several registers. The Ark has cherubim. The Temple possesses elaborate symbolic furnishings. Earlier biblical narratives picture divine encounters in human terms, and Israelite archaeology has revealed a broad range of religious objects and household practices. The history of Israelite aniconism is therefore more complicated than a single rule obeyed without exception. The canonical prohibition declares an ideal whose historical reception has to be investigated.

Another scriptural image stands nearby. Genesis 1 attributes the *ṣelem*, the image of God, to human beings. Its implications are disputed among interpreters, and the word carries resonances of royal representation and cultic images in the ancient Near East. The contrast this creates for a theological reader is powerful. Deuteronomy guards against making God in the form of an animal. Genesis presents human life as already entrusted with a relation to God's image. The proper treatment of persons may consequently become a test of religious claims made in the divine name. [TNT-04]

The argument needs a qualification. Genesis 1 cannot simply be made to say that every later sacrificial ordinance is invalid, nor does its original author supply the complete modern doctrine of human rights. The proposed moral inference is the author's theological reading across texts. It must be defended against the ancient legal passages that appear to authorize the execution of persons bearing precisely that image.

The sword in the story

The end of Exodus 32 forces that confrontation earlier than expected. Moses descends, sees the calf, breaks the tablets, destroys the image, and makes the Israelites consume water mixed with its powdered remains. He questions Aaron, who offers a comic excuse: he threw the gold into the fire and the calf emerged. Moses then calls for those who belong to YHWH. The Levites assemble. At Moses' order, delivered as an utterance of the God of Israel, they pass through the camp with swords, killing brothers, friends, and neighbors. The narrative reports about three thousand dead. Their act becomes the occasion for a special priestly commission. [TNT-01]

The passage is among the reasons for this book's title. It is possible to read it as a stern lesson about the moral cost of worshipping a false god. It is also possible to wonder whether the story of purifying the community has made an unlimited claim on human life. The text speaks from inside a tradition that understood itself as hearing God's command. Its attribution has to be taken seriously as textual testimony. A reader still faces a moral and theological judgment about the character of that command.

Moses himself complicates a flat account of holy violence. He has already asked God to turn from the announced destruction of the entire people. The narrative says his intercession succeeds. After the killing he returns to plead for forgiveness, even offering to lose his own place in God's book. The intercessor and the executor are the same figure. The chapter's portrait of divine-human relations is therefore a living dispute over punishment, loyalty, mercy, and mediation.

This should make the modern believer uneasy about declaring one of those elements an embarrassment to be cut away. It should also make the historian uneasy about treating all the voices of the Pentateuch as transcripts dictated in a single sitting. Joel S. Baden's defense of a renewed documentary approach offers a method for identifying tensions among source traditions by examining narrative continuity, language, and distinctive assumptions rather than assuming a unified authorial intention. The existence of differences is observable. A proposed partition into sources remains an explanatory model requiring argument in each passage. [TNT-05]

We will eventually return to the question of whether an original divine command can be distinguished from a later priestly authorization. That question belongs in chapters on sacrificial law, Deuteronomy, and the composition of Torah. For the present, Exodus 32 has supplied the experiment in miniature. An idol is fashioned and acclaimed in the name of liberation. Its destruction is followed by a claim of sacred authority over the deaths of human beings. The same narrative preserves a prophet prepared to sacrifice himself in intercession.

The calf in the heart

The Qur'an remembers the calf through a metaphor that turns the direction of the story inward. In 2:93, the Israelites are described as having absorbed the calf into their hearts. The Arabic verb has the force of being made to drink something in; the object has passed from external worship into intimate attachment. The episode's ancient imagery is thus transformed into a diagnosis of devotion. [TNT-06]

For a Muslim reader this is a warning with obvious historical targets in the Qur'anic account of Israel, yet the metaphor is capable of self-application. A worshipper can carry the calf inside the intention to defend revelation. A Qur'an reciter can turn an inherited interpretation into a god whose character he refuses to examine. A scholar of any tradition can excuse his own cruelty by assigning it to the unseen deity who cannot appear to cross-examine him. Such applications are theological analogies, and no citation of 2:93 alone proves the specific charges.

What would the presence of this hidden idol look like? The worshipper begins to assume that God's honor depends on the humiliation of a vulnerable human being. The custodian of the law loses the capacity to distinguish faithfulness from the power of his office. Sacrificial procedures become an end whose human cost is scarcely visible. Religious violence is reimagined as a test of obedience, leaving the actor relieved of personal responsibility. Each is a claim about a possible moral deformation in religious life. The later chapters will have to demonstrate where particular historical texts support it.

One can love Torah and still ask who wrote its lines, how its commands have been understood, and which human claims to its authority have distorted the purpose of covenant. Indeed, the warnings within Torah give readers permission to fear the idol even when it bears a sacred name. The alternative to carelessness is a more demanding fidelity, answerable to the God whose voice gave the command and whose form remained unseen.

El, Yahweh, and the Council of Heaven

A genealogy of divine language

The covenantal imagination of the Hebrew Bible often places Israel in conflict with the religion of Canaan. That distinction is an ancient literary reality, and in later Jewish theology it acquires enduring importance. The historical situation behind the literature was more entangled. Early Israel emerged in a Levantine world whose inhabitants shared language, material culture, sacred places, artistic conventions, and inherited stories about the divine. Mark S. Smith has argued that the origins of biblical monotheism become more intelligible when Israelite theology is studied through this West Semitic setting. His work gives the present investigation a necessary discipline: examine the names and images before assigning every similarity to a corruption that occurred after an imagined pristine beginning. [TNT-07]

The tablets found at Ras Shamra, ancient Ugarit, gave scholars a remarkably detailed record of a Late Bronze Age religious world. El appears as a senior deity and head of a divine family. Baal's stories concern storms, kingship, combat, and the ordering of the world. A mother figure associated with Athirat, often compared with biblical Asherah, appears within a complex divine household. Ugarit was a particular northern Levantine culture rather than a convenient stand-in for all inhabitants of Canaan. Its texts provide comparative evidence, not a lost first draft of the Bible.

Hebrew preserves *ʾel* as a word for God or a god, and expressions involving El appear in patriarchal narratives.

Exodus 6:2–3 presents an especially suggestive theological memory: the ancestors knew the deity as El Shaddai, while the name YHWH is now made known to Moses. The text can be understood within the canonical story as an orderly disclosure of one divine identity under different names. Source critics also examine the verse alongside passages in Genesis that already use the name YHWH, since the tension offers clues about the compilation of ancestral and Exodus traditions. Neither reading authorizes an effortless reconstruction of an original pantheon. [TNT-08]

Scholars propose different histories for the rise and spread of YHWH worship. Poetic theophanies associate YHWH with southern locations such as Seir, Paran, and Teman. These associations have contributed to hypotheses about the southern provenance of the divine name or the worship that bore it. The evidence has limits. A deity arriving in poetry from a geographic direction need not have been invented there, and modern scholars lack a contemporary inscription announcing the precise moment that the God of Israel was first named.

There is, however, a central observation that bears directly on our theme. The biblical God inherited and transformed a religious vocabulary that had once circulated amid many divine beings. The movement toward exclusive worship involved the interpretation of older traditions, disputes over places and images, and the recasting of divine relationships. Monotheism developed through history in the communities that eventually transmitted the text. The theological judgment that the one God was always real lies beyond the archaeological method; the historical judgment concerns how human beings came to speak and write about him.

The sons of God in the Song of Moses

One of the clearest windows into that transformation comes from a difference among manuscripts. Deuteronomy 32:8 describes the Most High dividing the nations and setting their boundaries. The medieval Masoretic Hebrew text ties that distribution to the number of the *sons of Israel*. A fragment from Qumran, conventionally designated 4QDeutj, preserves *sons of God* instead. Greek witnesses also preserve a heavenly-being reading, though the wording of their manuscript traditions varies. Verse 9 names YHWH's portion as Jacob. [TNT-09]

The difference changes the imagined scene. Under the heavenly-being reading, the nations are assigned with reference to a celestial assembly. Readers have connected this with the wider West Semitic picture of a divine council. The Masoretic form turns attention toward Israel as the organizing number. A plausible text-critical account holds that the less familiar divine-council language was softened in transmission. That proposal draws support from the Qumran witness and ancient Greek versions. It remains necessary to distinguish a reconstruction of an early verse from a reconstruction of what every original audience believed.

The passage also provokes a tempting theological leap. If the Most High apportions the nations and YHWH receives Israel, perhaps El Elyon and YHWH were originally separate divine persons in an older tradition. Some scholarship explores this possibility. The text can also be read as the supreme God giving Israel to himself within a poetic scene populated by subordinate heavenly beings. A manuscript variant alone cannot decide the whole history of the names. What it securely demonstrates is

that the transmitted Torah contains a textual history with different theological implications.

This is why source criticism has stakes beyond antiquarian interest. The canonical object often looks singular once it is bound between two covers. Its ancient witnesses preserve a record of choices, revisions, and readings that complicate the appearance of a single unmediated voice. To study those choices is to study how communities protected and interpreted a confession of divine identity.

The council placed under judgment

Psalm 82 offers a striking companion. God stands in a divine assembly and judges those addressed as *elohim*. The poem accuses them of corrupt judgment and commands concern for the weak, orphaned, poor, and needy. Its condemned figures are told that they will die like mortals. The reading of the figures is disputed. They may be divine beings in a heavenly court, human judges addressed with exalted language, or figures whose rhetorical function permits more than one hearing. [TNT-10]

For a reader attentive to older divine-council traditions, the scene is remarkable. Divine membership becomes the setting for an ethical prosecution. Exalted figures are judged according to their treatment of vulnerable human beings. Whether the psalmist imagines the death of gods or the downfall of rulers, the moral language is unmistakable. The high court has failed the lowly.

The poem suggests a productive question for the whole book. What if the ancient struggle over which powers deserve the name of God also contains an ethical struggle over what power

must do? The progression need not be imagined as a triumph of abstract monotheism over the supposedly primitive practices of an earlier culture. Power, justice, and divine legitimacy were contested throughout the region. The biblical poets arranged their inherited images into an accusation that can also be read against Israel's own authorities.

Psalm 82 gives the later book a bridge to the prophets. The widow, orphan, and poor are more than figures in a charitable appendix to religion. They appear at the tribunal where exalted power must account for itself. A cult that has mastered the correct name for God while failing the human beings under its care still faces the psalm's question of judgment.

The name that outlived the pantheon

At Kuntillet ʿAjrud, an Iron Age site in the northeastern Sinai, inscriptions preserve blessings associated with YHWH of Samaria and YHWH of Teman. Texts from the site also contain divine language involving El, Baal, and Asherah. The assemblage belongs to the late ninth or early eighth century BCE, a dated window into forms of Israelite religious expression earlier than many extant biblical manuscripts. Jeremy Smoak and William Schniedewind have shown that the site's texts may be part of a scribal and everyday world rather than evidence that every inscribed vessel belonged to a shrine. [TNT-11]

A historian must avoid the opposite modern superstition: that a single artifact can explain the mind of an entire civilization. A blessing on a vessel proves that someone wrote the blessing and that its wording circulated. The titles associated with YHWH tell us something about regional worship and language. Their

existence does not tell us how every household prayed, which theological interpretations were orthodox in every locality, or exactly how those words traveled into the biblical canon.

Still, the finding matters. The God who later comes to be proclaimed as uniquely beyond representation was named in a setting thick with the religious inheritances of the Levant. The sense of historical continuity is harder to escape once we can read the inscriptions in their own period. This is a stronger argument than a sensational claim that archaeologists have discovered a photograph of God's lost wife. That claim will fail as soon as the language and iconography are examined closely.

This book therefore approaches an invisible God through the visible history of a name. The encounter with historical complexity should sharpen the theological argument. If generations of human beings used inherited words, stories, and objects to address God, the problem of confusing one's inherited medium with the divine reality has been present since the beginning of the surviving record. The problem survived every later decision to make the community's worship more exclusive.

The Most High and the Seventy Children

Book chapter for Torah or Not Torah, edition 1.7
Sources are given in the companion comparative dossier.

The earth that could be carried

A foreign soldier, cured of a disease by the prophet Elisha, wanted to take home some dirt. Naaman, the Aramean officer in

2 Kings 5, asked for two mule-loads of Israelite earth. He promised that henceforth his sacrifices would belong to YHWH. He expected to return to Damascus, where his official duties would force him to accompany his king into the temple of Rimmon. The soil offered a way of worshipping Israel's God on another nation's ground. Elisha sent him away in peace.

David had earlier described another consequence of sacred geography. Pursued by Saul, he complained that his enemies had driven him from YHWH's inheritance, effectively telling him to go and serve other gods (1 Samuel 26:19). David carried no recorded sacks of soil in this episode. The physical earth belongs to Naaman; David's speech records the associated fear that expulsion from the land could separate a worshipper from the proper sphere of his God.

Both passages preserve the religious significance of territory even in texts that later readers receive as testimony to the universal Lord. The old assumption was comprehensible. Nations had patron deities; kings tended their shrines; sacred ground was a form of political geography. Mesha of Moab invoked Chemosh to explain his victory over Israel. Israel's prophets repeatedly located YHWH's inheritance among Israel's people and lands. The curious part begins when those same traditions move beyond this geography and insist that all places already belong to God.

The Muslim worshipper bows toward the Kaaba and then places the forehead on the ground. In that low posture the worshipper says *Subḥāna rabbiyal-aʿlā*: glory be to my Lord, the Most High. The formula is attested in the prayer reported by Hudhayfa in Sahih Muslim 772 and recalls Qur'an 87:1, which commands

glorification of the name of the Most High. The Qur'an also says that east and west belong to Allah and that divine presence cannot be confined to a direction (2:115). Its appointed qibla organizes a worshipping community; the earth beneath the forehead has no exclusive jurisdiction over God.

The resemblance between Arabic *al-aʿlā* and Hebrew *ʿElyon* reaches into the shared Semitic language of height and exaltation. It is a lexical relationship, not a proven chain of cultic borrowing. That distinction matters. We are about to follow one title, *Most High*, through a religious history in which it could signify a senior deity in a family, a national god taking over universal kingship, and a God without genealogical peers.

A priest before the priesthood

In Genesis 14, Abram returns from war and encounters Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of **El ʿElyon**. The priest offers bread and wine, pronounces a blessing, and receives a tenth. His divine patron is described as maker of heaven and earth. The story contains a peculiar meeting of sacred authorities. Abram, whose descendants would claim a distinctive covenant, receives a blessing from a foreign king-priest. The older figure stands within a landscape of West Semitic sanctuaries, and his title may preserve the memory of Jerusalem's pre-Israelite religious world.

The Masoretic Hebrew of Genesis 14:22 joins the names: Abram swears by YHWH, El ʿElyon, maker of heaven and earth. In the received narrative this supplies the identification that allows Abram and Melchizedek to worship the same highest God. Historical-critical commentators have treated the encounter as

an independent episode, and some argue that the Melchizedek verses and the explanatory identification of the deity were inserted into an older war narrative. A 2026 redactional study proposes successive war, Abraham, and Melchizedek layers. The order of these literary events remains a reconstruction rather than an excavated manuscript history.

The argument is larger than the proposed insertion. The book of Genesis does not demand that an ancient reader regard the foreign king-priest as an enemy of the divine. His blessing enters Abram's story as a blessing from the Most High. Later interpreters could understand this as a recognition that the true God was known outside Israel, or as evidence that an older local divine title had been absorbed into Yahwistic theology.

Even the city is unstable in its historical interpretation. *Salem* came to be associated with Jerusalem, especially through Psalm 76, and Psalm 110 places a priestly Melchizedek title beside a royal figure. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes Melchizedek a pattern for Jesus' priesthood. Other modern research disputes the assumption that the original Salem setting has been securely identified with Jerusalem. A theological genealogy built from Genesis 14 must distinguish its ancient story from its much later interpretations.

The council of the Most High

The tablets from Ugarit offer a glimpse of a divine society. Their literature knows El, Athirat, Baal, and other divine figures whose relationships resemble a royal household. In the Baal Cycle, the poet refers to **the seventy, the children of Athirat** (KTU 1.4 VI 46). The title is often paraphrased as the seventy

children of El because Athirat belongs to El's divine household, but the actual line names Athirat. Seventy can be a conventional figure of plenitude rather than a census that reliably names seventy separate gods.

Now place Deuteronomy 32:8–9 beside it. The Masoretic Text describes the Most High setting boundaries for nations according to the number of the *sons of Israel*. A manuscript from Qumran, 4QDeut-j (4Q37), reads **sons of God**; the Old Greek tradition commonly renders the phrase as **angels of God**. The next verse declares that YHWH's share is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. The earlier reading fits a world in which nations are distributed within a heavenly assembly, while YHWH's own portion is Israel.

One influential interpretation sees Elyon as the fatherly high god assigning each nation to a lower divine patron, with YHWH originally receiving Israel. A second understands *Elyon* as YHWH's title already within the poem, and the divine sons as dependent celestial servants. The textual variant is secure; the distinct identity of Elyon and YHWH in the poem's original conception remains contested. The manuscript does not yield a dated account of when a particular god was first worshipped or when divine identities were merged.

Psalm 82 stages a divine assembly in which God stands among heavenly beings and rebukes them for judging unjustly. Their failure to defend the poor and fatherless precedes the announcement that they will die like mortals. The poem ends by asking God to rise and possess every nation. Here the older council language has become a vehicle for criticizing unjust divine administrators, or the deities of nations, in a movement

toward unshared universal rule. The referents of *elohim* remain disputed: gods, angelic beings, or human judges have all been proposed, though the poem's cosmic imagery lends weight to a divine council reading.

The next important stage appears inside the Torah itself. Deuteronomy 4:19–20 still recalls heavenly bodies allotted to the peoples, then claims that Israel was brought out of Egypt to belong to YHWH. Yet 4:35 and 4:39 say that YHWH is God and there is no other. Deuteronomy 6:4 requires Israel to hear the oneness of YHWH. Scholars debate whether the Shema began as an insistence on exclusive loyalty or already asserted metaphysical monotheism; its later reception clearly treats it as an expression of divine uniqueness. The book therefore contains inherited language of cosmic division beside categorical assertions of universal sovereignty.

The documentary hypothesis and the acquired divine names

The Pentateuch offers another bridge in Exodus 6:2–3. In the Priestly narrative, God tells Moses that the patriarchs knew him as *El Shaddai*, while the name YHWH was revealed to Moses in a new manner. The Yahwist material presents the divine name being invoked much earlier, including Genesis 4:26. Source critics use the difference to explain how distinct patriarchal and Mosaic traditions were brought into one literary sequence. *El Shaddai* is commonly translated "God Almighty," although the etymology of *Shaddai* remains debated.

A neat sequence of J, E, P, and D producing one steadily improving theology would be misleading. Genesis 14 belongs to an especially difficult independent tradition, and Deuteronomy

32 is a poem with its own transmission and editorial history. Literary layers are analytical models. Different communities could preserve household images, local manifestations of YHWH, exclusive worship, and uncompromising monotheistic declarations at overlapping dates.

Kuntillet ʿAjrud, in the southern Levant, makes that coexistence tangible. Eighth-century inscriptions invoke “YHWH of Samaria” and “YHWH of Teman” together with “his asherah.” Scholars dispute whether the last term means the goddess or a cultic object. The inscriptions nevertheless show a local and embodied religious vocabulary at a time when later biblical authors would formulate or preserve sweeping prohibitions against images and rivals.

The strongest unambiguous claims of divine exclusivity in the prophetic corpus appear in Isaiah 40–45: YHWH alone is creator and sovereign, and the Persian king Cyrus becomes his instrument, even without belonging to Israel. A tradition grounded in Israel’s special inheritance speaks of the creator of the whole world commissioning a foreign emperor. In this universalizing theology, the earlier geographical allotment no longer limits God’s agency.

The Vedic comparison, and what contact means

The ritual world of the early Vedas supplies a striking comparison across religious cultures. The Rigveda celebrates Indra, Agni, Soma, and other divine figures within a social order organized around priestly poetry, sacrifice, cattle, land, and warfare. Soma sacrifice and offerings through the sacred fires define a ritual relationship among gods, patrons, and priests.

Indra's martial victories provide language through which human leaders can imagine their own campaigns as cosmic achievements. Thomas Oberlies, Stephanie Jamison, and Joel Brereton describe these ideas in the history of early Vedic ritual.

There is even a genuine Indo-Aryan presence in the wider Near East. The Late Bronze Age Hittite–Mitanni treaty invokes gods whose names correspond to Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, and the Nāsatyas. That evidence places an Indo-Aryan elite and divine vocabulary in northern Syria during the second millennium BCE. It makes regional cultural exchange historically possible. It offers no direct evidence that Canaan's El pantheon derived from Vedic religion or that Israel's sacrifices were modeled on the Rigveda.

A second bridge runs through Iranian religion. Vedic and early Iranian religious traditions share earlier Indo-Iranian vocabulary and ritual structures, including parallels between soma and haoma. The worship of Ahura Mazda later shaped a powerful Persian religious world. The Achaemenid empire brought Iranian authority into Judean life, as the Cyrus material already shows. The degree to which Zoroastrian doctrine influenced Jewish monotheism, angels, cosmic dualism, or eschatology remains debated; the religion of Cyrus is difficult to identify securely with later Zoroastrianism.

The most defensible comparative claim is structural. Priests can link a community's sacrifices to cosmic order, rulers can describe successful violence as a god's victory, and rituals can become emblems of loyalty. Those patterns recur in ancient South Asia and the Levant. They do not constitute a shared permission to annihilate populations. An Indra victory hymn, a

sacrificial fire, Mesha's dedication of a city to Chemosh, and the Israelite *ḥērem* are different texts and actions. Any stronger equivalence needs a demonstrated connection and an account of the human victims each source actually names.

When the king borrows the god's voice

The older divine allotment tells a nation that it has a patron. The territorial covenant tells people that their land belongs to God. In some historical circumstances the claim could restrain kings by placing them under obligations. In others a king or prophet could turn national violence into divine service.

Mesha's inscription invokes Chemosh in the destruction of an Israelite settlement. Deuteronomy 20 and 1 Samuel 15 attribute commands of annihilation to YHWH. Their similarity reveals a regional grammar of sacred warfare. It cannot establish whether any such command originated with God, nor how much of the reported destruction actually took place. The historical work must distinguish a royal triumphal formula from a civilian casualty record and from an independently recoverable revelation.

The danger becomes sharper when people inherit a text that forbids questioning the authority of its attributed speaker. In Islamic jurisprudence, *taqlīd* has a technical sense: a layperson relies upon the judgment of a qualified scholar. That practice can serve a reasonable division of intellectual labor. The Qur'an itself criticizes followers who make the customs of their ancestors a substitute for judging religious truth (2:170; 43:22–24). A religious community therefore needs a way to distinguish responsible reliance from surrendering moral scrutiny.

The same scripture makes the ethical problem explicit in a different register. Qur'an 6:137 condemns people whose alleged divine partners made the killing of their children appear acceptable. Qur'an 22:37 insists that the flesh and blood of sacrificial animals never reach God; what matters is reverence. These verses remain within a religion that practices animal sacrifice and contains its own difficult warfare passages. Their force is an invitation to apply one standard of scrutiny across the traditions, including Islam.

The prophets of the Hebrew Bible also question the claims of cult and monarchy. Hosea puts covenant loyalty above sacrifice; Micah asks for justice and humility; Amos hears divine displeasure with assemblies alongside the demand for justice in public life. Their disputes belong to the same scriptural collection as the conquest commands. The Qur'an's reproach of destructive ancestral devotion makes an analogous argument against treating inherited ritual as an independent source of moral permission.

The highest Lord and the lowest forehead

The older sacred world could imagine a great god sitting above a council while nations received their divine patrons below. The worshipper might carry a fragment of holy earth into a foreign country. The worshipper might also carry the god's name into battle, attaching heavenly glory to the king's victory.

The recitation in prostration invites a different act of imagination. The worshipper lowers the forehead and calls the Lord *al-Aʿlā*, the Most High. The posture teaches that the human person has neither a privileged height from which to command

God nor a piece of earth that can confine him. The earthly direction remains meaningful, but it serves worship of a God who exceeds geography. The sacrificial animal remains part of a ritual, but its blood cannot feed God.

The resulting theological test applies to every religious inheritance. When an interpreter claims God's name for an order to destroy a community, can the claim be examined under the demands of justice that the same religious tradition preserves? Can the worshipper recognize when a sacred object, an inherited text, or an authorized command has begun to stand where God should stand? The history of El Elyon and YHWH supplies the background; the debate about *taḥrīf* concerns the passage from that background into a text claiming final authority.

The man carrying earth from Israel to Damascus and the Muslim prostrating toward Mecca belong to very different religious worlds. Their gestures invite a shared inquiry into what a human being is trying to preserve when he turns toward the Most High.

The Wife of the Invisible God

What the jar says

The phrase customarily rendered *YHWH and his asherah* has become one of the most famous pieces of evidence in the study of early Israelite religion. It appears in inscriptions at Kuntillet ʿAjrud, and a related formula is known from Khirbet el-Qom. The expression makes readers ask what the author of the blessing believed accompanied the God named in it. [TNT-11]

A popular answer is that the deity had a wife. A more cautious answer begins with the written form. The possessive suffix attached to *asherah* has generated competing interpretations. Some scholars take the word to refer to a goddess or a manifestation associated with her. Others think it denotes a sacred object, perhaps a cult symbol. Ancient images and inscriptions must also be compared without assuming that every figure painted on a vessel illustrates the sentence written beside it. The Bes-like figures on one of the Kuntillet ʿAjrud jars are often presented as portraits of YHWH and Asherah, even though the relationship between the painted scene and the inscription is uncertain. [TNT-12]

The Hebrew Bible knows the name Asherah and cult objects associated with it. In the narratives of Kings, objects and practices related to Asherah enter or are removed from royal sanctuaries. The stories place these practices within the contested religious life of Israel and Judah. They are biblical witnesses to disputes over cult, not disinterested inventories of every household's theology. [TNT-13]

The evidence therefore supports a historical claim with some force: the worship of YHWH in parts of ancient Israel was entangled with religious symbols and ideas that the later canonical tradition classified as unacceptable. A stronger claim about the exact marital status of YHWH in every community would require evidence the present record cannot provide. The famous jar deserves a chapter because it makes the reader confront a past that the canon's mature theology cannot simply erase.

The god a community imagines

We have now seen three different forms of religious mediation. The calf makes divine presence portable. The inherited names and council imagery make divine identity intelligible through an older cultural language. The inscription makes a particular form of blessing durable enough to survive its writers by nearly three millennia. Each is a human approach to what worshippers regarded as sacred. The biblical polemics ask which approaches were faithful.

A dangerous inference would be to portray the old polytheistic culture as uniquely cruel and the subsequent monotheistic culture as automatically merciful. The very texts that defend exclusive worship often give sacred status to practices that later readers find morally troubling. The books of the prophets are powerful partly because they protest wrongs in a community that already knows the name of its God. The history of the names prepares us to examine the history of the commands.

The question in the next part will be how a community came to possess a Torah that could command offerings, insist on certain deaths, and preserve the voices of prophets who challenged the moral life surrounding the cult. The answer will require looking at composition, historical context, and interpretation rather than expecting one line of the text to silence every other line.

PART II · THE LAW AND ITS CUSTODIANS

The Law That Spoke with Moses' Voice

The book found in the Temple had no voice of its own. A reader had to open it. A king had to hear it. According to the story in 2 Kings 22, Josiah tore his clothes when its words reached him, because he believed Judah had lived beneath commandments it had neglected. His officers carried the scroll from the sanctuary to the throne, and its speech reorganized the kingdom. High places were removed, objects used in other cults were destroyed, and Jerusalem became the place to which authorized worship was drawn.

The reader of Deuteronomy has already been prepared for that scene. The book says that Moses delivered his final instructions while Israel stood east of the Jordan. The events it recalls belong to the wilderness. The future it commands belongs to a people with towns, fields, courts, priests, kings, and a functioning sanctuary. Its repeated word is *today*. Each generation is addressed as though it personally stands before the covenant. The voice of Moses becomes available to people who never heard the living Moses speak.

Historical criticism asks how such a book was written and gathered. Its strongest argument concerns the relationship between Deuteronomy's laws and older rules that the Pentateuch also preserves. Exodus allows an altar to arise in places where God's name is remembered. Deuteronomy declares that offerings belong at the place God will choose. One system assumes that the worshipper can slaughter a sacrifice

near home. The other has to distinguish an animal killed for a meal from an animal offered at the sanctuary, because the distance to Jerusalem may be considerable. The law adapts to a changed religious map.

A devoted reader can believe that the change belongs to God's providence. A historian can examine what the change does to the institutions that preserve religion. Bernard Levinson has shown how Deuteronomy revises earlier biblical law while speaking in the inherited authority of Moses. The book's remarkable literary achievement is to make innovation arrive as recollection. It places later arrangements in the mouth of the man from whom law first came.

This is the difficulty that every later revelation inherits.

The Qur'an calls the Torah guidance and light. When certain Jewish interlocutors are challenged about food, the command is to bring the Torah and recite it. Elsewhere the Qur'an asks why people seek Muhammad's judgment while possessing a Torah containing God's own judgment. These are difficult sayings to reconcile with the idea that every recognizable word of the Torah had already been erased. They depict a text that can still be opened. It is available for argument, and its contents can still convict those who invoke it selectively.

The legal hadith gives the scene a body. In a report collected by Abu Dawud, Muhammad is handed a Torah during a dispute concerning Jewish offenders. He removes a cushion from under himself and places it under the book. The Arabic formula of acknowledgment addresses the Torah directly: *amantu biki wa-biman anzalaki*. The image is unusually concrete. A Jewish scroll is treated as worthy of reverence. The report's special wording is

carried through a particular chain and requires the same critical assessment as any other hadith. Its presence in the narrative matters to the reader even before that historical question is settled.

A separate group of hadith reports makes the dispute still more pointed. Jews are said to have concealed the passage relevant to stoning by laying a hand over it. Muhammad discovers what has been hidden and orders a sentence to be carried out. In the Hebrew Torah, Deuteronomy specifies stoning for certain sexual offenses, including the case of a betrothed woman in a city. Other passages prescribe death without naming the means. Later rabbinic law assigns methods of execution through further distinctions. The image of a single lost verse containing a universal stoning rule does little justice to this legal history. It is enough that the hadith imagines an identifiable legal text, held by Jews, whose authority can be invoked in an actual dispute.

There is a second report, transmitted through different routes in Musnad Ahmad and elsewhere, in which Umar brings Jewish writings to Muhammad and provokes his anger. In the strongest form of the rebuke, Moses himself would have been obliged to follow the newer messenger. Individual routes of the report have been judged weak, while other scholars find support in their combined transmission. Its meaning also depends on what Umar was attempting. Gathering separate traditions to compete with a new revelation is one activity; asking Jews to account for a rule in their own acknowledged scripture is another. Both stories can have a place in an Islamic account of scriptural authority. Their evidential weight still needs assessment, and the interpreter must explain the boundary.

Deuteronomy is especially hard to set aside because some Muslim thinkers recognize it as the fullest surviving shape of the Torah itself. Javed Ahmad Ghamidi, in his discussion of belief in revealed books, describes Deuteronomy as a collected presentation of the law amid the surrounding books' historical narrative. He recognizes its long textual history and continues to treat the Qur'an as its final criterion. The position allows meaningful continuity between Moses and Muhammad. It also brings the old commands out into the open where they can be examined.

What, then, of the captive woman? Deuteronomy permits a victorious soldier to take a woman he desires from among the defeated. It commands that she be given a period to mourn and prohibits selling her if the union ends. The restrictions say something significant about the law's effort to restrain the victor. They leave us with the fact that the woman entered the household through war. Qur'an 4:24 has its own difficult history, including a hadith about captives whose husbands remained alive after battle. Ghamidi's interpretation emphasizes the captive's voluntary remarriage. Classical jurists described legal access after captivity dissolved a former marriage. The exact texts, and the human predicament behind them, deserve a hearing on their own terms. One cannot make the problem vanish by assigning it exclusively to the people of an earlier covenant.

The same book that permits captive marriage orders a roof parapet so that a person does not fall. It tells a farmer to return a neighbor's lost animal and to release a mother bird rather than take her with her young. Then it forbids planting two kinds of seed in a vineyard and wearing cloth made of wool with

linen. A later reader may recognize humane practical concerns and remain unsure why the garment is a matter of holiness. Rabbinic interpreters gave the mixture prohibitions a range of meanings. Their variety suggests that ancient law can preserve obligations whose original reasons were never stated in the form a philosopher might wish.

The Qur'an speaks with a similarly arresting concern for the authority to prohibit. Its warning in 16:116 is directed against declaring one thing lawful and another unlawful through false speech attributed to God. At 5:48, it describes a distinct law and way given to different communities. The possibility that God imposed a rule for a particular people and later lifted it is therefore already inside the Qur'anic framework. That explanation can be reasoned through. It asks the interpreter to distinguish a divine command intended for one covenant from an inherited custom that only claimed divine origin.

Deuteronomy's most searching passage occurs in its treatment of prophets. Moses promises a prophet to come, speaking words placed in his mouth by God. A few chapters earlier the book has warned against a wonder-worker whose teaching turns Israel toward other gods. The prophet who speaks falsely in God's name is condemned. The prophet who speaks truly must be heard. Reading the book in a later age makes those two imperatives collide, because each new claimant arrives through the human world. His listeners must decide whether the voice is God's, and they have only inherited words and contested signs with which to judge.

Jewish readers have understood the promise as providing prophecy within Israel. Christians have applied the figure to

Jesus. Muslim interpreters have read the promised likeness to Moses as a sign of Muhammad. The Qur'an says that the messenger can be found described in earlier scripture. That claim presents a task for careful historical reading: to locate the alleged description, examine what it meant in its earliest surviving setting, and then ask whether a later fulfillment is being claimed. A favorable interpretation cannot serve as its own independent proof.

Behind the arguments stands another sentence from Moses' law. He tells Israel to choose life. The command appears after long threats of punishment and exile. The very lawbook that can arm the public executioner also asks the listener to turn back, accept an intelligible obligation, and live. That internal complexity should guide the book's method. We will examine a command's literary history and ask what kind of human action it authorized. Whenever a religious authority claims to speak for God, we will bring the claim back to the people who must live with its consequences.

The God Who Ate the Fat

A people released from forced labor arrive at the mountain, and their freedom assumes the shape of instructions. The opening of Leviticus has none of the dramatic impatience of the golden calf. Its God speaks from a tent. Human beings approach with animals, flour, oil, and blood. The priest touches the altar. A hand is laid on the head of a creature that will die. Its body is divided according to rules exact enough to distinguish one

membrane of fat from another. Then the smoke ascends, and the sacred writer calls it pleasing.

A modern reader may be tempted to skip the details. A lamb's kidneys offer little spiritual excitement. The distribution of the breast, the right thigh, the skin, and the blood seems to belong to a cult that has disappeared. The temptation is a mistake. These details are the author's account of how an invisible God agrees to live among finite people. Leviticus is a theology of divine presence written as instructions for handling matter.

Its central question, for this book, is whether those instructions preserve the knowledge of God or become an object that can displace God. There is an obvious danger in assuming that ritual is intrinsically idolatrous. The Torah's priestly texts often insist on the exact opposite: a dangerous holiness cannot simply be possessed. Access is mediated because the sanctum is dangerous, and a careless priest can die. The priestly account of Nadab and Abihu, consumed by fire after presenting an unauthorized offering, is among the strongest ancient statements of this view. Precisely because the stakes are so high, the worshipper must ask who taught the priest which fire God desires.

The book with more than one priestly voice

Historical criticism begins with the book's seams. Leviticus is made mainly of Priestly writing, conventionally designated P, together with a Holiness stratum, H, usually concentrated in chapters 17–26. The older textbook story imagined the Holiness Code as a preexisting collection swallowed by a later priestly editor. Scholars such as Israel Knohl, Jacob Milgrom, Jeffrey

Stackert, and Christophe Nihan have given substantial reasons to regard H as a later development that expanded the early priestly system, even while disagreeing over dates and the relation between composition and editing. The analysis is a reconstruction from language, structure, and differences of law. The scrolls themselves do not arrive with source initials written in their margins.

The shift is theological as well as literary. The first chapters are preoccupied with sacred boundaries: the sanctuary, the altar, the duties of Aaron's descendants, and the conditions under which impurity threatens holy space. The Holiness material repeatedly addresses the people with an imperative to become holy. It reaches into harvests, debts, treatment of strangers, sexuality, kinship, and the use of land. It can sound unexpectedly tender. Its command to love the resident alien as oneself stands near its instructions for preserving divisions among animals, crops, and garments. The very chapter that tells the landowner to leave food for the poor forbids clothing woven from two specified materials.

The philosophical problem lives inside this mixture. Rules can represent divine generosity and also a human way of classifying the world. Some classifications seem to protect life; others preserve ceremonial differences that modern readers cannot recover with confidence. H does not deliver a single abstract principle that explains every command. The formula of authority recurs at the end of many statutes: *I am YHWH.* The formula puts the unanswerable question into the mouth of every reader. How does a rule acquire this signature?

The animal outside the tent

Leviticus 17 directs an Israelite who kills an ox, sheep, or goat to bring the animal to the tent of meeting. Slaughter outside the authorized sacrificial space is treated as bloodguilt. The rule imagines a world in which a domestic animal's death must be brought under divine supervision. If people slaughter where they please, the chapter fears that they will return to sacrifice for other powers, including the enigmatic goat-demons of the countryside.

Deuteronomy 12 pictures another country. The people will be spread across their territory, far from the place where God chooses to put the divine name. The distance makes household sacrifice impractical, so they may slaughter and eat meat in their towns, provided they pour out the blood. The same books are received as the one Torah. Historically oriented readers see in them different legal schemes, while traditional interpreters can locate the difference between wilderness conditions and settled life.

The question becomes sharper when the Qur'an speaks. It recognizes earlier revelation and tells Jews, in 5:43, that they possess a Torah containing divine judgment. Yet it sets out a new dietary law for its own hearers and describes other food prohibitions as especially imposed upon Jews. Its account of revelation already includes changing legal obligations. The apparent disagreement between Leviticus and Deuteronomy therefore provides a more demanding test than a simple claim that later scripture changed an earlier one. A reader first has to explain how a single earlier scripture can house differently framed commands.

The camel and the meaning of an exception

In Leviticus 11 the camel is unclean for Israel because it fails the stated hoof test. It belongs with other animals identified by the text as excluded from eating. The Qur'an's dietary statements are strikingly different. In 6:145, the messenger reports a comparatively short list of prohibited foods. The following verse says additional restrictions were imposed upon Jews, including animals identified by an expression often translated as having an undivided hoof or claw. In Sahih Muslim, a report about eating camel meat assumes that this flesh may be eaten while regulating the ablution that follows it.

This is an instance of legal change with unusually good textual support. A Muslim can affirm that the prohibition on camel meat was a genuine command to Israelites and still eat camel meat. Such an explanation needs no imagined lost Torah. The Qur'an itself supplies a concept of laws that were given to a particular community. It does, however, require the Muslim exegete to say what exactly happened to a command written in God's name and called binding upon Israel. The answer is a theology of audiences and times, rather than a single undifferentiated law.

A second difficulty comes from the hadith collections. The Qur'an's concise list of forbidden food seems, taken by itself, comprehensive. Reports in Bukhari and Muslim prohibit predatory animals with fangs and birds with hunting talons. Classical jurists generally read these as the Prophet's authoritative specification of dietary law. Other Muslim interpreters question how the list can be supplemented. The methodological problem is the same as the one posed by P and

H: what constitutes an authorized addition, and what counts as a human being speaking with God's voice?

Two sorts of uncleanness

The priestly writers are also exact about bodies. A woman who has given birth to a male infant undergoes a seven-day initial period followed by thirty-three days of blood-related purification. For a female infant, the text doubles both numbers. A woman menstruating and a man with bodily discharge occupy other positions in a system whose concern is the movement of impurity through persons, objects, and sacred space.

Qur'an 2:222 addresses menstruation as a condition involving harm and restricts sexual approach. The hadith tradition attributed to Anas describes the Prophet allowing ordinary intimacy apart from intercourse. It places this decision in a polemical account of Jewish menstrual separation; that account should be understood as a report of a later speaker's description rather than a complete description of Jewish law. The Qur'an does not reproduce the Levitical system of contamination by furniture and bedding. Hadith about postpartum bleeding give a forty-day practice, different from Leviticus 12's son/daughter distinctions.

The comparisons matter because purity can slip into moral judgment about the body. A ritual state can be an ordinary temporary condition in one system and be interpreted as shame in another. Neither scripture permits an honest reader to confuse its detailed instructions automatically with a claim about the worth of women. Yet both inherit societies in which

the authority to name bodies clean or unclean has practical consequences.

Two commands beside one another

Leviticus 19 is the most serious obstacle to any argument that the priestly Torah consisted of ritual cruelty. A field must retain gleanings for people in need. Workers must receive wages in time. The disabled must be protected from abuse. A neighbor must be loved, and a resident alien treated as a native-born person. These commands appear in the same legislative voice as the prohibition of mixed livestock, mixed seed, and a garment of mixed cloth. Later Jewish interpretation identifies the textile prohibition in conjunction with Deuteronomy as a restriction on wool and linen.

Here the Qur'an offers a useful warning. Its verses against inventing prohibitions in God's name are addressed to people whose religion also contains restrictions and sacrifices. The warning is therefore a test of any religious interpreter. A Muslim who looks at the wool-and-linen rule and laughs at Jewish legalism should ask by what warrant his own exegetes restrict a food beyond the Qur'an's explicit list. A Jewish reader who insists that every ritual detail reveals the divine will must confront the same problem when another Torah text revises a rule. The point is to make the interpreter's warrant visible.

The eye that was to be taken

Leviticus 24 requires a blasphemer to be stoned, then states principles of retaliation for injury. The Qur'an's fifth surah attributes a life-for-life, eye-for-eye rule to the Torah, adding a clause about remission as charity. The correspondences are too

specific to reduce to generic agreement about justice. They show the Qur'an invoking a legal memory that readers could recognize.

The Babylonian Talmud, however, famously argues that an eye for an eye means financial compensation. The rabbis do not treat the written formula as permission for an injured party to remove an eye. Their reasoning is elaborate: injuries differ, defendants may have no matching organ, and legal equality requires a remedy that can be applied. The result poses a counterintuitive question. Where does preservation reside: in a verbal formula or in an interpretive practice that prevents its literal enactment? The Qur'an's later invocation of the formula does not alone answer whether it requires literal maiming in every case. The question must be asked against each legal tradition's interpretive history.

The neighbor and the inheritance

Leviticus 25 forbids an Israelite to be held as a chattel slave by another Israelite. In the same chapter, foreign slaves may be acquired and passed to children as inherited property. The legal distinction is explicit, however uncomfortable it is. The Torah here limits exploitation inside its covenantal family without extending the same protection to everyone. The command to love the resident alien in Leviticus 19 remains available for moral criticism of the arrangement, though it concerns a different legal category.

The Qur'an treats freeing a slave as a virtuous act and, in certain circumstances, a required act of expiation. It also assumes the existence of slavery, captive possession, and distinctions of

status, as do the early Muslim legal traditions. A comparison that turns either community into a simple symbol of humanitarian progress obscures the humans placed inside those systems. The more serious question is how a religious tradition can remember a God of liberation while administering the status of people whom another person owns.

The idol made of a command

The book's thesis will stand or fall on a distinction here. Scripture can use embodied practices to transmit gratitude, protect vulnerable people, and place limits upon power. An idol is manufactured when the claim of revelation turns the practice into an unchallengeable object and prevents the worshipper from asking how the command came to be written, transmitted, interpreted, and applied. Historical criticism exposes competing legal voices; rabbinic argument shows a tradition struggling to live with them; Qur'anic affirmation forces the discussion into a third scriptural setting.

In the opening of Leviticus, the sanctuary's altar receives fat and blood. At the end, the people are warned that the land and its inhabitants will suffer if they betray holiness. Between these two locations stands the human being for whose sake religious law claims to exist. The book must keep that person in view when it asks which voice, among all the voices bearing a sacred name, deserves obedience.

The Camp That Faced Its Own Heart

Numbers, sacred direction, and the vengeance at Midian

The compass in the wilderness

The first thing a traveller approaching Israel's encampment would encounter was an arrangement. On the eastern side stood Judah with Issachar and Zebulun. Reuben's division guarded the south, Ephraim's the west, and Dan's the north. Between them, at successive distances, lay the Levites and the tent of meeting. Numbers 2 describes an army, a settlement and a sanctuary assembled according to a single design. Numbers 3 reserves the eastern approach to Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons. The stranger who trespasses within their guarded sphere faces death.

The pattern is a claim about where God is to be encountered. The invisible God has a geographical address, although the address moves whenever the cloud rises and the camp marches. Each family knows its standard and place. Each kind of human body is assigned a different degree of proximity. To move inward is to cross a hierarchy maintained by priestly labor and threatened by ritual punishment. Within this arrangement a God who cannot be fashioned into a statue is represented by an extraordinarily exact distribution of spaces, objects and authorized persons.

This is the wilderness predecessor of a question Muslims ask with their bodies each time they pray. Where shall the face turn when the person addressed cannot be placed anywhere in the created world? Numbers gives the camp a ritual center. It does not give every Israelite a command to face the tabernacle at prayer, and the distinction is important. A developed Jewish orientation toward Jerusalem comes into focus in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8 and in the

later Mishnah's instructions for worshippers far from the sanctuary. The Qur'an gives Muhammad a direction toward the Sacred Mosque in 2:144 and says that Moses and Aaron received an instruction to make their houses *qibla* in Egypt in 10:87. Early Muslim interpreters understood the latter in several ways, including homes serving as places of prayer and homes arranged toward a worship direction. Sacred geometry travelled through different texts before becoming a comprehensive rule about facing a point in space.

An ancient sanctuary did not have to be an idol. It was an attempt to order an approach to the unseen. The danger appears when the pattern claims an authority greater than the purpose for which it was made. Numbers continually asks how near the living God may be approached, and who has the right to decide. The stranger is stopped at the fence. The Levite is stopped at an inner boundary. Even a priest can die for conducting the wrong act. Those judgments prepare the ground for the war narrative at the book's far end, where the priestly guardians of the sacred order carry its implements into a foreign campaign.

A place that travels, a place that remains

Exodus has already given detailed instructions for the tent and its furnishings. Numbers turns architecture into government. The Levites handle transport, the priests preserve the degrees of holiness, the census classifies fighting men, and the tribes set out in a prescribed order. God's presence appears in the cloud, which determines when the people remain and when they move. A moving sanctuary poses an unusual problem: the community carries its source of legitimacy, yet every piece must

be carried without permitting unauthorized access to the holiest things.

Jewish tradition later imagines another form of centrality. Solomon prays that an Israelite in exile may face the land, the city, and the house bearing the divine name; the prayer itself asks God to hear from heaven. Mishnah Berakhot 4:5 allows a traveller who cannot turn physically toward the Holy of Holies to direct the heart there. The rule preserves the value of physical orientation and acknowledges that the worshipper's intention can reach beyond it.

The Qur'anic account of the qibla change similarly tests the relation between obedience and direction. The believers once faced one prayer direction and now face another. Qur'an 2:177 then describes righteousness in terms of belief, generosity, fidelity, and endurance rather than merely turning east or west. The Kaaba has a defined role in prayer and pilgrimage. Qur'an 2:125–127 associates it with Abraham and Ishmael, while 22:37 says that neither the flesh nor blood of offerings reaches God. A ritual point on earth can therefore be affirmed as sacred even as revelation warns against reducing divine regard to material exchanges.

There is a potential historical irony here. An ancient Priestly system becomes, in Numbers, an instrument for allocating authority over Israel's approach to God. The Qur'an affirms the significance of worship direction while denying that direction exhausts righteousness. The argument over the idol can be found again where there is no idol to be seen. It waits at the point where protecting access to the holy becomes a justification for harming someone beyond the gate.

The heifer and the serpent

Numbers 19 orders the slaughter of a red heifer outside the camp. Its ashes, combined with water, cleanse corpse impurity. The ritual simultaneously requires those handling its preparation to undergo purification. Rabbis later argued over the animal's age, coloring, suitability and the distinctive logic of this command. Qur'an 2:67–73 recounts Moses commanding a cow to be slaughtered, a congregation repeatedly asking for specifications, and an unsolved killing brought into the story. Gabriel Said Reynolds discusses the possible relationship to Numbers 19 and the unworked heifer of Deuteronomy 21. The Qur'an's cow is described with a color word commonly translated *yellow*. A claim of direct textual identity between the accounts would erase the important differences.

Numbers 21 presents the opposite visual problem. Moses fashions a bronze serpent at God's command, and the bitten Israelites who look toward it survive. Second Kings 18:4 later describes Hezekiah destroying the bronze serpent because Israelites had been burning incense to it. An object associated with divine deliverance has become an object of worship. The theological logic is extraordinary: a thing can be introduced in a narrative as a commanded instrument of healing and become, through its subsequent use, the thing a reformer must break.

The danger of substituting the means of salvation for its author is therefore articulated inside the Jewish scriptures themselves. It requires no polemic against Judaism from beyond its borders. Numbers is the place where that danger is bound to a second, more difficult question. What happens when a zealot protects God's name by killing human beings?

Two tales at Peor

Numbers 25 begins with Israelite men participating in the worship of Baal of Peor in association with Moabite women. Soon the story turns toward a Midianite woman, Cozbi, and an Israelite man, Zimri. Phinehas, a descendant of Aaron, drives a spear through them. God is then reported to give him a covenant of peace. It is a disturbing sentence for a theology of peace to explain. The authors appear to imagine priestly zeal as capable of ending divine wrath, even when that zeal takes a life without a narrated trial.

The narrative bears signs of composition. Its movement from Moab to Midian, its differing punishments, and its shift in cast have prompted source critics to reconstruct more than one antecedent account. The neighboring stories of Balaam create another tension. Numbers 22–24 repeatedly has Balaam speak blessings over Israel. Numbers 31:16 retroactively credits him with advising a betrayal at Peor. Rabbinic interpreters developed accounts of his concealed hostility; historical criticism asks whether the later accusation grew from another strand of tradition.

The intervening chapters also matter. Israel takes a census, receives laws concerning inheritance and offerings, and regulates vows before Moses is suddenly told to carry out the vengeance against Midian. The war is placed among preparations for entering the land. Its position gives the massacre the appearance of a necessary preliminary to communal settlement. A narrative originally associated with Peor may have been inserted into this sequence and expanded through Priestly legal material. Ariel Kopilovitz's study offers

precisely such a model. He also demonstrates that the war's priestly procedures disagree with other laws elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Calling it a late addition captures part of the debate; the editorial history remains a scholarly reconstruction rather than an independently dated event.

Moses after the victory

Twelve thousand warriors depart. The account says they kill Midian's males, its five kings and Balaam; the towns burn. They return with women, children, livestock and other property. Moses becomes angry that women have survived. He then orders the killing of the boys and of women who have had sexual relations, while the other girls may be retained. There are no soldier deaths in the campaign according to the commanders' final report. The figures belong to a crafted ancient war narrative and deserve attention as literary assertions. They cannot simply be entered into a modern census of a verified historical atrocity.

The change of speaker matters. Numbers 31 begins with a divine instruction to avenge Israel. The particular order to kill surviving captive children and women is spoken by Moses in verses 15–18. An interpreter may regard his instructions as executing the divine mission; that interpretation should be stated. The chapter does not put the exact wording of the order into God's mouth. For a reader asking how a prophet's speech acquires divine authority, the gap is the central fact.

The girls are counted afterward as booty. The total is 32,000. The spoils are divided between soldiers and the wider community, with levies allotted to the priesthood and the Levites. Thirty-two

human captives appear in the levy placed in Eleazar's charge. The allocation is a count of living captives among goods. It supplies no report of a human sacrifice, nor does it tell us what happened to those assigned to the priest. The silence makes the people disappear into a form of accounting.

The book's language of pollution offers a remarkable contrast. After the killing, soldiers and captives must remain outside the camp and be cleansed because of contact with death. The metal utensils undergo purification. The purity of the encampment is protected through procedures applied to those who have destroyed a population. A cultic system that describes contamination with such precision does little to describe the interior life of the captive girl. The human question is left in the margins of the ritual specification.

A rabbinic debate in Yevamot 60b makes those margins newly visible. One argument infers from the retained girls a legal possibility of marriage after conversion, including eligibility for a priest in a specified case. Another reads the passage as allowing the captives to remain as slaves. The rabbinic discussion is not an eyewitness account of Midian; it is evidence of how later readers understood the text's consequences. It confirms that retaining young females had social and sexual implications worthy of legal treatment. The text does not describe a rape in progress. The system of ownership that it depicts creates the circumstances in which a captive's consent cannot be assumed.

The Qur'an's more difficult comparison

A reader who seeks a moral escape in the Qur'an will encounter serious difficulties. Numbers 31 has no direct Qur'anic retelling. The Qur'an does, however, speak approvingly of military victory and of taking captives. In 33:26–27, it describes a group among the People of the Book brought down from fortified places; some are killed, others captured, and their property is inherited. The hadith account in Sahih al-Bukhari 4121 identifies the occasion with Banu Qurayza and has Sa'd ibn Mu'adh order the execution of combatants and captivity of dependents. The prophet affirms that judgment in language the report associates with divine judgment. Historical reconstruction of the campaign requires distinguishing this literary testimony from facts independently established.

Qur'an 4:24 includes an exception concerning married women under lawful possession. Sahih Muslim 1456a connects that provision to married captives taken at Awtas and to intercourse after a waiting period. Classical law gave owners access to enslaved concubines within its own legal rules. The use of modern language about rape demands a clear ethical standard: sexual contact under coercive captivity lacks the freedom required for meaningful consent. Kecia Ali's scholarship shows how late and modern assertions about consent can obscure what the premodern legal discussions addressed.

Other texts pull interpretation in a different direction. Qur'an 2:190 forbids transgression during fighting; 60:8 calls for fairness toward people who have not fought the believers or driven them from their homes. Qur'an 47:4 describes release or ransom of prisoners after capture, and a report in Bukhari 3015

forbids killing women and children. Qur'an 5:32 attributes to the Children of Israel an enormously serious valuation of a single human life, with exceptions for homicide and corruption in the land. These passages form part of the evidence. Their interpretation and relationship to reports authorizing harsher practices remains a juristic dispute.

It would be a distortion to say the Qur'an commands Moses to perform the massacre of Numbers 31. Its own texts contain war captives and killings that deserve an independent ethical judgment. The comparison gets closer to the truth when it asks how each corpus mediates the power to kill, possess and pardon. The older Torah scene sets the exact plot of a divine vengeance, a prophetic escalation and a distribution of prisoners. The Qur'an and hadith preserve their own arrangements of revelation, historical judgment and limits on violence.

The idol beside the sanctuary

At the beginning of Numbers the sanctuary rests in the center of an encamped people. At the end of the Midian narrative, the priest receives a share of human booty. The texts may come from distinct writers and moments of compilation. Their placement in one book invites a reader to ask how a geography of holiness can become a technology of violent legitimacy.

This is where the theological experiment must be honest about its own sympathies. A worshipper can be attracted to a God who sanctifies a site and also repelled by the actions assigned to that God's servants. A believer may explain a command through covenantal history or limits of human understanding. A critic may regard the attribution itself as the product of an ancient

priestly institution. Each answer presupposes an account of what revelation is and how its voice may be recognized. The book must let those accounts confront the text before one of them claims victory.

For John and Jesus, the later chapters will ask whether repentance and restored humanity offer a better way of preserving holiness than guarding a sacrificial center with threats of death. The question belongs equally to Muslims who face a holy house and Christians who call a crucified man their image of God. The second Adam, in this book's emerging theology, will have to answer for the captive as well as for the priest.

Primary and critical references for this chapter: Numbers 2–4, 19, 21, 25, 31; 1 Kings 8:41–49; 2 Kings 18:4; Mishnah Berakhot 4:5; b. Yevamot 60b; Qur'an 2:125–144, 2:177, 4:24, 5:32, 8:41, 10:87, 22:37, 33:26–27, 47:4, 60:8; Sahih al-Bukhari 3015 and 4121; Sahih Muslim 1456a; Ariel Kopilovitz (2020); Kecia Ali (2017); Gabriel Said Reynolds (2018). Full URLs and evidence grades are provided in the Numbers dossier.

The Temple That Asked Permission to Return

A letter from the southern border

In the seventeenth year of Darius II, priests on an island in the Nile sent a letter north. Their temple had been destroyed. Its stone pillars had been broken, its roof burned, and its offerings interrupted. They wanted the building restored, and they wanted help from an official in Judah.

The island was Elephantine. The year was 407 BCE. The priests called their God YHW, recognizable as the divine name that later readers know from the Hebrew Bible. Their community included soldiers and families who lived at the southern edge of Persian Egypt, where the Nile passed between temples, fortifications, and the houses of several peoples. Their immediate neighbors worshipped Khnum. Relations with that sanctuary had turned destructive. The petitioners had reasons to present themselves as faithful, injured, and deserving of official protection. The document survived in their own archive, a piece of Aramaic paperwork that allows us to hear the religious concerns of people who lived outside the Bible's completed literary world. [TXH-11; TXH-12]

If we had only Deuteronomy, we might imagine the history of Yahwistic worship proceeding toward one legitimate sanctuary in an orderly line. If we had only the fifth-century petition, we might never guess that a law restricting sacrifice to the chosen place had already become part of an authoritative teaching somewhere else. The two kinds of evidence meet unevenly. A law tells a community how it ought to worship. A letter tells us what a particular community did, or wished officials to permit. Neither can stand in for the other.

The petition has another advantage over many biblical scenes. Its approximate historical date does not depend on disentangling a story whose layers may have grown over centuries. The Aramaic correspondence is administrative evidence from the people involved. We can dispute a priest's motive, or whether his account gives the whole sequence of the temple's destruction. The survival of the letter itself anchors the

existence of an appealing community, its YHW sanctuary, and its attempt to enlist the Persian administration. [TXH-11]

That is the scene through which I want to return to the question of the Torah. What exactly was the religious authority that these priests believed themselves to be defending? Did they know Deuteronomy's law of the one chosen sanctuary? Did they regard its geography as limited to the ancestral land? Were they continuing a form of worship that predated the law's widespread adoption? The answers matter because a later manuscript of the Pentateuch can hide the time and distance between a command and the community expected to follow it.

The book behind the book

A modern Bible arrives as a single object. Its cover keeps many histories from falling apart in the reader's hands. The Pentateuch can be printed as five books, consistently paginated and furnished with verse numbers, though the texts emerged and circulated before any of those modern conveniences existed. A contemporary reader may mistake the finished arrangement for an eyewitness transcript, as if the entire history of its writing had occurred while Moses held a pen.

Joel Baden gives one rigorous alternative. The narrative is the outcome of combining four distinct documentary sources, commonly known as J, E, P, and D. His neo-documentary hypothesis treats many apparent narrative contradictions as the product of originally coherent, independent tellings. Other scholars reconstruct longer sequences of transmission and editorial supplementation. Each approach must account for the passage as it exists, and the disagreement among scholars needs

to remain visible in this book. The source labels identify an analytical reconstruction, since no excavation has produced an original complete J or P scroll. [TXH-01]

The actual manuscript witnesses provide a different kind of evidence. The Samaritan Pentateuch, the Jewish Masoretic tradition, ancient Greek copies, and the Dead Sea Scrolls sometimes preserve divergent wording. The person studying them is comparing texts that survived, often through partial fragments and later copies. Their witness to variation is materially different from an assignment of a paragraph to an otherwise lost Yahwist source. Both investigations are necessary. It would be easy to make the ancient witnesses bear more certainty than they permit. [TXH-03; TXH-05]

A small example comes from Cain and Abel. The Masoretic Genesis says Cain spoke to his brother and then tells us what happened in the field, without recording Cain's words. In the Samaritan and Greek traditions he invites Abel into the field. Perhaps a copyist omitted the words; perhaps a scribe supplied the most natural missing sentence. Both possibilities belong to textual criticism. Neither requires a conspiracy against the revelation to explain it. The Qur'an recounts the murder of a son of Adam, making it a testimony about the first killing, yet has no apparent interest in whether Cain explicitly invited Abel to the field. A reader who claims the Qur'an has confirmed this precise Masoretic or Samaritan wording has borrowed a conclusion that the Qur'an does not state. [TXH-22]

Another example is more consequential. In Deuteronomy 32, the Most High divides the nations. The received Masoretic text relates their allotment to the number of Israel's sons, while a

Qumran manuscript speaks of the sons of God. The Greek witnesses speak of angels or divine sons. The divine-council imagery is more overt in the earlier attested alternative. If the Hebrew poem once imagined a heavenly assembly distributing nations, its religious imagination looks closer to other ancient West Semitic poetry than a later reader might expect. Emanuel Tov argues the witnesses preserve a meaningful history of this reading. A change from divine sons to Israelites would be a substantive alteration. Which scribe changed it, when, and with what conscious theology remains an historical question. [TXH-08]

The Samaritan and Jewish versions disagree in another place where institutions have an obvious stake. Should an altar be built on Mount Ebal, as in the received Masoretic Deuteronomy, or on Mount Gerizim, as in the Samaritan text? The Judean Desert evidence prevents us from simply calling every Gerizim reading a recent Samaritan invention. Yet the history of the passage is complicated, involving additions and changing interpretations that could themselves precede the two communities' later fixed scriptures. Michael Segal follows this history with care. This is a place where the physical text and the rivalry over the holy mountain come into contact. [TXH-04; TXH-10]

These are the sorts of cases a serious accusation of distortion must examine. We need the different readings, the ages and relationships of the witnesses, and an account of what social interest an alteration might have served. Mere dislike of a command cannot identify the lost original. Religious sympathy for one of the communities cannot establish that its edition was first.

A Torah that could be summoned

The Qur'an treats Moses as the recipient of divine teaching and repeatedly calls the Torah a revelation containing guidance. Yet its most remarkable claims about the Torah concern people who lived long after Moses. In a dietary dispute, it challenges opponents to bring the Torah and recite it (3:93). When some Jews seek Muhammad's decision, it asks why they come to him while possessing the Torah in which is God's judgment (5:43). It also says the messenger can be found described in the Torah and Gospel that are with the People of the Book (7:157). These passages concern a scripture available to interlocutors, a text that could be displayed, consulted, or disputed. [TXH-19]

The language is demanding. An apologist could rescue the claim by saying that the divine Torah had vanished altogether and that the living Jewish scriptures contained nothing trustworthy. That approach leaves the Qur'an's challenge difficult to understand. Why ask opponents to produce and recite a book if it has no capacity to bear evidence? Why locate God's judgment within it? The text instead presupposes some surviving and recognizable relation between previous revelation and the available scriptures.

The same Qur'an condemns people who write religious material with their own hands and attribute it to God (2:79), accuses others of twisting their tongues while speaking from scripture (3:78), and describes the concealment of portions of Moses' book (6:91). This is an accusation against identifiable acts and agents, although the verses do not list which verses in today's Pentateuch underwent which ancient edits. In 5:48 the Qur'an describes itself as confirmer and overseer of earlier scripture

and says different communities have been given a law and a path. The resulting position allows authentic earlier revelation to survive in a text that has a human literary history, while permitting criticism of later additions, readings, or norms. How one identifies those elements remains the problem. [TXH-17; TXH-18; TXH-20]

The Arabic word *taḥrīf* can become too convenient here. Its later theological uses range over corruption of wording and misrepresentation of meaning. The Qur'an's individual accusations are more precise than a single catchall judgment. A scribe omitting Cain's invitation, a priest interpreting Sinai's laws, and a forger presenting his own command as revelation would be three different events. Only the last description implies the deliberate fraud that 2:79 condemns. To turn every literary seam into proof of conscious deceit is to adopt the very overconfidence about human agency that this book questions.

There is another temptation. A defender may label every Pentateuchal sentence that agrees with the Qur'an as original Mosaic revelation and assign every disagreement to later corruption. That rule guarantees its own conclusion. The religion's internal criterion of truth may be the Qur'an, as Muslim interpreters have said for centuries. The historical question requires independent reasons for selecting one Hebrew witness over another. If one cannot say in advance what evidence might force a revision, one has a confession of faith rather than a textual experiment.

The missing manuscript and the unlost revelation

The Elephantine archive offers a check on one piece of the story. Its priests did not cite a five-book Torah when they made their case for rebuilding the YHW temple. No Pentateuch manuscript has been found among the surviving correspondence. A damaged letter about unleavened bread provides an important exception to absolute silence about practices related to biblical law. Its restored passages also teach caution: when editors reconstruct a festival calendar from the Pentateuch, an ancient papyrus may seem to quote a book more clearly than its surviving ink actually permits. [TXH-13; TXH-14]

This is significant evidence of uneven religious practice. It also has limits. The community lived in Egypt, and some interpretations of Deuteronomy's single-sanctuary requirements apply those laws specifically within the land promised to Israel. The priests' requests to Judah may show substantial contact with Jerusalem-oriented circles. We cannot infer the nonexistence of the Torah in Jerusalem from its absence in a military archive hundreds of miles away. [TXH-16]

There is a way to ask this more productively. Suppose an authentic Mosaic teaching existed before the collection reached its eventual five-book form. Suppose royal and priestly scribes continued to develop law, narrative, and commentary, sometimes preserving old instruction and sometimes speaking in the name of an ancient authority. Suppose communities such as Elephantine continued worshipping God according to local forms, while other Judeans were consolidating stricter patterns of priestly authority. By the time of the Qur'an, Torah scrolls could carry the inherited material in more stable forms and still

remain subjects of interpretation. This reconstruction is plausible under several historical-critical models; it is also compatible with much of the Qur'an's own language about earlier revelation and later distortions. It does not tell us exactly which laws Moses received. [TXH-01; TXH-03; TXH-16]

The most sensitive example is a law that directs the killing of another human being. Our previous chapters have considered Numbers 31 and the biblical penalties for apostasy. A believer may insist that the law expresses God's will. Another may claim that the worst commands were added by human authorities. Historical criticism can ask about the layer's vocabulary, institutional setting, relation to other laws, and ancient witnesses. It cannot distinguish divine revelation from human legislation merely by our ethical response. The moral argument must still be made; it cannot borrow an unsupported manuscript reconstruction as its proof.

The danger of making a text into God

The irony is difficult to miss. The Qur'an condemns those who make false religious claims in God's name. The Hebrew Bible repeatedly warns Israel against worshipping the image through which it attempts to control its God. In both traditions, the human wish for a manageable source of certainty threatens the integrity of worship. A scripture can be honored without surrendering the historical question of how its pages were written.

The letter from Elephantine was an appeal to an official. Its authors wanted permission to restore a temple where they believed they served God. The question of which sanctuary was

legitimate cannot be settled by importing the later confidence of either Jerusalem or Gerizim into the fifth century and announcing that the petitioners were primitive or corrupt. Their documents place us among actual people trying to preserve a religious life under imperial government. Their world is a useful discipline for anyone tempted to treat the finished Torah as if it always governed every worshipper with a single voice.

A Qur'an-conscious historiography can begin here, at the distinction between divine reality and human custody of its words. It must allow the prior revelation to have a history if the evidence demands one. Its claims of corruption become precise only when attached to an act, a witness, and a demonstrable change. The recovered fragments leave room for serious faith and demand serious criticism. The rest of the Tanakh should be read under that discipline.

Evidence references [TXH-01]–[TXH-23] are defined in the accompanying research dossier.

The Torah That Could Be Opened

A book in the room

The Qur'an's most awkward instruction to a critic of the Jewish scriptures may be its simplest. In the midst of a dispute about permitted food, Muhammad's opponents are told to bring the Torah and read it, if their claims are truthful. The challenge in Qur'an 3:93 presupposes a book that can be fetched, a reader who can pronounce its words, and an argument that the reading could settle. Qur'an 5:43 presses the point further, asking why

people seek another judgment when they have the Torah and it contains God's judgment. Those are claims about an available religious text, rather than a wholly lost book whose original contents are inaccessible to everyone present.

By the time this challenge was uttered, Jewish readers had inherited centuries of scribal labor. The Torah had crossed borders, languages, temples and schools. Several of its ancient forms can still be glimpsed. Among the scrolls of the Judean Desert there are Hebrew readings close to the textual tradition later called Masoretic, and others whose differences connect them to Greek or Samaritan versions. The survival of those manuscripts complicates any claim that the words of every edition are identical. It equally complicates the assumption that a late-complete manuscript must contain a late-created text.

What, then, did the Qur'an mean by a Torah that remained available and authoritative? The answer has to begin with a recognition that the same title can name different things. A revelation given to Moses is one object of faith. A composition assembled from priestly narratives, covenantal speeches and ancestral stories is a literary object. The Hebrew words copied into separate communities' scrolls constitute several historical objects. The shared name *Torah* cannot erase the distances between them.

The place where a letter becomes a mountain

One difference between the witnesses almost seems designed for our book. Deuteronomy 27 directs the building of an altar after Israel crosses the Jordan. In the received Jewish Masoretic text, the stones stand on Mount Ebal. The Samaritan Hebrew text

places them on Mount Gerizim. The difference matters because each mountain can participate in a history of choosing a sanctuary. A reader who mistakes the wording of one inherited scroll for an unmediated divine voice may take the rival altar to be a rebellion against God.

Gerizim also occurs in ancient Greek and Latin witnesses, which means that the Samaritan reading cannot responsibly be dismissed as a late improvisation without historical argument. The modern controversy about a purportedly ancient Hebrew Gerizim fragment offers a second warning. The fragment surfaced from the market with a claim of Qumran provenance and a reading that seemed to confirm an already persuasive reconstruction. Årstein Justnes showed why its material history and features raise grave doubts and why it should be considered a forgery. A pleasing variant arrived dressed as material proof. It had the kind of authority that a photograph and a museum label can confer, and scholars cited it accordingly. The comparison survives after removing it. The alleged artifact itself must leave the evidence table.

We see here a curious reenactment of the problem described in the Qur’an. A document can be attributed to a revered past for reasons that later examination exposes as false. The modern case makes visible our own susceptibility to false authority. It is an ethical warning for researchers and readers, rather than proof that an ancient Jewish or Samaritan community was engaged in the same sort of fraud.

The sons of God in Moses' song

Deuteronomy 32:8 presents a different kind of evidence, one that does not require an unproven fragment. The Masoretic text speaks of the nations being divided according to the number of the sons of Israel. The Qumran scroll 4QDeut-j preserves a Hebrew reading with sons of God. Greek witnesses describe angels or sons of God. Emanuel Tov's comparison makes the ancient disagreement particularly clear. The reading about heavenly beings fits the allotment of peoples in the surrounding poem and may preserve an older conception of a divine council. An older religious imagination can remain visible in the transmission of a text that later readers treat as uncompromisingly monotheistic.

This need not settle what Moses himself believed. Source criticism asks about the composition of the poem and its relation to other biblical texts; archaeology and comparative religion set it beside ancient West Semitic traditions. The scroll settles only a more bounded question: a form of the Hebrew poem with divine sons was copied in the Second Temple period. An editor's possible motive in replacing that language with the sons of Israel is a historical inference. The inference is stronger when parallel textual and theological evidence support it, and weaker when the claim depends on a story invented to suit the investigator's preferred religion.

Qur'an 112 emphatically rejects God begetting offspring. A Muslim interpreter could reject a literal divine family while acknowledging that the ancient Hebrew words are old. He might read the sons of God as angelic beings, figurative language, or a theological error in an ancient poem. A historian would ask

which reading the witnesses support and how communities interpreted it. Those are different kinds of questions. A conclusion about the age of the words cannot be won by announcing which ones fit our creed.

A critic of scripture who believed in scripture

Abu Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī, writing in the early fourth Islamic century, is an especially instructive reader because he refuses to fit neatly into the modern labels assigned to him. On Qur'an 2:75, he records disagreements over people who heard and then distorted the word of God. He gives priority to an interpretation about Israelites who heard God's speech near Sinai and subsequently misreported it. The accusation concerns a historical act of interpretation and transmission, though the passage also preserves interpretations involving the Torah itself.

On Qur'an 2:79 his language turns to writing. People produce a book according to their own interpretations and then attribute it to God. On 5:13 he likewise speaks of replacing revealed words with writing falsely presented as the Torah. The same author can read another Qur'anic passage, 5:43, as a rebuke to people who possess a real divine law in their Torah but seek to evade it. Here the presence of authentic judgment is essential to the argument. His corpus will not yield a clean binary in which ancient Muslims believed only in corrupted meanings and medieval Muslims invented the possibility of corrupted words.

The evidence resists a second simplification as well. That some people forged a document and misrepresented it as revelation would not demonstrate that every copy of the Pentateuch had become a forgery. A lie written in one book can circulate

alongside a truthful book. An interpreter may conceal the provision against which his client has offended while everyone in the room still has the means to verify it. The Prophet's reported warning about Jews reciting Hebrew and explaining it in Arabic fits this intermediate world of speech, translation and contested trust.

The report of the Torah placed on a cushion adds a vivid image. Muhammad is said to have honored a physical Jewish scroll and affirmed belief in it and in its revealer. The distinctive scene in Abu Dawud 4449 deserves examination through its own chain, because the legal episode of stoning has more numerous transmissions than the details of the cushion. Even if the wording is accepted, the scene proves that the author or transmitter perceived the Torah as a book worthy of reverence. Whether that reverence entails affirmation of each paragraph in all five received books is a further proposition.

The temple that the book could not erase

We return to a petition written in Aramaic in 407 BCE. At Elephantine on the Nile, priests of YHW asked the governor of Judah to help them rebuild their temple, destroyed a few years earlier. The petition supplies an unusually firm date and a surprisingly ordinary administrative setting. The people wanted to restore the site where they had offered to their God. Their practice stood at some distance from the centralization of sacrifice so closely associated with Deuteronomy.

A law can be authoritative and ignored. Its readers can disagree over its geography. Its wording can also have changed in the period during which different temples competed for recognition.

The Elephantine letters alone cannot tell us which explanation is correct. A fragmentary festival letter of 419 BCE has often been read through the rules of the Torah, but its missing words are supplied by modern editors. The restorations must be excluded whenever the letter is used as independent proof of those same scriptural requirements.

The historian's restraint here is a form of respect for the ancient people. They existed before our arguments about which books they ought to have possessed. They left documents whose language, place, date, and omissions are as important as the theological story one hopes to write about them.

The threshold of the Prophets

This investigation began with an idol that wore the name of God. A textual history turns the question toward the person who speaks on God's behalf. The Masoretic copyist, the Samaritan custodian, the Greek translator, the rabbi, the Muslim exegete and the modern critical editor all stand between an ancient sentence and the person who hears it today. Their work makes the past legible. Each also has the capacity to impose a new certainty upon that past.

The Qur'an's challenge to bring the Torah asks readers to consult evidence. Its accusations of concealment and fabricated writing warn about the human handling of revelation. Those warnings apply with unusual force to anyone who believes himself the final guardian of the true text. A history worthy of the name must permit the documents to surprise its author. As we enter the books of Joshua, Kings and the prophets, the

distinction between the divine voice and the institution authorized to repeat it will keep returning.

PART III · CONQUEST, KING, AND SACRED AUTHORITY

The Canaanites Who Became Israel

The first people were already there

The Egyptians knew of Israel before anyone had written the Hebrew Bible in the form in which we now possess it. Around 1208 BCE, a royal stele commemorating Merneptah's victories named a people called Israel among the defeated inhabitants of Canaan. Egyptian scribes supplied a sign normally used to identify a people rather than a city-state. They also praised the king for having annihilated that people and destroyed its seed. The boast deserves to be read as royal rhetoric. Israel persisted, and the inscription is valuable precisely because the ruler appears to have recognized an identifiable population whose existence his victory song tried to erase. [ORI-02]

The evidence then leads into an unfamiliar history. In the early Iron Age, modest villages multiplied through the central highlands. Agricultural terraces, household buildings, cisterns, ceramics and animal remains disclose settlements with close connections to the material world of Canaan. Survey archaeology, especially the work associated with Israel

Finkelstein, made this development difficult to reconcile with a single invasion by a previously united nation. The surviving evidence permits the emergence of new identities among inhabitants of the land, movement out of the declining lowland city-state system, and smaller contributions from elsewhere. Its traces disclose patterns of settlement and economy rather than the names each family used for itself. [ORI-03; ORI-04]

This is the point at which Joel S. Baden turns an archaeological question into a literary one. In an October 2026 episode of *Misquoting Moses*, Baden asks why a community whose material culture emerged from Canaan would tell a national origin story in which it arrived from outside. The traditions gathered into Genesis begin with a migrant ancestor from Mesopotamia. Exodus brings a people out of Egypt. Joshua then supplies a conquest of the land, followed by the allocation of tribal inheritances. The different stories have become a continuous account, and each makes Israel's arrival a movement into Canaan. [ORI-01]

Baden proposes an explanation grounded in the anxieties of identity formation. A population learning to distinguish its worship, kinship and customary obligations from neighboring communities might eventually imagine those neighbors as the people it had come to replace. In his formulation, the biblical warnings against Canaanite worship could preserve the memory of habits already familiar to Israelites. The feared religious enemy was once part of the worshipper's own world. This is an explanatory hypothesis about the development of scripture, and its appeal rests in its fit with patterns of cultural continuity. It cannot turn every individual biblical tradition into a deliberately invented political claim.

Two histories of a single land

The first twelve chapters of Joshua narrate a rapid series of victories, with Jericho and Ai preparing the way for northern and southern campaigns. Joshua 11:23 announces that Joshua had taken the whole land. The list of defeated kings in chapter 12 and the summary of distribution in chapter 21 make conquest appear a completed inheritance. Yet Joshua 13:1 opens by announcing that much land remains, and chapters 15–19 preserve cases of populations who still hold towns. Judges 1 brings that incompletion into the foreground. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and several other cities remain, while individual tribes advance unevenly. [ORI-05]

The discrepancies matter even before anyone compares the stories with excavated settlements. They show that the final literary collection contains divergent representations of what Israel's possession of the land meant. A traditional reading can distinguish an initial military victory from the subsequent obligation to occupy territories. Exodus 23:29–30 also describes gradual displacement. That harmonization is a serious interpretive response, though it requires readers to give different weight to the conquest's totalizing summaries and its surviving exceptions.

Baden is unusually candid about the limits of source criticism here. He explains that Joshua through Kings contain apparent duplicates, conflicting traditions and editorial frames, while the precise model that accounts for their combination remains far less secure than the documentary divisions he defends for the Pentateuch. The editors have left us a final story with recognizable tensions, but the lost earlier books have to be

reconstructed. One may grant those tensions without pretending to possess the earlier manuscripts. [ORI-01]

Archaeology introduces a second restraint. The famous Middle Bronze fortifications at Jericho were destroyed well before the conventional late-thirteenth-century setting often assigned to Joshua. At Ai, the standard identification with et-Tell confronts an extended interval without a settlement matching the story's city. Hazor did suffer a major Late Bronze destruction, whose perpetrators remain disputed. Local conflicts and destructions belong to the historical picture. The model of a coordinated national annihilation campaign has little archaeological support. The severity of that judgment does not authorize treating every remembered migration or local war as a fiction. [ORI-06]

How Canaan became foreign to itself

The literary transformation becomes more revealing when the biblical authors speak about religious influence. Deuteronomy commands Israel to avoid Canaanite cults and marriage alliances, while Judges depicts repeated adoption of Baal worship. The framework supposes a bounded Israelite people repeatedly attracted to practices of its religious outsiders. In the archaeological reconstruction, an ancestral local population could retain or recover familiar sacred habits even after its elite institutions had begun to define a different covenantal identity. [ORI-07]

The distinction between El and YHWH complicates the history. The West Semitic name *El* could name a chief deity or function as a common term for a god. The name Bethel means house of El or house of God. Jacob's shrine in Genesis 28 attaches an

Israelite ancestral story to a place that may already have enjoyed sanctity. Exodus 6:3 connects the ancestral era to El Shaddai and places disclosure of YHWH's name within the story of Moses. Different texts preserve different ways of relating the ancestral divine designation to the God of the Exodus. [ORI-08]

It would be premature to infer that every Israelite who called upon El was worshipping an altogether separate god. Divine names can converge through identification, inherited titles, and reinterpretation. It is also historically implausible to imagine a clean transition in which a uniform Canaanite pantheon was discarded in one generation. Mark S. Smith places Israelite religion in a development marked by continuity with the religious language of the southern Levant, and by features that are harder to derive from Canaan itself, notably an older tradition connecting YHWH with the southern wilderness. The poems in Judges 5:4, Deuteronomy 33:2 and Habakkuk 3:3 speak of the divine coming from Seir, Paran or Teman. The Egyptian references sometimes associated with *Shasu of yhw* offer an additional and disputed point of comparison. [ORI-09]

The early worshipper therefore may have inherited traditions from more than one direction. A local understanding of El could meet a southern YHWH tradition, while stories of liberation from Egypt entered the shared identity of the people. The growth of a single Israelite religion would then be an historical process of theological integration. The model is attractive precisely because it makes the disagreements in the surviving literature useful evidence rather than mere embarrassment.

The biblical attacks on sacred images can now be understood in their specific setting. Exodus 32 says that Aaron makes a calf

and announces a feast to YHWH. First Kings 12 makes the northern king Jeroboam establish calf sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan. Second Kings 18:4 says that Hezekiah destroyed the bronze serpent attributed to Moses because incense had been offered to it. These accounts show the struggle over legitimate mediation happening within a self-consciously Yahwistic world. The fierce argument about images cannot be neatly mapped onto an original Israelite monotheism confronted by a wholly separate foreign religion. [ORI-10]

A material difficulty remains. Baden's claim that archaeology will find no statue of YHWH expresses the importance of aniconic tendencies in Israelite worship. The absence of a securely identified statue establishes a limit of our evidence. Inscriptions at Kuntillet ʿAjrud invoke YHWH and 'his asherah', and the relation of that wording to accompanying drawings remains disputed. Small figurines and other cult objects occur in Israelite and Judahite sites. We must investigate which objects their users regarded as divine, which served symbolic functions, and which belonged to household ritual. [ORI-11]

The question of an idol therefore becomes more penetrating. The reformer who condemns Baal may still take a humanly arranged religious system as the complete will of the God whose presence exceeds every sanctuary. The antiquity of a custom proves that people practiced it. Its dedication to YHWH shows how the practitioner described the act. Neither observation alone gives the historian access to a divine authorization.

The Egyptian memory that survives the ablation

Baden regards a large-scale migration of all Israel from Egypt as historically unsupportable. He recognizes the possibility that a smaller group carried Egyptian memories into the expanding population. Richard Elliott Friedman makes that possibility central to his own reconstruction. Friedman proposes that a limited Exodus group, perhaps linked to Levites who bear names with Egyptian linguistic connections, transmitted the story of deliverance to people already established in Canaan. The ancient songs in Exodus 15 and Judges 5 become part of his argument: the first celebrates deliverance without naming the complete twelve-tribe nation, and the second praises tribal cooperation without mentioning Levi. Each inference can be challenged, and the proposed identification of the migrants with Levites has no independent documentary proof. [ORI-12]

The narrower hypothesis still matters. The great highland settlements and Merneptah's Israel remain where archaeology places them. A movement of a much smaller group from Egypt is harder to detect. Its story could have become the treasured beginning of a community formed from several populations. A historian may hold the evidence for the settlement pattern with confidence and leave the scale of an ancestral migration unresolved.

This chapter needs a similarly explicit distinction between historical confidence and religious interpretation. If a group was once oppressed, the truth of its memory of God cannot be assessed solely by finding pots that belonged to its members. A believer can accept a genuine event of prophetic deliverance while acknowledging that the literary narrative received

centuries later contains editorial expansions. The reverse error would be to declare every troubling command an expansion only because its removal gives a more comforting portrait of revelation. Such an operation would merely create an idol of the historian's preferences.

What does the Qur'an require of Israel's origins?

The Qur'an makes the exodus and the promise of land integral to its story. Moses is commissioned against Pharaoh, the Children of Israel cross the sea, and God reminds them of their deliverance. In 5:20–26 Moses orders the people to enter the holy land that God has assigned to them. They refuse to fight the powerful inhabitants and face forty years of wandering. In 7:137 the formerly oppressed inherit a blessed territory. Verse 17:104 tells the Children of Israel, after Pharaoh, to dwell in the land. A Muslim historian is committed to taking these assertions seriously as Qur'anic claims while examining the historiographical questions they raise. [ORI-13]

Their scope matters. The Qur'an does not supply Joshua's list of thirty-one kings, a report that Jericho's walls fell to trumpets, or a detailed allocation of territories among all twelve tribes. It provides no Numbers 31-style narrative of an annihilation campaign in Canaan. Its affirmation of Moses' command to enter the land therefore carries a substantial account of movement, opposition and inheritance without endorsing the entire battle chronology of Joshua. [ORI-13]

One should resist an effortless reconciliation in which the whole Qur'anic people become a handful of Levites without argument. The Qur'an addresses a collective called the Children of Israel,

speaks of their families and prophets, and describes their departure and subsequent refusal to enter the land. It would require a separate exegetical account to say that the historical actors referred to in each passage are only the migrants of a minority tradition. A collective can, however, grow through ancestry, alliance and incorporation. The Qur'an never gives us archaeological proof that every later Israelite household descends biologically from one Exodus caravan.

Qur'an 7:138 adds a delicate point. After the sea crossing, Israel encounters a people devoted to cult images and asks Moses to make a god for them. The verse is a narrative of religious exposure after deliverance. It does not amount to an ethnographic claim that all later Israelite religious practices came from a newly encountered people. The theological force lies in the willingness to domesticate the divine through a manufactured object even after being rescued. The historical-critical explanation that some religious practices were ancestral rather than recently borrowed remains an alternative account of the growth of those traditions. [ORI-14]

The Qur'an's account of Abraham is especially relevant. In 3:67 he is described as a *ḥanīf* prior to the later Jewish and Christian communal divisions. In 49:13 the diversity of peoples and tribes is not itself the source of moral worth. These passages encourage distinguishing prophetic monotheism from the ethnic form through which a historical community transmits it. They do not themselves prove an archaeological reconstruction of Iron Age Israel. [ORI-15]

Early Muslim commentators often identify the two men who encourage entry in Qur'an 5:23 as Joshua and Caleb. Al-Ṭabarī

discusses which territory is meant by the holy land and what it means for God to have prescribed it. The identifications and geographic elaborations belong to exegetical history, whose evidentiary standing differs from that of the Qur'anic wording. It is tempting to read the later complete Joshua narrative back into a more economical Qur'anic account. The historian must document that move rather than silently perform it. [ORI-16]

The oldest enemy and the newest identity

Ezekiel 16:3 addresses Jerusalem with an accusation that its father was an Amorite and its mother a Hittite. This is prophetic invective directed against a city and its conduct, rather than a sober census of ancient parentage. Its rhetorical power nevertheless depends on the ease with which the prophet connects Jerusalem to Canaan. At another point, Amos 9:7 compares Israel's deliverance from Egypt with divine guidance of the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir. The prophet introduces Israel's cherished story of migration into a wider history of peoples whom God also moves. [ORI-17]

What does our reconstructed origin narrative do to the theological problem of conquest? Suppose much of early Israel was descended from Canaanite households who developed new forms of religious identity. The object of the conquest story's total destruction would then be a population closely related to the eventual authors and audiences of that story. The text's extermination commands become retrospective claims about a religiously purified past, whether or not later writers believed them to be literal records of an ancestral war.

That possibility cannot settle the moral status of the written command by archaeological means. It does sharpen the question of who profits from the attribution of violence to God. A sacred history can persuade a community that its deepest identity began when an enemy was driven out. Yet its own archaeological past may lie among the people it now imagines as strangers. For a believer whose highest obligation is to the God beyond the image, the problem is how to recognize the presence of the human author inside a claim that only God could have made.

The calf at Sinai and the holy war at Jericho may be connected by the same movement of religious imagination. A community casts its deity into a material form, or casts its past into a single story of pure inheritance. In either case, it is possible to overlook the human work involved in the casting. The answer to that danger begins with taking every surviving voice seriously, including the voices that do not fit the finished picture of an ancient nation.

Source notes

- **[ORI-01]** Joel S. Baden and Megan Kraege, *Misquoting Moses*, episode “Where Did the Israelites Actually Come From?”, 9 October 2026, approximately 00:00–1:09: https://podcastrex.com/shows/misquoting-moses-with-joel-baden/where-did-the-israelites-actually-come-from/transcript . User-supplied transcript. Emphasizes tensions between Joshua/Judges, settlements, shared Canaanite background, northern origin, and Q&A on language and place-names.

- **[ORI-02]** Merneptah Stele, approximately 1208 BCE: https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/the-merneptah-stela-israel-enters-history/ . An Egyptian inscription identifies Israel as a people in Canaan, not the origin or size of that people.
- **[ORI-03]** Avraham Faust, "The Emergence of Israel and Theories of Ethnogenesis," 2015: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118774199.ch9 . On archaeological ethnicity, highland settlements and Canaanite interactions.
- **[ORI-04]** Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, excerpt on highland settlements: https://courses.lsa.umich.edu/israel-palestine/wp-content/uploads/sites/142/2013/12/016.-I.Finkelstein_N.A-Silberman-105-120_01.pdf . Compare qualified evidence regarding livestock and identity.
- **[ORI-05]** Joshua 11:23; 13:1; 15:63; 21:43–45; Judges 1:8, 21 and 27–36; Exodus 23:29–30. Biblical literary witness; no external corroboration of the national battle narratives is implied.
- **[ORI-06]** Conquest archaeology overview: https://biblical-archaeology.org/en/locations/occupation-or-settlement/ . For a traditional harmonization, see Walter R. Roehrs (1960), https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol31/iss1/85/ .
- **[ORI-07]** Deuteronomy 7; Judges 2; 1 Kings 12. Ancient canonical witnesses shaped by multiple historical settings.
- **[ORI-08]** Genesis 28; Exodus 6:2–3; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, pp. on Bethel and El: https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-

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- **[ORI-09]** Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God*; relevant overview of southern YHWH and Canaanite continuities: https://www.perlego.com/book/3036706/the-early-history-of-god-yahweh-and-the-other-deities-in-ancient-israel-pdf . Egyptian Shasu/yhw identification remains debated.
- **[ORI-10]** Exodus 32; 1 Kings 12:26–33; 2 Kings 18:4. Written claims about cult reform and earlier priestly objects.
- **[ORI-11]** Smoak and Schniedewind, "Religion at Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *Religions* 10 (2019): https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/211 . Images and meaning of 'asherah' disputed.
- **[ORI-12]** Richard Elliott Friedman, "The Historical Exodus": https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-historical-exodus . A small Levite migration is an alternative reconstructed historical model, not established through an Egyptian record of the group.
- **[ORI-13]** Qur'an 5:20–26; 7:137; 17:104: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=21 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=7&verse=137 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=104 .
- **[ORI-14]** Qur'an 7:138; 20:85–97; 2:93: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=7&verse=138 .

- **[ORI-15]** Qur'an 3:67; 49:13: https://quran.com/3/67 ; https://quran.com/49/13 .
- **[ORI-16]** Al-Ṭabarī's commentary on Qur'an 5:21, with reports and disputed geography: https://www.islam.museum/en/passage/quran-5-21/ . Source for reception history rather than independent archaeology.
- **[ORI-17]** Ezekiel 16:3; Amos 9:7. Metaphor and prophetic comparison cannot be treated as straightforward ethnographic statistics.
- **[ORI-18]** Lidar Sapir-Hen, Meirav Meiri, and Israel Finkelstein, "Iron Age Pigs," *Radiocarbon* 57 (2015): https://doi.org/10.2458/azu_rc.57.18564 . Pig avoidance varied by region and period; seafood-loss anecdote unverified as origin of dietary law.
- **[ORI-19]** Omer Sergi, *The Two Houses of Israel* (2023): https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.8816160 . Treat north/south and state formation as contested historical reconstruction.
- **[ORI-20]** Yosef Garfinkel et al., "State Formation in Judah," *Radiocarbon* 54 (2012): https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033822200047147 . Fortified early Judean site challenges excessive late-dating of state capacity.
- **[ORI-21]** Dafna Langgut, *Climate and Environment in the Southern Levant, 1300–300 BCE* (2026): https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009558341 . Models late Bronze aridity and Iron Age environmental change.
- **[ORI-22]** Dennis Pardee, "Ugaritic," in *The Ancient Languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia* (2008):

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486890.005 .
Northwest Semitic affinities do not make the Ugaritic language an uncontroversial Canaanite dialect.

The God of the Victors

Book chapter for Torah or Not Torah, edition 1.6

The king who brought his god the bodies

In the ninth century before Christ, the king of Moab ordered his victories cut into stone. His name was Mesha. He had fought Israel, recovered towns, built walls, and restored the fortunes of his people. The inscription survives in fragments, sufficient to hear the voice of a king who believed his god had guided his sword.

Mesha says Chemosh told him to take Nebo. He describes a night attack and a battle lasting until midday. He reports killing the inhabitants, enumerating boys, girls, women, and men among the dead. He says that he had devoted the city to Ashtar-Chemosh. He carried sacred objects belonging to YHWH away from the defeated town and placed them before Chemosh. [GOD-01]

The language belongs to a recognizable religious grammar. A god gives victory. The ruler renders the defeated city forbidden or devoted to that deity. Human beings become an offering of victory, and the gods of the defeated are humiliated in the triumph of the victor. The Moabite word describing the ban belongs to the same Semitic root that the Hebrew Bible uses for

ḥērem. The correspondence is striking because it comes from a dated inscription composed outside Israel. [GOD-02]

Our historian does not have to determine whether Chemosh spoke. The inscription shows that Mesha said he did. Its preserved wording proves that a Moabite monarch could invest a campaign of killing with divine authorization, and that such a claim was intelligible in the world from which the biblical writers emerged.

Joshua has another king, another people, and another god. In Deuteronomy 20, Moses instructs Israel to leave alive nothing that breathes among the nations assigned to the land. Joshua 11 depicts the destruction of captured populations and reports that God made the enemies stubborn so that they would meet Israel in battle and fall under the ban. The narrator then announces that Joshua took the whole land. [GOD-03]

The obvious question is whether these words describe a historical extermination. A harder question comes afterward. If the story belongs to royal and national victory literature, its author has still chosen to portray a mass killing as obedience to God. The narrative licenses something even when archaeology cannot recover the alleged bodies.

A country that appears twice

The book of Joshua has a way of finishing the war. Its conquest summary says that the land was taken and apportioned. Soon afterward Joshua is told that much of the land remains to be occupied. Judges begins with separate campaigns, failures of displacement, cities retained by earlier populations, and local compromises. Even within Joshua, the Anakim are described as

exterminated from Israelite territory while some survive in coastal cities. The contradiction between completion and continuation is part of the received literature. [GOD-04]

Archaeology supplies a further check. The great Middle Bronze fortifications of Jericho belong to a horizon earlier than the usual late-thirteenth-century dating of Joshua's conquest. At Ai, the commonly identified archaeological site had its major destruction much earlier. Hazor suffered a genuine Late Bronze destruction, although the identity of its attackers remains disputed. Highland villages associated with emerging Israel expanded during the early Iron Age and share much of the material culture of Canaan. The Merneptah Stele confirms that a population called Israel existed in the region around 1208 BCE. [GOD-05]

These observations weigh against an organized campaign conquering the entire land in the fashion narrated by Joshua 1–12. They leave room for local battles, smaller migrations, later alliances, and inherited memories of places that had been destroyed. They also leave the text's theological work to be explained. Why would a community formed partly from Canaanite surroundings say that its identity began through the destruction of Canaanites?

The origin stories are addressed to later Israelites. A map of ancestral cities, sacred places, and enemy nations supplies an account of belonging. The people who already inhabit the land receive a story explaining why the land has been promised to them. The old inhabitants, whose culture may also belong to the audience's ancestry, become the strangers whom God commanded their fathers to remove. Joel Baden's reading of the

differences between Joshua and Judges makes this historical inversion vivid. [GOD-06]

Dominik Markl develops a further possibility: the Deuteronomistic account of conquest should be read against the cultural trauma of the Assyrian and Babylonian defeats, when Israel and Judah lost territory and suffered forms of mass violence themselves. A narrative of complete ancestral conquest can restore a sense of agency to a later community dispossessed by empire. This is a scholarly interpretation of the literary setting. It is a testable explanation of the writing, independent of whether a particular ancient campaign occurred. [GOD-07]

The ban and the boast

Military inscriptions often enlarge a victory. Mesha declares that Israel has perished forever, even though Israel's history continued after him. Assyrian rulers likewise filled their monuments with total victories over peoples they would encounter again. K. Lawson Younger has shown that ancient conquest narratives follow recognizable forms, using totalizing expressions for the reach and completeness of a campaign. [GOD-08]

Such rhetoric changes what a historian may infer from phrases about every inhabitant or every city. A claim that no one escaped may be a conventional assertion of dominance. Its presence is poor evidence that an entire ethnic population was destroyed. For the ethics of the written story, the very choice of the language matters. The conquest writer understood victory as something that could be expressed through the imagined extinction of a rival group.

Deuteronomy 20 makes the problem sharper because it speaks as law. It distinguishes distant cities, whose inhabitants may survive under forced labor, from the peoples assigned to the promised land, among whom the law commands total destruction. A figurative reading of a battle account cannot by itself dissolve the prescriptive language of a legal text. A nonliteral interpretation of Deuteronomy requires a separate argument about its purpose, authority, or historical scope. [GOD-03]

The word genocide belongs to modern law and history. The Genocide Convention requires acts committed with the intent to destroy a protected group, in whole or in part, as such. Biblical *ḥērem* is an ancient category of devotion, destruction, and removal whose exact use varies by text. A narrative that instructs the intentional killing of an entire named population, children included, is plainly relevant to genocide as a modern moral comparison. Proving a historical genocide requires evidence of actual acts and intent in a historical setting. The biblical command and the excavated record must be evaluated separately.

Amalek after Amalek

Samuel takes the problem into the monarchy. In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel attributes to God an order to kill the Amalekites, including infants. Saul destroys many of them, spares Agag and valuable animals, and is condemned for his failure to obey. The children whom the command would have killed never receive their own voices in the narrative. [GOD-09]

The account later returns to Amalekites. David raids groups identified as Amalekites in 1 Samuel 27, an Amalekite force captures his household in chapter 30, and an Amalekite appears in the story of Saul's death. A reader can propose surviving bands, nonliteral totality, misleading individual identification, or the coexistence of different narratives. Each move protects some part of the canonical sequence. The simplest literary observation remains that one tradition's purported extinction does not determine the population assumed by another.

Cynthia Edenburg's 2025 study examines Amalek as a literary enemy with uncertain historical referents. She argues that 1 Samuel 15 bears signs of secondary composition and explores whether the Amalek of 1 Samuel 30 may encode hostility toward Idumea in a later period. Her reconstruction offers a stronger alternative to a failed historical census than merely labeling the killing hyperbole. The historical existence and precise identity of the biblical Amalekites have little independent evidence. [GOD-10]

The rabbinic sages heard the moral difficulty. *Yoma* 22b imagines Saul asking what offense the children committed. The voice from heaven rebukes him for excessive righteousness. The same passage condemns his subsequent killing of the priests and families at Nob. This source belongs to centuries of Jewish moral reasoning over Samuel and contains an uncomfortable defense of the command alongside a condemnation of other violence. It describes rabbinic interpretation, rather than establishing what Saul historically thought. [GOD-11]

The embarrassment that serves the author

An argument often appears when scripture records a disturbing act by one of its heroes: surely an author would have omitted such disgrace unless the event had happened. Historians call this the criterion of embarrassment. Used carefully, it asks whether a preserved detail was sufficiently costly to its particular author that its survival supports an earlier source. The word *embarrassing* can deceive us. A modern reader's discomfort tells us little about an ancient writer's literary interests. [GOD-12]

David's killings in 1 Samuel 27 provide a test. He raids Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites, and he leaves no men or women alive to report his conduct to Achish. The narrator explains the purpose as avoiding witnesses. The text may embarrass readers who expect David to be a morally exemplary prophet. Within its narrative, however, his deception keeps him safe in enemy territory and protects the future king from being seen as an accomplice of the Philistines against his own people. A royal defense can preserve violent and discreditable behavior because the plot also makes him resourceful. An account may contain an ugly event and serve its author at the same time. [GOD-13]

The later Chronicler provides an observable example of biblical authors rewriting inherited history. Second Samuel 24:1 makes the anger of YHWH the occasion for David's sinful census. First Chronicles 21:1 attributes the incitement to a *satan*, an adversary, whose identification as the later Satan is interpretively debated. The Chronicler works with older Samuel–Kings material and relocates responsibility for the

incitement. Here an altered theological attribution is visible by comparing two received texts. [GOD-14]

There are many reasons a compiler might retain a damaging story: the story may legitimate a rival king, explain a national catastrophe, defend a later institution, or display the hero's repentance. We can ask what social purpose the difficulty serves before treating its preservation as proof of historical accuracy.

The Qur'an's narrower inheritance

The Qur'an recognizes Moses' deliverance of Israel, the command to enter the Holy Land, and the inheritance of blessed territory. It affirms Joshua only indirectly through later Muslim identifications of unnamed figures. It gives no catalogue of Joshua's captured cities and never reproduces Samuel's order to kill Amalekite infants. A Qur'anic reader must therefore specify the level of affirmation before importing the full military chronicle into revelation. [GOD-15]

The Qur'an also possesses demanding war texts. Verse 33:26 describes people from the Book being killed and captured after a conflict, and 4:24 became central to juristic discussions of captive women. The prophetic reports in Muslim 1744 condemn deliberately killing women and children, while Muslim 1745 deals with their deaths during night attacks. These materials create an Islamic ethical debate about the treatment of enemies and the legitimacy of captivity. They should be read together with Qur'an 2:190's prohibition of transgression and 5:32's teaching about the gravity of unjustified killing. [GOD-16]

A Muslim interpretation may conclude that a claimed command to annihilate Canaanite children is a human attribution rather

than the intention of the God who guided Moses. The historical-critical evidence makes that conclusion plausible as a theological reading. The Qur'an does not enumerate each distorted verse, and it provides no manuscript from Moses' lifetime by which the identification could be demonstrated. The conclusion should be expressed as a reasoned reconstruction, rather than as a newly discovered textual variant.

The different meanings of corruption

The Arabic vocabulary of *taḥrīf* concerns alteration and displacement. The Qur'an accuses particular people of moving words from their proper places, speaking as though their words are scriptural, writing material and attributing it to God, and concealing revelation. Those are accusations about conduct. A critical history of Joshua could add a further case: a community may construct an idealized past, transmitting it as the history of God's people. That is what we may call **historiographical distortion**. Whether it constitutes the Qur'anic charge of *taḥrīf* depends on what is claimed about the author's knowledge, intention, and relation to a prior revelation. [GOD-17]

The oldest texts offer little help for identifying a specific dishonest writer. The extant manuscripts tell us how traditions were transmitted after they had already taken form. A conflict between Deuteronomy and Joshua or between Samuel and Chronicles reveals literary plurality and editorial change. Archaeology weighs the historical plausibility of the war stories. A moral judgment about a narrative's imagined victims can be made in advance of certainty about the editor's motives.

Our question is whether the true God delights in killing populations. The historian cannot inspect the desires of God. The surviving evidence gives us ample grounds to say that ancient authors could attribute such commands to the divine, and that competing authors preserved different pictures of obedience. Scripture also speaks of protecting the vulnerable, the stranger, and the accused, while the prophets regularly challenge the security of sanctified violence. Religious traditions have built their moral judgments from these contending voices.

The earliest monument in our comparison belongs to Mesha. He credited Chemosh for the ban. It is easy to see the human ambition behind the inscription when the speaker worships another people's god. The harder work begins when the name at the top of the text is our own divine name, and the person left without a voice is someone else's child.

Chapter source notes

[GOD-01] Mesha Stele, lines 14–18, translated by André Lemaire, *Biblical Archaeology Review* / BAS Library, https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/a-new-reading-translation-of-the-mesha-stela/ . The line includes damaged readings; exact enumeration varies with reconstructions.

[GOD-02] Dominik Markl, "Triumph and Trauma: Justifications of Mass Violence in Deuteronomistic Historiography," *Open Theology* 8 (2022): 412–427, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0217 . On *ḥērem*, West Semitic comparisons, and exilic trauma.

[GOD-03] Deut 7:1–6; 20:10–18; Josh 11:14–23, https://bible.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/20 and https://bible.usccb.org/bible/joshua/11 .

[GOD-04] Josh 11:21–23; 13:1; 15:63; 21:43–45; Judg 1; 1 Kgs 9:20–21. Compare the multiple editorial profiles instead of presuming one war chronology.

[GOD-05] Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity* (2005); Joshua D. Kennedy, “The Bronze Age Destruction of Jericho, Archaeology, and the Book of Joshua,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 796, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060796 . The latter argues for a minority early-destruction reconstruction and summarizes the prevailing assessment.

[GOD-06] Joel S. Baden, *Misquoting Moses*, “Where Did the Israelites Actually Come From?”, supplied transcript, ca. 02:00–04:10 and 25:40–56:40;
cf. /Origins_Archaeology_Quran_Dossier_v1.5.md in this manuscript’s research files.

[GOD-07] Markl (2022), esp. literary framing and trauma comparison, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0217 .

[GOD-08] K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (1990). Critical review:
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/ancient-conquest-accounts-a-study-in-ancient-near-eastern-and-biblical-history-writing-jsot-supplement-98/ .

[GOD-09] 1 Sam 15, 27, 30; 2 Sam 1. The text reports Agag and valuable livestock as spared, not an explicit decision to spare the children.

[GOD-10] Cynthia Edenburg, “In Search of Amalek: The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30,” in S. Germany and B. Hensel, eds., *Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books*

of Samuel (Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 129–149, https://cris.openu.ac.il/en/publications/in-search-of-amalek-the-pursuit-of-an-historical-referent-in-1-sa/ . Alternative reconstruction, not scholarly unanimity.

[GOD-11] Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 22b:8–9, https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.22b . Later interpretive tradition.

[GOD-12] Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, “Changing Methods, Disturbing Material: Should the Criterion of Embarrassment Be Dismissed in Jesus Research?” *Revue des Études Juives* 175 (2016): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.2143/REJ.175.1.3146819 . Applies the criterion in a different historical subfield; method transferred cautiously.

[GOD-13] 1 Sam 27:8–12 and 29, with 1 Sam 30; David J. Shepherd, *King David, Innocent Blood, and Bloodguilt* (2023), on moral and narrative evaluation.

[GOD-14] 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chr 21:1. NET Bible note, https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?passage=1Ch+21%3A1 . Lexical ambiguity of *satan* retained.

[GOD-15] Qur’an 5:20–26; 7:137–138; 17:104. Later exegetical Joshua identifications must be marked as reception.

[GOD-16] Qur’an 2:190; 4:24; 5:32; 33:26–27; Sahih Muslim 1744a–b and 1745a–c, https://sunnah.com/muslim/32/29-35 ; https://quran.com/al-ahzab/26/translations/en . Distinguish deliberate attacks on noncombatants, collateral casualties, and coerced captivity.

[GOD-17] Qur’an 2:75, 2:79; 3:78; 4:46; 5:13, 5:43–48; Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on*

the Qur'an (2011), and related discussions in the previous textual-collation dossier. Historical criticism does not independently prove that a biblical author knowingly forged an original revelation.

The Conquest That Ran Out of Land

The book of Joshua opens with a dead prophet. Moses has led the people from Egypt, survived a wilderness that repeatedly challenged his authority, and died within sight of the country promised to their fathers. The reader has been taught to expect a conclusion. Joshua receives the command to cross the Jordan, and the story responds to a promise still unfinished by gathering the tribes for war.

The new leader carries Moses' authority in a particularly literal way. Joshua 1 orders him to keep the book of the law near his mouth, meditating upon it day and night. His courage will be measured by his fidelity to words already spoken. A river then opens before an ark borne by priests. Twelve stones mark the passage. Circumcision, Passover, and the cessation of manna make the transition from wandering to possession into a ritual sequence. The landscape itself is asked to recognize the covenant.

Jericho is the first city whose walls encounter that arrangement. The priests march with the ark, trumpets sound, and the walls fall. The Hebrew verb *ḥaram*, devoting something to destruction, determines the fate of the inhabitants. Joshua 6:21 describes the sword reaching old and young, male and female, as well as the

animals. Rahab and her household survive because she sheltered Israelite scouts and entered an agreement with them. A woman marked as marginal by occupation becomes one of the story's few named Canaanites granted a future. That exception is integral to the narrative, although it leaves its command of general slaughter in place.

At Ai, the conquerors first fail. Achan has taken objects placed under the ban at Jericho. An investigation by lot identifies him, and the community executes him with his household implicated in the punishment. The following battle ends with the killing of Ai's inhabitants, but Joshua 8 explicitly permits taking cattle and other spoil. The change exposes a central feature of the narrative: whether goods may be taken depends on the terms of a divine command assigned to that particular battle. The same act of seizure can therefore appear as an offense against God in one chapter and as permitted profit in the next.

The book's great tension emerges before the conquest has ended. Joshua 10 depicts a sequence of victories over southern kings, and chapter 11 describes the northern campaign culminating in Hazor. The prose announces that the entire country had been conquered. Joshua 12 enumerates defeated kings. Yet Joshua 13 begins by telling the aging conqueror that much territory remains. Later allotment notices explain which Canaanite populations continued to inhabit their towns, and Joshua's farewell warns against the danger posed by their presence. The first chapter of Judges then describes the inability or unwillingness of Israelite tribes to dislodge them.

Mordechai Cogan has shown how different biblical authors solved that difficulty. Exodus 23 envisages a gradual expulsion;

Deuteronomy 7 likewise allows the conquest to proceed in stages. Joshua's sweeping campaign summary gives the promise a dramatic narrative fulfillment. Judges 2 makes coexistence a consequence of covenantal failure. Each explanation reorganizes the moral meaning of the surviving inhabitants. Those people themselves have scarcely been permitted a voice.

Archaeology supplies another chronology. Jericho's fortified Middle Bronze Age settlement was destroyed long before the conventional late-thirteenth-century date often proposed for Joshua's campaign. The usual identification of Ai with et-Tell yields a much longer occupation gap. Hazor provides a genuine Late Bronze Age destruction, but its perpetrators cannot be established simply by assigning the burning to the Israelites of the biblical narrative. The Merneptah Stele independently attests a people called Israel in Canaan around 1208 BCE. Its Egyptian inscription names a people rather than narrating their arrival. This evidence has encouraged models in which Israel emerged substantially from the population already living in Canaan, along with possible migrations and conflicts. The relative weight of those elements remains disputed.

The literary evidence requires its own caution. Martin Noth argued that Deuteronomy through Kings formed a large Deuteronomistic History, a telling of Israel's past under the covenantal conditions of Deuteronomy. Frank Moore Cross subsequently proposed a major edition associated with Josiah's reign and an exilic updating. More recent work allows layered editing and multiple narrative collections, some older and some later. Thomas Dozeman's survey records significant scholarly debate over Joshua's textual history, composition, conquest ideology, and reception. A credible reconstruction should let the

older tales and later explanations remain visible even when their dates cannot be precisely assigned.

There is a particularly valuable textual experiment at Joshua 8:30–35. The Masoretic narrative places the altar and public reading of Moses' law after Ai. The Old Greek places the scene after Joshua 9:2. The Qumran manuscript 4QJosh[a] appears to place at least the reading of the law earlier, after the Jordan crossing. This is evidence for the movement and editing of material inside the book itself. Kyle Rouse and other scholars have disagreed over which location best explains the narrative. Source criticism can identify a problem without granting its practitioner the power to reconstruct a lost original with certainty.

The Qur'an preserves a considerably shorter account of Israel's movement into the land. In 5:20–26, Moses recalls the favor bestowed on his people and commands them to enter the holy land allotted to them. They refuse because it contains powerful inhabitants. Two faithful men urge an entry by the gate, yet the community refuses to fight. The result is forty years of wandering. The Qur'an leaves these men unnamed; classical tafsir commonly identifies them with Joshua and Caleb. In 7:137, the formerly oppressed inherit a blessed land, while 17:104 instructs the Israelites to inhabit the land after Pharaoh. The entry narrative is recognizable, and its decisive moral lesson concerns refusal, fear, and fidelity.

The Qur'anic passages do not supply Joshua's list of thirty-one kings, a command to kill the women and children of Jericho, or an account of exterminating the inhabitants of Ai. Sahih al-Bukhari 3124 tells of a prophet on campaign for whom the sun is

restrained until victory and whose army is investigated over stolen booty. The prophet remains unnamed in that report. Later interpretation relates him to Joshua, joining Joshua 10's sun miracle with Joshua 7's concealed plunder. Ibn Kathir does so openly in his discussion of the entry into the land. These materials attest reception of the Joshua cycle in Islam. Their scope should be measured separately from the Qur'an's own words.

The rabbinic tradition developed a moral and legal reading of the conquest that complicates a simple image of unqualified massacre. Maimonides, in *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars 6, describes Joshua sending three proclamations to the inhabitants of Canaan: an offer to leave, an offer to submit, and notice of war. He extends the requirement to offer peace even to wars treated as obligatory. His terms, however, included acceptance of the Noahide commandments, tribute, and subjugation. This is a historically grounded legal mitigation with its own coercive structure. The biblical story of the Gibeonites, who secure survival through a deceptive treaty, remains an awkward witness to the fear generated by the conquest.

Our earlier inquiry into *taḥrīf* makes a difference here. A Muslim interpreter may affirm that Moses was commanded by God to lead Israel into a promised land, and may even accept the traditional identification of Joshua as a faithful successor. Those commitments do not compel an endorsement of every description of conquest within a heavily edited Hebrew narrative. Conversely, dismissing Joshua's severe passages solely because they offend a later ethical judgment would be circular unless the interpreter identifies the textual or theological

principle that makes the rejection valid. The evidence must bear the weight of the conclusion.

A disturbing possibility therefore enters the book. Israel's scriptural authors may have preserved competing memories of the land and reshaped them into arguments about divine obedience. One author depicts total victory, another remembers remaining cities, and a later framework turns persistence into divine discipline. The inherited text becomes an archive of these struggles. For the believer concerned with worshipping the true God, the necessary question is what happens when a literary account of conquest begins to speak with the authority of God's own voice.

Notes to the conquest chapter

[JQ-01] John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 4th ed., sections on Joshua and the Deuteronomistic History: https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.18979302

[JQ-02] Mordechai Cogan, "Israel's Incomplete Conquest of Canaan," 2022: https://www.thetorah.com/article/israels-incomplete-conquest-of-canaan

[JQ-03] Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Joshua in Recent Research," 2017: https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X16661918

[JQ-04] "Occupation or Settlement?", Biblical Archaeology: https://biblical-archaeology.org/en/locations/occupation-or-settlement/

[JQ-05] Shlomit Bechar, "Hazor's Standing Stones": https://www.thetorah.com/article/hazors-standing-stones-what-do-they-commemorate

[JQ-06] Joshua 8:30–35 textual relocation; see https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-bja10185 and Kyle A. Rouse, *JBL* 143 (2024), 229–244: https://doi.org/10.15699/JBL.1432.2024.3

[JQ-07] Qur'an 5:20–26: https://legacy.quran.com/5/20-26 ; 7:137: https://legacy.quran.com/7/137 ; 17:104: https://legacy.quran.com/17/104

[JQ-08] Ibn Kathir on Qur'an 5:23: https://quran.com/tr/5%3A23/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir ; Bukhari 3124: https://sunnah.com/bukhari/57/33

[JQ-09] Maimonides, Laws of Kings and Wars 6: https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Kings_and_Wars.6.1

The Grandson of Moses and the God Made of Silver

The book of Judges opens with unfinished battles. It ends with Israelites seizing women from one another at a festival. Between those events it constructs a history in which the people abandon their God, cry out under oppression, and are rescued by leaders whose conduct becomes increasingly difficult to praise without reservation. The framework gives its episodes a recurring explanation: Israel did evil in the eyes of YHWH. Yet the episodes also ask whether the men claiming to rescue Israel understand the God whose name they invoke.

Deborah appears as a prophet and judge who settles disputes beneath a palm tree. She summons Barak to confront Sisera's army. Judges 4 gives Jael, the wife of Heber, the decisive action, killing Sisera after he takes refuge in her tent. Judges 5 celebrates the victory in an extraordinary poem. Scholars have

long debated whether this song preserves very early Hebrew poetry, as Richard Elliott Friedman and others have argued, or whether its language and theology indicate a later composition, as Serge Frolov proposes. Aaron Koller offers comparative models of oral and scribal epic performance. The differences between the prose account and the song show the need to study the two as literary witnesses, regardless of their final dating.

Judges 4:4 explicitly calls Deborah an *ishah nevi'ah*, a woman prophet, and 4:6 has her communicate a command attributed to YHWH. This creates a limited but important question for the Qur'anic audit. Qur'an 12:109, 16:43, and 21:7 say that God sent only *rijāl*, men, to whom revelation came. The Arabic wording concerns those whom God *sent* (*arsalnā*). Its application to every person described as a *nabī* is debated: the predominant Sunni theological position excludes female prophets, while Ibn Ḥazm distinguished prophethood from messengership and accepted the possibility of female prophets. The Qur'an does not discuss Deborah by name. The Hebrew text certainly attributes prophetic status to her, but the theological standing of that attribution remains disputed across interpretive traditions. The case therefore enters our audit as **explicit Tanakh attribution; contested Qur'anic compatibility; no demonstrated textual alteration**. [JQ-18]

The book's religious landscape is considerably less uniform than a modern reader's expectation of a single temple and a single law. Gideon makes a golden *ephod* from the spoil of victory. Judges 8:27 says that Israel went after it in worship and that it became a snare to his household. The object begins as an artifact of deliverance and becomes an occasion for ritual failure. The same chapters portray Gideon refusing kingship in God's name,

even while his household acquires the resources and relationships of a ruler. Religious language and political power arrive together.

Then Jephthah, the son of a marginalized woman and the leader of men whom respectable society rejected, wins a war and makes a vow. He promises YHWH that whoever comes out of his house first to greet him will be offered as a burnt offering. His only daughter meets him with music. In Judges 11:39 he performs his vow. The author stops short of narrating the act graphically. The description of the vow, its fulfillment, and the annual mourning of Israelite daughters strongly supports a reading in which she dies. Some Jewish and Christian interpreters have understood her fate as lifelong dedication instead. The uncertainty about how to imagine the event need not erase the violence of the father's decision.

The contrast with Genesis 22 is severe. Abraham raises a knife over Isaac, and the divine messenger intervenes. Jephthah returns victorious and hears no comparable interruption. Leviticus and Deuteronomy prohibit the offering of children, and Leviticus 27 offers procedures for valuing persons subject to vows. The narrator never reports God asking Jephthah to offer his daughter. A vow pronounced in God's name has acquired more authority in the father's mind than the life of the person he professes to love. *Targum Jonathan* criticizes his failure to seek priestly counsel and says that redemption would have been possible. This is an internal Jewish judgment against the sacrificial logic of the story, preserved in the tradition that transmitted the story.

The daughter is unnamed. She receives time to mourn with other women, and the women preserve her memory annually. Johanna Stiebert and John L. Thompson have traced the ways her narrative exposes household authority and the moral interpretation of sacrifice. Jephthah's subsequent killing of Ephraimites, including the famous *shibboleth* test, extends the problem from domestic tragedy to violence against fellow Israelites. Victory over foreign enemies has left a leader willing to destroy his own people.

The sharpest theological scene, however, is almost domestic. In Judges 17, a man named Micah confesses to taking his mother's silver. She blesses him, dedicates part of the silver to YHWH, and orders an image to be made. Micah builds a shrine with an *ephod* and household gods. He hires a wandering Levite who will serve as his priest. He then announces that YHWH will surely prosper him now that a Levite administers the sanctuary.

The logic is perfectly recognizable. The divine name is correct. A ritual specialist carries a respected lineage. A valuable object marks the presence of the sacred. A household has arranged its relationship with the unseen God so that blessings may be expected to follow. The story supplies all the elements of religious seriousness while showing an object made by human hands at its center.

When the tribe of Dan seeks land, its scouts consult Micah's Levite. He gives them favorable divine guidance. They later return, seize the idol, and persuade the priest to serve a whole tribe instead of a single household. He accepts the promotion. A cultic object and its minister move as the tribe expands, converting Micah's household religion into a territorial shrine.

Dan's violence against the city of Laish, whose people were living in relative security, becomes the foundation of the new sanctuary.

Judges 18:30 places an unexpected name at the heart of the shrine. The Danite priest Jonathan is described as a descendant of Gershom. A peculiar suspended Hebrew letter changes the following name from Moses into Manasseh. Rashi states the purpose directly: the added letter protects Moses' honor. The textual note of the modern Jewish Publication Society and discussions of the Greek and Latin witnesses support an earlier reading of Moses. An identifiable scribal operation has changed the genealogy of the man who presided over an image. Here the book's concern with *taḥrīf* is tangible at the level of individual Hebrew letters.

The reading is also uncomfortable for a simplistic attack on Judaism. Jewish scribes preserved the suspended letter rather than silently erasing the trace. Rashi explained the problem rather than concealing its meaning from readers. The history of transmission contains acts of reverence that altered the visual surface of a text and traditions that exposed precisely those alterations. The text's own custodians supply some of our strongest evidence for its history.

Dan's shrine stands while the House of God is at Shiloh, according to Judges 18:31. The national cultic center has a rival dedicated to the same deity. The later story of Jeroboam's calves at Dan and Bethel in 1 Kings 12 belongs to another period and another political argument. The literary resemblance matters, while the chronological relationship and specific archaeological identifications require investigation. The authors of biblical

polemic could condemn rival Yahwistic sanctuaries as idolatrous even when their worshippers claimed devotion to YHWH.

The final appendix turns from the image to human bodies. Judges 19 relates how a Levite traveling through Gibeah exposes his concubine to an abusive mob. Her body lies at the threshold the next morning; he takes her home and dismembers it to summon the tribes. The resulting war nearly eliminates Benjamin. In Judges 21 the victorious Israelites preserve their oath against giving their own daughters to Benjamin by killing the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead and distributing surviving young women, then arranging the seizure of women celebrating at Shiloh. The book repeats the observation that Israel had no king and that people acted according to what was right in their own eyes.

The literary frame may support an argument for monarchy or a polemic against Benjamin and the house of Saul. These possibilities have been developed by scholars of Judges 19–21. Yet the narrator's political purpose does not reduce the suffering of the women to a technical problem in royal succession. The text describes a community whose covenants and vows produce a succession of outrages. Religious oaths have become instruments for overriding the lives of people who never consented to them.

The Qur'an does not retell the stories of Micah, the Danite priest, Deborah, Jephthah's daughter, or the concubine at Gibeah. Its claims about divine revelation cannot simply be transferred to every episode in Judges. It does, however, repeatedly condemn manufactured images and the killing of children, and its account

of the Israelites' covenant allows a theological comparison with the judges' cycles of disobedience and restoration. That comparative judgment belongs to the modern interpreter; the silence of the Qur'an about an episode is evidence of silence.

The reader arrives at a painful proposition. The most revealing idol in Judges is dedicated to the God of Moses, served by a priest whose lineage reaches Moses, and surrounded by rituals designed to obtain divine approval. The most revealing false religious command may be the vow that a warrior has spoken to the true God. The book preserves both stories, together with ancient objections to their abuses. Its religious history provides a sustained examination of the distance between naming God and knowing what God requires.

Notes to the Judges chapter

[JQ-10] Judges 17:3 and YHWH dedication: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.17.3

[JQ-11] Judges 18:30 and suspended *nun*: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.18.30 ; Rashi: https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Judges.18.30.2 ; NET textual note: https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?passage=Jdg+18%3A30

[JQ-12] Targum Jonathan on Judges 11:39: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.11.39?lang2=en&with=Targum

[JQ-13] Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, ch. 2: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673827.003.0003

[JQ-14] Jonathan Magonet, “Did Jephthah Actually Kill His Daughter?”: https://thetorah.com/article/did-jephthah-actually-kill-his-daughter ; Jack M. Sasson: https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-story-of-jephthah-the-urge-to-manipulate

[JQ-15] Song of Deborah dating disagreement, Serge Frolov and Aaron Koller: https://thetorah.com/article/dating-deborah ; https://thetorah.com/article/composing-the-song-of-deborah-empirical-models

[JQ-16] Judges 19–21 as possible anti-Saul polemic: https://thetorah.com/article/the-story-of-the-concubine-at-gibeah-a-satire-on-king-saul

[JQ-17] Deuteronomy’s prohibition of child offerings, Deut 12:31 and 18:10; Leviticus 27:1–8 on valuation; Qur’an 17:31 on killing children: https://legacy.quran.com/17/31

[JQ-18] Judges 4:4–6: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.4.4 ; Qur’an 12:109, 16:43, 21:7 and Arabic *arsalnā/rijālan*: https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=12&verse=109 ; M. Zakyi Ibrahim, ‘Ibn Ḥazm’s Theory of Prophecy of Women,’ *Intellectual Discourse* 23 (2015): https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v23i1.656

The King Who Asked About the Children

1 Samuel 1–31; the price of hearing a prophet

Samuel grows up among the furnishings of a sanctuary. His mother has prayed for him before Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and

she keeps her promise by leaving him there. The house has a reputation for holiness and a family problem that the narrator considers catastrophic. Eli's sons use the sacrificial system to feed themselves and abuse those who come to worship. The child Samuel hears a voice during the night. He has to ask an older man how to recognize it. The word of God comes to a novice whose priestly supervisor helps him listen even as his own house stands under judgment.

The scene gives the history of monarchy an epistemological beginning. Samuel must learn to distinguish a divine summons from an ordinary human call. The narrator tells us which one is which. Everyone inside the story must live with the consequences of believing him. Samuel will shortly become the person who speaks in God's name to a king, and the stakes will rise from a boy's vocation to the lives of an entire people.

In 1 Samuel 8, Israel asks to be governed by a king like the surrounding nations. Samuel describes what the ruler will take. He will conscript sons for his chariots, seize daughters for service, claim fields and vineyards, collect a tenth of produce, and turn free households into the resources of a royal establishment. This is a remarkable political critique, placed inside a book whose narrative will also celebrate Israel's most famous king. Other accounts in 1 Samuel 9–11 show Saul's elevation more favorably. Source critics have long identified the difference in outlook, although the boundaries and history of the traditions remain disputed.

Saul is tall, young enough to command attention, and sufficiently hesitant to hide among equipment when he is chosen. His early victory over the Ammonites at Jabesh-gilead

wins popular loyalty. The institution Samuel warned against becomes a source of national deliverance. It also places Saul under a particular kind of dependence. A king has soldiers and public authority; a prophet can tell him that the kingdom has been taken from him. The same narrative evaluates the king by his obedience to a spokesman whom the story itself validates.

The decisive episode comes in chapter 15. Samuel presents an instruction to destroy Amalek completely. Men, women, infants, and animals are expressly named in the scope of the command. Saul kills extensively and preserves Agag along with valuable animals, offering sacrifice as part of his justification. Samuel responds with a famous formula in which obedience takes priority over sacrifice. He then kills Agag himself. The narrative's ethical center is placed on exact compliance with an extermination order. The cattle's bleating becomes evidence of the king's failure to perform it.

The chapter belongs alongside Numbers 31, where Moses orders the execution of captives in a campaign already attributed to God. Each story asks the reader to treat human destruction as an instance of fidelity. There is a meaningful distinction in the Samuel narrative between what the prophet attributes to YHWH and what historical criticism can verify about Saul's campaign. A modern reconstruction can identify strong Deuteronomistic language in chapter 15 and propose extensive reworking of an older war report. That finding describes the literary form in which the command reached its readers. It leaves the theological question exactly where the book needs it: when Samuel claims that God requires something, how is Saul to know?

The rabbis understood that question. In *Yoma* 22b, Saul reasons that punishment of the guilty cannot explain the deaths of children and that even animals have done nothing deserving execution. A heavenly voice reproves him for being excessively righteous. The interpretation preserves a protest against collective killing and then defeats that protest by appeal to God's authority. Its uncomfortable honesty matters. The exegete has allowed the innocent child to enter the argument. The reader still has to decide what the scene teaches about moral reasoning in obedience to revelation.

The Qur'an offers another perspective on Saul. In 2:246–251, the Israelites demand a king to lead them in battle. Their prophet appoints Ṭālūt, whose legitimacy is initially contested. A sign connected with the Ark confirms him, and a trial by water separates those prepared to fight from those unable to continue. Dāwūd kills Jālūt, and God grants him kingship and wisdom. The narrative joins elements recognizable from Samuel with a water test strongly reminiscent of Gideon in Judges 7. It stresses the instability of mass confidence, the smallness of faithful numbers, and victory by God's permission. Its account leaves out the Amalekite extermination commission. That silence creates a bounded conclusion: the Qur'an affirms the general royal setting and David's victory without making Samuel's command in 1 Samuel 15 part of its own narrated instruction.

Saul's decline becomes intimate. He listens to the voices of courtiers who feed his jealousy, pursues David through the wilderness, and receives mercy twice when David could kill him. In chapter 25, David himself nearly becomes the author of a household massacre after Nabal insults him. Abigail intervenes with food and an argument, and David recognizes

that she has prevented bloodguilt. This small scene furnishes a test that the larger military story rarely permits. The future king hears an objection, changes his course, and thanks God for restraining him.

At Endor, the king seeks a forbidden medium. He has expelled such practitioners but now needs a message from the prophet he cannot hear. The practitioner calls up a figure identified within the narrative as Samuel. The account has lived for centuries beside prohibitions of necromancy in Deuteronomy 18. Its literary world remains populated by dangerous modes of contact with the dead, and the reader is invited to distinguish a forbidden technique from a message that turns out to be devastatingly true.

Saul dies on Mount Gilboa. David laments him without narrating chapter 15 again. The crown is now available, and the account of David that follows will make visible how quickly deliverance can become entitlement.

Key witnesses: 1 Samuel 1–3, 8–12, 15, 25, 28, 31; Deuteronomy 25:17–19; Numbers 31; Judges 7; Qur'an 2:246–251; *b. Yoma* 22b. For source criticism: Thomas Römer, "The So-called Deuteronomistic History and Its Theories of Composition"; Nadav Na'aman, "Ancient Edom: The Tel Masos Polity…" (2025). Sources: https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/34226/chapter-abstract/290218228 ; https://doi.org/10.1080/00310328.2025.2558276 ; https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/24a_vayikra-and-shabbat-zakhor-etz-hayim.pdf

The Lamb the King Took

2 Samuel 1–24; the morality of a chosen dynasty

David enters the story of royal succession as a man who repeatedly benefits from the deaths of other men. The narrator also gives him genuine tenderness. He mourns Saul and Jonathan, laments the assassination of Abner, and condemns the killers of Ish-bosheth. These gestures may be sincere expressions of the character's grief. They also serve the literary work of showing that each removal of a rival occurred without the future king ordering it. Joel Baden's *The Historical David* urges readers to examine the political interest served by precisely these disclaimers. The skeptical interpretation is a hypothesis about the production of royal memory, not an independent record of David's secret commands.

The kingdom is established in Jerusalem. The Ark, long an object through which divine presence and danger had been mediated, is brought into the city. Uzzah touches it when the cart is shaken, and he dies. David responds with anger and fear. Religious history here turns on a gesture that might have saved the object from falling. Numbers had already marked dangerous boundaries around contact with holy furnishings. In Samuel, the lethal danger of the Ark is narrated as an event on the road to establishing a royal cultic center.

The promise of an enduring house arrives in chapter 7. David wishes to build YHWH a house, meaning a temple. Through Nathan, God promises to build David a house, meaning a dynasty. The exchange turns architectural ambition into hereditary authority. It also links kingly sovereignty with

prophecy. The man empowered to build a royal line is given a divine guarantee that later editors and interpreters can use to read an otherwise violent succession as providential.

Chapter 11 tests the meaning of that guarantee. David sees Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, sends for her, and takes her to bed. When she becomes pregnant, he attempts to arrange for Uriah to return home and sleep with her. Uriah refuses comforts while soldiers remain in the field. David then sends instructions for the commander to position Uriah where he will be killed. The story keeps the moral contrast painfully sharp: the soldier honors the war, and the king uses it to conceal his own conduct. Bathsheba's voice is sparsely recorded. A close reading must leave room for coercion in a situation structured by royal power without claiming to know her unrecorded intentions.

Nathan returns with a story. A rich man steals the only lamb belonging to a poor man. David condemns the act, and Nathan reveals that the king has judged himself. The prophet now uses the king's moral ability against his royal privilege. He speaks to David in the language of justice, and the ruler recognizes his sin. The punishment that follows remains ethically disturbing. The child becomes sick and dies; Nathan also announces that David's household will be publicly violated. Later Absalom has intercourse with David's concubines before the public, as described in 2 Samuel 16. The narrator understands this violence as the fulfillment of divine judgment. Those women become the instruments through which the king is punished.

Qur'an 38:21–26 tells of disputants whose case involves a man with ninety-nine ewes demanding the single ewe of another. David recognizes the injustice, repents, and receives forgiveness.

The Qur'an places the incident within a charge to judge truthfully and restrain desire. It says nothing explicit about Bathsheba, Uriah, the child's death, or the concubines. Early exegetes often supplied the missing background from Israelite stories. Other Muslim commentators rejected those identifications, especially when they threatened prophetic righteousness. A comparison of these traditions must identify where a commentator is reading the Qur'an and where the commentator is importing an explanation.

Jewish interpretation was never confined to a single response either. *Shabbat* 56a contains a striking defense of David, arguing that the Bathsheba episode should be read through the possibility of wartime divorces and David's intention rather than consummated adultery. The same discussion includes the observation that an interpreter descended from David has an interest in vindicating him. Here an ancient tradition is conscious of the politics of its own defense of a king. The Qur'anic text gives David forgiveness, while rabbinic reasoning explores the limits of what he can have done. Both traditions witness discomfort with the morally damaged royal portrait preserved in Samuel.

The consequences accumulate. Amnon rapes Tamar in chapter 13. Absalom murders Amnon and eventually leads a revolt. David's commanders defeat the rebellion and kill his son despite orders to preserve him. Near the end of the book, a famine is explained through Saul's violence against the Gibeonites. David hands seven members of Saul's family to the Gibeonites for execution. Rizpah keeps watch over the exposed bodies until they can be buried. The episode sits beside Deuteronomy 24:16, which restricts punishing children for the sins of their parents,

though the narrative's legal and political context differs. A theology of reparative violence emerges from the text and encounters its own covenantal limits.

The final census story adds a different problem. In 2 Samuel 24, divine anger prompts the census, and a plague kills seventy thousand after David orders it. In 1 Chronicles 21, an adversary, commonly rendered Satan, incites the act. The later author has inherited the event and changed its causal framing. The Hebrew *śāṭān* permits debate over whether a personal supernatural agent is meant. The juxtaposition still matters. A later biblical writer found another way to tell the same damaging story about divine agency.

The book closes with a king purchasing a threshing floor and building an altar. The sacrifice marks an end to the plague and becomes part of the later story of Jerusalem's sacred geography. Its path to holiness has passed through an occasion of mass death. The question of what the altar repairs can be asked without accepting the narration's theological explanation as a historical verdict on the victims.

Key witnesses: 2 Samuel 6–7, 11–13, 16, 21, 24; Deuteronomy 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21; Qur'an 38:17–26, 21:78–80, 17:55; *b. Shabbat* 56a. Sources: https://www.posenlibrary.com/entry/redeeming-david ; https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+24%3A1%2C1+Chronicles+21%3A1 ; https://yalebiblestudy.org/courses/the-books-of-samuel/

The House That Could Not Hold God

1 Kings 1–11; Solomon and the architecture of divine presence

Solomon receives the kingdom through a contested succession. Adonijah has supporters, and Bathsheba together with Nathan secures Solomon's accession. The first chapters preserve a court whose arguments are made through inherited promises, oaths, and force. David's dying advice includes settling old scores. Solomon executes or removes rivals until the throne is firm. The same king will become a symbol of wisdom to later Jewish, Christian, and Muslim readers. The book allows us to watch wisdom arise within institutions sustained by coercion.

In chapter 3, Solomon worships at Gibeon, described as the great high place. God appears to him in a dream and offers a gift. Solomon asks for understanding to judge. The famous judgment between two women who claim the same child presents the king as capable of discerning a mother through her willingness to yield rather than permit a child's death. In this scene, the protection of the vulnerable is the measure of royal wisdom. The story is placed early enough that later failures can be read as a departure from it.

The Temple is built in a style that borrows heavily from the architecture of monarchy. Cedar, gold, sacred furniture, cherubim, bronze columns, the sea supported by twelve oxen, and a long sequence of rooms turn divine encounter into a carefully regulated palace of worship. The prohibition of images coexists with authorized religious ornament. The distinctions between icon, symbol, throne, and worshipped object belong to the ancient cultic language in which the narrative developed.

At the dedication, Solomon speaks the most theologically important sentence in the building's history. God cannot be contained even by the highest heavens, much less by this structure. The sanctuary becomes a site toward which prayers are directed, and 1 Kings 8 includes explicit petitions for the foreigner. The Temple is represented as a center of prayer to an uncontainable God. That sentence has survived within a book that also describes a politically centralized priestly order. It will become important when the Qur'an discusses the direction of prayer, while preserving the distinction between early Israelite sanctuary practice and the later institution of a qibla.

The wealth that builds the Temple comes through an imperial machine. Work crews, officials, dependencies, palace consumption, taxation, alliances, and forced labor appear across 1 Kings 4–9. Some passages classify the forced labor more narrowly among non-Israelites; others describe Israelite levies. The social history behind the building reports cannot be recovered simply by treating their inventories as administrative documents. They nonetheless show that the biblical celebration of sacred architecture has preserved the cost of construction within its own pages. The oppressed descendants of slaves now employ a state capable of conscription and labor extraction.

The Queen of Sheba arrives in chapter 10 and sees Solomon's wisdom and wealth. The Qur'an, in 27:20–44, develops an expanded encounter involving a hoopoe, a letter, the queen's response, a transported throne, and a glass floor. The narrative moves toward the queen's recognition of God. Those episodes belong to the Qur'an's own literary and theological presentation. Their absence from Kings provides evidence of different narrative forms and later interpretive development, without

proving a particular historical channel through which the story was transmitted.

The crisis comes in chapter 11. Solomon's foreign wives turn his heart toward other gods, and the king is associated with shrines for their worship. In rabbinic *Shabbat* 56b, the offending act is recast as a failure to protest against his wives' rites; the king's guilt is treated as an attribution for negligence. Qur'an 2:102 explicitly rejects Solomon's disbelief and condemns the demons who taught magic. That verse answers a charge connected to sorcery and his kingdom, so identifying it as a direct word-for-word rebuttal of every sentence in 1 Kings 11 would require a further interpretive step.

The three witnesses show a difficult evolution in the reception of a revered ruler. The biblical narrative portrays a gifted king responsible for serious religious deviation. Rabbinic interpretation preserves the verse while rereading its accusation. The Qur'an defends Solomon's prophetic status and presents his power as belonging to God's gift. Each text requires examination on its own terms before being used as evidence of textual corruption. The surviving Hebrew story may preserve an ancient hostile political memory, a Deuteronomistic judgment on royal cult, and later editorial coordination. Source criticism can investigate those possibilities without deciding whether a prophet could have committed the reported acts.

The story ends with the kingdom approaching division. The man whose Temple was built for the one God has accumulated wives, wealth, and dependent labor. His heir will inherit grievances that religious architecture cannot conceal.

Key witnesses: 1 Kings 1–12, especially 3, 5–11; Qur'an 2:102; 21:78–82; 27:15–44; 34:10–14; 38:30–40; *b. Shabbat* 56b. Sources: https://yalebiblestudy.org/courses/kings-and-chronicles/ ; https://www.sefaria.org/Shabbat.56b ; https://quran.com/2/102

The Calf at the Border

1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17; rival sanctuaries, prophets, and kings

Rehoboam makes the division of the kingdom possible by refusing to reduce his father's labor demands. His subjects describe the royal burden with vivid language, and the young king announces that he will make it heavier. The warning that Samuel gave about kings taking property and persons finds its political answer. The northern tribes break away. Their ruler, Jeroboam, faces a religious problem created by the new border. Pilgrims who continue to travel to Jerusalem may carry political loyalty back to David's house.

Jeroboam therefore establishes sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan with golden calves. In 1 Kings 12:28, the liberation formula attached to them closely matches the wording placed in the mouths of the worshippers at Sinai in Exodus 32:4. The resemblance is so exact that the literary relationship deserves analysis before making historical claims about a tenth-century ritual. In the Deuteronomistic presentation, the error at Sinai has returned as a state institution. It could also be that the condemnation of Jeroboam's northern cult influenced the received shape of the golden calf account in Exodus. The source of the resemblance and the direction of dependence remain subjects of scholarship.

An early prophet denounces the altar at Bethel in 1 Kings 13 and predicts that a future king named Josiah will defile it. The story then becomes stranger. Another prophet lies to the messenger about an angelic command to return for food. The messenger follows the reported revelation and is killed by a lion for violating the original instruction. The deceiver later recognizes the dead man's authenticity. Within a story that prizes obedience, obedience to a convincing but false prophet becomes fatal. The argument about discernment has reached the point where a pious hearer can die because an apparent religious authority tells him God has changed his mind.

Elijah enters the royal world as Ahab's critic. The drought and the confrontation on Carmel show an Israelite prophet accusing the court of Baal worship. After the contest by fire, Elijah orders the seizure and killing of the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. Qur'an 37:123–132 recalls Ilyās rebuking those who call upon Baal. The Qur'anic passage does not narrate that massacre. Its depiction of prophetic loyalty to God operates through a different selection of events. The violence of Elijah's later acts, including fire that kills soldiers in 2 Kings 1, belongs to the biblical material left outside the Qur'anic account.

At Horeb in 1 Kings 19, Elijah hears divine presence associated with a low, quiet sound after wind, earthquake, and fire. The phrase has often been romanticized. Its setting is a prophet in despair, convinced that the covenant has collapsed, receiving instructions that include a new political arrangement and the appointment of a successor. The moment of stillness does not end the history of royal violence. It supplies an alternative register in which the God of Israel may be encountered.

Ahab's seizure of Naboth's vineyard is narrated through a conspiracy orchestrated by Jezebel. The royal court creates witnesses, accuses an innocent landowner of blasphemy, and has him killed so that the crown can take his land. Elijah condemns the act. The machinery of accusation appears with all its institutional force, and prophecy becomes an indictment of the state's abuse of religious law. It is one of the Tanakh's clearest examples of legal piety being used to sanctify theft.

In 1 Kings 22, the prophet Micaiah describes a heavenly council. A spirit volunteers to deceive Ahab by speaking through the mouths of his prophets, and YHWH authorizes the plan. Micaiah tells Ahab what has happened. The passage exposes a deep puzzle about public claims of revelation. The prophets at court are depicted as instruments of deception coming from the divine council itself. A listener can hear an apparent prophecy that the story attributes to God's own purpose and still be led astray. Micaiah's own disclosure becomes the surviving warning. The episode belongs beside Deuteronomy's tests for authentic prophecy and the book's central anxiety over the idol that speaks.

Jehu's coup, told in 2 Kings 9–10, claims prophetic sanction for eliminating Ahab's dynasty. The narrator approves his destruction of Baal's worshippers, even though Jehu preserves the northern calf shrines. In 2 Kings 10:30, God commends him for doing what was right regarding the house of Ahab. Hosea 1:4 later promises judgment involving the blood of Jezreel and the house of Jehu. One scholarly reading sees Hosea condemning the massacre; another interprets the place-name as a model for the future downfall of the dynasty. Both readings deserve display, because the history itself supplies the terms of the

dispute. Violence commissioned in a divine name is assessed differently across Israel's prophetic memory.

The independent inscriptions of the ninth century BCE give this section firmer historical anchors. The Mesha Stele presents a Moabite king crediting Chemosh for victories over Israel. An Assyrian inscription commemorates tribute from Jehu, associated with the house of Omri. The records stand as royal testimonies written for their own political purposes. They substantiate the existence of kings and wars while leaving the theological interpretations of those wars contested. The Moabite language of consecrated destruction also helps place Israel's *ḥērem* within a wider Near Eastern royal ideology.

Kings eventually describes the fall of Samaria to Assyria. Its explanation is long and religious: the northern kingdom's persistence in Jeroboam's sin becomes a principal cause of disaster. The northern court and sanctuaries had histories of their own, much of which survives only through southern literary judgment and through occasional external inscriptions. The historian's verdict is part of the story that later readers inherited. It should be analyzed as a judgment made by an author with commitments, as well as a report about a kingdom that fell.

Key witnesses: Exodus 32; Deuteronomy 13, 18; 1 Kings 12–13, 18–22; 2 Kings 9–10, 17; Hosea 1:4; Qur'an 37:123–132. Sources: https://yalebiblestudy.org/courses/exodus/lessons/the-golden-calf-study-guide/ ; https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/nimrud/livesofobjects/blackobelisk/ ; https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010120339 ; https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac176-704-05

The Book Found During the Repairs

2 Kings 18–25; destruction, reform, and the limits of religious certainty

Hezekiah breaks something made by Moses. The bronze serpent had once been an instrument through which Israelites looked toward healing in the wilderness. The people had begun to burn incense to it. In 2 Kings 18:4, a king praised for fidelity destroys the relic. The narrative offers an unusually exact instance of the distinction at the heart of this book. Even an object with an authorized origin can acquire a religious use that calls for its removal. Its provenance does not rescue it from becoming the center of a cult.

Hezekiah's political world is also documented beyond the biblical story. Sennacherib's annals boast of laying waste to Judah and confining its king within Jerusalem like a bird in a cage. The Assyrian palace reliefs narrate the capture of Lachish. The biblical account describes threats to Jerusalem and a remarkable deliverance. These records overlap on a campaign dated to 701 BCE, while varying in what they emphasize. The survival of Jerusalem under siege and threat is a historical datum discussed through multiple testimonies; the angelic destruction of the Assyrian camp belongs to the biblical theological explanation.

Later kings abandon reform. Second Kings 21 ascribes severe idolatry and violence to Manasseh, including worship linked to the heavenly bodies and an image placed in the Temple. Some modern reconstructions question the extent to which the account reflects seventh-century practice and how much it

serves as a retrospective explanation for Judah's fall. The author builds an argument that the capital had become irreparably defiled. Ancient reformers could invoke that argument in support of purifying the city's cult.

Josiah's discovery in chapter 22 brings us back to the Pentateuch. During temple repairs, Hilkiah announces that he has found a book of law. The king hears it, tears his garments, consults the prophet Huldah, and organizes a covenant ceremony. The description of reform in chapter 23 matches much of the centralization and cultic exclusivity associated with Deuteronomy. Scholarly proposals connect the book of law with an early form of Deuteronomy, while disagreeing about the historicity of the discovery and the extent of the reform. Thomas Römer's work emphasizes how a historical narrative can legitimate a program by giving its prescriptions an ancient origin. Recent research also asks how Holiness traditions may have shaped the received form of this account.

There is a reflexive difficulty here. A document allegedly found in the Temple tells its readers how religious life ought to be arranged. Its discovery becomes the event that authorizes an extensive campaign to close local worship sites. The story is preserved by authors who value the law it elevates. Archaeological evidence for the actual reach of Josiah's reforms is mixed. An exact reconstruction of what was read aloud in Jerusalem is beyond current evidence. We can still study the relationship between the law, the discovery narrative, and the authority conferred on the reforming ruler.

For Qur'anic *taḥrīf* discussion this is decisive. A seventh-century Arabic revelation can speak of Torah as a genuine gift to Moses

and as a book still present among Jews. It can also describe people concealing or rewriting material. A source-critical model in which the Deuteronomistic library developed across the monarchic, exilic, and Persian periods raises a historical question that the Qur'an does not explicitly settle: which portions of the resulting history claimed to be Mosaic teaching, and which were later narratives of Israel's monarchy? The canon itself distinguishes law given through Moses from the histories that followed. An argument about the authenticity of Moses' Torah must keep the different literary claims separate.

The reform does not save the kingdom. Josiah dies confronting Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo. The later kings rule under foreign powers, and Jerusalem is conquered by Babylon. The Babylonian Chronicle independently records Nebuchadnezzar's seizure of the city and appointment of a new king in 597 BCE. The biblical narrative continues through the destruction of the Temple in 587/586 BCE, the assassination of Gedaliah, and the release of Jehoiachin from prison. The surviving Babylonian chronicle does not independently narrate the later destruction in its extant section, although the disaster itself is abundantly attested through other evidence.

In Qur'an 17:4–8, the Children of Israel are warned of two occasions of corruption and punishment. Early commentators associate the unnamed invaders with episodes in the history of Jerusalem, but the Qur'anic verses do not identify Nebuchadnezzar by name. The comparison invites discussion of how later interpretive histories fit historical catastrophes into sacred chronology. The point of contact is the recurring theme of divine judgment upon Israelite institutions.

The book of Kings ends with the Temple ruined. Its editors have connected political catastrophe to religious failure, and the reader has watched generations of kings judged by the standards of one sanctuary. Some of those kings built idols. Some destroyed them. One destroyed the serpent made by Moses. Another found a book and made it the foundation of a campaign to remove rival cults. The surviving testimony forces us to ask which reform acted in fidelity to God, how a human community recognized that fidelity, and how much of the later certainty came from authors who wrote after the events.

Key witnesses: Numbers 21:4–9; 2 Kings 18–25; Deuteronomy 12; Qur'an 2:93, 3:93, 5:43–48, 17:4–8. Scholarship: Thomas Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History*; Lauren Monroe on the Holiness substrate in Josiah's reform; Nadav Na'aman on the discovered book. Sources: https://www.imj.org.il/en/exhibitions/special-display-assyrian-campaign-judah-told-sennacherib-prism ; https://cojs.org/the_babylonian_chronicle_-chronicle_5-_nebuchadnezzar_besieges_jerusalem-_597_bce/ ; https://jhsonline.org/index.php/jhs/article/download/5648/4701/12680 ; https://doi.org/10.2307/41304187

PART IV · PROPHETS AND THE PERSIAN RESTORATION

The City That Divorced Its Wives

Ezra and Nehemiah, the Holy Seed, and the Problem of Converting a Household

The people stood in the rain because the question before them could not be decided indoors. Ezra tells us that men gathered in the square by the house of God, trembling both at the words they had heard and at the heavy weather. The dispute had already entered their kitchens. Some of the men had married women from neighboring communities, and some of those women had borne children. The new covenant was to be written into the lives of families that had existed before the reformers arrived.

In Ezra 10, Shecaniah proposes a covenant to send away the foreign wives and their children. Ezra has been weeping at the temple because the “holy seed” has mixed with the peoples of the land. The community agrees in principle, then asks for time: the crowd is too large, the rain is too heavy, and the matter cannot be completed in one or two days. The machinery of separation is given a schedule. Elders and judges will investigate the households one by one.

The scene has an unmistakable pathos that a doctrinal summary conceals. A prohibition on future marriages is relatively easy to describe. A decree affecting marriages already made reaches backward into years of shared life, property, dependency, and

affection. It treats children as evidence that the boundary was crossed. Ezra's story allows us to hear the collective oath; it gives us almost none of the voices of the wives.

Why did the community regard them as strangers? The immediate answer is that its leaders had developed a conception of Israel that treated genealogy as a vessel of sanctity. The Hebrew of Ezra 9:2 is *zeraʿ ha-qodesh*, holy seed or holy offspring. The wording imagines covenantal identity as something liable to mixing, and it places the authority to identify genuine members in the hands of the returned community. The biblical traditions that precede Ezra had been more varied. Moses married a Midianite woman. The Book of Ruth celebrates a Moabite woman who joins Naomi's people and becomes an ancestor of David. Yet Deuteronomy warned Israel against certain marriages because their partners might turn worship toward other gods, and it regulated entry into the congregation for Moabites and Ammonites. Ezra's reformers carried those traditions into a new political moment.

That moment followed the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, the destruction of its temple, and the transfer of elites into exile. Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE. The sanctuary in Jerusalem was rebuilt in the following decades, traditionally dated to 516/515 BCE. The story of Ezra and Nehemiah is placed in the fifth century under Artaxerxes, although the dates of Ezra's mission and the composition of the narratives remain contested. The restored community occupied a small province of a great empire. Its governors could negotiate boundaries and enforce local institutions; they did not possess an army capable of remaking the whole Levant by conquest.

The project is sometimes tempting to describe as a campaign to monotheize the Holy Land. That language catches a real ambition in the stories: the temple is to be restored, its ritual personnel regulated, the Sabbath enforced, foreign cultic associations resisted, and the city organized around a scroll called the Torah of Moses. It also risks imagining a single campaign progressing smoothly from the fall of Babylon to the eventual triumph of monotheism. Archaeological and documentary evidence resists such simplicity. Jerusalem's size and walls in the Persian period are matters of serious disagreement. The Yahwists at Elephantine in Egypt worshipped at their own temple and maintained customs that the Jerusalem reformers might have found troubling. The shared name of God had not yet produced uniform practice.

One may use "jihad" in a limited, comparative sense to describe strenuous religious reform pursued under public authority. It cannot serve as the historical name of Ezra's movement, and the narratives provide no account of a military campaign to convert the population of Canaan. The weapons most visible in these pages are administrative: exclusion from the assembly, confiscation of property, custody of sanctuary offices, and, in Nehemiah's own memoir, the governor's fists.

Nehemiah narrates a later encounter with married men whose children spoke the language of Ashdod and other neighboring peoples but could not speak Judean. He rebukes the men, strikes some of them, and pulls out their hair. He makes them swear to abandon the practice of intermarriage. An in-law of Sanballat, the influential official associated with Samaria, is expelled from Nehemiah's presence. The objection has become a question of language, marriage alliance, priestly lineage, and political

loyalty. The opposition to worshipping foreign gods remains the theological setting, but the account's concrete markers are often cultural and civic.

A closer legal examination makes the reform even more provocative. Deuteronomy 7 speaks of intermarriage with specified peoples and explains the danger through the lure of other gods. Deuteronomy 23 treats certain groups differently in rules about entry into the congregation. Ezra 9 extends the rhetoric into a list containing Egyptians and others, and the families are judged as though an earlier ban already resolved their present marriages. A modern study by Yigal Levin argues that Ezra and Nehemiah each adapt Deuteronomy's laws in ways their original contexts do not straightforwardly require. If that is right, the event is an instance of interpretation becoming government.

The argument turns upon the meaning of a marriage. If two people were joined under one social and religious order, what happens when their community discovers a stricter understanding of divine law? Does the law govern marriages made henceforth, or does it dissolve those whose spouses have already built a home? The question would return centuries later among the earliest Muslims, and it would produce answers whose differences still trouble Islamic jurists.

Muhammad's daughter Zaynab had married Abū al-ʿĀṣ before Islam. She came to embrace her father's message while her husband remained outside the new religious community. The transmitted accounts of their reunion preserve a legal dispute. In one report, Muhammad returned her to Abū al-ʿĀṣ on the original marriage, with no new ceremony. Another report says

the union was renewed with a fresh contract and dowry. The first carries stronger support according to some hadith graders; the second is expressly qualified by Tirmidhi. Both reports acknowledge that a human marriage had preceded the community's new legal boundary.

The Qur'an makes that boundary more complicated than an easy argument for retaining every marriage. Verse 2:221 forbids entering marriages with polytheists until they believe. Verse 60:10 addresses believing women who arrive as emigrants and declares the marriages of believing women and unbelieving men unlawful in that setting; it also instructs believers to relinquish marital bonds with unbelieving women. Verse 5:5 permits Muslim men to marry chaste women from the People of the Book. The classical juristic rules distinguish categories of spouse, religion, timing, waiting periods, and conversion; they do not recognize an unlimited right to keep every pre-Islamic union. Reports about men entering Islam while married to eight or ten women, or to two sisters, instruct them to end some of those unions.

The contrast with Ezra is therefore one of legal architecture and moral pressure, rather than a simple opposition of cruelty and mercy. The Islamic material contains an explicit theory of conversion that can sometimes protect the original contract, as Zaynab's case indicates. It also contains a rule capable of separating spouses after one has crossed a religious boundary. Ezra's text turns pre-existing marriage into a communal offense and orders wives and children away. Both traditions require us to ask who bears the cost when inherited family life collides with newly enforced holiness.

The other voices in the Hebrew canon make the question difficult to close. Ruth's journey is an act of chosen affiliation, voiced through her pledge to Naomi: your people will be my people, and your God my God. The prophet of Isaiah 56 opens God's house to foreigners who hold fast to the covenant. Malachi condemns faithlessness toward a wife of one's youth, even as the same oracle addresses marriage with the "daughter of a foreign god." These texts can be placed in conversation without pretending that they were written by one author at one time. Their differences are part of Israel's surviving argument about what fidelity demands.

The rabbinic tradition develops its own way of protecting Ruth. In *Yevamot* 77a, the exclusion of Moabites from the congregation is interpreted to concern Moabite men rather than Moabite women, securing the legitimacy of David's ancestry through Ruth. Whatever one thinks of that legal exegesis, it shows an enduring effort to make the received Torah accommodate a foreign woman who chose Israel's God.

Our earlier investigation of Exodus centered on the calf that bore God's name. Here the object through which divine identity is controlled is more intimate. It is a genealogy, a marriage record, a boundary between citizens and outsiders. A community that has survived conquest and exile has genuine reasons to fear disappearance. Its effort to preserve a language, a calendar, and a temple requires organized labor. The moral problem begins where the community's survival is made to require that a child lose one of the homes he already possesses.

At Jerusalem's Water Gate, the people listen to a scroll and the Levites explain its meaning. The Hebrew says the words are

made clear and understood; scholars debate whether the reading involved translation into Aramaic or another form of interpretation. The scene offers a remarkable portrait of a society organizing itself around a book. Its authority is mediated through a public act of interpretation. The people do not hear stone tablets speak on their own. They hear human readers explaining the Torah.

The chapter's final question concerns the place where a prohibition turns into a sentence upon persons. An ancient rule may be sincerely interpreted. A community may have persuasive reasons to adopt a religious boundary. Then the husband has to send away his wife, and the children learn that their names have been entered on the wrong side of the covenant. If the book is to test whether a religious institution has made an idol of its authority, that household is where the test should be conducted.

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10. Sunan Abi Dawud 2240, 2241, 2243; Jamiʿ at-Tirmidhi 1128, 1142. https://sunnah.com/abudawud:2240 and https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:1142
11. The provenance of the Ezra 10:44 dismissal wording differs between the Masoretic tradition and 1 Esdras

9:36. See Wolfgang Oswald (2012), pp. 2–3, and Un Sung Kwak, Oxford doctoral dissertation (2022), ch. 5. https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid%3A090e3de6-1e33-4599-b574-b061ab688765/files/d2227mq343

12. *Yevamot* 77a, on Moabite and Ammonite men and women. https://www.chabad.org/torah-texts/5449214/Talmud/Yevamot/Chapter-8/77a

The Prophets Against the Priests

The gate that offered sanctuary

The book of Jeremiah places a man at the entrance to the Temple, where people have come to worship. They are passing toward a building that carries a promise of divine presence. The city has its priesthood, a remembered covenant, and a place where generations have brought gifts to the God of Israel. Jeremiah is told to stand in their way and speak. His accusation begins with the words the worshippers trust most: the Temple of YHWH. They have learned to repeat its name as though the building could answer for the lives of those entering it. [PP-01]

Jeremiah 7 requires the people to deal justly with their neighbors and stop oppressing the resident foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. Innocent blood has been shed. The divine name has become part of the reassurance by which a community evades the question of what it has done. The accusation reaches the Temple itself, which the prophet compares to a robbers' den. It is possible to have a sacred

address while having lost the habits by which the God of that place is to be recognized.

The comparison is sharper when read with the history of Jerusalem. A sanctuary was a place where people sought protection from danger and believed that a divine presence had chosen to dwell. The royal ideology surrounding Jerusalem gave the city a special status, and the survival of its central district during the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE could reinforce such expectations. By Jeremiah's time the military and diplomatic conditions had changed. The Babylonian threat made the promise of inviolability a matter of life and death. The literary report of his warning turns sacred security into a question under examination. The prophet names Shiloh, a sanctuary that once held the ark and later lost its former place in Israel's religious life. A holy site already had a history of abandonment. [PP-01]

We should picture this as a dispute within Israel. Jeremiah 1:1 locates the prophet among the priestly families of Anathoth. In Jeremiah 26, priests and prophets accuse him of deserving death for his Temple speech, while other figures defend his right to speak. Those scenes come to us through a literary work with its own complex composition. Their force lies in the recorded contest over who may interpret the covenant. The people who had preserved religious institutions could also be summoned to account by inherited religious language. [PP-02]

This is where the earlier story of the golden calf returns. Aaron could announce a festival in the right divine name before an image made by human hands. Jeremiah's worshippers could pronounce the name of the Temple while walking past the

injuries named in the covenant. In both scenes the claim of holiness becomes unusually easy to make. Its authority is precisely what must be examined.

What God said when Israel left Egypt

Jeremiah makes a more difficult claim a few lines later. The voice attributed to YHWH says that when the ancestors were brought out of Egypt, God had given no instruction concerning burnt offering and sacrifice, and had instead commanded obedience. The sentence in Jeremiah 7:22–23 has disturbed interpreters because the Torah contains elaborate accounts of sacrifices commanded by God. Its meaning determines whether the prophet is rejecting the system itself or the assumption that its performance can compensate for injustice. [PP-03]

The Hebrew permits a vigorous rhetorical hearing. A speaker can deny one thing in order to establish the greater importance of another. Hosea 6:6 likewise gives priority to covenantal loyalty and knowledge of God, while Amos 5:21–25 condemns festivals whose worshippers have abandoned justice. A traditional interpreter can read Jeremiah as placing obedience at the center of the covenant, with sacrifice retaining its legitimate place when rightly offered. In that reading the prophet's words belong to a recognizable mode of moral rebuke. [PP-03]

There is also a historical-critical problem. The different law collections of the Pentateuch presuppose different ritual settings. Exodus 20:24 contemplates altars; Leviticus presents regulated offerings associated with priestly mediation; Deuteronomy concentrates worship at a chosen sanctuary. Their

literary relationships are debated. A sentence contrasting the command at the Exodus with an elaborate sacrificial system may preserve a memory of law in which that system had a different place. Such an interpretation has to be established by analysis of the passages and their compositional histories. Jeremiah's single line cannot date Leviticus by itself.

The contrast with the Temple's practical business is worth retaining. Jeremiah 7:21 uses a deliberately abrasive invitation to eat the meat of offerings ordinarily destined for the altar. Its sting depends on the meaning of the ritual that the audience already knows. In the prophet's indictment, the machinery of the cult keeps running while the social obligation of the covenant is neglected. One can arrive with the correct animal, follow the prescribed process, and carry home a judgment of rejection.

A reader attracted to the idea that original Torah contained no animal offerings will find this passage suggestive. That stronger thesis would need to explain the breadth of sacrificial material across biblical literature, traditions of legitimate offering in prophetic books, and the historical evidence of sacrifice in Israel and its neighboring societies. The text also supports a less sweeping inference, whose moral force is considerable: a rite can lose the religious meaning claimed for it when the person performing it refuses the obligations that give the rite its setting.

The children at the edge of Jerusalem

The Temple discourse goes from the sanctuary to a valley. Jeremiah 7:31 accuses the people of building a place at Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom where sons and daughters were

burned. The oracle describes this action as something God had never commanded and that had not entered the divine intention. Jeremiah 19 repeats the horror. The contrast between a divine command and a practice ascribed to divine demand is therefore written into the prophetic accusation itself. [PP-01]

The historical reconstruction is difficult. The biblical writers identify rites of child sacrifice and place them within an argument over forbidden worship. Archaeologists and historians debate particular ritual contexts and how frequently such practices occurred. The Hebrew text gives us a more immediate fact: an ancient author could make the rejection of burned children part of the public meaning of fidelity to YHWH. The accusation places an ethical limit on what may be brought to a sanctuary.

The difficulty deepens when the reader returns to laws concerning the firstborn. Exodus contains a demand that the first issue of the womb be given to God, while other passages specify redemption of human firstborn. The relation of these laws to earlier ritual practice is disputed. One could imagine someone making a terrifying inference from the language of surrender. The prophetic protest, with its explicit rejection of child burning, is a control on that inference within the surviving scriptural tradition. [PP-04]

It also prevents the chapter from finding an easy historical villain. The biblical texts themselves preserve divergent ways of speaking about firstborn obligation, ritual transfer, and what God demands. To decide whether the problem came from a misunderstood law, a rival cult, a retrospective denunciation, or a historical layer of legislation requires a wider inquiry. The

voice that condemns the burning is available within the same literary inheritance as the laws that raise the question.

The statutes by which no one could live

Ezekiel offers the most disturbing version of the problem. The book places the priest Ezekiel among Judean exiles in Babylonia. In chapter 20, the elders come to inquire of YHWH, and the prophet responds with a long recollection of rebellion from Egypt onward. God gave statutes through which people could live; the ancestors rejected them. Then the divine speaker says that he gave the people statutes that were not good, rules through which they could not live, and connects this judgment with offerings that passed firstborn children through fire. [PP-05]

The wording is severe because the subject of the verb remains God. A reader may wish to supply the sense of permitting or handing people over to ruinous practices. That is a serious interpretive option, since the speech describes rebellion followed by judgment. Another reading treats the bad statutes as a punitive divine act. The chapter's contrast between life-giving law and destructive practice has also led scholars to see child sacrifice itself as the reference. The difficult sentence remains present in every case. An interpreter should preserve the discomfort caused by an oracle in which the divine voice claims agency over the laws that destroy. [PP-05]

A contemporary argument by Nathan Mastnjak and Charles Hughes Huff is important here. They object to the longstanding Christian idea that the full body of priestly law was imposed as punishment for the golden calf. They show that Ezekiel's bad

statutes belong to the discussion of firstborn sacrifice and that the rest of Ezekiel continues to value commandments and priestly order. The text gives us no license to identify the whole sacrificial Torah as divine revenge. Their warning about the anti-Jewish uses of that theory is an important constraint on this book's own interpretation. [PP-06]

We can now state the question more precisely. A prophet reports that God gave Israel laws by which to live and also speaks of laws through which life became impossible. If a reader judges the latter an accommodation to rebellion, a punishment, or a mistaken human attribution, each solution implies something different about revelation. A scriptural collection can preserve the tension without supplying the modern reader with a single authorized theory of how it arose.

There is another kind of danger here, one that belongs to every religion capable of claiming an authoritative text. An interpreter can protect a familiar account of God's goodness by declaring a disturbing verse metaphorical. Another can protect the authority of every received command by regarding the suffering it causes as obedience. Both strategies must be tested against the language and history of the particular passage. The lives of children cannot be turned into a convenient proof of whatever conclusion the interpreter arrived with.

The priest who measured a new Temple

Ezekiel himself changes the direction of the inquiry. He is explicitly called a priest in the book's introduction. His visions accuse sanctuary personnel, rulers, and the people; the glory of YHWH departs from Jerusalem. Yet Ezekiel 40–48 devotes an

astonishing amount of attention to the dimensions and administration of a future sacred complex. The vision specifies gateways, chambers, priestly responsibilities, sacred land, and offerings. A new religious order takes shape in the very book whose prophet recalled laws that brought death. [PP-07]

Ezekiel 36 promises a heart of flesh in place of the heart of stone. The transformation is offered so that the restored people will walk in divine statutes. A new spirit makes covenantal life possible within an ordered community. In Jeremiah 31, the law is written within the people. These promises share the conviction that failure reaches into human willing and knowing. They retain different institutional horizons, which later communities would interpret in different ways. [PP-08]

It would be easy to construct a story in which Israel's greatest religious minds steadily escaped priesthood into pure interior devotion. Ezekiel interrupts that story. For him the heart renewed by God belongs to a people who receive a sanctuary again. The question becomes which forms of mediation can serve life, and under what conditions the visible arrangements of holiness become instruments of exclusion.

The future Temple's boundaries expose that question. Ezekiel 44:9 restricts access to the sanctuary for uncircumcised foreigners. Later, Ezekiel 47:22–23 instructs that resident foreigners with children among Israel receive hereditary land portions among the tribes. The two passages regulate different things, temple admission and land inheritance. Their presence in the same final vision nevertheless complicates a simple picture of the stranger as an outsider. Israel's restoration

contains both a protected sacred center and a wider account of belonging. [PP-07]

The book's argument therefore has to travel through priestly sources with care. A priest may be a critic of other priests. A shrine can preserve an ethic of hospitality while marking ritual limits. A prophecy of renewed inward life can accompany a legal program. These are disagreements about the forms of fidelity, carried by authors who believe God has spoken. It will take specific evidence to name a particular practice corruption.

The prophet preserved in two books

The problem of authority reaches the manuscripts themselves. The book of Jeremiah survives in two ancient literary editions, one represented by the shorter Old Greek tradition and related Hebrew witnesses from Qumran, another by the longer Hebrew form represented by the Masoretic tradition. Their contents and arrangements differ. An important passage in the longer edition, Jeremiah 33:14–26, repeats the hope for a righteous Davidic branch while affirming the enduring place of Levitical priests. That unit is absent from the Old Greek. [PP-09]

The variant matters to this investigation because the longer passage explicitly ties the future of the promised king to the future of priestly service. If the unit arose as a later expansion, its presence would document the growing interpretation of prophetic restoration. Emanuel Tov and other textual critics have disputed a simple account of secondary addition, and scholars continue to examine the passage's literary formation. The manuscript fact is secure; a complete story about the motives of its editors remains a hypothesis. [PP-09]

What would it mean to call this *taḥrīf*? A historical critic may conclude that a book continued to grow after its earliest recoverable edition. A believer may regard part of that growth as inspired interpretation. A Muslim theologian may ask whether a textual expansion changed the authority of an earlier message. Each judgment requires its own argument, beginning with the identity of the earlier text and the degree of change that can be established. The existence of the longer passage is evidence of transmission history; the moral worth or divine authorization of that editorial history remains a separate inquiry.

Jeremiah 31 itself is less cooperative with an easy theory of replacement. Its new covenant is promised to the houses of Israel and Judah. It recalls the covenant broken after the Exodus and speaks of a new act by the same God. Readers who understand it as an internal renewal of Israel's Torah have substantial textual grounds. Christians have read it through Jesus and the language of a new covenant. The dispute should begin with the prophet's own addressees before proceeding to later fulfillment claims.

The anointed stranger

Now the scene turns east. Babylon has fallen to Cyrus in 539 BCE. A clay cylinder written for the conqueror praises Marduk, the god of Babylon, as the one who selected him and set his victory in motion. The text belongs to royal commemoration and expresses a Mesopotamian account of legitimate rule. It never identifies Cyrus as a worshipper of YHWH, and it does not name Jerusalem. [PP-10]

The prophetic voice in Isaiah 44–45 tells the same imperial moment through a different divine agent. YHWH names Cyrus a shepherd and an anointed one, *māšîaḥ*, taking him by the hand to subdue nations. The oracle says the king is summoned though he does not know the God who calls him. A Judean reader is made to imagine a foreign ruler carrying a vocation from the God of Israel while remaining outside the normal channels of Israelite priesthood and Davidic succession. [PP-11]

That claim has a long scholarly history. Some critics understand the Cyrus material as an addition to earlier poetry, while many regard it as integral to the exilic message. Lisbeth Fried has investigated what royal designation is conveyed by the title; a reader must avoid importing the complete later messianic theology into a sixth-century political address. Still, the vocabulary of anointing has crossed a remarkable boundary. The ruler's lack of knowledge is placed explicitly within the very sentence by which the God of Israel claims his service. [PP-11]

Isaiah 45 intensifies the divine claim. YHWH creates light and darkness, makes well-being and *raʿ*, a word which in this setting refers to calamity or disaster. The oracle's insistence on one universal power is bound to political upheaval and military victory. Universal sovereignty can make a conquering empire an instrument of providence. The theology is expansive, and its moral consequences demand examination rather than celebration by reflex. [PP-12]

The chapter culminates in an invitation directed to the ends of the earth. It is possible to read the imperial drama as an argument that the God of Israel exercises power beyond Israel. The text gives the people of Israel a form of religious speech

larger than possession of a single territory or succession line. Yet the foreign ruler is still a ruler whose victories involved the exercise of force. To make Cyrus into an icon of pure tolerance would repeat the very habit this book has been studying, the use of providential language to cleanse political power of its ordinary human history.

The house of prayer and its guests

The book of Isaiah does not end its account of the nations with Cyrus. Isaiah 56 welcomes foreigners who join themselves to YHWH and keep the covenant. Eunuchs, whose place in inherited communal rules had been constrained, are promised a lasting name. The sanctuary is described as a house of prayer for all peoples. Significantly, the passage accepts their burnt offerings and sacrifices on its altar. [PP-13]

Here is a powerful constraint on a theory that the prophets steadily replaced ritual with morality. The author of Isaiah 56 imagines a more hospitable sanctuary and describes its sacrificial worship as acceptable. The expansion is covenantal and conditional: Sabbath fidelity and the choice to serve YHWH matter. It is a literary vision of the divine house capable of welcoming those earlier boundary-making projects might have pushed aside.

The same historical library contains Ezra's action against foreign marriages, Ezekiel's regulated sacred access, and Ruth's memory of a Moabite woman who entered the ancestry of David. Those writings belong to different contexts and genres, but they show what it meant for a community to preserve opposing ways of narrating the presence of the stranger. They

were all carried forward in Jewish scripture. Such disagreement is a fact about the textual inheritance, while the historical outcome of each program belongs to a further inquiry into actual communities.

Flesh and blood cannot travel to heaven

The Qur'an enters this debate through an argument about the meaning of an offering. Qur'an 22:36–37 speaks positively of sacrificial animals and instructs believers to eat from them and feed others. It then declares that the animals' flesh and blood do not reach God; what reaches him is *taqwā*, reverent consciousness or piety. The rite persists within the text, and the human intention is placed under examination. [PP-14]

That is a better comparison with Jeremiah than a claim that Islam simply abolishes ancient sacrifice. Jeremiah exposes a rite deprived of covenantal obedience. The Qur'an explains why the material of a sacrifice cannot nourish an exalted deity. These are different literary interventions, made within different religious settings, that direct attention to the worshipper's conduct and understanding. Their resemblance supports a theological comparison, while their distinct legal settings deserve to remain visible.

Other Qur'anic passages raise the stakes of inherited command. Qur'an 6:137 condemns religious misdirection that made the killing of children appear attractive to those performing it. Qur'an 16:116 warns against declaring things lawful or unlawful by falsely attributing the judgment to God. Qur'an 2:170 records the problem of answering moral instruction with the authority of the ancestors. These verses supply a Muslim reader with

reasons to ask how a claim received from the past acquired the force of divine speech. [PP-15]

The same reader must face texts within the Qur'an and Muslim legal inheritance that authorize severe penalties and practices of war. The method developed here must operate on those passages under the same evidentiary and ethical discipline. A verdict already predetermined by religious membership would leave the golden calf standing in another sanctuary.

The Qur'an's own account of Torah is essential to the test. It calls the Torah guidance and light, appeals to a scripture held by Jews in its audience, and describes the Qur'an as confirming and overseeing earlier revelation. It also condemns falsification and concealment. These claims permit disagreement about the integrity and applicability of particular transmitted laws. They demand an actual history of the witnesses and interpretations when the question concerns a particular biblical sentence. [PP-16]

A voice that must endure questioning

The title of this chapter names a conflict that passed through priestly institutions and was often articulated by people of priestly background. Jeremiah came from a priestly family. Ezekiel was a priest. Isaiah's later tradents could welcome offerings at an expanded Temple. Their protests resist being assigned to a single party that had already discovered the answer to the problem of scripture.

What they make possible is a different form of religious responsibility. Jeremiah asks whether the vulnerable are protected by those who invoke the Temple's name. Ezekiel asks

how a community that received commandments for life could come to practice laws that brought death. The prophet of Cyrus lets the God of Israel appoint an agent beyond Israel's inherited royal boundary. All three lines of inquiry place authorized power under a question it cannot answer merely by repeating its title.

There are limits to what their words prove. Jeremiah's accusation does not settle the historical origin of every sacrifice. Ezekiel's terrible sentence does not identify the entire priestly tradition as a punishment. The anointing of Cyrus does not make every imperial act holy. Those limits strengthen the historical inquiry because they force a distinction between the text as transmitted, the past it claims to describe, and the theological judgment a living reader must make.

Later readers will carry this dispute into the wilderness. The community that withdrew toward the Dead Sea claimed a purified covenant and developed its own sharp boundaries around the righteous. John the Baptist called people to repentance through water. The earliest Jesus traditions portray disputes about the Sabbath, purification, the Temple, and the relation of commandments to human need. Each movement belongs within the longer Jewish argument over the voice of God. Their different answers will become the subject of the chapters that follow.

At the Temple gate the people had been speaking the name of YHWH. The prophet's challenge concerned the lives they expected that name to protect. The next person who invokes a divine command inherits the same question.

Source notes and adversarial checks

PP-01. Jeremiah 7:1–34; Jeremiah 26:1–24. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/jeremiah/7 . Temple security, Shiloh, the vulnerable, and Topheth are literary claims; precise dating of the original sermon and its redaction remains disputed.

PP-02. Jeremiah 1:1; 26:8–24. Jeremiah is introduced as belonging to the priests of Anathoth. The narrative of his prosecution has a literary history.

PP-03. Jeremiah 7:21–23; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–25; Exodus 20:24; Leviticus 1–7; Deuteronomy 12. The interpretation of Jeremiah's negation is contested. See the essay *Sacrifice and the Old Testament*, St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/SacrificeandtheOldTestament/ ; NET textual notes, https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?passage=Jer+7%3A21-23 .

PP-04. Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4–5; Exodus 13:12–15; 22:28–29; Numbers 18:15–16. Child sacrifice, firstborn dedication, and redemption require separate analysis; the specific referent of every biblical firstborn formula cannot be assumed.

PP-05. Ezekiel 20:1–26, especially 20:11, 20:25–26. Primary text and commentary: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/20 . Readers dispute permission, punitive divine agency, and the precise practice identified.

PP-06. Nathan Mastnjak and Charles Hughes Huff, "Promise Not Punishment: A Christian Theological Interpretation of the Priestly Law and the Golden Calf," *Harvard Theological Review* 119, no. 2 (2026). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816026101187 .

This is a substantive objection to interpreting priestly law wholesale as punishment for the calf.

PP-07. Ezekiel 40–48; 44:9; 47:22–23. Different rules address sanctuary participation and resident foreigners' land inheritance.

PP-08. Ezekiel 36:25–27; Jeremiah 31:31–34. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/36 . Their shared inward renewal vocabulary allows comparison without assuming identical views of cultic law.

PP-09. Jeremiah 33:14–26 in MT, absent from Old Greek. The general shorter/longer edition distinction is supported by Qumran witnesses. Mark Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26–45* (Cambridge, 2007), chapter 5, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511551147.006 ; Emanuel Tov, "Is the 'True Branch' Prophecy Really Part of Jeremiah?", https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/is-the-true-branch-prophecy-really-part-of-jeremiah/ . Competing reconstructions should be presented in the dossier.

PP-10. Cyrus Cylinder, Akkadian royal inscription after the conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. Encyclopaedia Iranica, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cyrus-iv/ ; translation associated with the British Museum, https://exhibitions.asianart.org/exhibitions/the-cyrus-cylinder-and-ancient-persia-a-new-beginning/ . Its rhetoric belongs to Babylonian royal legitimation and names Marduk.

PP-11. Isaiah 44:28–45:7; Lisbeth S. Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 4 (2002), 373–393.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816002000251 . The passage's original literary boundaries and political significance remain debated.

PP-12. Isaiah 45:5–7, 45:22. The Hebrew *raʿ* is context-sensitive, often translated disaster or calamity in this passage; the assertion of universal sovereignty should not be converted into a claim that Cyrus's every action was morally good.

PP-13. Isaiah 56:1–8. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/56 . The offerings of covenant-keeping foreigners are explicitly welcomed.

PP-14. Qur'an 22:36–37; comparison with Jeremiah 7 and Isaiah 56. Arabic morphological/translation reference: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=22&verse=37 . *Taqwā* carries a broader ethical and devotional sense than mere ritual feeling.

PP-15. Qur'an 6:137; 16:116; 2:170. Context distinguishes condemnations of child killing, fabricated law, and ancestral deference.

PP-16. Qur'an 3:3, 3:93, 5:43–48, 2:75–79, and 3:78. The exact scope of scriptural corruption and confirmation remains a subject of Islamic exegesis and critical comparison. See the Torah textual audit in the existing manuscript.

The Stranger Whom God Called Messiah

A king who did not know the name

Cyrus entered Babylon in 539 BCE under the favorable gaze of a god whose name was Marduk. The surviving cylinder describes

the Babylonian deity choosing the Persian conqueror and guiding him toward the city. It celebrates the restoration of sanctuaries, displaced cult images, and the proper ordering of religious life after the failures of Nabonidus. The language belongs to Mesopotamian kingship. The ruler praises the god of the people whose city he has captured. Those people are invited to see a conquest as the correction of an offense against heaven. [PR-05; PR-06]

A Judean prophet living in the shadow of the same upheaval spoke differently. He called the Persian king by name, declared that Israel's God had grasped his right hand, and placed on his forehead a title that later ages would make almost synonymous with final redemption. Cyrus is YHWH's *māšîaḥ*. Isaiah 44:28 calls him God's shepherd; Isaiah 45:1 makes him the anointed agent of victory. The honor arrives with a qualification: the king has been summoned although he does not know the God summoning him (45:4–5). [PR-01; PR-02; PR-32]

That qualification matters more than a romantic story about a uniquely enlightened empire. The Persian ruler did not have to become a Judean, enter the Jerusalem priesthood, or prove descent from David. The prophetic text places the initiative with a God free to appoint someone outside the community. The divine agency appears through a man whose religious knowledge remains incomplete. A nation that had guarded its covenant by genealogy now encounters its deliverer at the head of a foreign army.

The cuneiform cylinder and the Hebrew oracle speak from different political locations, and the distinction can be tested. The cylinder never names Judeans or Jerusalem. The books of

Ezra and Chronicles attribute a particular restoration decree to Cyrus. The empire's wider policy of restoring local cults supplies a plausible setting for that memory. The Judean record supplies the specific theological claim. A foreign sovereign has been useful to Israel's God, yet the surviving Persian document itself praises Marduk. [PR-05; PR-06]

Anointed does not yet mean a single Messiah

The Hebrew word *māšîaḥ* belongs to a history of appointment. Priests could be anointed; kings bore the title; Israel's threatened dynasty was defended through promises made to David. Isaiah 45 applies it to an outsider without assigning him a Davidic genealogy. It is the strongest warning against treating every ancient use of "messiah" as though it already contained a developed first-century doctrine of one anticipated end-time savior. [PR-01]

The book of Isaiah itself contains several royal and servant figures. Isaiah 11 imagines a shoot from Jesse's stump, empowered to judge the poor with righteousness. Isaiah 42 introduces a servant who brings justice to the nations. Isaiah 49 calls the servant Israel, yet in the following lines gives him the task of gathering Israel. A collective name and an individual vocation inhabit the same poem. Isaiah 52–53 describes a servant whose humiliation, death and subsequent vindication transform the understanding of suffering. None of these portraits can be collapsed into Cyrus by vocabulary alone. Their later convergence is a history of interpretation. [PR-07]

The tension appears in the Jewish reception of Isaiah 53. Rashi's influential medieval interpretation treats the servant

collectively as Israel. Targum Jonathan explicitly identifies the servant at Isaiah 52:13 as the Messiah, then reshapes the ensuing description toward a victorious deliverer. The Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 98b, can imagine the Messiah as afflicted, drawing on Isaiah 53:4. Jewish sources preserve more than one way of hearing the servant's pain. Christianity reads the suffering figure in light of Jesus' death and exaltation, and early gospel narratives quote the servant songs. The textual witnesses and reception history must be allowed to speak in their own voices. [PR-08; PR-09; PR-29]

The historical-critical approach adds a chronological check. The poetic material in Isaiah 40–55 speaks from the Babylonian catastrophe and impending release, and names Cyrus directly. A widespread scholarly reconstruction places it in the mid-sixth century BCE, while recognizing older materials and further editing within the final book. The original Isaiah of Jerusalem belonged to the eighth century. Its later chapters were transmitted with his name as a single work. The question of fulfillment has to be asked after identifying the historical horizon of each oracle. [PR-02; PR-07]

A Persian from Zarathustra's world?

Zarathustra belongs to a much older Iranian religious horizon whose dates remain disputed. The king's ethnic and political world was certainly Iranian; his specific devotion remains uncertain. Mary Boyce argued for significant Zoroastrian influences among early Achaemenids, using names, ritual installations and parallels in religious speech. Prods Oktor Skjærvø gives greater weight to the absence of an explicit Zarathustrian confession in Cyrus' surviving inscriptions.

Neither historian can quote Cyrus declaring himself a disciple of Zarathustra. [PR-03; PR-04]

The paradox of Isaiah 45 becomes even richer in that setting. The prophet praises YHWH as the creator of light and darkness, of peace and *raʿ*, a Hebrew term capable of describing calamity or disaster in this context. The passage has sometimes been read against Iranian ideas of cosmic opposition, although dating a particular polemic against Zoroastrian doctrine demands more than a thematic resemblance. The text's immediate argument is that the God who summons Cyrus directs both victory and adversity. Cyrus can wield authority while knowing little of the one whom Isaiah credits with his commission.

The Qur'an names the Magians, *al-Majūs*, among the religious communities God will judge (22:17). It names Jesus *al-Masīḥ*. It does not name Cyrus or Zarathustra, and it does not identify the ruler of Isaiah 45. To speak of Cyrus as a member of Zarathustra's *ummah* is therefore a plausible comparative hypothesis only if one separately establishes his religious allegiance. The theological possibility is wider than that proof: God might act through a person whose own tradition is only partly known to us. [PR-04; PR-14; PR-19]

Jeremiah's covenant survives the temple

The priests had guarded a house. Jeremiah warned that confidence in its walls would not protect people whose conduct violated the covenant. His temple discourse in chapter 7 joins fidelity to God with justice for foreigners, orphans and widows. He questions the place of sacrifices in the original encounter between Israel and God. The argument belongs to an internal

Jewish challenge to the authority of cultic security. It anticipates the book's recurring danger: the temple itself can be treated as an object powerful enough to excuse cruelty.

Jeremiah 23 promises a righteous Branch from David, a king who will practice justice. Jeremiah 31:31–34 looks beyond the failure of the covenant toward a law written in minds and hearts. The people addressed are the houses of Israel and Judah. Their renewed relationship with God presupposes a shared history of obligation. The author imagines a transformation in the knowledge and practice of Torah. Later Christian texts, especially Hebrews 8, read that promise in relation to Jesus and a new covenant. A Jewish reading can treat it as the inward renewal of Israel's own covenant. These are historically distinct acts of interpretation. [PR-24]

We possess another unusually tangible complication. Jeremiah has circulated in two large ancient editions: the shorter Hebrew edition underlying the old Greek translation and the longer form preserved by the Masoretic Text. Qumran manuscripts provide evidence for both textual families. In the longer edition, Jeremiah 33:14–26 returns to the righteous Branch and expands the promise to the Levitical priesthood. That unit is absent from the old Greek. It changes the way the promise is situated in the book, especially the continued status of priestly service. A prophetic word can be preserved while its literary frame develops. [PR-10; PR-11; PR-25]

Ezekiel's new heart and his old sacrifices

Ezekiel saw a ruined sanctuary and described divine presence departing from it. He pronounced judgment on rulers who fed

themselves instead of their sheep. God promised to shepherd the flock directly and to appoint one shepherd, “my servant David,” over it. In Ezekiel 36 the people are cleansed and given a new heart and spirit. Chapter 37 stages national restoration as dry bones rising to life, then promises an enduring covenant under David’s rule.

The vision returns us to a problem Jeremiah seemed to have moved beyond. Ezekiel 40–48 supplies intricate dimensions for a future temple, ranks its priesthood, and anticipates renewed offerings. A heart transformed by God inhabits a community again organized around sacred space, priestly boundaries and sacrificial procedure. Later Christian readings have variously spiritualized that temple, interpreted it through Christ, or expected a future sanctuary. Jewish interpreters have placed it within expectations for a restored Temple. Each interpretation must face the surviving ritual specification. [PR-21; PR-30]

There is a sharp internal debate about the foreigner. Ezekiel 44 excludes uncircumcised foreigners from sanctuary service. Isaiah 56 promises a place in God’s house to foreigners who hold fast to the covenant, calling it a house of prayer for all peoples. Ezekiel 47 itself makes room for resident aliens to receive hereditary land allotments. The dispute concerns ritual membership and sacred access as much as ethnic ancestry. It shows how differing prophetic visions continued to argue within Israel’s scripture. [PR-21; PR-30]

Ezekiel’s Gog from Magog becomes part of a later apocalyptic vocabulary. Qur’an 18:83–99 portrays Dhū al-Qarnayn constructing a barrier against Yājūj and Mājūj, and 21:96 foresees their release. A modern Muslim interpretation

identifies Dhū al-Qarnayn with Cyrus. The older literary tradition of the two-horned world conqueror, however, points scholars such as Kevin van Bladel and Tommaso Tesei toward Alexander legends circulating in late antiquity. The text names neither Cyrus nor Alexander. The Cyrus identification and the Alexander-literary explanation therefore have different kinds of support. [PR-18; PR-31]

Bethlehem, the nations, and the humble remnant

Micah supplies a second setting for the promised king. The ruler comes from Bethlehem Ephrathah, associated with David's family, and is expected to bring security under God's strength. Matthew's infancy narrative uses that geography to locate Jesus' birth. The same prophetic book condemns officials who judge for bribes, priests who teach for payment, and prophets who speak for money. A future ruler is measured against the corrupt religious world that precedes him. Micah 6:8 makes justice, loyal love and humble conduct the measure of what God requires. [PR-22]

Micah 4 and Isaiah 2 share the vision of nations streaming toward God's instruction and turning weapons into farming tools. Their overlap is so close that scholars debate their literary relationship. Marvin Sweeney argues that the respective settings can point to different political programs: one conceives peace in relation to an imperial order, another pairs restoration with a righteous Davidic ruler. The oracle's survival in two books preserves a debate over the route to universal peace. [PR-12]

Zephaniah makes the horizon still larger. Following the violent day of judgment, 3:9 imagines purified lips among the peoples so

that they call upon God's name together. The humble and truthful remnant of 3:11–13 has learned to live without deception. The chapter does not erase its terrifying language about a consuming judgment. It places universal worship after that crisis and makes truthfulness part of restored life. [PR-23]

The Qur'an's reference to the righteous inheriting the earth in 21:105 closely recalls Psalm 37; it also belongs beside Isaiah's and Micah's universal horizons. Qur'an 49:13 grounds human diversity in peoples and tribes, while locating honor before God in moral consciousness. Its 22:17 lists Magians with Jews, Christians, Sabians, believers and polytheists under divine judgment. These are important textual resources for imagining universal divine government without assuming every people has already entered the same religious institution. [PR-19; PR-20; PR-26]

The Messiah who eats food

When the Qur'an calls Jesus *al-Masīḥ ʿĪsā ibn Maryam*, the title arrives with centuries of Jewish and Christian expectations behind it. Qur'an 3:45 calls him a word from God and gives him the name Messiah. Qur'an 4:171 calls him God's messenger, word and spirit, while refusing theological claims about divine plurality; 4:172 emphasizes his willing servanthood. Qur'an 5:75 describes him and Mary eating food, an earthy argument for creaturely dependence. The messianic office remains elevated while the boundary between creature and creator is guarded. [PR-13; PR-14; PR-15]

The disagreement about the servant in Isaiah 53 now becomes acute. Christianity can read the servant's affliction through

Jesus' crucifixion and the salvific meaning attached to it. The Qur'an, in 4:157–158, disputes the claim that Jesus was killed and crucified by the agents boasting of his death, and says that God raised him. Classical Islamic interpretations often understand this as a denial of the crucifixion itself, with alternative reconstructions among later interpreters. The Qur'an also presents a moral and salvific world in which human accountability is not simply transferred by a suffering victim. A historical comparison must keep these differences visible alongside the shared title Messiah. [PR-13; PR-15]

A hadith about Muhammad raises the question of who else may fulfill Isaianic descriptions. In Bukhari 2125, Abdullah ibn Amr describes the coming messenger as patient, forgiving and unlike a noisy market crier, with language reminiscent of Isaiah 42. The report calls the earlier testimony "Torah" while the closest surviving biblical wording appears in Isaiah, a text located among the Prophets. The observation matters for the book's earlier textual-commitment argument: the term Torah could name a wider scriptural testimony, or a transmitted characterization could draw on more than one source. It cannot on its own prove that a lost Pentateuchal verse once contained that exact description. [PR-16; PR-28; PR-29]

Late-antique Christianity provides an immediate environment in which the Qur'an's messianic language could be understood. Joshua Sijuwade's study traces Syriac traditions of the Messiah as healer, servant and eschatological figure. The Gospels' portrayals of Jesus and the Christological language of later communities had already passed through centuries of interpretation before the Qur'an addressed them. This is

evidence for a historically mediated conversation, even for a theological reader who regards the Qur'an as revelation. [PR-13]

A further irony belongs to the Christian infancy narrative. Matthew describes eastern *magoi* visiting the newborn Jewish king, recognizing him while Herod fears for his throne. They are often imagined as Persian religious specialists, although the narrative itself leaves their origin imprecise. The foreign watchers of the heavens announce a Jewish royal figure in the same broad tradition where Isaiah once named a Persian liberator as God's anointed. Neither scene proves the religion of its eastern characters. Together they show how the imagined borders of Israel's deliverance could be crossed by visitors and rulers from beyond Israel.

The book's central question returns in a new form. If God's anointed may be a king who does not know God's name, if a servant may bear the name Israel while bringing Israel home, and if a new covenant may be written upon hearts while the old temple is rebuilt, then no one inherited interpretation can occupy the whole field. The struggle over Jesus is a struggle over how these voices belong together. It must be conducted through texts whose authors lived in different centuries, in languages that transformed their meanings, and within communities whose claims about God remained subject to ethical judgment.

PART V · THE LAW AND THE ZABŪR TESTED

The Laws That Survived

Torah or Not Torah · Part IV, law-ranking chapter and critical apparatus · Working edition 2.0 · 18 November 2026

The book ends before the first century BCE

The history told in this volume closes with the Persian and early Second Temple efforts to recover, write, enforce, and contest Torah. The older text has carried us from the divine family of El to the God who claims every nation, from Aaron's calf to Jerusalem's Temple, and from the royal ban to the restoration community that expelled foreign wives. We can now ask the question that the title has promised. Which laws in the received Pentateuch have a claim upon the reader who believes that God gave Moses the Torah and that the Qur'an confirms what remains true within it?

The Essenes, John, Jesus, Mandaean Baptist memory, and the origins of later *bāṭinī* interpretation belong principally to *Finding Injil*. Their sources may be cited retrospectively as manuscript witnesses or examples of reception. The narrative history here stops around 100 BCE. Its comparative Qur'anic standpoint necessarily comes from the seventh century CE; it is a theological method applied to earlier texts, not a claim that seventh-century events occurred within the period being reconstructed.

A law can be old without having been revealed to Moses. It can have belonged to Israel under a genuine covenant while being

inapplicable to Muslims. A later court may read an ancient injunction through procedures that its wording never supplied. A transmitted sentence can be textually secure within the surviving Hebrew tradition while its precise date of composition remains unknown. The ranking must separate those possibilities before deciding what *taḥrīf* might mean.

The Qur'an supplies a demanding test. In 5:44–45 it declares Torah a source of guidance and presents the formula of retaliation as a decree written therein. In 6:146 it identifies particular dietary burdens imposed upon Jews. In 3:93 it asks opponents to bring their Torah and read from it; 5:43 assumes a Torah containing judgment was accessible in the Prophet's time. The Qur'an also claims authority over earlier scripture in 5:48 and assigns communities distinct legal ways. These statements make wholesale disappearance of meaningful Torah revelation a difficult hypothesis while allowing substantial change in legal obligation.

What is being ranked?

Each line in the register receives a **Qur'anic attestation grade**. This is an ordinal measure of how clearly the Qur'an supports the *specific asserted law*, rather than a numerical estimate of divine authorship.

Code	Evidential meaning	What the code cannot establish
Q4	The Qur'an explicitly attributes that legal content to the Torah or an identifiable earlier Israelite decree.	That every detail in the current Masoretic wording was part of Moses' original revelation.
Q3	The Qur'an identifies the	That it was universal,

Code	Evidential meaning	What the code cannot establish
	obligation or restriction as a real requirement for Israel or the Jews.	perpetual, or contained in a particular layer of the Pentateuch.
Q2	The Qur'an independently states substantially the same specific injunction.	That the biblical rule was revealed in the same form, to the same audience, or with identical sanctions.
Q1	The Qur'an gives a thematic or institutional parallel, or a later Muslim report supplies a more exact match.	A direct divine endorsement of the biblical detail.
Q0	The Qur'an supplies no close, identifiable control on the stated law.	That the law is fabricated; silence is an open historical question.
QT	An interpretation of the biblical law creates a serious tension with an explicit Qur'anic claim.	That the Hebrew sentence is demonstrably a scribal forgery. The interpretation itself may need revision.

A separate **Sunnah/fiqh note** distinguishes a direct prophetic report from later legal conclusions. **S3** denotes a specifically identified report in a major hadith collection that classical Sunni scholars generally regard as sound; it does not imply that every historical-critical scholar endorses the attribution. **S2** denotes an extensively received juristic position or several pertinent reports that still require isnād and scope analysis. **S1** marks disputed, inferential, or school-specific extension; **S0** means that the present audit offers no specific prophetic control. A report and a ruling can carry different grades for the same case.

Historical witness status must be recorded independently in the source ledger: Masoretic Text (MT), Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), Septuagint (LXX), and any surviving relevant Dead Sea Scroll (DSS) manuscript; date and literary context; possible priestly, Holiness, Deuteronomic, or other composition; and an adverse reconstruction. Later manuscripts are admissible evidence for earlier texts without turning their copying communities into characters in this book's historical narrative. Until each clause has been collated, the register withholds invented percentages and a claim that its original Mosaic wording has been recovered.

The resulting order ranks **Islamic textual attestation**, with a provisional interpretive assessment at each step. It does not purport to measure metaphysical probability.

Decision register: the strongest cases first

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
01	Retaliation: life for life, eye for eye (Ex 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–22; Deut 19:21)	5:45 expressly attributes the formula to Torah	**Q4**	Schools define liability, compensation, pardon and evidentiary thresholds differently	**Affirmed earlier-law core**; procedure remains open
02	Certain fats of cattle/sheep	6:146 enumerates prohibited	**Q3**	Muslims do not inherit the Jewish fat	**Explicitly Israel-specific**; match the

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	restricted for Jews (Lev 3:17; 7:23–25)	fats and exceptions		ban; details of *ḥelev* require Hebrew study	exceptions
03	Israelite food exclusions involving hoof/animal classes (Lev 11; Deut 14)	6:146 describes a Jewish restriction; 3:93 calls for Torah	**Q3**	Sunnah and fiqh permit camel meat; ritual washing after eating it is disputed	**Earlier restriction acknowledged**; exact animal mapping disputed
04	Sabbath obligation for Israel (Ex 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15)	4:154; 16:124 and other Sabbath narratives	**Q3**	Muslim Friday prayer is a different ordinance; Sabbath stoning requires another test	**Earlier covenant recognized**; scope and penalties separated
05	Ban on consuming blood (Lev 7:26–27; 17:10–14)	2:173; 5:3; 6:145	**Q2**	Jurists distinguish flowing blood and residual blood by textual and practical	**Shared prohibition**, not identical priestly rationale

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
				criteria	
06	Ban on eating pork (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8)	2:173; 5:3; 6:145	**Q2**	Strong cross-school agreement; necessity exceptions occur in the Qur'an	**Shared injunction**
07	Ban on animal offerings to rival gods / idols (Ex 20:3–5; 22:20)	16:36; 21:52; 5:90	**Q2**	Statutory execution for idolatry is a distinct problem	**Shared worship principle**, punishment open
08	Homicide accountability (Ex 21:12–14; Num 35)	2:178–179; 5:45; 5:32	**Q2–4**	*Qiṣāṣ*, blood-money and heirs' rights have school-specific law	**Core affirmed**; unequal classifications require audit
09	Prohibition on killing children as sacrifice (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5)	6:137; 6:151; 17:31	**Q2**	Severe shared condemnation of child killing; no positive proof of each biblical penalty	**Shared moral prohibition**
10	Prohibited	4:22–23	**Q2**	Lists	**Specific**

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	close-kin unions (Lev 18:6–18; Deut 27)			overlap substantially; levirate exception receives its own row	**core overlap**, case differences remain
11	Sexual intercourse avoided during menstruation (Lev 18:19; 20:18)	2:222	**Q2**	Muslim 302 treats intercourse as prohibited while preserving ordinary contact	**Shared narrower rule**; broader impurity code unconfirmed
12	Prohibition on usury/interest (Ex 22:25; Deut 23:19–20)	2:275–279; 3:130	**Q2**	Schools elaborate *ribā* across debts and sales; Hebrew foreigner distinction remains	**Shared concern**, distinct scope and mechanisms
13	Basic norms against theft (Ex 20:15; 22:1–4)	5:38	**Q2**	Torah's restitution schedules and Qur'anic cutting penalty diverge	**Shared prohibition**, specific sanctions differ
14	False accusation and	24:4; 2:282; 4:135	**Q2**	Testimony requirements vary by	**Shared judicial principle**,

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	evidentiary caution (Deut 19:15–21; Ex 23:1)			cause and school	not a single witness ratio
15	Charity and protection of poor debtors (Ex 22:25–27; Deut 15)	2:177; 2:280; 90:13	**Q1–2**	Relief principles supported; sabbatical debt-release mechanism unconfirmed	**Moral overlap**; institutional details open
16	Animal sacrifice as a devotional act (Lev 1–7; Num 28–29)	22:34–37; 5:27	**Q1–2**	Eid sacrifice and *hady* have their own schools and procedures	**Sacrifice recognized**; Aaronide service unconfirmed
17	Divorce, waiting, financial rights (Deut 24:1–4; Ex 21:10–11)	2:228–232; 65:1–2	**Q1–2**	Schools distinguish divorce acts, waiting and restoration differently	**Comparable institutions**, procedures differ
18	Release and humane	4:92; 24:33; 90:13	**Q1–2**	Classical schools recognize	**Shared concerns**; permanent

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	treatment of enslaved people (Ex 21; Lev 25; Deut 15)			slavery and manumission, with historical legal differences	hereditary foreign slavery not affirmed
19	Firstborn dedication and redemption (Ex 13:11–16; Num 18)	2:67–73 is a separate cow narrative; 6:137 condemns child killing	**Q1**	Firstborn human immolation is an entirely separate claim	**Dedication possible**; alleged killing requires adverse test
20	Fasting or expiatory observance (Lev 16; 23)	2:183	**Q1**	Qur'an says fasting was prescribed to earlier communities; exact Day of Atonement rite undetermined	**Institution acknowledged**, exact calendar unproven
21	The holy land as an allotted obligation (Deut 1; Joshua)	5:20–26	**Q1**	The Qur'an depicts entry and refusal; it supplies no blanket extermination	**Historical theme recognized**, war claims independent

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
				ordinance	
22	Stoning for adultery in specified cases (Deut 22:23–24; Lev 20:10)	5:43 refers to Torah judgment; 24:2 gives lashes in Qur'anic law	**Q1**	**S3:** Bukhari 6819; Muslim 1699a; four Sunni schools and Jaʿfari law recognize *rajm* in specified *muḥṣan* cases	**Strong Sunni-hadith reception**, precise Torah case and scope disputed
23	Killing apostates or idolaters under a town/prophet statute (Deut 13)	2:256; 4:137; 5:33 require contextual comparison	**Q0 / QT**	**S3 report:** Bukhari 3017; classical Hanafi treatment of women differs from other Sunni schools	**Hadith-law question**; general Qur'anic attribution to Moses unestablished
24	Stoning a Sabbath-breaker (Num 15:32–36)	16:124 recognizes Sabbath, not this incident's fixed sanction	**Q0**	No direct prophetic confirmation of this Mosaic execution was identified	**Unconfirmed detail**
25	Levitical	20:29–36	**Q0**	Later	**Unconfir**

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	monopoly on priestly altar service (Ex 28–29; Num 18)	concerns Aaron's prophetic assistance		Muslim priesthood is not an equivalent institution	**med institutional claim**
26	Red heifer ashes for corpse impurity (Num 19)	2:67–73 narrates a cow for a different purpose	**Q0**	The stories cannot be treated as one ordinance	**Unconfirmed ritual detail**
27	Mixtures of wool and linen, seed and animals (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9–11)	16:116 warns against inventing prohibitions	**Q0**	No direct Qur'anic prohibition of these particular mixtures	**Historically open**; silence cannot prove invention
28	Sanctuary exclusivity and a ban on ordinary slaughter away from the Temple (Lev 17; Deut 12)	22:36–37 speaks of another pilgrimage cult	**Q0**	Lev 17 and Deut 12 already require intra-Torah reconciliation	**High-priority composition test**
29	Jubilee land restoration and permanent foreign	59:7; 90:13 are distant comparisons	**Q0**	Classically accepted ownership of enslaved persons	**Unconfirmed institutional detail**

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	slavery (Lev 25)			does not authenticate this precise Israelite statute	
30	Mandatory levirate union (Deut 25:5–10)	4:19 restricts coercive inheritance of women; 4:23 addresses kin prohibitions	**Q0 / QT**	Under Muslim law widow consent and marriage rules differ	**Unconfirmed specific duty**, assess coercion separately
31	Extermination of whole enemy populations under *ḥērem* (Deut 7; 20; Josh; 1 Sam 15)	5:20–26 concerns land; 6:151 and 17:31 prohibit killing children	**Q0 / QT**	War reports and classical *siyar* require independent review; none prove that this biblical ban was revealed	**Severe unresolved attribution**, no blanket Qur'anic endorsement
32	Warfare against Midian: killing boys,	4:24; 8:67–70; 47:4 treat other war and captive	**Q0 / QT**	Classical debates over captives do not	**Severe unresolved attributio**

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
	preserving virgin girls (Num 31)	questions		independently validate Moses' reported order	**n**
33	Firstborn sacrifice construed as a divine demand (Ezek 20:25–26; Ex 22:29)	6:137; 6:151 reject child killing	**QT**	Jewish readings of Ezekiel and ransom provisions must be compared	**Conflicting interpretive claim**, textual history unresolved
34	Blasphemer stoned (Lev 24:10–16)	6:68; 33:57 supply different responses to irreverence	**Q0**	Later blasphemy doctrine has contested hadith and political history	**Unconfirmed biblical penalty**
35	Permanent daily and future Temple offerings (Ex 29; Ezek 40–48)	22:37 says neither flesh nor blood reaches God	**Q1**	Qur'anic critique concerns ritual meaning; it does not erase all sacrifice	**Theological dialogue**; exact perpetual service unproven
36	King must be Israelite (Deut 17:15–20)	2:247 recognizes Saul's appointment, not	**Q1**	Selection and ethnicity should be separated	**Partially analogous historical claim**

Priority	Received Torah law or claim	Quranic evidence	Q rank	Sunnah / madhhab checkpoint	Provisional disposition
		every Deuteronomic qualification			

The order is deliberate within the broad levels; adjacent rows sharing a code are editorially arranged for usefulness, not by an unsupported statistical score. Q2–4 means a generic legal core receives Qur'anic affirmation while its narrower biblical phrasing has another status. QT flags an interpretation that needs a separate argument, rather than assigning moral disapproval as evidence of manuscript alteration.

The school comparison that changes the result

The crucial legal-theory question is *sharʿ man qablanā*, the law of those before us. Jurists generally agree that a past command affirmed anew by Islamic revelation is binding in the sense established by Islamic revelation, and that an earlier rule expressly superseded is no longer binding in its older form. Disagreement centers on a previously revealed rule transmitted in Muslim scripture without express renewal or abrogation. Text found only in a Hebrew Bible requires yet another authentication step. The schools contain internal disagreements, so their names below identify mainstream tendencies or important documented positions, not unanimous votes by every jurist.

Tradition	How it handles the earlier law and Sunnah	Consequence for this book
Ḥanafī	Gives the Qur'an, accepted prophetic Sunnah and legal inference defined authority; some formulations treat an earlier law narrated without repudiation in Islamic scripture as relevant. Juristic preference (*istiḥsān*) and case classification matter.	A Torah law appearing only in the Pentateuch cannot automatically be enforced; report, legal ratio and subject are tested.
Mālikī	The practice of Medina (*ʿamal*) may have independent juristic weight alongside reports; public welfare and established practice shape application. Some Mālikī legal theorists accept earlier law narrated through revelation absent abrogation.	A claimed Sunnah may be weighed against inherited communal practice as well as written hadith.
Shāfiʿī	Gives authenticated prophetic hadith a defining role in specifying Qur'anic law. On whether otherwise unconfirmed earlier law binds Muslims, prominent Shāfiʿī formulations reject independent binding force.	A clear hadith may narrow a general Qur'anic rule, while an unconfirmed Mosaic claim carries no parallel authority.

Tradition	How it handles the earlier law and Sunnah	Consequence for this book
Ḥanbalī	Places pronounced weight on transmitted texts, with reports and interpretive variants in earlier-law theory.	A specific transmitted rule may be adopted while other reports or contextual evidence constrain it.
Jaʿfarī (Twelver)	Takes reports from the Prophet and the recognized Imams as legal evidence, with a different hadith canon and legal theory. Earlier Jewish law is not treated as an independent source of binding law.	A Sunni *ṣaḥīḥ* classification alone cannot stand in for Jaʿfarī authentication and interpretation.
Ibāḍī / Zaydī and Qur'an-centered approaches	Their hadith corpora and legal reasoning require separate source registers; modern Qur'an-centered interpretations often give the Qur'an exclusive decisive legislative priority.	They should be reported as distinct traditions, with specific jurists and texts rather than a fabricated common "minority" view.

Compare the schools through their treatment of **specific evidence**, rather than counting how many agree. A four-school majority is an important fact about the history of Sunni law. It is not an independent witness to the precise wording God gave Moses. The witness that matters here might be Qur'an 5:45, a particular report from Ibn ʿUmar, a Syriac or Hebrew manuscript, or a later jurist explaining how competing materials can be combined.

The stoning test: the same case, three different authorities

Deuteronomy 22:23–24 specifically prescribes stoning for a betrothed virgin and the man in the narrated city case. Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 20:10 specify death for adultery in other circumstances without fixing the method in those verses. Rabbinic capital-law classifications make distinctions among categories of offenders. Qur'an 24:2 states a punishment of one hundred lashes for *zinā*, while 5:43–45 treats Torah as a source of judgment and quotes retaliation law. The Qur'an does not itself name a particular Torah verse requiring *rajm*.

The Ibn ʿUmar reports in Bukhari 6819 and Muslim 1699a depict a Jewish reader concealing a Torah passage on stoning and Muhammad ordering the two offenders stoned. These are substantial witnesses to Sunni transmission about a seventh-century Torah consultation. Their narrative identification of the *verse of stoning* must be checked against the actual Hebrew legal categories. A report that names a Torah judgment is different from the Qur'an quoting that judgment. An accepted report of the Prophet's conduct is also different from a demonstrable historical reconstruction of the occasion.

Classical Sunni schools generally maintain *rajm* for a suitably classified *muḥṣan* offender, through Sunnah and legal specification of the Qur'an. Twelver Jaʿfarī law also recognizes stoning in qualifying cases while defining the requisite marital condition through its own jurisprudence. The legal issue is how an additional severe penalty is justified alongside 24:2 and 4:25, which speaks of a halved punishment in a particular servile-status case. The historical issue is whether each attributed

prophetic report predates its attested redaction. The theological issue is whether the Qur'an's confirmation of Torah commits a believer to the divine institution of this particular punishment for the relevant older community. Each answer must specify its premises.

A Qur'an-centered objection that 24:2 governs *zinā* without a separate stoning penalty is a recognizable modern position, while the established Sunni jurisprudential account grants significant legislative and explanatory force to the transmitted Sunnah. We record the disagreement at the level of its evidence rather than treating either view as a substitute for research.

The apostasy test: an impressive hadith with a contested legal scope

Deuteronomy 13 speaks of a prophet enticing Israel to worship other gods, of close relatives who solicit idolatry, and of a town accused of religious defection. Its sanctions include killing. Qur'an 2:256 addresses compulsion in religion; 4:137 describes repeated belief and unbelief; other Qur'anic passages discuss organized hostility and armed conflict. It supplies no unambiguous general instruction to execute a person for a private change of belief alone. A reader must therefore examine which facts a particular text considers legally relevant.

Bukhari 3017 reports an argument attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās after ʿAlī punished a group by burning: he rejects burning and cites a prophetic command to kill a person who changes religion. The report is a direct Sunni hadith witness to a severe sanction. Classical Ḥanafī jurisprudence differs from Mālikī, Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī practice in its treatment of female apostates, commonly stipulating imprisonment and invitation to return rather than execution. That divergence also exposes different accounts of

the rule's relationship to armed political hostility. Recent Muslim reformist authors argue for distinguishing peaceful belief change from treason or rebellion, a reading requiring separate engagement with the hadith corpus.

None of these later legal positions authenticates Deuteronomy 13 as a verbatim Mosaic command. The overlap is a possible history of religious law, and its precise transmission requires evidence. The book must ask why a court enforces a sanction, what proof it admits, and whether it understands the event as religious choice or coercive organized aggression.

The dietary test: a past divine restriction that ceases to bind Muslims

Qur'an 6:146 is unusually explicit. It says God prohibited certain animals and particular fats to Jews and gives a reason connected with their wrongdoing. It makes the distinction between historical genuineness and enduring applicability unavoidable. Leviticus 3 and 7 prohibit certain animal fats, while Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 classify permissible creatures. The exact Hebrew classes, especially *ḥelev*, and the Arabic *dhū ẓufur* should be compared before claiming word-for-word equivalence.

Qur'an 3:93 adds a separate argument about foods Israel made unlawful to himself before Torah's descent. Reading that reference as Jacob's personal abstention, a community custom, or a counterclaim to Jewish legal rhetoric leads to different historical proposals. It does not cancel the Qur'an's own assertion that God imposed particular restrictions in 6:146. The two verses need to be interpreted together rather than made to prove that all Jewish food law was fabricated.

The Sunnah supplies an excellent cross-school demonstration: Muslim 360a commands ablution after camel meat in one report. The accepted Ḥanbalī position requires new ablution after eating camel meat, while predominant Ḥanafī, Mālikī and later Shāfiʿī positions generally do not regard eating it as invalidating ablution. Every named school recognizes the permissibility of camel meat itself. The interpretive disagreement is about a ritual effect of food within Islamic law. The earlier Jewish ban and the Muslim ritual-washing question must be kept on separate axes.

The menstruation test: separating a rule from its social enforcement

Leviticus 18:19 and 20:18 prohibit intercourse during menstruation. The wider purity rules of Leviticus 15 attach additional conditions to bodily discharge and contact. Qur'an 2:222 prohibits marital intercourse during menstruation. Muslim 302 describes Jews who avoided ordinary meals and household contact with menstruating women, then attributes to Muhammad the directive to continue other interactions while abstaining from intercourse. The report is evidence for a Muslim polemic about the scope of impurity; it is not a neutral statistical description of every Jewish household in Medina.

This case gives us a precise method. Identify the narrow biblical rule, the wider Levitical purity system, what the Qur'an reiterates, and what the hadith interprets. Rabbinic halakhah has its own historical development, with different applications and restrictions. The Qur'an's overlap supports a shared prohibition against intercourse. The later communities interpret ritual presence, prayer and household conduct through different categories.

The ḥērem test: divine attribution without a corresponding Qur'anic warrant

Deuteronomy 7 and 20, Joshua, Numbers 31 and 1 Samuel 15 contain commands and narratives of collective destruction. Their literary voices and chronology vary. The Mesha Stele demonstrates that a neighboring king could attribute devastation to Chemosh in the same regional culture of sacred war. In some cases archaeological evidence challenges the narrative's military chronology; in others the material record offers little direct control. Literary exaggeration, royal triumphalism and retrospective authorization remain explanations requiring passage-level evaluation.

Qur'an 5:20–26 tells the Israelites to enter a holy land and records resistance to the command. It does not reproduce the command to kill every child or destroy an entire ethnic population. Qur'an 6:137 condemns sacralizing the killing of children. Those texts create a serious burden for someone claiming that an indiscriminate slaughter order was genuine universal divine guidance. They leave open the historical origin of the Hebrew narrative and the difficult question of whether the Qur'an affirms some bounded military action in an earlier covenant. The book should draw the conclusion at the scope supported: **the Qur'an offers no explicit attestation for the total-destruction clauses as reported in these passages**. A separate literary and ethical case is needed to argue they were falsely attributed to God.

The Qur'an itself discusses fighting, captivity and punishment in particular conflicts, and classical Muslim jurists developed extensive laws of warfare. An internally consistent Muslim

critique must apply the same standards of civilian protection, historical circumstance and valid transmission to those materials. Differences among juristic rules for prisoners, fighting and sexual slavery cannot be erased by the shared vocabulary of war.

Critical sources and verification register

- **LR-01 | Qur'anic Torah affirmation and legal difference.** Q 3:93; 5:43–48; 6:145–146. https://legacy.quran.com/5/43-91 ; https://legacy.quran.com/6/145-146 ; https://quran.com/5:48/answers/in-what-sense-does-the-quran-confirm-earlier-scriptures
- **LR-02 | Prior revealed laws in legal theory.** *Sharʿman qablanā* discussion: https://www.islam.museum/en/concept/shar-man-qablana/ ; Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law* (IIIT), https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/Maqasid-Al-Shariah-as-a-Philosophy-of-Islamic-Law-Combined.pdf . School positions vary between texts and generations; do not treat a popular summary as the final school manual.
- **LR-03 | Source and legal-school distinction.** ICRC, *Islamic Law and International Humanitarian Law* (2025), https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/Islamic%20Law%20and%20International%20Humanitarian%20Law.pdf ; Cambridge essay, *When Law Meets Theology*, https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/law-as-religion-religion-as-law/when-law-meets-theology/8AFB5C11BB85D1C9CAD53A0644405260

- **LR-04 | Stoning, the Torah, and medieval legal construction.** Bukhari 6819, https://sunnah.com/bukhari/86/47 ; Muslim 1699a, https://sunnah.com/muslim:1699a ; M. H. Kamali, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190910648.003.0005 ; E. Pavlovitch, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 11 (2011), https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/jais/volume/docs/vol11/v11_05_Pavlovitch_137-235.pdf
- **LR-05 | Apostasy report and school difference.** Bukhari 3017, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3017 ; Razi Quadir, *Apostasy in Islam: An Overview of Sources and Positions*, 2026, consult the publisher's chapter record for final citation metadata.
- **LR-06 | Jewish food laws and Qur'anic comparison.** Q 6:145–146 with translations, https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=6&verse=146 ; G. S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (2018), commentary on Q 6:146, plus Lev 7:23–25 and Lev 11.
- **LR-07 | Camel and ablution.** Muslim 360a, https://sunnah.com/muslim/3/123-124 ; comparative school treatment, https://www.islam.museum/en/concept/wudu-fiqh/ . This secondary school summary is a lead for verification against individual manuals.
- **LR-08 | Menstruation and social separation.** Q 2:222, https://quran.com/2:222 ; Sahih Muslim 302 in https://sunnah.com/muslim/3 ; H. Algar, "Bīnamāzī ii. In

Islam," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/binamazi-npers/binamazi-ii-in-islam/

- **LR-09 | Text and historical method.** Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch* (2012); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (2001); the existing v1.7 dossiers and Qumran, MT, SP and LXX witness ledgers.
- **LR-10 | Editorial comparison rather than an extra scriptural witness.** The Quranic legal claims and historical-critical reconstruction are separate evidence streams. See the existing *Torah or Not Torah* source register for the Mesha Stele, Numbers 31, Joshua, Samaritan Pentateuch, Deuteronomy and Elephantine; these need passage-specific collation in the next research pass.

Publication status: a comparative ranking and legal-theory chapter. The Q codes are explicit evidentiary labels; they are not numerical probabilities of divine authorship or a substitute for manuscript and hadith criticism.

The Zabūr and the 150 Psalms

Torah or Not Torah | Critical chapter and research dossier | Working edition 2.1 | 18 November 2026

A book David received and a library David did not write alone

The Qur'an names a gift that the historian must take seriously without pretending to have seen the gift being given. Twice it

states that God gave David the *Zabūr* (Q 4:163; 17:55). A third passage announces that the inheritance of the earth by God's righteous servants was written in the *zabūr* after the *dhikr* (Q 21:105). In the Hebrew Psalter, Psalm 37:29 promises that the righteous will inherit the land and dwell there. The verbal correspondence is unusually close. It gives this inquiry an identifiable place at which Qur'anic affirmation meets a surviving biblical poem. [ZA-01; ZA-02; ZA-03]

The surviving Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems in the Masoretic Hebrew arrangement. Seventy-three carry a Hebrew superscription involving David. The preposition in *le-Dāwīd* can signal several relationships, including association or dedication; a heading alone does not establish that the historical king composed the poem. Other psalms bear the names of Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon or Moses, and the collection contains poems situated in an age long after David. The lament beside Babylonian rivers in Psalm 137, for instance, presupposes the experience of exile. Psalm 72 ends with a statement that the prayers of David son of Jesse are finished, though later psalms carry Davidic headings. The Psalter presents the history of anthologies becoming scripture. [ZA-04]

A reader committed to the Qur'an can affirm that David received revealed praise or wisdom, while continuing to ask how the received Hebrew collection grew around a Davidic tradition. One claim concerns divine communication to a prophet. Another concerns the provenance of a 150-unit literary compilation. A third asks whether a given verse expresses something the Qur'an itself corroborates. These questions should be kept on separate pages of the evidence register.

The witness that prevents a closed-book argument

The Great Psalms Scroll, 11QPs[a], shows part of this process in material form. It survives from a first-century-CE copy, with many Psalms 101–150 appearing in an order unlike the medieval Hebrew collection. It also contains psalmic compositions outside the familiar 150, including Hebrew versions of material corresponding to Psalm 151 and other hymns. The Greek Bible's Psalm 151 presents another form of that tradition. The Scroll's date is after this volume's historical cutoff, but it can witness to the transmission of older material. The same methodological distinction applies to later rabbinic and Muslim reports. They are sources for reception, with claims about earlier events requiring independent examination. [ZA-05; ZA-06]

A particular text-critical example matters for the theological argument. In Psalm 40 the Hebrew wording about obedience refers to ears opened for the speaker, whereas the ancient Greek used in Hebrews 10 speaks of a body prepared. The different formulations support distinct later readings about sacrifice and offering. Psalm 51 supplies another warning against turning a single verse into a whole doctrine: it says that contrition is acceptable to God and subsequently anticipates burnt offerings when Zion is restored. Critical commentators have proposed that the final verses belong to the poem's later growth. Their actual textual status and literary function have to be assessed before declaring the Psalm evidence for the wholesale abolition of sacrifice. [ZA-07; ZA-08]

What ‘confirmation’ means for a psalm

Our Torah law audit used a ladder of Qur’anic attestation. Psalms require a related system because a poem’s anger, metaphor, reported speech and blessing make different claims on the reader. An imprecation against an enemy is not by itself a legal command to a magistrate. An address to a king as a divine son may employ ancient enthronement language. The historian must identify who speaks in the poem before judging whether the line presents God as its author or beneficiary.

Four labels govern the accompanying 150-Psalm index. **V: specific verbal parallel** identifies language remarkably close to an identifiable Qur’anic passage; Psalm 37:29 is the principal case. **T: thematic correspondence** records shared ideas about worship, justice, the creator, mercy, repentance or righteous conduct without claiming a textual quotation. **X: interpretive stress test** marks passages whose literal wording, political implication or relation to another biblical passage demands close examination from the Qur’an-conscious perspective. **U: no specific Qur’anic attestation assigned** means that the present audit makes no stronger judgment. These are editorial evidence labels, not probabilities of inspiration or accusations of fraud. A psalm may carry both T and X.

A second column records the degree of historical review: **close-read** means that the identified passages have been examined against cited translations and secondary scholarship; **index-triage** means the whole psalm has been assigned a provisional subject and awaits verse-level witness collation. The phrase *independently verified Davidic autograph* has no entries because none is established in the available evidence. The full 150-row

index is a coverage map, not a declaration that the text of all 150 has been reconstructed from their earliest recoverable witnesses.

The inheritance test: Psalm 37 and Qur'an 21:105

Psalm 37 is an alphabetic wisdom poem directed toward people troubled by the apparent success of wrongdoers. It counsels confidence, patience and the practice of good. A repeated promise of inheriting the land occurs in verses 9, 11 and 29. The relevant Hebrew noun, *ʾereṣ*, can denote land or earth; its context in Israel's covenantal history matters. The Qur'an's *al-arḍ* also has a semantic range, while the sequence around Q 21:105 points toward divine rule, final restoration and a universal moral audience. A translation that chooses 'earth' for both traditions has made an interpretive decision. [ZA-02; ZA-03]

Qur'an 21:105 is especially revealing because Muslim interpreters disagree about its references. Al-Ṭabarī records an understanding in which the *zabūr* means scriptures broadly and the *dhikr* the heavenly archetypal record. He also reports a reading that takes the passage to mean David's Psalms after Moses' Torah. Al-Ṭabarī prefers the broader interpretation. Ibn Kathīr reads the righteous inheritance in terms that include the world and the hereafter. In Twelver Shiʿi reception, traditions collected in works such as *Tafsīr al-Qummī* and discussed by al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī relate the eventual inheritance to the Qāʾim and his companions. These are historically ascertainable readings of the Qur'an. Their differences show how a nearly identical scriptural promise could enter different accounts of the future. [ZA-09; ZA-10; ZA-11]

The strongest claim is modest and significant: the current Hebrew Psalter preserves a formulation that closely matches the Qur'anic statement. Whether the author of Q 21:105 meant to quote this particular Hebrew verse, a related oral tradition, or a broader scriptural promise remains open to historical argument. The agreement does not authenticate every neighboring line, and it cannot establish David's personal authorship of Psalm 37 from a medieval superscription.

The oldest divine family beneath the hymns

The earlier chapters traced the language of El and his divine family through Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 82. The Psalter strengthens that case. Psalm 29 summons the *sons of God* or heavenly beings to acknowledge YHWH while describing a storm moving across the Levant. Its cadences recall the religious imagination known from Ugarit; it is a particularly instructive control against reading every divine council as a courtroom staffed only by human judges. Psalm 82 portrays God judging among the *elohim*, holding them answerable for failing the poor and fatherless, and concluding with an appeal for rule over all nations. [ZA-12; ZA-13]

The textual presence of heavenly figures does not by itself make the psalm a profession of independent rival gods. Their relation to YHWH and the stages of the poem's development require interpretation. From the standpoint of *tawḥīd*, their historical value is high because they reveal vocabulary that could be inherited and transformed. Psalm 82's ethical accusation also prevents a purely numerical approach to the history of monotheism. Its question is how exalted powers behave toward the weak.

Psalm 2 places the king under a declaration that calls him God's son, and Psalm 89 also uses firstborn and covenantal language for the royal house. The royal idiom can indicate appointment, rank or metaphorical affiliation. Qur'anic rejection of divine begetting (Q 112:3; 19:88–92) obliges a Muslim interpreter to distinguish those possibilities, especially before claiming that a psalm necessarily taught ontological divine offspring. The question is about the use of metaphor in an ancient royal setting, followed by much later theological appropriation. [ZA-14]

The altar judged from inside the sanctuary

The Psalter contains one of the strongest internal biblical challenges to ritual without justice. In Psalm 50 God addresses covenant worshippers and makes the adequacy of sacrifice depend upon gratitude, sincerity and obedience. Psalm 40 can prefer attentive obedience to offerings, and Psalm 51 locates an acceptable sacrifice in a humbled heart. Psalm 69 places thanksgiving above the presentation of a horned animal. These voices belong to the worshipping tradition that transmitted temple poetry. They do not require a foreign reformer to expose failures of the cult. [ZA-07; ZA-08]

The harder evidence is their coexistence with psalms that love Jerusalem's sanctuary and praise sacrificial service. Psalm 51's closing vision anticipates proper bulls on an altar. Psalm 66 promises offerings in thanksgiving; Psalm 20 asks God to remember a king's offerings. These details make a strict 'original religion opposed sacrifice' reconstruction unsafe. A better historical question is how offerings were integrated with ethical

judgment in different liturgical settings and whether later editors combined previously distinct attitudes.

For Islamic comparison, Q 22:37 declares that meat and blood do not reach God while making piety central to sacrifice. That is a strong thematic correspondence with Psalms 40, 50 and 51. It is equally important that the Qur'an retains rites of sacrifice, including Q 22:34–36. The comparison supports criticism of ritual arrogance. It cannot, on its own, establish that the original *Zabūr* rejected all animal offerings.

Justice, the land, and the king who must answer

Psalm 72 imagines a ruler who judges the poor fairly, defends the vulnerable and opposes exploitation. Psalm 82 places failures of justice at the heart of the divine-council trial. Psalm 146 connects the sovereign God with help for the oppressed, sustenance for the hungry and protection of the stranger. These poems furnish a moral measure for claims to sacred kingship. They also place the Psalter within the book's account of Israel's own criticism of abusive authority.

Psalm 89 supplies a less comfortable counterpart. It rehearses the promise to David's house and then asks why the anointed king has been rejected and humiliated. A royal promise can become a complaint against God when political history turns against it. Such a poem must be read in the horizon of remembered monarchy and loss. The difference between its narrative horizon and the lifetime of David is material to the claim that the received Psalter is identical with an original Davidic book. [ZA-15]

The Qur'an's portrayal of David as a ruler commanded to judge justly (Q 38:26) has a powerful thematic relationship with these royal and ethical psalms. Psalm 72 could speak of a son or ideal successor rather than David's own first-person revelation. This form of correspondence should be classified as a shared moral vision rather than confirmation of a particular author's name.

Melchizedek's second appearance

Genesis 14 presents Melchizedek, priest of El Elyon, blessing Abraham. Psalm 110 offers the complementary royal tradition: a king seated at the divine right hand receives a priestly designation tied to Melchizedek while enemies are crushed. The psalm gives this book a remarkably compact case of priesthood, monarchy, sacred territory and violence joined in a single poem. [ZA-16]

Its Hebrew and ancient Greek renderings have also generated different later interpretations. Scholars disagree about the extent to which Psalm 110 invokes the historical Melchizedek of Genesis 14, a title of royal priesthood, or a court ideology subsequently reapplied. Christian readings in Hebrews 7 belong primarily to *Finding Injil*, although the earlier Psalm's historical horizon belongs here. Qur'anic *tawḥīd* supplies no passage individually confirming a hereditary or royal priesthood 'after Melchizedek.' Psalm 110 therefore remains an important **X** case. Its violent triumphal images are royal poetry rather than a general penal code.

When a prayer asks for blood

Psalms 58, 83 and 109 include severe speech against opponents; Psalm 136 praises divine covenant loyalty while remembering

the defeat of hostile kings; Psalm 149 imagines the faithful carrying weapons and binding kings. Psalm 137 ends its exile lament with a terrible blessing pronounced on the one who retaliates against Babylon's little children. The speaker is a traumatized exile's voice in a poem of remembrance. The line cannot be read as an explicit divine command in the manner of Deuteronomy 20 or 1 Samuel 15. Its presence nonetheless forces the theological reader to ask what happens when a community continues to recite a desire for the destruction of children. [ZA-17; ZA-18]

The reception of Psalm 137 matters. Early Christian writers, including Origen, developed allegorical readings of its last line that diverted it away from harm to literal infants. A recent historical study shows that ancient Christian interpreters were disturbed by the violent image and sought nonviolent understandings while retaining the Psalm. Their interpretations cannot erase the literal image or reconstruct the poem's original author. They demonstrate that moral resistance to an inherited sacred text is itself part of ancient reception. [ZA-19]

A Qur'an-conscious evaluation brings Q 6:137's condemnation of sacralized child killing, Q 17:33's protection of life, and the wider ethical demands of accountability into comparison. That gives the interpreter strong grounds to reject a modern attempt to authorize the killing of children by citing Psalm 137. It does not prove that every sentence recording a human desire for revenge was fabricated or erased from an original *Zabūr*. We should preserve the distinction between an attested poem, a prayer as spoken by its historical voice, and a command claimed on God's behalf.

The entire creation called to praise

Psalms 104 and 148 are essential to the audit's more affirmative side. Psalm 104 gives a rich poetic account of creation, providence, seas and living creatures; Psalm 148 calls upon the heavenly and earthly worlds to praise their maker. Qur'an 34:10 and 38:18–19 describe mountains and birds praising God with David. Q 17:44 speaks of all things glorifying God, and Q 24:41 names creatures and birds in worship. Such texts disclose a recognizable family resemblance in the religious imagination of the two traditions. [ZA-20]

The link is thematic. Psalm 148 in its received setting does not assert that David authored it; and the Qur'anic statements do not quote its sequence of mountains, beasts or birds verbatim. The difference matters because a book concerned with *taḥrīf* must be able to identify meaningful agreement without pretending that every resemblance reconstructs a lost line of scripture.

A sunnah and madhhab audit of the Zabūr

The clearest Sunni prophetic report is Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3417, attributed through Abū Hurayra, according to which David could complete his recitation before his animals were saddled. The report speaks of David's remarkable devotional recitation and his living by manual work. It supplies no numbered Psalm and no surviving Hebrew verse. Elsewhere, prophetic reports caution Muslims about the unverified statements of the People of the Book; the authority of a Jewish scriptural quotation therefore requires careful specification in Muslim argument. [ZA-21]

The four Sunni legal schools and the Jaʿfarī tradition developed approaches to previous revelation, inherited law and the authority of transmitted reports. Their differences mattered greatly in the Torah-law audit, where the subject was a purported command with legal consequences. For Psalms, the most prominent disputes are about exegetical identification, the role of scripture outside the Qur'an, and the meaning of inherited promises. Assigning a Hanafi, Maliki, Shafiʿi, Hanbali or Jaʿfari verdict to each of the 150 psalms would imply a body of rulings that the sources inspected here do not establish.

A more truthful register identifies each school-specific authority only where a named scholar or documented opinion speaks to the question. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr are Sunni exegetes with materially different emphases on Q 21:105. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī preserves discussion of Shiʿi traditions connecting the inheritance to the Qāʾim. Their readings tell us about reception of the Qur'anic verse, not whether Psalm 37 was physically composed in the reign of David. [ZA-09; ZA-10; ZA-11]

The ranking the evidence permits

Editorial designation	Representative psalms	What it permits us to say	What remains open
V: identifiable verbal parallel	Psalm 37:9, 11, 29	One extant wisdom promise closely matches Q 21:105	Exact transmission route, *al-zabūr*'s referent, Davidic authorship
T: strong thematic comparison	Psalms 19, 33, 40, 50–51, 67, 72, 104, 113, 146, 148	Qur'anic teaching shares motifs of divine praise, justice, repentance or	Whether individual verses belong to the revelation given to David

Editorial designation	Representative psalms	What it permits us to say	What remains open
		ethical worship	
X: interpretive stress test	Psalms 2, 29, 45, 58, 82, 89, 110, 136–137, 149	Royal sonship, divine-council language, ritual authority and vengeance require contextual argument	Literary layering, translation choices, later religious appropriation
U: no specific warrant assigned	Remaining indexed psalms	They form part of the received Psalter under historical investigation	Per-psalm Hebrew/Greek/DSS collation and Qur'anic comparison

A single psalm can have a strong thematic fit and a difficult historical or theological feature. The codes index evidence, rather than sort inspired poetry into a numerically graded league. The separate first-pass research workbook indexes all 150 psalms, identifies close-read priorities, and marks which entries remain first-pass triage.

How this changes the book's verdict

The law audit asks whether an extant command can be identified as a divine obligation for an earlier community. The Zabūr audit adds the history of prayers and royal hymns. A prayer can preserve truthful knowledge of God while retaining the fear, vengeance or incomplete understanding of the person praying. Such speech can be sacred testimony without supplying divine permission to act upon every desire it expresses.

Psalm 37 stands at the meeting point. The righteous inherit the land, yet the poem makes righteousness a moral vocation rather than a genealogy of conquerors. Psalm 82 then places divine-sounding rulers beneath a demand for protection of the poor. The same collection has preserved militant victory songs, the anguish of exile, the troubling splendor of kingship, and worship in which sacrifice must answer to the condition of the heart. Those tensions give the historian data. They give the theological reader a reason to examine the voice speaking in each line.

Sources and verification register

- **ZA-01 | Qur'anic Zabūr attributed to David.** Q 4:163; 17:55. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=163 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=55
- **ZA-02 | Inheritance formula.** Q 21:105, compare Q 7:128 and 21:107. https://quran.com/21/105 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=55
- **ZA-03 | Psalm 37.** Especially verses 9, 11, 29. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/37 ; https://www.alim.org/quran/compare/surah/21/105/
- **ZA-04 | Davidic attribution and collection.** Yale Bible Study, 'What are the Psalms?' https://yalebiblestudy.org/courses/psalms/lessons/what-are-the-psalms-study-guide/ ; Milken Archive on Davidic superscriptions

https://www.milkenarchive.org/articles/view/the-book-of-psalms-and-its-musical-interpretations/

- **ZA-05 | 11QPsᵃ primary manuscript context.** Library of Congress, Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition, Psalms Scroll. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/scrolls/scr1.html
- **ZA-06 | Extra psalms and manuscript forms.** Peter W. Flint, 'Apocryphal Psalms' (2014). https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/35006/chapter/298748176 ; Alma Brodersen, *The End of the Psalter* (2018), reviewed at https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flaa124
- **ZA-07 | Psalm 40 and sacrifice/obedience.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/40 ; compare Hebrews 10:5–9 for Greek reception.
- **ZA-08 | Psalm 51 and the restored altar.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/51 ; see commentary on verses 18–21 and proposed growth of the text.
- **ZA-09 | Al-Ṭabarī on Q 21:105.** Arabic primary exegesis and variant opinions. https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura21-aya105.html
- **ZA-10 | Ibn Kathīr on Q 21:105.** https://www.alim.org/quran/tafsir/ibn-kathir/surah/21/105/
- **ZA-11 | Twelver Shiʿi reception and Qāʾim traditions.** Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, commentary on Q 21:92–112. https://almizan.org/chapter-21-al-anbiya/verses-92-112 ; reports assembled at https://shialibrary.com/book/burhan-tafsir/chapter/526127

- **ZA-12 | Psalm 29 and the heavenly court.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/29
- **ZA-13 | Psalm 82 and judgment of the exalted.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/82
- **ZA-14 | Royal sonship as a reading problem.** Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Q 112:3, 19:88–92. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/2 ; https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/89
- **ZA-15 | Psalm 89 royal lament and covenant.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/89
- **ZA-16 | Psalm 110 priest-king.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/110 ; Deborah W. Rooke, 'Mysterious Melchizedek,' https://doi.org/10.1093/0198269986.003.0004 ; Robert R. Cargill, 'Psalm 110: From Davidic King to Melchizedek,' https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190946968.003.0009
- **ZA-17 | Psalm 137 as exile lament.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/137
- **ZA-18 | Psalm 149, vengeance and binding kings.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/149
- **ZA-19 | Ancient interpretation of Psalm 137:9.** S. Mullins, 'The Imprecatory Psalms and Modern Sensibilities' (2026). https://doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2025-0013
- **ZA-20 | Cosmic praise and Qur'anic David.** Psalms 104, 148; Q 34:10; 38:18–19; 17:44; 24:41. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/104 ; https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/148
- **ZA-21 | Sunnah on David's Zabūr recitation.** Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3417 (narrated from Abū Hurayra). https://sunnah.com/bukhari/60/89

Editorial status: finished first-pass argument with a complete 150-Psalm triage index; original-language witness collation remains open. No probability of divine origin or Davidic authorship has been fabricated.

Epilogue: The Book That Cannot Testify for Itself

A book is found during repairs to the Temple. The king has it read aloud, tears his garments, and asks how to obey its warning. The oracle comes through Huldah, a woman identified by Kings as a prophetess. The scene may look like scripture simply announcing its own authority. It contains a scribe who reads, a priest who transmits, a ruler who reacts, and a prophet who interprets. Every one of them belongs to the human history through which a written command becomes public law.

This is the burden of the question in the title. One can believe that Moses received revelation and still need to establish which passage, wording, institution, and command actually descends from him. There are textual differences that can be photographed and collated. There are literary relationships that can be argued from diction and narrative structure. There are dates and objects recovered from the ground. There are moral and theological judgments for which the historian's method supplies facts without pretending to be an oracle itself.

The Qur'an makes the problem difficult in a productive way. Its audience could be told to bring a Torah and read it. It also heard accusations about manipulation of sacred testimony. A Muslim

who accepts both claims has reason to inspect the surviving scriptures with care, including passages that are disturbing and passages that seem to agree with his expectations. Qur'an 5:48 describes the Qur'an as a witness and guardian over earlier scripture while acknowledging different laws for different communities. That does not deliver a critical edition of Deuteronomy, a missing autograph of Moses, or an automatic veto over historical argument.

Consider the law of retaliation. Qur'an 5:45 quotes a Torah principle expressly. Its status as a biblical rule is secure, though implementation and application have been contested in Jewish and Muslim law. Consider the slaughter requirements in Leviticus 17 and Deuteronomy 12. The texts can be compared word for word; historians investigate changes in sanctuary centralization and law. Qur'anic silence about the exact reconciliation supplies limited grounds for a theological verdict. Consider the annihilation of Amalek in 1 Samuel 15. The Qur'an remembers earlier peoples, prophets, and wars; it does not turn that particular sentence into an independently confirmed command to kill infants. A Muslim must argue from what is established in the Qur'an and from the chosen account of Sunnah, while recognizing that he is doing interpretation.

The Psalms demand an even finer ear. A poet's curse is a human utterance preserved in sacred literature. Psalm 137 records rage in exile and a hideous blessing upon retaliation against Babylonian children. Another psalm calls for broken-hearted repentance, and Psalm 37's promise that the righteous inherit the land has an unusually close counterpart in Qur'an 21:105. The Psalter contains royal propaganda, worship, sorrow, and

ethical protest. Its unity as scripture says little by itself about who composed each poem or what kind of speech it is.

I suspect the biggest mistake in debates over *taḥrīf* begins when we ask a single word to perform several jobs. A variant manuscript is a history of transmission. A law that a later community interprets differently is a history of legal reasoning. A scribe who falsely attributes his own text to God is committing a different wrong. The accusation matters enough that it should be made with precision. Every hypothesis should explain the witnesses we possess and admit what the witnesses leave beyond our reach.

The book has reached the Persian restoration because the older Israelite question remained open there. The Temple was rebuilt, the boundaries of the covenant were contested, an outsider could be named God's anointed, and the law could be both recovered and disputed. The conflict survived because scripture preserved arguments about its own custodians.

There is a reason that the golden calf remains the first scene. Aaron had the name right, the ritual in order, and the community behind him. The story asks us to inspect what stood in the center of the celebration. We can bring that question to a modern pulpit, a rabbinical court, a legal school, and the pages of a book. I have tried to ask it of this manuscript as well.

Allah knows best.

Companion source register

The identifiers in square brackets in the chapters refer to the primary-text and scholarly entries below. Historical reconstructions remain open wherever a note says the witnesses permit more than one reading. The full working research archive retains the longer chapter-by-chapter dossier, competing source partitions, manuscript-variant tables, and legal case registers.

TNT sources

- **TNT-01: The calf in Exodus.** Text: Exodus 32:1–34. Aaron announces a festival to YHWH (32:5), and the Levites kill about three thousand under Moses' reported command (32:26–29). **Status:** Directly attested literary claims; the chapter is not an independent historical account of a verifiable event. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/exodus/32
- **TNT-02: Jeroboam's calves.** Text: 1 Kings 12:25–33. Narrative of Bethel and Dan as royal sanctuaries, with the liberation formula repeated. **Status:** Canonical narrative and political polemic; direction of literary dependence on Exodus 32 debated. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1kings/12
- **TNT-03: The unseen form.** Text: Deuteronomy 4:9–24. Divine voice at Horeb without visible form; prohibition of images. **Status:** Clear canonical argument; dating and relationship to actual Israelite cultic practice require separate evidence. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/4

- **TNT-04: Humanity as image.** Text: Genesis 1:26–28. Scholarship: C. L. Crouch, "Genesis 1:26–7 as a Statement of Humanity's Divine Parentage," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010), 1–15. **Status:** Textually direct attribution of divine image to humans; modern applications to ethics require argument. https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flp185
- **TNT-05: Composition of the Torah.** Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (Yale University Press, 2012); *Source Criticism* (2024). **Status:** Source-critical method and contested explanatory models, rather than demonstrated partition of each cited passage. https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300152647/the-composition-of-the-pentateuch/
- **TNT-06: The calf absorbed into hearts.** Qur'an 2:93, phrase *wa-ushribū fī qulūbihimu l-ʿijla*. **Status:** Direct Qur'anic textual claim; its extension to later religious institutions is this book's theological interpretation. https://quran.com/2:93
- **TNT-07: Ancient West Semitic setting.** Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (Oxford University Press, 2001), and Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Harvard University Press, 1973). **Status:** Scholarly reconstruction from Ugaritic, biblical and other ancient evidence; individual stages of Yahwism's development debated. https://academic.oup.com/book/12858
- **TNT-08: El and YHWH in ancestral and Exodus texts.** Exodus 6:2–3 and comparative passages in Genesis.

Status: Direct narrative variation; historical genealogy of divine names and source-attribution remain debated. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/exodus/6

- **TNT-09: Deuteronomy 32:8–9.** The Qumran witness 4QDeutj preserves *sons of God*, against the Masoretic *sons of Israel*; Greek witnesses have related heavenly-being language. **Status:** Firm textual variation; earliest recoverable wording and implications for El/YHWH identity are matters of critical argument. https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/deuteronomy-328/ ; https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php/xml/passage.php?passage=Deu+32%3A7%2C8
- **TNT-10: The divine council judged.** Psalm 82. **Status:** Direct poetic testimony to a divine assembly and an indictment about social justice; whether the named figures are divine beings, rulers, or judges remains disputed. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/82
- **TNT-11: Kuntillet ʿAjrud.** Jeremy Smoak and William Schniedewind, "Religion at Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019), art. 211. **Status:** Archaeological and epigraphic data from a securely dated Iron Age site; the site's specific function and the roles of inscriptions remain debated. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030211
- **TNT-12: His asherah.** Interpretations include goddess, cult symbol, or other local sacred referent. Relation of the text to the images on the jar is uncertain. **Status:** Formula attested; precise referent disputed. Smoak and Schniedewind (2019), sections 4 and 5. https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/211

- **TNT-13: Biblical Asherah polemic.** 1 Kings 15:13, 2 Kings 21:7, 23:4–7. **Status:** Royal and reform narratives are ancient literary witnesses; care required in using them as neutral descriptions of every ancient Israelite's worship.

TXH sources

- **TXH-01.** Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (Yale University Press, 2012); Baden, "The Re-Emergence of Source Criticism," *The Bible and Interpretation*, 2012. https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/articles/bad368008
- **TXH-08.** Emanuel Tov, "The Sons of Israel or God? – Deuteronomy 32:8," *TheTorah.com* (2023; updated 2026). https://thetorah.com/article/the-sons-of-israel-or-god-deuteronomy-32-8
- **TXH-11.** *Posen Library*, "Request about the Rebuilding of the Elephantine Temple," 407 BCE, with document description and translated opening. https://www.posenlibrary.com/entry/request-about-rebuilding-elephantine-temple
- **TXH-16.** John J. Collins, "Torah in the Persian Period," in *The Invention of Judaism* (University of California Press, 2017), pp. 44–61. https://academic.oup.com/california-scholarship-online/book/13373/chapter-abstract/166755671
- **TXH-19.** Qur'anic Arabic Corpus, Q 3:93, Q 5:43–48, Q 6:91 and Q 7:157, translations and morphology. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=3&verse=93 ;

https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=48

- **TXH-22.** Hebrew Genesis 4:8 and ancient witnesses surveyed by the Common Text Project. https://www.ctp1.net/textual_issue/22/sample
- **TXH-23.** Exodus 12:40 ancient textual variants surveyed with manuscript-specific disagreements, including 4Q14. https://biblearchaeology.org/research-articles/the-duration-of-the-israelite-sojourn-in-egypt/

ORI sources

- **ORI-01.** Joel S. Baden and Megan Kraege, *Misquoting Moses*, episode “Where Did the Israelites Actually Come From?”, 9 October 2026, approximately 00:00–1:09: https://podcastrex.com/shows/misquoting-moses-with-joel-baden/where-did-the-israelites-actually-come-from/transcript . User-supplied transcript. Emphasizes tensions between Joshua/Judges, settlements, shared Canaanite background, northern origin, and Q&A on language and place-names.
- **ORI-02.** Merneptah Stele, approximately 1208 BCE: https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/the-merneptah-stela-israel-enters-history/ . An Egyptian inscription identifies Israel as a people in Canaan, not the origin or size of that people.
- **ORI-03.** Avraham Faust, “The Emergence of Israel and Theories of Ethnogenesis,” 2015: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118774199.ch9 . On archaeological ethnicity, highland settlements and Canaanite interactions.

- **ORI-04.** Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, excerpt on highland settlements: https://courses.lsa.umich.edu/israel-palestine/wp-content/uploads/sites/142/2013/12/016.-I.Finkelstein_N.A-Silberman-105-120_01.pdf . Compare qualified evidence regarding livestock and identity.
- **ORI-05.** Joshua 11:23; 13:1; 15:63; 21:43–45; Judges 1:8, 21 and 27–36; Exodus 23:29–30. Biblical literary witness; no external corroboration of the national battle narratives is implied.
- **ORI-06.** Conquest archaeology overview: https://biblical-archaeology.org/en/locations/occupation-or-settlement/ . For a traditional harmonization, see Walter R. Roehrs (1960), https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol31/iss1/85/ .
- **ORI-07.** Deuteronomy 7; Judges 2; 1 Kings 12. Ancient canonical witnesses shaped by multiple historical settings.
- **ORI-08.** Genesis 28; Exodus 6:2–3; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, pp. on Bethel and El: https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Bethel-deity . Etymology and original cult must be distinguished.
- **ORI-09.** Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God*; relevant overview of southern YHWH and Canaanite continuities: https://www.perlego.com/book/3036706/the-early-history-of-god-yahweh-and-the-other-deities-in-ancient-israel-pdf . Egyptian Shasu/yhw identification remains debated.
- **ORI-10.** Exodus 32; 1 Kings 12:26–33; 2 Kings 18:4. Written claims about cult reform and earlier priestly objects.

- **ORI-11.** Smoak and Schniedewind, “Religion at Kuntillet ʿAjrud,” *Religions* 10 (2019): https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/211 . Images and meaning of ‘asherah’ disputed.
- **ORI-12.** Richard Elliott Friedman, “The Historical Exodus”: https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-historical-exodus . A small Levite migration is an alternative reconstructed historical model, not established through an Egyptian record of the group.
- **ORI-13.** Qur’an 5:20–26; 7:137; 17:104: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=21 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=7&verse=137 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=104 .
- **ORI-14.** Qur’an 7:138; 20:85–97; 2:93: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=7&verse=138 .
- **ORI-15.** Qur’an 3:67; 49:13: https://quran.com/3/67 ; https://quran.com/49/13 .
- **ORI-16.** Al-Ṭabarī’s commentary on Qur’an 5:21, with reports and disputed geography: https://www.islam.museum/en/passage/quran-5-21/ . Source for reception history rather than independent archaeology.
- **ORI-17.** Ezekiel 16:3; Amos 9:7. Metaphor and prophetic comparison cannot be treated as straightforward ethnographic statistics.

- **ORI-18.** Lidar Sapir-Hen, Meirav Meiri, and Israel Finkelstein, “Iron Age Pigs,” *Radiocarbon* 57 (2015): https://doi.org/10.2458/azu_rc.57.18564 . Pig avoidance varied by region and period; seafood-loss anecdote unverified as origin of dietary law.
- **ORI-19.** Omer Sergi, *The Two Houses of Israel* (2023): https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.8816160 . Treat north/south and state formation as contested historical reconstruction.
- **ORI-20.** Yosef Garfinkel et al., “State Formation in Judah,” *Radiocarbon* 54 (2012): https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033822200047147 . Fortified early Judean site challenges excessive late-dating of state capacity.
- **ORI-21.** Dafna Langgut, *Climate and Environment in the Southern Levant, 1300–300 BCE* (2026): https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009558341 . Models late Bronze aridity and Iron Age environmental change.
- **ORI-22.** Dennis Pardee, “Ugaritic,” in *The Ancient Languages of Syria-Palestine and Arabia* (2008): https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486890.005 . Northwest Semitic affinities do not make the Ugaritic language an uncontroversial Canaanite dialect.

GOD sources

- **GOD-01.** Mesha Stele, lines 14–18, translated by André Lemaire, *Biblical Archaeology Review* / BAS Library, https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/a-new-reading-translation-of-the-mesha-stela/ . The line

includes damaged readings; exact enumeration varies with reconstructions.

- **GOD-02.** Dominik Markl, “Triumph and Trauma: Justifications of Mass Violence in Deuteronomistic Historiography,” *Open Theology* 8 (2022): 412–427, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0217 . On *ḥērem*, West Semitic comparisons, and exilic trauma.
- **GOD-03.** Deut 7:1–6; 20:10–18; Josh 11:14–23, https://bible.usccb.org/bible/deuteronomy/20 and https://bible.usccb.org/bible/joshua/11 .
- **GOD-04.** Josh 11:21–23; 13:1; 15:63; 21:43–45; Judg 1; 1 Kgs 9:20–21. Compare the multiple editorial profiles instead of presuming one war chronology.
- **GOD-05.** Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity* (2005); Joshua D. Kennedy, “The Bronze Age Destruction of Jericho, Archaeology, and the Book of Joshua,” *Religions* 14 (2023): 796, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060796 . The latter argues for a minority early-destruction reconstruction and summarizes the prevailing assessment.
- **GOD-06.** Joel S. Baden, *Misquoting Moses*, “Where Did the Israelites Actually Come From?”, supplied transcript, ca. 02:00–04:10 and 25:40–56:40; cf. /Origins_Archaeology_Quran_Dossier_v1.5.md in this manuscript’s research files.
- **GOD-07.** Markl (2022), esp. literary framing and trauma comparison, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0217 .
- **GOD-08.** K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (1990). Critical review:

https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/ancient-conquest-accounts-a-study-in-ancient-near-eastern-and-biblical-history-writing-jsot-supplement-98/ .

- **GOD-09.** 1 Sam 15, 27, 30; 2 Sam 1. The text reports Agag and valuable livestock as spared, not an explicit decision to spare the children.
- **GOD-10.** Cynthia Edenburg, "In Search of Amalek: The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30," in S. Germany and B. Hensel, eds., *Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books of Samuel* (Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 129–149, https://cris.openu.ac.il/en/publications/in-search-of-amalek-the-pursuit-of-an-historical-referent-in-1-sa/ . Alternative reconstruction, not scholarly unanimity.
- **GOD-11.** Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 22b:8–9, https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.22b . Later interpretive tradition.
- **GOD-12.** Fernando Bermejo-Rubio, "Changing Methods, Disturbing Material: Should the Criterion of Embarrassment Be Dismissed in Jesus Research?" *Revue des Études Juives* 175 (2016): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.2143/REJ.175.1.3146819 . Applies the criterion in a different historical subfield; method transferred cautiously.
- **GOD-13.** 1 Sam 27:8–12 and 29, with 1 Sam 30; David J. Shepherd, *King David, Innocent Blood, and Bloodguilt* (2023), on moral and narrative evaluation.
- **GOD-14.** 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chr 21:1. NET Bible note, https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?

passage=1Ch+21%3A1 . Lexical ambiguity of *satan* retained.

- **GOD-15.** Qur'an 5:20–26; 7:137–138; 17:104. Later exegetical Joshua identifications must be marked as reception.
- **GOD-16.** Qur'an 2:190; 4:24; 5:32; 33:26–27; Sahih Muslim 1744a–b and 1745a–c, https://sunnah.com/muslim/32/29-35 ; https://quran.com/al-ahzab/26/translations/en . Distinguish deliberate attacks on noncombatants, collateral casualties, and coerced captivity.
- **GOD-17.** Qur'an 2:75, 2:79; 3:78; 4:46; 5:13, 5:43–48; Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'an* (2011), and related discussions in the previous textual-collation dossier. Historical criticism does not independently prove that a biblical author knowingly forged an original revelation.

JQ sources

- **JQ-01.** John J. Collins, *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 4th ed., sections on Joshua and the Deuteronomistic History: https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.18979302
- **JQ-02.** Mordechai Cogan, "Israel's Incomplete Conquest of Canaan," 2022: https://www.thetorah.com/article/israels-incomplete-conquest-of-canaan
- **JQ-03.** Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Joshua in Recent Research," 2017: https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X16661918
- **JQ-04.** "Occupation or Settlement?", Biblical Archaeology: https://biblical-archaeology.org/en/locations/occupation-or-settlement/

- **JQ-05.** Shlomit Bechar, “Hazor’s Standing Stones”: https://www.thetorah.com/article/hazors-standing-stones-what-do-they-commemorate
- **JQ-06.** Joshua 8:30–35 textual relocation; see https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-bja10185 and Kyle A. Rouse, *JBL* 143 (2024), 229–244: https://doi.org/10.15699/JBL.1432.2024.3
- **JQ-07.** Qur’an 5:20–26: https://legacy.quran.com/5/20-26 ; 7:137: https://legacy.quran.com/7/137 ; 17:104: https://legacy.quran.com/17/104
- **JQ-08.** Ibn Kathir on Qur’an 5:23: https://quran.com/tr/5%3A23/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir ; Bukhari 3124: https://sunnah.com/bukhari/57/33
- **JQ-09.** Maimonides, Laws of Kings and Wars 6: https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Kings_and_Wars.6.1
- **JQ-10.** Judges 17:3 and YHWH dedication: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.17.3
- **JQ-11.** Judges 18:30 and suspended *nun*: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.18.30 ; Rashi: https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Judges.18.30.2 ; NET textual note: https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?passage=Jdg+18%3A30
- **JQ-12.** Targum Jonathan on Judges 11:39: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.11.39?lang2=en&with=Targum
- **JQ-13.** Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, ch. 2: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199673827.003.0003

- **JQ-14.** Jonathan Magonet, “Did Jephthah Actually Kill His Daughter?”: https://thetorah.com/article/did-jephthah-actually-kill-his-daughter ; Jack M. Sasson: https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-story-of-jephthah-the-urge-to-manipulate
- **JQ-15.** Song of Deborah dating disagreement, Serge Frolov and Aaron Koller: https://thetorah.com/article/dating-deborah ; https://thetorah.com/article/composing-the-song-of-deborah-empirical-models
- **JQ-16.** Judges 19–21 as possible anti-Saul polemic: https://thetorah.com/article/the-story-of-the-concubine-at-gibeah-a-satire-on-king-saul
- **JQ-17.** Deuteronomy’s prohibition of child offerings, Deut 12:31 and 18:10; Leviticus 27:1–8 on valuation; Qur’an 17:31 on killing children: https://legacy.quran.com/17/31
- **JQ-18.** Judges 4:4–6: https://www.sefaria.org/Judges.4.4 ; Qur’an 12:109, 16:43, 21:7 and Arabic *arsalnā/rijālan*: https://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=12&verse=109 ; M. Zakyi Ibrahim, ‘Ibn Ḥazm’s Theory of Prophecy of Women,’ *Intellectual Discourse* 23 (2015): https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v23i1.656

PP sources

- **PP-01.** Jeremiah 7:1–34; Jeremiah 26:1–24. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/jeremiah/7 . Temple security, Shiloh, the vulnerable, and Topheth are literary claims; precise dating of the original sermon and its redaction remains disputed.

- **PP-02.** Jeremiah 1:1; 26:8–24. Jeremiah is introduced as belonging to the priests of Anathoth. The narrative of his prosecution has a literary history.
- **PP-03.** Jeremiah 7:21–23; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–25; Exodus 20:24; Leviticus 1–7; Deuteronomy 12. The interpretation of Jeremiah's negation is contested. See the essay *Sacrifice and the Old Testament*, St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/SacrificeandtheOldTestament/ ; NET textual notes, https://classic.net.bible.org/passage.php?passage=Jer+7%3A21-23 .
- **PP-04.** Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4–5; Exodus 13:12–15; 22:28–29; Numbers 18:15–16. Child sacrifice, firstborn dedication, and redemption require separate analysis; the specific referent of every biblical firstborn formula cannot be assumed.
- **PP-05.** Ezekiel 20:1–26, especially 20:11, 20:25–26. Primary text and commentary: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/20 . Readers dispute permission, punitive divine agency, and the precise practice identified.
- **PP-06.** Nathan Mastnjak and Charles Hughes Huff, "Promise Not Punishment: A Christian Theological Interpretation of the Priestly Law and the Golden Calf," *Harvard Theological Review* 119, no. 2 (2026). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816026101187 . This is a substantive objection to interpreting priestly law wholesale as punishment for the calf.

- **PP-07.** Ezekiel 40–48; 44:9; 47:22–23. Different rules address sanctuary participation and resident foreigners' land inheritance.
- **PP-08.** Ezekiel 36:25–27; Jeremiah 31:31–34. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/ezekiel/36 . Their shared inward renewal vocabulary allows comparison without assuming identical views of cultic law.
- **PP-09.** Jeremiah 33:14–26 in MT, absent from Old Greek. The general shorter/longer edition distinction is supported by Qumran witnesses. Mark Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26–45* (Cambridge, 2007), chapter 5, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511551147.006 ; Emanuel Tov, "Is the 'True Branch' Prophecy Really Part of Jeremiah?", https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/sidebar/is-the-true-branch-prophecy-really-part-of-jeremiah/ . Competing reconstructions should be presented in the dossier.
- **PP-10.** Cyrus Cylinder, Akkadian royal inscription after the conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE. Encyclopaedia Iranica, https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cyrus-iv/ ; translation associated with the British Museum, https://exhibitions.asianart.org/exhibitions/the-cyrus-cylinder-and-ancient-persia-a-new-beginning/ . Its rhetoric belongs to Babylonian royal legitimation and names Marduk.
- **PP-11.** Isaiah 44:28–45:7; Lisbeth S. Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 4 (2002), 373–393. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816002000251 . The

passage's original literary boundaries and political significance remain debated.

- **PP-12.** Isaiah 45:5–7, 45:22. The Hebrew *raʿ* is context-sensitive, often translated disaster or calamity in this passage; the assertion of universal sovereignty should not be converted into a claim that Cyrus's every action was morally good.
- **PP-13.** Isaiah 56:1–8. Primary text: https://bible.usccb.org/bible/isaiah/56 . The offerings of covenant-keeping foreigners are explicitly welcomed.
- **PP-14.** Qur'an 22:36–37; comparison with Jeremiah 7 and Isaiah 56. Arabic morphological/translation reference: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=22&verse=37 . *Taqwā* carries a broader ethical and devotional sense than mere ritual feeling.
- **PP-15.** Qur'an 6:137; 16:116; 2:170. Context distinguishes condemnations of child killing, fabricated law, and ancestral deference.
- **PP-16.** Qur'an 3:3, 3:93, 5:43–48, 2:75–79, and 3:78. The exact scope of scriptural corruption and confirmation remains a subject of Islamic exegesis and critical comparison. See the Torah textual audit in the existing manuscript.

PR sources

- **[PR-01] Lisbeth S. Fried, "Cyrus the Messiah? The Historical Background to Isaiah 45:1," Harvard Theological Review (2002).** Scholarly debate on the foreign anointed king. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/harvard-

theological-review/article/cyrus-the-messiah-the-historical-background-to-isaiah-451/22B409B7AB7DE3827A62D1DF48841305

- **[PR-07] Oxford Handbook of Isaiah, introduction / Servant studies.** Literary diversity of Isaiah and ambiguity of servant figures. https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/38588/chapter/334627304
- **[PR-12] Marvin A. Sweeney, "Micah's Debate with Isaiah," JSOT (2001).** Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 share peace oracle but differ in context. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/030908920102509308
- **[PR-13] Joshua Sijuwade, "The Qur'an and the Biblical Subtext for 'The Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary'," Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations (2025).** Qur'anic Messiah in late-antique Syriac Christian setting. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2025.2529063
- **[PR-22] NET Bible, Micah 5:2 philological notes.** Bethlehem Davidic background and "ancient days" language. https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Mic&chapter=5&verse=2
- **[PR-23] NET Bible, Zephaniah 3:9.** Pure lips, nations worship shoulder to shoulder. https://classic.net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Zep&chapter=3&verse=9
- **[PR-24] Bible Gateway, Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 8.** New covenant in prophetic and Christian interpretation. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?

search=Jeremiah+31%3A31-34%2CHebrews+8%3A7-13&version=NIV

ZA sources

- **ZA-04 | Davidic attribution and collection.** Yale Bible Study, 'What are the Psalms?' https://yalebiblestudy.org/courses/psalms/lessons/what-are-the-psalms-study-guide/ ; Milken Archive on Davidic superscriptions https://www.milkenarchive.org/articles/view/the-book-of-psalms-and-its-musical-interpretations/
- **ZA-14 | Royal sonship as a reading problem.** Psalm 2:7; 89:27; Q 112:3, 19:88–92. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/2 ; https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/89
- **ZA-15 | Psalm 89 royal lament and covenant.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/89
- **ZA-16 | Psalm 110 priest-king.** https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/110 ; Deborah W. Rooke, 'Mysterious Melchizedek,' https://doi.org/10.1093/0198269986.003.0004 ; Robert R. Cargill, 'Psalm 110: From Davidic King to Melchizedek,' https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190946968.003.0009
- **ZA-19 | Ancient interpretation of Psalm 137:9.** S. Mullins, 'The Imprecatory Psalms and Modern Sensibilities' (2026). https://doi.org/10.1515/jbr-2025-0013
- **ZA-20 | Cosmic praise and Qur'anic David.** Psalms 104, 148; Q 34:10; 38:18–19; 17:44; 24:41. https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/104 ; https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/148

- **ZA-21 | Sunnah on David's Zabūr recitation.** Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3417 (narrated from Abū Hurayra). https://sunnah.com/bukhari/60/89