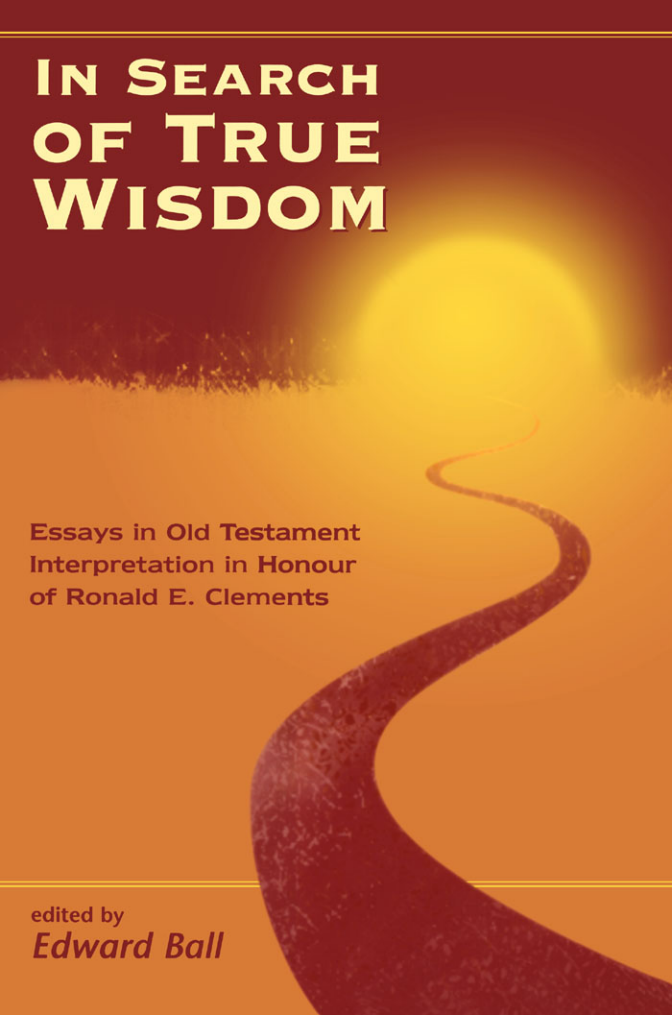
In Search of True Wisdom

Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements



edited by
Edward Ball

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PREFACE

The essays in this volume are presented with respect, admiration and affection to Ronald Clements on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. The contributors are drawn principally from the universities with which he has himself chiefly been associated, and from his own former pupils; but there is representation, too, from the wider world of British and international Old Testament scholarship to which Ronald has contributed so liberally and inspiringly.

For he has been known for over 30 years as a prolific and creative scholar and teacher, who has also been generous in his encouragement and support of younger scholars, and always ready to share the fruits of his own latest research. A person of wide sympathies, he has followed no party line, established no school, and has encouraged his pupils as they have gone their own ways. It is, even so, a tribute both to the fertile stimulus of his work and to his kindness and friendship, that so many have found their own study richly influenced by his. A pointer to a new approach or conclusion has often been indicated by his unassuming question, 'Don't you think that...?' More often than not, this is indicative of a fresh direction in Ronald's own work: he has never been afraid to move beyond previously accepted positions (I think, for instance, of his recent questioning of traditional critical forms of the 'Deutero-Isaiah' hypothesis); and he has shown himself able to make use, both critical and creative, of what he has presciently seen as positions likely to establish themselves firmly (such as the proposal of a 'Josianic redaction' in the preceding chapters of Isaiah). In several areas he has been something of a trail-blazer: think, say, of the wide impact of his work on the redactional patterning of the Old Testament prophetic books.

A (select) bibliography of Ronald's published writings appeared in his 1996 collection of essays, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*, pages 265-70, and he has continued to add to it. There are, for example, (yet) more essays on the later chapters of Isaiah, and his

substantial commentary on Deuteronomy in the *New Interpreter's Bible* (1998). The merest glance at the bibliography will show how focused his concerns have always been in the broad, central heartlands of Old Testament literature and theology; one will search in vain for published notes on isolated textual or philological issues.

If the present collection is entitled *In Search of True Wisdom*, that is intended to create a number of resonances. In recent years, Ronald has himself devoted considerable attention to what is usually (but perhaps not altogether happily or helpfully) referred to as the 'wisdom literature' of the Old Testament. But a good deal of contemporary research has suggested how 'wisdom' has been deployed as a kind of interpretative framework for understanding the nature of the Old Testament as a whole, at least in the later stages of its canonical formation—and Ronald has commented on that in his essays in the *Festschriften* for the late Barnabas Lindars and for Professor John Emerton. In that sense, to study the Old Testament is to be in search of that wisdom which it seems to present itself as expressing—like the personified figure of wisdom herself, a reality of both heaven and earth, transcendent gift and matter for human quest. More generally, it is the common conviction of the contributors to this volume that the Old Testament has its continuing part to play, not only in shaping the ongoing human quest for meaning and truth, but also in mediating in rich and luminous, if not necessarily simple, ways something of the reality that is sought. In other words, it may yet bring us to Jacob's ladder, to the significance of which Ronald called out attention in his London inaugural lecture in 1984.

The central concerns of the present volume, then, are with Old Testament theology and hermeneutics, and this quite deliberately in so far as it reflects the wider but far from peripheral aspects of Ronald's own work. A first group of essays focuses chiefly on approaches and methods in constructive theological interpretation; later ones consider specific books through the lens of such interpretative interests.

It is a matter of particular sadness that Professor Norman Whybray did not live to see the appearance of his contribution. As his opening comments indicate, he was delighted to participate in this tribute.

I would like to express my thanks to all the contributors, and especially to Eryl Davies and Bill Bellinger for their assistance in the early stages of planning for this book. My gratitude goes also to those at the

Press who have with care and efficiency overseen the book's production, especially Rebecca Cullen.

It remains only to express again our deep regard for Ron, with the hope that he (and maybe a few others) will find these essays of interest. We pray for him, and for Valerie, God's continued blessing in the years ahead.

Edward Ball
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ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AV	Authorized Version
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHS	*Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft von Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur *ZAW*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament Series
CTA	A. Herdner (ed.), *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra–Ugarit de 1929 à 1939* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale Geuthner, 1963)
DTC	*Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
Int	Interpretation
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament

NCB	New Century Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
PG	J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia cursus completa... Series graeca* (166 vols.; Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–83)
PL	J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia cursus completus... Series prima [latina]* (221 vols.; Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1844–65)
RB	*Revue Biblique*
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLSP	SBL Seminar Papers
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
ST	*Studia theologica*
ThWAT	G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970–)
TTod	*Theology Today*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TRE	*Theologische Realenzyklopädie*
VF	*Verkündigung und Forschung*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum* Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

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RONALD ERNEST CLEMENTS: AN APPRECIATION

Rex Mason

Ronald Clements was born on 27 May 1929 and grew up in that not unpleasant part of 'Outer London in Essex' flanked by Epping Forest. He was educated at Buckhurst Hill County High School, where he was recognized as one of their most outstanding pupils. However, he did not continue into the Sixth Form and so aim for a direct route to university but went instead into banking. In that postwar period National Service was still obligatory and his time of service in Barclays Bank was interrupted as he served in the RAF from 1947–49, an experience he greatly enjoyed and which left him an enthusiast for travel of almost every kind, with a great love of aeroplanes and flying. This was a taste he could indulge later in Cambridge, surrounded as it was, especially in earlier years, by so many aerodromes and flying fields. He was a keen glider and still loves to fly in light aircraft. Once, after addressing a conference in South Africa, he stayed on for a week in order to travel its remaining steam train network. When the Society of Biblical Literature met in New Orleans, two of the great attractions for him were the paddle steamers on the Mississippi and the Charles Avenue streetcar.

However, this is to anticipate, for the road leading from a bank desk to participation in international conferences of biblical scholars might not seem a direct or easy one. That it was taken is the result of another major influence in his life in addition to Buckhurst Hill County High School, and that was the Baptist church in South Woodford. The Minister during Ron's formative years was the Revd Herbert Hunter, a delightful and enthusiastic Northern Ireland Protestant whose devotion to evangelical doctrines was matched only by the strength of his suspicion of deeply-laid papal plots! He was a deeply caring and sensitive pastor, however, who saw the great potential in this young church member and who encouraged in him a sense of call to the Baptist Ministry. No one will understand Ron Clements's later work as a scholar

who does not see in it a marriage of great erudition and love of scholarship with a concern for sharing with others his own love of the Bible and the faith it nourished in him. Coming from the tradition he did it was natural that this candidate for ministerial training should apply to Spurgeon's College, the Baptist theological college in London founded by the great nineteenth-century Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, an institution which has always embraced a deep commitment to scholarship with the evangelical emphasis imprinted on it by its founder. It is the college which, among others, has also produced Arnold Anderson for Old Testament, and George Beasley-Murray for New Testament scholarship.

Lack of formal sixth-form education does not seem to have hindered Ron in any noticeable way, for his own industry and intellectual ability led him to prepare for entry to theological college with a thoroughness that few others could have matched. He attended extra-mural studies in French, Greek and Hebrew, and before his entry into college he was able to inform the college Principal, Dr F. Cawley, that he had completed his Greek grammar book and was working through Davidson's Hebrew Grammar. This latter, in particular, was no light enterprise, for it is a book which poses formidable barriers even for undergraduates, many of whom today have turned gratefully to more user-friendly substitutes or successors.

Ron entered Spurgeon's College in 1951 and in 1954 gained the London BD. In those days it was the custom for Baptist ministerial candidates with obvious academic abilities to go on from their first college to Regent's Park College in Oxford, since it was (very sensibly) seen that, with its attachment to the Theological Faculty in Oxford, it could provide scope for them in a way others then could not. Towards the end of his time at Spurgeon's, therefore, Ron applied to Regent's. At this point, however, a complication arose. He had by this time met his wife-to-be, Valerie Suffield, and after the protracted period of National Service and three years at Spurgeon's they naturally wished to get married without further delay. Regent's, however, had at that time a strict rule that ordinands were not to marry until the end of their college course. Pleas for the rules to be waived in this particular case were met with flinty hearts, not least that of the then Principal, Robert Child, who, a bachelor himself, perhaps had little sympathy with such a headlong dash for the altar. How good it is to report that Ron and Valerie put love before rules and regulations and, with a commendable show of

that independence which has also often characterized his later work, Ron applied instead to Cambridge. Oxford's loss was Cambridge's gain, for thus began an association with Cambridge which has been broken only relatively briefly ever since. And, it is well worth recording, so also began a marriage which has been a long and happy one, a firm and secure base for all Ron's multifarious activities. It has produced two gifted daughters, Gillian and Marion, both of whom achieved success in their respective careers and who have in their turn presented Ron and Valerie with grandchildren who are a source of great delight to them.

In 1954 Ron went, then, to Christ's College, Cambridge. Among his teachers were J.N. Schofield, who was soon setting him two pages of Hebrew a day, and D. Winton Thomas, who taught him Hebrew prose composition. In such surroundings and inspired by such tutelage no wonder he was later writing to say how much he was 'enjoying the riches that Cambridge offers'. In 1956 he gained a first-class degree, and then proceeded to a pastorate in Southey Green Baptist Church, Sheffield, a church situated on a new housing estate. During this time his academic work forged ahead at a quite stupendous rate for one who was settling into a new ministry. He continued preparation for the Cambridge University Hebrew Prize which entailed mastering Aramaic for the Targums, but which he won the following year. At the same time he began work on a PhD at Sheffield under the supervision of F.F. Bruce. This he gained as early as 1961 upon the submission of a thesis entitled 'The Divine Dwelling Place in the Old Testament', a work subsequently published in 1965 as *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel*, and which has always been highly regarded and has exercised considerable influence.

It was inevitable that such industry and such ability would come to be more widely recognized, and so it was that in 1960 he was appointed as Assistant Lecturer in Old Testament Language, Literature and Theology at the University of Edinburgh, a post which became permanent in 1964. It was a significant move in which Ron may be said to have found his true 'ministry'. He had found the three years' work in the Sheffield church in some ways frustrating, and although he had received another invitation to a congregation in Stratford-upon-Avon and had just started his ministry there, he had little hesitation in moving to Edinburgh. With hindsight we can see how right this decision was, although at the time it ruffled a few official feathers in the high eyries of

the Baptist Union! It was greatly to the credit of the then General Secretary of the Union, Ernest Payne, that he defended Ron's choice and insisted on keeping him as an accredited Baptist Minister, a choice which has greatly enriched Baptist circles in this country and throughout the world since.

At Edinburgh he worked with Professor Norman Porteous, a happy conjunction, since the interests of both were very much in the *theological* issues raised by study of the Old Testament. This was an interest well reflected in Ron's next book, *Prophecy and Covenant*, which also appeared in 1965. This, perhaps unsurprisingly in a young scholar at an early stage of his career, reflected very much the 'Covenant Theology' prevalent at the time, which saw the prophets as exponents of early covenant ideas rather than as innovators who helped to blaze the trail for such concepts. The appearance later of another book, *Prophecy and Tradition* (1975), in which some of these earlier opinions were revised in the light of later scholarship, showed, however, that his was by no means a closed mind but one always open to new exploration and to fresh insights.

In 1967 his growing reputation was recognized by the University of Cambridge which appointed him as Lecturer; and thus began, not only his long association with that university, which later was to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, but also his association with Fitzwilliam College, one which he has always enjoyed greatly. The college gave him a base from which to influence generations of students, not only by his teaching and scholarship, but also by his pastoral care of them as individuals. These individual students have included by no means only those reading Theology, or ordinands. The circle has been diverse enough to include an England cricketer, Phil Edmonds, and another who was appointed a Master of Foxhounds immediately upon completing his Theology course! Cambridge was also the setting for the publication of a formidable array of books, articles and contributions to works of composite authorship, a scholarly output which has firmly established Ron's international reputation. Here one may record particularly his study *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (1967) and his contributions to the study of Deuteronomy (e.g. *God's Chosen People* [1968] and *Deuteronomy* [1989]) and Isaiah (both *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem* and *Isaiah 1–39*, his contribution to the New Century Bible series of commentaries, were published in 1980). All these works and many others

have fully demonstrated both his love of the biblical texts and his interest in the theological issues they raise. This concern for theology was certainly evident in *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (1978). Ron is one of very few British Old Testament scholars to have attempted such a work in recent years, and if there was criticism that the book somewhat neglected the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament this 'neglect' was more than amply compensated for in *Wisdom for a Changing World: Wisdom in Old Testament Theology* (1990) and *Wisdom in Theology* (1992).

It was fitting that such a scholar should come to occupy a professorial chair, and this duly occurred with his appointment in 1984 as Samuel Davidson Professor of Old Testament Studies at King's College, University of London. The appointment coincided with a period of ill-health for his wife, Valerie, and this was doubtless one of the reasons why he continued to reside in Cambridge. Happily, Valerie's health recovered and since Ron's slightly early retirement from London, they have both continued to live near Cambridge and in close touch with the university where he has been so happy for so many years. And there, fortunately for us all, his literary output seems to continue unabated.

He served as Foreign Secretary of the Society for Old Testament Study from 1973 to 1983. It was indeed fortunate for the Society to be served by him in this way for so long, since his overseas connections are so extensive and his own international reputation so strong. His knowledge of academic literary output in a formidable variety of languages is encyclopaedic, and his reputation is perhaps even more firmly established abroad than it is in Britain. Shortly after he retired from that post the Society elected him as its President for 1985.

His is a quiet personality, although friends very quickly find him to be a man of great warmth and humanity. There can be no doubt that Ron is an outstanding scholar whose work has made an invaluable contribution to many facets of Old Testament study. In this respect he stands worthily in that remarkable long line of outstanding Baptist Old Testament scholars which has included T.H. Robinson, H. Wheeler Robinson, H.H. Rowley and A.R. Johnson. But it is his human personality which has also contributed to the effectiveness and influence of his scholarly work. There is, first, the close relation he has established with generations of students, relationships which have included personal friendship and a real pastoral care to which many of them testify. Every one of them mattered to him and they were made to feel they were val-

ued for what they were and for their own insights. One has also only to reflect on those of his past students who currently occupy significant posts in Old Testament studies to realize how wide has been the range of his influence as teacher. And when one further reflects on how diverse they are and how varied their approaches to their work, one sees here the mark of a truly great teacher who does not merely seek to reproduce clones of himself but encourages individuals to be themselves and helps to release their own individual powers and insights. And such a relationship has been effected, not merely because of his own meticulous and well-informed scholarship, but by his 'fullness' as a human being. For example, in addition to his interests in flying and all forms of travel he is also an enthusiastic photographer and takes a keen interest in the cinema. One distinguished Old Testament teacher who was taught by him put it exactly this way: '...he has always seemed the most down-to-earth and generally approachable of my eminent teachers and colleagues'. Nor is it only the intellectual élite of Edinburgh and Cambridge whom he has helped. He never considered himself too great to help as tutor, for example, in such lay educational schemes as those organized by the Baptist Union. A Cambridge minister told me of one young man in his church, who had received little formal education, to whom Ron gave great time and attention. The boy was so enthused by his teaching that he went on to tackle and pass the A-Levels needed to apply to university to read Theology.

Nor is it only students who have benefited from his erudition and his personal readiness to give time and encouragement to others. One of our most outstanding Old Testament scholars who was formerly a Cambridge colleague made the interesting remark to me, 'If you want to assess the value of Ron's contribution to scholarship look not only at his own books, but at the number of times he is mentioned in the prefaces of the books of other scholars'. That is because fellow scholars are always glad to be able to talk over their own work with Ron, partly because of his immense knowledge of current scholarly trends (perfectly illustrated in his *A Century of Old Testament Study* [1976, rev. edn, 1983]) but also because of his interest and concern and ability to provide new shafts of insight into a wide variety of issues.

In 1971 Ron was asked by his old college, Spurgeon's, to contribute a short article about himself as part of a series on illustrious former students in the college magazine, *The Record.* With characteristic self-effacement he wrote, not about himself, but about his work. He began,

'The lecture halls of a historic university may sound like a very sheltered place in which to exercise a Christian ministry...' However, he continues, '...teaching the Old Testament to men [this *was* 1971!] who have committed themselves to read a course of Theology has its spiritual excitement and interest... The Bible can only seriously continue to hold the affections and faith of men, so long as it also holds their intellectual convictions. A scholarly and critical investigation therefore is always a searching out of faith'. That is a remarkably succinct statement of how Ron has always seen his 'ministry', of holding faith and scholarship together, each employed in the service of the other, a process illustrated in all his work and particularly in such a book as *The Prayers of the Bible* (1986).

The present book is an expression of indebtedness by many who have gained immeasurably from this 'ministry' in many different ways. And those who write here are but representatives of many others who are grateful for this rare combination of scholar, man of faith and man of humanity.

HISTORY–INTERPRETATION–THEOLOGY: ISSUES IN BIBLICAL RELIGION*

Graeme Auld

1. A whole set of recently controversial issues clusters round the topics of history and meaning in the Bible.

How 'do-able' is ancient Israelite history? How serviceable are the biblical materials as historical sources? Can we at least write—or attempt to write—a history of the biblical material? Must we so attempt, because that is simply our principal way of organizing our thinking in the modern world?

Are we dependent for 'history properly so called' on written documentation? Is study of the past by means of other sources 'pre-history', or simply non-history?

Are biblical history and ancient Israelite history interchangeable terms? Should they be? If a choice must be made, does 'ancient Israel' refer first and foremost to the people about whom the Bible speaks, or to the people who produced the Bible? And what about biblical theology? Is that something done in the Bible, or to or with the Bible?

How historical—how history-focused—is biblical faith or religion? Is a strong positive answer demanded by the oft-repeated biblical injunction to remember or memorialize the past? And how otherwise may we understand the concern with their own time and their own world that seems prominent among the biblical prophets?

What does 'biblical religion' mean? Should answers be sought first from the Psalms, where overt interest in history is less (and the memory

* It is a pleasure to offer these remarks to one of my teachers, half his lifetime ago, whose influential monographs on *Abraham and David*, *God's Chosen People*, and *Prophecy and Covenant*, were all prepared in his Edinburgh period. A first version of this paper was presented as the 1998 Ethel M. Wood Lecture at the University of London, where Ronald Clements completed his career as Samuel Davidson Professor.

most mentioned is God's), rather than from Torah and Prophets?

Recent controversy on the aims and the possibility and the means and the ethics of writing histories of ancient Israel is well documented, and need only be selectively mentioned here.[1] Some of the discourse is very bitter. Raw nerve ends of individuals or of corporate bodies are clearly being exposed. Important values are held to be—or feared to be—at stake. For at least some of the participants, it is 'us' and 'ours' that are being slightingly discussed; and careless talk matters.

Elements of the conversation I want to grapple with include:

The compelling review (by Barstad) of historical methodologies, although I remain less persuaded than he that Solomon was an historical figure.[2]

The biblical narrative as propaganda rather than history (Carroll).[3] I take it he means propaganda in the older ecclesiastical sense of 'congregatio de propaganda fide' (a 'congregation for the "advancing" of faith'). However, I grant it that the politics in question is adversarial, rather than consensual.

If we say (with Philip Davies[4]) that there is no neutral history, do we thereby shorten our distance from the Bible? If we agree with him that we should not trust anyone who claims to offer a neutral history (and is his analogy for neutrality Switzerland or No-Man's-Land?), that does not preclude an attempt at greater inclusiveness, at an account of the past that could be more widely shared.

Just as the history of Palestine (its past and our discourse about its past) must be given back to all of its inhabitants (Lemche,[5] reviewing Whitelam[6]), so too, one hopes, the (history of the) Bible must be made

1. It is conveniently attested and explored in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?* (JSOTSup, 245; European Seminar in Historical Methodology, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

2. H.M. Barstad, 'History and the Hebrew Bible', in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel'*, pp. 37-64 (on Solomon see p. 60).

3. R.P. Carroll, 'Madonna of Silences: Clio and the Bible', in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel'*, pp. 84-103 (on propaganda see pp. 101-102).

4. P.R. Davies, 'Whose History? Whose Israel? Whose Bible? Biblical Histories, Ancient and Modern', in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel'*, pp. 104-22.

5. N.P. Lemche, 'Clio is also among the Muses! Keith W. Whitelam and the History of Palestine: A Review and a Commentary', in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel'*, pp. 123-55.

6. K.W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

available to all of its readers. And, throughout, there is the nagging question of involvement and detachment: whether the historian can be the physician or only the pathologist of memory. Yerushalmi relates the flowering of contemporary Jewish historiography to the widespread loss of memory and faith.[7] An important related question is whether the sort of truth-telling envisaged (at least) in (the setting up of) the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission can lead to a future—and a history—with which people in a radically divided society can more readily live.

After such a scatter of questions, are we reaching a place, finally, at which discussion of the relatedness of historical criticism and biblical theology can begin? There is so much variety, so much ambiguity, there are so many contrary strands, in the Hebrew Bible that biblical interpretation or biblical theology, however defined, must be given wide scope.

A first biblical illustration of several of the issues at stake, and one with continuing resonance, is provided at the end of Exodus 17. 'Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Write this as a memorandum in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: Nothing less than "blot out" from under heaven is what I will do to the memory/ial of Amalek." And Moses...said, "...Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation".' The words of Moses ('from generation to generation') appear to be in tension with those of his God ('I will utterly blot out the memory'). Yet they also offer a consistent reading of Yahweh's own words, which appear to subvert each other: put on record—and recite the record—that I will erase the record. At the very minimum the whole passage represents a confidence—or a deeply-held longing—that Amalek, a contemporary cipher in Israel for the Palestinians or at least the PLO, will never win; that it does not belong alongside Israel. Put more mythologically: Israel's divine champion is committed to denying Amalek a place in heaven's book. The memory, the memorial, the record is of a future pledge. As such, it is rather like Isaiah's Maher-shalal-hash-baz, attested by reliable witnesses (8.1-4), or his document inscribed 'for a later day, as a witness for ever' (30.8). When we recognize that our historiography is for the present and the future, we stand in continuity with biblical memory. 'It is I AM/I SHALL BE who has sent me to you' (Exod. 3.14).

7. Y.H. Yerushalmi, *ZAKHOR: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

2. The stories of Joseph in Egypt model for us two different sorts of interpreter: the sort Joseph himself was, and the sort he did not need. Joseph was able, by virtue of divine gift, to explain the significance of their dreams to his family, his fellow prisoners and Pharaoh himself (Gen. 37; 40-41). On the other hand, he needed no translation facilities to understand what his brothers were saying among themselves in his presence—they themselves were unaware of this because their communication with the Egyptian vizier was through an interpreter (Gen. 42.23).

A story set early in Genesis sees God punish overweening human ambition by turning linguistic intercourse into a confusing babble (Gen. 11.1-9). Yet interpretation as translation is seldom an explicit issue within the pages of the Hebrew Bible. With half an eye already open to our topic, we might offer different explanations. The tales of any country seldom delay to tell us how their characters communicate, even where one of them is a traveller from a distant land: they simply speak to each other. Wherever we find such material in the Bible, we should not expect evidence of communication difficulties. Alternatively, in the ancient Levant as in the same area today, 'real' people may have been more competently multi-lingual than most native English-speakers would suppose possible.

We might conveniently continue our approach towards issues of history and biblical interpretation via two narratives from the books of Luke and Acts in the New Testament. These tales are apparently related, and are certainly cautionary. Two puzzled followers of Jesus, walking homewards away from Jerusalem, are trying to make sense not only of his death, despite their hopes for him, but also of reports that he is alive. Someone they meet chides them for their slowness to 'believe all the prophets have declared', interprets for them all the Scriptures, breaks and blesses bread for them, and vanishes as they recognize him as the risen Jesus (Lk. 24.13-32). The eunuch in charge of an African queen's treasury is also on a road down from Jerusalem after worship at the temple. He is reading Isaiah. His interlocutor asks him if he is understanding what he is reading. 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' Philip starts from the passage of Isaiah the eunuch is reading, and proclaims the good news about Jesus. Seeing water, the eunuch asks for baptism; after administering that, Philip is snatched away by the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 8.26-40).

In both cases, Scripture is interpreted, or a reader is led to understand

Scripture, as being about Jesus. The one tale moves from Jesus to Scripture and the other from Scripture to Jesus: the starting point matters less than the relatedness. And each story ends with what has become one of the sacraments of Christianity, and the immediate disappearance of the interpreter. Was no further interpretation required, once the code was broken? Or was further interpretation now the business of the (Christian) community?

The eunuch in the story knew he needed a guide to help him read Isaiah no less than Pharaoh's cup-bearer and chief baker needed an interpreter for the dreams that worried them. And history is important in *pesher* or *pitron*. Yet the history that is vital in such interpretation is the contemporary history that is illumined by the divinely-provided dream or text. The history or the reality that is important to each of the New Testament tales is in part the good news about Jesus—but also in part how that good news bears on those who come to know it. However, in order for the interpretation to 'work', the (books of) 'Moses and the prophets' which are 'interpreted' need be no more historical in part or whole than the dreams and visions which required interpretation by Joseph and Daniel in the first book of Moses and the last book of the prophets.

Yet to say that the biblical means of illumination may be no more real than a dream or a vision or a story is to give a misleadingly negative impression. For the means of 'real' illumination will be dream-like or story-like. Plain speaking about God is no more possible in most of the Hebrew Bible than straightforward looking at God. I am suggesting that these two New Testament stories, by featuring an interpreter or a guide at work on the Bible, should actually permit a latter-day Theophilus to remove the historicity of Moses and the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures from the agenda of Christian theology.[8] The implication of such an attitude to biblical history is more fashionable in some contemporary quarters than others—and is quite a recent fashion. For many, the historicity of Old Testament materials is much more important theologically than I have suggested.

3. It may readily be conceded that New Testament interpretation of Scripture is largely a matter of contemporizing exposition. But much contemporary biblical interpretation is closer to translation: the kind of

8. Theophilus in P. Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988) would not readily have been so encouraged. For the Lucan Theophilus, see section 3 below.

interpretation Joseph did not require. It is more concerned with better understanding of documents from a strange culture in unfamiliar language: with developing competence in reading. A whole clutch of books from the current decade have addressed the issue. I draw attention first to three of these: two by Christian academics of different persuasions and one by a Jewish scholar.

Bartlett's 'critical enquiry into the nature of biblical history'[9] reports on and discusses what was widely taught in the 1980s, as indeed still in the 1990s, about the production and development of much of the Bible: how greater awareness of the history of the text should induce greater sensitivity to such history as is reported in the text. I suspect he is perceived by conservative readers as too ready to argue that much of the biblical text is other than history pure and simple. Many will be impatient over his agreement with Oscar Wilde that history is 'rarely pure and never simple'. And I wonder at his optimism that dating individual books is 'for the most part...not particularly difficult'.[10] Yet he is enthusiastic himself to talk up the importance of substantial historicity for the believer, even if not for belief itself:

> While it is true that what matters for faith and theology is Israel's perception of what happened, her understanding of her history, it is also true that what matters for our peace of mind is that Israel's perception of her history was not too far removed from what actually happened.[11]

Yet that depends on which part of the history is under review: the peace of mind of many readers (for example Calvin on Joshua[12]) would have been eased had what happened been more remote from the perception.

Long has contributed a confessedly conservative evangelical but also very irenic discussion of *The Art of Biblical History*.[13] He writes well, though in very general terms, about the need to develop 'ancient literary competence'—only on his last page does he mention ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic literature—; and about the ambiguity of history no

9. J.R. Bartlett, *The Bible: Faith and Evidence. A Critical Enquiry into the Nature of Biblical History* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990).

10. Bartlett, *The Bible*, p. 17.

11. Bartlett, *The Bible*, p. 5.

12. See D.F. Wright, 'Accomodation and Barbarity in John Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries', in A.G. Auld (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (JSOTSup, 152; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 413-27.

13. V.P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, 5; Leicester: Apollos, 1994).

less than of fiction.[14] Yet there is a good deal of 'persuasive definition' in his argument. Remarkably few biblical authors claimed divine inspiration for their writing, despite the impression he gives; and Luke's preface (1.1-4), one of the few explicit statements of intent in all of the Bible, does not so much make a truth claim as assert that the author has taken care and been orderly.[15]

Brettler's *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*[16] is in many respects not dissimilar in aim to Bartlett's critical enquiry. He endeavours to 'show what various biblical authors were 'trying to do' when they wrote works which we typically categorize as historical'. Yet he is more radical than Bartlett: he continues-

> The approach I suggest questions the traditional assumption that ancient Israelite and early Jewish religions were fundamentally historical religions in the sense of being primarily concerned with, and based on, actual events in history. A strong impetus for my dissenting perspective comes from a study by Moshe David Herr, 'The Conception of History among the Sages'. He points to an idiom in rabbinic literature: 'what was, was', which shows the rabbis' complete disregard for actual events of the past. Based on the use of that idiom and other rabbinic evidence, he notes, 'there was no question more meaningless or boring [to the rabbis] than the purpose and usefulness of an exact description of what actually transpired.'[17]

Although their religion is important to each of them, these three scholars are addressing a wider readership. Each is facing the less partisan, more disinterested questions of the public: not (just) what is the Bible for (us) believers, but what is the Bible in itself? The studies by Bartlett, Long and Brettler all use the books of Samuel and Chronicles as worked examples.

Bartlett aptly sketches the difficulties in assessing the contents of 1 and 2 Samuel as historical. His remarks are typical of a historian assessing the quality of evidence. Few of the materials could possibly be archival. The source-material available to the author exhibited more of the character of popular story-telling. As to the character of the final writing: 'who but a novelist could recount the many private conversa-

14. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, pp. 33, 226, 58-63.

15. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, pp. 75, 92.

16. M.Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995).

17. Brettler, *The Creation*, p. 2.

tions given in these chapters?'. His account of the Chronicler's work, which he states to be 'clearly based on the earlier books of Samuel and Kings', pinpoints its leading ideas and notes indicators, such as coinage, that it dates from the fifth or even fourth century BCE.[18]

Long's interests seem more those of the expositor than the historian. He directs our attention first to a synoptic view of Samuel and Chronicles, with Nathan's oracle to David as his main example.[19] Alternative accounts are less historical problem, and more historian's opportunity. The Chronicler offers not so much a repainting (on the same canvas) as a second painting of the subject matter of Samuel–Kings. This new version explains and updates the earlier work for a later age, but with no intention to replace it. What it does allow us is a richer appreciation of the shared subject matter.

Long's final main chapter reviews 'the rise of Saul' as an extended example of the argument of his book. He is concerned to rebut the widely-held conclusion that the events by which Saul came to the throne 'are and will remain a mystery'.[20] He recognizes that the issue is not so much the paucity of relevant archaeological evidence, or the lack in the ancient Near East in the tenth century BCE of suitable historiographic parallels. 'By far the most frequently cited reason for the historical agnosticism regarding Saul's kingship is the belief that the biblical narratives recounting Saul's rise simply do not make sense as a story'.[21] This issue he faces with some success; and he concludes that, since the books of Samuel as a whole have a historiographical character, the narrative of Saul's rise (when correctly read as a coherent account) does make truth claims.

Bartlett begins with Samuel, Long with Samuel and Chronicles together, but Brettler very deliberately with the Chronicler. Since we have his main source (Samuel–Kings), we can learn most clearly from the Chronicler how a biblical historian worked. He commends Cogan's view that the Chronicler should be assessed not only as a theologian, 'but also as an example of historiographic writing which mirrors the canons of ancient Near Eastern literature'. And after a very useful review of the Chronicler and recent study of him, he concludes:

18. Bartlett, *The Bible*, pp. 69, 150-53.
19. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, pp. 76-87.
20. *The Art of Biblical History*, pp. 201-23, 202.
21. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, p. 204.