

Textual Challenges and Denying Inspiration Minimalist vs. Maximalist Approaches

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Biblical history is important to us as Christians. The Christian's faith is based, in part, on historical fact. Paul wrote the following in 1 Corinthians 15:13-14: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain."¹ Like the historical event of Jesus' death and resurrection, we believe biblical history, both in the Old and New Testaments, to be factual and true.²

We believe biblical history to be based upon reality, the actual events that took place just as the biblical authors said they did. But, it is not just a belief of the mind. In the case of Jesus' death, our belief also has a corresponding expression in the weekly memorial observance of the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).³ And with regard to this week's lectureship, "In the Beginning", we believe the events of Genesis to be accounts of things that actually happened (true, real, and actual history), from God's "Let there be light" in chapter 1, to Joseph's embalmed body in Egypt in chapter 50, and every event in between.⁴

Biblical Minimalism

However, not all contemporary Bible scholars profess this same belief. The main question today in Old Testament studies is this: to what extent is the Old Testament⁵ historically reliable? Biblical minimalism would answer this question with, "Not much." Biblical minimalism⁶ is an approach to OT studies by some contemporary (unbelieving) scholars, mostly in Europe, that suggests there is only a

¹ Scripture quotations in this lecture are taken from the *American Standard Version*, 1901.

² The Christian's relationship with Christ stemming from the historical event of the resurrection is similar to the Jew's relationship with God stemming from the historical event of the exodus (Exodus 20:2).

³ Graham A. Cole makes a good point about the observance of the Lord's Supper as it relates to history. He writes: "When a church celebrates the Lord's Supper as an important part of its regular assembly, it has a safeguard in place against historical amnesia" ("The Peril of a 'Historyless' Systematic Theology", 68).

⁴ For an approach to Genesis that maintains the truthfulness and historicity of the narratives, see the works of Arnold, Averbek, Bright, Hess, Howard and Grisanti, Kaiser, Kitchen, Provan (et al), Rooker, Ross, and Shanks in the bibliography.

⁵ I am referring to the 39 books of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi (of the Protestant and Jewish canon); hereafter, "OT".

⁶ "Minimalism" is used to describe simplicity found in art, music, architecture, interior design, etc. "Biblical minimalism" is also associated with the practice of living with less.

minimal amount of historical reliability in the OT. Only a minimal amount of OT information is factual; hence, the term “minimalism”.⁷

“Israel”, according to minimalism, is a fabrication of biblical writers⁸ who wrote around the time of the Persians (500-300’s B.C.) or the Hellenists (300-100’s B.C.). It is alleged that biblical writers, relying upon their “cultural memory,”⁹ wrote their “story” consisting of fiction and they fabricated an entire “history” and nation called “Israel”. Minimalists say that biblical writers did not even intend to write history (about facts), merely theology (about God). So, according to some minimalists, the “Israelites” as we know them from the Bible, did not even exist. “Israel”, according to minimalists, was never a nation (united monarchy), but merely an insignificant group of people among many peoples in Palestine. Surprisingly, such thinking has led minimalists to conclude that books like the Apocrypha (1 Maccabees) are historical, while the biblical books are non-historical.¹⁰

Some minimalists say that the “biblical Israel” we have come to know today is nothing more than “a scholarly construct based upon a misreading of the biblical tradition and divorced from historical reality”.¹¹ According to minimalists, the majority of OT material is fiction and so the OT is a doubtful source of information for ancient Israel. Some go so far as to say that the narratives of the Pentateuch are “radically irrelevant as sources of Israel’s early history”.¹² Because of minimalism’s popularity in some circles, it is now fashionable to call the “Old Testament”, the “False Testament.”¹³

Given the large amount of material in the OT that contains references to persons and events, one wonders how the OT as a whole fairs with the modern minimalists. Lawrence J. Mykytiuk raises the question: “How much of the Bible is potentially affected by the minimalist view?” He concludes: “Of the thirty-nine books in the Hebrew Bible, thirty-five books are potentially affected by minimalist teaching. These amount to about 90% of the number of books in the Hebrew Bible...”¹⁴ So, when you remove 90% of the OT from a discussion of historical Israel, what would a minimalist “history of Israel” even look like? It would look very slim. For example, when one minimalist, Jim West, attempted to write his history

⁷ Bible students and “scholars” among Churches of Christ are typically disinterested in using this type of approach to biblical studies. However, various brethren have written articles through the years that touch on issues presented in this lecture and they have brought attention to some of the methodologies of liberal scholarship. These articles are listed in the bibliography. From *Truth Magazine*, see the articles by Jenkins, King, McKee, Roberts, and Willis. From *Restoration Quarterly*, see the articles by Ash, Batey, Hamilton, Huddleston, Lewis, Olbricht, Roberts, Scott, Watson, and Zink. From *Reason & Revelation*, see the articles by Bryant.

⁸ Minimalists will describe biblical writers as “Judaean scholars” or the “intellectual elite”. It makes me wonder if maybe these minimalist “scholars” among today’s “intellectual elite” share an affinity with their alleged ancient Judaean counter-parts in knowing how to creatively fabricate a non-history of Israel.

⁹ For a good critique of “cultural memory”, see the article by Jens Bruun Kofoed, “The Old Testament as Cultural Memory.”

¹⁰ Thomas L. Thompson, “Giovanni Garbini and Minimalism,” 1.

¹¹ K. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Routledge, 1996): 3.

¹² Dorothy Irvin, “The Joseph and Moses Narrative”, quoted by Edwin Yamauchi; “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*.

¹³ See the March 2002 article in *Harper’s Magazine* by Daniel Lazare titled “False Testament: Archaeology Refutes the Bible’s Claim to History.”

¹⁴ “Strengthening Biblical History,” 6. See Appendix 2 for a full list of works by Mykytiuk covering various confirmations of biblical persons and scholarly responses to minimalism.

of Israel *without the Bible* and without appealing to archaeology, he was able to do so in just under five pages!¹⁵

In 1981, when minimalism was in its commencement stage, George W. Ramsey, himself a minimalist, wrote the following which serves as a good summary of the minimalist mindset:

“Biblical interpreters are now exploring afresh methods of interpretation which do not require or rely heavily on a recovery of the events lying behind the biblical stories. While the reconstruction of the history of biblical times will always be a legitimate and important historical undertaking, we seem to be witnessing in biblical studies the end of an era in which the settlement of the historical questions was thought to be of first importance and a sine qua non in the interpretation of the Bible. There is a serious effort in much recent biblical scholarship to come to grips with the biblical narrative as a *story* – which means listening to what it says about God and ourselves, *apart from the question of how accurately the narrative reflects the actual events of the past.*”¹⁶

More recently, in 2017, Ingrid Hjelm, a minimalist as well, wrote:

“Such analyses, archaeological achievements and considerations have resulted in a dismissal of the historicity of the Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua’s conquest, the kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon, and an increasing skepticism about the remaining narratives in the Hebrew Bible, their time scale, geography, sociology, political circumstances and cultic behavior. From seeing biblical tradition as a continuous narrative that had been updated concurrently to the history it told, biblical narratives have been loosened from their own chronology and setting, and dated at a distance from the events narrated. The biblical tradition, especially in the so-called Deuteronomistic History, has undergone a transformation from historical source to historical narrative and has become ‘fictional historiography’...”¹⁷

Daniel I. Bock summarizes the current debate over the history of Israel this way:

“Within scholarly circles the poles of debates swirling over the place of Israel in history are represented by labels like “maximalist” and “minimalist.” Both terms are often used disparagingly of others by those who are involved in the discussions. While the detractors accuse ‘maximalists’ of a naïve approach to Scripture and an uncritical acceptance of the information it purports to communicate, contemporary scholars in this camp represent the long history of scholarly investigation into the origins and history of Israel. Following the train of W.F. Albright and John Bright, ‘maximalists’ assume the Old Testament does in fact speak of historical realities. When seeking to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel they readily refer to the biblical record as a valid and valuable source for their reconstruction. On the one hand, they recognize that archaeological discoveries may force modern readers to question long held opinions on the meaning of biblical statements, but on the other they assume that the traditions recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures have their origins in real historical events. Accordingly, when all the data are in, a biblical history of Israel will exhibit a close correspondence with the real history of Israel.”

“‘Minimalists’ operate from a fundamentally different perspective. A century ago skeptics questioned the historical value of the first chapters of Genesis (were Adam and Eve historical figures?). However, most assumed that the stories of the Patriarchs, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the conquest and settlement of the land of Canaan, the united monarchy under David and

¹⁵ “The History of Israel – Without the Bible: A Thought Experiment”, 99-103.

¹⁶ *The Quest for the Historical Israel*, 123.

¹⁷ “Maximalist and/or Minimalist Approaches,” 4-5.

Solomon, the divided history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the conquest of these states by Assyria and Babylon respectively, represent a solid historical core, even if the accounts have been embellished by historians who were more interested in theology than history per se. During our lifetime we have witnessed the successive dismissal of almost all these records. The minimalism has developed incrementally; it seems that every decade more and more branches of the tree have been stripped. The first doubts arose over the historicity of the patriarchal narratives, then people began to wonder if Moses was a real figure from the past, if the Israelites actually came as a group from Egypt and seized the land of Canaan, then the historicity of David, and finally the end of the nations of Israel and Judah themselves. Some have argued that the history of Israel begins with the post-exile community around Jerusalem, who created the traditions in order to give account for themselves and their distinctive religious notions and practices within their ancient Near Eastern context. Where there is tension between the biblical and extra-biblical records, the latter are not only preferred as evidence but the apparent contradictions are also exploited expressly to undermine the former.”¹⁸

A Brief History of Histories of Israel

To set the stage for understanding minimalism today, we will first look back about 200 years to the OT studies of German scholars and examine their attempts at a “quest for the historical Israel”.¹⁹ This 200-year quest has been divided into “early quests” (1800 to 1970) and “modern quests” (1970 to present)²⁰ by those who are interested in its progress. When you examine this quest you will find certain trends in German scholarship that have led the way to the contemporary approach known as minimalism.

Early Quests (c. 1800 to 1970)

Early study of OT literature and history can be traced back to German origins in the late 1700s. German scholars, influenced by the so-called Age of Reason and Enlightenment, and teaching in German universities, engaged in “critical”²¹ scholarship. During this time, many sought to understand the truth of their world apart from the Bible and religious explanations. “Critical thinking” was promoted, rather than “irrational” or “superstitious” belief. Knowledge was acquired through the empirical (scientific) method. With regard to history, the story being told was tested and examined with rational thinking and critical research. At this time, the Bible story (the “story” with the “hi” of “history” removed) was no longer accepted by scholars as a self-evident, unquestioned story about Israel’s past. One practice of these German scholars was “historical criticism”, the scholarly inquiry into how the past influenced the Bible writers and how the Bible story evolved. Also known as “the historical-critical method” or “higher criticism”, historical criticism seeks to investigate the origin of ancient texts in order to understand the “world behind the text”. Unfortunately, while scholars, old and new, are looking for the “world behind the text,” they often refuse to see the “God behind the text.”

German scholars like J.G. Herder (1744-1803), J.G. Eichhorn (1752-1827), and W.M.L. de Wette (1780-1849) sought to investigate the authors and sources behind the OT books. Two schools of thought emerged among these German scholars. The first school followed the ideas of Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) who was located in Göttingen. Ranke adhered to a rationalist intellectual tradition that sought

¹⁸ “Israel – Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?”, 4-5.

¹⁹ This is similar to the contemporary “quest for the historical Jesus” made popular in the 1980s by Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar.

²⁰ These dates, of course, are approximate.

²¹ “Critical”, in biblical studies, often results in an unwillingness to accept traditional interpretations and presuppositions of scripture; namely, the presence of the divine, the supernatural, inspiration, inerrancy, and the use of the historical-grammatical method.

empirical objectivity in historical matters. History, according to von Ranke, was to be separated from philosophy (theology) and only the “facts” of history should be considered. He approached history as “wie es eigentlich gewesen”; that is, “as it really (essentially) happened”. Heinrich Ewald (1803-1875), a student of Eichhorn, and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), a student of Ewald, were also in this first school.

Influenced by the work of Friedrich Hegel, Wellhausen believed that religion and history were evolutionary and that they followed a progressive development. Like Ranke, Wellhausen looked for “facts” and so he dismissed any oral tradition (myth) that he supposed was present in the OT.²² However, Wellhausen was also different. He took the four alleged “sources” of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) that had already been proposed by scholars of his day and placed them in a new chronological order. Critical scholars at this time alleged reasons for the origin of these sources. They looked at things like the use of different divine names in the Pentateuch, the existence of what they believed to be contradictory accounts (“doublets”), differences in literary style, and differences in theological outlook. But, it should be noted here that no consensus at this time was found among German scholars as to the dating of the “sources”, the order of the “sources” (PEJD, EJDP, or JEDP), or the connection between the “sources”. Admittedly, much of the enterprise of “source criticism” was still in the realm of the hypothetical and theoretical.

The “source criticism” approach of Wellhausen found in his famous *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1893) would determine and define the face of OT historical-critical studies for many decades to come. In this work, Wellhausen set forth his well-known “Documentary Hypothesis” or “JEDP theory”.²³ According to Wellhausen’s theory, the “J” (Yahweh) source was written to promote the anthropomorphic nature of God and the “E” (Elohist) source was written to promote positive memories of the northern tribes. Both of these sources were composed c. the 10th to 7th centuries B.C. The “D” (Deuteronomistic) source was written to promote obedience to the law code. It was composed c. the late 7th century B.C. The “P” (Priestly) source was written to promote the order of the priesthood. It was composed c. the 5th century B.C. Accordingly, these “source” documents were written and compiled by a “redactor” long after the time of Moses and so are worthless in establishing the historical realities of the peoples and events of the Pentateuch.

The second school of thought followed the work of J. Burckhardt (1818-1897) who was located in Berlin. Burckhardt, a student of de Wette, opposed Ranke’s idealistic objectivity. He sought to join history and philosophy (theology) once again and to explore the evolution of the *Zeitgeisten* of history (the spirits of the times) in a non-chronological way. He focused more on the evolution of the thoughts and ideas of biblical writers than on the “facts” demanded by the Rankean school. Burckhardt believed that biblical writers were not actually authors, but editors of traditions that go back to very old myths and legends. Burckhardt and other scholars sought to reconstruct the history of these OT traditions regardless of the accuracy of what was contained in them. They believed that an original core of Israel’s history could be identified within these traditions. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), a student of Burckhardt, H. Gressmann (1877-1927), and F. Delitzsch (1813-1890) also belonged to this second school of thought. German scholars like Otto Eissfeldt (1887-1973), a student of both Wellhausen and Gunkel, and Albrecht

²² When a scholar does not want to accept something in the biblical text, he often labels it “tradition”. The scholar’s label of “tradition” is nothing more than his own “ipse dixit” (what he himself says).

²³ Also known as the “Four-Source Documentary Hypothesis” or the “Graf-Wellhausen Theory.” Anthony L. Ash documented in his four-part series, “Old Testament Studies in the Restoration Movement,” how various members among the Disciples of Christ in the late 1800s actually adopted elements of the German “higher critical” approach to the Old Testament.

Alt (1883-1956) carried these ideas forward into the 20th century. Alt's theories about Israel's history, law, religion, etc., are often the starting point for scholarly approaches to the OT even to this day.²⁴

At this time outside of Germany, OT scholars associated with Uppsala University in Sweden were reconstructing Israel's history as well.²⁵ Men like J. Pedersen (1883-1977) and Sigmund Mowinckel (1884-1965), similar to Wellhausen, reconstructed Israel's history by using source criticism and by focusing on the supposed myth and folklore behind Israel's traditions. J. Lindblom (1882-1974) and H. Ringgren (1917-2012) were also a part of the Uppsala school of thought. This school, in turn, influenced two German scholars Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971) and Martin Noth (1902-1968). G. von Rad, following the works of Eissfeldt, Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Alt, was interested in the process of tradition transmission in early Israel. Noth, following the works of Alt and Mowinckel, also put his *History of Israel* (1958) into the commonly accepted framework of source criticism. He emphasized the role of oral traditions in the formation of biblical texts and he believed that one editor wrote the "Deuteronomistic History" (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings).

Across the Atlantic, the critical study of the OT continued with the work of William F. Albright (1891-1971).²⁶ Albright was both a biblical scholar and biblical archaeologist. His primary interest was to understand the historical claims of the Hebrew Bible using his mastery of archaeology and ancient Near Eastern texts. Albright had a more positive view of the historicity OT books than the European scholars of his day. George Ernest Wright²⁷ and John Bright²⁸, both students of Albright, followed the same basic approach to OT studies as Albright and maintained a high regard for the historicity of the OT.

Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle summarize well the relevant assumptions found in OT biblical studies from the days of Wellhausen to the present:

1. Scholarship must recognize that the biblical texts were written in definite historical circumstances. Sometimes these circumstances can be ascertained with certainty; other times, historical research and hypothesis are necessary for making historical claims about the text itself.
2. The authors of the Bible had opinions about the past, their own world, and how the two were connected.
3. Any author's opinions about what was important in the past, what in the past led to the present, and how this happened, affected his or her presentation of and interpretation of the past.
4. Modern scholarship can, and must, recognize the biblical author's particular outlooks, aims, and biases, and explain them in historical perspective."²⁹

Before moving on to the minimalism of the "modern quest", a brief evaluation of the impact of Wellhausen on present OT biblical studies is in order. What of Wellhausen's influence today? First, it must be noted that liberal critical scholars today, including minimalists, are in some way or another

²⁴ For a good survey of Old Testament studies from 1900-1950, see Jack P. Lewis, "Old Testament Studies in the Past Fifty Years."

²⁵ See James K. Zink, "The Scandinavian Oral Tradition School."

²⁶ See Thomas H. Olbricht's "The American Albright School" and Seymour Gitin's "The House That Albright Built."

²⁷ *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology As Recital*. Studies in Biblical Theology. No. 8. (London: SCM Press, 1956).

²⁸ *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1959).

²⁹ *Biblical History and Israel's Past*, 9-10.

modern day successors of German critical studies. The trends in OT biblical scholarship coming out of Germany that led the way to contemporary minimalism would be the following: 1) source criticism: suggesting multiple editors/redactors of biblical books, over a single author; 2) tradition criticism: suggesting oral tradition of biblical books (with all of its myths and legends),³⁰ over written history; and, 3) form criticism: suggesting a late date of composition for biblical books (the Persian or Hellenistic period), over an early date. It is these three trends that led to the slow erosion of confidence in the historical reliability of the OT in the past 200 years of critical scholarship. These three trends, naturally, found their way into modern liberal biblical scholarship and they make up the foundation of modern minimalism.

However, the well-known “JEDP” – Documentary Hypothesis of Wellhausen’s day no longer remains the predominant force in OT biblical studies. Wellhausen’s theory was not always completely accepted by scholars even in his day. Men like Wilhelm Moeller, Hermann Gunkel, and later Martin Noth, rejected various aspects of Wellhausen’s theory. Additionally, the 20th century witnessed the use of newer approaches to OT studies (form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and structural exegesis) which challenged and rejected many of the approaches and conclusions of Wellhausen. Another factor leading to the decline of Wellhausen’s theory was the work of the archaeologist in the early 1900s and the resulting examination of biblical texts in light of extra-biblical Ancient Near Eastern literature and artifacts recovered from the biblical world. Archaeologists discovered evidence of writing among ancient peoples and the existence of otherwise unknown ancient peoples and practices. More recent linguistic studies have also played a role in overturning Wellhausen’s theory by dating OT books farther back based upon word use and etymology. Today, many critical scholars are more interested in “socio-scientific” approaches to the OT than the older “source criticism” of Wellhausen.³¹

Simply put, it is more acceptable to attack and reject Wellhausenism today than a hundred years ago. While we may not speak of the “death of Wellhausenism”, we can surely speak of the “collapse of Wellhausenism.” It is well-recognized today in scholarly circles that Wellhausen’s theory in its classic form has ceased to exist. But, be that as it may, many contemporary OT scholars still do accept that same conclusions (foundations) set forth by Wellhausen (the late dating of OT books), but based upon different theories. As mentioned above, modern minimalist scholars remain the inheritors of the great Wellhausen legacy. They continue to promote the same natural, anti-supernaturalistic (God, miracles, inspiration, etc.) character of the OT as Wellhausen did long ago. What they have done, however, is succeed in putting the new face of post-modernism on the old body of modernism.

Modern Quests (c. 1970 to present)

Having examined some of the “early quests” originating in Germany, let us now turn our attention to some of the “modern quests” that fall into five broad categories: 1) maximalists, 2) qualified maximalists, 3) minimalists, 4) Wellhausian, and 5) convergence.³²

First, the “maximalists”: they are known for their “traditional approach”, typically drawing most of their data for a history of Israel directly from the Bible (“biblical history”) and integrating archaeology (“biblical archaeology”) and extra biblical sources when appropriate. They believe the Bible to be a reliable source, for the most part, that should be weighed and evaluated fairly along with other ancient

³⁰ For a good critique of the liberal’s use of “myth” in the Bible, see John N. Oswalt’s *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?*

³¹ For more on influence and/or decline of Wellhausenism, see the articles by Arnold, Hurvitz, Kratz, and Surburg.

³² Different scholars offer different categories ranging from three to five. I have chosen to use the categories offered by R.D. Miller II in his article “Quest of the Historical Israel”.

sources. They believe that although the Bible contains different kinds of literature (including the figurative), that literature is set within a historical context. W.F. Albright³³ could be placed at the head of this group along with his student, John Bright.³⁴ Rainer Albertz³⁵ and G. E. Mendenhall,³⁶ a student of Albright, are also in this group. Eugene Merrill would be considered a maximalist.³⁷ The more recent work by Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*,³⁸ is a classic example of maximalism. Similarly, Paula McNutt³⁹ approaches the biblical accounts of Israel as “probably true” and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,⁴⁰ assumes that they are true.

Second, the “qualified maximalists”: they are known for being critical (even minimalist) of the early history of Israel (the 12th to 9th centuries B.C.), but not the later history (the 7th century B.C. and following). Scholars of this sort will often start their “history of Israel” with the period of Joshua, Judges, or, the United Monarchy, and they are not willing to simply paraphrase the biblical text, from beginning to end, as a history of Israel. They interpret archaeology through the lens of a “new paradigm” to date Israel’s history with a “Low Chronology”.⁴¹ The works of J. Alberto Soggin,⁴² Giovanni Garbini,⁴³ Victor Matthews,⁴⁴ and Israel Finkelstein⁴⁵ would fall into this category.

Third, the “minimalists”: they are known for rejecting the historicity of the OT. Within this category, there are three distinct branches of minimalism (also called “revisionism”). There are those scholars who are antibiblical. They say the OT biblical narrative is doubtful or out-right wrong. Niels Peter Lemche would be of this persuasion. Then, there are those scholars who are extra biblical. They ignore the Bible for the most part and attempt to reconstruct a history of Israel from archaeology and Near Eastern evidence alone. Philip R. Davies and Thomas L. Thompson fit into this category. Finally, there are those scholars who are nihilist. They say that a “biblical Israel” never existed, period. Keith Whitelam would be of this persuasion.⁴⁶

³³ *From Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940).

³⁴ *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1952). This book is now in its fourth revision (2000).

³⁵ *History of Israelite Religion*. 2 volumes. Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

³⁶ *Ancient Israel’s Faith and History: Introduction to the Bible in Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

³⁷ *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. Second Edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

³⁸ *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 2015).

³⁹ *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003, 2016); idem, *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁴¹ Shimon Amit, “Biblical Archaeology and Identity: Israel Finkelstein and his Rivals”, 1.

⁴² *A History of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster, 1985).

⁴³ *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ *A Brief History of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ With N.A. Silberman. *The Bible Unearthed: Archeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Touchstone, 2002). For a good critique of this work, see William G. Dever, “Excavating the Hebrew Bible, or Burying It Again?”

⁴⁶ For a good critique of this position, see the articles by Dever and Provan reviewing Whitelam.

Fourth, the “Wellhausians”: they, though fewer in number today, are known for continuing to work firmly within the Wellhausian paradigm of source criticism of the Pentateuch and for using archaeology as well. Scholars like F.M. Cross⁴⁷ approach the history of Israel this way.

Fifth, the scholars suggesting “convergence”: these scholars view the OT like a “painting” which has many elements, some true and some false. This makes it the work of the scholar, then, to take biblical information (the “painting”) and the interpretations of archaeological excavations in Palestine to see if any “convergence” (or “anchor point”) can be found between the two. These scholars are looking for “historical nuggets” or a “core history” in the biblical text. Scholars of this category include John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller,⁴⁸ G. Ahlström,⁴⁹ Norman K. Gottwald,⁵⁰ and William G. Dever.⁵¹

The Emergence of Minimalism

1970's

Let us now focus our attention further on the minimalists category of contemporary OT scholars. Beginning in the mid 1970s, more scholars began to evidence a minimalist approach to the OT.⁵² This period of time saw rapid, radical changes and innovation in OT scholarship. Thomas L. Thompson in 1974⁵³ and John Van Seters in 1975⁵⁴ were two of the first minimalists to exercise such a radical approach. These men proposed the idea that the patriarchs of Genesis were non-historical figures made up by Jewish writers living in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.⁵⁵

1980's

Early on, minimalist approaches were considered controversial in the world of biblical studies, but by the mid-1980s, minimalism had become a part of mainstream scholarship. Along with Thompson⁵⁶ and Van Seters,⁵⁷ more scholars began to emerge who viewed the OT as fictitious creations of Jewish

⁴⁷ *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ *Israelite and Judaeon History* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990); idem, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ *Ancient Palestine: A Historical Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

⁵¹ *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001); idem, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

⁵² Jim West, a minimalist, would disagree with my tracing of minimalism back to the 1970s. He actually argues that minimalism began with the OT bible writers and it is the “maximalists” who are the true distorters of Scripture. See his “A (Very, Very) Short History of Minimalism: From The Chronicler to the Present.”

⁵³ *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); idem, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987).

⁵⁴ *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

⁵⁵ For an early critique of Thompson, see John E. Huesman, “Archaeology and Early Israel: The Scene Today” and, John Tracy Luke, “Abraham and the Iron Age.”

⁵⁶ *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel, I: The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1-23* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

⁵⁷ *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

writers from the Persian or Hellenistic periods; scholars like Niels Peter Lemche,⁵⁸ Gösta Ahlström,⁵⁹ Keith W. Whitelam,⁶⁰ Israel Finkelstein,⁶¹ and Giovanni Garbini.⁶² In one way or the other, these scholars approached the OT books as late creations of Israelite ideology and not as true history. They rejected any historical value in the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the Conquest, and the Judges. The 1980s also witnessed a “paradigm shift” in the practice of archaeology. There was a moving away from “biblical archaeology” among some archaeologists to archaeology more disinterested in proving the historical accuracy of scripture. “Biblical archaeology” was replaced with “Palestinian archaeology” by some in the field.⁶³

1990's

Scholars taking a low or negative view of the OT since the mid-70s were soon labeled “minimalists” by their opponents who were in turn called “maximalists”. Regarding the OT, maximalists and minimalists held to a trust or distrust of the text respectively.⁶⁴ Lemche actually described himself and other scholars like him as “maximalists” on one occasion because, in his words,

“...we try to get as much historical information out of the sources as we can. We're historians, after all. The only difference is the amount of information we think we can get out. We try to get as much out of it as possible, but we don't think it's very much.”⁶⁵

The debate between maximalist and minimalist scholars was intense in the 1990's. William Dever, the well-known American archaeologist was fond of calling these scholars “revisionists” in his critiques. “Nihilist” was another name given to them by conservative scholars. Many books and articles were written during this decade, for and against minimalism. Two journals, going back to the mid-1970s, published articles in favor of minimalism: the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (JSOT) and *Semeia*⁶⁶. A newer journal beginning in the late 80's, the *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, supported minimalist approaches and gave scholars like Lemche and Thompson and outlet for their theories.

Some of the more prominent advocates of minimalism that developed their craft during the 90's were Lemche⁶⁷ and Thompson⁶⁸ of the University of Copenhagen in Denmark,⁶⁹ Philip R. Davies⁷⁰ and

⁵⁸ *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985); idem, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1988).

⁵⁹ *Who Were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986).

⁶⁰ With Robert B. Coote. *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (Sheffield: Almond, 1987).

⁶¹ *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988)

⁶² *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

⁶³ See the articles by Dever, Downing, Eakins, King, Lance, and Meyers. Downing writes about “a paradigm shift” at this time where “archaeology is no longer the handmaiden of biblical theology. Archaeology no longer seeks to prove the historicity of the Bible” (“Rewriting the History of Israel”, 340).

⁶⁴ See Tim Bulkeley, “The End of Scripture and/or Biblical Studies.”

⁶⁵ “Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers,” 1.

⁶⁶ *JSOT* is published in England by University of Sheffield and *Semeia* (now in book form) in the United States by the Society of Biblical Literature.

⁶⁷ *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁶⁸ *The Early History of the Israelite People* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); idem, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁶⁹ Minimalism is sometimes referred to as “the Copenhagen School”.

Whitelam⁷¹ of the University of Sheffield in England, and Finkelstein, the Israeli archaeologist. By the end of the 1990s three clear debates emerged surrounding archaeology and the study of Israel's history: 1) the "Biblical archaeology" debate – to what extent archaeology should be connected to the historicity of the Bible; 2) the "maximalist-minimalist" debate – to what degree, large or small, archaeology demonstrates any historical worth contained in the Bible; and 3) the "10th century debate" – whether or not archaeology confirms a 10th century B.C. date for the beginning of Israel's history.⁷²

Present-day

Minimalist scholars, and their numbers continue to grow,⁷³ assume that OT biblical accounts are automatically wrong and their first order of operation is to discard them for something else. They are suspicious of the biblical text and they either ignore it, or treat it as fundamentally flawed in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern texts. They suggest that no historical material in the OT should be considered factual or reliable until it is verified by external sources like archaeology. Since, according to them, archaeology has not confirmed the existence of a nation called "Israel", no Israel existed.⁷⁴ Minimalists do not agree among themselves on some points of their argument.⁷⁵ While their method is not the dominant one, they do in fact continue to exercise a considerable impact on OT biblical studies today, especially in Europe.

Moore and Kelly summarize the key questions that are being asked today by scholars, both maximalist and minimalist, in OT biblical studies:

"Should the Bible be accepted as a historical source? Why or why not? If so, how should one use the Bible?"

"Should historians put more or all of their faith in external sources? If so, what is the place of archaeology and artifacts in studying Israel's past? What about other fields, such as anthropology and sociology?"

"Should the biblical concept of 'Israel' be the subject of history, or should historians write about 'ancient Palestine' or some other entity? Is there sufficient evidence that there existed an entity akin to the unified religious Israel that the Bible assumes, and, if so, at what point do we find it?"

"How has narrative and literary criticism, also on the rise since the 1970s, affected historical interpretation of the Bible?"

"How have postmodern perspectives influenced biblical interpretation and the practice of writing history?"⁷⁶

⁷⁰ *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); idem, *The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

⁷¹ *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁷² See Ziony Zevit, "Three Debates about Bible and Archaeology."

⁷³ In 2010, Mykytiuk estimated that there were about 20 major minimalists in the world of biblical studies ("Strengthening Biblical Historicity," 4, footnote 9). Lester Grabbe listed 21 minimalists that attended the July 1996 European Seminar on Methodology in Israel's History ("Introduction" in *Can A 'History of Israel' Be Written?*, page 12).

⁷⁴ Minimalists do not accept the reference to "Israel" on the Merenptah stele (c. 1208 B.C) to be credible evidence for a "biblical Israel". See William G. Dever's "Merenptah's 'Israel', the Bible's, and Ours."

⁷⁵ Philip Davies. "Minimalism, 'Ancient Israel', and Anti-Semitism".

⁷⁶ *Biblical History and Israel's Past*, 41.

Minimalists Speak

Thomas L. Thompson

1974: “The results of my own investigations, if they are for the most part acceptable, seem sufficient to require a complete reappraisal of the current position on the historical character of the patriarchal narratives. These results support the minority position that the text of Genesis is not an historical document, but is rather a collection of literary traditions whose ‘historical background’ ... need to be sought at every stage of each tradition’s development. As literary tradition, no part of Genesis can be assumed to be history unless its literary character can first be shown to be historiographical ... in this quest for the historical Abraham, we are not dealing with a legitimate historical reconstruction which merely lacks verification; we are rather dealing with a search that is essentially misdirected. Not only has the historicity of Abraham not been proven, but it does not seem to be implied in the biblical narratives themselves ... not only has ‘archaeology’ not proven a single event of the patriarchal traditions to be historical, it has not shown any of the traditions to be likely⁷⁷ ... it must be concluded that any such historicity as is commonly spoken of in both scholarly and popular works about the patriarchs of Genesis is hardly possible and totally improbable⁷⁸ ... Salvation history is not an historical account of saving events open to the study of the historian. Salvation history did not happen; it is a literary form which has its own historical context. In fact, we can say that the faith of Israel is not an historical faith, in the sense of a faith based on historical events; it is rather a faith within history.”⁷⁹

1997: “We find a great deal in the Bible, it’s just that we don’t find the Bible to be a historical record.”⁸⁰

1999: “Today we no longer have a history of Israel. Not only have Adam and Eve and the flood story passed over to mythology, but we can no longer talk about a time of the patriarchs. There never was a ‘United Monarchy’ in history and it is meaningless to speak of pre-exilic prophets and their writings. The history of Iron Age Palestine today knows of Israel only as a small highland patronate lying north of Jerusalem and south of the Jezreel Valley. Nor has Yahweh, the deity dominant in the cult of that Israel’s people, much to do with the Bible’s understanding of God. Any history we write of this people will hardly resemble the Israel we thought we knew so much about only a few years ago. And even that little will hardly open to us the Bible’s origins in history. Our history of biblical tradition has come topsy-turvy. It is only a Hellenistic Bible that we know: namely the one that we first begin to read in the texts found among the Dead Sea scrolls near Qumran. I have argued that the quest for origins is not an historical quest but a theological and literary question, a question about meaning. To give it an historical form is to attribute to it our own search for meaning. Biblical scholarship used to believe that we might understand the Bible if we could only get back to its origins. The question about origins, however, is not an answerable one. Not only is the Bible’s ‘Israel’ a literary fiction, but the Bible begins as a tradition already established: a stream of stories, song and philosophical reflection, collected, discussed and debated. Our sources do not begin. They lie already *in media res*.”

“We can say now with considerable confidence that the Bible is not a history of anyone’s past. The story of the chosen and rejected Israel that it presents is a philosophical metaphor of a mankind that has lost its way. The tradition itself is a discourse about recognizing that way. In our

⁷⁷ *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, 2-3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

⁸⁰ “Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers,” 2.

historicizing of this tradition, we have lost sight of the Bible's intellectual centre, as well as of our own. The question of origins which has dominated modern research into the Bible belongs to theology rather than to history. It asks after the meaning of the Bible in its beginnings. In this, it shares the same Hellenistic quest that was also the Bible's: to trace our traditions of ourselves and God back to the creation."⁸¹

Niels Peter Lemche

1997: "What this means is that he was not really writing history. He was making it up. He didn't know the genre of history writing. Antiquity simply did not know that genre. That's a modern genre. That means there are traditions; the tradents [creators and carriers of a tradition] were creating mythologies. It has nothing to do with history⁸² ... Similarly, the David of the Bible, David the king, is not a historical figure ... The Biblical David did not exist."⁸³

1998: "Modern scholars created an image of ancient Israel in this way. It was little more than a repetition of the image of Israel as found in the Old Testament, however, transferred into the historical world of which it had no part, being the creation of the imagination of the biblical authors ... As far as ancient Israel is concerned, there can be no doubt that it is an artificial creation of the scholarly world of the modern age ... It simply developed out of the usual bad habit of paraphrasing the biblical text ... Modern scholars invented ancient Israel, not because they wanted to invent something new but simply because of a rather naïve reading of scripture ... It is one of the theses of this book that the Israel found on the pages of the Old Testament is an artificial creation which has little more than one thing in common with the Israel that existed once upon a time in Palestine, that is, the name. Apart from this not absolutely insignificant element, the Israelite nation as explained by the biblical writers has little in the way of a historical background. It is a highly ideological construct created by ancient scholars of Jewish tradition in order to legitimize their own religious community and its religio-political claims on land and religious exclusivity ... At the end we have a situation where Israel is not Israel, Jerusalem not Jerusalem, and David not David. No matter how we twist the factual remains from ancient Palestine, we cannot have a biblical Israel that is at the same time the Israel of the Iron Age."⁸⁴

Philip R. Davies

2017: "'Israel' in the Hebrew Bible is not a historical community but an identity claimed by several communities"⁸⁵ ... My main concern has been to show how 'biblical Israel' is not a historical datum but a construction of cultural memory that defines not the community of the past but that of the present. It is not at all a common denominator of literature and archaeology: it exists only as a literary phenomenon. Attempts to write a history of correlating biblical and archaeological date are misguided until and unless the character of literary Israels is [sic] understood."⁸⁶

Keith Whitelam

⁸¹ *The Mythic Past*, xv-xvi.

⁸² "Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers," 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁴ *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, 161-166.

⁸⁵ *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, 172.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

1996: “The picture of Israel’s past as presented in much of the Hebrew Bible is a fiction, a fabrication like most pictures of the past constructed by ancient (and, we might add, modern) societies”⁸⁷ ... “Israel has been invented”⁸⁸

Israel Finkelstein

2007: “The Patriarchal, Exodus, and Conquest narratives, which describe the formative history of the people of Israel, cannot be read as straightforward historical accounts. It is conceivable that many of the stories preserve old memories, folk tales, myths, and aetiological anecdotes. Yet, in the way they are portrayed in the Bible, they are wrapped in late-monarchial ... realities. Moreover, the way in which they were compiled discloses that they serve the ideological aims of their late-Iron II period authors. These stories should not be read therefore in a sequential order, from early to late; rather, they must be understood from late to early – beginning from the perspective of the period when they were set down in writing.”⁸⁹

Minimalist Methodologies and Critique

What fallacies in methodology are committed by minimalists? Let us now consider some of the main methodologies or approaches suggested by minimalists⁹⁰ and a brief critique of each one.

1. Minimalists argue that persons and events of OT books are to be rejected and considered unhistorical where there is no external documentation or corroboration such as found in archaeology or ancient Near Eastern documents. This is a poor argument for at least four reasons:

First, it is true that archaeologists have not discovered evidence of certain biblical characters, places, and events. But, consider the large amount of evidence that archaeologists have discovered and much of it 100 years before minimalism was even born! Minimalism is to be rejected simply because it refuses and resists the plain and obvious evidence of archaeology. For example, the minimalist, Thomas L. Thompson, said that the reference to “Omri, king of Israel” on the Moabite Stone is simply an “eponym of the highland patronate *Bit Humri*” and it “belongs to a theological world of Narnia.”⁹¹ This is nothing more than intellectual dishonesty. I would liken the minimalists of today to the mockers of Peter’s day who “willfully forget” (2 Peter 3:5) what has been shown them over and over again from the archaeologist’s spade. Minimalists are like the audience that Stephen preached to when he said, “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 7:51).

Before the advent of minimalism it was common knowledge that archaeology had demonstrated the historicity of OT biblical persons. Here are a few examples. The Sheshonq (Shishak) Relief (or Bubastite Portal) discovered in 1825 mentions the military accomplishments of Pharaoh Shishak against Solomon’s son Rehoboam. The Sennacherib Cylinder (or Taylor Prism) discovered in 1830 describes the siege of Jerusalem and Hezekiah shut up “like a bird in a cage”. The Behistun Inscription discovered in 1835 provided evidence for the reign of Darius the Great. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser discovered in 1846 shows “Jehu of the house of Omri” kneeling down to Shalmaneser III. The Belshazzar Inscription

⁸⁷ *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, 23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁹ *The Quest for Historical Israel*, 55.

⁹⁰ These minimalist methodologies are not listed in any particular order, they are gathered from different minimalist sources, they are not an exhaustive list, and, no one minimalist, of course, would adhere to all of these methodologies.

⁹¹ See “Problems of Genre and Historicity with Palestine’s Descriptions,” page 326. For a good critique of Thompson’s statement, see J.A. Emerton, “The Value of the Moabite Stone As An Historical Source.”

(or Nabonidus Chronicle) discovered in 1854 listed Belshazzar as coregent with Nabonidus. The Mesha Stele (or Moabite Stone) discovered in 1868 mentions Moabite-Israelite relations and the following statements: “Omri was king of Israel” and “the vessels of Yahweh”. The Cyrus Cylinder discovered in 1879 illustrates the restoration policy of Cyrus. The Merneptah Stele discovered in 1896 is the earliest extra-biblical mention of “Israel” that we have to date.

Several of these artifacts just mentioned I have seen with my own eyes and I tell you that it is quite a faith building experience to see them firsthand. Archaeologists even continue to make new discoveries every year which offer detailed corroboration of the biblical text.⁹² In 1993, the now-famous Tel Dan inscription was found which contains the words: “house of David”.

In this century alone, there have been many discoveries that confirm biblical persons and places. Consider here just a few: the Gedaliah Ben Pashchur bulla (2017) and the Yehuchal Ben Shelamayahu bulla (2010),⁹³ the Lachish gate cultic shrine (2016),⁹⁴ the Gath city gate (2015),⁹⁵ the Eshbaal inscription (2012),⁹⁶ the scarab of Sheshong I or Pharaoh Shishak (2014),⁹⁷ the Matanyahu seal (2012),⁹⁸ the Absalom pillar (2011),⁹⁹ the Solomonic gatehouse wall (2010),¹⁰⁰ the Netanyahu seal (2008),¹⁰¹ and the Goliath inscription (2005).¹⁰²

Additionally, site work at Khirbet Qeiyafa has shown evidence of administrative buildings dating to the time of King David.¹⁰³ Of interest to us here is the archaeological work of Luke Chandler, son of Royce Chandler, and minister for the North Terrace church of Christ in Lutz, Florida. Luke participates annually in archaeological excavations in Israel. He did site work at Khirbet Qeiyafa from 2009 to 2013 and Tel Lachish from 2014 to 2017.¹⁰⁴ He wrote in 2016:

“The Bible describes some unusual customs involving worship and sacred space during the 11th and early 10th centuries BC. This is the time of Samuel, Saul and David, shortly before the Temple’s construction. Recent excavations at Khirbet Qeiyafa, a contemporary site in Judah, uncovered evidence of these time-specific practices.”¹⁰⁵

⁹² For older discussions of this point, see the articles by Allen, Glock, Jenkins, King, J. J. Roberts, Scott, Watson, and Zink. For more recent discussions, see the articles by Adler, Block-Smith, Browning, Chandler, Drinkard, Grisanti, Merrill, Mykytiuk (Appendix 2), Pehlke, Schoville, and Schreiner. See also the special issue “Archaeology and the Bible” in *Truth Magazine* (Vol. 54, No. 1, Jan. 4, 2001). For a large list of recent archaeological finds see the books by Anderson and Edwards, Graves, and Price in Appendix 1.

⁹³ See Jeremiah 38:1.

⁹⁴ See 2 Kings 18:4, 22; 2 Chronicles 29:3.

⁹⁵ See 1 Samuel 17:4.

⁹⁶ See 1 Chronicles 8:33.

⁹⁷ See 2 Chronicles 12:2-9.

⁹⁸ See 1 Chronicles 1:25.

⁹⁹ See 2 Samuel 18:18.

¹⁰⁰ See 1 Kings 7:1-12.

¹⁰¹ See 1 Chronicles 17:25.

¹⁰² See 1 Samuel 17:4.

¹⁰³ For more on Khirbet Qeiyafa, see the articles by Garfinkel, Keynan and Schreiner.

¹⁰⁴ You can follow Luke’s work in archaeology on his blog: “Bible, Archaeology, and Travel with Luke Chandler” (<https://lukechandler.wordpress.com/>).

¹⁰⁵ “Does the Bible Accurately Depict Historical Detail? Fresh Evidence from Archaeology”, 6.

There is a very large amount of ancient epigraphic and archaeological remains that support the historicity of many biblical texts and these remains continue to be uncovered every day. There are numerous Bible land sites that still need to be excavated. There are final reports that still have to be published. There are earlier reports that are at times questioned and overturned. There are sites that are re-excavated and new finds reported on a regular basis. Archaeology is in constant flux and, in the words of Edwin Yamauchi, “The absence of archaeological evidence is not evidence of absence.”¹⁰⁶ Paul L. Maier put it this way:

“Let the debate continue, but let all the evidence be admitted. Ever since scientific archaeology started a century and a half ago, the consistent pattern has been this: the hard evidence from the ground has borne out the biblical record again and again — and again. The Bible has nothing to fear from the spade.”¹⁰⁷

Second, even when archaeological confirmation of OT persons is found, it is often quickly dismissed by minimalists. For example, minimalists at first rejected the 1993 Tel Dan stele, which read *byt dwd*, “house of David”, as a forgery, then they argued that it should not be translated as “house of David,” and finally, they dismissed the whole thing as insignificant to the debate.¹⁰⁸ Some minimalists refuse to be convinced no matter how much archaeological evidence you present to them.¹⁰⁹

Third, historians typically do not reject the histories of peoples outside the Bible because of a lack of archaeological corroboration. Edwin Yamauchi makes the following astute observation: “Roman historians do not reject Tacitus’ account of Agricola’s seven-year administration of Britain because only a single inscription of Agricola has been found there.”¹¹⁰

Fourth, archaeology should not take preference over written sources (such as the Bible) as some minimalists suggest. Paul Watson reminds us: “One must start with Israel’s own accounts of her history and let them shape our reconstructions. External, secondary, non-literary materials may then be used to illuminate and illustrate; they should never be allowed to dominate.”¹¹¹

Minimalist scholars proceed from the understanding that written sources are “open to different interpretations”, while the results of archaeology are not. But, this simply is not the case. While archaeology has value, it also has its limitations.¹¹² An archaeological find may be “objective” evidence, but the analyzing of it involves “subjective” interpretation. Nadav Na’aman reminds us of a basic fact concerning archaeology that all honest archaeologists would have to admit:

“Like the written sources, the results of the archaeological excavations are open to different, sometimes even contradictory, interpretations. The archaeological literature is replete with controversies on endless number of issues, including stratigraphy and pottery, typology, the function of the excavated building and artifacts, settlement hierarchy, population estimate, among

¹⁰⁶ “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 34.

¹⁰⁷ “Biblical Archaeology: Factual Evidence to the Support the Historicity of the Bible.”

¹⁰⁸ For the Tel Dan inscription debate, see the articles by Cryer, Becking, Biran and Naveh, Davies, Fosdal, Hagelia, Kitchen, Lamaire, Laughlin, Lemche and Thompson, Wesselius, and Zvi.

¹⁰⁹ For an example of how two archaeologists evaluate the same archaeological evidence today, see *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹¹ “Review Article: The History of Israel”, 303.

¹¹² For more on this, see Alan R. Millard, “The Value and Limitations of the Bible and Archaeology” in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?* Daniel I. Block, Editor. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008. See also the articles by Miller and Rainey.

many others. Archaeology data do not speak for themselves and its interpretation is fraught with difficulties.”¹¹³

2. Minimalists argue that the OT scriptures are to be rejected as historical sources because their composition (they would say, “redaction”) is later than they claim to describe. Three responses are in order:

First, literary analysis of an ancient text (source criticism, form criticism, literary criticism, etc.) is a theoretical venture.¹¹⁴ By itself, literary analysis cannot determine the date or historicity of biblical books. Additionally, modern scholars employing various “criticism” methodologies often approach the text with a biased perspective and an arrogant attitude that essentially says, “If the text is not coherent and it contains the unhistorical, then it must be. If the text does not say what I think it should say, then it is flawed.”

Second, this argument fails to accept the fact that a writer can record history with an accurate memory and by using earlier reliable and primary sources. This is done all the time by writers of history of various peoples, ancient and modern and it is done by writers of both sacred and secular history. We cannot simply ignore the Bible, the OT in particular, when it comes to a study of Israel’s history.¹¹⁵

Third, claiming that the OT is unhistorical is no small claim. When minimalists make this claim, they are saying in effect that much of the OT is a fraud. When they do this, they undermine the moral character of the Bible and cause people to lose their faith in the Scriptures as a reliable guide in matters of religion and morals – but, this might be exactly what they want to accomplish.

3. Minimalists argue that the historicity of the OT is to be rejected because the OT contains the accounts of a deity (God) and the miraculous (supernatural) which are not verifiable. However, minimalists are inconsistent. They do not reject the historicity of other ancient texts (Near Eastern, Greek, Persian, etc.) when those texts make reference to deities and the supernatural. To be consistent and truly “scientific”, these same scholars would have to reject the historicity of the writings (traditions?) of other ancient Near Eastern cultures, Greek, and Roman, which contain a claim to pagan deities, miracles, etc. An historian, biblical or otherwise, should not be disqualified outright simply because he makes reference to a deity or the supernatural.

4. Minimalists claim the OT is to be rejected because its message is ideologically and sociologically conditioned. Minimalists argue the OT books were written by Jews living in the Persian or Hellenistic period in order to offer a legitimate claim for the people of Israel to the land of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. Biblical writers were just recording their own personal ideology or “propaganda”.¹¹⁶ Four points are in order here:

First, minimalists assert their own theories about OT ideology and sociology without proof. Additionally, minimalists themselves have their own ideologies.¹¹⁷ They are minimalist with regard to OT

¹¹³ “Does Archaeology Really Deserve the Status of a ‘High Court’ in Biblical Historical Research?”, 167.

¹¹⁴ For a good critique of the “source criticism” and some of the methodological flaws associated with it, see the article by Robert R. Chisholm, Jr., “Old Testament Source Criticism: Some Methodological Miscues.”

¹¹⁵ See H.G.M. Williamson, “The Origins of Israel: Can We Safely Ignore the Bible?”

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Huddleston, Professor of Old Testament at Abilene Christian University, advocates this aspect of minimalism. See his “Recent Scholarship on the Pentateuch.”

¹¹⁷ See the articles by Dever and Provan covering the matter of ideology.

history and maximalist with regard to their own philosophies.¹¹⁸ They are guilty of having (an ideology) the very thing (an ideology) they accuse the OT of having. Why is it that the “history” of biblical writers is to be rejected because of their ideology, but the “history” of minimalists is to be received in spite of their ideology? Additionally, minimalists exhibit inconsistencies and hypocrisies. They will at times appeal to the OT to make their case and other times reject it when it does not suit their agenda.

Second, a text can contain ideology and still be historical. Ideology is one thing and historical accuracy is another. OT authors indeed presented an “ideology” of a saving God among Israel and the nations, but that did not skew their presentation of historical facts in the process. Biblical writers intended their documents to be factual and they expected their readers to be attuned to their document’s historicity. Charles David Isbell remarks:

“If the Bible is read only as a search for “facts,” then most of its message will be lost, for the authors of the Bible were not interested in “just the facts.” They looked at the ways in which “facts” which they assumed true influenced people to live. That is why the Bible is so difficult to read and understand. We want to know facts of a kind that the Bible most often does not give. But it does not follow that because their interest in “history” was different from ours we may pronounce them at fault, even less that we may accuse them of twisting the truth to create out of whole cloth a piece of writing they themselves knew to be false and did not believe. We may be so arrogant as to assume that we know better than they did what they should have put in their “Bible.” But I doubt that they were so arrogant as to presume readers would be so gullible that both their present and all later generations [including us] could be fooled by ideas they themselves knew fully well to be mere fiction.”¹¹⁹

Third, if it is the case that Jews made up their history, then how did many unknown and unhistorical figures going back to Adam become so significant and so widespread during the exilic period?

Fourth, why would any knowing person in the Persian court believe such lies made up by a handful of Jewish writers? The Persians had their own records to check and see if an entire nation of “Israel” was being invented by biblical writers. Were Persian officials that ignorant to accept such a made-up “history”?

5. Minimalists argue the parts of the OT narrative that speak of individuals instead of nations are to be judged unhistorical. They say “stories” of individuals are not “history”. This is not true. This is simply an arbitrary and restricted use of the term “history” by minimalists.

6. Minimalists argue that the “history of Israel” we know today is simply an invention of modern-day scholars paraphrasing OT material. Two points in response are in order here:

First, how is that the biblical writers, living a few hundred years from the events they wrote about, got it wrong, but minimalists, living thousands of years from the events they write about have gotten it right? How is it that OT scholars over the past 200 years have gotten it wrong about Israel, but in the past 40 years, minimalist scholars have gotten it right? How it is that a multitude of believers have gotten it wrong about Israel over the past 2,000 years (including Jesus, Paul, many Jews and Christians), but minimalist scholars in the past 40 years have gotten it right?

¹¹⁸ See Jaco Gericke, “When Historical Minimalism Becomes Philosophical Maximalism.”

¹¹⁹ “‘History’ and ‘Writing’.”

Paul Lawrence offers a good reminder with these words: “It is our contention that history should primarily be based upon written sources and ... theoretical reconstructions of the past based on minimal or no evidence have no place here. Ancient writers lived much closer to the events they described than we do, so it is our basic policy to show them healthy respect.”¹²⁰

Minimalists believe they have exposed the elaborate ruse of OT writers and have broken the spell these writers have had on people for 2,000 years! Apparently, thanks to minimalist scholars, “the jig is up”. These scholars are quite assured of when biblical texts were written and why they were written. They know precisely the correct interpretation of all the archaeological data. Minimalist scholars do not want us to put our faith in the ancient OT narratives, but rather in their modern scholarly narratives. Such academic hubris! There are approximately 419, 687 Hebrew words in the Old Testament. It would be interesting to compare how many words that minimalists have written about Israel’s history over the past 40 years with how many words the ancient Israelites have written about their own history. At some point, if not already, the all-knowing minimalists will have written more about Israel than she has written about herself.

Second, minimalist scholars are not even agreed among themselves and they have not brought us to an agreed understanding of Israel (either Israel or “Israel”) in the past 40 years. Examine their theories and you will not find consensus about what is right with Israel, only what is wrong with “Israel”. Minimalists are united in their rejection of the OT and they are confident about their theories, but they are also highly critical of each other’s views. Lemche criticizes Whitelam, Finkelstein finds fault with Lemche, etc., etc.

When Richard Coggins, the British scholar, spoke in 1994 about the future of OT studies concerning a “History of Israel”, he concluded that he could not offer “any kind of confident reconstruction” of Israel’s history and “What kind of model may emerge to replace the historical one cannot yet be determined with confidence ... I am as yet not much nearer to seeing what shape the future pattern of study will take...”¹²¹

So, we are left with a scholarly agnosticism about the whole matter of Israel’s history. And, I believe many contemporary scholars would be perfectly fine to leave it that way. Consider the following from the minimalist Davies as recent as 2017:

“The history of scholarship is littered with many firm conclusions and even more agreed ones. But the history also shows that most conclusions have a limited shelf-life. Some are disproved; others go out of fashion; some become irrelevant. But this fact does not diminish the value of scholarship. Biblical scholarship is a conversation and a quest as well as a science. If we can rarely decide definitely what is right, we can often declare emphatically what is *not* right. We also learn to ask new and better questions; and, most importantly, perhaps, we realize that scholarship, like history-writing, answers questions of its own time and can therefore never reach any definitive goal. In other words, understanding does not necessarily mean knowing more answers: it can mean knowing better questions.”¹²²

When minimalists, like Davies, set forth their theories today about “biblical Israel” and OT “history” they lead off with words like “may,” “maybe,” “possible”, “possibly”, “suggest”, “suggested”, “suggestion(s)”, “guess”, “presumably”, “seems to me”, “perhaps”, “appears”, and even “surmise”.¹²³

¹²⁰ *The IVP Atlas of Bible History*, 7.

¹²¹ *What Future for the “History of Israel?”*, 18-19.

¹²² *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, 172.

¹²³ See Davies’ concluding chapter to *The Origins of Biblical Israel*, 172-177.

When the minimalist Lemche posed the question of the origin of “Israel”, he proceeded to answer his own question with mere “possibilities”, “probably the most likely explanation”, what “may be found”, and what “seems to be.”¹²⁴

Apparently, this passes for “critical scholarship”. This is contemporary biblical scholarship at its finest. This is the expert understanding of Israel’s history that we’ve all been waiting for. This is the high-priced academic education that some young seminarians are paying for today. Minimalism’s rejection of the historicity of the OT inevitably leads to what some have called “historiographic skepticism” and “historiographical suicide”.¹²⁵ The “history” (or lack thereof) of minimalism, then, is simply the contemporary step-child of modernism’s rejection of the supernatural and postmodernism’s rejection of objective truth.¹²⁶ The acceptance of minimalism among young seminarians today will lead to the denigration and death of the OT. Very little of it will be preached from the pulpit or read for personal profit.

History and the Christian’s Faith

So, according to minimalism, the OT is fiction, fabrication, falsehood, and fairytale. It is legend, lie, and lore. But, it is odd to me that some minimalists will say that the OT is not historical, yet that should not keep us from having a “biblical faith” derived from OT writings. They speak of “faith”, “truth,” and, “revelation” like we do, but they mean something completely different by those terms. To them, “faith” is simply the “experience of Israel’s history” (written in the present Persian or Hellenistic period, but made to look like the past); “truth” is not factual or historical, but merely “the ability to express the reality that Israel experienced”, and, “revelation” is nothing more than “the extent that this experience can be communicated”.¹²⁷

For many contemporary scholars, the Bible does not have to be historically accurate to be of value. The Bible, according to them, is a “story,” and as long as you are moved by “the power of the story”,¹²⁸ then you have gained some value from the Bible. These scholars speak of the “power in myth and legend”¹²⁹ and the ability of these literary forms to “convey truth and meaning”, even if the “story” is unhistorical. They even ask what is gained if one were to demonstrate the historical accuracy of a biblical account. They believe the “story” does not depend upon its correspondence with actual historical realities. For them, a “story” can “move us” regardless of whether or not it is based upon actual persons or events. What is important to them is that the “story” captures our “imagination” and “illuminates our contemporary situation.” They say that the “story” being “true to life” is more important than being “accurate”. What is important to them are the traditions received from the Bible “story” not the “past-as-it-actually-was.”¹³⁰

¹²⁴ “A Sectarian Group Called Israel”, 86-88.

¹²⁵ Edwin Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 29.

¹²⁶ For the affect of postmodernism on the practice of writing history, see Tom Dixon’s “Postmodern Method: History” in *The Death of Truth*.

¹²⁷ *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*. Reprint. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002. Pages 328-330.

¹²⁸ *What Future for the “History of Israel?”*, 19.

¹²⁹ Minimalists are in fact creating their own “myth” as they go about seeking to identify “myth” in the OT. They remove all alleged “myth” from the OT and then insert their own “myth” back into the storyline. See Efraín Velázquez II, “The Persian Period and the Origins of Israel: Beyond the ‘Myths’.”

¹³⁰ *The Quest for the Historical Israel*, 119-124.

All this rhetoric is simply scholarly gobbledygook. If minimalists of this sort who claim to be believers¹³¹ want this kind of post-modern “faith”, “truth,” “revelation”, and “story”, that is their choice. But, we will have none of it. We choose to operate in a real world unaffected by post-modern, biblical minimalist scholars. (I hasten to add here that not all biblical “scholars” are liberal.) We will not have a “faith” that is based upon the unhistorical. Minimalism may work in the academic classroom where young, wide-eyed students look to their professors for ever-changing and chic critical theories. But, minimalism will not work where we spend most of our time: in the home, in the local church, in the community.

Try telling people that the Bible is unhistorical and un-factual; people who are hooked on drugs and alcohol, addicted to pornography, quitting school, having children out of wedlock, living with the boyfriend or girlfriend, cheating on their spouse, trans-gendering, marrying someone of the same sex, abandoning their children, having an abortion, living with a dying marriage, beating their spouse, facing divorce, shooting innocent bystanders in a school or church building, fighting cancer or some life-threatening illness, giving up on God; or, people who are on their death-bed. See if that helps them in any way to properly handle the difficult issues that they are facing in life.

On the other hand, the Christian’s faith in, and use of, God’s word can actually help these people with the problems they are facing each day. The Christian’s faith is based, in part, upon historical fact. The record of that historical fact was made by men, including OT writers, who were inspired by God in their speech (2 Peter 1:20) and in their writing (2 Timothy 3:16). God, who is unlying (Titus 1:2), revealed his word to men and inspired them to write the story of how he saves mankind through Jesus Christ. This revelation is set in history and this history is not full of lies, but of truth. It was Jesus who said, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Our belief in the historicity of the OT is founded upon sound reasoning. There is no reason to doubt the historicity of the OT. First, the OT is a document of God’s revelation to mankind (Hebrews 1:1-2). Second, the OT makes no distinction between truth and reality. What was reported in the OT actually happened (Numbers 33:2). Third, the God of the OT is a God who rules and acts in the historical events of mankind (Isaiah 28:21). Fourth, the many authors and scribes of the Bible, both early and late, were literate – capable of reading and writing many different forms of literature (Exodus 24:4; Joshua 24:26; 1 Samuel 10:25; Jeremiah 36:4; Daniel 7:1; etc.). Finally, the large amount of ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeological remains that have been discovered in the past 150 years confirm the historicity of many biblical characters, events, and places.¹³²

Additionally, the Christian’s faith as it relates to the OT is patterned after the faith of Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude, and other New Testament believers. We believe the stories of the OT are historical and true just like these men did. For example, Jesus believed in the historicity of Abraham (John 8:31-59), Paul in the historicity of David (Acts 13:34-36), Peter in the historicity of Noah (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5), James in the historicity of Job (James 5:11), and John in the historicity of Cain and Abel (1 John 3:12). Jude even believed in the historicity of Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Jude 5).¹³³

God has revealed himself in past history.¹³⁴ It is the Christian’s acceptance of that divine revelation and inspiration of scripture that is the crux of the whole matter regarding our topic at hand.

¹³¹ Minimalists like Thomas L. Thompson or George W. Ramsey.

¹³² The same confirmation has been made for many NT characters, events, and places.

¹³³ See Appendix 3 at the end of this lecture for more examples of this kind. This approach to OT history is found in the well-known work of John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*.

¹³⁴ See the articles by Werner E. Lemke, Richard Batey, and Paul L. Watson (“Old Testament Theology”).

Unlike us, minimalist scholars are often atheistic and anti-supernatural, while at the same time teaching in Biblical Studies departments in various universities around the world. Amazing! They do not believe in God, the miraculous, inspiration, etc., so they “deconstruct” the Bible for their students. They gut the Bible of all that is God, the miraculous, and the historical. What is left is a Bible that is merely an interesting, maybe even “inspiring”, piece of literature for today. In this way, the Bible is on par with other popular religious texts like the Muslim Quran, the Hindu Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, the Buddhist Sutras, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Chinese Tao Te Ching, the American Book of Mormon, etc. Here is an example from Thompson of the anti-supernaturalism found among some minimalists:

“Nevertheless, the present stage of research into the origin traditions of Israel has only begun to distinguish between the real and the imagined. Even the little we can already do is - with few exceptions - negative: a process of discounting what is obviously unhistorical, the maraculous [sic], the most apparent motifs of literary origin and intention, and most of the more complex plot developments, the clearly editorial and derivative passages, and others.”¹³⁵

We will never see eye-to-eye with the contemporary minimalist because we both proceed to understand the OT from two different starting points. We start with God, miracles, and the divine inspiration of scripture and many of them do not. The late Phil Roberts, writing back in 1978 about modernism’s assault on the history of Israel, made this fine point:

“...we must realize that the real gulf between us and modernism in the study of Biblical history is neither a matter of scholarship nor of argumentation. They work with the same data we do. They know it just as well as we do, and often better. It is naive for us to think we can overthrow them by argumentation from that data, because their position was not arrived at by argumentation from that data to begin with. Rather, their reconstructions are the interpretation of the data which is forced upon them by their anti-supernatural presuppositions and methodology. And until that philosophical impass [sic] is solved, no real communication with modernism is possible.”¹³⁶

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, Paul was addressing the historical event of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and their wilderness wandering, when he wrote the following: “Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). The minimalist scholar would say, “These things did not happen.” The Apostle Paul wrote: “these things happened”. Who will you believe the minimalist or the Apostle Paul? Christians can indeed gain admonition from these, and many other OT events, because “these things happened”.

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¹³⁵ “History and Tradition”, 59.

¹³⁶ “Modernism’s Assault on the History of Israel,” 666.

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Appendix 1
(*Recommended Reading List*)

When preaching, teaching classes, or writing about OT matters, be mindful of the contemporary maximalist – minimalist debate. When using study resources outside the Bible, include those from authors who interact with minimalist issues and arguments and who are also committed to a maximalist approach to Bible. I recommend that you look for current resources with a publication date from the late 1990's to the present. Stay current, especially in the area of archaeology. With that in mind, I would recommend the following:

History of Israel

1. *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars*. Revised Edition. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Paul Wegner. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016.
2. *A Biblical History of Israel*. Second Edition. Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.
3. *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*. Bill T. Arnold and Richard Hess, Editors. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.
4. *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*. Second Edition. Eugene H. Merrill. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
5. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. K.A. Kitchen. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.

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2. *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology*. Randall Price with H. Wayne House. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
3. *Biblical Archaeology*. Volumes 1 and 2. David E. Graves. Toronto: Electronic Christian Media, 2015, 2017.
4. *The Stones Cry Out: What Archaeology Reveals About the Truth of the Bible*. Randall Price. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1997.

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1. *The IVP Atlas of Bible History*. Paul Lawrence. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.
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1. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, Editors. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012.
2. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, Editors. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.
3. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson, Editors. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005.
4. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, Editors. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003.

Appendix 2

(*Publications by Lawrence J. Mykytiuk*)

Dr. Lawrence J. Mykytiuk has been a Purdue University Libraries Faculty member and History Librarian since 1993 and is currently a tenured Associate Professor of Library Science. In 2014 he received a courtesy appointment as Associate Professor of History, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. He holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Semitic Studies (1998) and an M.A. in Library and Information Studies (1992), both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He also holds an M.T.S. summa cum laude in Theological Studies (1983) from Asian Theological Seminary, Quezon City, Philippines; a B.A. summa cum laude in English (1972) from Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois; and a Diploma in Bible-Theology (1970) from Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois. He reads 12 languages: modern English (mother tongue), French, German, Italian, and Pilipino, plus ancient

Aramaic, Canaanite dialects, Greek, Hebrew, Phoenician, Syriac, and Ugaritic. He has been a member of the Society of Biblical Literature since 1988. This list below was supplied by Dr. Mykytiuk.

A. On the Bible, archaeology, and ancient writings:

1. “New Testament Political Figures Confirmed.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43.5 (September/October 2017): 50–59, 65.
2. “New Testament Political Figures: The Evidence.” A web supplement to “New Testament Political Figures Confirmed.” Bible History Daily, Biblical Archaeology Society, September 7, 2017; <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/new-testament-political-figures-the-evidence/> (with endnotes).
3. “Herod the Great and the Herodian Family Tree.” Excerpted from “New Testament Political Figures Confirmed.” Bible History Daily, Biblical Archaeology Society, September 25, 2017; <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/herod-the-great-herodian-family-tree/>.
4. “Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 41.1 (January/February 2015): 44–51, 76.
5. “Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible. Lawrence Mykytiuk’s feature article from the January/February 2015 issue of BAR with voluminous endnotes.” Bible History Daily, Biblical Archaeology Society, December 8, 2014; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/>.
6. “Archaeology Confirms 3 More Bible People.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43.3 (May/June 2017): 48–52.
7. “Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the [Hebrew] Bible.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40.2 (March/April 2014): 42–50, 68.
8. “53 People in the Bible Confirmed Archaeologically.” A web supplement to “Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible.” Bible History Daily, Biblical Archaeology Society, March 3, 2014, with updates; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/50-people-in-the-bible-confirmed-archaeologically/#note05r>.
9. “Eleven Non-Royal Jeremianic Figures Strongly Identified in Authentic, Contemporaneous – Inscriptions.” In *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical, and Geographical Studies, Volume 32: Joseph Naveh Volume*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016, 57*–64*; http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/164/
10. “Sixteen Strong Identifications of Biblical Persons (Plus Nine Other Identifications) in Authentic Northwest Semitic Inscriptions from before 539 B.C.E.” In *New Inscriptions and Seals Relating to the Biblical World*, 25–57. Edited by Meir Lubetski and Edith Lubetski. Archaeology and Biblical Studies 19. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012; http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_research/150/.
11. “Corrections and Updates to ‘Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.’” *Maarav* 16.1 (2009): 49–132; http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_research/129/.

12. *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.* SBL Academia Biblica 12. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Boston: Brill, 2004.
<https://books.google.com/books?id=CS9DKZgzfDIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=mykytiuk+identifying&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjNxfXDUMPAhXCwVvKkHZPRCGwQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage∓aq=mykytiuk%20identifying&f=false>

B. On scholarly responses to biblical minimalism:

1. “Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008 and Beyond, Part 2.3: Some Commonalities in Approaches to Writing Ancient Israel’s History.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 14.1–2 (2015): 30–48. Author’s accepted manuscript: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/137/. Link to original published article, containing the official version of record: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2015.1035197>.
2. “Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008 and Beyond, Part 2.2: The Literature of Perspective, Critique, and Methodology, Second Half.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 12.3–4 (2013): 114–155. Author’s accepted manuscript: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/58/. Link to original published article, containing the official version of record: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10477845.2013.841475>.
3. “Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008 and Beyond, Part 2.1: The Literature of Perspective, Critique, and Methodology, First Half.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 11.3–4 (2012): 101–137. Author’s accepted manuscript: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs/52/. Link to original published article, containing the official version of record: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10477845.2012.673111?src=recsys#.VCBYcpRdXK0>.
4. “Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008, Part 1: Introducing a Bibliographic Essay in Five Parts.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 9.3–4 (2010): 71–83. Author’s accepted manuscript: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_research/148/. Link to original published article, containing the official version of record: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2010.526920>.

Appendix 3

(*New Testament References to Old Testament History*)

Below is a list of references in the New Testament to Old Testament persons and events.¹³⁷ Clearly, individuals in the first-century, like Jesus, Paul, and others, viewed Old Testament persons and events as real and historical. A brief appraisal of these references follows at the end of this list.

Matthew

1. Matthew’s genealogy from Abraham to Jesus (1:1-17).
2. The angel’s reference to Joseph as son of David (1:20).
3. John the Baptist’s reference to Abraham our father (3:9; Lk. 3:8).

¹³⁷ I did not include all OT passages that are quoted or alluded to in the NT. I focused on references to OT persons and events. For a comprehensive list of NT references to OT passages see the following: *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, Editors. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

4. Jesus' reference to Solomon in all his glory (6:29; Lk. 12:27).
5. Jesus' reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom (8:11).
6. The blind men's reference to Jesus son of David (9:27; 20:30; Mk. 10:47-48; Lk. 18:38-39).
7. Jesus' reference to Sodom and Gomorrah (10:15; 11:23-24; Lk. 10:12).
8. Jesus' reference to Elijah to come (11:14).
9. Jesus' reference to David eating the showbread (12:3-4; Mk. 2:25-26; Lk. 6:3-4).
10. The multitudes' reference to Jesus son of David (12:23).
11. Jesus' reference to Jonah the prophet (12:39-41; Lk. 11:29-30, 31).
12. Jesus' reference to the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon (12:42; Lk. 11:31).
13. The Canaanite woman's reference to Jesus son of David (15:22).
14. Jesus' reference to the sign of Jonah (16:4).
15. The disciples' reference to Elijah, Jeremiah, and the prophets (16:14; Mk. 8:28; Lk. 9:19).
16. The reference to Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration (17:3-4; Mk. 9:4-5; Lk. 9:30, 33).
17. The disciples' reference to the scribes acknowledgment of Elijah (17:10; Mk. 9:11-13).
18. The reference of the Pharisees and Jesus to Moses and the bill of divorcement (19:7-8; Mk. 10:3-5).
19. The reference of the multitude and the children to Jesus son of David (21:9, 15; Mk. 11:10).
20. The Sadducees' reference to Moses' law concerning marrying a brother (22:24; Mk. 12:19; Lk. 20:28).
21. Jesus' reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mt. 22:32; Mk. 12:26; Lk. 20:38).
22. The reference of the Pharisees and Jesus to the Christ being the son of David (22:42-45; Mk. 12:35-37; Lk. 20:41-44).
23. Jesus' reference to the OT prophets from Abel to Zachariah (23:29-35; Lk. 11:51).
24. Jesus' reference to the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel (24:15; Mk. 13:14).
25. Jesus' reference to the flood of Noah (24:37-39; Lk. 17:26-27).
26. The crowd's reference to Elijah coming (27:47, 49; Mk. 15:35-36).

Mark (parallel accounts are listed under Matthew)

1. Jesus' reference to Moses' law concerning the leper (2:44; Lk. 5:14).
2. Jesus' referencing to Moses saying "Honor thy father..." (7:10).

Luke (parallel accounts are listed under Matthew and Mark)

1. The angel's reference to the power of Elijah (1:17).
2. Luke's reference to Joseph of the "house of David" (1:27).
3. The angel's reference to Jesus on the throne of David over the house of Jacob (1:32-33).
4. Mary's reference to Israel, the fathers, and Abraham (1:54-55).
5. Zacharias' reference to David and Abraham (1:69, 73).
6. The angel's reference to Bethlehem as the "city of David" (2:11).
7. Luke's reference to the law of Moses concerning purification (2:23).
8. Luke's genealogy from Joseph back to Adam (3:23-38).
9. Jesus' reference to the work of Elijah and Elisha (4:25-26).
10. Jesus' reference to the woman being a daughter of Abraham (13:16).
11. Jesus' reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (13:28).
12. Jesus' reference to Abraham and Moses (16:22-31).
13. Jesus' reference to Lot and Sodom (17:28-29).
14. Jesus' reference to Zacchaeus being a son of Abraham (19:9).
15. Jesus' reference to Moses and the prophets with the two on the way to Emmaus and later the disciples (24:27, 44).

John

1. John's reference to creation (1:1-3).
2. The Pharisees reference to Elijah (1:25).
3. Jesus' reference to Moses lifting up the serpent (3:14).
4. John's reference to the ground that Jacob gave to Joseph (4:5).
5. The Samaritan woman's reference to her ancestor's worship (4:20).
6. Jesus' reference to Moses' writings as a witness (5:45-47).
7. Jesus' reference to the Israelites eating manna in the wilderness (6:31-32, 48).
8. Jesus' reference to Moses giving the law and circumcision (7:19-23).
9. The multitudes' reference to the Christ being from the seed of David (7:42).
10. The Pharisees' reference to stoning in the Law of Moses (8:5).
11. The reference of the Jews and Jesus to the father Abraham (8:33-41, 52-53, 56-58).
12. The Jews' reference to being a disciple of Moses (9:28-29).

Acts

1. Luke's reference to the patriarch and prophet David spoke (2:29-31).
2. Peter's reference to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:13).
3. Peter's reference to Moses, Samuel, and Abraham (3:22-25).
4. Stephen's reference to historical persons and events from Abraham to Solomon (7:2-50).
5. Paul's reference to historical persons and events from Israel's exodus to David (13:17-23).
6. Paul's reference to Israel being of the stock of Abraham (13:26).
7. Paul's reference to the God of our fathers (24:14).

Romans

1. Abraham's belief reckoned for righteousness (4:1-23).
2. Adam's sin and its consequence (5:12-21).
3. The children of promise: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Esau (9:6-13).
4. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart (9:14-18).
5. Isaiah's reference to the remnant of Israel (9:27).
6. Mention of Abraham, Benjamin, Elijah, and David (11:1-10).

1 Corinthians

1. Israel's exodus from Egypt and wandering in the wilderness (10:1-11).
2. The creation of the first man and woman (11:8-9).

2 Corinthians

1. Moses' face shining upon receiving the law at Sinai (3:7, 13).

Galatians

1. Abraham's belief and God's blessing (3:6-14).
2. The law that was given after Abraham's blessing (3:17-18).
3. The children of Abraham by Sarah (Isaac) and Hagar (4:21-31).

Philippians

1. The stock of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin (3:5).

1 Timothy

1. Adam was formed first and Eve's transgression (2:13-14).

2 Timothy 3:8

1. Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses (3:8).

Hebrews

1. God speaking through the OT prophets and Jesus creating the world (1:1-2).
2. The seed of Abraham (2:16).
3. Moses, the exodus, and the wilderness wanderings (3:2-6; 3:16 - 4:11)
4. Joshua leading the Israelites into Canaan (4:8)
5. The high priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek (5:1-6, 10).
6. God's promise to Abraham (6:13).
7. Melchizedek as king and priest (7:1-10).
8. The change in the OT priesthood (7:11 – 8:5).
9. The change in the Old Law (8:6-13).
10. The items and service of the tabernacle (9:1-10).
11. The OT sacrifices (9:11 – 10:18).
12. Punishment under the Law of Moses (10:28).
13. OT characters of faith from Abel to David (11:4-40).
14. Esau sold his birthright (12:16-17).
15. The quaking of Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law (12:18-21).

James

1. Abraham and Rahab were justified by works (2:21-25).
2. The patience of the OT prophets and of Job (5:10-11).
3. The fervent prayer of Elijah (5:17).

1 Peter

1. The OT prophets (1:10).
2. Sarah obeyed Abraham calling him lord (3:6).
3. Noah's ark (3:20).

2 Peter

1. The flood of Noah's day (2:5).
2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6-7).
3. Balaam and his donkey (2:15-16).
4. The creation and the flood (3:5-6).

1 John

1. Cain killed Abel (3:12).

Jude

1. Israel's exodus from Egypt (verse 4).
2. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 7).
3. The body of Moses (verse 9).
4. The way of Cain, the error of Balaam, and the gainsaying of Korah (verse 11).
5. The prophecy of Enoch the seventh from Adam (verse 14).

Revelation

1. The teaching of Baalam (2:14).
2. The tribe of Judah and the root of David (5:5).
3. The children/tribes of Israel (7:4-8).
4. Gog and Magog (20:8).
5. The twelve tribes of Israel (21:12).
6. The root and offspring of David (22:16).

An Appraisal

What can be said about these references in defense of Old Testament historicity? Six points come to mind:

First, there are many different NT individuals who refer to OT historical matters, not just one or two. The more who refer to OT historical matters (especially the same story), the more credible their testimony.

Second, individuals are often making an argument when they reference the OT historical persons and events. Their argument means nothing without the OT references being historical, true, and factual. Using unhistorical persons and events from the past to make a case in the present would be a terrible way to debate. Surely, Paul, for example, learned at the feet of Gamaliel better than to do this.

Third, sometimes the audience is drawn into the historical reference and they too admit the historicity of the OT reference (see the Jews concerning Abraham in John 8:37-39). The use of OT historicity, then, is not limited to Jesus and his followers, but also to Jesus' enemies or to the crowds in general.

Fourth, in some cases, there are large groups of Jews like in Acts 7 and 13 who could easily hear these OT references and discredit them as untrue, but they did not do that.

Fifth, when there is a longer recounting of historical matters like in the speeches of Acts 7 and 13, what part of the speech is historically accurate? All of it, part of it, or none of it? In these two examples, the ancient past (the patriarchs) is just as historical as the recent past (Jesus' rejection in Jerusalem). If not, why not? Will we "deconstruct" these NT speeches to determine what part of the speech is historical and what part is not? Will we now say, like some scholars, that Jesus is unhistorical too?

Sixth, NT writers documented NT individuals referring to OT historical persons and events. If these OT persons and events did not exist, as minimalists argue, then what you have is this: 1) an untrue person or event is purposely made-up by an OT author, 2) the OT made-up person/event is then referenced knowingly or unknowingly by a NT individual, 3) this is then recorded knowingly or unknowingly by a NT author which makes the whole matter stem from incredible ignorance or incredible deception, and, 4) to top it off, all of these OT persons/events are wrongly believed for 2000 years by

thousands of Jews and Christians! I think not. Given the choice between the minimalist's explanation of OT (made-up) "history" and the NT use of OT history, I choose the NT.