University of Pennsylvania

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Three Biblical Beginnings

Michael Carasik, University of Pennsylvania

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36. Here the notion of authentic beginning is transmitted through the channel of the text as much more than the text itself. I will speak about this in my commentary below.

37. I have been unable to locate the source for this statement, although in the text it appears to be cited from a rabbinic text.

38. This refers to the festival of Sukkoth as the beginning of calculating sines for the coming year. See Lestraise Raba 207, p. 704-706, "On the eve of Rosh Ha-Shana, the great ones of the generation fast and God forgives one third of their sins. From Rosh Ha-Shana to Yom Ha-Kippurim (the Day of Atonement) certain elite individuals fast and God forgives another third of their sins. On Yom Ha-Kippurim all men, women, children, and God says to Israel, "Whatever happened, happened!" From that point on, a new calculation begins. R. Aba disagrees... From Yom Ha-Kippurim until the Festival (of Sukkoth) Israel is busy with mitzvot. This one in preparing his Sukkah, the one bit Lulav. On the first day of the Festival, all Israel stand before God, waving their Lulav and Etrog, prating God’s name. Then God says, "Whatever happened, happened!" From that point on a new calculation begins. Therefore Moses warned Israel, And you should take for yourselves on the first day."

39. In true pietistic style, R. Kedushaum Kalman returns to the initial mishnah now reading it through his discussion of true and false beginning.

40. This refers to God’s revelation at Sinai and its prophetic interpretation in the verse, I am God, the first (Isaiah 41:4).

41. I have taken considerable license here in the translation. R. Kedushaum Kalman merely states "Eau Ha-Rishon" which appears to play on Adam Ha-Rishon, who is the carrier of a true beginning. Because Eau did not do the necessary work to correct himself and to repent for his sins, he did not achieve any internal innovation (he did not change himself). Therefore, his beginning is deceptive in that it is wholly external and does not indicate any authentic force, nor embody any "new light."

42. R. Kedushaum Kalman’s comment seems to point both to the danger of Israel becoming absorbed in the world, the remnant of Eau, as well as to false prophecy, which the Torah explicitly states exists to "test Israel." See Deuteronomy 13:2-13.

43. Our text does not mention these categories. I have constructed them to attempt to understand the theoretical underpinnings of this bardic hymn.

44. On this see Nehemias Polin, The Holy Five, pp. 26, 27.

45. This resembles R. Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman, the Gaon of Vilna’s position on individuality. The Gaon was adamant about the necessity for each individual to be a sovereign thinker in his/her entirety of Torah. On this, see Hillel ben Simon, The Personality of the G.I.A. and His Historical Influence (Hebrew), Zion (1960): 55, 56.

46. See Hovet Ha-Talmidim, p. 8, 9, "The manner in which to train our generation is the way of Hazardsim, authentic (emeth), heartfelt (lozim), and inspirational (shaghil)."

CHAPTER 1

Three Biblical Beginnings

Michael Carasik

History, like life, is "just one damned thing after another." To begin telling a story with any particular damned thing is, by the very chance, inevitably to mark that thing as a starting point, just as an event can be marked visually as an inauguration. Finally, the beginning is an apparently arbitrary point: that place in the seamless web of events where the author chooses to begin his narrative. Arbitrary as this choice may be, however, it is not just a selection, but a shaping. "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is externally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily appear to do so."

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the process of literary shaping as it took place in the Bible, by a discussion of three biblical beginnings—a beginning at the beginning, a beginning in the middle, and a beginning at the end.

Genesis I

Let us turn first to the famous beginning that is at the beginning—that is, "In the beginning." It might seem that the most obvious method for telling a story is to follow the immortal advice the King of Hearts gave to the White Rabbit: "Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop." Given this guideline, to begin the Bible with the creation of the universe would seem the most apropos of all beginnings. As Aristotle explained, A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something else naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the
contrast is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by
causal necessity or in a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that
which follows something as some other thing follows it. Place that are
well planned, therefore, are such as do not begin or end as hap hazard, but con-
form to the types just described.\footnote{14}

Such a beginning is the necessary starting point for the complete story
of our world; but most stories are of more limited scope than this. Consider the
absurdity of following Aristotle's advice in the following situation:

A: How did you come to be at the scene of the accident?

B: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

True, every story that does not begin with this kind of ultimate beginning
is in some sense an incomplete story, a mere episode. Thus films, plays, and
novels have a “back story,” an untold story that explains the existence of the
situation and the circumstances at the beginning of the story that is actually
told. Yet to begin most stories with the creation of the world would be to in-
troduce an element of absurdity into the tale. Washington Irving exploited ex-
actly this effect, for comical purposes, in his A History of New York, from the
Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty. After a chapter-long
description of the earth as “a huge . . . mass, floating in the vast ethereal ocean
of infinite space,” he begins the second chapter of his history this way:

Having thus briefly introduced my reader to the world, and given him
some idea of its form and situation, he will naturally be curious to know
from whence it came, and how it was created. And, indeed, the clearing up
of these points is absolutely essential to my history, inasmuch as if this
world had not been formed, it is more than probable that this renowned
land, on which is situated the city of New York, would never have had an
existence. The regular course of my history, therefore, requires that I should
proceed to notice the cosmogony or formation of this our globe.\footnote{15}

That the Bible should begin \textit{ab initio}, then, rather than accepting Horace's
advice to plunge \textit{in medias res}, is (as noted long ago by Jewish exegesis) not
to be taken for granted.

Yet even Gen 1:1, correctly understood, may not begin completely \textit{ab initio}
(a distinction that belongs, almost literally, only to \textit{Tristram Shandy}). It is cu-
rious that the most famous beginning in world literature is one whose mean-
ing is not entirely certain. The grammatical obscurity of the phrase \textit{berechit
bara} leaves open the question of whether, as is accepted by many modern
commentators, the traditional English rendering of the King James Version,
“\textit{In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth},” is not to be sup-
planted by an \textit{in medias res} beginning: “When God began to create heaven
and earth—”.\footnote{16}

Naturally, the philosophical and theological ramifications of this distinc-
tion are immense. Yet for a literary point of view the difference between the
two is fairly subtle. The \textit{ab initio} opening begins with the ultimate beginning of
the universe, but at least the \textit{in medias res} opening begins with the first thing
that can be said to have actually happened. Even this distinction looms larger,
however, through the lens of literary and cultural history. Mimicking the de-
bate over whether human beings are qualitatively or merely quantitatively dif-
ferent from other animals, the understanding of \textit{berechit bara} places an
interpreter on one side or the other of the debate about whether Israel's con-
tribution to the world represents a development of the ancient Near Eastern
civilization in which it arose, or a radical break with that tradition. From this
perspective, the translation that sounds contemporary to the ears of an Eng-
lish reader, “\textit{When God began to create},” is the “old” kind of beginning, like
that found in the famous Babylonian epic of creation called (from its first
words) the Enuma Elish. The traditional English of the King James Bible, “In
the beginning,” would actually mark a radically new kind of cosmological be-
inning in the ancient Near Eastern context.\footnote{17}

In a larger sense, of course, even “\textit{In the beginning, God created the
heaven and the earth}” is an \textit{in medias res} opening, for beginning always im-
plicates the existence of something before. A closed curve, like a circle, has no
beginning, but a line, like anything else that starts, has to start somewhere.
As the woman who believed that the world rests on the back of a giant turtle
explained when asked what the turtle was standing on, “\textit{It turtles all the way
down}.” The mere fact that a narrative must begin puts it at odds with the in-
finite regression that seems to be built into the nature of time. Even the sto-
ryteller who wants to begin \textit{ab initio} can do no better than pick a particular
solid-looking turtle to start with. From this perspective—if it is not un-
representative to continue the metaphor for one more moment—the author of Gen
1:1 made a conscious decision to begin with the top turtle in the stack.

The sages anticipated this conclusion in Gen. R. 1:10, when they inter-
preted the three-sided shape of the \textit{het} that begins the Bible as a barrier block-
king access to anything that happened “before” the beginning—a barrier, it
must be said, which they themselves sometimes successfully evaded. The
comparative material shows us clearly that placing the barrier at that particu-
lar point in the story was arbitrary, and therefore a deliberate choice to give
the narrative a particular shape. The Enuma Elish picks up the thread some-
what earlier in the story:
When skies above were not yet named
Nor earth below pronounced by name,
Asu, the first one, their begetter
And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,
Had mixed their waters together,
But had not formed the land above
When yet no gods were manifest.
Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,
Then gods were born within them.

Enume Elish 1:1–5

Here, as in Genesis, the story opens on a scene of watery chaos, the blyle of the philosophers. Yet the first thing that happens is not the creation of heaven and earth—that will have to wait five hundred lines or so—but that of the gods themselves. Interestingly, the first mention of creation here (line 9) is in the passive mood. Unlike Genesis 1, where the story is one of active creation by a God who is on stage when the curtain goes up, the Enuma Elish begins not with the first action of the gods, but with their generation. They arise...
This writing was copied out anew by his majesty in the House of his father Pash-South-of-his-Wall, for his majesty found it to be a work of the ancestor which was worn-eaten, so that it could not be understood from beginning to end. His majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last.12

One source of authority for this story is given, and a second is implied. First, the story has passed down from the ancients, a tradition so old (and, thus, accepted for so long) that the physical manuscript that preserves it has seriously deteriorated. Second, the text is supposed/recreated by the King of Egypt, who, as Horus, is himself a manifestation of Ptah, the “self-begotten.”13 My point is not that this is so convincing that we, too, must accept the truth of the Memphite Theology, but that the author of this text began it in a way calculated to lend the necessary authority to it.14 Genesis I has no such introduction.

We may cite one more example, where the very same story that begins the Bible is retold, but not before the following lines of introduction:

Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With line of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heavenly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of chaos; or if from Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Sion’s brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song.

Milton, Paradise Lost, I. 1–13

Moses (“that shepherd who first taught the chosen seed”) was inspired by the Muse!

Regina Schwartz observes of Milton’s work in Paradise Lost.

[He is] not certain that beginnings are accessible, and, if they are, he is not sure that they can be expressed guilelessly. His creation stories are always mediated—by accounts and accounts of accounts—by Raphael, by Uriel, by angels, hymns, by the reconstructions of memory, and by language, so that each doubt on the ability of language to convey origins at all.15

That comes through very strikingly here in the first few lines of the poem, where it is not clear whether the Muse’s aid came to Moses from Sinai or from “Oreb” (Horeb, not Sinai, is the name of the site of revelation in Deuteronomy), and whether Milton will come to Milton from there or from Mount Zion in Jerusalem and “Sion’s brook that flowed / Fast by the oracle of God.” This is not the only confusion that attends the beginning of the poem, for in line 17 Milton invokes a voice which may or may not be that of the Muse of line 7:

And chaft Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples th’ upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou knowest; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like saic brooding on the vast abyss
And madist it pregnant. . .

This is very far from the “natural” beginning of the Bible’s Genesis. As if to emphasize the point, Moses “In the beginning” does not find its way into Paradise Lost until line 10, and the “action” of Milton’s own telling does not start until line 34, when, after being asked in line 28 to “say first what cause” moved Adam and Eve to disobey God, the Muse or Spirit at last begins to speak: “Th’ infernal Serpent.”

We have already seen biblical attribution of one’s words to a heavenly source, in the introductions to prophecy; but a beginning like this one, which invokes self-conscious reference to the writer’s own words, is equally biblical:

Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;
Let the earth hear the words I utter;
May my discourse come down as the rain,
My speech distill as the dew,
Like showers on young growth,
Like droplets on the grass.

My heart is stive with gracious words;
I speak my poem to a king;
My tongue is the pen of an expert scribe.

(Deut 32:1–2)

(Prov 45:2)
Gen 1:1, by contrast, is extremely sparse. It may be that the lack of an
in-positive reference is a purposeful way of pre-stalling a question about
authenticity, which had no good answer. Ultimately, to ask how someone dared
write the words benehit bara touches upon the questions of the invention
of creative writing and the role of the imagination in religion, both questions too
vast to be explored here. We may still ask, however, why our author began his
story where he did, with the creation of the universe.

Washington Irving's season, at least, played no role. There is comedy in the
Bible, but not here. Yet some of the other authors of Irving's era, to whom
he was perhaps responding, may provide some clue. Terence Martin's Pardoles
of Fable, 2nd ed. (1784), describes the fascination with beginnings expressed by American
writers in the early years of the country's independence. That Jeremy Belknap,
in his History of New-Hampshire (1784), writes that Americans are fortunate
in being able to be "precisely the beginning of this great American
tapestry," the two histories of these sorts of origins are "disguised by fiction and
romance" or cloaked in "impenetrable obscurity." John Daly Burt, in The
History of Virginia, from Its First Settlement to the Present Day (1804), "speculates
at some length on the universal desire to know one's origins" and to believe
them "illustrious, or at least respectable." Even the notion that God was in-
volved in the nation's beginning finds its place in the title of Benjamin Trumbull's
A General History of the United States of America: Sketches of the Divine
Agency in Their Settlement, Growth, and Progression (1810). The Israelites'
consciousness of their people as a new creation may have inspired them, too,
to look deeper into the past for their origins.

In the end, the last word on the understanding of why the Bible begins as it
does may belong to Rashi's R. Isaac, after all:

Why did he begin with benehit? "He told people the power of his
deeds, to give them the nations' inheritance" (Ps 111:6). For if the nations
- at the world should say to Israel, 'You are thieves, for you conquered
the lands of the seven nations," they would reply to them, 'The whole world
belongs to the blessed be He. He created it and gave it to
whomever He thought best. According to His will He gave it to them and
according to His will He took it from them and gave it to us.'

If, as Goethel remarked, the Bible is the story of how the people of Israel
won the land of Israel,10 then the notion of a law-giving God who would
turn out to be the God of the people of Israel would be a very powerful one.
Indeed, if an American historian could conceive of American history as being
under the control of divine agency, why could an Israeli writer not do the
same? We know that such a view was held by the Deuteronomic historian,
whom we are about to speak; it is not too much to assume the existence of
an author who wished to trace Israel's history back into the pre-Israelite
past—first ten generations from Abraham to Noah, and then ten more antediluvian
generations from Noah to the first human pair (Gen 1:27). Here, as in
Psalm 114, the schema of history links up to the schema of creation. For
such an author, in all innocence, benehit bara may have been a "natural"
beginning after all.

1 Samuel

The second of our three beginnings—the beginning in the middle—is the begin-
ning of the book of 1 Samuel, a choice that requires a bit of explanation.
The physical outer of a bound, one-volume Hebrew Bible is more likely to
be close to the beginning of the book of Isaiah, not that of 1 Samuel. In one
sense, Isaiah also lies in the conceptual center of the Bible, equidistant from
the Torah and the Writings, and marking, in the person of the prophet him-
self, even straddling, the boundary between the Former and the Latter
Prophets. (The meaning of the acronym notwithstanding, the Tanakh is re-
ally composed of four, not three, equal-sized and conceptually distinct parts.)
Moreover, the beginning of Isaiah has long been the subject of discussion.
The fact that Isaiah call to prophecy comes not in chapter one of the book but
in chapter six is unique to the prophetic books.

Indeed, where in the hands of another author delaying the apparent be-
ginning of the book might be a matter of careful structural design, there
is no apparent narrative structure in the book of Isaiah. There is first, middle,
and last words, but no beginning, middle, and end—none of the literary sca-
olding that might have given the book the shape of a story. The fact that, like
so many prophetic works, the book begins with condemnation and ends with
consolation has implications for the history of the reduction of the book and
of the Bible as a whole, but this is not really enough to provide a sense of plot.
The beginning of the words of Second Isaiah, the anonymous prophet of the
return from exile in Babylonia, is not even marked by an incipit; rather, in the
first verse of chapter 40, a new voice simply begins to speak, again preceding
the actual summons to prophecy in 466.

Perhaps most significant for the present discussion is the lack of promi-
nance given to Isaiah's role is the failure of the siege of Jerusalem by
Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. (Isaiah 36–37). This event—arguably the most
important in Jewish history other than the destruction of the two Temples—
might have given shape to the book of Isaiah just as Wallace Stevens' jar upon
a hill in Tennessee "made the slovenly wilderness surround that hill." Instead, it is told in what is essentially an appendix to the book of First Isaiah, taken from 2 Kings 18:19-20. Second Isaiah, to be sure, locates Israelite history in the between the two parallel events of the exodus from Egypt and the return from exile in Babylonia. But the details of history—the story line connecting these two events—are of no concern to him.

It is quite otherwise with the book of 1 Samuel, for with Samuel, of course, we enter the realm of the Deuteronomistic History. In extent, this corpus makes up the section of the Bible called the Former Prophets, the books of Joshua through Kings. Some of the ways in which this work structures the facts of Israelite history into a story are evident to even the most casual reader of the Bible: the frequent periodization of the era of the judges into chunks of twenty (e.g., Jud 4:31), forty (e.g., Jud 3:11), or eighty (Jud 3:30) years; or the formulaic recitation of the basic facts and Deuteronomistic evaluation of each reign in the contrapuntal chronology of the books of the prophets (e.g., 2 Kgs 18:1-3; "In the third year of King Hoshoea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah became king. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years; his mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. He did what was pleasing to the LORD, just as his father David had done."). Yet the Deuteronomistic historian has shaped the narrative of the Israelite past in larger ways as well.

In the Deuteronomistic schema, the books of Samuel, and especially 1 Samuel, describe the transition between the period of the judges and that of the kings. When the book of Kings begins, David is on the throne and ready, for the first time in Israelite history, to chart the dynastically down to his son after him. By contrast, Judges ends with a clear statement of anarchy: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased" (Jud 21:25). Samuel, then, is the Deuteronomistic narrative of the transition from the condition of there being no king to the condition of there being a king. Gen 36:31, "These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites," shows that kingship was widely regarded as an innovation in Israel's history.

It is frequently remarked that the material of Judges is arranged to show Israel gradually descending further and further into the chaos that made kingship necessary (or at least inevitable). It is less often remarked, though, that the very periodization of Israelite history into eras of judges and kings—a periodization still followed in political histories of ancient Israel—is a construct of the narrative of the Deuteronomistic History, and not the only possible way of looking at the Israelite past. It was, after all, not David or Saul who was the first king of Israel, but Gideon’s by-blows, Abimelech. He was proclaimed king at Shechem (Jud 9:6); just as Solomon's son Rehoboam would later attempt to be (1 Kgs 12:1). That Abimelech’s rule was on a national, not just a local, scale is indicated by Jud 9:22, "Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years."

There are even indications that Abimelech’s rule was the result of a dynastic struggle, like Solomon’s. In Jud 9:2 he asks the citizens of Shechem, "Which do you think better—that 70 men should rule you, all the sons of Jerubbaal, or that a single man should rule you?" Jud 8:18 further hints that even Gideon/Jerubbaal was already recognized as a king. It is probable that, like the rulers of Canaanite city-states in Genesis 14 and in the Amarna letters, other petty rulers in the groups that would one day comprise Israel also called themselves by the name "king." But the Deuteronomistic History was determined to present kingship as a new thing in Israel.

Yet Saul's kingship, shorty to be taken from him and transferred permanently to David and his descendants, was not merely a new beginning in Israelite political history. In its biblical literary context, coming as it does halfway through the Deuteronomistic History, it is very much what we have called it, a beginning in the middle. We have already seen that the book of Judges was literally arranged (and chronologically rearranged when necessary) to paint Israelite history as a descent into anarchy, summed up in the book's final verse by the words "In those days there was no king in Israel—"a statement that, in context, cries out for a sequel. The sequel, of course, is provided by 1 Samuel.

Anachronically, the continuity of 1 Samuel with the period of the Judges that preceded it is emphasized by a break in the literary pattern. Deuteronomistic ends with the death of Moses, and the immediately following book of Joshua begins with the words wa-yehi acharei mat momeh. Joshua ends with Joshua's death and the immediately following book of Judges begins with the words wa-yehi acharei mat yehoshua. 1 Samuel ends with the death of Saul, and 2 Samuel begins with the words wa-yehi acharei mat shaul. Admittedly the division of Samuel into two books was not part of its composition. Nonetheless, the composition with Josh 1:1 and Jud 1:1 shows 2 Sam 1:1 to be an original structuring device of the Deuteronomistic History, a device deliberately not used in 1 Sam 1:1. For 1 Sam 1:1 ("There once was a man . . .") does not sound like the beginning of a book; it sounds like the beginning of a story.

This again becomes clear by comparison with other texts within the Deuteronomistic History. The parallel to the beginning of the story of Samson in Judges 13 is particularly clear. Both stories begin with the words "There once was a certain man from . . . whose name was . . ." (1 Sam 1:1; Jud 13:25). The plots of both stories begin with a barren woman who is promised
a child. Moreover, in both cases the promised son is not to be of the ordinary run of men, but dedicated in some fashion to God—Samaran as a nazir from birth, avoiding alcohol and impure foods; Samuel, as his mother Hannah’s initiative, to be given to the LORD for life (once weaned). Of both it is said—in Samuel’s case by an angel’s command, in Samuel’s by his mother’s promise—‘No razor shall touch his head’ (Jud 13:5; 1 Sam 1:11).22 Most significantly, both of these holy children will grow up to be the leader of Israel (Jud 16:31, 1 Sam 12:2). Yet here the similarities end. Samuel’s story is just that: an episode in the book of Judges. Samuel’s puts him in place to play a key role in the transition to monarchy.

There is another story in the material that concerns us that begins with a similar phrase: “There once was a man from Benjamin whose name was Kish” (1 Sam 9:1).23 Again, the comparison is more than stylistic. It is Saul who, in this reading of Israelite history, will become the first king. Yet he makes a relatively late and inglorious entry into a story that might logically have begun with him—as, in another telling, it no doubt once did. This earlier telling still leaves its trace in the declaration of Saul’s superior qualities (NIV, “He was an excellent young man [habach va-teo]; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he”) and his kingly stature (“taller from the shoulders up than all the rest of the people”; both 1 Sam 9:2). Yet despite this praise, the story that now introduces him to the page of history frames him as small, lost, and buffeted by the winds of chance. When we first meet him, he is sent looking for his father’s lost asses, a humble enough task. They are ultimately found, but not by Saul, presaging the lack of success and inability to complete a task—which, in the eyes of the Deuteronomistic historian—will characterize Saul’s life. It is Saul’s return, not he, who has some plan (1 Sam 9:6) and even has control of their money (v. 8); and of course it is Samuel who, already the day before, has been not only warned by the LORD of Saul’s arrival, but instructed to anoint him as ruler of Israel.

This is all the more curious because the actual beginning of Samuel, the beginning of the story of Samuel himself, has Saul’s name written all over it. I mean this, of course, in the most literal possible way. The root šl’t, “to anoint” (in a variety of senses), appears too frequently in this story to be coincidental. It is found nine times, all in connection with the child whose birth is the focus of the chapter. In 1 Sam 1:17, after realizing that Hannah was not drunk but praying from the depths of her heart for a child, Eli the priest tells her, “Go in peace. May the God of Israel grant the request [shbeletab] that you have made [asher shalat] of him.” Eli’s statement is recalled when, in v. 27, Hannah brings the child to Shiloh, “This is the boy I prayed for, and the LORD granted the request [shbeletab] which I made [asher shalat] of him,” and again in 2:20 when Eli blesses Elkanah and Hannah, wishing her children of her own, saying to Elkanah, “May the LORD grant you offspring from this woman in place of the loan [the-sheled] which she made [asher shalat] to the LORD.” The child’s very naming (in 1:20) highlights the discrepancy: ‘She named him Samuel, for I requested him [shbeletab] from the LORD.’ TFS’s explains this name as connected with “shaal nel” asked of God,” but the use of the word “LORD” rather than “God” in the etymology seems, in context, to deliberately emphasize the inappropriateness of the link with Samuel and, as a consequence, the true connection with Saul.24 Finally, as if this were not enough, the chapter ends by Hannah’s telling Eli about her son, “I hereby lend him [shbeletab] to the LORD... He is lent [the-shaled] to the LORD.” It is impossible to read not the words šelah šeled as also meaning what they say in plain Hebrew: “He is Saul.”

Two points emerge from this echoing of Saul’s name throughout the birth narrative of Samuel. The first is that, in an earlier version of the story than the one we have, it was most likely Saul, not Samuel, who was compared to Samuel. We have already noted that Saul, too, is introduced into the story with a notice about his father (1 Sam 9:1) like those given to the fathers of Samuel (1 Sam 1:1) and Samuel (Jud 13:2). It is Saul, not Samuel (a mere bystander in 1 Sam 13), who leads Israel against the Philistines, Samuel’s enemies. Moreover, it is Saul of whom we read three times “the spirit of God rushed upon him” (1 Sam 10:16, 11:6, and, slightly variant and to different effect, 18:10), just as we do of Samuel (Jud 14:6, 14:19, and 15:14). The only similar phrase anywhere else in the Bible is used, in our book, of David when he is anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13). It is worth noting that the notion of Saul as Samuel has been completely reintegrated into the larger story. In 1 Sam 11:6, the “spirit” that possesses Saul turns him into a benerker, as Samuel’s did to him, but elsewhere it refers to something less like the rage of a fighter and more like mental illness. Note, too, that everywhere else the phrase is used, even in 1 Sam 10:6, where Samuel tells Saul what will happen to him, it is “the spirit of the LORD.” But when this spirit actually comes upon Saul it is always a “divine spirit” [nachelah], not specifically that of the Lord. The barrier between Saul and the Lord, in contrast to the Lord’s closeness to David, is very apparent.25

The fact that an apparently original story likening Saul to Samuel has not been eliminated, but rather woven into a larger literary scheme, brings us to our second point about the reverberation of Saul’s name in the birth narrative of Samuel. Again, this is not the work of a haphazard redactor who did not understand the point of the repetition of the root šl’t; if anything, we must suspect our redactor of laying it on even thicker than the original story had done.
The deliberate overlay of Samuel and Saul achieves a number of different purposes. First, it lessens the reader's knowledge that this is, indeed, the part of the history in which Saul's story will be told, but it eliminates the possibility of framing that history in such a way that Saul himself will be, as he might well have been, the hero of it. Long before he appears on the scene in 1 Samuel 9, Saul already has been given the same now-year-see-him-now-you-don't quality that belongs to his kingship as seen by the Deuteronomistic historian of the Israelite monarchy. The usurpation of the story of Saul's miraculous birth by Samuel fore shadows the usurpation of his throne by David.

Second, Samuel too, from his very birth, is haunted by the ghostly presence of Saul. True, despite the promise of an eternal dynasty to Eli (1 Sam 2:30), Samuel will supplant his sons in the Israelite leadership. But Samuel's own sons will prove no more wholesome than Eli's (compare 1 Sam 2:12–17 with 8:1–5, Samuel's attempt to make his sons judges, immediately followed by the people's demand for a king who will turn out to be Saul). Saul's son Jonathan will in turn be displaced, not, to be sure, because of his own unworthiness, but because the promise of an eternal dynasty will at last devolve upon David. It is the establishment of David's descendents on his throne in perpetuity that is the raison d'être of the Deuteronomistic History.

Finally, the beginning of 1 Samuel is not merely the beginning of the story of Samuel himself. It is the start of the story that tells of the beginning of the Israelite monarchy. The literary positioning of Samuel in uneasy balance between Samson and Saul matches the historiographer's positioning of him in uneasy balance between the era of the judges and that of the kings. In the view of Deuteronomy, from which the Deuteronomistic History drew its inspiration, the ideal leader of Israel is Moses—a prophet and a judge, not a king. Yet when the Deuteronomistic-historian wrote, the knapship of which Deuteronomy and Samuel were so suspicious (Deuteronomy 17, 1 Samuel 8, 10, 12) was an established fact. What's more, David was both the founder of the dynasty and possessor of a divine promise that his descendants would sit on the throne forever. How to bridge this gap between the oral and the written was the essential problem of the Deuteronomistic History. 1 Samuel 1 represents a key point in the solution to that problem. Monarchy was indeed, according to this theology, a new thing in Israel, but it was not an utterly new beginning. Rather, like the story of Samuel, it was a beginning in the middle.

2 Chronicles 36

We come at last to the beginning that is at the end; that is, to 2 Chr 36:22–23, the last two verses in the Hebrew Bible. I emphasize "Hebrew" Bible here because these verses are in the middle of the Christian Old Testament, not at its end. Indeed, even within the Masoretic tradition, Chronicles was sometimes placed at the beginning, not the end, of the Writings. Nonetheless, in the dominant tradition of the Hebrew Bible, these verses constitute its ending, and that is how we will discuss them.

It may seem strange to call an ending a beginning (though biblical scholars have made stronger claims), but in this case, it is strictly accurate: The end of the book of Chronicles is the same as the beginning of the book of Ezra.

2 And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, according to the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, and he sent him a letter through all the kingdoms he ruled, ordering him to appoint a wise man and a discreet male to be in charge of Judah and Jerusalem. So the exiles were appointed a prince, a wise man, and a discreet male. Then he appointed Sherezer, Ramah, and Adaiah from Judah; and Jeremiaiah, Pashhur, and Zachariah from Benjamin; and Zedekiah and Maaseiah from Ephraim; and Hananiah, Gershom, and Shelemiah from Benjamin; and Joshua, Hananiah, and Malchijah from the priests of the Levites; and all their relatives, a large company of Israel.

23 And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, according to the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, and he sent him a letter through all the kingdoms he ruled, ordering him to appoint a wise man and a discreet male to be in charge of Judah and Jerusalem. So the exiles were appointed a prince, a wise man, and a discreet male. Then he appointed Sherezer, Ramah, and Adaiah from Judah; and Jeremiaiah, Pashhur, and Zachariah from Benjamin; and Zedekiah and Maaseiah from Ephraim; and Hananiah, Gershom, and Shelemiah from Benjamin; and Joshua, Hananiah, and Malchijah from the priests of the Levites; and all their relatives, a large company of Israel.

Curtis in his ICC commentary to Chronicles of 1910 says of these verses: They are not the proper close of a history, but the introduction; hence their true place is in Ezr 1:1–4, 1 and 2 Chronicles originally formed with Ezra one work, and in the separation this paragraph was allowed to remain in each either by chance, or as an evidence that the two writings were originally one, or with less probability, it may have been appended to 2 Chronicles to give a more hopeful close to the book (even as 2 Kings closes with a notice of the release of Jehoiachin).

The assumption that these verses are indeed a beginning and not a conclusion, though Curtis does not say so, is no doubt based on the fact that the phrase "in the fifth year..." (usually of a king) is not merely used for dating purposes, but serves some fifty or sixty times as the beginning of a biblical passage. This can be so even when, as in our passage (both in Chronicles and in Ezra), the word begins with a conjunction: "And in the first year..." Hence one cannot rest too great an interpretive burden on this and it is the overlap of words, not the conjunction, that seems to emphasize the historical continuity between Chronicles and Ezra.

The assumption that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah form a single historical work is still current, but it is no longer (as it was in Curtiss' day) the scholarly consensus. It would seem, then, that this was not an original link that was subsequently broken, but that the Chronicler (or someone later) de-
liberally copied these phrases from Ezra 1. A second, somewhat different, Aramaic version of the decree is found in Ezra 5:13-15 and 6:3-5, which might have been used instead, so it is clear that the link with Ezra 1 was deliberately forged.

There is another somewhat unusual beginning to be remarked on in these verses. That is the identification of the decree as having been promulgated "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia." But Cyrus had been king of Persia for twenty years before he conquered Babylon and with it the power to issue a decree concerning the Judeans exited there. Yet all four of the biblical sources for the decree, including the Aramaic version of Ezra 5:13-15 and 6:3-5, the latter purporting to be a copy of an official Persian government document, all date it to the first year of King Cyrus. To be sure, the citation in Ezra 5:13 gives the clue to the idea underlying the dating of the decree to Cyrus' first year, for it calls him "Cyrus king of Babylon." The years before Cyrus stepped onto the stage of biblical history, before he became King of Babylon, are unimportant.

This would be a simple enough solution to the problem if all four texts called him King of Babylon, but they do not. It seems likely that there is something else going on here. Rather, the deliberate combination in 2 Chr. 36:22 and Ezra 1:1 of the "first year" with Cyrus' identification as King of Persia suggests that the decree was understood to mark the beginning of a new historical era, the one we now call the Persian period of Jewish history. From the perspective of its author, however, this period must have looked somewhat different. If the Chronicler himself added these words to conclude his book, then it was almost certainly done during the period of Persian rule. If a later author added them, however, this would most likely not have happened until the Persian period was over. Indeed, though the latest texts in the Bible were written almost two centuries after Alexander conquered the province of "Beyond the River" from the Persians, there is, surprisingly, no mention of this fact, or of Alexander, in the biblical text. The biblical perspective, then, was that the historical period inaugurated is "the first year of Cyrus king of Persia" was considered to be ongoing—the contemporary period, if you will. Simply put, it was the era of the Return to Zion.

I say the Return to Zion, not the Second Temple period, even though the explicit purpose of the decree is the achievement of what Cyrus vowed to "the God of Heaven" for giving him "all the kingdoms of the earth." He charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, Judea." (The addition of "Judea" here is a nice touch. Perhaps it was intended to lend authenticity to the decree, as if there were as many Jerusalemites in Persia as there are Springfields in the United States, and Cyrus had trouble keeping track of them all). Indeed, the context of the Aramaic reference to the decree is a challenge (in Ezra 5:3) by Tattenai, the provincial governor, and his colleagues to the legality of the rebuilding. The memorandum retrieved from the government files at Ecbatana (Ezra 6:2) goes into specific detail: "Let the house be rebuilt, a place for offering sacrifices, with a base built up high. Let it be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, with a course of unusual timber for each of these courses of hewn stone. The expenses shall be paid by the palace" (Ezra 6:3 f., NJV translation).

Nonetheless, the placement of this "beginning" at the end of Chronicles has something other than the rebuilding of the Temple in mind. One is not immediately aware of it when reading the passage in Chronicles, but comparison with Ezra 1:1-4 shows instantly that the Chronicles citation of the decree is truncated. Not that it is merely an abbreviated version of the Ezra passage, it is literally cut off in the middle of a sentence. Picking up near the end of the overlap, the Ezra text reads, "Whoever there be of you from all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, Judea, and let him build the house of Yahweh, God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3). It continues with instructions for the support of the returns. But the Chronicles text breaks off abruptly after the word "whosoever"... "Whoever of you from all his people, the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up..." The book of Chronicles, and hence the entire Hebrew Bible, ends in the middle of a sentence.

It is not that the Chronicles text wanted to omit any mention of the Temple. As we have already pointed out, the building of the Temple is referred to in 2 Chr. 36:23, before the truncation, as the purpose of the decree from Cyrus' viewpoint. Indeed, this may well have been so. The famous Cyrus Cylinder makes clear that it was very much part of Cyrus' policy—and, for all we know, of his sincere personal belief—to attribute his success to whoever was worshipped as chief god by the various groups under his rule, and to reconstruct their temples. But by eliminating Jerusalem as the indirect object of the verb, the Chronicler (if indeed it was he) focuses attention purely on the process of "going up."

Chliss interprets the phrase "go up to Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3), found in the fuller version of the decree, not in the typical sense of going up to Jerusalem as an elevated place, but (following a suggestion of G. R. Driver with reference to occurrences of the verb in four narrative passages) to mean "go up country," that is, north, "following the Ephraimites route northward before striking out to the west." Apart from the difficulties in Driver's original suggestion—it is difficult to see why "up" should mean "north" in a geographical conception where east is in front and south to the right—this shows a fundamental misunderstanding of what voice is speaking in at least this version of..
the decree. It is not Cyrus the head of the Persian empire telling the exiles, "Go north, young man!"; the Aramaic versions of the decree make no explicit reference to the return. Rather, the speaker of the decree is Cyrus to whom Yahweh gave "all the kingdoms of the earth" (2 Chr 30.23); that is, Cyrus who is the LORD's "anointed" (Isa 45.1). Thus, the religious-metaphorical use of abah is completely appropriate and was certainly intended. It is the same as is found in Ezra 2.1 (as Neh 7.6), 2.59 (as Neh 7.61), and Neh 7:5, a further indication that Ezra is the original source of the passage.

The truncation of the beginning of Ezra at the end of Chronicles, then, points to the return from exile as the focus of this passage. Like the wedding that precedes the "happily-ever-after" ending of a fairy tale, the return to Zion is a culmination that implies a new beginning. Like the marriage that follows the fairy-tale wedding, what will happen after the return is a different kind of event, not part of the "story." I do not mean to suggest that the selection of such an ending is entirely arbitrary, only to point out that the composition of a frame changes how we look at what is inside the frame and what is outside.43 A moment's consideration of Second Isaiah makes clear why the beginning of the return to Zion makes such a good frame for a story. One of the things we look for in a frame is symmetry. If one exiles had thought of themselves as people who had been uprooted from a land where they had lived since time immemorial, the most satisfying conclusion would have been the first sight of the recovered homeland, or the first footfall on its soil. But their story was that of a people whose identity was forged on the foreign soil of Egypt andimmered in the heat of a desert journey to a land promised to their immigrant ancestors. Second Isaiah explicitly frames the return from Babylon as a second exodus. Thus it is appropriate for Chronicles to end as the story of the original exodus does, with the Israelites not home, but on the point of going there.44

The Torah ends with Moses' death. If anything is appropriate as a narrative conclusion, certainly the end of a human life is. Yet the circumstances of Moses' death demand a sequel, a new beginning. This we find in the book of Joshua, where the Deuteronomistic History describes the Israelite conquest of the land and allocation of it to the various tribes. Just as with the deterioration into anarchy during the period of the Judges, this was a structure artificially imposed on a real history that was considerably more chaotic. In the case of Chronicles, we do not know at what point the concluding words were added or, indeed, when Chronicles itself was written. Certainly the Temple had already been rebuilt,45 and yet that renewal—a different and in some ways more obvious point of new beginning—was not made the conclusion of Chronicles. It seems likely, then, that this ending was a response to literature, not history. The return from Babylonian exile is the end of the long story that began with the command "Get thee up" to Abraham (Gen 12:1)—or perhaps, indeed, with the command "Le: there be light," which, according to Gen 1:3, inaugurated the world under the control of the one who would ultimately be God of Israel. With the end of that story, the "contemporary" period could begin.

One final beginning (if that is not an oxymoron) must occupy our attention before this survey is over. It is indicated by the reference to Jeremiah in 2 Chr 36:22, indicating a rereading of earlier literature as a guide to history. This is certainly not the earliest route of a biblical text; inner-biblical allusion had gone on even before the exile. Yet its use here nicely synchronizes the return to Zion and the end of the Bible (as a piece of literature) with the beginning of the tendency that has characterized Judaism ever since as a religion of the book, of the rereading of earlier texts for contemporary inspiration. The same beginning, that is, that marked the end of the biblical period from the standpoint of Second Temple historiography also marks the inception—if as yet only in embryo—of the rabbinic phase. In this final sense too, then, the ending of the Bible—like every ending that shapes a story—marks a beginning as well.

Notes
1. It is not clear who is responsible for this version; the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (3rd ed., 365:5) cites an attribution to the American writer Frank O' Malley, but spurs another to Elbert Hubbard.
5. Chapter Three of the book goes on to explain, in the same vein, that Israel, although Africa, Asia, and Europe to his three sons; the fourth quarter of the globe, the americas, would not have escaped discovery so long as only Noah had had a fourth son to give it. For further discussion of this aspect of Irving's book, see Terence Martin, Trouble of Possibility: The American Need for Beginning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 18 f.
6. Tov, A. A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985); UBS and NSSY combine both readings: "In the beginning, when...". The Jewish translators were less bound to the traditional English translation, and they had traditional support of their own for the "new" translation in Rahab's commentary. For the argument that the implicit understanding of the text in this fashion long preceded Rahab, see R. Schaefer, "Bibletit and Biblical Text Interpretation as Genesis 1:1 and the rabbinic Literature," JSJ 2 (1971): 161-66.

7. For a recent defense of the "In the beginning" translation and its radical uniqueness, see Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11, translated by John J. Scullion (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1986), 93-98. He associates Gen 1:1 with the old kind of beginning with a temporal clause; unfortunately for his argument, the only word in the Hebrew text that could actually serve this function is ובם which of course occurs at the beginning of v. 3, not v. 2.

8. This translation is from Sophistica Dalley, Mythos from Mesopotamia. Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 233.


10. The Memphite Theology may also suggest that creation began with a struggle; see Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 1:52, 2:7-48.


12. The verb used is לְמָנַח, not לְמָמַח ("cursing").


14. This statement of authority was so successful that Egyptologists, too, were convinced by it; in Lichtheim himself, ibid, 2:5, "The dating is decisive, the dates are determinate.


16. Both translations are those of the NJPS. P's 451:1 is a title or technical note; thus v. 2 is the actual beginning of the poem.


18. See similar: Talmudic Ber. 11. The subject is addressed somewhat differently in Gen. R. 128.


20. Amos adds to his call in Amos 7:15, but this is an aside to Amosia, not a structure element of the book.


on which the entire tradition presents turns (1988), the events of 791 give the book a revered synchronically as literature only the most rudimentary structure.

22. Notch's original proposal includes Deuteronomy as part of the Deuteronomic History, and many still follow this definition. In practice, however, the term is often used as a scholarly-standing substitute for the Hebrew תּוֹם הַיָּמָה. In any case, it would seem that the framing of Deuteronomy as Most of the final note's argument on the meaning of the Hebrew term תּוֹם הַיָּמָה" be reserved for Joshua-Kings only. Bernard M. Levinson, Deuteronomy and the Horsemanship of Legal Innovation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 153 n. 18, points out the remarkable fact that the job of matching Deuteronomistic and Deuteronomistic editorial tags (there "to complete").

23. See also Jud 17:6, as well as 19:1 and 19:11.

24. The fact that one of the Edomite kings is named Saul (Gen 36:37 F) is probably coincidental, not significant for an evaluation of 1 Samuel. Modern scholars hold that verse in conflict with implications elsewhere in the story that Abimelech's rule was geographically quite limited. May attribute the verse to the Deuteronomic historian. This, of course, would mean that the latter (whether correctly or not) recognized Abimelech's kingship over Israel, but denied it. The verb in 2:2 is יָשָׂב (NIV "held sway"); see קָנָה ("begat"). On the deliberate avoidance of the latter word, see Robert H. O'Connell, The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges, VT 35 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 269 n. 3, and references there.

25. The verb used is קָנָה, not קָנָה, "begat.""See further G. Hinson Davies, Judges VIII 22-23," VT 17 (1963): 151-57, for the suggestion that Gideon, in these verses, accepts rather than rejects the kingship.

26. Jud 13:1 is one of the "round-number" statements that chronologically structure the book of Judges: "The hand of the Lord came to judges, and the Lord sent judges to deliver...". The phraseology is that used in the Book of Joshua.

27. The Semitic and perhaps Qumran (Qumran) suggest that the parallel may have originally been eves closer at this point. See R. J. Miller, V. Samuel, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 53 ff.

28. McCarter, J. Samuel, 303, suggests that, before being integrated into the story of Samson and Saul, 1 Sam 7:12 once introduced David in the same way: "There once was a man from Bethlehem of Juda, whose name was Jesus.

29. The Nk has been dropped from this spelling, a not uncommon phenomenon. See GKC 236.

30. The NK has יָשָׂב, יָשָׂב, יָשָׂב which is impossible if the following 2 of יָשָׂב is correct. The preferable reading is יָשָׂב, following what was most likely that "Qumranism," which has been cited in the notes to Judges 17:6-10.
Chapter 2

Expulsion as Initiation Displacement, Divine Presence, and Divine Exile in the Torah

Benjamin D. Sommer

33. Ad loc. n. g.
34. Against this, see Mccarter, 1 Samuel, 62.
35. Some manuscript and vernacular evidence has "Lord" rather than "God" with Saul too, in 10:10 and 11:6; but this is more likely to be a deliberate correction to the phrase as used in Judges.
37. For the place of Chronicles in the Bible, see Sara Jaeger, 1 & II Chronicles, OIT (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 2.
39. Ezra 1:3 has "not a word of the Tetragrammaton," "May his God be with him.
41. E.g., 1 Kgs 11:1-9, 2 Kgs 8:16, and Dan 2:1.
43. For an argument that this policy was in fact limited to Babylon, see Amelie Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," ISO 25 (1985), 63-97.
44. D. J. A. Clines, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, NCB (Grand Rapids: Mt. Eendtman's, 1984), 38.
45. Jack Segal remarks about the creation story, "we may imagine ourselves in a photographic exhibit where we can only see what the camera can frame." See Sosin, "Time ... to Begin," in Shavuot Telman, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Lov (Winston Lake, IN: Enorthems, 1992), 189.
46. Marc Berenson of Beantie University points out to me that Genesis, too, ends with a comparable reference, Joseph's request that the Israelites "bring up [אֵת עב]" his bones out of Egypt (personal conversation). Thanks to him also for a number of other helpful comments.
47. For an argument against this, see Mark A. Levine, When Kings Speak Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles, SBLDS 93 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 97-107.
Beginning/Again
Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts

edited by
Aryeh Cohen
University of Judaism

and
Shaul Magid
Jewish Theological Seminary