

## The Emergence of Ancient Israel // Some Related Problems

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What is the original meaning of “Israel” in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup> and what were its roots? These questions have arisen again in recent decades for several reasons:

- (1) Previous answers to these questions proved doubtful or wrong. This applies to the famous solution of Martin Noth, according to which “Israel” at first was the name of an amphictyony of twelve tribes. Today this answer is no longer accepted by most scholars. Likewise another solution based on the supposition of the existence of a large empire in the times of David and Solomon. This existence has become doubtful, and together with it the view that originally “Israel” was the name of this empire.
- (2) Today the Old Testament tradition is generally deemed less reliable than it was in the last generation. Now this tradition is often thought to be the construction of later (Persian or Hellenistic) times, chronologically and culturally far removed from the First Temple Period. Therefore some scholars argue that one should evaluate historical questions related to the early periods not by means of the biblical traditions but by means of extra-biblical sources or by different means such as archaeology<sup>2</sup>, sociology, anthropology, and so on. This is particularly necessary, as in recent decades archaeology has added many important new data relevant to these questions.
- (3) Finally, reasons of contemporary history have imparted new immediacy to questions concerning Israel and its Bible. We may regret this development, but we cannot change it. We hope that most of our colleagues will continue to treat these questions and problems on a purely academic level *sine studio et ira*. Concerning

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<sup>1</sup>Lecture delivered at the International Meeting of the Society for Biblical Studies, Berlin 2002.

<sup>2</sup>But although this scholarly self-restraint may have some methodological justification, it actually can be dangerous. A small example may illustrate this point. According to biblical tradition several smaller peoples existed in Canaan at the time of the emergence of “Israel”, such as the Hivites. If the existence of these peoples is not confirmed by archaeology, this does not mean at all that they actually did not exist.

the subject of this paper we may add, for certain reasons, that the question of the origin of Israel must remain a legitimate issue for scientific research<sup>3</sup>.

Concerning the second point we note the view whereby the biblical tradition is of little or no help for understanding preexilic Israel. We shall try to show that the opposite is true: despite many problems the biblical tradition is of great historical importance for the reconstruction of the early history of Israel or Palestine.

Here a general comment is in order concerning the attitude of many "revisionist" historians, according to which the Old Testament should not be used at all or only to a very limited degree to reconstruct the early history of Israel. According to this logic 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars should have refrained from trying to reconstruct the history of Israel because of the absence of any substantial means at their disposal except the Old Testament.

It is of course true that an empty sheet of white paper contains no mistakes and is methodologically perfectly correct. Nevertheless, I venture to suggest that a history of Israel based on a critical analysis of the biblical traditions only, and written by a genius like Julius Wellhausen is to be preferred to an empty sheet of white paper, although it almost certainly contains many mistakes. I even suppose that most "revisionists" agree on this point.

If a reconstruction of the history of Israel, based on the Old Testament only<sup>4</sup>, is "better" than no reconstruction at all, the Old Testament tradition must contain material of direct historical value<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>One must concede that the results of these investigations should have no relevance for modern conflicts in this region and, vice versa.

<sup>4</sup>Without question, all known data have to be taken into account; *today* a history of Israel cannot be written only on the basis of sources available to Wellhausen.

<sup>5</sup>This is obvious with every new archaeological find of some importance. These finds illustrate that the Old Testament, although it does not express historical reality, reflects it to a high degree. This does not mean, of course, that archaeology proves the correctness of the bible. Often new archaeological discoveries do not solve problems but create new ones. But archaeology sheds new light on the literary accounts in the Old Testament.

Some examples may illustrate the case. The inscription from Tel Dan mentioning "Beit David" says nothing about king David or about the size of his kingdom, and the exact meaning of the inscription is very much disputed. But after the discovery of this inscription it became much harder to argue, that David never existed. In addition, this inscription could throw new light on another figure known from the Old Testament, king Hazael and his time, although in this respect too details are very much disputed. According to the ostraca from Samaria biblical name-material appears in new light, as its geographical importance becomes clear. The Moabite king Mesha, known from the Old Testament, appears in his inscription in a different light, which causes many problems. The same is true for the biblical seer Balaam, who has to be removed chronologically from the period of the emergence of Israel according to the inscription from Tell Deir 'Alla. The inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud led to the discovery of a facet of OT religion, for which in the Old Testament itself there are only very slight indications. All these examples, which could be multiplied easily, show that Old Testament tradition is of great historical importance but has to be used after very critical evaluation. This fact has been clear to scholars of many generations, and one wonders why it has become less clear today.

Recently, an additional argument has been put forward, namely that it is inappropriate to look for the origins of the people of Israel in preexilic times. According to this view peoples and nations did not exist during these early times: “peoples” (in German: “Völker”) did not exist prior to the Persian period, and “nation” is a modern term which developed in connection with the French revolution AD 1789<sup>6</sup>.

But one has to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water: peoples and nations like those of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century AD are not to be found in OT times<sup>7</sup>, but ethnic groups did exist that defined themselves in contrast to other groups<sup>8</sup>. Thus, there existed “peoples in OT times”, and not since the Persian period only. For our question of the origins of Israel this is sufficient<sup>9</sup>.

In the following we shall tackle the modern theory, according to which “Israel” is a late construction of postexilic times; a united Israel never really existed, not in preexilic nor in postexilic times.

First we refer to a lecture by Sara Japhet, who showed that the concept of “All-Israel” does not conform to the reality of the Persian Period<sup>10</sup>, and therefore could not be developed during this period out of nothing. If a “myth of origin” was created artificially to explain and to legitimize the new reality of the Persian Period, it

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<sup>6</sup>See E.A. Knauf, *Die Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar: Altes Testament 29, Stuttgart 1994, 184-189; N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land. The Tradition of the Canaanites*, JSOT Suppl. Series 110, Sheffield 1991, 151-152.

<sup>7</sup>Also the forms of government and even the states differed from their modern counterparts. There was no territorially defined state (“Flächenstaat”) with exact borderlines, but instead urban centers of power whose influence decreased with geographical distance. This influence could be increased by special actions of the central government, but these changes often were very temporary. The interest of the rulers concentrated very much on the towns of a region, and not on the region and its area itself.

<sup>8</sup>For attempts to discern divergences in the material culture that might indicate ethnic differences, see W.G. Dever, “Archaeology, Ideology, and the Quest for an ‘Ancient’ or ‘Biblical’ Israel”, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 61 (1998), [39-52] 47-50; A. Faust, “Ethnic Complexity in Northern Israel during Iron Age II”, *PEQ* 132 (2000), 2-27. There can be little doubt that ethnic differences can result in material diversity, but much caution is required when the reasons for material differences are evaluated. See H.N. Rösel, *Israel in Kanaan. Zum Problem der Entstehung Israels*, BEATAJ 11, Frankfurt a.M. etc. 1992, 74-79.

<sup>9</sup>Accordingly, we don’t have to deal with whether in ancient Israel the development led from the existence of a state to the people, i.e., whether the Israelite state was a precondition for the emergence of a people, or whether the development was reverse. The answer, as indicated, is firstly that these modern terms are not appropriate for ancient times, and secondly that ethnic groups existed in the Ancient Near East before the emergence of states.

Leaving this aside and speaking as a lay person, I feel that a common consciousness can exist in a society before the emergence of a state; the modern history of Israel may serve as an example, as well as the modern history of the Palestinian movement. Thus we suppose that a common consciousness could also develop among the ancient “Proto-Israelites” before the emergence of a state.

<sup>10</sup>The following is based on S. Japhet, “Can the Persian Period Bear the Burden? Reflections on the Origins of Biblical History”, *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division 100 קונטרס 100, תשנ”ט, “האם הומצא תולדות עם ישראל” בתקופה הפרסית?”, *תשנ”ט*, A, Jerusalem 1999, 35\*-45\* 120-109.

stands to reason that Yehud – Judah would occupy the center of such a myth, not “Israel”, as it appears now.

Why should a late scribe, whose actual interest was Yehud and its constitution, invent an “Israel” which never existed? The invention of a system of twelve tribes would be entirely superfluous. And why should scribes in Persian times actually invent several such systems<sup>11</sup>? Did they take pleasure in introducing difficulties and contradictions into their own literary creations? Why did they put Reuben at the head of all systems and not Judah, if the aim was to construct a myth of origin for Judah?

If a “myth of origin” was invented in Persian times, an age when the problem of mixed marriages was acute, why should the scribes invent the motif that the invented kings of the invented Israel were involved in (invented) mixed marriages?

According to this “myth of origin” even Judah himself married a Canaanite woman (Gen 38,2). Must we conclude that the inventor of the “myth of origin” intended to express the idea that all inhabitants of the contemporary province of Yehud were the offspring of a mixed marriage? According to Gen 38,18 Judah even had intercourse with his daughter in law, a strange motif in a myth of origin, because such relations were strictly forbidden according to the same “myth” (Lev 18,15; 20,12)<sup>12</sup>.

Obviously, this “myth of origin” does not fulfill its task. It does not suit the Persian Period so it becomes clear that “Israel” cannot be an invention of that period. In addition, one of the foundations of critical Old Testament scholarship is that biblical literature developed in a very long and complicated process over hundreds of years. When they probed the details, scholars found so many intimations of this fact that it cannot simply be brushed aside to make room for the development of a new theory. The long process of development of the biblical literature accords with the fact that “Israel” does not appear one-dimensionally in the Old Testament, but in diverse meaning and with different facets, to be shown later. One doubts whether human imagination would be capable of inventing this large variety during a few generations of the Persian Period<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>With or without Levi, with Joseph or with his “sons”.

<sup>12</sup>Similar transgressions were attributed to Joseph, brother of Judah, who married an Egyptian woman, and to Jacob, Judah’s father, who married two sisters. Abraham too married his half-sister according to Gen 20,12, compare Lev 18,9,18; 20,17. Additional motifs in the biblical “myth of origin”, which do not suit the Persian Period, are mentioned in the articles by S. Japhet cited in note 10.

<sup>13</sup>And why should a late scribe invent *different* concepts of “Israel”, which never existed and had no relation to historical reality? Having introduced so much complicated fiction he would run the risk of not being understood by his contemporary readers.

Turning to another biblical literary creation, the Books of Chronicles, the late origin of which is not in doubt: a problem exists of “Israel in the Books of Chronicles”. We don’t have to deal with this problem which is rather difficult; the number of articles and books treating this subject may serve as proof. (The most important publications are: H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, Cambridge etc. 1977; S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, BEATAJ 9, Frankfurt a.M. etc. 1997; T. Willi, *Juda – Jehud – Israel*, FAT 12, Tübingen 1995.) But this problem

Let us turn to the theory that “Israel” originally was the name of the Northern Kingdom only, but not designation of a united kingdom, which never existed. According to this theory the name “Israel” ceased to be employed after the end of the Northern Kingdom c 720 BC; so it could be used differently, for example as the name for the empire of a greater Israel, which is a literary fiction.

This theory is close to the one we dealt with earlier, although it is less radical. But for several reasons it is not probable either:

- (1) The Northern Kingdom of Israel existed only for c 200 years, according to the “minimalists” even less. According to Old Testament tradition this kingdom was not only rather short-lived, but also not very stable in its ruling dynasties. Therefore, first doubts may arise as to whether this Israel could serve as historical background for the biblical concept of Israel.
- (2) Why should a scribe in Judah choose precisely the name of the hateful and sinful Northern Kingdom, which had only just received its due punishment and had disappeared from the stage of history, and apply it to an invented ideal empire and a chosen people? One does not choose the name of one’s personal enemy to serve as a center for one’s own historical and religious ideology and beliefs<sup>14</sup>.

A solution for this difficulty<sup>15</sup> was recently offered by Reinhard Gregor Kratz, who shares the view that the name of the Northern Kingdom “Israel” served as the “Vorlage” for the biblical concept of Israel.

Referring to the synchronistic datings of the kings of Judah and of Israel in the Book of Kings, Kratz states that this synchronization was an important means to create a common consciousness in Israel and Judah<sup>16</sup>.

One may ask whether this synchronization was not an expression of such a common consciousness rather than its cause. But we can leave this question aside as the whole point is not essential for Kratz’s thesis.

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could only arise because “Israel” was an older term reflecting realities of ancient times, which had to be adopted to the Book of Chronicles and its ideology.

<sup>14</sup>After the “reunification” of Germany the Federal Republic of Germany did not choose the name of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) through which to construct a new all-German ideology. It would not have done so even if the GDR had been larger and more influential than the FRG. In the same way, Judah did not choose the name of the deceased Northern Kingdom for such an ideological purpose.

<sup>15</sup>R.G. Kratz, “Israel als Staat und als Volk”, ZThK 97 (2000), 1-17. After I had completed the manuscript of the present article Prof. Nadav Na’aman sent me his new book: N. Na’aman, *The Past that Shapes the Present. The Creation of Biblical Historiography in the Late First Temple Period and after the Downfall*, Yerirot [3]. In memoriam Y. (I.) Hess, Jerusalem 2002 (Hebr.). On p. 109 he explains that the name “Israel” was chosen during the reign of Josiah to attract the inhabitants of Samaria to the kingdom of Judah.

<sup>16</sup>R.G. Kratz, ZThK 97 (2000), 9.

More important is his explanation for why the name "Israel" was chosen as the central term for the construction of history and theology after the Northern Kingdom named Israel had perished:

According to Kratz<sup>17</sup>, the reason was that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was exemplary for Judah in so far as it progressed faster to sin and punishment than Judah. The "evil in the sight of the Lord" was the element that bound Israel and Judah. But in this respect Israel was the example for Judah. Therefore the name of Israel was better suited to designate an earlier united Israel, which never existed in history, and to designate the people of God as well.

But can we really assume that this was the reason why Israel in postexilic times, the Israel of a new beginning, chose this name? Where is the logic in the assumption that the name of the sinful Northern Kingdom was chosen to signify a new ideal Israel? We surmise that too much Christian theology of sin was introduced into Old Testament tradition and history here.

To cut it short, the theory according to which a scribe of Judah "misused" the name of the "sinful" Northern Kingdom of Israel to develop his ideology of a united Israel and a people of God appears very strange and cannot be accepted. So we are left with the conclusion that the term "Israel" is of more ancient origin. It also is clear that it had no negative connotations, when it was chosen to express the idea of a united Israel.

Fortunately these conclusions concerning the antiquity of "Israel" can be corroborated by the famous stela of Merneptah which contains the earliest existing reference to "Israel". It is conceded that this testimony raises more questions than answers. We know virtually nothing<sup>18</sup> about the Israel of the Merneptah-stela, nothing about its size, its constitution, or its whereabouts. Many scholars assume that "Israel" here signifies an indefinable group of people<sup>19</sup> living somewhere in Palestine, possibly in the central highlands<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup>R.G. Kratz, ZThK 97 (2000), 11: "Daß sich der Name »Israel« und nicht etwa Juda durchgesetzt hat, liegt daran, daß Israel Aufstieg und Niedergang des Königtums vormachte". "Das Böse in den Augen Jhwhs schweißt die beiden Staaten zur Schicksalsgemeinschaft zusammen". The further development is, "daß nach der Zerstörung Jerusalems und dem Untergang des Staates Juda Israel und Juda im Zeichen des Gerichts nun auch auf politischer Ebene eine Liaison eingehen und sich zum Zwölfstämmevolk, dem einen Gottesvolk, entwickeln" (p. 15). The "one people of God" sounds reasonable, but why "a people of twelve tribes"?

<sup>18</sup>Similarly G.W. Ahlström, "The Origin of Israel in Palestine", SJOT [5],2 (1991), [19-34]22, although Ahlström arrives at a conclusion which is not shared by most scholars. Compare also T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: from the Written and Archaeological Sources*, Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East IV (ed. M.H.E. Weippert), Leiden etc. 1992, 404; N. Na'aman, "The 'Conquest of Canaan' in the Book of Joshua and in History", *From Nomadism to Monarchy. Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (eds. I. Finkelstein & N. Na'aman), Jerusalem - Washington. 1994, [218-281] 248-249.

<sup>19</sup>H.G. Kratz, ZThK 97 (2000), 3: "eine recht verlorene Menschengruppe in Palästina".

<sup>20</sup>See even P.R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, JSOT Suppl. Series 148, Sheffield 1992, 61: "It is possible that the Israel of this inscription is the name of a population living, presumably, in the highlands of Palestine".

One should not discard this line of reasoning by arguing that the connection of the Israel of Merneptah and the biblical Israel is one of names only<sup>21</sup>:

- (1) The geographical aspect adds to the aspect of the name: The “Israel” of the Merneptah-stela lived somewhere in the territory of biblical Israel.
- (2) Names often suggest the probability of historical relations<sup>22</sup>. The ancient Scots are not identical with the modern inhabitants of Scotland, but connecting lines exist. The same is true for the Britons of the Roman Period and the modern British. Likewise there are connections between the tribe of the Alemanns and l’Allemagne akin to those between the tribes of the Germans and modern Germany. If connections exist<sup>23</sup> between Old Testament Israel and the modern state of Israel<sup>24</sup>, and they do, why should we not assume the existence of connecting lines between the Israel of Merneptah and biblical Israel<sup>25</sup>? It should be stressed that the entire matter is not one of identity but of the development of Israel in history.

Finally we turn to “Israel” in the Old Testament and concentrate on a few verses which highlight special aspects of its meaning. This may serve as an additional indication that “Israel” is no literary invention of later times devoid of historical reality.

Three different aspects can be distinguished in the meaning of Israel: the geographical, the religious, and the military, each of which may be dominant in a certain verse<sup>26</sup>.

Concerning the geographical aspect, note the absence of any uniformity: “Israel” may include Judah, may exclude Judah, or may designate an even smaller entity in the north of Palestine. 2 Sam 3,19 distinguishes “Israel” and “Benjamin”. 2 Sam 2,9 describes the territory of the kingdom of Ishbaal. There “all Israel” summarizes some or all of the areas<sup>27</sup> mentioned before in that verse. In any case the size of this kingdom was smaller than that of the later Northern Kingdom of Israel.

<sup>21</sup>P.R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’*, 62-63.

<sup>22</sup>We start with examples mentioned by Philip R. Davies; see the foregoing note.

<sup>23</sup>It is foolish to deny this fact. But one has to agree that the most important connecting lines are those which exist in the people’s mind.

<sup>24</sup>It may be relevant that some discussion took place on whether to call the modern state “Israel” or “Judah”. In the final analysis the historic decision in this matter makes no difference for our case.

<sup>25</sup>M.G. Hasel, “*Israel*” in the Merneptah Stela”, *BASOR* 296 (1994), [45-61] 47: “Most scholars agree that the *Israel* of the Merneptah stela is in some way related to the Israel of the Hebrew Bible”. Explicitly Hasel mentions the names of Kitchen, Stager, Albertz, Lemche, Singer, Coote, [A.] Mazar, Ahlström, Yurco, Bimson, Dever, Murnane, Neu, and Rendsburg. We should also mention G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*, New York 1988, 15, and compare for example N.P. Lemche, “Is it still possible to write a History of Ancient Israel?” *SJOT* 8 (1994), [165-190] 170.

<sup>26</sup>Here we concentrate on the geographic aspect only. For the details and for the two additional aspects see H.N. Rösel, “Israel – Gedanken zu seinen Anfängen”, *BN* 25 (1984), 76-91, which is virtually identical with H.N. Rösel, *Israel in Kanaan. Zum Problem der Entstehung Israels*, *BEATAJ* 11, Frankfurt a.M. etc., 1992, 23-35.

<sup>27</sup>See E.A. Knauf, “Saul, David, and the Philistines: from Geography to History”, *BN* 109 (2001), [15-18] 16 (literature in note 11); N. Na’aman, “The Kingdom of Ishbaal”, *BN* 54 (1990), 33-37.

The assumption is not reasonable that it was a late author writing in the Persian Period or close to it who invented these slight geographical differences. And, in general, why should such a late author invent a verse like 2 Sam 2,9 at all?

In the summery notes on David and his government we read:

2 Sam 5,4.5 ... he (David) reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

1 Kings 2,11 And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years, seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty-three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

It appears that the note in 2 Sam 5 is more ancient than that in 1 Kings 2. The former differentiates David's government over Judah from his government "over all Israel and Judah". "All Israel" here means northern Israel. An author writing in or near Persian times would not have used "all Israel" in such a sense. This geographical differentiation no longer exists in 1 Kings 2. Here "Israel" means the whole empire. Why should a late author introduce such differences into his writings<sup>28</sup>?

One reaches the conclusion that the biblical tradition developed as a long process and absorbed different notions and concepts. This contradicts the theories of the "revisionist school" about the emergence of Old Testament literature. "Israel" was no invention of the Persian or of the Hellenistic Period; nor was the concept of "all Israel" invented in the time after the disappearance of the Northern Kingdom.

Now we turn to the difficult question of the historical roots of this concept. One would first of all think of the period of the Davidic and Solomonic empire as suitable for the development of an all-Israel concept.

But judging by the present state of scholarship this solution is no longer acceptable. According to the archaeological remains the kingdom of David existed on a much smaller scale than it appears in biblical tradition. We don't intend to deal with the question of the size of this kingdom, as a clear answer is still impossible.

But even according to biblical tradition the Davidic empire existed for a comparatively short period only. In this tradition one can find the terminological division between Judah and Israel, even in texts related to David's reign. It is hard to believe that during this reign a concept emerged stressing the importance of Israel, thereby diminishing the importance of Judah.

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<sup>28</sup>One may compare 2 Sam 24,1:

And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.

Here "Israel" first means "people of God"; afterwards the writer moves to the political sphere and distinguishes between Israel (now: "northern Israel") and Judah. For additional examples see H.N. Rösel, *Israel in Kanaan*, 28.



So far we have eliminated several historical periods as matrices for the emergence of the biblical concept of Israel:

- (1) Israel was not invented during the Persian Period.
- (2) The Northern Kingdom after its end could not have served as a historical matrix for the development of the biblical concept of Israel.
- (3) Such a concept could not have been developed during the Davidic and Solomonic Period either.

So we are left with the possibility that the roots of biblical Israel go back to the premonarchic period and are not connected to the existence of a state of Israel<sup>29</sup>.

Thus the attractiveness of the theory of Martin Noth, who explained "Israel" as name of an amphictyony in premonarchic times, becomes intelligible. This theory is attractive for a second reason: In it "Israel" is defined by cult and religion (or ideology), which are the central themes of the Old Testament.

But as mentioned before, Noth's theory is no longer accepted by most scholars; in its original form<sup>30</sup> it probably is incorrect.

Nevertheless, we have to preserve the notion that the element of religious ideology is a most important factor for understanding ancient Israel and its development<sup>31</sup>.

According to biblical tradition there exists a special relation between Israel and Judah. This relation is different from other relationships, for example, that between Israel and Edom, although both are explained in the Bible along the lines of blood ties. The reason for the special relation might have been the fact that the same god was worshipped in Israel and in Judah, although the details of this worship certainly were different.

The same god was god of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and of the kingdom of Judah. The question immediately arises: How did this happen?

The details of the process leading to this reality are not transparent and probably will never be. Based on the biblical evidence we suppose that "El Elohē Israel"<sup>32</sup> originally belonged to Israel and not to Judah. Judah and Jerusalem were latecomers

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<sup>29</sup> Again, the existence of a state is not a precondition for the development of a common consciousness. It also may be the other way round: a common consciousness can be a precondition for the emergence of a state. But these are questions probably similar to the imponderable of the chicken and the egg.

<sup>30</sup> Compare N.K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh. A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.*, London 1980, 386. Gottwald does not accept Noth's theory, but he stresses its heuristic values and even concludes: "In the end, some aspects of Noth's analysis may prove to be better grounded than now appears to be the case". Recently an interesting proposal for understanding the early Israelite tribal system was made by J. Schaper, "Die religionsgeschichtlichen Wurzeln des frühisraelitischen Stämmebundes", VT 46 (1996), 361-375. His proposal is free of some of the shortcomings of Noth's theory.

<sup>31</sup> For the following see the article cited in note 26.

<sup>32</sup> This fact is stressed by E.A. Knauf, "Review of G.W. Ahlström, Who were the Israelites?" JNES 49 (1990), [81-83] 82.

in the history of Israel<sup>33</sup>. The existence of different meanings of “Israel” in the Old Testament might be explained by the supposition that Israel grew during its history, starting from a nucleus in the northern part of the country. This may be alluded to in the Merneptah-stela.

Israel, during its development, succeeded in integrating additional groups; geographical expansion was the result. We suppose that reasons of ideology and religion played an important part in this process. The details of this process are not clear. We do not even know to what degree Judah took part in this process.

The integrating force of Israel was essential for its development. Israel had a special attraction, which is to be connected to its ideology and religion. Such phenomena are well known in connection with the development of other “successful” religions or ideologies.

At the end of the day we have to concede that we know next to nothing about the process of the emergence of early Israel and its development. But we feel that one should bear two points in mind:

1. Israel developed starting from small beginnings.
2. Religious ideology was essential in this process.

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<sup>33</sup>Compare Dt 33,7.