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THE BIBLE'S CONTEXT AS A PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE

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"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" is, in principle and intention, an uncritical statement as much as it is a misrepresentation of another argument.[1] Closely related is the supercilious assertion that as the history of Israel's Kings has not been shown to be impossible, it is therefore possible.[2] I shudder at the thought of all the possible histories of the future, written without evidence. When I first considered today's topic, I had thought that the most difficult problems I would face would be Lester Grabbe's recent effort to affirm the historicity of royal names, chronologies and order of succession as presented in the Bible, even when external evidence is lacking,[3] or Diana Edelman's rehabilitation of Saul's historicity by demoting him to a tribal chieftainship and forgiving her argument's lack of seriousness with the claim that history writing is, indeed, more art than science.[4] That such drivel is daily fare at the evangelically oriented Tyndale House in Cambridge is no more than can be expected.[5] When such statements, however, are presented as the central arguments within Jens Bruun Kofoed's Århus dissertation, one must be concerned about the commitment to science within the theological academy in Denmark. Distinguishing what we know from what we do not know is not minimalism; it is—since ancient times—the beginning of science.

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1. Jens Bruun Kofoed, *Text and History: The Old Testament Texts as a Source for the History of Ancient Israel* (PhD dissertation, Århus, December, 2002), p.44-59. The reference to "absence of evidence" refers first of all to the discussions in the 1970s about the historicity of the stories of the pentateuch (see esp. Th.L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham, BZAW* 133, de Gruyter: Berlin, 1974; 3rd. ed. Trinity Int. Press, 2002; J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition,* New Haven, 1975 and J.H. Hayes and J.M. Miller, *Israelite and Judean History,* Westminster: Philadelphia, 1977), which led to a widespread recognition of the absence of evidence for an historical reconstruction of "Israelite" history prior to the monarchy. Since 1991 (cf. E. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judaism,* SAP: Sheffield, 1991; Th.L. Thompson, *The Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources, SHANE* 4, Brill: Leiden, 1992; 3rd. ed. 2000 and P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel,* SAP: Sheffield, 1992), the discussion has involved the early iron-age settlement history of Judah, the early monarchy in Jerusalem and the nature and identity of population transfers from both Palestine and Mesopotamia during the Assyrian to the Persian periods.

2. Kofoed, *Text and History, passim* and as principle: p.105-109.

3. L. Grabbe, "The Kingdom of Israel from Omri to the Fall of Samaria: If we had Only the Bible. . ." (*ESHM* annual meeting, Rome, 2000), in L. Grabbe, forthcoming. See my response "A Testimony of the Good King: Reading the Mesha Stele," in *ibidem.* Kofoed takes a similar position in *Text and History,* p.249. The principle for the necessity of external evidence has frequently been argued by esp. W.F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: *A New Archaeological Interpretation,*" *BASOR* 163 (1961), 36-54; *idem, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (1968), p. 47-95; 232-234; Th.L. Thompson, *Historicity,* p. 52-57. See also the discussion on Albright in my *The Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources, SHANE* 4 (Brill: Leiden, 1992; 3rd. ed. 2000), p.10-25.

4. D. Edelman, "Sourcing Saul," (SBL national meeting: Toronto, 2002); similarly, Kofoed, *Text and History,* p. 250.

5. See, e.g., A.R. Millard *et alii* (eds.), *Faith, Tradition and History* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 1994); V.P. Long, *et alii* (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument and the Crisis of Biblical Israel* (Eerdmanns: Grand Rapids, 2002); B. Halpern, "Erasing History: The Minimalist Assault on Ancient Israel," in V.P. Long (ed.), *Israel's Past in Present Research* (Eisenbraun: Winona Lake, 1999), p.415-426; H. Barstad, "The Strange Fear of the Bible: Some Reflections on the 'Bibliophobia' in Recent Ancient Israelite Historiography," in L. Grabbe, *Leading Captivity Captive: The Exile as History and Ideology, ESHM* 2 (SAP: Sheffield, 1998), p. 120-127.

Unlike Kofoed, I think it is necessary to be cautious about oral traditions to which we do not in fact have access. How does one measure the length, let alone the existence, of a tradition absent? Lemche has written interesting things about the social aspects of tradition transmission in his *Early History* of 1985[6] and I think few who have read this work would protest Lemche's statement in 1998 that "we may safely conclude that the ordinary man in the street had little if any knowledge of what may have happened in his country hundreds of years ago."[7] Although hardly programmatic, the statement makes a necessary point. Some 50 pages of Kofoed's dissertation are dedicated to the statement[8] as if it represented some fundamental thesis, not only of Lemche, but of all associated with the Copenhagen school. Kofoed's conclusion is that it is not necessarily to be excluded that information may have been passed down to Lemche's proverbial man in the street. That Lemche has ever consistently argued that the Book of Kings, not just possibly, but certainly, contains historical information from the Iron Age suggests that the problems with Kofoed's arguments about oral tradition begin with his failure to read Lemche.

Kofoed presents a surprisingly similar strategy to deal with the Bible's many close parallels to ancient Near Eastern literature. The argument he uses was first brought forward in articles by W.W. Hallo since 1980 and more comprehensively in M. Mallul's monograph of 1990[9] in an effort to avoid many of the critical restrictions on the comparison of biblical traditions with ancient Near Eastern texts after Morton Smith ridiculed Albrightean "parallelomania" in his 1968 presidential address to the *Society of Biblical Literature*.[10] Hallo's and Malul's arguments are based on formalistic analysis drawn from comparative literature. This "contextual" or "comparative" method stresses long-digested principles, which were first introduced into biblical studies by Eduard Meyer, Hugo Gressmann and Kurt Galling of the early 20th century's *religionsgeschichtliche schule* and were fundamental, for instance, to my own comparative analysis of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts in my studies of the patriarchal and Joseph and Moses narratives.[11] Among the benefits of such analysis has been an awareness of the common thematic context and countless detailed associations shared by biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature since the Bronze Age. It provides the means to describe both similarities and differences in the literature compared. The method has stressed the need to establish typological spectra of thematic elements so that comparison can be made within comparable genres, as well as the need to demonstrate both chronological and geographic contiguity in comparisons in order to foster an

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6. N.P. Lemche, *Early Israel. Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy, VTS* 37 (Brill: Leiden, 1985), esp. p.377-385. Particularly important is Lemche's distinction between the function of the rhapsode and that of the singer in the maintenance of early Greek traditions. In his discussion of S.M. Warner's thesis ("Primitive Saga Men," *VT* 29, 1979, p.325-335), Lemche points to the need for field studies in oral traditions and the difficulty of controlling the historical basis of orally transmitted narratives (p.382-383).

7. N.P. Lemche, "The Origin of the Israelite State: A Copenhagen Perspective on the Emergence of Critical Historical Studies of Ancient Israel in Recent Times," *SJOT* 12 /1998), p.44-63; here p. 45-46; cited by Kofoed, *Text and History*, p. 60; for my own perspective on oral tradition, see Th.L. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel: The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1-23, JSOT* 55 (SAP: Sheffield, 1987), p.41-53.

8. Kofoed, *Text and History*, p.60-110.

9. Kofoed, *Text and History*, p. 48-59; M. Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990); W.W. Hallo, "Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach," in C.D. Evans *et alii* (eds.), *Scriptures in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (Pickwick: Pittsburgh, 1980), p.1-26.

10. M. Smith, "The Present State of Old Testament Studies," *JBL* 88 (1969), p.19-35. A similar argument was made by B. Mazar, "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis," *JNES* 28 (1969), 73-83.

11. Th.L. Thompson, *Historicity*, esp. p.196-297 and 311-314; idem (with D. Irvin), "The Joseph and Moses Narratives," in J.H. Hayes and J.M. Miller, *Israelite and Judean History*, p. 147-212.

independent understanding of discrete texts within their own cultures. The method has supported clearer distinctions between primary and secondary traditions and has stressed the danger of using modern genres and functions anachronistically. It has also been of great use in developing common critical standards regarding historicity and, not least, has supported the requirement of corroborative extra-biblical evidence for drawing historical conclusions on the basis of such comparisons. In Hallo's and Malul's analyses, as in Kofoed's reuse of them, the gains of the 1970s historicity debates are replaced by mildly reactionary syllogisms, forbidding "too sceptical stances" or "a priori rejections" of the Bible's antiquity and historicity.[12] That no one would disagree with the obvious suggests that the argument's insouciance affronts the most serious scientific principle of all—the principle of "indifference" or objectivity, that biblical element of "purity of heart," which provides the central critical theme in the story of Job's trial.

Ever since A. Jepsen's effort to trace the Gilgamesh story's influence throughout the biblical text,[13] the field of comparative literature has recognized that its methods do not lead to conclusions regarding text borrowing or dependence. Of far more importance are the contributions to an understanding of the character of the Bible's reuse and revision of ancient Near Eastern thematic tropes for philosophical purposes in the creation of its tradition, as well as the function of such literature in movements of renaissance and library creation. I concur, for instance, with Ingrid Hjelm that what Isaiah does with the Assyrian and Persian traditions he knows is of far greater importance than questions of either historicity or chronology.[14] The common base in metaphor and the function of common thematic elements in the Merneptah and Mesha steles with comparable figures and themes in Genesis and 2 Kings is of far greater significance to an understanding of both biblical and extra-biblical texts than empty speculation about hypothetical events in Palestine's history.[15]

On the issue of historicity, as well as on how the biblical narratives might be used for historical reconstruction, much progress has been made in developing scientific principles of research and it is hardly likely that we will return to the biblicism of the 1960s. A history of Palestine, reconstructed independently of the biblical perspective of the past: an archaeologically oriented history, dominated by a discussion of contemporary materials and data and regionally oriented histories exists now, both as an ideal and as a common critical goal. New perspectives

12. J. Kofoed, *Text and History*, p.58 and 249; W.W. Hallo, "The Limits of Skepticism," *JAOS* 110 (1990), p.187-199, esp. 187-189; *idem*, "Sumerian Historiography," in H. Tadmor and M. Winfield, *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem, 1984), p.11; M. Malul, *The Comparative Method*, p. 12-13; 109-110; see also, more recently, A.R. Millard, "Story, History and Theology, in A.R. Millard *et alii, Faith, Tradition and History* (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 1994), p. 37-64; *idem*, "Back to the Iron Bed: Og's or Procrustes?" in J.A. Emerton, *Congress Volume, VTS* 61 (1995), p.199-201 and H. Barstad, "History and the Hebrew Bible," in L. Grabbe, *Can a History of Israel be Written?* (SAP: Sheffield, 1997), p. 37-64.

13. A. Jepsen, *Das Gilgamesh Epos*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1924-26); see already E. Meyer's strictures against H. Winkler and the Babel-Bibel School (H. Winkler, *Altorientalische Forschungen I-III*, Leipzig, 1893-1902; *idem, Religionsgeschichtlicher und Geschichtlicher Orient*, Leipzig, 1906) in E. Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle, 1906), p.146-148.

14. For a recent example of the use of comparative method in biblical studies, see I.Hjelm, "The Hezekiah Narrative as a Foundation Myth for Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty, " in S.K. Jayyusi, *Islamic Studies* 40/3-4 *Special Issue on Jerusalem* (2001), p.661-674; *idem, Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty in Ancient Tradition and History* (Continuum, London 2004). On the question of cultural transference as reflected in ancient literature, see N. Wyatt, "Arms and the King," *Und Moses Schrieb dieses Lieb auf: Festschrift für Oswald Loretz, AOAT* 250 (Neukirchen, 1998), p.833-881, esp. p. 874-876; also Th.L. Thompson, "4Qtestimonia and Bible Composition: A Copenhagen Lego-Hypothesis, " in F.C. Cryer and Th.L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and New Testaments, CIS* 6 (SAP: Sheffield, 1998), p. 261-276; *idem*, "Kingship and the Wrath of God: Or Teaching Humility," *Revue Biblique* 109 (2002), p. 161-196; *idem*, "At sætte det guddommelige i verden," *Bibliana* 3 (2002), p. 45-58.

15. I.Hjelm and Th.L. Thompson, "The Victory Song of Merneptah, Israel and the People of Palestine," *JSOT* 27 (2002), 3-18; Th.L. Thompson, "A Testimony of the Good King: Reading the Mesha Stele," in L. Grabbe (forthcoming).

have also been opened regarding social conflict implicit in the texts, as issues of tradition ownership and literary relationship of our biblical texts with the traditions of the Samaritans and Jews of the Greco-Roman and Medieval periods. Such development, however, has created serious problems of anachronism regarding our texts' implied context and perspective. Time allows that I mention only four.

1. A Hellenistic Bible?

Central to the *question* of a Hellenistic Bible is not chronology but the question of origins: whether the Bible is Israelite or Jewish, whether it is Jewish and Samaritan and whether it is also Christian. The "reality" of an *original* biblical text is greatly weakened today, and the use of such anachronizing terms as "proto-Masoretic" is as counter-productive in preserving biblical unity as Dever's use of "proto-Israelite" had been in saving the origins of a literary people.[16] Neither is the question of the early forms of a Greek Bible any longer firmly anchored by the Septuaginta legend. The question has become much more complex and rich as we begin to question both the chronological and ideological watershed that once lay between so-called "Old" and "New Testaments." The Bible as a Hellenistic book is a very productive concept, even as it is exposed in Hjelm's recent dissertation as laced with anachronism.[17] Our Bible is, in fact, medieval and it is Masoretic; and *our* Bible is a most emphatically tendentious 20th century Christian revision of Ben Asher's Masoretic one, with an apparatus dominated by a Protestant "origins ideology." As a literary and religious tradition, it has a variety of variants that are to be identified in distinctive Samaritan, Jewish, Christian and, yes, pre- and early Islamic recensions. A coherent Bible comes first with the Christian and Greek codices. Unless we are referring to very specific, fragmented manuscripts from Qumran, not only must our Bible imply a considerable multiplicity of texts, not excluding such as Jubilees and 1 Enoch, but our medieval Bible needs to be read within its context of comparable manuscripts and traditions with a potentially comparable antiquity. Coming to terms with the anachronism of our Hellenistic Bible has yet further implications within tradition and redaction history.[18]

2. The Bible as a text of religion

If our search for an original Bible is mistaken, the *Sitz im Leben* of our traditions is no longer to be sought in either historical event or in a social context of a people. That context becomes rather inter-textual.[19] The historicity of the Josiah narrative, for example, is a very central, but historically unwarranted assumption in both historical-critical and archaeologically oriented historical research.[20] The role that a reiterated tale of cult reform has had in identifying the Penta-

16. W.G. Dever, "Ceramics, Ethnicity and the Question of Israel's Origins," *BA* 58 (1995), p.200-213; *idem*, "Cultural Continuity, Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record and the Question of Israelite Origins," *Eretz Israel* p.*22-*33; *idem*, "Will the Real Israel Stand Up? Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: Part I, *BASOR* 297 (1995), p. 61-80; *idem, What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2001), p.108-130; cf. Th.L. Thompson, "Methods and Results: A Review of Two Recent Publications," *SJOT* 15 (2001), p. 306-325.

17. I. Hjelm, "Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty in Ancient Tradition and History" (PhD dissertation, Copenhagen, December, 2002).

18. See I. Hjelm, *The Samaritans and Early Judaism: A Literary Analysis* (SAP: Sheffield, 2000); also the discussion of the Masoretic tradition in *idem, Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty.*

19. Th.L. Thompson, "Historiography in the Pentateuch: Twenty-Five Years after Historicity," *SJOT* 13 (1999), p.258-283.

20. See, for example, S.L. McKenzie, "The Books of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History, " in S.L. McKenzie and M.P. Graham, *The History of Israel's Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth, JSOTS* 182 (SAP: Sheffield, 1994), p.281-307, esp. p.294-295; I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (The Free Press: New York, 2001); cf.

teuch's "D" within an historical context of one particular reiteration,[21] as well as the comparable role that the nearly ubiquitous trope of "exile" has played in the relative chronology of, for example, the sources of the Pentateuch, Isaiah and even the development of the Hebrew language, have been most seriously undermined.[22] Similarly, Rainer Albertz' use of the Bible for a reconstruction of Israelite religion is lamed by our inability to construct an historically viable people, for which there might be a religion.[23] Albertz' Israel is certainly not that highland entity of the 9^{th}-8^{th} centuries, but rather a complex literary trope of another period and another people.[24] Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen's project avoids the circular problems of Albertz' historical arguments by asserting an "Old Testament" rather than an "Israelite" religion.[25] Yet, his effort to describe that religion as a literary rather than a social construct continues to trouble, particularly as it is argued that this religious construct projects an idealistic and elitist program.[26] Are we dealing with religious praxis that has evoked the production of a text, which, in its reception, has become a literary world, evoking *halakah*? I am doubtful, as I think Lundager also is, that one can any longer trust such an historical-critical perspective to provide us with a context for both evocations. I find Lundager's textual-religious hybrid both attractive and unsatisfactory. In removing his text from traditional literary categories, he successfully abstracts himself from history's immediate contingency, but he also removes the religious qualities of his text from their narrative contexts. It is only apart from such story contexts—in which more ordinary paedagogical and philosophical programs can clearly be identified—that his description of a religious and society-regulating praxis, refracted through the literature of the Old Testament, becomes tenable.[27] His religion therefore remains abstract, hypothetical and, perhaps, inappropriate.

3. The Certainties of Implied Contexts

That much of the Bible's storied religion has also been practiced historically, Lundager insists, is certain, and he refers to Jewish sources of the Roman period to support such certainty's *likeli-*

Th.L. Thompson, "Methods and Results"; also see *idem*, "Martin Noth and the History of Israel, in *The History of Israel's Traditions,* p.81-90

21. I. Hjelm, *Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty*; for an understanding of the Josiah story as eiterated history, see Th.L. Thompson, "Text, Context and Referent in Israelite Historiography," in D. Edelman, *The Fabric of History: Text, Artefact and Israel's Past*, *JSOTS* 127 (SAP: Sheffield, 1991), p.65-92; idem, "Reiterative Narrative as an Historiographic Problem," in M. Liverani (fothcoming); on the historiography of the deuteronomistic history, see, e.g., E.A. Knauf, "From History to Interpretation," in *The Fabric of History*, p. 26-64; *idem*, "Does Deuteronomistic Historiography Exist?" in A. de Pury and T. Römer, *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research, JSOTS* 306 (SAP: Sheffield, 1996), p.388-398.

22. L. Grabbe (ed.), *Leading Captivity Captive, passim;* Th.L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How* Writers *Create A Past* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1999), p.217-227 = *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (Basic Books: New York, 1999).

23. R. Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels I-II* (Neukirchen, 1992); B. Janowski and N. Lohfink (eds.), *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des alten Testaments, Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 10 (Neukirchen, 1995).

24. N.P. Lemche, "Warum die Theologie des alten Testaments einen Irrweg darstellt," in Janowski and Lohfink (eds.); *Religionsgeschichte Israels*, p.79-92; Th.L. Thompson, Das alte Testament als theologische Disziplin," in Janowski and Lohfink (eds.), *Religionsgeschichte Israels*, p.157-173.

25. H.-J. Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig Religion. En Indføring* (Anis: Frederiksberg, 1998); also *idem, Den fortærende Ild* (Århus Universitetsforlag: Århus 2000).

26. H.-J. Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig Religion,* p.20-22.

27. H.-J. Lundager Jensen, *Gammeltestamentlig Religion,* p.22.

hood (sic!).[28] The scientific problem is very similar to that raised by historians such as Grabbe, who would accept, in principle, royal names, dates and successions in 2 kings as historically trustworthy, simply because we have evidence that some of them, in fact, are.[29] Rather than asserting such unconfirmed historicity, one needs to establish an independent religio-historical context for biblical narrative. The purpose is not so much to establish or undermine historicity, but to test the literary re-use of what appears to be related to authentic religious practices. This Old Testament literature does not so much report religious practice, as it presents *haggadah*, myth and legend. Severally, such literary reiterations may or may not have counterparts in Palestine's religion or Jewish *halakah*. Three examples encourage me to maintain a restrictive historical discipline: the realism of the Bible's reuse of Babylonian law in Exodus 21-22 does not allow us to assume that this has anything to do with historical praxis in Palestine. It is even more difficult to find a basis in praxis for P's regulations of tribal order in Numbers 2 in any other context than their literary one within the wilderness narrative, whatever the forms of encampment ancient armies may have used. So too, the stories about the rights and obligations of the *levir* or *go'el*, which we find illustrated so well in the stories of Genesis 38, Deuteronomy 25 or Ruth 4, like the illustrations of the oath of the Nazirene in such stories as Numbers 6, Judges 13 or 1 Samuel 1, can not be assumed to reflect Palestine's historical praxis. They play far too important ideological roles in their literary contexts.[30]

4. Reading the Old Testament in Light of the New

To interpret the Old Testament in light of its New Testament reception[31] creates a perspective of an economy of salvation that attributes a Christian perspective to the New Testament. Whatever interests might be served in viewing the New Testament as superceding the Old, one must question—as an historian of religion—the extent to which this theme of the Gospels can be said to share the same supersessionist ideology found in most early Jewish texts; namely, a "new Israel" perspective. Christian supersessionism, however, reads the Gospels anachronistically—as origin story—within a context of narrative plot. They are read apart from the literary, intellectual and biblical context which their authors implicitly, but demonstrably, shared. It may take effort to avoid understanding references in the Gospels to a "new Jerusalem," "new covenant," "new wine" or the like, as implying a Christian context or seeing such new beginnings as marking a historical departure from an "older" and superceded Judaism, based in an older covenant. One reads a particular future into both text and its context. This is the essence of anachronism.

I use a single, well-known, example from the beginning of the gospel's passion narrative to illustrate my point. In describing Jesus' last meal with his followers, the gospels have him refer to the wine, which he gives his followers to drink, as the "blood of the covenant" (Matt 26,17-29; Mark 14,12-25; Luke 22,7-23). Matthew also has Jesus speak of a "new wine," which he will drink with them in his "father's kingdom" (Matt 26,28). Long recognized is an echo of an older text from Jeremiah 31,31-34,[32] in which Yahweh speaks of a "new covenant," one in which

28. Ibidem.

29. A clear discussion is found in L. Grabbe, (forthcoming).

30. T. and D. Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *VT* 18 (1968), p.79-99; Th.L. Thompson, *Jesus, David and the Kingdom of God* (forthcoming).

31. For a discussion of this issue in contemporary theology, see H. Hübner, "Vetus Testamentum und Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum," *Jahrbücher für biblische Theologie* 3 (1988), 147-162; M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint, Copenhagen International Seminar1* (Sheffield, 1996), p.142-144.

32. For discussion of some of the techniques of rewriting scripture in this and other scenes, see esp. J. Jeremias, *Die Abendmalsworte Jesu* (Göttingen, 1935); W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St Matthew* III (Edinburgh, 1997), 472-473 and esp. M. Müller, *Kommentar til Matthæusevangeliet* (Århus, 2000), 529-533.

the divine law will be written on the hearts of "Israel and Judah's house." All sin is forgiven as all "know Yahweh." Matthew's use of the last supper scene to introduce the story of Jesus' suffering and death also allows us to recognize the "blood of the covenant" as a plot-related citation from Zechariah 9,11, allowing the last supper story to evoke the deeper meaning of the coming story of Jesus' death: "Because of the blood of your covenant, I have freed prisoners from the pit." With this interpretive illustration, the story of Jesus' coming suffering, as bringing salvation, reiterates a similar and more expansive illustration in Isaiah of the figure of Israel—Yahweh's first-born son—as the righteous sufferer on the path towards understanding (Isaiah 53,4-12), much as young Elihu plays the role of the wine-sack, bursting with a new wine of understanding for a suffering Job (Job 32,6-22). That the writer of the gospel intends such allusions to give his story meaning is particularly clear as the passage of Zechariah 9, echoed in the gospel, follows immediately a song celebrating the eternal and universal peace in Jerusalem, when its king enters his kingdom, humbly riding on a donkey (Zech 9,9-10). In the scene of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21,1-11; Mark 11,1-11; Lk 19,28-40) Matthew has used Jesus, as 1 Maccabees had once used Judas (1 Macc 5, 52-54), to give dramatic illustration to his version of the kingdom.[33] Zechariah's song, which both 1 Maccabees and Matthew similarly reiterate, is itself a rendition of a trope from Isaiah, where the people rather than the king enter the gates of Jerusalem, cleaning the stones to make a highway for those saved by Yahweh (Isa 62,10-12). In Matthew, all of our figures contribute to this utopian scene about the kingdom of God. It is well recognized that the Gospel's use of the motif, "blood of the covenant," is a deft rewriting of the closing scene in the story of Moses' covenant on Mount Sinai (Ex 24). The indirection of narrative reiteration, so central to biblical composition, allows us to read a story about Jesus and his disciples, sharing a cup of wine the night before his death, through multiple evocations of figures of suffering: Isaiah's Jerusalem, the elders of the wilderness generation and the righteous one of Israel. Like Zechariah's prophetic shepherd (cf. Matt 26,31 and Zech 13,7), the elders of Israel on Mt. Sinai, Israel, Jerusalem, Job, Judas, Jesus and the readers themselves, all stand on common ground within the Bible's universal pedagogy of enlightenment through suffering.

33. In the previous episode, I Maccabees 5, 45-51 reiterates Numbers 21,21-24.