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Paul Michael Kurtz

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# Is Kant among the Prophets?

## Hebrew Prophecy and German Historical Thought, 1880–1920

Paul Michael Kurtz

Religion is history.

—Bernhard Duhm<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

In a biblical tale likely little known, the spirit of God falls upon an ancient king of Israel who proceeds to strip himself naked and prophesy. “This is why people say,” the text explains, “‘Is Saul among the prophets?’”<sup>2</sup> Now, what exactly King Saul said—or why he said it naked—is not recounted in the story, but for German biblical scholars of the nineteenth century, it may well have sounded like Kant: a modern German thinker in an ancient Hebrew’s clothing, or rather more form than attire. If historians know anything about biblical scholarship in this ‘age of history,’ they know *The Life of Jesus* by D.F. Strauß, from 1835: the sensational work of a Left Hegelian who pushed Jesus out of the realm of history and into that of myth. They might also know the fate of Moses at the hands of the so-called Documentary Hypothesis, a theory of composition history, consolidated in the 1860s, that made him not the author but the authored of the Pentateuch—a founder fictionalized to justify a later Jewish cultic apparatus. In each case, questions of deity and history burned bright and hot alike, from the

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1        Attributed by student Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, *Die wissenschaftliche und die kirchliche Methode in der Theologie. Ein encyclopädischer Versuch* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897), vii, 90, 223; idem, “Dem Senior der Basler Universität, Professor Bernhard Duhm zu seinem 80. Geburtstage,” *National-Zeitung*, Supplement 470 (Sunday, 9 October 1927). Bernoulli cites two works by Duhm, but this precise formula appears in neither. However, Duhm did use this language to re-present claims in the biblical text: Duhm, *Israels Propheten* [Lebensfragen 26; Tübingen: Mohr, 1916], 302, 309, cf. also 354. Unless cited otherwise, all translations are my own.

2        1 Samuel 19; cf. 1 Samuel 10.

authenticity of biblical texts to the credibility of their claims about the past to the authority of ancient writings for the modern world. So, too, the match was mostly struck by theologians: biblical scholars occupied with issues textual and historical and working inside institutions bound to the Christian faith. Yet over the course of the century, those flames were fanned by other winds as well. Further challenges—scientific, philosophical, comparative—destabilized the place long assigned to God in history, as epistemological fields from economics to biology offered new ways of explaining the human: origins, society, and mind. As the century wore on, the standing of God in the present, like the footing of Moses and Jesus in the past, looked less and less secure. In response, novel interpretations of prophecy in Israel promised to reconcile old theological commitments to divine involvement in the world with the latest, potentially disruptive explanations for human existence that were gaining ground. The ancient prophets seemed to tell some modern Germans just what they wanted to hear.

This article examines the interpretation of Hebrew prophecy by German Protestant scholars in the era of 1880–1920. If Hebrew antiquity had offered food for political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Enlightenment then drew nourishment on its ideas of poetry and nationhood.<sup>3</sup> Through the nineteenth century, the Hebrew Bible—once disparaged for its morality (or lack thereof) compared to the New Testament—enjoyed a growing appreciation for the prophets’ ‘ethical monotheism,’ which marked an interpretative shift away from the prophetic prediction of a future messiah. Though overlooked by commentators, Protestant interpreters came to value the prophets of Israel for yet another reason: their historical understanding. The article argues, firstly, that German Old Testament exegetes elevated Hebrew prophets since they presented God as the guiding force behind all human history and, secondly, that these theologians cum philologists saw this prophetic conception of history—i.e., divine work as visible in the simple course of events, rather than miracles or intervention—as supporting their own historicist approach to the Bible and as anticipating their own theological understanding of God in the world. It bases this argument on a reading of numerous *Alttestamentler* from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, both leading lights like Bernhard Duhm, Julius Wellhausen, and Hermann Gunkel and, for historians, now forgotten figures such as Carl Heinrich Cornill, Rudolf Smend, Rudolf Kittel,

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<sup>3</sup> See Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Ofri Ilany, *In Search of the Hebrew People: Bible and Nation in the German Enlightenment*, trans. Ishai Mishory (German Jewish Cultures; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

Karl Budde, and Otto Eißfeldt. Moreover, it traces this interpretative tendency across a range of sources, including specialist studies, theological monthlies, critical and literary journals, popular works, public talks, and pedagogical literature. Reaching outside the upper echelons of scholarship, these authors also targeted an audience among the faithful as well as the lapsed in German Protestant culture. With work translated into English, they pushed, too, beyond the germanosphere.

The examination offers two principal interventions for Christian views of Judaism and for the history of biblical scholarship in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the one hand, this inquiry identifies a different reason for the elevation of Hebrew prophecy in liberal Protestant theology, in addition to ethical monotheism. Critics have long recognized both a linking of prophecy to ethics and a binding of prophetic ethics to Jesus in biblical interpretation. Uriel Tal has hence detected a “general theological tendency of scholarly research in that period that Christianity was the legitimate successor of ancient Israel, with all its claims and prerogatives, charged with the task of developing and preserving the ethical elements in the religion of the prophets and in the psalms. . . .”<sup>4</sup> However, as this essay argues, commentators have missed how German Protestant scholars gravitated toward the prophetic corpus because of a particular sense of history they perceived within these writings, an understanding of God at work in human events. That sense of history, moreover, supplied another tie from Christianity—circumventing Judaism—to ancient Israel. This argument furthers, then, postcolonial analysis of Protestant theology, which has discerned a colonial relationship not between metropole at home and settlement abroad but within a European nation-state, in the relations of majority Christian and minority Jewish populations in Germany. While Susannah Heschel has recognized the historiographical seizure of Jesus and Christian origins by Protestant theologians, Christian Wiese has shown a similar annexation of the prophets’ ethical monotheism.<sup>5</sup> In like manner, Protestant scholars did not stop at claiming a prophetic

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<sup>4</sup> Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, trans. Noah Jonathan Jacobs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 199.

<sup>5</sup> Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Christian Wiese (Studies in European Judaism 10; Leiden: Brill, 2005). Both authors ultimately concentrate on the efforts of Jewish scholars to reclaim the history of Judaism and subvert such master narratives of Christianity as the fount of Western civilization. For another dimension of biblical scholarship as colonial knowledge, see Paul Michael Kurtz, “The Silence on the

conception of history for their own intellectual patrimony but even juxtaposed the historical understanding of earlier Israelites with that of later ‘unhistorical’ Jews. Hebrew prophecy, in consequence, became not only morally but also historiologically Christian, not Jewish.

On the other hand, the investigation qualifies frequent overstatement in descriptions of biblical interpretation. Historians as well as biblical scholars and theologians writing on their disciplines have tended to exaggerate the opposition created between prophecy and law. As one exegete asserts, “. . . a major legacy of nineteenth-century Christian reconstructions of ancient Israelite history and their accompanying biblical interpretations is their devaluation of the Torah, reified as Law and equated with Judaism, in their attempts to valorize the Prophets cum Christianity.”<sup>6</sup> Now, some Christian writers certainly did juxtapose prophecy with law—chronologically (pre-exilic vs. post-exilic), politically (state vs. post-state, individual vs. collective), canonically (Prophets vs. Torah), and religiously, if not even ethnically (Israelite vs. Jewish)—and did so often in hierarchical opposition. Likewise, the coupling of Jesus with prophecy was indeed attended by a decoupling from Judaism. Yet not only does such a common collapse of categories make parenthetical the internal Christian polemics and liberal politics active in biblical scholarship, where Protestants cast Catholics—often through the cipher of Jews—as medieval, legalistic, degenerate, and unmodern, but this widespread re-presentation of prophecy and law as a clear polarity also all too neatly severs the deep entanglement these scholars recognized themselves and went great lengths to understand. Inconveniently, the usual protagonist (or culprit) in these descriptions, Julius Wellhausen, equally called the prophets “the founders of the religion of the law, not forerunners of the gospel,” and even stated, “prophets and law are no opposition but identical and relate to one other as cause and effect.”<sup>7</sup> The contrast between them may well have started as a theological premise and ended as a historiographical conclusion, but their multifaceted relationship was not infrequently the very object of analysis. After all, questions surrounded whether the prophet-priest Ezekiel was more prophet or more priest. Such

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Land: Ancient Israel versus Modern Palestine in Scientific Theology,” in *Negotiating the Secular and the Religious in the German Empire: Transnational Approaches*, ed. Rebekka Habermas (New German Historical Perspectives 10; New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 56–97.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Stackert, *A Prophet like Moses: Prophecy, Law, and Israelite Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1894), 77, 95. In the preface, he also stated, “Prophecy cannot be separated from the law, from Jewish piety, and from Christianity; it forms, already, the transition from Israelite to Jewish history” (*ibid.*, v).

overgeneralizations, furthermore, conceal the diversity within each term. This essay therefore challenges the notion that Protestant interpreters extolled Hebrew prophets simply to denigrate Jewish priests. Instead, as the argument contends, biblical scholars perceived a deep and intimate connection between prophecy and law, and they even differentiated between the prophets—with certain figures held in high esteem and others seen more critically—using (an ideal) historical understanding as a criterion to do so.

To analyze how German Old Testament scholars not only constructed a prophetic conception of history but also used that same conception to address their own theological challenges between 1880 and 1920, the article proceeds in three stages. First, it scrutinizes representations of Hebrew prophecy in the new historiography of ancient Israel. The inquiry uncovers, in consequence, an appreciation of prophecy for its contribution to historical thinking, a ranking of the prophets themselves based on their notions of history, and a juxtaposition of historically minded Israelites with ahistorical Jews. Second, it probes the correlation of historical thinking between biblical prophets and biblical scholars. The exploration excavates, accordingly, exegetes' own understanding of God in the world, their claims of a precedence for that understanding in Hebrew prophecy, and their pretensions to such a theological inheritance not merely as Christians but specifically as Protestants and Germans. Third, it surveys the application of ancient prophecy to the German present. The essay demonstrates, as a result, the appeal to a prophetic theology of history—the equation of divine action with the course of events—which interpreters then used, on the one hand, to confront the theological problems posed by supernaturalism, mechanism, materialism, and comparatism and, on the other hand, to champion both the significance and the relevance of the Old Testament for modern German culture. In conclusion, it relates this construction of history, in brief, to wider and longer patterns of thought. The investigation considers, therefore, other reflections on the absolute and the historical in philosophies of history at the time as well as the historicizing modality of reading within the deeper history of hermeneutics. Ultimately, Hebrew prophecy, it seemed, could serve as a guide through intellectual turmoil—for continuing to see God at work in the world.

### ***Making the prophets historical***

While the duality of law and prophecy has long occupied a central place in Protestant

thought, the pairing traces back to antiquity itself. Ben Sira, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and New Testament all referred to a corpus of texts as ‘the law (or Moses) and the prophets,’ even if the precise order and content of each remained in flux for centuries.<sup>8</sup> The two also constitute the acronym Tanakh, a term for the Hebrew Bible in Jewish tradition, as opposed to the Old Testament of Christian nomenclature: *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). In the long nineteenth century, such a literary and theological distinction became a scientific one, through a historicizing philology.

Whatever the early modern, or even ancient, roots of ‘higher criticism’—grounded in a deep tradition of biblical and classical erudition—its trunk was mighty enough, by the early 1800s, to support an historical study of texts that branched out beyond ancient pagan literature, into sacred scripture itself.<sup>9</sup> This form of biblical criticism increasingly fixated on authenticity and authorship: examining interests and motives, tendencies and assumptions in texts and inspecting their language, vocabulary, and style. Whether Strauß on the New Testament or Wilhelm Vatke on the Old, old truths became new fictions. Interpreters hence debated everything from a mythical Jesus to Markan priority in the Synoptics, from Moses as author of the Pentateuch to the credibility of Chronicles.<sup>10</sup> If such radical reassessment of the Old Testament brewed in the 1830s, it gusted in the 1860s and stormed by 1880. Following the era of critical analysis, from 1830 to 1880, which separated sources within the biblical literature, came an epoch of historiographical synthesis, from 1880 to 1920, which rearranged those sources chronologically.<sup>11</sup> By the final quarter of the century, an historical study of the

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<sup>8</sup> Other writings fit into yet another category, one more open and generic, which eventually consolidated into a third division and restructured the two-part compilation.

<sup>9</sup> See Anthony Grafton, “Introduction,” in F.A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer, 1795*, ed. and trans. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E.G. Zetzel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3–35; “The Rise and Fall of *Quellenforschung*,” in *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. Ann Blair and Anja-Silvia Goering, 2 vols. (Scientific and Learned Cultures and Their Institutions 18; Leiden: Brill, 2016), 2:933–54.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the trends of this period, see David Lincicum, “Criticism and Authority,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, ed. Joel D.S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 72–88; John W. Rogerson, “The Bible and Theology,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 455–67; and Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 4, *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Leo G. Perdue (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 63; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010 [2001]).

<sup>11</sup> For a guide through the complexities of this scholarship, see John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* ([Philadelphia]: Fortress Press, 1984); and especially the following

Bible had moved from controversial to conventional in faculties of Protestant theology. Importantly, these *Alttestamentler* saw their textual work as scientific just like any other. As Bernhard Stade claimed, in his 1883 rector's address at the University of Giessen, "Here no one has ever cast into doubt that what we theologians do is science (*Wissenschaft*), for everyone knows that it is done by the same means and with the same method used in all of science."<sup>12</sup> Yet they also saw their science as Protestant *au fond*. Stade immediately proceeded to cast his confession's scholarship as modern, critical, neutral, and historical—as opposed to Roman Catholic scholarship, denigrated as medieval, doctrinal, political, and fictional.

Between 1880 and 1920, a reshuffling of sources thus occasioned a retelling of the past. The Abel to law's Cain, prophecy held pride of place in this new historiography. Against the biblical narrative, which told of Moses giving the law, the people falling away, and the prophets seeking to restore it, the 'scientific' account reversed the story. Accordingly, the Israelite prophets had first taught ethical obligations to the people; then, following destruction by the Babylonians and restoration by the Persians, Jewish priests and scribes not only inflated the demands of religious law but also projected their ideals onto the past, overwriting the true history and distorting biblical texts into their current form. Prophecy, in this telling, corresponded to the pure, dynamic past of the Hebrew nation, whereas the law correlated to a later, static Jewish community. The history of Israel was therefore pinned to the history of religion, which was pegged to the composition history of the biblical literature, itself tied to the political history of the nation.

With this larger history of Israel, that of Hebrew prophecy also underwent revision in the period. "Prophecy has a history," so Bernhard Duhm declared.<sup>13</sup> As Carl Heinrich Cornill noted, in 1894, that history had only been accessible since the 1860s, thanks to a

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contributions in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3/1, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013): Jean Louis Ska, "The 'History of Israel': Its Emergence as an Independent Discipline," 307–45; Thomas Römer, "'Higher Criticism': The Historical and Literary-critical Approach – with Special Reference to the Pentateuch," 393–423; Rudolf Smend (Jr.), "A Conservative Approach in Opposition to a Historical-critical Interpretation: E.W. Hengstenberg and Franz Delitzsch," 494–520; Karl William Weyde, "Studies on the Historical Books – Including Their Relationship to the Pentateuch," 521–555.

12 Bernhard Stade, "Ueber die Lage der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands. Rectoratsrede, gehalten zur Feier des Stiftungsfestes der Landes-Universität Giessen am 1. Juli 1883," repr. in idem, *Ausgewählte Akademische Reden und Abhandlungen* (Giessen: Ricker, 1899 [1883]), 1–36, quote at 3.

13 Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 3.



revolution—likened to Copernicus—sparked by historical criticism (with its thesis *lex post prophetas*) and stoked by the discoveries in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, while such philological study had long dominated biblical interpretation, marked by internal analysis of the literature itself, circa 1900 other hermeneutical strategies arose by way of anthropology, psychology, and comparative religion.<sup>15</sup> New tools were added to the exegetical toolbox, often owing to German imperialism: not only other textual traditions but also practices from cultures past and present all across the globe. Advancing Duhm's ideas, in the early 1900s, Hermann Gunkel and Gustav Hölscher drew on this expanded set of data and stressed the irrational and ecstatic, emotional and somatic, facets of prophetic experience.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, a nuanced history of prophecy emerged: one that, building on earlier work by Heinrich Ewald, identified types of prophets and infused them with chronology, running from ecstatic bands to religious geniuses to uninspired epigoni.<sup>17</sup> To distinguish between prophetic periods and among the prophets themselves became a main preoccupation of Old Testament scholars. Thus, an Isaiah interested in world history and the future was contrasted to a

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Heinrich Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel: Popular Sketches from Old Testament History*, trans. Sutton F. Corkran (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1895[1894]), 4, cf. v–vi, which slightly altered the German original.

<sup>15</sup> For more on prophetic psychology, see Robert Kurtz, *Zur Psychologie der vorexilischen Prophetie in Israel* (Pörsneck: Feigenspan, 1904); Paul Schwartzkopff, *Die prophetische Offenbarung nach Wesen, Inhalt und Grenzen, unter dem Gesichtspunkte der alttestamentlichen Weissagung geschichtlich und psychologisch untersucht* (Giessen: Ricker, 1896).

<sup>16</sup> Cf., inter alia, Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 3/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892); Hermann Gunkel, *Die Propheten. Die geheimen Erfahrungen der Propheten, Die Politik der Propheten, Die Religion der Propheten, Schriftstellerei und Formensprache der Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917), a collection of articles first published between 1903 and 1917; Gustav Hölscher, *Die Profeten. Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1914). For more on prophetic interpretation by Duhm, see Henning Graf Reventlow, “Die Prophetie im Urteil Bernhard Duhms,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 85, no. 3 (1988): 259–74; Rudolf Smend (Jr.), “Wissende Prophetendeutung. Zum 150. Geburtstag Bernhard Duhms,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 54, no. 4 (1998): 289–99; by Gunkel, see Konrad Hammann, *Hermann Gunkel. Eine Biographie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 237–53; by Hölscher, see Rudolf Smend (Jr.), “Gustav Hölscher. Alttestamentler und Zeitgenosse,” in *Diasynchron. Beiträge zur Exegese, Theologie und Rezeption der Hebräischen Bibel. Walter Dietrich zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Naumann and Regine Hunziker-Rodewald (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), 345–73.

<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Ewald, *Die Propheten des Alten Bundes erklärt*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Krabbe, 1840–41), which underwent English translation. On the nineteenth-century consolidation and mid-twentieth-century breakdown of the portrait of (some) prophets as inspired individuals with unmediated contact with God, see Konrad Schmid, “Klassische und nachklassische Deutungen der alttestamentlichen Prophetie,” *Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte* 3, no. 2 (1996): 225–50.

Jeremiah concerned with a religion of the heart more than matters of history.<sup>18</sup> To determine causation was also a fixation—i.e., whether developments in prophecy had sprung organically from qualities inherent in the nation or derived from external influences by surrounding peoples—one that reflected a wider anxiety about cultural autonomy, if not autarky, of Hebrews as of Greeks.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, this revised prophetic history fit squarely in the grand historiography of Israel also being rewritten, which extended from primitive Semitic tribes to the Hebrew nation to a Jewish community (and, implicitly or explicitly, early Christianity). If Protestant exegetes placed law after prophecy, they replaced it with a still more ancient religion, a national one that had presupposed a bond between the people and their god. It was the prophets who came in between. These “spiritual destroyers of the old Israel” forged their path by asserting God’s relationship with the people depended on their actions, by divorcing this relationship from the nation’s political life, and by shifting the locus of religion onto the individual.<sup>20</sup> Prophetic religion became conditional on ethics, severed from politics, and written on the heart.

In a variety of genres, to an array of audiences, biblical scholars extolled Hebrew prophecy, the “greatest wonder of pre-Christian history” or “the most powerful and most wonderful phenomenon of ancient history.”<sup>21</sup> As Cornill rhapsodized, in a 1894 work received both well and widely, “The whole history of humanity has produced nothing which can be compared in the remotest degree to the prophecy of Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Much of this

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18 Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 284.

19 On the debate over the role of Assyrians in the development of prophetic thought, cf. Julius Wellhausen, review of *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion dargestellt*, by Bernhard Duhm, in *Jahrbücher für Deutsche Theologie* 21 (1876): 152–58.

20 Julius Wellhausen, “Israel,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., vol. 13 (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1881), 396–432, at 417.

21 Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Sammlung Theologischer Lehrbücher: Alttestamentliche Theologie; Freiburg: Mohr, 1899), 174; Ernst Sellin, *Der alttestamentliche Prophetismus. Drei Studien* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1912), 101. As for terminology, Israel initially referred to the northern kingdom in the Levant and Judah to the southern; however, even in the biblical texts themselves, the Judahites claimed the name and legacy of the Israelites. Eventually, critical scholarship fixed the nomenclature of Hebrews, Israelites (i.e., Israelites and Judahites), and Jews based on a chronology tied to political history: the pre-state, state, and post-state populations, respectively.

22 Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, 178–79. He continued, “let this never be overlooked nor forgotten: the costliest and noblest treasure that man possesses he owes to Israel and to Israelitic prophecy.” By 1917, the English translation had seen 11 editions; by 1920, the German, 13.

appreciation both fed and fed on a notion of religion that idealized the private, individual, interior, and moral—a notion that, not coincidentally, corresponded to the bourgeois values celebrated and the historical narrative constructed by liberal Protestant theology. First, Old Testament interpreters attributed a religious individualization to Hebrew prophecy. In a series of prestigious lectures before an American audience, in 1898–99, Karl Budde praised the “important step, that from a national to an individual religion.”<sup>23</sup> Second, these authors attributed monotheism to the prophets. True, various positions debated the monotheistic tendency of Semites as an ethnological class, the period in which veneration of a single deity took hold among the Israelites, and the stages along the path to an ontological monotheism. But prophecy consistently received credit for at least consolidating this belief into its mature biblical form. As claimed by Bruno Baentsch, in 1906, “It is to the great prophets of Israel, most of all, that Yahweh won the final victory in terms of monotheism.”<sup>24</sup> Third, biblicists accredited a moral consciousness to prophetic personages. In a volume originally conceived as both introduction and supplement to a leading series of commentaries, Karl Marti asserted that same year, “the true character of the prophetic religion will be best represented by calling it a pure ethical monotheism. And, in so doing, the emphasis must be laid on the qualifying adjective. This religion is not merely a monotheism, it is a purely ethical monotheism.”<sup>25</sup> In the end, the construction of ethical monotheism—credited to

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23 Karl Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile* (American Lectures on the History of Religions, Fourth Series, 1898–1899; New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1899), 196, a volume also published in German, in 1900.

24 Bruno Baentsch, *Altorientalischer und israelitischer Monotheismus. Ein Wort zur Revision der entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung der israelitischen Religionsgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1906), 122. On the conservative side, see Eduard König wrote numerous works on religion in general and the prophets in particular, including *Geschichte der Alttestamentlichen Religion kritisch dargestellt* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912) and *Das alttestamentliche Prophetentum und die modern Geschichtsforschung* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1910).

25 Karl Marti, *The Religion of the Old Testament: Its Place among the Religions of the Nearer East*, trans. G.A. Bienemann, ed. W.D. Morrison (Crown Theological Library 19; London: Williams & Norgate, 1907 [1906]), 158, the original series being *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*, published by Mohr (Siebeck).

The Dutch Old Testament scholar Abraham Kuenen usually receives credit for coining the term ethical monotheism, in *De godsdienst van Israël tot den ondergang van den joodschen staat* (1869–70) and, at length, in *De profeten en de profetie onder Israël* (1875). But the phrase had also circulated earlier, in discussions of the ur-religion of humanity (Franz Xaver Pritz, “Über den Monotheismus als Urreligion der Menschheit,” *Neue theologische Zeitschrift* [1833] 6.1, 189–210, 305–29, 6.2, 26–50) and the universalism of Zoroaster—as the highest form of religion before Christianity—compared to the tribal god of Abraham and ethical national god of Moses (Pertinax Philalethes [Peter Conradin von Planta], *Die Wissenschaft des Staates*, vol. 1, *Der Mensch* [St Gallen: Huber & Co., 1848], 120–22).

prophecy—promoted the private over public, the universal over particular, the individual over collective, and internal faith over external practice.

A different quality, however, also drew Protestant interpreters to the Hebrew prophets between 1880 and 1920: namely, their historical thinking. The bond of prophecy and history occurred on several levels. To start with, the prophets of ancient Israel had allegedly launched the philosophy of history. Rudolf Kittel commented on such sustained historical reflection in his substantial history of Israel, from 1909: “It is one of the most grandiose speeches of Isaiah, as well as the first attempt at a philosophy of history in great style, which is built on the law of moral world order in history: world history is the world’s tribunal.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, prophecy had reportedly discerned the hand of God in human history. Duhm, a prominent promoter of the prophets, described how they had “struggled triumphantly with events by discovering therein the hand, the will, the plan of [their] God.”<sup>27</sup> With his popular 1916 *Israel’s Prophets*, he detailed their ideas of the nation, conduct, and suffering, glossing, “It [sc. the world storm] is no blind rage as from natural powers, no uncanny fate: there is an intention, a plan behind it, it is the history made by God.”<sup>28</sup> Wellhausen, too, contended, in his major history of Israel and Judaism, first published in 1894, “From the prophets he chose the interpreters of his will and work in connection to Israel. It is their contribution that history, not the past but the present one, was understood as the meaningful product of divine dealings. Events were wonders and signs; coincidence, the tip of a higher hand.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, prophecy had putatively shaped a distinct historiography. Following historian Eduard Meyer, who had called Hebrew historical writing better than any other people’s in the ancient Near East (Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians), Gunkel placed it alone on par, intellectually, with that of the Greeks—a claim advanced in no less a venue than the influential journal *Deutsche Rundschau*, in 1914.<sup>30</sup> By recognizing the deep interrelation between human and divine and

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26 Rudolf Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 2, *Das Volk in Kanaan, Quellenkunde und Geschichte der Zeit bis zum babylonischen Exil*, 2nd ed. (Handbücher der alten Geschichte 1/3; Gotha: Perthes, 1909), 510, n. 1, being the second edition of his *Geschichte der Hebräer*—a work also translated into English. Though uncited, this final aphorism was penned by Friedrich Schiller, in his poem “Resignation,” but memorialized by Hegel.

27 Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 3.

28 Ibid., 89–90.

29 Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Reimer, 1895), 104.

30 Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme. Alttestamentliche Untersuchungen*, with contributions by Bernhard Luther (Halle: Niemeyer, 1906), 486; idem, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1.1, *Einleitung: Elemente der Anthropologie* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1907), §130–35; Hermann Gunkel, “Was haben wir am Alten Testament?,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 161 (1914): 215–41, at 226, published separately in 1916 as *Was bleibt vom Alten Testament?* and

between past and present, the Hebrew prophets had developed their own account of history. Prophetic historiography, as argued by Franz Delitzsch even earlier, thus aimed to demonstrate “the internal, divine connections of external happenings, which annals only register.”<sup>31</sup> Last, but certainly not least, prophetic thinking had supposedly fused ideas historical and moral. As Hölscher held in *The Prophets*, of 1914, “Before the philosophers of Greece, the Israelite prophets discovered the moral causality that rules the world uniformly. By clearly formulating the idea of the unity of God and the moral sense of world events, most of all history, they elevated the religion of the cult to ethical religion, the religion of nature to the religion of history.”<sup>32</sup> More than merely include both, the prophetic patrimony therefore integrated ethical monotheism and a conception of history.

Despite this universal appreciation of Hebrew prophecy, not every Hebrew prophet was universally appreciated. Not only did exegetes judge the prophets, but they even employed historical thinking a key criterion to do so. Just as the history of prophecy mapped onto the broader history of Israel, so also the prophetic grasp of history corresponded to the larger history of religion.<sup>33</sup> At first, Amos had emphasized divine judgment and stressed the consequences of human conduct for the political life of the nation. Wellhausen portrayed

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later translated into English with some omissions; see further Hugo Greßmann, *Die älteste Geschichtsschreibung und Prophetie Israels (von Samuel bis Amos und Hosea)* (Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt 2/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910); Max Haller, *Das Judentum: Geschichtsschreibung, Prophetie und Gesetzgebung nach dem Exil* (Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt 2/3; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914).

31 Franz Delitzsch, *Biblischer Commentar über den Propheten Jesaja*, 2nd ed. (Biblischer Commentar über das Alte Testament 3/1; Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1866), 8, which saw English translation; see also Otto Pfleiderer, *Die Religion, ihr Wesen und ihre Geschichte, auf Grund des gegenwärtigen Standes der philosophischen und der historischen Wissenschaft dargestellt*, vol. 2, *Die Geschichte der Religion* (Leipzig: Fues [Reisland], 1869), 331–40. More fundamentally, one line of interpretation compared Hebraic and classical historiography within the framework of religious, psychological, and universal ‘pragmatism’: cf. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen und apokryphischen Bücher des Alten Testaments, sowie in die Bibelsammlung überhaupt*, 8th ed., ed. Eberhard Schrader (Berlin: Reimer, 1869), 251; see also Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 2, 552.

32 Hölscher, *Die Profeten*, 188.

33 For a stark contrast between Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Ezekiel, “the three foundation pillars” of Judaism, see the remarkable portrait by Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile*, 217. In particular, Jeremiah and (Deutero-)Isaiah saw approval for promoting an inner piety and a non-particularist perspective: e.g., Eduard Krähe, *Jüdische Geschichte. Von ihren Anfängen bis zu dem Untergange des Reiches Juda* (Berlin: Gnadenfeld, 1888), 424–25.

him, in 1892, as understanding history to be a quasi-objective (or sub-divine) force in the world, expounding, “Everywhere he considers only the fate of the entire people and in doing so distinguishes between just and unjust as little as history does itself.”<sup>34</sup> Next, Deutero-Isaiah had universalized the deity beyond the Hebrew nation. Exegetes acclaimed him for seeing God as “the driver of history.”<sup>35</sup> In a monumental history of Israel, published in 1887/88, Stade argued, favourably, “Because he was understood as the god of prophecy and of world history, Yahweh became the sole god, the creator of the world, and the preserver of the word.”<sup>36</sup> Interpreters both underlined such positive statements on the place of God in history and underscored the prophet’s own critiques of the people for misunderstanding divine work in the world.<sup>37</sup> Later, Ezekiel had served as the link between the prophets and the law, “the beginning of the end” of prophecy.<sup>38</sup> “Jeremiah is therefore the last prophet,” another scholar stated, in 1885, “but Ezekiel [is] the first scribe, the ‘spiritual father of Judaism’.”<sup>39</sup> Smend disapproved of his historical perspective, claiming in an 1880 commentary, “His judgment on the past of Israel is, objectively viewed, without a doubt very unfair; he constructed history according to his a priori assumptions and has no sense anymore for

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34 Julius Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, vol. 5, *Die kleinen Propheten übersetzt, mit Noten* (Berlin: Reimer, 1892), 93, cf. 94; cf. idem, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, 1st ed., 77.

35 Stade, Bernhard Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 2.1, *Geschichte des vorchristlichen Judenthums bis zur griechischen Zeit*, 74 (Allgemeine Geschichte in Einzeldarstellungen 1/6; Berlin: Grote, 1888). While vol. 1, *Geschichte Israels unter der Königsherrschaft*, was single-author (1887), vol. 2 was bipartite, with Stade writing part 1 and Oskar Holtzmann part 2, *Das Ende des jüdischen Staatswesens und die Entstehung des Christenthums*.

36 Ibid., 73, cf. 77.

37 Cf. Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 356, cf. 435, 439. With this work, he intended “to show the difference of pre-prophetic and post-prophetic religion from prophetic [religion]” (ibid., v). Although he argued for a greater appreciation of Judaism in its significance for Christianity, he did so only by distinguishing “earlier and later” Judaism (i.e. pre- and post-Maccabean) and casting the former as positive and the latter as negative (ibid, v–vi).

38 Richard Kraetzschmar, *Das Buch Ezechiel übersetzt und erklärt* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 3.3.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), viii.

39 Theodor Arndt, *Die Stellung Ezechiels in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie* (Berlin: Haack, 1885), 28, cf. 6. Smend was a, if not the, first to designate him thus (idem, *Der Prophet Ezechiel*, viii). Previously, the fatherhood of Judaism had been assigned to Abraham (Anton Ziegler, *Historische Entwicklung der Göttlichen Offenbarung in ihren Hauptmomenten speculativ betrachtet und dargestellt* [Nördlingen: Beck, 1842], 78–79), Adam (cf. Salomon Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes, eine wissenschaftliche Darstellung des Judenthums nach seinem Charakter, Entwicklungsgänge und Berufe in der Menschheit* [Frankfurt: Hermann, 1841], 134, cf. 205), and even “the spirit of superstition” (*der Geist des Aberglaubens*) (Carl Friedrich Bahrdt, *Die sämtlichen Reden Jesu, aus den Evangelisten ausgezogen und in Ordnung gestellt zur Uebersicht des Lehrgebäudes Jesu* [Berlin: Vieweg, 1786], 21).

objective historical truth.”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, prophecy had declined. Though conceding there could be prophets in “the age of law,” Duhm qualified, in 1916, that they were not like those of old: “They are mostly prophets like one typically imagines the prophets today: men who predict the future and perhaps also give sermons calling for repentance,” much of their work being less prophecies than poetries.<sup>41</sup> This decline was manifest in the perception of God in the world. As he wrote of one such prophet, “We also notice that Habakkuk knows nothing of the connection between earlier history and his present, that he has no historical sense at all. . . .”<sup>42</sup> In the book of Daniel, too, he found a disregard for actual history and mere fantasy instead—i.e., that God stands with the Jews alone and regardless of circumstance—which only went to prove “no genuine prophecy stands before us.”<sup>43</sup> For these Protestant interpreters, with the rise and fall of prophecy came the birth and demise of true historical thinking.

This construction of historical thought exacerbated negative representations of Judaism. With it, Protestant interpreters not only distinguished the good from the bad among the prophets but also separated out the Jews. On the one hand, scholars depicted ancient Jews as having abandoned the historical here and now, projecting themselves instead into some distant, ideal time to come. For Duhm, Jews had departed from the old prophetic drive of world history: “along with historical coherence, the sense for the historical also disappeared more and more.”<sup>44</sup> Letting go of the actual past, as it essentially had been, they grasped hold of a fanciful future, in what he called the antithesis between “the fantastical fog of scribal eschatology and historical sense.”<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, critics rendered Jewish accounts of the past as fanciful, deceitful, and disgraceful. According to Cornill, like the Arabs who had erased pre-Islamic history and the German Christians who had destroyed the old pagan literature, so the Jews had misunderstood, disavowed, and excised their own past.<sup>46</sup> Such a

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40 Rudolf Smend, *Der Prophet Ezechiel*, 2nd ed. (Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament, Lfg. 8; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1880), xviii, the first edition being by Ferdinand Hitzig.

41 Duhm, *Israel's Propheten*, 393, cf. 391, 397.

42 *Ibid.*, 401–02. The sentence then went in a different direction: “. . . and that he is far from perceiving the kind of importance the migration of European Indogermans, their culture, their defining spirit should have in the world of the Asians, who are not capable of higher organisation.”

43 *Ibid.*, 412–13, 419.

44 *Ibid.*, 375, 386.

45 *Ibid.*, 426, cf. 444.

46 Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, 3–4.

conviction on the subsequent corruption of biblical literature—i.e., the distortion of a more authentic heritage recording the truer, purer, earlier past—burned at the heart of historical criticism during this era of 1880 to 1920. In his popular *The Writing of History in the Old Testament*, of 1911, Hans Schmidt described “the lack of perspective of the late Jewish view of history,” on display in Chronicles and the Priestly Code, with its “priestly-forensic style, proclivity for series of names and genealogy, recklessness with sources, unworldliness and churchly delight.”<sup>47</sup> By casting a fully developed cultic apparatus back onto the dawn of time, such historiography by ancient Jews had denied history itself. Yet Jewish historical thinking and writing was more (or rather less) than un-prophetic: it was also un-Israelite. Schmid perceived “a foreign, un-Israelite outlook that found its way into the historiography,” which he traced to the astrology of the Babylonians: “a people who believes history is governed by the stars cannot recognize a development in history.”<sup>48</sup> He continued, “here was born the fatalism and determinism that knows no authentic life, no well-planned activity by God, no history with a great purpose, one to which everything appears pre-ordained—as under the force of clockwork slowly running down.” In this telling, the kind of historical thought that reigned among the Jews was not native to the Hebrew people but a foreign import, which further contradicted the ideal prophetic conception of history. Jews were therefore ahistorical: divorced from the past of Israel, disconnected from conditions and causality in human events, and detached from this world in favor of some imaginary one. Such claims resonated with others standard in colonial discourse—that another people, being primitive, remain outside of history; that they, being static, have no history; and that they, being insufficient, cannot tell their own.

### ***Claiming continuity with prophecy***

Between 1880 and 1920, liberal Protestant interpreters envisioned a fundamental continuity

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<sup>47</sup> Hans Schmidt, *Die Geschichtschreibung im Alten Testament* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher 2/16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1911), 53; cf. also Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 440, 267; Bernhard Duhm, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments. Rede zur Rektoratsfeier des Jahres 1896 und zur Einweihung der neuen Basler Universitätsbibliothek am 6. November gehalten* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1897), 30. Stade saw some precedent in the prophet Hosea for the allegedly Jewish understanding of history as decline: see Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 1, 582.

<sup>48</sup> Schmidt, *Die Geschichtschreibung im Alten Testament*, 54.



from the historical thinking of Hebrew prophets to that of German idealists like Kant and Fichte to their own views on the meaning and nature of history. In doing so, they created yet another tie from prophecy to Protestantism. While Peter Berger has espied how late nineteenth-century scholars, on the model of “brave individualists defying the religious authorities of their time,” painted a picture in which “the prophets are made to appear as proto-Protestants of an earlier dispensation,” Tal, too, has descried how textual studies by liberal Protestants in the German Empire – with a particular presentation of ethics – depicted “that the literature of prophecy and the psalms is not Jewish but Israelite; hence, its theological essence is Christian and its historical teaching pre-Christian.”<sup>49</sup> Small coincidence that Wellhausen’s story of Israel featured a chapter entitled “The Prophetic Reformation.”<sup>50</sup> Paul Volz thus consolidated a wider sentiment when, in the new edition of his 1907 monograph on Moses, of 1932, he hailed prophecy “the *Protestantism* of antiquity.”<sup>51</sup>

Exegetes read their neo-idealist notions into ancient prophecy. In the end, the ancient Hebrew prophets came to sound like modern German Protestants. Fully developed and seen as a whole, this prophetic conception of history they construed comprised two basic claims: God directed events on earth, teleologically, and God could be seen in those events. The divine less interfered than inhered in human events. On such readings, Isaiah had seen the moral force of God behind the rise of Assyria (which profane historians only recognized as a normal episode of ancient empires), while for Deutero-Isaiah the entire past and even present had testified to God.<sup>52</sup> In fact, not only had prophecy cultivated a “belief in the God who directs the fate of peoples according to his decree,” but the Hebrew prophets had also promoted the still greater conviction that “the world is full of God’s ordering; meaning and

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<sup>49</sup> Peter L. Berger, “Charisma and Religious Innovation: The Social Location of Israelite Prophecy,” *American Sociological Review* 28, no. 6 (1963): 940–50, at 942, 943; Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany*, 199.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Wellhausen, “Israel”; idem, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*. He also spoke of a “counter-reformation.”

<sup>51</sup> Paul Volz, *Mose und sein Werk* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932), 137, emphasis original, cf. 129; see, too, idem, “Die radikale Ablehnung der Kultreligion durch die alttestamentlichen Propheten,” *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 14 (1937): 63–85; idem, *Prophetengestalten des Alten Testaments. Sendung und Botschaft der alttestamentlichen Gotteszeugen*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1938); cp., in the anglosphere, John Bright, “The Prophets Were Protestants: Fresh Results of Valid Criticism,” *Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (1947): 153–82.

<sup>52</sup> Bruno Baentsch, “Prophetie und Weissagung,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 50, n.s. 15, no. 4 (1908): 457–85, at 465; Max Haller, *Der Ausgang der Prophetie* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart 2/12; Tübingen: Mohr, 1912), 21.

purpose are everywhere.”<sup>53</sup> Divine revelation was thus bound up with history itself.

When critics expressed their own sense of deity and history, they articulated ideas that seemed to harmonize with this reconstruction of prophetic historical thought. Those ideas, moreover, stood in full accord with ‘the German conception of history,’ as outlined in the classic work by Georg Iggers.<sup>54</sup> With German Idealism, they understood ‘history’ not as arbitrary chaos but a source of truth, filled with rational meaning, where the great diversity and individuality within the world revealed a still greater unity of development towards an absolute beyond it: the entirety of the past converging in the present as a basis for the future. With the so-called Historical School, they believed in ‘history’ as a real, objective process—secured by a metaphysical force—yet focused on the individual rather than the universal, affirmed the autonomy and distinctiveness of every epoch or each people, and proceeded by induction not deduction. On the one hand, liberal Protestants presented a grand unity of past, present, and future, a unity both cohesive and progressive. Gunkel placed this idea on full display at a famed event of 1910, the Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress:

Now if the religion of Israel steps into the centre of our sphere of investigation, we are convinced that the religion can only be recognized if we conceive it as bound up with history. In doing so we are starting out from the ground-thought which, at the present day, rules all true historical investigation, namely, that the spiritual life of mankind is a unity, and that it is, by a certain orderly arrangement, bound together as a whole. In this mighty cohesion which moves toward mysterious ends which only faith can comprehend, everything has come into being by a continuing process, operated upon and still operating, nothing is isolated, everything is connected with everything else, each with its own special character

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<sup>53</sup> Willy Staerk, *Religion und Politik im alten Israel* (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 43; Tübingen: Mohr, 1905), 25; Otto Procksch, *Geschichtsbetrachtung und geschichtliche Überlieferung bei den vorexilischen Propheten* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1902), 57.

<sup>54</sup> Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, rev. ed. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); see, too, Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For other dimensions of historical thought in the Germanies, see, with respect to Christian theology, Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); regarding Judaism, Nils Roemer, *Jewish Scholarship and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany: Between History and Faith* (Studies in German Jewish Cultural History and Literature; Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); concerning politics, John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

and yet in some measure to be brought into comparison with the rest.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, these *Alttestamentler* argued for a history not only unified and discernible but also meaningful and steered by the divine. By studying the history of Israel, they hoped to learn the history of God. Gunkel, again, promoted this idea on multiple occasions. He did so forcefully with a chapter on Old Testament studies in a popular book on the state of religion in the present, published five years prior:

The historian, who has made his way through and now, having arrived at the end, at the greatest height, overlooks the whole, sees order and law in the whole of the human bustle—no matter how confused it appears to the superficial observer. [...] Thus, the concept of historical development leads to the idea of revelation. And on the other hand, for the one who thinks historically, a revelation is not conceivable at all without history. ...[W]here the profane view sees nothing other than the human, it is precisely there that belief beholds the great work of God in humanity.<sup>56</sup>

Such a sub-idealist philosophy of history suffused historiography by liberal Protestant writers, especially those who worked on the history of ancient religion or comparative religion but still wanted to preserve the uniqueness, absoluteness, and unsurpassability of the Christian faith. William Wrede, a colleague in New Testament, thus delivered a lecture to theology students, in 1903, wherein he asserted that God’s “progressive revelation” appeared “in the whole of history.”<sup>57</sup> God had morphed from a causal explanation to a deep interpretation.

Scholars therefore presented a correspondence between their views of God in history and those by the Hebrew prophets. To start, authors held these truths of prophecy to be valid and eternal. If Gunkel considered “the powerful idea that history is a unity, a great

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<sup>55</sup> Hermann Gunkel, “The History of Religion and Old Testament Criticism,” in *Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress, Berlin, August 5–10, 1910: Proceedings and Papers*, ed. Charles W. Wendte (Berlin-Schöneberg: Protestantischer Schriftenvertrieb/ London: Williams & Norgate, 1911), 114–25, at 121, which had been published in German the previous year. For more on Gunkel’s interpretation of history, see Paul Michael Kurtz, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 1/122; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 287–90.

<sup>56</sup> Hermann Gunkel, “Das alte Testament im Licht der modernen Forschung,” in *Beiträge zur Weiterentwicklung der christlichen Religion*, ed. Adolf Deissmann et al. (Munich: Lehmann, 1905), 40–76, at 63. See further Mark Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 33–35, who has observed a shift away from this tendency in the thought of Ernst Troeltsch.

<sup>57</sup> William Wrede, “Das theologische Studium und die Religionsgeschichte. Vortrag im Neuen theol. Verein zu Breslau am 2. Nov. 1903,” in idem, *Vorträge und Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1903), 64–83, at 66.

divine-human activity” to be “an inalienable achievement of its spirit,” Stade insisted, in his 1887 *History of the People Israel*, “By proclaiming God the just one, the god of salvation, the god of history, it [sc. their message] secured for humanity the most blissful possession.”<sup>58</sup> With his 1916 book on prophecy, Duhm likewise sought to show how they could “understand and uncover the inner meaning and coherence of world history,” while Kittel, in his own history, from 1909, argued that the ideas of Isaiah “became history,” breathing life into future generations: “Whoever recognizes and esteems the traces of God in history will not mistake the man of God in a figure like Isaiah.”<sup>59</sup> Next, expounders employed the same language when themselves describing God in history and when describing the prophets describing God in history. In both presentation and re-presentation, they spoke of the divine ‘working in’ or ‘presiding over’ human events (*Wirken, Walten*), as the ‘driver’ or ‘director’ of history (*Lenker, Leiter*). Whereas Eduard König contended in a 1900 talk at church, “In the religious history of Israel, the beyond extends into this world,” Stade stated, “If Israel’s national god is, in reality, the only god, then Israel’s history pertained to the whole world. Israel is Yahweh’s prophet; its history has been a sermon from Yahweh.”<sup>60</sup> Many thus affirmed that the prophets had, indeed, been called by God, experienced the divine, and brought knowledge of him to the world. Finally, the ancient and modern perspectives could collapse entirely. Like their own object of analysis—where the voice of a prophet in the biblical text often blends with that of the deity, obscuring the precise identity of the speaker I—scholars often narrated prophetic thought such that the source of the claim was unclear (e.g., without indirect speech), which left ambiguous whether the writer was simply describing the text or also affirming its truth.<sup>61</sup> The same kind of ambiguity, namely, whether the perspective was descriptive and particular or affirmative and universal, occurred in more general comments, too, as when Cornill

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58 Hermann Gunkel, “Die Propheten als Schriftsteller und Dichter,” as repr. in Hans Schmidt, *Die großen Propheten übersetzt und erklärt*, with an introduction by Hermann Gunkel, 1st ed. (Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt 2/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915), at lxix; Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 1:553.

59 Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 3; Kittel, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 2, 474–75.

60 Eduard König, *Das Berufungsbewußtsein der alttestamentlichen Propheten. Vortrag gehalten in der evangelischen Kirche zu Unter-Barmen am 9. August 1900* (Barmen: Wupperthaler Traktat-Gesellschaft, 1900), 27–28; Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israels*, vol. 2.1, 77.

61 Cf., e.g., a key passage that connects world history, a god beyond all structures of the earth, prophetic persons, divine communication to individuals, and Jesus in Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, with a reprint of the article “Israel” from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with a preface by William Robertson Smith (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 398.

plainly stated, in his popular work of 1894, “The prophet possesses the capacity of recognising God in history.”<sup>62</sup> In the end, modern historical critics repeated the claims of their ancient theological sources.

More than sense a mere affinity between their views of God in history and those by the Hebrew prophets, these authors suggested that prophetic historical thinking had continued in the Christian faith, nay, the Protestant confession. By casting the prophetic as pre-Christian and by claiming their own theology to be general, not particular—representing Christian thought without an attribute—biblical scholars forged a seemingly real historical connection between prophets and Protestants. Lending support to this positive expression were two negative impressions: that Jews were not historically minded and that Catholics were both unhistorical and degenerately Christian. If, as Gunkel insisted with an 1897 essay in the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Christians were the children of Jesus’ spirit and grandchildren of the prophets, a specific view of God and world was reckoned part of that prophetic patrimony.<sup>63</sup> Duhm spoke of “the certainty that the history of humanity is not a blind muddle of events but something God ‘formed from afar’ and something guided towards a purpose most high—the certainty that someday God will be all in all. This belief is also our belief, the belief of Christians; it is also no theology.”<sup>64</sup> Implications slid into asseverations, too. While Duhm proclaimed Amos, so prized for his sense of history, as “a reformer, a poet, an orator, who despite all difference in nation and time remarkably recalls the German reformer [*sc.* Luther],” Gunkel later hailed Isaiah “the Luther of the Old Testament” for his trust in the work of God through human events.<sup>65</sup>

If the Christian could merge into the Protestant, the Protestant could blend into the German. Biblical scholars echoed an older claim, soft yet no less clear: “Religious man was not only Christian man but, culturally, also German man.”<sup>66</sup> The sentiment rested not only on reformers, statesmen, and laureates but also on philosophers and historians. By 1908, a systematician described, and sought to correct, a powerful trend among so-called historians of religion that claimed God had continued to reveal himself in humanity and that drew a line

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<sup>62</sup> Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Hermann Gunkel, “Der Prophet Elias,” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 87 (1897): 18–51, at 51.

<sup>64</sup> Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 193. Unreferenced, the first citation seems to be Isaiah 22:11; though unquoted, the phrase “all in all” appears in 1 Corinthians 15:28.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 96; Gunkel, *Die Propheten*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 233.

from Augustine and medieval theologians to Luther, Schleiermacher, Kant, and Hegel, followed by the modern historical mode of thinking.<sup>67</sup> In fact, when Kaiser Wilhelm II had come under pressure, five years earlier, to address questions of God in human history amidst the Babel–Bible Affair, he himself had endorsed such progressive revelation and convened a pantheon of mostly German Protestants: from Hammurabi, Moses, Abraham, and Homer to Charles the Great, Luther, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kant, and Wilhelm I.<sup>68</sup> Gunkel attributed this idea—that is, the unity, meaning, and purpose of human history—to the German historical spirit, in 1905 and again in 1910. For him, the very word ‘history’ represented “an entire worldview that our great idealist thinkers and poets have won for us”; he credited “our great masters” (specifically, Vatke, F.C. Baur, Wellhausen, Adolf Harnack) for applying to religion this notion of human past, present, and future as unified, ordered, and teleological.<sup>69</sup> Though evocatively, a theological understanding seemed to have crossed the Rubicon, or Spree: the human and divine were inextricably entwined, as recognized by a Hebraeo-German sense of history.

Now, authors indeed differentiated: certainly between ancient and modern mentalities, definitely between Hebrew and Christian religion, and at least vaguely between an Old Testament and Protestant perception of history. Gunkel equally claimed, in a 1903 defense of the Hebrews’ importance, “We are Israelites in religion just as we are Greeks in art and Romans in law,” even evoking “the Israelite-Christian religion,” and, in a programmatic article the following year, “Of course, the faith of the Old Testament is not simply ours. We feel ourselves akin to the prophets and psalmists in piety, but not simply the same as them.”<sup>70</sup> In his textbook on ancient Israelite religious history, of 1899, Smend pointed to foibles in “the

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<sup>67</sup> Reinhold Seeberg, *Offenbarung und Inspiration* (Biblische Zeit- und Streitfragen zur Aufklärung der Gebildeten 4.7/8; Berlin: Runge, 1908), 65. He summarized, “History is of God; therefore, God is everywhere in it.”

<sup>68</sup> The text, “Babel und Bibel. Ein Handschreiben Seiner Majestät Kaiser Wilhelms des Zweiten an das Vorstandsmitglied der Deutschen Orientgesellschaft, Admiral Hollmann,” dated February 15, 1903, was widely printed, circulated, and translated. The occasion was the Babel–Bible Affair: see the next section below.

<sup>69</sup> Gunkel, “Das alte Testament im Licht der modernen Forschung,” 55; idem, “The History of Religion and Old Testament Criticism,” 122.

<sup>70</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Israel und Babylonien. Der Einfluss Babyloniens auf die israelitische Religion* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 37, 16, the work being translated into English, too; idem, “Ziele und Methoden der Erklärung des Alten Testaments,” repr. in idem, *Reden und Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913 [1904]), 11–29, at 17. For more comparing and contrasting, see Gunkel, “Was haben wir am Alten Testament?”

prophetic view of history,” like a romanticizing of the still more ancient past.<sup>71</sup> Duhm also admitted distinction: Isaiah, “the creator of the ‘teleological’ line of thought in religion,” had focused on the future of this world, whereas Christian hopes extend into the next.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, these claims of continuity permitted, even required, such difference so the theological trajectory could continue to develop beyond Judaism through Christianity in modern Protestantism. Duhm himself proceeded to call that variance inevitable for there to be “progress in the history of humanity directed by God.” So it was that German liberal Protestants became the heirs of Hebrew prophecy.

### ***Putting the prophets to work***

In the era of 1880–1920, biblical scholars did more than argue for continuity in historical thought between the prophets of Israel and Protestants of Germany. They sought to actualize that conception of the divine in human history: to carry it beyond antiquity into modernity, beyond a simple understanding of the past into a contemporary worldview, beyond a relative description into an absolute evaluation. Like the Hebrew prophets, who, according to Baentsch, in 1908, had risen up to speak for God whenever momentous occasions spelled a twist in the fate of Israel, Old Testament interpreters could rise to face the challenges of their day.<sup>73</sup> True, theological scholarship had been dividing the labor more and more, with systematists handling issues of philosophy, ethics, and dogma and biblicists treating matters empirical and historical.<sup>74</sup> Gradually, contentiously, hermeneutics was steered by a concern with past developments over present relevance and by a critical, historicist modality of reading. In their work on Hebrew prophecy, exegetes thus increasingly focused on debating textual problems, resonant material from across the ancient world, comparative phenomena

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<sup>71</sup> Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 355, 195.

<sup>72</sup> Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, 193–94. August Bender called Isaiah an “idealist”: Bender, *Vorträge über die Offenbarung Gottes auf alttestamentlichem Boden, mit steter Berücksichtigung der kritischen Forschung* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1891), 193.

<sup>73</sup> Baentsch, “Prophetie und Weissagung,” 463.

<sup>74</sup> On the wider venture in Protestant theology to synthesize historical work and philosophical reflection, see Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F.C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* (Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); cf. also Frederick

in contemporary religions, and psychology, including consciousness, of divinatory experience; on discussing prophetic themes such as salvation and damnation, the kingdom of God, and apocalypticism; and on entertaining larger questions like revelation in view of history and inspiration in light of higher criticism. Nevertheless, rather than leave the Hebrew prophets in the ancient past, they also ushered them into the German present. At key moments, these writers retrieved prophetic teachings to shore up the Christian faith. Some reflected on their aptness for modern social problems, like Paul Kleinert in 1905.<sup>75</sup> Others utilized them in upholding the longer tradition of fighting bogeymen, from pantheism to deism to rationalism, such as the more conservative König, writing in 1882.<sup>76</sup> Still others trotted out the prophets to consider the beyond within the here and now. Prophecy, after all, had been—in the words of a former inspector at the seminary in Hofgeismar—“master of history, of its inscrutable ways, and of the problems of humankind.”<sup>77</sup>

Yet these *Alttestamentler*, as Protestant theologians, were met with several sets of difficulty. On one level, they had objective problems with their data. Empirical impediments with scripture itself, from complications in establishing a lost ‘original’ text to controversies in disentangling the messy composition process, called into question the authenticity and authority of the Bible. On another level, they encountered trouble with the interpretation of that data. While other peoples had bequeathed similar stories to those in the Bible, deeper inquiries into anthropology and psychology questioned the uniqueness of religion in ancient

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Gregory, *Nature Lost? Natural Science and the German Theological Traditions of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>75</sup> Paul Kleinert, *Die Profeten Israels in sozialer Beziehung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905). Cf. also the range of interpretation on economy, politics, and ethics, from alcohol to egotism—even beyond professional Protestant scholarship: e.g., R., “Kampf der Propheten gegen den Alkoholismus,” *Die Umschau. Übersicht über die Fortschritte und Bewegungen auf dem Gesamtgebiet der Wissenschaft, Technik, Litteratur und Kunst* 4, no. 47 (1900): 926–31; Hermann Köhler, *Sozialistische Irrlehren von der Entstehung des Christentums und ihre Widerlegung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899), 102–04; the Jewish Sigmund Maybaum, *Die Entwicklung des israelitischen Prophetenthums* (Berlin: Düllmer, 1883); and Catholic Franz Xaver Walter, *Die Propheten in ihrem sozialen Beruf und das Wirtschaftsleben ihrer Zeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sozialethik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1900)

<sup>76</sup> Eduard König, *Der Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1882); cf. Theodor Christlieb, *Moderne Zweifel am christlichen Glauben für ernstlich Suchende erörtert*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Marcus, 1870). For responses to König, see Sellin, *Der alttestamentliche Prophetismus*; Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Die Berufsbegabung der Alttestamentlichen Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897).

<sup>77</sup> Karl Bachmann, “Israels Prophetengestalten in ihrer Bedeutung für Unterricht und Predigt. Vortrag gehalten in der Konferenz des Jahresfestes des Prediger-Seminars-Hofgeismar am 22. August 1905,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 16, no. 4 (1906): 286–320, at 296.



Israel. On yet a third level, they confronted obstacles in the significance of that interpretation. Questioning the very nature of historical knowledge, epistemological controversies raised suspicions as to why the biblical past would be worth knowing—if it could even be ‘known’ in the first place. As Frederick Beiser has delineated, amidst the dispute over scientific materialism, the growth of historicism, the ascent of Neo-Kantianism, and the rise of pessimism in the second half of the century, bodies of knowledge were cut to the core by assertions that only matter existed and that nature obeyed strictly mechanical laws; by claims that historical understanding must rely on empirical evidence, must consider the particular, and must eschew nomothetic explanation; and by asseverations that purposiveness operates through mechanism in nature, not supernatural intervention, that the empirical sciences bear a deep interconnectedness to each another, and that a moral, normative sphere—one autonomous and rational—stands outside of nature.<sup>78</sup> On still another level, they found among the wider public a dearth of appreciation for the significance of that interpretation of data. Biblical scholars lamented that no one cared about their subject anymore: New Testament experts emphasized Jesus’ distinction from his Jewish heritage, and orientalists hailed Babylonia as the true source of much in the Old Testament, while not only schools but also churches ignored the prophets even in their religious instruction. In consequence, doubt befell the Bible: as a moral foundation for society and as a teacher of God’s place in the world.

To overcome certain challenges of the age, liberal Protestants deployed their reading of Hebrew prophecy. Those challenges, both general conceptual problems and particular moments of crisis, included the following: causation in the world, distinction of the biblical past in human history, relevance of the Old Testament to modern society, and meaning of war for the German nation. First, they used the prophetic conception of history as a raft to navigate the rough intellectual waters on questions of causality: between the Scylla of supernaturalism and the Charybdis of naturalism. On the one side, interpreters rejected what they deemed an outmoded orthodox position, which held to divine intrusion in the world. If Baentsch believed historical and psychological processes could account for prophecy, Gunkel found, in 1905, a “crass supernaturalism” incompatible with the fundamental views of modern historical thought, rooted in Hebrew prophets and German idealists.<sup>79</sup> A survey of

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78 Frederick C. Beiser, *After Hegel: German Philosophy, 1840–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); cf. also idem, *The Genesis of Neo-Kantianism, 1796–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

79 Baentsch, “Prophetie und Weissagung,” 483; Gunkel, “Das alte Testament im Licht der modernen

prophetic thought revealed to another, writing in 1901, that an up-to-date understanding of the Old Testament and its religion contradicted “the traditional teaching, which was based on the mechanical concept of inspiration.”<sup>80</sup> On the other side, critics resisted newer explanations of the world—human as well as natural—which seemed to make a deity superfluous and call into question the freedom of the will and autonomy of the subject. More the object of affective allusion among exegetes than sustained articulation or rigorous refutation, such troubles, from natural science in particular, appeared to pose a greater threat than orthodoxy, inasmuch as liberal theology had purportedly prevailed in the nexus of cultural Protestantism. Duhm, a co-inventer of meteorological instruments with Wilhelm Lambrecht, gave two lectures in Basel, long since overlooked: on the mystery of religion and on cosmology and religion. In one, from 1896, he noted the apparent difficulties of reconciling religious and scientific frames of reference, adverting to a “mechanistic worldview” and “materialist consequences” in the exact sciences.<sup>81</sup> Seeking to separate ‘religion’ from geology, cosmology, and biology, with the other, of 1892, he invoked prophetic teachings—perfected by Jesus—to present a material, sensory world and a higher yet no less real one, which not only intersected but also formed a coherent history driving towards the future.<sup>82</sup> Wellhausen drew a similar distinction. In direct response to physiologist Emil du Bois-Reymond, who had stated, “Natural science is the absolute organ of culture[,] and the history of natural science is the actual history of humanity,” the philologist declared, in the first edition of his *Israelite and Jewish History*, of 1894, “History is the history of the society, of the constitution and of the law, of the economy, of the ruling ideas of morality, of art and science,” whose progress and regularity (*Gesetzmäßigkeit*) proved somewhat quantifiable: whereupon he waxed poetic about individuals being more than the product of nature and culture, against the claims of science, and a God who stood “behind the mechanism of the world” and acted on the human soul.<sup>83</sup> He then identified the gospel, what

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Forschung,” 62. Gunkel argued elsewhere that supernatural explanation risked overlooking inspired individuals, which God’s revelation as did the “eternal ideas” they carried: idem, “Die Propheten als Schriftsteller und Dichter,” in Schmidt, *Die großen Propheten*, xxxvi.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Kraetzschmar, *Prophet und Seher im alten Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 31–32.

<sup>81</sup> Bernhard Duhm, *Das Geheimnis in der Religion. Vortrag gehalten am 11. Februar 1896* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1896), 4–5.

<sup>82</sup> Bernhard Duhm, *Kosmologie und Religion. Vortrag, gehalten am 26. Januar 1892* (Basel: Schwabe, 1892), 5–7, 27–31.

<sup>83</sup> Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, 1st ed., 320–21. The reference to du Bois-Reymond was removed in the second edition (with another to Thomas Carlyle). The first article in the first issue of *Internationale*

he called the highest religion, as individualism—having just claimed that the teachings of Jesus were the same as those of Moses and the prophets.

Second, in addition to matters of materialism or mechanism (which banned the divine from nature and history) and supernaturalism (with its emphasis on miracles), writers deployed prophetic thought as a buttress against comparatism, which imperilled the uniqueness of the Old Testament literature and the people of ancient Israel. The accumulating, processing, and publishing of new discoveries from the Middle East was stacking up questions on who got there first, who did it best, and where God was in all of it. Match came to powder keg with the Babel–Bible Affair, starting in 1902, which pitted biblical accounts against similar yet older stories from other ancient cultures and ignited such great debate that the Kaiser himself had to stake out a public position on divine revelation and history.<sup>84</sup> Although liberal writers had surrendered the historical credibility of the Creation or Deluge, they were at pains to preserve the theological reliability of the Bible, not least on a personal God who governed the world. In doing so, they put prophecy to work. With a 1903 lecture delivered at the annual meeting of a Christian association and printed in a Protestant periodical, one professor exhorted his audience to turn to Hebrew prophecy to grasp the idea of divine revelation in the history of Israel.<sup>85</sup> Gunkel’s intervention that same year also invoked their sense of Yahweh steering world events as he emphasized a “deeper understanding of revelation,” advanced by academic theology à la mode, “where the divine and the human do not stand alongside one another externally but rest in each other internally. The history of revelation thus takes place among humanity according to the same psychological laws as all other human events. But in the depth of these events, the eye of faith

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*Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik*, on the unity of science, set these quotations in opposition to show two fundamentally different conceptions of history: Hermann Diels, “Die Einheitsbestrebungen der Wissenschaft,” *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907): 3–10; for more on this exchange, and on Wellhausen in general, see Kurtz, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan*, 162–65.

<sup>84</sup> See further Yaacov Shavit and Mordechai Eran, *The Hebrew Bible Reborn: From Holy Scripture to the Book of Books, A history of Biblical Culture and the Battles over the Bible in Modern Judaism*, trans. Chaya Naor (Studia Judaica 38; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>85</sup> Wilhelm Rothstein, “Religionsgeschichtliche Forschung und Offenbarungsglaube im Kampfe um das Alte Testament,” *Deutsch-evangelische Blätter. Zeitschrift für den gesamten Bereich des deutschen Protestantismus* 28 (1903): 525–62, at 558. For wider deployment of this perspective, cf. Paul Kalweit, “Offenbarung,” *Deutsch-evangelische Blätter* 30 (1905): 155–69; Erich Haupt, “Gemeinde und Wissenschaft im Kampf um die Bibel,” *Deutsch-evangelische Blätter* 30 (1905): 453–79.

sees God....”<sup>86</sup> Kittel, too, employed the prophets to this end. At the request of the Royal Sachsen Ministry of Culture and Public Education, he gave a set of talks to schoolteachers on Old Testament scholarship and fielded a series of questions, printed in 1910. Having described in his presentation the views of Isaiah, which imagined a God who realized his will in human history, Kittel adduced prophetic ideas on the subject of Babel–Bible. Like Moses and the prophets, he argued, God ruled over the entire history of the human spirit and revealed himself not only to the chosen but also to the seeker: the divine had worked through Hammurabi, too.<sup>87</sup> These *Alttestamentler* therefore colonized all of human history. To do so, they cited prophetic precedent.

However, the general collapse of heavenly doings and worldly dealings created problems of its own in the era of 1880–1920. Although Old Testament scholars, occupied with questions empirical and historical, were far less busy with affairs of theory and ethics, many did see and speak to larger issues. Having dispensed with the biblical narrative—of God giving the law to Moses and intervening in nature—critics still wanted to explain how and why Israel had been different from its neighbors: remarkable, remembered, and relevant, and this despite political destruction. They required a sign of distinction and a cause for that distinction. In his 1888 tome on the history of Semitic religion, Friedrich Baethgen juxtaposed Israelite monotheism with Semitic polytheism and in the end deferred to a *deus ex machina*: “That this destination was reached by Israel I can explain from nothing other than constant divine guidance and divine revelation.”<sup>88</sup> In a review, Wellhausen qualified the sign and criticized the cause, stressing, instead, a specifically ethical monotheism and a divergent sense of God: “Only with the Yahweh of the prophets can one truly speak of monotheism; for the value of monotheism consists solely in the belief: *all power is moral*.”<sup>89</sup> But he, too, had run

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<sup>86</sup> Gunkel, *Israel und Babylonien*, 36–37, cf. 33–34, 39–40; cf. also Wilhelm Lotz, *Geschichte und Offenbarung im Alten Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1892), 7–8.

<sup>87</sup> Rudolf Kittel, *Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft in ihren wichtigsten Ergebnissen, mit Berücksichtigung des Religionsunterricht dargestellt* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1910), 204–05, cf. 175–78. The book, which went through five editions over the next 20 years, underwent English translation.

<sup>88</sup> Friedrich Baethgen, *Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte. Der Gott Israel's und die Götter der Heiden* (Berlin: Reuther, 1888), 288.

<sup>89</sup> Julius Wellhausen, review of *Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte. Der Gott Israels und die Götter der Heiden*, by Friedrich Baethgen, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 9, no. 37 (1888): 1321–22, at 1321—italics original and in English, alluding to Carlyle. An earlier commentator had also argued Moab could have developed a universalist monotheism if only it had conceived of its god in moral terms—this morality, of course, having been introduced by Israel’s great prophets, mediated through Judaism, and completed in “the consummate religion,” i.e.,

into trouble when searching for the source of that morality. The conundrum went on full display in his own 1881 article on Israel for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. In the course of two sentences, Wellhausen first attributed the “progressive step” of ethical monotheism, founded by the prophets, simply to “the course of events” yet immediately ascribed the timing of those events to “the providence of God.”<sup>90</sup> The problem of causality recurred, as did its solution: *deus cum historia*. To account for the events that triggered prophecy and for prophetic notions of history and ethics, even the most critical of biblical critics could thus retreat to some kind of divine causation.

Third, despite their conviction the Hebrews prophets still had something to say, they felt the significance of that message was not being realized. A benighted public was one problem. If in 1894 Cornill had diagnosed that the laity held little grasp of the prophets, over the next two decades the situation hardly improved, at least in the estimate of Duhm, who both regretted that the educated scarcely knew about the methods and results of academic theology and regarded familiarity with Old Testament religion, especially the prophets, to be just as crucial for insight into human history as knowledge of the Greeks, Romans, and Indians.<sup>91</sup> According to one pastor, in 1911, the prophets were even unknown in the churches.<sup>92</sup> Alongside this ignorance was animosity. As cultural values shifted in the period, a

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Christianity (Kayser, *Die Theologie des Alten Testaments in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung dargestellt*, 77).

90 Wellhausen, “Israel,” 411. When referring to “ethical monotheism,” Wellhausen likely referred to Kuenen. During the Great War, debates over prophetic ethics expanded into wider intellectual history and addressed larger questions of universalism and nationalism, history and philosophy, and Judaism and Christianity, notably between Hermann Cohen and Troeltsch: see Susannah Heschel, “Ecstasy versus Ethics: The Impact of the First World War on German Biblical Scholarship on the Hebrew Prophets,” in *The First World War and the Mobilization of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Andrew Mein, Nathan MacDonald, and Matthew A. Collins (Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible 15; Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 676; London: T&T Clark), 187–206; David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 35–67; Eckart Otto, “Die hebräische Prophetie bei Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch und Hermann Cohen. Ein Diskurs im Weltkrieg zur christlich-jüdischen Kultursynthese,” in *Asketischer Protestantismus und der ‘Geist’ des modernen Kapitalismus*, ed. Wolfgang Schluchter and Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 201–55; cf. also idem, “Max Weber und Ernst Troeltsch zur hebräischen Prophetie. Eine Interaktion zwischen Soziologie und Religionsphilosophie,” in idem, *Max Webers Studien des Antiken Judentums. Historische Grundlegung einer Theorie der Moderne* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 246–75.

<sup>91</sup> Cornill, *Der israelitische Prophetismus*, 1st ed, 1–2; Duhm, *Israels Propheten*, v, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Otto Zurhellen, *Die Religion der Propheten. Predigten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1911), 2.

number of critiques destabilized the position of the Old Testament, which jeopardized the *raison d'être* of professional interpreters. Emil Kautzsch, in his speech at a 1901 church conference, and Gunkel, with a 1914 essay in a distinguished cultural and literary journal, registered such criticism: obvious inconsistency, suspect historicity, scientific falsity, patchy morality, Jewish ancestry, and Babylonian affinity.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the merit of teaching the Old Testament in religion class at school was heavily contested amidst the material educational reforms of the age.<sup>94</sup> Even if the ancient Hebrew prophets could help solve the problems of modern Christian theology, that solution was thus at risk of going unheard, both inside and outside the walls of increasingly empty churches.

To rescue the Bible from insignificance, writers argued for its relevance. In publications targeting not merely specialists but the wider Christian bourgeoisie, prophetic thoughts on history were introduced as key evidence in defense of its aesthetic, historical, and religious value. Kautzsch, in his 1901 speech “The Lasting Significance of the Old Testament,” distilled its importance down to Hebrew prophecy, as medium of God and testimony to his plan for salvation: to study the prophets was to study divine revelation. Before offering pedagogical recommendations for schools and churches, Gunkel used his 1914 essay “What Remains of the Old Testament?” to contrast the great empires and edifices of Egypt and Babylonia with the spiritual feats of Israel in general and prophecy in particular (namely, the cultivation of individuals who led pious lives before God) and to compare the former powers to modern society, with its technological prowess and organisation of labour. He then lamented the wane of inspired personages since the era of idealists, exacerbated by the mighty machinery of the present, which reduced individual autonomy, and proceeded to express a hope that the prophets might quicken his age with their spirit. Having identified the Old Testament as “revelation becoming historical,” Gunkel asserted that “world history” had made Israel one of the two foundations of Christian Europe, the other being Greece, of course. The task for those of historical mind, he proffered, was “to grasp that reason (*Vernunft*) which reveals itself in all history and which made both these boulders into the foundation”—the foundation of a building whose additions would continue.<sup>95</sup> For any

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<sup>93</sup> Emil Kautzsch, *Die bleibende Bedeutung des Alten Testaments. Ein Konferenzvortrag* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902); Gunkel, “Was haben wir am Alten Testament?”

<sup>94</sup> Cf. P[aul] Hartmann, “Biblische Geschichte und Kirchengeschichte in dem Lehrplan der höheren Schulen,” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 123 (1906): 295–304.

<sup>95</sup> Gunkel, “Was haben wir am Alten Testament?,” 241; cf. idem, “Das alte Testament im Lichte der modernen Forschung,” 62

number of Protestants, this conception of God continuing to operate in world history, and through the nations of Christian Europe, also underwrote ‘civilizing missions’ abroad, where divine and human work were intertwined to expand the kingdom of God, from Africa and India to China and Japan.<sup>96</sup>

Fourth, the greatest challenge, or opportunity, came with the Great War. As Susannah Heschel has observed, the prophets featured far less prominently in theological mobilization than other parts of the Bible: not only did they seem to offer fewer militaristic or nationalistic models compared to judges, kings, and psalmists, but exegetes had also emphasized their ecstatic experience, ethics, and universalism, which then vitiated their utility for war efforts.<sup>97</sup> However, when scholars did put prophecy into service, they utilized their theology of history. With a 1915 public lecture at the University of Berlin, Otto Eißfeldt appealed to their idea of war as a means for God to implement his pedagogical plan for humanity; for a universal, ethical deity who governed nature and directed history, he argued, a just and moral war was God’s war.<sup>98</sup> Advancing similar claims in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* that next year, Eißfeldt not only compared their day to his own but also correlated them to church and press, to poets and writers, whose task likewise entailed assessing world events from a moral perspective.<sup>99</sup> Such sentiment reverberated in one particular article printed by a Protestant monthly, also in 1915, entitled “The Prophets and Their Significance for the Present,” which declaimed that the prophets “also have something to say to us”—although its author was less sanguine than Eißfeldt about divining God’s full purposes in war.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> E.g., Johannes Wendland, “Wunderglaube und Wunderbegriff in der Theologie der Gegenwart,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 53, n.s. 18 (1911): 193–217; Hermann Gunkel, “Was will die ‘religionsgeschichtliche’ Bewegung?” *Deutsch-Evangelisch. Monatsblätter für den gesamten deutschen Protestantismus* 5, no. 7 (1914): 385–97, which was later translated into English.

<sup>97</sup> Heschel, “Ecstasy versus Ethics,” 188.

<sup>98</sup> Otto Eißfeldt, *Krieg und Bibel* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart 5/15-16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1915), 39–41, 50; cf. also idem, *Israels Geschichte* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher 6/4; Tübingen: Mohr, 1914); Hermann Gunkel, “Kriegsfrömmigkeit im Alten Testament,” *Internationale Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 9 (1915): 723–58, which was also published separately with another of his wartime pieces; Wilhelm Frankenberg, “Der Krieg in der Religion der älteren Propheten,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 27 (1917): 103–12.

<sup>99</sup> Otto Eißfeldt, “Politiker und Propheten,” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 164 (1916): 514–21, esp. 519–20.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Torge, “Die Propheten in ihrer Bedeutung für die Gegenwart,” *Protestantische Monatshefte* 19, no. 12 (1915): 397–412. He contrasted this appreciation with previous disparagement by “race theorists,” who deemed the Old Testament “un-German.”

As during, so after the conflict, interpreters of the German present made recourse to ancient Israel. In a pedagogical periodical for educators in religion, Otto Richter, a teacher at the Royal Gymnasium in Lauban, announced, in 1920, that the prophets of Israel could offer in the aftermath what the psalms had supplied at the height of war.<sup>101</sup> Richter, who had studied with leading liberals like Harnack and Otto Pfleiderer and analyzed Kant in the borderland of theology and philosophy, drew on prophetic teachings to decry mammonism and materialism, communism and capitalism. Like the Hebrew prophets, who had consoled themselves in reviewing the mighty deeds of God in the history of his people, Richter recommended contemporary renewal through reflection on “the profound revelations of our German prophets”: Ekkehard and Luther, Schiller and Goethe, Kant and Fichte, Bach and Beethoven. In doing so, he continued a long tradition of claiming divine revelation in the German nation. As Max Haller had analogized in his popularizing work on ‘the end of prophecy,’ from 1912, just like after the fall of Prussia, in 1806, God had sent Germany both great idealists (Fichte, Schleiermacher, Ernst Moritz Anrdt, Theodor Körner) and great realists (Gerhard von Scharnhorst, August von Gneisenau, Karl vom und zum Stein), so also he had sent the idealist Deutero-Isaiah and realist Ezekiel after the fall of the Davidic dynasty.<sup>102</sup> Hebrew and German prophets, it seemed, were a match made in heaven. In this way, biblical theologians availed themselves of prophecy not only to tackle explanations of the past but also to handle anxieties about the present and future, reading ancient texts with an eye to the modern condition. Questions of meaning in the world—and the ability of the Bible to answer them—seemed more urgent than ever. Looking for God in history, German Protestants turned to Hebrew prophecy for answers.

### ***Conclusions***

Biblical scholars were not, of course, the only, best, or even most conspicuous to reconsider the relationship between things absolute and things historical in this period of 1880 to 1920. In higher intellectual history, philosophers wrestled with the basis and limits of human knowledge. Neo-Kantians famously contemplated the possibility of ethics, values, and

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<sup>101</sup> Otto Richter, “Die Propheten Israels und wir,” *Monatsblätter für den Evangelischen Religionsunterricht* 13 (1920) 97–106, quote at 105–06; cf. idem, *Kants Auffassung des Verhältnisses von Glauben und Wissen und ihre Nachwirkung besonders in der neuen Theologie* (Lauban: Goldammer, 1905), biography at 53–54.



freedom within a matrix of oppositions: the rational and experiential, necessary and contingent, transcendental and empirical, nomothetic and ideographic, normative and natural, ideal and real, subjective and objective, ideal and material. In the process, they also sought to insulate aesthetics and morality from the realms of nature and history, from mechanistic ineluctability and conditioning contingency. Hermann Cohen consistently extolled Judaism as the source of rational religion and prophecy as the teacher of universal ethical laws, placing the Hebrew prophets alongside the Greek Plato as the two great nourishing streams of modern culture: the ideals of moral doctrine and scientific knowledge.<sup>103</sup> Yet he showed little interest in past phenomenon as such. Hans Liebeschütz has thus discerned how he transformed historical descriptions into static concepts “free from the impact of time and history,” while David N. Myers remarks, “In seeking to construct a grand ethical lineage, Cohen was attempting to locate the timeless moorings of the Judaic—or more accurately, Judeo-German—spirit over and through historical time.”<sup>104</sup> If all went back to Kant, some even returned to Hegel, who had fallen out of fashion. To turn from Marburg to Baden, representatives of the Southwest School could thus retreat, at times, to an idea of history as unified, holistic, and teleological, stressing the individual and the progressive realization of some absolute category working itself out in the human world (if not culminating in the German state).<sup>105</sup> With his treatise on the epistemological foundation of historical study, from 1896, Heinrich Rickert championed the assumption of “a holy power that effects what we cannot, i.e., which realizes through our actions the unconditionally

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<sup>102</sup> Haller, *Der Ausgang der Prophetie*, 4–5.

<sup>103</sup> E.g., Hermann Cohen, “The Significance of Judaism for the Progress of Religion,” in *Fifth International Congress of Free Christianity and Religious Progress*, ed. Wendte, 385–400, published in German the previous year; idem, “Das soziale Ideal bei Platon und den Propheten,” in Bruno Strauß, ed., *Hermann Cohens Jüdische Schriften*, vol. 1, *Ethische und religiöse Grundfragen*, with an introduction by Franz Rosenzweig (Veröffentlichungen der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums; Berlin: Schwetschke & Sohn, 1924), 306–30, although the editorial notes on the lecture indicate its oral delivery in 1916 and 1918 (*ibid.*, 341); see further Daniel H. Weiss, *Paradox and the Prophets: Hermann Cohen and the Indirect Communication of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Frederick C. Beiser, *Hermann Cohen: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); on his debate with Troeltsch over prophetic ethics, see n. 90 *supra*.

<sup>104</sup> Hans Liebeschütz “Hermann Cohen and his Historical Background,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 13, no. 1 (1968): 3–33, at 23; Myers, *Resisting History*, 60.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 392 (Wilhelm Windelband), 446–47 (Emil Lask), as well as, earlier, 318–19 (Johann Gustav Droysen), and, relatedly, 422–25 (Heinrich Rickert).

universal values,” a reality beyond full scientific comprehension.<sup>106</sup> So, too, during the Great War, Wilhelm Windelband affirmed the premise “that historical life is no meaningless accident, no biological sort of mechanism devoid of reason but that a rational purpose governs it, a *logos* that also makes the historical world into a cosmos.”<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, an absolute universal stood beyond human particulars.

With their work on Hebrew prophecy, liberal Protestant interpreters suggested a different solution. They, too, wanted to uphold some kind of universal validity (and truth), in the form of true ‘religion’—encapsulated in individual ethics and encountered through personal piety. Like Wilhelm Dilthey, however, exegetes of the Old Testament parted ways with Neo-Kantians in placing the normative within the historical, not beyond it.<sup>108</sup> First, history, for them, was not a construct of the mind but a real process. Second, rather than accept an ahistorical normative realm, much less seek refuge in Enlightenment natural theology, they postulated that absolute norms and values were both discernible and embedded in said process and, therefore, that studying human history could bring knowledge of them. Timeless principles appeared in time. Just as Iggers has concluded for the influential theologian Ernst Troeltsch, so also Old Testament scholars “still believed that history is meaningful and that the truths and norms won from history, although relative to specific historical situations, reflected an absolute truth hidden behind history.”<sup>109</sup> Nor did history stand still. These *Alttestamentler* imagined the realization of (divine) principles continuing to unfold: a teleology of the human past that converged in the present to serve as the basis for a

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<sup>106</sup> Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung. Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften*, Part 1 (Freiburg: Mohr [Siebeck], 1896), 736.

<sup>107</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichtsphilosophie. Eine Kriegsvorlesung, Fragment aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Wolfgang Windelband and Bruno Bauch (Kantstudien Supplement 38; Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1916), 9–10. Cf. also Droysen, who declared, “Our faith gives us the comfort that a divine hand carries us, that it governs fate, large and small. And the science of history has no higher history than to justify this faith; for this reason, it is science” (Johann Gustav Droysen, *Vorlesungen über die Freiheitskriege*, 2 vols. [Kiel: Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1846], 1:5), a sentiment also expressed, *inter alia*, at the beginning of his ‘private foreword’ to volume two of *Geschichte des Hellenismus* (1843), which was then brought into wider circulation when published in his posthumous *Kleine Schriften zur Alten Geschichte* (1893) and, moreover, in subsequent reprintings as “Theologie der Geschichte.”

<sup>108</sup> Cp. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 133–44; Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 358–64, 377–80.

<sup>109</sup> Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, 188–89. He continues, “Indeed, since this absolute manifested itself only in individual, historical forms, history became the only way to gain true knowledge and the historical approach constituted the most significant achievement of the modern spirit” (*ibid.*).

progressive future. They conceived of a cumulative access to truth, which legitimated both their historical study of biblical antiquity and the modern legacy of Protestantism, including its frequent identification with the German national state. Most exegetes were far from philosophers. Gone were the days of a W.M.L. de Wette, the biblical scholar who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, had united historical criticism with the philosophy of Fries. Nonetheless, with their conception of history, and reading of Hebrew prophecy, Old Testament interpreters took part in the transformation of Idealism and the Historical School at the turn of the twentieth century: heirs to that “entire worldview” which Gunkel so prized in his praise of the German intellectual tradition.

Any review of discourse on the metaphysical and historical between 1880 and 1920 inevitably evokes larger questions of historicism, especially the ‘crisis of historicism.’<sup>110</sup> Though aware of doubts about the relativity of knowledge, conditionality of ideas, eternity or universality of values, and meaning and purpose in history, Protestant biblical scholars rarely lost confidence in the reconcilability of essential Christian truths and some kind of factual basis in the past. Franz Overbecks were exceptional, the professor of New Testament and early church history (and, famously, friend of Nietzsche) who taught theology while restraining his belief in a fatal contradiction between history and Christianity. Rather, critics continued to busy themselves with writing endless commentaries, studying lexemes, locating intertextual links, theorizing sources and supplements, and contrasting Israel to other cultures. Going about their business, exegetes happily left systematic theologians to brood over epistemology, natural science, and consciousness. Instead, they assumed such problems were already solved, being solved, or at the very least solvable—even if they could express frustration at the laity for falling prey to hyped philosophical dilemmas, for not trusting the trouble was only illusory. What helped them overcome contradictions and conundrums in their work was a specific conception of God in the world, one that marked a further transformation in the relationship between theology and history. As Thomas Albert Howard has argued, historicizing principles and procedures did not usher in a post-theological world—the critical methods of a Leopold von Ranke, once imported, driving Christian faith into despair—but themselves developed out of intra-theological debates, i.e., hermeneutical and epistemological orientations that ambled in the early modern period but bustled in the

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<sup>110</sup> On the varied interpretations of said crisis, see Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition*, 23–26; cf. n. 54 supra.

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>111</sup> At base, Old Testament specialists sought to mitigate that earlier separation, explored by Hans Frei in his classic study, between the biblical narrative and its subject matter, “now taken to be its true meaning.”<sup>112</sup> This separation engendered what Jörn Rüsen has identified as “an unsolved structural problem of historical thought,” between meaning and method: “With methodical-critical historicizing, the holy texts lose their religious meaning. They gain historical contingency and empirical facticity but at the price of losing a religious significance to the factuality—ascertained methodically—of what is claimed in the text.”<sup>113</sup> For liberal Protestants of this period, the Bible was itself no longer revelation as a text, nor had God directly appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai as an event, but, by directing history, the divine had, indeed, become manifest in the human world. On one level, they transferred revelation from the product of sacred scripture to the process of production and even the interpretation of those biblical texts, thanks to a modality of reading afforded by the Protestant tradition. On another level, this belief in the work of God in the past and texts of ancient Israel warranted their belief in God’s continued work in human processes: state, society, and civilizing missions abroad. Even as they surrendered certain claims, critics maintained the distinctiveness of Israel’s past, meaningfulness of scripture, uniqueness of Christianity, and immortality of the soul. Placing the universal in the particular, these authors upheld God as the driver of human history and the source of morality.

Throughout the ages, exegetes had looked to the Old Testament in general and prophets in particular to understand the world, be it for the coming of Jesus Christ, the relationship of spiritual and temporal powers, or a typology for the political present. Between 1880 and 1920, interpreters turned to prophecy anew. As one averred, in 1914, the Greeks endowed humanity with sculptors and philosophers; the Romans, with generals and lawyers; the Englishmen, with colonial rulers; the Americans, with businessmen; the Germans, with

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<sup>111</sup> Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, esp. 1–22.

<sup>112</sup> Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 51.

<sup>113</sup> Jörn Rüsen, “Historische Methode und religiöser Sinn – Vorüberlegungen zu einer Dialektik der Rationalisierung des historischen Denkens in der Moderne,” in *Geschichtsdiskurs*, vol. 2, *Anfänge modernen historischen Denkens*, ed. Wolfgang Küttler, Jörn Rüsen, Ernst Schulien, repr. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Humanities Online, 2007 [1994]), 344–77, at 351, 357.

musicians—and the Hebrews, with prophets.<sup>114</sup> Amidst revolutionary findings in the natural world and new discoveries in the human one, explicators reconceived a hermeneutic of history. The prophets seemed to offer, in addition to ethics, a way of thinking ‘historically’: one that also salvaged the Bible. Adherents to the Christian faith, champions of critical reading, proponents of liberal culture, and influencers in a Protestant empire, these scholars thus availed themselves of prophecy for a lens to discern the divine in an arc of past, present, and future. Even as higher criticism rewrote the biblical narrative, as literary studies pared down the texts ascribable to individual figures, as developmental approaches traced diversity and change in prophecy, as psychological analysis probed the mental state of prophetic experience, as comparative data from other ancient peoples jeopardized the uniqueness of the institution, and as the Israelite tradition lost ground to the Aryan one, they preserved the value of Hebrew religion, which culminated in the prophets. Liberal Protestants ultimately presented a prophetic conception of history that represented their own, identifying earthly dealings with heavenly dealings. This collapse of ancient and modern viewpoints transpired as part of a series in biblical scholarship: divine will and human events, revelation and history, Old Testament theology and ancient Israelite religion. As history was becoming God among the sciences, God became history itself. Invoking the Hebrew prophets, German Protestants placed their faith in that history. But if such a hermeneutic was severely maimed in the Great War, after the Holocaust the sense of God as history could not but lie on its deathbed.

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<sup>114</sup> Wilhelm Caspari, *Die israelitischen Propheten* (Wissenschaft und Bildung, Einzeldarstellungen aus allen Gebieten des Wissens 122; Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1914), 5.