

Who Wrote the Bible?

Understanding Redactors and Social Groups behind Biblical Traditions in the Context of Plurality within Emerging Judaism

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1. A Formative Period

The Persian period (6th–4th centuries BCE) is now generally considered, and rightly so, to be the formative phase of Judaism. This concerns not only early Judaism as a religio-social entity but also the writings that shaped its identity, specifically the Hebrew Bible.¹ Only in the last few years has this come to be taken firmly as the default view,² not least also because the advancements in the subdisciplines of literary history (especially concerning redaction history), religious and social history, and archaeology of Israel – each through their own respective methodologies – reached comparable conclusions and were equally able to substantiate the Persian period as the cornerstone of Judaism – an era that (and this is worth emphasizing) the field, up until a good two decades ago, still widely considered to be a “dark age.”³

However, although the presentation thus far has depicted a broad consensus on the matter, it must also be interjected that there is presently an increase of voices (mine included) arguing that this formative phase should not be limited to the Persian period but should rather be extended well into the Hellenistic period. Particularly in the most recent research there are three advancements that support this:

(1) In recent years, it has repeatedly been shown that the group-specific, identity-forming processes that led to the formation of Judaism in antiquity, including its specific identity markers (especially the practice and understanding

¹ See, among many others, the current and comprehensive overview on the matter by Schmid/Schröter, *The Making of the Bible*, 105–139 (the chapter “Emerging Judaism”).

² See Schmid, “Textual, Historical, Sociological, and Ideological Cornerstones of the Formation of the Pentateuch,” 29–51; Römer, “Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen,” 2–24; Kratz, “The Analysis of the Pentateuch: An Attempt to Overcome Barriers of Thinking,” 529–561; Gertz et al. (ed.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch*.

³ See the exemplary assessment by Uehlinger from 1999: “The Persian period is still a very poor parent in the archaeology of Palestine” (Uehlinger, “Powerful Persianisms,” 136).

of the Torah, circumcision, food and purity laws,⁴ and monotheism), basically only appear beginning in the Hasmonean/Maccabean period.⁵ In addition the Samaritans and the Judeans only experienced a “parting of the ways” as religious groups in the late 2nd century BCE and only thereafter began to form their own specific identity markers.⁶ Therefore, the anchoring of “early Judaism” should be extended several centuries prior to this event: it is only from this point onwards that we can speak of “Jews” and “Samaritans” in a proper sense, since Judaism and Samaritanism each construct their own identities in relation to the other, so to speak. Examples of the results of this process of group profile construction include the specific letter type of the Samaritan script and the formation of group-specific text forms of the Bible that later became the Samaritan and Masoretic texts.

In any case, *before* this formation of Judaism, there was still much that was “in flux”: the formational processes of early Judaism thus extend over the entire so-called “Second Temple period” (or at least through the Persian period and into the Hellenistic period).⁷

(2) Secondly, the importance of the Hellenistic period for the formation of scripture has also gradually been cited more and more clearly concerning literary history. In the recently published volume *Times of Transition: Judea in the Early Hellenistic Period*, edited by Sylvie Honigman, Christophe Nihan, and Oded Lipschits, the individual exegetical contributions – and especially that by Konrad Schmid – have succeeded in elaborating the fundamental importance of the Ptolemaic period for essential strands of traditions and theological possibilities within the Hebrew Bible.⁸ To echo Schmid’s words, “this does not make the Hebrew Bible a Hellenistic book, but it shows that its literary growth at least extended into the Ptolemaic period.”⁹ It can also be added regarding the thematic focus of the present volume that especially the perspective of and about the “Yahwistic Diaspora” experienced both a specific shaping and, at the same time, a diversification during the Hellenistic period (see below, § 3).

(3) Thirdly, the current methodological developments within literary criticism and textual history also show that the production, reproduction, and passing down of writings are not processes that can be strictly separated from each other and that they instead go hand-in-hand. Accordingly, the formational

⁴ Especially for this aspect of the Diaspora, see Schöpf, *Purity without Borders? Purity Concerns in the Early Jewish Diaspora during the Second Temple Period Regarding the Case of Tall Zira’a, Northern Jordan*.

⁵ Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness*.

⁶ Schorch, “The Construction of Samari(t)an Identity from the Inside and from the Outside,” 135–149.

⁷ Hensel, “Yahwistic Diversity,” 16–21; see also, with different argumentation but comparable results, Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 323–326.

⁸ Schmid, “How to Identify a Ptolemaic Period Text in the Hebrew Bible,” 281–292.

⁹ Schmid, “How to Identify a Ptolemaic Period Text in the Hebrew Bible,” 289.

processes of the Hebrew Bible are thus to be extended well throughout the Second Temple period (see especially the excellent methodological groundwork by Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala titled *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible: Toward a Refined Literary Criticism* [2022]).¹⁰

2. Emerging Judaism(s) and Yahwistic Diversity in the Second Temple Period

A significant aspect of this formative period that has thus far been regularly neglected is the following: the emerging Judaism of the Persian and early Hellenistic periods was – unlike stated in earlier treatments of these periods – not a quasi-“orthodox” monolith oriented towards Jerusalem but – quite to the contrary – shaped by many different, regionally diverse “Judaisms.” The best known and researched of these are, of course, the groups in Babylon (significant here: *āl-Yahudu*¹¹), on the island of Elephantine on the Nile,¹² in Judea, and in Samaria.¹³ For this volume, I am thankful that we have been given exclusive insight into the new excavations on Mt. Gerizim (from the 2019–2021 seasons) with the contribution by Dalit Regev and Uzi Greenfeld, confirming many previous results but also providing corrections in details.¹⁴ Most importantly, the authors finally present detailed studies of the pottery finds that have been missing until now.

However, there is also evidence of Yahwistic groups in the multiethnic contexts of Idumea¹⁵ and in the regions of Transjordan.¹⁶

Fundamental methodological research in this area is connected above all with the detailed historical studies of Christian Frevel,¹⁷ as well as with my own

¹⁰ Müller/Pakkala, *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible*. See also in the present volume W. Schütte with a test case on this matter: Schütte, “The ‘Scroll of David’ – a Samaritan Name of the Book of Samuel?”

¹¹ See Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE*; Berlejung, “A Sketch of the Life of the Golah in the Countryside of Babylonia,” 148–188, and Wunsch/Pearce, *Judeans by the Waters of Babylon: New Historical Evidence in Cuneiform Sources from Rural Babylonia*.

¹² See (alongside the contribution in this volume by Wigand) Kratz/Schipper (ed.), *Elephantine in Context*; Granerød, *Dimensions of Yahwism*; Rohrmoser, *Götter, Tempel und Kult der Judäo-Aramäer von Elephantine*.

¹³ Kartveit, *The Origin of the Samaritans*; Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans*; Pummer, *The Samaritans. A Profile*; Hensel, *Juda und Samaria*.

¹⁴ Regev/Greenfeld, “The Persian Pottery from Salvage Excavations at Har Gerizim (2019–2021): Preliminary Findings.”

¹⁵ See Levin, “The Formation of Idumean Identity,” 192–194, 196–198; Hensel, “Think Positive!,” 348–355; and idem, “Was there an ‘Idumean Yahwism’? Material and Biblical Evidence on Religion and Yahweh-Worship in Idumea.”

¹⁶ See Hensel, “Transjordan and Judah from the Babylonian to Hellenistic Periods.”

¹⁷ See Frevel, “Der Eine oder die Vielen?,” 238–265; idem, *Geschichte Israels*, 323–326;

studies on the history of religion that relate here to the intersection of history and biblical reflections of exactly this diversity.¹⁸ Cynthia Edenburg has recently published an article that likewise lays a methodological foundation for addressing representations of the “Diaspora” in late biblical texts.¹⁹ Her study is noteworthy primarily because it asks about how the scribes of various Judean, Samaritan, and Diasporic groups would have been in contact with each other and how they would have exchanged traditions.²⁰ This *concretizing* of the practice of the oft-cited (also on my part) exchange between the scribal groups provides a very helpful point of departure for further refinement of both the thesis of a “Yahwistic diversity” that can actually also be found reflected in certain biblical texts (on such reflections, see § 3 below, as well as my theory of early Judaism developing only over the course of the Second Temple period through both *convergence with* and *differentiation from* the other religious groups of Yahwistic provenance (as different as the specific religious formations of each respective “Yahwism” may have been).²¹ Of course, this process of identity formation clearly presupposes that the groups were in contact with each other. This is – when looking at the biblical evidence (§ 3) – probable, in any case. Historically, these contacts are immediately tangible at least in the correspondences of the Judeo-Arameans with governors of Judah and Samaria (TAD A4.7–10). However, there is still only little that can be deduced about the concrete “hows” of this contact between social groups or specific scribes.

There has been an excellent debate over the *naming* of this phenomenon. Christian Frevel has, with good argument, supported the designation “Judaism” (in current publications) as a larger entity or (in earlier publications²²) “Judaisms.” In my opinion, the phenomenon should, from the approach of religious studies, be viewed as neutrally as possible: the different groupings exist alongside each other in these periods, even if they display differences in detail regarding religious practice and the sociology of religion. So, for example, monotheism is a *possible* option during the Persian period (Judah and Samaria) but not an *exclusive* option for faith in the God of Israel (so, e. g., Elephantine and Idumea). Moreover, “Judaism” is only one single development within a wider entity. The “Samaritans,” for example, would never call themselves (nor would they have in

idem/Pyschny, “A ‘Religious Revolution’ in Yehûd?,” 1–22; idem/Pyschny (ed.), *A “Religious Revolution” in Yehûd? The Material Culture of the Persian Period as a Test Case*.

¹⁸ See esp. Hensel, “Yahwistic Diversity,” 1–44.

¹⁹ Edenburg, “Messaging Brothers in Distant Lands,” 204–223.

²⁰ Edenburg, “Messaging Brothers in Distant Lands,” 222–223.

²¹ See also Beyerle, “Intolerance in Early Judaism: Emic and Etic Descriptions of Jewish Religions in the Second Temple Period,” 115–156.

²² Alongside the aforementioned texts from Frevel, see also idem, “Alte Stücke – Späte Brücke?,” 270 (“Formationsprozesse der ‘Judentümer’”); Edelman has also used the term “Judaisms” in a recent publication: Edelman, “Introduction,” 1–5 (in her volume *Religion in the Achaemenid Persian Empire*).

antiquity) “Jews.” I have thus suggested the neologism “Yahwisms” (not without predecessors in the field²³) or “Yahwistic diversity” for describing this phenomenon.²⁴ The “faith in Yhwh” therefore forms a religious constant common to all of the groups under consideration here. Thus, it is possible to describe this phenomenon without assigning it to one of the (assumed) main currents (like “the Judaism,” so to speak). The term proves moreover to be connectable to the term “Judaisms,” first introduced in 1987 by Neusner, Green and Frerichs and used as a qualification of Rabbinic Judaism.²⁵ In my opinion, early Judaism in its Jerusalem instantiation is only *one* “branch” of a complex nexus of religious options that can be related in this time period to the phenomenon of the God of Israel, Yhwh.

In any case, and this terminological debate notwithstanding, the decisive insight into this phenomenon lies in the fact that, in the approach of religious studies, the “panorama” of all these regionally diversified groups must first be observed and described in order to accurately capture the emergence of early Judaism from this *diversity of religious options and religiosociological substantiations of faith in Yhwh*.

3. A Research Desideratum:

A Broader Perspective on Yahwistic Diversity of Social Groups and Redactions behind Biblical Traditions

There is very much still a decisive desideratum in research, namely the one to which this volume is dedicated: although the field now recognizes the formative character of the Persian and early Hellenistic periods for the Hebrew scriptures, and although the religious diversity of “early Judaism” is a well-established and solidly founded research position, there is still a lack of detailed studies that “bridge the gap,” so to speak, between redaction history and the historically tangible groupings. There has been a long tradition in research of identifying biblical redactors and redactor groups as well as the groups of biblical tradents of this period with the social groups of Judea (and especially those of Jerusalem). This is also still the case for the majority of the biblical texts: the Hebrew Bible seems to be, in the end, clearly a Judean-dominated tradition.

However, this is not true for all texts. It seems clear that, even if most of the traditions at the surface of the text were shaped from a Judean perspective, this diversity is still reflected in certain biblical traditions or redactional material. In this regard, another question arises: which social groups or redactor groups

²³ See Edelman’s terminology from 1995: “Yahwisms”: Edelman, *Triumph*. In later publications, she speaks of “Judaisms” (cf. Edelman, “Introduction,” 1–5).

²⁴ Hensel, *Juda und Samaria*, 152–162; idem, “Yahwistic Diversity,” 20–21.

²⁵ See Neusner/Green/Frerichs, *Judaisms*.

(Judean as well as “non-Judean”) stand *behind* the Hebrew Bible’s productional processes? Most fundamentally, the *representations* of the diverse social groups within the biblical texts can be categorized into two groups which will be discussed in more detail in the following. It should be noted here that this research question is complicated by the fact, that a widespread feature of biblical authorship was *anonymity*.²⁶ The term “representation” here is chosen to give credit to this feature; it bears in mind that we are not able in every case to exactly identify the redactors, authors, or social groups behind the various biblical traditions.

(1) The first option involves *active* participation in shaping biblical traditions. In addition to the diverse traditions of Judean scribal groups, the Samaritans have been identified and discussed as an influential group who helped shape (at least parts of) the Pentateuch. Here, this involves above all the thesis, oft-discussed in recent years, of a “Samaritan-Judean Pentateuch” (Bernd J. Diebner,²⁷ Gary Knoppers,²⁸ Christophe Nihan,²⁹ Benedikt Hensel³⁰).

Diebner can here be regarded as the forefather of considerations of this “Common Pentateuch,” which he – building upon on preliminary work – developed already in the 1980s. Problematic from today’s point of view is how he dated the Torah very late (Hasmonean!), which is no longer tenable. On the positive side, however, Diebner does need to be credited with having recognized and described early the fundamental hermeneutic that sees the Common Torah as a compromise document.

Regarding the Samaritan participation in the Torah, it should be further emphasized that also – and especially – the Priestly Writing, which comes from the Persian period, is not necessarily an exclusively Judean tradition but also represents Samaritan interests, which has since been sufficiently proven;³¹ this may also be applied, even if to be taken with a grain of salt, to the later redactional additions to Deuteronomy (e. g., Deut 11:29–30 and Deut 27*; possibly already for Deut 12:13–14 – the “unnamed *maqom*”³²). The recent volume by Jaeyoung Jeon, *The Social Groups behind the Pentateuch*, which documents the results of a 2016 conference on the topic, opens up further perspectives on this phenomenon. Additionally, the volume *Yahwistic Diversity and the Hebrew Bible* (published in 2021 by Benedikt Hensel, Dany Nocquet, and Bartosz Adamczewski) shows via diverse detailed studies how important the historical recognition of

²⁶ See most recently on this Ben Zvi, “Matters of Authorship, Authority, and Power,” 93–113, esp. 102–105.

²⁷ Diebner first in 1983 in idem, “Genesis als Buch der antik-jüdischen Bibel,” 81–98.

²⁸ Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans*.

²⁹ Nihan, “The Torah Between Samaria and Judah,” 187–223.

³⁰ Hensel, “Temple and Torah”; and idem, *Juda und Samaria*, 187–194 (with literature).

³¹ Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*.

³² See further my considerations in Hensel, “Debating Temple and Torah,” 35–38 (Deut 11:27) and 45–47 (Deut 12); for a different view on how Mt. Gerizim is represented within Deuteronomy see also Otto, “Jerusalem und Garizim im nachexilischen Deuteronomium.”

certain social groups, who need not necessarily be Judean, is for the redactional history of the Pentateuch (and Hexateuch³³).

Moving beyond the state of research to this point, the present volume *Social Groups behind Biblical Traditions* explores the possibility of whether Samaritan participation in the production of scripture extended not only to certain areas of the Pentateuch but also to redactional material outside of these that have traditionally been considered purely Judean. Dany Nocquet's thesis of a Samaritan "prophetic" redaction of the books of Kings that he develops in his essay "1 Kgs 20 and 22, a Writing by a Prophetic Narrator? A Reconsideration" would have far-reaching consequences for current theories on the origin of these books as well as other literary contexts (such as the DtrH).³⁴

However, there is need in discussing *other groups* alongside the Judeans and Samaritans that also come into view as having possibly helped form biblical traditions. It should be mentioned here that especially the traditions that the field has identified as simply "Diaspora" redactions, which can be found in material from many biblical traditions stemming from the exilic period onward and across many literary genres, represent a particularly complex situation. The perception of the Diaspora does not only oscillate between the poles of "critical" vs. "positive" but is variegated to several degrees and with its own nuances: sometimes, Diaspora groups are simply rejected altogether, while there are also conceptions that fundamentally appreciate the existence of groups "in the Diaspora" (at least – but not exclusively – Mesopotamia, but possibly also Egypt). Cynthia Edenburg, for example, points to the concept of "delocalized" [my term] worship of Yhwh, which she sees represented in certain layers of Exodus and Leviticus:

What is particularly significant for the purpose of maintenance of Yahwistic identity boundaries are the specific directives to be observed "wherever you reside," and these are the observance of Mazzot (Exod 12:20); Sabbath observance (Exod 35:3; Lev 23:3); refraining from partaking of blood or the fat of meat (Lev 3:17; 7:26); observation of the festival calendar with regard to days requiring cessation from work (Lev 23:21); observation of the Kippurim fast and cessation from work (Lev 23:31); and the laws pertaining to homicide (Num 35:29).³⁵

At issue here, Edenburg continues, is the preservation of "identity boundaries in Diaspora through particular dietary regulations; observance of non-sacrificial customs on festive days, such as Mazzot and the Kippurim fast; cessation from work on the Sabbath and festive days; and adjudicating homicide within the community."³⁶ Added to this is the concept of a "mobile central shrine" (the tent

³³ Otto, *Deuteronomium* 12,1–23,15, 1132–1133.

³⁴ See Nocquet, "1 Kgs 20 and 22, a Writing by a Prophetic Narrator? A Reconsideration." For another possible example of "Samaritan authorship" see Adamczewski, "Othniel and the Unfaithful Concubine: Two Images of the Judean Yahwism from a Northern Perspective."

³⁵ Edenburg, "Messaging Brothers in Distant Lands," 215.

³⁶ Edenburg, "Messaging Brothers in Distant Lands," 216.

of meeting) within the Priestly Writing, which decouples the Deuteronomistic concept of cult centralization from a specific place (Jerusalem) and in principle allows for a “central shrine” in the Diaspora. The redactional additions to the original cult centralization law (Deut 12:12–14) also display a sense of *Diasporic realities* from vv. 20 ff. onwards (v. 20a: ... אֶת-גְּבוּלְךָ כְּאֶשֶׁר כִּי-יִרְחִיב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת-גְּבוּלְךָ כְּאֶשֶׁר (דְּבַר-לְךָ)).

Some of these “Diaspora conceptions” understand the Diaspora in a positive sense but only while based entirely on the expectation that they will, sooner or later, return to the land of Israel. Other (possibly later) concepts, however, also develop conceptions of diaspora that de facto or pragmatically decouple the group identity from the land: Faith in Yhwh is also – and especially – possible in the Diaspora. The goal of these groups is not to return, since group identity is defined by Yhwh establishing his sanctuary “in their midst” (Ezek 37:26: וְנִתְתִּי לְעוֹלָם אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְעוֹלָם); such is the theological conception of, for example, the pro-Babylonian-Golah redaction in Ezekiel, with Ezek 37* as its centerpiece. The theological conception of the vision in the book of Ezekiel can also be viewed along these lines. The vision of Yhwh’s throne in Ezek 1*, the vision of Yhwh’s departure from Jerusalem in Ezek 8–11*, and the vision of the temple in Ezek 40–48* belong to one and the same thematic context, as Christoph Koch has recently demonstrated.³⁷ All of these visions serve the theological conception that takes an exclusively positive stance towards the Babylonian Golah. Thus, this also suggests that representatives of certain “Diaspora” groups were bearers of certain traditions. This is the thesis of a doctoral project currently being undertaken by Kishiya Hidaka, who presents one aspect of this in his article “Leviticus 26 and the Pro-Babylonian-Golah and Pro-Diaspora Redactions in the Context of Identity Formation and Conflict of Yahwistic Groups in the Persian Period.”

(2) Another option for the representation of these groups is what I would call *passive participation*: certain redactional texts reflect not only Judean realities but also aspects of the religious plurality of this period. Especially the contributions authored by Yigal Levin,³⁸ Magnar Kartveit,³⁹ Charlotte Hempel,⁴⁰ C. L. Crouch,⁴¹ Stephen Germany,⁴² Ann-Kristin Wigand,⁴³ and Vjatcheslav

³⁷ Koch, *Gottes himmlische Wohnstatt*, esp. 133–189.

³⁸ Levin, “What Did Ezra and Nehemiah Have against Mixed Marriages?”

³⁹ Kartveit, “The Attitude towards the Northerners in the Book of Chronicles.”

⁴⁰ See Hempel, “Yahwistic Diversity in the Land of Israel: The Contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls.”

⁴¹ Crouch, “Involuntary Migration, Strategies of Identity Construction, and Religious Diversity after 586 BCE.”

⁴² Germany, “Gilead in 2 Samuel and the Discourse on Diaspora during the Persian Period.”

⁴³ Wigand, “The Judean Group of Elephantine: Reading Aramaic Literature in the Service of Achaemenid Rule.”

Dreier⁴⁴ in the present volume deal with various aspects of these representations. It should also be mentioned here that exactly these Yahwistic groups, which are attested *materially* in Idumea and in certain regions of Transjordan (all as part of a complex, fluid, multi-ethnic society) are also evaluated thoroughly ambivalently (but by no means entirely negatively). A nearly positive image of “Edom” can be identified in certain Persian-period redactions that, at its core, is in reference to the relations with certain Yahwist groups in “Edom-in-the-Negev,” i. e., Idumea.⁴⁵

4. Representation and Negotiation of Identity Perspectives

In any case, the findings of the various articles in this volume allow for the conclusion that the diverse redactor groups of the period in question were aware of the multifaceted nature of Yahwistic groups. However, assessments of these other groups are not homogenous; this representation of Yahwistic diversity can be positive or negative, and with or without value judgment. However, this *representation of Yahwistic plurality* in biblical texts of the Persian and Hellenistic periods shows a shared, recognizable struggle for their own perspectives of identity. In other words, the different traditions and social groups behind the biblical texts establish differing concepts of a “biblical Israel” under the question of who belongs and who does not (anymore). The formation of the biblical traditions thus comprises the counterpart to the historical processes of the formation of Judaism within the “canon” of the various Yahwistic groups. In regard to the process of negotiating “Israelite” identity found in the Hebrew canon, one can comfortably speak of “inner-Israelite processes of differentiation”⁴⁶ that then also – and here, they function as a reflection of the diversity of this period – stand in a *juxtaposition* of various conceptions of “Israel” (from being exclusive to Jerusalem [so in Ezr/Neh] all the way to being fully inclusive of the Diaspora⁴⁷) in the context of later biblical traditions of the Hebrew canon.

⁴⁴ Dreier, “The Theological Profile of the Masoretic Book of Esther in the Context of Diverse Yhwh Communities.”

⁴⁵ See further Hensel, “Think Positive!,” 338–362, esp. 340–348. For the Transjordanian areas (Moab, Ammon and Edom in traditional terminology), there are, in addition to Stephen Germany’s contribution here in this volume, also considerations in Hensel, “Transjordan and Judah from the Babylonian to Hellenistic Periods”; Artus, “Transjordan in the Book of Numbers,” 273–287; (with divergent views) Davis, *The End of the Book of Numbers: On Pentateuchal Models and Compositional Issues*.

⁴⁶ Hensel, *Juda und Samaria*, 312 (for further details, see 302–349 in the same monograph).

⁴⁷ Worth mentioning here is the Persian-period redaction of the Torah to only five books, which also results in insinuations of “Israel” being a migratory society, since the exodus no longer ends with the Eisodus but with the view of the land – from the outside. Observable in this is how it emphasizes the Diaspora perspective theologically, which has become an essential element of the Torah (as the foundational document of Judaism). For details, see Hensel, “Grundelemente einer alttestamentlichen Theologie der Migration,” 19–31, esp. 24–27.

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