
Author Douglas A. Knight is Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Hebrew Bible and Professor of Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University. He also is the general editor of the Library of Ancient Israel. This series publishes works that use diverse methodologies and draw on multiple disciplines to investigate social surroundings and historical processes in ancient Israel. It consists of nine books, and this book about the legal systems at work among the people of ancient Israel during the Iron Age is the latest one. The author uses archaeological data and comparative historical evidence to substantiate his reconstruction of the legal systems used in villages, cities and states, and cultic settings.

In the introduction, Knight states that his method is to look at ancient Israelite society from the modern sociological approach, not focusing on kings and dynasties, but on ordinary people, social norms, societal systems. The author emphasizes that the legal systems in Israel were not developed as an extension of Mosaic Law, but came into being through a gradual process of interactions between different power groups. He applies the hermeneutics of suspicion and recuperation. The former came from postmodernism; there is no truth and justice, but different perspectives and hidden agendas. The latter came from hypothesizing or speculation, using limited data to reconstruct the possible scenario. Knight admits uncertainty exists in reconstruction.

Part 1, "The Dimensions of Law," has four chapters that develop the method and approach to be used in Part 2. Chapter 1 differentiates between Israelite law and biblical law. The author claims that biblical law given in the Pentateuch was written very late as literature and was not the law the Israelites used. The legal systems in use are called Israelite laws. Knight gives a summary about the usual classifications of biblical law into Covenant Code, Deuteronomic Code, Holiness Code, Priestly Code, and Decalogue. He disagrees with the postulated historical periods associated with these different codes and raises questions about these standard historical hypotheses. Knight's main concern is that these biblical laws are just literature, not the actual laws practiced in the ancient Israel. His assumes the Hebrew Bible includes only those laws and traditions the biblical authors preferred, and therefore compiled. He appeals to the principle of Critical Legal Studies that all law is politics.

In chapter 2, "The Power of Law," the author discusses general theory about law. Because of the need for social order and control, law came into existence. Laws are written to resolve conflicts, which can be classified as crime and tort. Knight emphasizes that Israelite law is a subsystem of the overall social system. It was not homogeneous, and should not be treated as only one subsystem. He warns that one should not try to apply biblical or Israelite law to our world without careful consideration. He questions that biblical law has uniformly high morality.

In chapter 3, "The Law of Power," Knight applies the principle that all law is politics, and discusses the power groups behind the various Israelite laws. He describes the social structure of power in ancient Israel. For every judicial setting, he
lists the primary and secondary power person or group. He then chooses to focus on three broad settings: the villages; the cities, states, and empires; and the cults. He acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible has influenced Western society to become more just and equal, but he maintains that it should not be shielded from suspicion and examination.

Chapter 4, "Speaking and Writing Law," discusses the evolutionary process of law formation from speaking to writing. Knight discusses legal vocabulary and forms in oral stage, then the emergence of written laws. Here he articulates his hypothesis that the biblical law was all written down in the Persian period after Darius.

Part 2, "Laws in Their Contexts," has three chapters that discuss the three legal systems. In chapter 5, "Law in the Villages," Knight begins with a description of village life, then laws relating to village life. He creates twelve criteria for identifying ancient village laws in the Hebrew Bible and other Southwest Asian legal documents. Then he discusses the substance of laws pertaining to village social and economic lives. In the end, he qualifies his reconstruction as plausible.

Chapter 6, "Law in the Cities and the States," depicts urban life in different kinds of cities and in various residential groups. Knight sets up fifteen criteria to determine which law was pertaining to the cities and states. He then enumerates laws related to social and economic lives in an urban setting. He concludes that the laws in the Bible were primarily those of the cities, the states, and the elites.

In chapter 7, "Law in the Cult," Knight describes cultic sites, artifacts, personnel, temple economy, and popular religion. He uses ten criteria to find cultic laws, and discusses cultic laws on membership, behavior, and duties and rights of priests and Levites. The author concludes that the world of the cult in ancient Israel is multi-faceted.

Finally, in the epilogue, Knight states his work as expanding the study of law in ancient Israel both horizontally and vertically: horizontally through inclusion of the study of ordinary village life; vertically through the means of ideological criticism, to discover the hidden agenda as to why laws were created. He incorporates the findings in archaeological research in his hypothesizing and exploring.

Overall, Knight succeeds in incorporating the archaeological finds about the ancient social life and legal documents in this social-historical study of the ancient Israelite law. He considers biblical laws in the Hebrew Bible as literature, but still uses them, through his criteria, to reconstruct the Israelite laws. He hypothesizes that biblical law was put into written form during the Persian period and is related to the legal traditions of Israel during the Iron Age. He admits that many of his conclusions are hypotheses and speculations. His approach is inter-disciplined and unique. His detailed analyses of legal systems in these areas are useful for one to gain more understanding of ancient Israel.

My first career was as a medical research statistician. Research involves data collecting and forming theory to explain the data. Creating hypotheses and models is necessary in order to make progress in acquiring new knowledge. However, in scientific research, one can design experiments to collect more data. With more data, the research conclusion can be verified more surely. Also, it is well known in medical research that experimental data is more reliable than observational data.
From observational data, one easily can be led to wrong conclusions. The hypotheses generated through observational data are prone to errors, as clearly exemplified by the Bible-code controversy (Drosnin, *The Bible Code*). Statistical methods are developed to collect better observational data and also to analyze them properly. All social-historical study of the ancient world is heavily dependent on archaeological finds. Archaeological data is observational in nature, so it may not give us a good representation of the past human condition. One should bear in mind this limitation when hypothesizing or speculating about the ancient world.

I also subscribe to the ETS doctrinal standard affirming the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture. From this perspective, one accepts the Mosaic authorship or influence on the Pentateuch. This conservative approach, which is different from Knight’s, proposes a different model or hypothesis to explain the observed data. It seems this traditional model can also fit the data well. Throughout Western history, people accepted this traditional model and believed the Bible is the Word of God. Due to this conviction, many benefits and reforms resulted, and better society and human lives emerged.

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Siphrut, Eisenbrauns’s series devoted to OT literature and theology, has thus far generated a number of remarkably insightful monographs. In its most recent release, *The Rhetoric of Remembrance*, Jerry Hwang offers an analysis of Deuteronomy’s “nearly fifty references to the רַאֵי, the ‘fathers’ of Israel” (p. 3). By studying the uses of the word “fathers,” Hwang endeavors to pave new ground for understanding the complex narrative chronology and theology in Deuteronomy.

As Hwang outlines it in his introduction, the more recent controversy over the word “fathers” has divided scholars into basically two camps, represented by Thomas Römer and Norbert Lohfink, respectively. Römer provided the catalyst for the debate in his published dissertation of 1990, where he attempted to parse out the redactional layers of “fathers” in Deuteronomy. Römer concluded that the term basically referred to the Exodus generation, and that references to the patriarchs were later additions. The following year, Lohfink penned a volume in direct response to Römer where he argued that the first use of “fathers” in Deuteronomy (1:8), which explicitly refers to the patriarchs, must govern our interpretation of all subsequent uses. As is so often the case, the first voices set the sides for the subsequent debate.

Hwang takes a markedly different tack in *Rhetoric*. As his title indicates, he is interested not in the fruit of redactional investigations, but in asking questions of the text *as it stands*. In other words, Hwang examines the different uses of “fathers”
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