

VALUABLE AND VULNERABLE

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Children in the Hebrew Bible,
Especially the Elisha Cycle

by
Julie Faith Parker

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CHILDREN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE,
ESPECIALLY THE ELISHA CYCLE

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Brown Judaic Studies
Providence, Rhode Island

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to Bill

זֶה דֹדִי וְזֶה רֵעִי

Song of Songs 5:16a

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
AJET	<i>Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999; repr., Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906
Berit	Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CC	Continental Commentaries
CDA	<i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i> . Edited by Jeremy Black, Andrew George, Nicholas Postgate. Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997–2002

DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011
DLU	<i>Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica</i> . G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín. Barcelona: Editorial AUSA. Vol. 1, 1996. Vol. 2, 2000
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910
GNV	Geneva Bible (1599)
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Study Edition</i> . Rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBLMS	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
JBTh	<i>Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JHCY	<i>Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JLA	<i>Jewish Law Annual</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (1917)
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>

JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version (1611)
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. Second enlarged edition of <i>KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995
KUSATU	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXE	Brenton's English Translation of the Septuagint (1851)
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible (1970)
NAS	New American Standard Bible (1977)
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	<i>The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervon, 1997
NIV	New International Version (1984)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
RBL	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952)
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
SBLBSNA	Society of Biblical Literature Biblical Scholarship in North America
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series

SBLSBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
SBLSP	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplement to <i>Numen</i>)
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEB	Webster Bible (1833)
YLT	Young's Literal Translation (1868)
ZABR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
*	hypothetical form

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Introduction

Children are integral to the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the world that gave rise to its stories, yet they have been largely overlooked in biblical scholarship. One pioneering contribution was *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, edited by Shaye Cohen and published in the Brown Judaic Studies series in 1993. In the introduction, Cohen noted that the evidence for studying the Jewish family in antiquity was abundant, but the research was slim. He rightly observed that this was due to “lack of interest” and added, “the purpose of this volume is to stimulate interest in this underexplored field.”¹ Twenty years later, this book seeks to build on Cohen’s seminal volume by offering a scholarly treatment of children in the Hebrew Bible.

Research in this area is still sparse. The field of childhood studies has expanded greatly over the past few decades with new academic departments and journals emerging.² However, childhood studies in the biblical

1. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (BJS 289; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 2.

2. For introductions to childhood studies, see Dominic Wyse, ed., *Childhood Studies: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Mary Jane Kehily, ed., *An Introduction to Childhood Studies* (2nd ed.; Maidenhead, NY: Open University Press, 2009); and Jens Qvortrup, William A. Corsaro, and Michael-Sebastian Honig, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Many related topics appear in the *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: In History and Society* (ed. Paula S. Fass; 3 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 2004). Academic journals include *The Journal of Childhood and Religion* (published by Sopher Press and established in 2010), *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (in association with the Society for the History of Children and Youth, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, and established in 2008), *Childhoods Today* (www.childhoodstoday.org, in association with the University of Sheffield and established in 2007), and *Childhood* (published by Sage and established in 1993). Allison James points out that children have long been a focus of academic research in a variety of disciplines, including literature, science, psychology, sociology, etc. However, scholars have only recently started engaging children themselves and combining interdisciplinary approaches to create the emerging field of childhood studies. See Allison James, “Understanding Childhood from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: Problems and Potentials,” in *Rethinking Childhood* (ed. Peter B. Pufall and Richard P. Unsworth; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 26. Colleges and universities in the United States with interdisciplinary childhood studies programs include Antioch University Los Angeles, Brooklyn College, Bucknell University, Case Western Reserve University, Charter Oak State College, Christopher Newport University, Eastern Washington University, Farleigh Dickinson University, George Mason University, Hampshire College, King’s University College at the University of Western

field lag far behind those of other disciplines.³ Within biblical and wider antiquity studies, scholarship on children in the New Testament and the Greco-Roman context far outpaces that on children in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ For example, a review of over nine hundred titles of articles published in

Ontario, Lesley University, Missouri Western State University, Montclair State University, Post University, Rutgers University-Camden, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Vanderbilt University, Washington University in St. Louis, Wilfrid Laurier University, and York University. (I am indebted to Professors John Wall and Dan Cook of the Center for Children and Childhood Studies at Rutgers University for this list of institutions.)

3. Much of the recent scholarship about children in the Bible has surfaced in other fields of religious studies. For a collection of essays from various faith traditions, see Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For discussions of children, ethics, theology, and religious traditions, which often engage biblical texts, see John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010); Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, eds., *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Don S. Browning and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds., *Children and Childhood in American Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Annette Esser, Andrea Günter, Rajah Scheepers, eds., *Kinder haben, Kind sein, Geboren sein: Philosophische und theologische Beiträge zu Kindheit und Geburt* (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer, 2008); Patrick McKinley Brennan, ed., *The Vocation of the Child* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Douglas McConnell, Jennifer Orona, and Paul Stockley, eds., *Understanding God's Heart for Children: Toward a Biblical Framework* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2007); Martin Marty, *The Mystery of the Child* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Marcia J. Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," *JR* 86.4 (2006): 549–79; John Wall, "Childhood Studies, Hermeneutics, and Theological Ethics," *JR* 86.4 (2006): 523–48; Kristin Herzog, *Children and Our Global Future: Theological and Social Challenges* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), 21–50; David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2005), 13–33; among others.

4. For discussion of Jewish children in Greco-Roman society, see three articles in Cohen, *Jewish Family in Antiquity*: Adele Reinhartz, "Parents and Children: A Philonic Perspective," 61–88; Ross S. Kraemer, "Jewish Mothers and Daughters in the Greco-Roman World," 89–112; and Dale B. Martin, "Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family," 113–129. For bibliographies, see Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 423–34, and Reidar Aasgaard, "Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues," *Familia* 33 (2006): 37–46. New Testament studies are too numerous to be listed here, but for a helpful introduction, see Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," in *The Child in Christian Thought* (ed. Marcia J. Bunge; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 29–60. For a (Christian) theological discussion of children in the Old and New Testaments, see John T. Carroll, "Children in the Bible," *Int* 55.2 (2001): 121–34. For a more detailed overview of daily life at the beginning of the Common Era (although less explicit with respect to children), see Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, eds., *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997). O. M. Bakke's monograph, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (trans. Brian McNeil; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005) focuses primarily on the differences between children in Christian communities versus the surrounding Greco-Roman pagan culture. However, his title may lead readers to erroneously infer that children were not considered people prior to the Common Era, or that childhood did not exist before early Christianity.

the *Journal of Biblical Literature* since the year 2000 yields no articles with children in the Hebrew Bible as the explicit focus.⁵ Beyond Bible dictionary entries, information about children in the Hebrew Bible generally must be ferreted out from works dealing with wider topics.

Books on ancient Israelite society usually give little if any attention to children, with some exceptions. An early contribution comes from Carl Heinrich Cornill's *The Culture of Ancient Israel*.⁶ One-fifth of this book focuses on children in an overview of passages pertaining to both boys and girls. Roland de Vaux gathers and surveys texts related to birth, naming, circumcision, and education in *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*.⁷ In *Life in Biblical Israel*, Philip King and Lawrence Stager address a similar range of topics related to children, based on textual and archaeological evidence.⁸ Oded Borowski's *Daily Life in Biblical Times* offers additional archaeological treatment that discusses the household and includes children, largely by inference.⁹ Karel van der Toorn's reporting of an imagined sojourn with an ancient Israelite family, "Nine Months among the

5. A few articles reference children, but only tangentially. Michael Carasik, "Why Did Hannah Ask for 'Seed of Men?'" (*JBL* 129.3 [2010]: 433–36) discusses Hannah's request for a child, but concentrates on the phrase זרע אנשים, and not children per se. Child sacrifice surfaces as part of larger discussions in Alice Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," *JBL* 128.4 (2009): 665–85; and John S. Rundin, "Poza Moro, Child Sacrifice, and the Greek Legendary Tradition," *JBL* 123.3 (2004): 425–47. Only one article arguably looks at a child character in the Hebrew Bible (Jonathan Grossman, "'Gleaning among the Ears'—'Gathering among the Sheaves': Characterizing the Image of the Supervising Boy [Ruth 2]," *JBL* 126.4 [2007]: 703–16), although this article focuses more on the interpretation of Ruth 2:7. Two articles appear on children and youth in the New Testament (Reidar Aasgaard, "Paul as a Child: Children and Childhood in the Letters of the Apostle," *JBL* 126.1 [2007]: 129–59; and Ross Kraemer, "Implicating Herodias and Her Daughter in the Death of John the Baptizer: A [Christian] Theological Strategy?" *JBL* 125.2 [2006]: 321–49). Scholarship on children in the Hebrew Bible is slowly emerging, and the Society of Biblical Literature approved a new section on Children in the Biblical World in 2008 to foster this research.

6. See the chapter on "The Education of Children in Ancient Israel" in Carl Heinrich Cornill, *The Culture of Ancient Israel* (trans. W. H. Carruth; Chicago: Open Court, 1914), 68–100.

7. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 41–52. De Vaux combines biblical passages about children with anthropological comparisons to surmise what life would have been like for children in ancient Israel; however, his interpretation can border on romantic. See, for example, his observations on children's play on pp. 48–49.

8. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 40–49. Due to the organization of this material (reflecting concerns of the text), King, Stager, and de Vaux focus primarily on boys. For explicit attention to girls, see the work of Carol Meyers, Hennie Marsman, and Jennie Ebeling (citations below).

9. Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (SBLABS 5; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). Borowski discusses children briefly under "family" (p. 22); the chapters on "The Household and Life Cycles" (pp. 63–85) and "A Day in the Life of the Ahuzam Family" (pp. 109–26) also pertain to children.

Peasants in the Palestinian Highlands,” draws on anthropological comparisons to portray daily routines and religious practices of the home.¹⁰ These works include children as part of the household and society.

Scholarship with a primary interest in women often includes children through attention to issues such as marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, domestic labor, and child rearing. Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s essay in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* examines relationships within the hierarchies of the family and the state.¹¹ Noted works combining feminist and social-scientific approaches with textual evidence include *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* by Carol Meyers, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* by Karel van der Toorn, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* by Hennie Marsman, and *Women’s Lives in Biblical Times* by Jennie R. Ebeling.¹² As with other

10. Karel van der Toorn, “Nine Months among the Peasants in the Palestinian Highlands: An Anthropological Perspective on Local Religion in the Early Iron Age,” in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 393–410. In *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), van der Toorn mentions children explicitly only once (p. 130), although children are implicitly part of the household structure he describes. *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) also discusses quotidian life in ancient Israel, with an emphasis on family religion. See the essays in that volume by Rainer Albertz (“Family Religion in Ancient Israel and Its Surroundings,” pp. 89–112); Saul M. Olyan (“Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE” pp. 113–26); and Susan Ackerman (“Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women’s Religion in Ancient Israel,” pp. 127–209). (These articles have little direct discussion about the role of children in the ancient Israelite household.)

11. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Family in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* (ed. Anne Carr and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 55–73. Frymer-Kensky offers a succinct overview of family relations drawing on specific texts (notably Genesis and Judges).

12. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Meyers explains the levels of technological skill required of girls and women to make products essential for a family’s survival (pp. 139–49). For discussion of parents, children, and education, see pp. 149–54 and Meyers’s general overview in “Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 251–59. See also Karel van der Toorn, *From Her Cradle to Her Grave: The Role of Religion in the Life of the Israelite and Babylonian Woman* (trans. Sara J. Denning-Bolle; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); and Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), esp. pp. 52–66. For extensive discussion, see Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OtSt 49; Leiden: Brill, 2003). Topics especially relevant to children include mothers and childbirth (pp. 222–43), sibling relationships (pp. 247–52), daughters (pp. 274–91), and orphans (pp. 323–24). Finally, see Jennie R. Ebeling, *Women’s Lives in Biblical Times*

books on ancient Israelite society, children are not the primary focus but are incorporated into wider discussions.

Works that more directly address the topic of children can be found under the rubric of the family. Daniel Block's essay in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* surveys language pertaining to children in the Hebrew Bible and discusses children's integral role in society.¹³ Focusing on the postexilic period and selected texts, Friedrich Fechter explores the changing role of the family in *Die Familie in der Nachexilszeit: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der Verwandtschaft in ausgewählten Texten des Alten Testaments*.¹⁴ *Families in Ancient Israel*, with contributions by Leo Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, provides overviews of the family in the different periods of the Hebrew Bible, designated as "Early Israel" (Meyers), "First Temple Israel" (Blenkinsopp), and "Second Temple Judaism" (Collins). These essays are followed by synthesis and reflection from Perdue, who offers overarching conclusions about relationships in ancient Israelite and early Jewish households.¹⁵ Patricia Dutcher-Walls contributes

(London: T&T Clark, 2010). Ebeling's book includes direct discussion of girls in ancient Israel as she portrays the life of a fictitious female character from birth through death.

13. Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (ed. Ken M. Campbell; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 33–102. For theological discussion of the family, see J. Andrew Dearman, "The Family in the Old Testament," *Int* 52.2 (1998): 117–29; as well as John Rogerson, "The Family and Structures of Grace in the Old Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective* (ed. Stephen C. Barton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 25–42.

14. Basing his discussion on Josh 7, Lev 18, Ruth, and Mic 7:1–7, Fechter posits that the family grew stronger as the monarchy grew weaker. He suggests that paternal bonds gained increased importance in structuring society during the post-exilic period. See Friedrich Fechter, *Die Familie in der Nachexilszeit: Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der Verwandtschaft in ausgewählten Texten des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 264; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). For Fechter's review of scholarship related to the family, see pp. 12–31. For discussion of the kinship structure as pervasive and stable throughout the monarchy, see Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (beit 'ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996).

15. Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Most scholarship on the Jewish family in the ancient world focuses on Greco-Roman or rabbinic contexts. In addition to *The Jewish Family in Antiquity* (BJS 289), mentioned above, see Amram Tropper, "Children and Childhood in Light of the Demographics of the Jewish Family in Late Antiquity," *JSJ* 37.3 (2006): 299–343; Margaret Williams, "The Jewish Family in Judaea from Pompey to Hadrian—the Limits of Romanization," in *The Roman Family in the Empire: Rome, Italy, and Beyond* (ed. Michele George; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 159–82; *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianities: Texts and Fictions* (ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Athalya Brenner; STAR 2; Leiden: Deo, 2000); John M. G. Barclay, "The Family as the Bearer of Religion in Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor* (ed. Halvor Moxnes; London: Routledge, 1997), 66–80; and David Kraemer, "Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature," in *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 65–80.

a helpful overview of sociological and anthropological research related to the family in *Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel: Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives*.¹⁶ The above works help to sketch life for children in ancient Israel, as they explore issues around labor, education, marriage, war, religion, domestic architecture, individual roles, family relations, burial, and societal structure.

Only very recently have children grown to merit a place as primary subjects of scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. One of the first efforts is Roy Zuck's *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible*, which looks at both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. This book supplies a helpful compilation of biblical material related to children, yet is heavily laden with conservative Christian social ethics on topics such as abortion and corporal punishment.¹⁷ Danna Nolan Fewell offers an innovative contribution with *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children*, inviting readers to engage biblical stories and creatively explore possibilities for children in the text.¹⁸ In the first chapter of *The Child in Jewish History*, John Cooper combines textual, archaeological, and anthropological evidence to provide an overview of children in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁹ Kristine Garroway uses archaeological and textual data from the ancient Near East to determine a child's status in biblical Israel.²⁰ A landmark col-

16. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, "The Clarity of Double-Vision: Seeing the Family in Sociological and Archaeological Perspective," in *Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel: Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives* (ed. Patricia Dutcher-Walls; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), 1–15.

17. Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996). For Zuck's discussion of abortion, "'You Shall Not Murder': America's National Crime against the Unborn," see pp. 71–81. Zuck interprets Proverbs as encouraging modern parents to use the rod judiciously as a sign of their love (pp. 121–24).

18. Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003). Fewell's treatment of children in the text is both scholarly and popularly accessible, offering exegetical discussion with ethical implications regarding children today. For discussion of her methodology, see pp. 22–25, 36–40. For a much earlier (but not academic) re-telling of stories of the Bible's children, see Eveleen Harrison, *Little-Known Young People of the Bible* (New York: Round Table, 1937). Harrison elaborates on the stories of eleven youngsters in the Hebrew Bible; in the second part of this book, I discuss three of Harrison's subjects ("The Little Captive Maid" and "Brothers: The Story of a Wonder Jar"). For a reflective engagement on Samuel as a youngster, see Margaret Anne Doody, "Infant Piety and the Infant Samuel," in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* (ed. Christina Büchmann and Celina Spiegel; New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 103–22.

19. John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson: 1996), 7–33.

20. Kristine Sue Henriksen Garroway, "The Construction of 'Child' in the Ancient Near East: Towards an Understanding of the Legal and Social Status of Children in Biblical Israel and Surrounding Cultures" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 2009). Garroway's work focuses largely on evidence from burial remains of children during the Bronze and Iron ages in Canaan and the environs. For archaeological discussion of children and games in ancient Palestine (with illustrations from archaeological evidence on pp. 218–29), see Ulrich Hübner, *Spiele und Spielzeug im antiken Palästina* (OBO 121; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

lection, *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia Bunge, assembles essays on topics and texts related to children, giving child characters overdue recognition in biblical scholarship.²¹ Laurel Koepf's dissertation marks another significant contribution to the field with her perspicacious analysis highlighting the essential role of children as agents of familial and cultural survival.²²

Much of the emerging scholarship is in German and modern Hebrew. Joseph Fleischmann's *Parent and Child in Ancient Near East and the Bible* (in Hebrew) looks at the legal status of children in biblical law, Mesopotamian law, and the Talmud.²³ "*Du hast mich aus meiner Mutter Leib gezogen*": *Beiträge zur Geburt im Alten Testament*, edited by Detlef Dieckmann and Dorothea Erbele-Küster, offers a series of textually based essays focused on birth, as does *Geburt—ein Übergang: Rituelle Vollzüge, Rollenträger und Geschlechterverhältnisse* by Kathrin Gies.²⁴ Andreas Michel's monograph, *Gott und Gewalt gegen Kinder im Alten Testament*, catalogs various forms of violence against children, pervasive throughout the Hebrew Bible, and discusses the problematic portrayal of an abusive God.²⁵ "*Schaffe Mir*

1992). For essays exploring the relationship between the family in ancient Israel and archaeology, including questions of burial, domestic architecture, and familial relationships, see Dutcher-Walls, ed., *Family in Life and Death*. For a broader discussion of archaeological approaches to studying children and childhood, see Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2005); Kathryn A. Kamp, "Where Have All the Children Gone?: The Archaeology of Childhood," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 8.1 (2001): 1–34; Joanna Sofaer Derevenski, ed., *Children and Material Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott, eds., *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

21. Bunge, *Child in the Bible*, 2008.

22. Laurel W. Koepf, "Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature," Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2012.

23. Joseph Fleishman, *Parent and Child in Ancient Near East and the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999). Also by Fleishman, see "The Age of Legal Maturity in Biblical Law," *JANES* 21 (1992): 35–48; "Does the Law of Exodus 21:7–11 Permit a Father to Sell His Daughter to Be a Slave?" *JLA* 13 (2000): 47–64; "A Daughter's Demand and a Father's Compliance: The Legal Background to Achsah's Claim and Caleb's Agreement," *ZAW* 118 (2006): 354–73; *Father-Daughter Relations in Biblical Law* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2011).

24. Dieckmann and Erbele-Küster discuss Gen 3:16, Jer 30:6, Ps 22, and Song of Solomon, among others. See Detlef Dieckmann and Dorothea Erbele-Küster, eds., "*Du hast mich aus meiner Mutter Leib gezogen*": *Beiträge zur Geburt im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006). Gies focuses largely on Gen 18:1–16; 21:1–8; Lev 12; Jer 20:14–18; Ezek 16:1–14. See Kathrin Gies, *Geburt—ein Übergang: rituelle Vollzüge, Rollenträger und Geschlechterverhältnisse* (ATSAT 88; St. Ottilien: Erzabtei St. Ottilien: 2009).

25. Andreas Michel, *Gott und Gewalt gegen Kinder im Alten Testament* (FAT 37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Michel discusses vocabulary used to designate children and youth in the Hebrew Bible (pp. 21–27) and reviews the nearly two hundred violent acts perpetrated against children, who are victimized by war, gods, their parents, and society. Michel notes that portrayals of children as joyful are rare. He also shows how the Septuagint's translation

Kinder . . .": Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen, edited by Andreas Kunz-Lübcke and Rüdiger Lux, places discussions of adolescence, violence against children, children in prophetic texts, and children's upbringing within the context of the broader ancient Near East.²⁶ Andreas Kunz-Lübcke also offers an important comparative study with *Das Kind in den antiken Kulturen des Mittelmeers: Israel, Ägypten, Griechenland*, which explores topics such as birth, adoption, work, play, and violence, among others.²⁷ Irmtraud Fischer's article "Über Lust und Last, Kinder zu haben: Soziale, genealogische und theologische Aspekte in der Literatur Alt-Israels" examines the sociological and genealogical role of children in the Hebrew Bible.²⁸ However, at the time of this writing, I know of no other monographic study that brings a theoretical and historical discussion of children to studies in the Hebrew Bible and combines this with detailed analysis of one set of stories.

My goals with this book are fourfold: First, to help fill a void in Hebrew Bible scholarship, especially in English. Second, I will show that children were recognized as different from adults in the minds of the biblical writers. The Hebrew Bible contains awareness, and therefore concepts, of childhood. Third, this book offers and demonstrates an inter-

mitigates YHWH's culpability in theologically troubling passages. While Michel's important contribution calls attention to the prevalence and plight of children in the Hebrew Bible, his discussion focuses on children as objects, not agents.

26. Andreas Kunz-Lübcke and Rüdiger Lux, eds., *"Schaffe Mir Kinder . . .": Beiträge zur Kindheit im alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen* (ABG 21; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006). This collected volume explores issues related to children in antiquity. Articles on the ancient Near East address the following issues: evidence for childhood research in antiquity (Dieter Hoof, "Das Evidenzproblem in der althistorischen Kindheitsforschung," pp. 19–43); the sale and deportation of children in Babylonia and Assyria (Konrad Volk, "Von Findel-, Waisen-, verkauften und deportierten Kindern. Notizen aus Babylonien und Assyrien," pp. 47–87); education and labor among Egyptian children (Erica Feucht, "Kinderarbeit und Erziehung im Alten Ägypten," pp. 89–117); and childhood in Greco-Roman antiquity (Josef N. Neumann, "Kindheit in der griechisch-römischen Antike. Entwicklung—Erziehung—Erwartung," pp. 119–33). The second part of the book focuses on ancient Israel. Andreas Michel surveys violence against children then focuses on child sacrifice, especially associated with *mlk* offerings ("Gewalt gegen Kinder im alten Israel. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Perspektive," pp. 137–63). Andreas Kunz-Lübcke discusses adolescent biblical characters, particularly as they emerge from crisis situations ("Wahrnehmung von Adoleszenz in der Hebräischen Bibel und in den Nachbarkulturen Israels," pp. 167–95). Rüdiger Lux reviews passages with vulnerable children in prophetic literature ("Die Kinder auf der Gasse. Ein Kindheitsmotiv in der prophetischen Gerichts- und Heilsverkündigung," pp. 197–221). Otto Kaiser looks at children's education in Ben Sira ("Erziehung und Bildung in der Weisheit des Jesus Sirach," pp. 223–51).

27. See Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, *Das Kind in den antiken Kulturen des Mittelmeers: Israel, Ägypten, Griechenland* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007).

28. Irmtraud Fischer, "Über Lust und Last, Kinder zu haben: Soziale, genealogische und theologische Aspekte in der Literatur Alt-Israels," *JBTh* 17 (2002): 56–82. This volume of *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie*, entitled *Gottes Kinder*, is devoted to the topic of children.

pretive approach and methodology by which scholars might examine biblical stories with child characters, especially those who appear in the text briefly and are easy to bypass. Fourth, I seek to convince readers that appreciating these young characters greatly enriches our understanding of the Hebrew Bible. My hope is that more biblical scholars will notice child characters and will be prompted to explore their fascinating stories.

The children of the Hebrew Bible merit this attention for multiple reasons. Most significantly, many people in the ancient world did not survive to adulthood. Incorporating excavation evidence from a tomb in Palestine, with remains dated between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE, John Cooper reports that nearly half of this population did not live to age eighteen.²⁹ Milton Eng points out that the *life expectancy*, or average age of a person at death, differs from the *life span*, which is the age one could expect to reach without interference from war, disease, death in childbirth, etc. He estimates that the life expectancy in ancient Israel was probably in the mid-thirties, whereas the typical life span (barring calamities) would be between forty and fifty.³⁰ In societies with short life expectancies approximately one-third of the total population consists of children.³¹ For scholars to ignore this significant demographic while discussing ancient Israel (as many do) is to miss much of the culture that they try to understand.

Analyzing the children in the Hebrew Bible leads scholars to reassess characters, narratives, and the issues they raise. Topics such as adop-

29. Cooper, *Jewish Childhood*, 11.

30. See Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Hebrew* (LHBOTS 464; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 35–44.

31. Andrew Chamberlain, "Minor Concerns: A Demographic Perspective on Children in Past Societies," in *Children and Material Culture* (ed. Joanna Sofaer Derevenski; London: Routledge, 2000), 207. Chamberlain further observes that scholars who ignore children bypass "the predominant group of individuals in most past societies." Andrew T. Chamberlain, "Commentary: Missing Stage of Life—Towards the Perception of Children in Archaeology," in Jenny Moore and Eleanor Scott, eds., *Invisible People and Processes: Writing Gender and Childhood into European Archaeology* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 250. Anthropological studies suggest that in societies without developed medical care and lacking clean water supplies, 20 percent (or more) of babies do not survive to reach one year old, and another 25 percent do not reach age two. See Robert A. LeVine, "Child Rearing as Cultural Adaptation," in *Culture and Infancy: Variations in the Human Experience* (ed. P. Herbert Leiderman, Steven R. Tulkin, Anne Rosenfeld; New York: Academic Press, 1977), 24. N. Ray Hiner and Joseph Hawes note that children comprised a substantial demographic in past populations and played essential roles in economies. They were also crucial in the transmission of culture, even though historians have given them relatively little attention until recently. See Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner, eds., *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective: An International Handbook and Research Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1991), 2. In his study on the highlands of Israel during Iron I, Lawrence Stager estimates that approximately two of six children would live to become adults. Lawrence Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 18.

tion, birth order, sibling rivalry, inheritance, education, labor, discipline, continuance of the covenant, family rituals, sexuality, child sacrifice, warfare, prostitution, captivity, slavery, abandonment, and incest, to name a few, are seen differently when focusing on the children. Also, children help to shape the stories of the text, even when they play minor roles. Beyond the dramatic characters, those acting in subtle ways frequently mirror important human activity.³²

Episodes from the childhood or youth of a character merit attention since they can help us to fully appreciate his or her adult manifestation. A person's early years help to shape the rest of his/her life. Stories of a character's youth then add dimension to the overall persona, adding complexity to our reading.³³

Children also have an essential theological role in Jewish tradition. James M. M. Francis points out that "Israel as God's child and thereby God as Israel's Father, constitutes a particularly important and predominant motif (Deut. 1.31, 32.1–13; Jer. 3.4; 31.20; Is. 63.16, 64.8–9)."³⁴ The people of Israel describe themselves as children in relation to YHWH and Israel (בני ישראל), and children are part of Israel's restoration (Isa 49:22). Jewish customs and rituals are celebrated in the home and passed down through children. Parents and children have vital obligations to each other, as discussed in the Talmud and other early Jewish literature.³⁵ The Israelite covenant continues through children, who are integral to families, tribes, and nations.

Perhaps paramount, children permeate the Hebrew Bible. Their presence is tied to questions of legacy, survival, family strength, and honor. Many individual children, from slaves to princes, offer overlooked but riveting stories. Similarly, women in the Bible were neglected throughout most of the history of biblical interpretation. Just forty years ago, there were almost no academic books about biblical women. Today there are

32. Childhood historian Paula Fass explains that children's behavior is highly significant, even when focused on self-preservation. She notes, "Some of the most important kinds of human activities are defensive, preservative, un-self-consciously conservative." See Paula S. Fass, "Social History and the History of Childhood" in the *Society for the History of Children and Youth Newsletter* 13 (Winter 2009): 16.

33. For example, Ishmael (Gen 21:9–20), Isaac (Gen 22:1–19), Rebekah (Gen 24:10–67), Joseph (Genesis 37), Moses (Exod 2:1–10), Miriam (Exod 2:1–10), Samuel (1 Sam 3:1–18), David (1 Sam 17), and Jeremiah (Jer 1:4–10), all have pivotal incidents from their childhood or youth portrayed in the text. For discussion of biblical characters and the role of youth in shaping characterization, see Jon L. Berquist, "Childhood and Age in the Bible," *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 521–30. For discussion of David's development, see Kunz-Lübcke, "Wahrnehmung von Adoleszenz," 179–86.

34. James M. M. Francis, *Adults as Children: Images of Childhood in the Ancient World and the New Testament* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), 67–68.

35. See O. Larry Yarbrough, "Parents and Children in the Jewish Family of Antiquity," in *Jewish Family in Antiquity*, 41–53. See also Cooper, *Child in Jewish History*, 35–110.

hundreds, if not thousands. Yet children in the Hebrew Bible still languish in textual obscurity.

Theoretical Concerns, Methodological Considerations, and Ensuing Approach

Before embarking on our study of children in the Hebrew Bible, we need a theoretical foundation. Ideas about children and childhood are social constructs that are culturally bound. Our conceptions of children stem from social and economic conditions, as well as contemporary Western intellectual legacies. The biblical field has barely addressed these wider issues in childhood studies.

Modern theories of childhood have been shaped by the seminal work of Philippe Ariès. In 1960, this French historian published *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (English title: *Centuries of Childhood*), which suggests that childhood was essentially not recognized as a separate period of life until after the Middle Ages.³⁶ His thesis sparked formidable controversy and has been widely disputed. However, prominent biblical scholars have adopted Ariès's conclusion that children were seen as "miniature adults" until the modern era. In his essay "The Family in First Temple Israel," Joseph Blenkinsopp highlights Ariès's study and gleans an understanding of childhood from Hebrew terms for children, although he finds the biblical conception of childhood "rather vague and ill-focused."³⁷ He concurs with Ariès that childhood was not known as a distinct phase of life and adds, "in fact, no biblical source alludes to childhood or youth in the abstract before Koheleth, who speaks of the days of youth (*yaldût*, Eccl. 11:9–10)."³⁸ Building on Blenkinsopp's study, Philip King and Lawrence Stager also cite Ariès and observe, "The issue as to whether the Israelites treated their children as children or as 'small-scale adults' remains unresolved."³⁹ However, to ask whether the Hebrew Bible understands children as "miniature adults" or "children" is to impose a

36. Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960), and translated by Robert Baldick as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

37. Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," in Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 67. While not explicitly mentioning Ariès, Andrew Dearman also adopts his thesis. He sees children in the Hebrew Bible as "'little adults' as they grow toward maturity in their family identity" ("Family in the Old Testament," 125).

38. Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," 67. Blenkinsopp overlooks other words that indicate youth, such as נעורים (46 attestations), נער (Job 33:25; 36:14; Ps 88:16; Prov 29:21), *נערות* (Jer 32:30), *עלומים* (Job 20:11; 33:25; Ps 89:46; Isa 54:4), *צעירה* (Gen 43:33), *בחורות* (Eccl 11:9; 12:1) and *בחורים* (Num 11:28). Further discussion follows.

39. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 41.

distinction that the text itself has no means to express.⁴⁰ There remains a need for a discussion of *Centuries of Childhood* that serves the biblical field and exposes Ariès's methodological flaws.⁴¹

Some scholars question whether an academic conversation about childhood in the Bible is even appropriate. Andreas Michel maintains that to look for childhood in the Hebrew Bible may be largely irrelevant since children and adults led deeply integrated lives. He argues that applying current ideas of childhood to the Bible is anachronistic and has "cultural-colonist features."⁴² Like Michel, Andreas Kunz-Lübcke and Rüdiger Lux assert that Ariès's work may be irrelevant for Hebrew Bible studies, hence the dearth of attention to childhood.⁴³ These scholars are right to suggest that childhood is not cordoned off from adulthood in biblical understanding, nor does it resemble modern ideas of childhood. Yet this is not the same as saying that there is no concept of childhood in the Hebrew Bible. Understandings of childhood must not be limited to current Western presumptions. The question is not whether "the Israelites treated children as children," as King and Stager ask (above), because that assumes *our* understanding of childhood, carrying expectations that children should be coddled, cared for, educated, and cherished. Rather, we should ask, How did they treat their children? What can we infer about adults' attitudes toward children and children's attitudes toward adults? Was there any recognition of children's separate status? How can we discover what the ancient writers of the Hebrew Bible thought about children and childhood?

I offer two strategies: linguistic and literary. With the majority of biblical scholars, I think that the Hebrew Bible is grounded in the lives of real people in the region of Palestine during the millennium before the Common Era. Exactly who the Bible writers were and precisely how much the Hebrew Bible reflects historical reality are ultimately unanswerable questions.⁴⁴ This project then focuses on the world portrayed in the Hebrew

40. Biblical Hebrew does not have a gender-neutral word specifying that a person has reached maturity (i.e., "adult"). The closest equivalents, "man" (איש) and "woman" (אשה), carry a broad range of connotations, including, but certainly not limited to, adulthood. See HALOT 1:43–44, 93.

41. Naomi Steinberg's introduction to Ariès's work for biblical scholarship is helpful but very brief. See Naomi Steinberg, "Sociological Approaches: Toward a Sociology of Childhood in the Hebrew Bible," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 260.

42. Andreas Michel, "Sexual Violence against Children in the Bible," in *The Structural Betrayal of Trust* (ed. Regina Ammicht-Quinn, Hille Haker, and Maureen Junker-Kenny; London: SCM Press, 2004), 52.

43. Kunz-Lübcke and Lux, "Schaffe Mir Kinder," 12.

44. For a succinct overview of the Minimalist-Maximalist debate, see Ziony Zevit, "Three Debates about Bible and Archaeology," *Bib* 83 (2002): 1–27.

Bible, that is, biblical Israel. I understand that the writers of these texts were primarily privileged men who came from the upper echelons of society.⁴⁵ Presumably, their writings and the environment they portray must have borne some resemblance to people's lives to be not only relevant but compelling. Still, the extent to which the literary and historical worlds mirror each other is not my concern. This level of correspondence remains the reader's interpretive choice, while I focus on how the Hebrew Bible portrays its children, through both vocabulary and narratives.

This book is divided into two sections: Part I offers theoretical, historical, contextual, linguistic, literary, and methodological frameworks to recognize and appreciate children in biblical texts, and Part II analyzes stories with children in the Elisha cycle. Tales about Elisha begin in 1 Kgs 19:15–21, when Elijah chooses Elisha as his successor, and end with Elisha's death in 2 Kgs 13:14–21. Highlighting Elisha's role as a wonderworker among common people, the bulk of these narratives appear in 2 Kings 2–8. Taken together, these seven chapters contain forty-nine child characters, which is a strikingly high number. These child characters have received little attention from biblical scholars, further contributing to my decision to focus on them. Finally, by concentrating on one literary collection, I can offer more cohesive conclusions.

In Part I, Chapter 1 (“Concepts of Children and Childhood: A Theoretical and Historical Framework”) discusses issues in the wider field of childhood studies to bring this knowledge to the biblical field. This chapter also reviews the history of current Western understandings about children and childhood to increase awareness of our own biases. By acknowledging our assumptions about what it means to be a child, we can keep these presumptions at bay and replace them with knowledge revealed in the text.

Chapter 2 (“Learning about Children and Youth in the Hebrew Bible through Language: A Contextual and Linguistic Framework”) operates from the premise that language derives from experience and vocabulary

45. Ancient societies functioned with little reliance on the written word. Those with education and access to expensive writing materials were likely among the elite. However, writers of texts may have been semi-literate functionaries producing tangible items to sell. Susan Niditch, citing the work of Denise Troll, cautions against idealizing about the motivation and dedication of medieval scribes. See Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 131–34. David Carr notes that the rarity of the written word in antiquity imbued writing with power. See David McLain Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10. For detailed discussion about the writers of the Hebrew Bible, see Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Van der Toorn posits that the Hebrew Bible was produced by an elite cadre of scribes associated with the Jerusalem Temple.

is an index of a culture's ideas.⁴⁶ After noting the prevalence of children in the Hebrew Bible and briefly touching upon linguistic theory, I examine Hebrew terms that designate children and young people, approximately up to the age of marriage.⁴⁷ Previous works have also reviewed these terms, along with others for children and youth, though usually in less detail.⁴⁸ The analysis here focuses primarily on textual usage and the insights gained from these terms to develop an understanding of childhood in the Hebrew Bible. I group these words by family association, gender, and stages of growth since they lend themselves to these categorizations.

Chapter 3 ("Approaching the Elisha Cycle: A Literary and Methodological Framework") offers contextual discussions for understanding the Elisha cycle then proposes a methodology for childist interpretation (explained below). This chapter looks at the genre of these narratives, as well as their theological role within the Deuteronomistic History. I explain why minor characters, such as children whom biblical commentators frequently fail to notice, are nonetheless highly significant. I then propose a methodology that gives attention to the setting, characters, and plot of the story, followed by an interpretation that leads to insights about children. The final step of analysis connects the passage at hand with other references to children in the Hebrew Bible to show wider implications for understanding biblical concepts of childhood. In sum, the discussion of each narrative consists of six sections entitled *Setting, Characters, Reviewing the Plot from a Childist Perspective, Childist Interpretation, Insights about Children, and Children and Textual Connections*.

Part II consists of textual analyses that follow the prescribed six-step

46. Ferdinand de Saussure, often cited as the father of modern linguistics, observes, "The value of a word is mainly or primarily thought of in terms of its capacity for representing a certain idea." See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye; trans. Roy Harris; London: Duckworth, 1983), 112. Edward Sapir asserts that language colors all our thinking and functions as a "guide to 'social reality.'" See Edward Sapir, *Selected Writings in Language, Culture, and Personality* (ed. David G. Mandelbaum; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 162.

47. Scholars suggest that girls would be considered marriageable at the onset of puberty (i.e., early teenage years) and young men would be at least ten years older. See Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," 77; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 54. To use marriage as the cutoff point between childhood and adulthood provides practical limits for examining vocabulary that designates children and youth. However, this boundary between youth and adulthood remains flexible since the vocabulary does not offer separate words for married and unmarried youth. For example, an עלמה (generally translated as "young woman" [BDB, 761] or "a marriageable girl" [HALOT 1:836]) could be single (see Exod 2:8) or married (see Isa 7:14). (In Isa 7:14, עלמה is frequently translated as "virgin"; see p. 58 n. 58.)

48. See Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel," 67–68; Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," 78–85; Fischer, "Über Lust und Last," 56–57; Michel, *Gott und Gewalt*, 21–27; Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, 149–53. Milton Eng offers extensive discussions of three terms for young people: נוער, ילד, and טף (Eng, *Days of Our Years*, 58–94).

methodology.⁴⁹ The title of each discussion centers on the children in the selected passage of the Elisha cycle. These are the Mockers of Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23–25), the Moabite Prince (2 Kgs 3:26–27), the Debt-Collateral Children (2 Kgs 4:1–7), the Shunammite’s Son (2 Kgs 4:8–37), the Israelite Slave Girl (2 Kgs 5:1–14), the Sons of the Starving Mothers (2 Kgs 6:24–31), and the Boy Restored to Life (2 Kgs 8:1–6).⁵⁰ Unlike better-known children in the Hebrew Bible,⁵¹ the children in the Elisha cycle do not grow up to assume larger roles in the text and acquire biblical fame. They are not named nor do they reappear, save a brief return by a boy who is brought back to life (2 Kgs 4:8–37; 8:1–6). Since the spotlight is *not* on the young characters in the Elisha cycle, they offer a textual “back window” through which readers might peer in to get an honest glimpse at life for children in the periods that produced and preserved these texts.⁵²

A few further notes on this book’s approach: I work primarily from the Masoretic text (MT) of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), including English translations for comparison when relevant. Versification corresponds to that of the MT, with English chapter and verse noted in parentheses when different. Translations not attributed to another source are my own. The term “text” simply refers to the Hebrew Bible or portions thereof.⁵³ The interdisciplinary discussions draw upon narrative criticism, while incorporating insights from historical criticism and social-scientific disciplines, notably archaeology and anthropology.

49. The discussion of the final text analyzed here (2 Kgs 8:1–6) diverges from this pattern since this passage re-introduces a child character who has already been discussed.

50. The small children briefly mentioned in 2 Kgs 8:12 (עלליהם) are part of a literary trope and do not appear in a scene, so I do not analyze this passage.

51. E.g., Isaac being sacrificed (Gen 22:1–13), Joseph with his coat (Genesis 37), Moses and Miriam at the bulrushes (Exod 2:1–9), or Samuel in the temple (1 Sam 2:18–21; 3:1–19).

52. Reidar Aasgaard observes that the writers’ disinterest in children can lead to less polished and more forthright portrayals. He notes that the lack of “rhetorical or ideological adaptation” offers readers an opportunity to learn about the lives of children or attitudes toward them (“Children in Antiquity,” 25).

53. In linguistic studies, “text” refers to “a unit of language in use . . . [i.e.,] a meaning unit which is structured so that it coheres and functions as a unity with respect to its environment,” be it written or oral. See Janet Jones, Sandra Gollin, Helen Drury, and Dorothy Economou, “Systemic-Functional Linguistics and Its Application to the TESOL Curriculum,” in *Language Development: Learning Language, Learning Culture. Meaning and Choice in Language: Studies for Michael Halliday* (ed. Raqaiya Hasan and J. R. Martin; Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989), 316. For consistency, I use the word “text” (here as elsewhere) as generally applied in biblical studies, referring to the writings of the Bible. For a brief theoretical introduction to the role of text and interpretation, see Anne Cluysenaar, “Text,” in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (ed. Peter Childs and Roger Fowler; London: Routledge, 2006), 237–38.

Childist Interpretation

Since the academic study of children is new within the biblical guild, corresponding language is still developing. Reidar Aasgaard, in his well-reasoned appeal for more antiquity scholarship focused on children, argues for a “childish” reading that stems from children’s interests and perspectives.⁵⁴ Aasgaard’s use of “childish” is innovative, but this term (like many words associated with children) carries a subtle derogatory connotation.⁵⁵ Kristine Garroway uses “not-yet-adult” (abbreviated NYA) to describe a child or youth.⁵⁶ This term conveniently covers a wide range of young people, however it defines them by what they are not. In *The Child in the Bible*, Marcia Bunge explains that the contributors “re-examine selected biblical texts through the ‘lens’ or category of ‘the child.’”⁵⁷ While my project takes a similar tack, I prefer not to refer to “the child” (emphasis added). Analogously, to speak of “the adult” is simply too broad.⁵⁸ We want to avoid the ideological fallacy that there is a presumed archetypical child any more than there is a standard adult. More compelling is the phrase “child-centered biblical interpretation” adopted by Laurel Koepf.⁵⁹ This language is helpful and workable, yet for reasons explained below I find “childist” more compelling.

Recent scholarship introduces the terms “childist” and “childism,” while disagreeing as to what these words mean. Ethicist John Wall speaks of a “childist” paradigm that incorporates the concerns and experiences of children into theological ethics. Wall sees a need for this term as a self-critique of a society that neglects and impoverishes its children without

54. Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity,” 37.

55. Similar pejorative adjectives related to youth include “infantile,” “puerile,” “jeune,” “callow,” “immature,” and “juvenile.” Conversely, the terms “young” and “youthful” generally carry neutral or positive connotations in English, but to speak of a “young” or “youthful” reading of texts is confusing.

56. Garroway, “Construction of ‘Child,’” 2.

57. Bunge, *Child in the Bible*, xviii.

58. Sociologists Allison James and Adrian James note that to speak of “the child” erases children’s individuality in an abstract sense. While people rarely speak of “the adult,” “the child” metonymically stands for all children. James and James see childhood as a “structural site” common to children as a collective, within which an individual child exercises her or his own agency. See Allison James and Adrian L. James, *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2004), 14–15. See also Jens Qvortrup, “Childhood Matters: An Introduction,” in *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics* (ed. Jens Qvortrup, Marjatta Bardy, Giovanni Sgritta, Helmut Wintersberger; Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1994), 5–7. Qvortrup et al. view childhood as a structural concept to be compared with other categories in a given society, and children are the ‘incumbents’ of this structural category (p. 6).

59. Koepf, “Give Me Children or I Shall Die.” Similarly, the term “child-centered exploration of texts” was introduced in the dissertation form of this book.

awareness of its anti-child prejudices. He asserts that “childist” theological ethics reframes questions of human responsibility toward all people, including those who are young.⁶⁰ For Wall, “childism” joins movements appreciating the full personhood of every individual, akin to feminism, womanism, or humanism.⁶¹ Psychoanalyst Elisabeth Young-Bruehl agrees that an underlying bias against children is pervasive and disregarded in North American society. Both Wall and Young-Bruehl maintain that a focus on “childism” will help to identify and counter anti-child discrimination. However, for Young-Bruehl “childism” names a harmful prejudice, like racism, sexism, classism, ageism, or anti-Semitism. She cites publications in psychology and psychiatry dating from the late 1960s that introduced the term “childism” as decidedly negative.⁶² (Working in a different field, Wall makes no reference to these early studies.)

This poses a quandary. On one hand, the negative term “childism,” reflecting demeaning and harmful attitudes, has already been established and used by academics for decades. On the other hand, to use the term “childism” positively can offer a fresh and galvanizing lens through which to view not only ethics but texts. Since “childism” has not yet reached popular parlance as a term that reflects a bias either for or against children, the jury is still out. Therefore, this book should weigh in to influence if and how the term might be used in biblical studies.

I encourage biblical scholars to adopt Wall’s understanding of the term “childism.” Using this word positively emphasizes children’s active role in shaping culture, instead of seeing them as largely passive or victimized. Many adults view children as living according to adults’ rules and decisions, with little power of their own. While this is true in many respects, adults often fail to notice how children strategize and act to accomplish goals, exert control, maintain relationships, and organize their lives. Even babies and toddlers have tremendous ability to restructure adult lives. Just as we often do not acknowledge children’s influence in families and societies, we have largely ignored their roles in the text. “Childism,” as an affirming term, helps us recognize children as agents in culture and in literature.

To speak of a childist interpretation seems appropriate for this book that explores stories of the Bible’s children much as feminist biblical scholars have focused on women. The approach here also reassesses previously neglected characters. Like feminist biblical interpretation, childist biblical interpretation becomes part of a larger movement that questions engrained patterns of thought that minimize the contributions of certain kinds of people. Certainly, to use the word “childist” carries risks. This

60. Wall, “Childhood Studies, Hermeneutics, and Theological Ethics,” 524.

61. Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 3.

62. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice against Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 299–300.

term is still relatively obscure, and many scholars will find such language awkward. Others might hear something similar to “racist” or “sexist.” However, I trust that the following discussion will be clear in its childist goal: to identify and appreciate the influence and importance of promising, compelling young biblical characters.

BJS