

Biblical Children, Biblical Childhoods

Humans live with the illusion that their attitudes toward their everyday lives are timeless.

—PATRICK H. HUTTON

INTRODUCTION

Biblical studies has increasingly come to understand itself as an interdisciplinary field. It engages the tools of archaeology, Assyriology, ideological and literary theories, philology, and a number of other areas of study so as to better access the biblical text. Each of these fields's perspectives has left a mark on the academic study of the Hebrew Bible. This increasing disciplinary pluralism has made it clear that no method can claim scientific neutrality; each approaches interpretation from a particular point of view and set of assumptions. Neutrality is indeed impossible. Rather than pursue this impossible ideal, scholars can openly claim the perspective from which they write and recognize the benefits of the breadth of perspectives with which one may interpret the biblical text. Each is an opportunity to add an additional layer of insight. Each contributes an aspect of understanding without which our knowledge is incomplete.

This book seeks to contribute yet another perspective to the growing breadth of exegetical voices. It presents a child-centered interpretation of several texts from the Hebrew Bible, pointing to the impact attention to children and childhood can have on contemporary readers' understanding of the ancient context of this powerful cultural text. My goal in doing this is to reveal how attention to the particular understandings of childhood as essential aspects of ancient and modern life can help scholars avoid projecting anachronistic assumptions onto the ancient texts that are our focus.

In my pursuit of child-centered sociohistorical hermeneutics, I engage the tools, questions, and perspectives offered by a growing interdisciplinary field

in which scholars across academic disciplines have begun participating in the past thirty to forty years: childhood studies.¹ Across disciplinary boundaries, childhood studies seeks to draw academic attention to children and childhood, revealing new areas to be explored through academic research. It views children as full people with agency, rather than potential people in the making, and the concept of childhood as a cultural construction with a long and ever-changing history. The assertion that childhood is a social construction and the profound effect of this assertion on child-centered research is primary to the field of childhood studies. The understanding that childhood is socially constructed, along with the other tools and insights of childhood studies, provides significant interdisciplinary contributions to biblical studies. This book aims to explore the impact of these insights.

I will begin by reviewing present publications and developments in child-centered interpretation of the Hebrew Bible so as to note the growth of the field and the necessity for continuing research, most particularly concerning the impact of ancient constructions of childhood in the Hebrew Bible and its interpretation. I will then characterize childhood studies, the interdisciplinary field I will be engaging throughout, and stipulate the significance of the understanding that childhood is a social construct. I will give a brief overview of the social history of childhood, with particular attention to the changing value of children and the increasing dominance of privileged Western constructions of childhood innocence. Having established the changing social value of children, I will consider the potential impact of this awareness on sociohistorical interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. To that end, I will review mortuary evidence that points to the boundaries ancient people may have placed around infancy, childhood, and adulthood. I will also examine comparative ethnographies of children's labor in subsistence agricultural economies, as well as biblical texts that point to the economic value of children in the biblical world. Each of these elements points to the contrast between the dominant Western discourses around children and childhood and those that would have predominated in the world that produced the Hebrew Bible, suggesting that contemporary interpreters should look to ancient constructions of childhood to better understand the social and historical context of biblical texts.

1. Allison James and Alan Prout eds., preface to *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (London: Falmer, 1997), ix.

CHILD-CENTERED PUBLICATIONS IN HEBREW BIBLE

Just as attention to the voices and presence of women, indigenous peoples, and a variety of marginalized groups in the Bible has contributed to biblical studies, so too can increased attention to children. Indeed, such work has already begun. Within the academic study of the Hebrew Bible, Danna Nolan Fewell, Christine Hendricksen Garroway, Julie Faith Parker, and Naomi Steinberg have begun to explore biblical interpretation in light of modern and ancient childhoods respectively. Danna Nolan Fewell's *Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* is one of the earliest child-centered publications in the academic study of the Hebrew Bible. It arose from Fewell's experiences with her young daughter, Aubrey, which first prompted her, along with David M. Gunn, to ask in *Gender, Power, and Promise*² whether they wanted their children to read the Bible. This began a conversation with Francis Landy³ on that very question, published in a volume of *Semeia* on the ethics of reading. Fewell's continued interest in and research on the topic resulted in her monograph on the subject. Fewell explains in the introduction to *Children of Israel*, "I'm not proposing a study of 'what the Bible (explicitly) says about children.' Nor am I attempting to decipher what parts, if any, of the Bible can be described or used as children's literature. Rather, I am envisioning a way of reading that allows the subject of 'children' to reconfigure what is at stake in the biblical text."⁴ Fewell's most valuable contribution in this collection of rereadings and retellings of biblical texts is exactly this proposal, which she calls a "hermeneutic of interruption."⁵ Within the focus on the received text that Fewell proposes, adults and children have the opportunity to interrupt the text's discourses in potentially empowering ways. Fewell's text collects her own proposed interruptions and also includes several anecdotes of her daughter's and other children's interruptions, leaving room for a more intentional gathering of interruptions by, rather than on behalf of, a wide range of children.

Whereas Fewell's work focuses on ethical reading of the Hebrew Bible with modern children's well-being in mind, Julie Faith Parker's research is more centered on the lives of children in the ancient world and on child characters in 2 Kings. Parker's 2009 dissertation⁶ includes an excellent analysis

2. Danna Nolan Fewell and David A. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 20.

3. Francis Landy, "Do We Want Our Children to Read This Book?," *Semeia* 77 (1997): 157–76.

4. Danna Nolan Fewell, *Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 24.

5. *Ibid.*, 32.

of the range of Hebrew words associated with children, childhood, and youth, but focuses primarily on an exegesis of the Elisha cycle with attention to the many anonymous children therein.⁷ Her chapter in Elizabeth A. McCabe's 2009 edited volume, *Women in the Biblical World*, "You are a Bible Child: Exploring the Lives of Children and Mothers through the Elisha Cycle,"⁸ has the same focus. Although similarly employing her own and the reader's imagination to access the Bible, Parker employs a very different methodology than Fewell. Parker's work is more historical than literary, and she spends several pages of her chapter in the McCabe volume describing an average day in the life of an eleven-year-old girl living in the Israelite highlands in the eighth century bce. Parker *is* interested in what the Bible implicitly and explicitly says about children, and one of the primary strengths in her choice and analysis of the text at hand is her ability to focus on children who are mentioned in passing rather than as the focus of a narrative. Parker suggests that "because the spotlight is *not* being thrown on the children of 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 stories."⁹ Parker's research is thereby able to use both biblical and archaeological evidence to uncover some of the practical aspects of ancient childhoods.

Christine Hendriksen Garroway completed her dissertation, "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," almost simultaneously with Parker.¹⁰ Garroway's research¹¹ encompasses biblical and ancient Near Eastern law codes regarding NYAs, the abbreviation for "not yet adult" she prefers to substitute rather than use the value-laden "children" throughout her work. Garroway's strongest contribution in this thoroughly researched work is a comprehensive analysis of published mortuary evidence of fetuses, infants (birth to two years), children

6. Julie Faith Parker, "Suffer the Little Children": A Child-Centered Exploration of the Elisha Cycle" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009).

7. Parker's revised dissertation, *Valuable and Vulnerable: Children in the Hebrew Bible, Especially the Elisha Cycle*, is due out from Brown Judaic Studies in 2013.

8. Julie Faith Parker, "You are a Bible Child: Exploring the Lives of Children and Mothers through the Elisha Cycle," in *Women in the Biblical World: A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009).

9. *Ibid.*, 60.

10. Kristine Sue Hendricksen 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" (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, 2010).

11. Garroway's revised dissertation is soon to be published by Eisenbrauns.

(three to twelve years), and juveniles (thirteen to fifteen years) in Bronze and Iron Age Canaan and the surrounding area, supplemented by the yet unpublished findings of several scholars in the field regarding the same in Canaan proper. By combining both textual and archaeological evidence, Garroway is able to uncover multiple aspects of ancient adults' constructions of childhood.

One of the most recent publications on childhood and the Hebrew Bible is Naomi Steinberg's *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible*.¹² Steinberg's monograph utilizes social, historical, and philological methods to discern ancient understandings of childhood, looking toward modern ethical aims in considering the lives of children on a global scale. In this way, she bridges Parker and Garroway's ancient concerns with the ideals Fewell sets forward. Like Parker, Steinberg explores patterns in Hebrew words for "child." For Steinberg, Hebrew usage is one among many tools she utilizes to ask the important questions, What is a child? and Are there any children here? that inform her work. Her final chapters build on this in case studies of 1 Samuel 1 and Exodus 21:22-25 to explore modern ethical issues of child abandonment and the personhood of a fetus from a biblical perspective as informed by awareness of ancient constructions of childhood. Steinberg's work is especially adept in its separation of the ancient adult-child relationship from modern Western conceptions of childhood innocence.

*The Child in the Bible*¹³ is one in a line of edited volumes by Marcia Bunge focusing on children, each in an aspect of the study of religion. The research in this volume differs from Fewell, Garroway, Parker, and Steinberg's work in that most of its authors do not see children and childhood as the primary focus of their work (at the time of writing). Rather, they are established biblical scholars whom Bunge has asked to reexamine a text they have researched previously, only foregrounding children and childhood. Bunge explains, "Although few of the contributors writing for this volume had written previously on children or childhood, they had already published material on the particular strand of the biblical texts they address in this volume."¹⁴ In this way, the volume furthers child-centered biblical interpretation both by encouraging increased research and by broadening scholarly interest in this area of study. Bunge's introduction, an excellent review of the recent history of increased focus on children in the

12. Naomi Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013).

13. Marcia Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

14. *Ibid.*, xix.

study of religion, places the volume in context and is a significant contribution to the field in and of itself.

Professional conferences and peer-reviewed journals are prominent areas for the growth of child-centered biblical interpretation. The Consultation on Childhood Studies and Religion at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Children in the Biblical World section at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) have both encouraged scholarly contributions to the field. In 2009, the Bible and Popular Culture section at SBL focused on children's popular culture independent of either of these sections. Other isolated papers presented in sections not designated for children have also increased, including papers by both Hugh Pyper and Richard Briggs on the book of Daniel as children's literature. Melody Briggs¹⁵ has begun research on children's interpretations of the New Testament, with a focus on the Gospels, for her PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield. The *Journal of Childhood and Religion*, launched in 2010, is an online peer-reviewed journal, the first to focus on childhood and religion. Its first volume included several articles on biblical interpretation, including an excellent article by Naomi Steinberg,¹⁶ later published as a part of the monograph cited above, in which she critiques both 1 Samuel 1 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in light of the social constructedness of childhood.

Each of these contributions both broadens and furthers biblical studies by focusing on children and childhood. But although several note that we should expect differences between ancient and modern constructions of childhood and some point to particular differences, none includes sustained inquiry as to what the broader significance of particular differences might be for interpretation. Put another way, many publications have begun to explore biblical children, but few biblical childhoods. A thorough examination of the impact of biblical constructions of childhood on interpretation, such as this book pursues, will therefore better inform future studies of biblical children as well as biblical studies as a whole, by being attentive to the ancient mind-set with which the young people who would have been a ubiquitous aspect of daily life were commonly perceived.

15. Melody Briggs, "Investigating Children's Readings of Biblical Narrative" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Francisco, CA, November 2011).

16. Naomi Sternberg, "1 Samuel 1, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, and 'The Best Interests of the Child,'" *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 1, no. 3 (April 2010).

WHAT IS CHILDHOOD STUDIES?

Childhood studies is an interdisciplinary field of study focused on children and childhoods. Although other academic fields such as psychology, sociology, and education have historically studied children, childhood studies does so from a cultural studies perspective that brings attention to children's subjectivities and the social construction of childhood and adulthood. Research and theory within childhood studies are attentive to cultural diversities,¹⁷ reject both essentialization and naturalization, and point to children's rights and agency, recognizing, as Valerie Walkerdine aptly states, that "childhood is always produced as an object in relation to power."¹⁸ Childhood studies arose from an increase in child-centered scholarship across academic fields in the 1980s and 1990s, questioning how studies of children construct their subject(s).¹⁹ It has since grown to encompass work within a broad range of fields, and departments and areas of study in universities across Europe and North America have been launched.

Multiple names have been proposed for an interdisciplinary field focusing its attention on children. These include childhood studies, children's studies, and child studies. These semantic differences represent the importance in differentiating between children and childhood. "The child" is an abstraction, whereas "children" are individuals with their own subjectivities, and "childhood" is a set of cultural assumptions placed on children. Therefore the research tools necessary to study children and childhoods differ. However, because no child or researcher is immune to the social assumptions around childhood, the study of children is, by necessity, also the study of childhood. Researchers cannot know "the child" or children except through one of the many lenses of childhood. This understanding is primary in childhood studies and has played an important part in dictating the naming of the field.

The semantic differentiation between "children" and "childhoods" is particularly helpful in dismantling the tension between the goals set forth by the multiple fields contributing to childhood studies. Deconstructing childhood, particularly prominent in the humanities, and advocating for children's rights and agency, as seen in public policy and the social sciences, appear to be at odds with one another in that it is difficult to advocate for a category of people that one has argued does not exist. However, just as empowering

17. Martin Woodhead, "Childhood Studies: Past, Present and Future," in *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, ed. Mary Jane Kehily (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2009), 17.

18. Valerie Walkerdine, "Developmental Psychology and the Study of Childhood," in *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*, ed. Mary Jane Kehily (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2009), 117.

19. Woodhead, "Childhood Studies," 19.

children deconstructs essentialized childhoods, deconstructing particular social constructions of childhood is among the ways to advocate for children's rights and agency. By specifying that "childhood" refers to the social construction scholars are seeking to deconstruct and that "children" refers to the living, physically immature individuals to whom such constructions have been applied, both goals not only become possible but can also feed each other.

In that childhood studies is a relatively new and quickly growing field, scholars of childhood studies continue to debate the best way to define the field. Its relationship to the many fields from which it draws is particularly contentious. These fields include anthropology, children's literature, ethics, history, public policy, psychology, sociology, and a multitude of fields that have not traditionally studied children. Martin Woodhead has suggested three metaphors for interdisciplinarity within childhood studies.

1. A "clearinghouse model" would encompass all studies of children and childhood, all research questions, methodologies and disciplinary approaches.
2. A "pick'n mix model" would be more selective but would still incorporate specific topics studied or orientation to the field.
3. A "rebranding model" might appear to have interdisciplinary aspirations, but would mainly be about redefining a traditional field of enquiry while still adhering to conventional disciplinary boundaries.²⁰

I will provide more detailed descriptions of each model below. Each of these potential models has been applied at some point, yet a litmus test for childhood studies, or even the question of whether one is necessary, remains to be determined.

For the purposes of application in biblical studies, each of Woodhead's models has its own potential benefits and drawbacks. In childhood studies, a "clearinghouse model" would draw together all areas of academic inquiry relating to children and childhood. When defined by this model, childhood studies is helpful to biblical studies in that it combines a broad range of disciplinary tools, all of which could be useful in understanding children in the Bible, children in the biblical world, and/or the use of the Bible with children across history. Yet within this interdisciplinary model childhood studies does not create anything new, and its usefulness to biblical studies lies in its collection of other fields and not in itself. The application of a clearinghouse model for

20. *Ibid.*, 26.

childhood studies would bring a variety of preexisting tools to the academic study of the Bible.

Woodhead's "pick'n mix" model gives childhood studies more definition by limiting what research on children and childhood qualifies as fitting within the boundaries of the field. Potential limitations could be as broad as "concerns children" or as narrow as "asserts that childhood is socially constructed" or "claims childhood studies as its primary field." Notably, neither of the last two examples would necessarily encompass the same research. A basis for such limitation remains undetermined, and any boundary will seem arbitrary to some, leaving out potentially fruitful research both past and present that could become useful to the field in yet unanticipated ways. In this way, the pick'n mix interdisciplinary model would make childhood studies less useful to biblical studies by limiting its scope.

The third model, "rebranding," would take material traditionally understood to be a part of a previously existing academic field and "rebrand" that research as a part of "childhood studies" to reflect new interdisciplinary and cultural understanding. This model has very much the same pitfall as the clearinghouse model for interdisciplinarity; it does not create anything new. In fact, this criticism might be leveled to an even greater degree in that a clearinghouse at least draws several preexisting fields together under one heading. A rebranding model, however, merely calls the same scholarship by a trendier name. In this way, childhood studies as "rebranding" of previously-existing fields contributes nothing to biblical studies. Rather, other fields contribute under a new name.

I suggest, then, a fourth model of interdisciplinarity for childhood studies, which I will call the "coffeehouse" model. Childhood studies is the conversation space in which the many disciplines that have historically studied children and childhood come together, joined by disciplines that have not traditionally given significant attention to children and childhood. Each discipline brings and shares its own ideas, questions, and methodologies. The conversation itself is the primary contribution of the interdisciplinary "coffeehouse," along with new ideas, questions, and methodologies that inevitably emerge out of the conversation. It differs from the clearinghouse model in that although it brings together a wide range of previous scholars, fields, and secondary sources, its goal is less the gathering of these resources and more the new scholarship resulting from the resultant cross-fertilization. Biblical studies, by choosing to attend this coffeehouse can both draw from and contribute to the academic toolbox of ideas, questions, and methodologies being freely exchanged as they build on one another. This, therefore, is the model I will apply throughout.

CHILDHOOD AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The assertion that no construction of childhood is universal is one of the primary contributions that has come out of the conversation childhood studies fosters as an interdisciplinary field. Childhood and adulthood, like race and gender,²¹ are socially constructed. Sociologist Chris Jenks describes its social construction in this way: “Childhood is to be understood as a social construct, it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting.”²² This is not to say that differences in maturity do not exist. As with biological sex, the physical differences are certainly real. However, the categories cultures use to organize trends they observe in these differences are social constructions. This is evidenced in the differences in taxonomy across history and geography, as well as the inevitable exceptions to these categories.

Much of the classic research on children within the social sciences, by ignoring or discounting the influence of cultural expectations, naturalizes Western constructions of childhood, suggesting that its claims are universal. Jean Piaget’s research is the best known among the early developmental theorists. However, when the social construction of multiple childhoods across cultures is taken into account, the universality of particular childhoods becomes highly unlikely. Child-centered research has drawn attention to the ways in which research methods can perpetuate particular cultural understandings through the goals and tasks researchers set for children, the settings in which they study them, and the ways in which they interpret children’s performances of these goals and tasks. Allison James and Alan Prout state, “This is not simply a matter of habit, convenience, false consciousness or vested interests but what Foucault refers to as ‘regimes of truth’ (1977). He suggests that these operate rather like self-fulfilling prophecies: ways of thinking about childhood fuse with institutionalized practices to produce self-conscious subjects (teachers, parents and children) who think (and feel) about themselves through the terms of those ways of thinking. ‘The truth’ about themselves and their situation is thus self-validating.”²³ In this way, it has become clear that at this time scholars cannot objectively study children; we can only study childhoods, the varying social

21. Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

22. *Ibid.*, 7.

23. Allison James and Alan Prout, “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise, and Problems,” in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Falmer, 1997), 23.

constructions within which children function and adults relate to children and their own childhood memories.

As exemplary of the difficulty inherent in studying children, developmental psychology has become a highly debated discipline within childhood studies. Some wish to discard it entirely or substitute neuroscience, while others see this as going overboard and focus on more recent scholarship in developmental psychology that recognizes cultural and historical relativism. Woodhead advises, “While cruder versions of developmentalism may properly be consigned to the dustbin of history, it would be a mistake to discard a field so diverse as developmental psychology. . . . Piagetian approaches to development no longer dominate theory and research. Alternative approaches are much more closely aligned to the principle of social construction of childhood, notably social constructivist, or socio-cultural approaches.”²⁴ Sociologists such as James and Prout,²⁵ as well as Jenks,²⁶ have been especially critical of the Piagetian model of developmental psychology for setting forth Western adult ways of thinking as the ultimate goal of human development so that children must by necessity exhibit varying degrees of deficiency. Indeed, contrary to assumptions of cognitive deficiency, children and youth are adept at learning new technologies, and children acquire physical and linguistic competencies much more quickly than adults do, but are still seen as lacking.

Rationality, one of the primary goals of developmental psychology, cannot be assumed to be a universal learning goal as it is within post-Enlightenment Western liberalism.²⁷ This assumption of an unrealistic universality applied to childhood and developmental goals is exemplified in the ways these goals and assumptions were exported to children and adults alike by way of colonialism. James and Prout explain,

During the nineteenth century, western sociological theorists, the self-elected representatives of rationality, saw in other cultures primitive forms of the human condition. These they regarded as childish in their simplicity and irrational in their belief. Following on from Comte’s theory of social evolution the “savage” was seen as the precursor of civilized man, paralleling the way that the child prefigured adult life. Tylor, for example, argued that he could apply

24. Woodhead, “Childhood Studies,” 28.

25. James and Prout, “A New Paradigm,” 9.

26. Jenks, *Childhood*, 9.

27. James and Prout, “A New Paradigm,” 10.

“the often-repeated comparison of savages to children as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition” (1871: 31).²⁸

Rationality is therefore not the child’s inherent goal into which she naturally grows, but a Western cultural goal. Any number of other social values might be substituted in differing contexts. A child’s development, as understood by adults, is development into a certain set of social constructs, the achievement of which is understood to be adulthood or maturity within that culture. Jenks states, “What I am suggesting is that the concept of development does not signify a ‘natural’ process—it does, however, make reference to a socially constructed sense of change pertaining to the young individual which is encoded with a series of benchmarks relevant to the topical or predominant form or discourse.”²⁹ Woodhead, however, defends Piagetian developmental psychology as child-centered,³⁰ and Valerie Walkerdine has alternatively suggested an apprenticeship model for development, locating learning and its goals within the culture rather than within the child and thereby acknowledging that the rubric by which a culture judges growth and development is external to the child.

Childhood studies offers an opportunity to bring together many fields and the tools each applies so as to study and engage children and childhood. The resultant interdisciplinary conversation benefits each of the contributing fields while building up the field of childhood studies, most particularly by way of the understanding that all conceptions of childhood are socially constructed and that therefore no understanding of what children are, how they behave, or how they develop and toward what goals can be assumed to be universal. These same insights are highly applicable to the interpretation of Scriptures composed in one culture by scholars from quite another.

SOCIAL HISTORY OF CHILDHOOD

Philippe Ariès was one of the first modern scholars to explore changing attitudes toward children and childhood across history. His 1960 monograph, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, has become widely known and discussed under its English title, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*.³¹

28. Ibid., 10–11.

29. Jenks, *Childhood*, 39.

30. Woodhead, “Childhood Studies,” 27.

31. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962).

Ariès argues for the Western “discovery” of childhood as a distinct phase of life beginning in the thirteenth century but becoming more prominent from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century,³² arguing that “in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken, or despised. The idea corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult.”³³ Although Ariès makes several significant observations throughout his research, this particular aspect of his argument lacks nuance, resulting in anachronism. His work brings to light the emerging association of childhood and family with solely emotional value and function in that period as represented in portraiture, fashion, and domestic architecture. Yet sentimentalization is not the only potential understanding of childhood. It is possible to understand childhood as distinguished from adulthood in other ways. Indeed, the Western historical record alone evidences a variety of potential developmental strata separating infants, children, youths, and adults. Ariès’s observations uncover not the discovery of childhood per se, but rather the earlier stages of the emergence of modern constructions of childhood prior to the cultural shift other scholars have described in later histories of childhood. Children and childhood existed in earlier historical periods, but their nature was understood differently.

In 1968, Lloyd DeMause proposed a “psychogenic theory of history” to the Association for Applied Psychoanalysis, suggesting that historians should study changes in child rearing practices from antiquity to the present as “the central force for change in history.”³⁴ DeMause criticizes the idealization of childhood in the extant histories in spite of all evidence pointing to parental practices that would today be deemed abusive, complaining that “no practice in the past seems anything but benign to the social historian.”³⁵ Although I concur that the history of childhood is far from ideal, and that the social historians whom DeMause critiques indeed projected modern idealizations onto past experiences, his reactionary analysis of these same practices makes the same mistake with opposite results. Rather than assuming modern-style emotional attachment to children, he evaluates historical practices by a modern rubric, coming to the conclusion that adults in the past were incapable of affection, even empathy for their children.³⁶ The ease with which DeMause is convinced of ancient child

32. *Ibid.*, 47.

33. *Ibid.*, 128.

34. Lloyd DeMause, “The Evolution of Childhood,” in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd DeMause (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 3.

35. *Ibid.*, 4.

mistreatment by modern standards is most clearly evidenced for the biblical scholar in his unsupported assertion that Matt 19:13 references “the customary Near Eastern practice of exorcising by laying on of hands, which many holy men did to remove the evil inherent in children.”³⁷ It is unclear from what evidence he derives this conclusion, which is counter to the text’s own assertion in 19:14 that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. This is (fortunately or not) the only statement regarding the pre-Christian world in his chapter or the remainder of his edited volume on the history of childhood.

Although scholars including Richard Lyman,³⁸ Vigen Guroian,³⁹ Martha Ellen Stortz,⁴⁰ and Christina Traina⁴¹ have studied the child in late antiquity, the primary focus in the study of the history of childhood has been on the shift made from this time period to the modern one in the practical and emotional value of children, and most particularly the advent of cultural constructions of childhood innocence. According to Higonnet, “Historians date the modern, western concept of an ideally innocent childhood to somewhere around the seventeenth century. Until then, children had been understood as faulty small adults, in need of correction and discipline, especially Christian children who were thought to be born in sin.”⁴² Robert Davis has recently argued against the scholarly consensus on a seventeenth-century dating, pointing to several primary texts by early Christian authors, including Dante and Hildegard of Bingen, alluding to the innocence of children.⁴³ In recognition of Davis’s findings, I would nuance the assertion that the seventeenth century saw the origination of childhood innocence in Western culture. Taking into account that the concept was not entirely new, I would assert that it was, rather, established as culturally dominant over an extended period of time from the medieval to the modern period.

36. *Ibid.*, 16.

37. *Ibid.*, 17.

38. Richard B. Lyman Jr., “Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood,” in DeMause, *History of Childhood*.

39. Vigen Guroian, “The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 61–77.

40. Martha Ellen Stortz, “‘Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?’: Augustine on Childhood,” in Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*, 78–102.

41. Christina Traina, “A Person in the Making: Thomas Aquinas on Children and Childhood,” in Bunge, *The Child in Christian Thought*, 103–33.

42. A. Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 8.

43. Robert A. Davis, “Brilliance of a Fire: Innocence, Experience, and the Theory of Childhood,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 2 (2001): 379–97 (383).

Among the most influential perspectives leading to the modern Western understanding of childhood innocence is the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Romantic conception of the child, which idealized children as possessing inherently positive qualities. Colin Heywood explains, “The Romantics . . . depicted children as creatures of deeper wisdom, finer aesthetic sensitivity, and a more profound awareness of enduring moral truths. . . . The Enlightenment view of childhood as a time for education, and particularly education for boys, yielded to the notion of childhood as a lost realm that was not the less fundamental to the creation of the adult self. The upshot was a redefinition of the relationship between adults and children: it was now the child who could educate the educator.”⁴⁴ Ongoing shifts in adult understandings of childhood are evidenced in the predominant rhetoric regarding children in each era.

Viviana Zelizer’s seminal work, *Pricing the Priceless Child*,⁴⁵ analyzes a variety of factors in the postindustrial shift in the social understanding of childhood in the United States. She names this change in the cultural construction of childhood from the economically valuable, useful child to the priceless, useless child whose value can only be “sentimental.” Although she examines the moral conflict that is often prominent in discussions of child labor, her research points to the complexity of the issue and the less-than-altruistic aims that made way for child labor and compulsory education laws, enabling the moral rhetoric of an innocent childhood separated from economic concerns to become culturally dominant.

Complicating factors included decreased need for child labor from industrial lobbyists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and middle-class distrust of working-class values, especially in that many working-class parents were new immigrants. “By excluding children from the ‘cash nexus,’ reformers promised to restore proper parental love among working class families.”⁴⁶ New labor-saving technologies, supplemented by the influx of cheap adult labor from increased immigration, rendered child industrial labor economically unnecessary, even undesirable.

In an agrarian economy, as in the early stages of industrialization, the labor of “little work people,” was a welcome alternative that freed men for agriculture. But by the turn of the century, the cheap labor of children threatened to depress adult wages. Demand for child

44. Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 24–25.

45. Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

46. *Ibid.*, 72.

laborers was further undermined by new technology. For example. In late nineteenth-century department stores, such as Macy's and Marshall Field's, one-third of the labor force was composed of cash girls or cash boys, young children busily involved in transporting money and goods between sales clerks, the wrapping desk, and the cashier. By 1905, the newly invented pneumatic tube and the adoption of cash registers had usurped most children's jobs.⁴⁷

Zelizer's detailed analysis distinguishes among various forms of child labor and the public sentiment it aroused. Where farmwork and "helping around the house" were sometimes idealized, parents' engaging their children in factory labor in the home came to be seen as exploitation. Zelizer cites the 1914 *Child Labor Bulletin's* argument against tenement homework:⁴⁸ "It is obvious many parents know little of the nature of work needed by, or suited to, their children. It is still work because there is work to be done, not because certain selected work is educational."⁴⁹ However, the educational value of housework from tenement homework is difficult to distinguish.

The distinction made between housework and home factory work suggests that the physical location for children's work was not the problematic factor so much as the direct production of income and, hence, competition with adults for paid work. Even more revealing are the exemptions to child labor laws made for paperboys due to the strength of the newspaper lobby, and that for child actors in response to strong positive public sentiment. "The dispute over child labor on the stage was fueled by the cultural redefinition of a child's worth. Acting was condemned as illegitimate labor by those who defined it as a profane capitalization of the new 'sacred' child. Yet, ironically, at the time when most other children lost their jobs, the economic value of child actors rose precisely because they symbolized on stage the new economically worthless, but emotionally priceless child."⁵⁰ Child actors, paperboys, and children who "help out" at home have all come to be considered acceptable exceptions to the cultural and legal taboo on child labor. Each of these forms of work is exceptional in that it does not threaten adult wages or industrial profits. Yet because of the cultural shift from the valuable to the priceless child, these forms

47. *Ibid.*, 63.

48. *Homework* is the term used for the factory-style production of goods in the home during this period. It should be distinguished from the school assignments to which this word frequently refers today.

49. Jesse P. Rick, "Ideal Child Labor in the Home," *Child Labor Bulletin* 3 (May 1914): 7.

50. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 96.

of labor were made palatable to the public by constructing them as sentimental, educational, or both so as to fit with newer postindustrial, middle-class cultural understandings of childhood.

Zelizer is further able to account for the shift from the valuable, useful child to the priceless, useless child by examining quantitative evidence in the form of legal and insurance claims as well as changing adoption procedures. Insurance policies for working children covered the cost of burial, but following the advent of child labor laws children's insurance became symbolic as the price of the priceless child rose.⁵¹ Zelizer cites nineteenth-century court cases in which damages for a deceased child were calculated based on assumed economic worth by subtracting the cost of his or her maintenance from probable earnings up until adulthood. This included both waged work and housework.⁵²

Not all turn-of-the-century families required children's labor. The priceless innocence of children had already become an aspect of middle- and upper-class constructions of childhood. Hugh Cunningham suggests it "had taken deep root within the middle classes since the 1850's. Childhood, in this conception, became the repository of good feelings and happy memories which could help the adult live through the stickier patches of life."⁵³ At this time, however, this bourgeois ideal had not yet been projected on all children.

Significantly, wrongful-death claims made in this same time period by wealthier families in which children were not expected to work were not considered viable because their children were a financial drain rather than a source of income.⁵⁴ The turn of the century was marked by public outcry against pragmatic court cases placing a low economic value on child life, insisting on emotional value, while others decried placing any economic value on a child's life at all.⁵⁵ As a result, child death cases in the early twentieth century were some of the first to offer restitution for suffering. "Significantly, the long-standing policy against compensating for noneconomic losses—balancing a 'weight of gold with a weight of sorrow,' was in many instances first breached by a child's wrongful death. To be sure, payments for moral damages were not restricted to children. But they became particularly necessary in child death cases where it was impossible to prove any pecuniary injury."⁵⁶ Where previously only middle- and upper-class children had the

51. *Ibid.*, 137.

52. *Ibid.*, 142–43.

53. Hugh Cunningham, *The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 153.

54. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 145.

55. *Ibid.*, 146–49.

privilege of pricelessness, these court cases evidence the increasing cultural dominance of childhood innocence as a social value across class lines.

Child fostering practices also changed as child labor became less acceptable. In the nineteenth century, a farm family would have adopted an older child for the economic value of his or her labor without the strain of caring for a young child: “The most renowned nineteenth-century program of placing children in family homes was directly contingent on children’s economic usefulness. In 1853, the New York Children’s Aid Society, organized by Charles Loring Brace, began sending needy city children to rural homes out in the Midwest and upstate New York. The plan met with extraordinary success as farmers promptly responded to the society’s appeal for homes. Similar organizations were formed in cities all over the nation.”⁵⁷ Although “working homes” such as these continued into the 1920s, this practice fell out of public favor along with child labor as the culture shifted to childhood pricelessness.⁵⁸ In stark contrast, middle-class couples in the twentieth century sought the priceless affection of an infant, preferably attractive and female. Zelizer explains, “The sex and age preferences of twentieth-century adoptive parents were clearly linked to the cultural revolution in fostering. While the earlier need for a useful child put a premium on strong, older children, preferably male, the later search for a priceless child led to babies and particularly, pretty little girls. It was not the innate smiling expertise of females, but established cultural assumptions of women’s superior emotional talents which made girls so uniquely attractive for sentimental adoption.”⁵⁹ Zelizer’s evidence confirms a turn-of-the-century postindustrial shift to the dominance of pricelessness in American constructions of childhood. While some had endorsed ideas of this kind or upheld them for privileged children in previous ages, the priceless innocence of the child had become a widespread cultural value.

White and Brinkerhoff’s study of children’s work in the late-twentieth-century family in the United States suggests that the social mores whose early-twentieth-century development Zelizer analyzed continue to operate and are indeed pervasive. They found that children continue to do the kind of “acceptable” work Zelizer cited, particularly work in the household under the heading of “chores.” Most interesting among White and Brinkerhoff’s discoveries are the reasons parents give for their children’s work. Across all variants, a consistently high percentage of parents cited their children’s

56. *Ibid.*, 154.

57. *Ibid.*, 172.

58. *Ibid.*, 182.

59. *Ibid.*, 194.

betterment as the primary reason for their doing work in the home. That is, they mentioned educational or character-building qualities, particularly the development of a sense of responsibility, making the actual work accomplished by the children secondary to the benefit to their character.⁶⁰ “The results again indicate that the developmental response is so standard that it is almost invariant across families. This strongly suggests the presence of a cultural norm. To the extent that this response is given as a socially desirable rather than an honest answer, the normative interpretation is strengthened. A nearly constant three quarters of our sample believes or feels it ought to believe that chores are assigned to children for the benefit of the child.”⁶¹ Largely, the parents White and Brinkerhoff interviewed reflected back the cultural construction of children’s pricelessness. This further insists that because children are priceless, they should be useless. They should not work; any work they do must be to their own benefit and therefore not true work.

This is not to say that child labor has been completely obliterated, even from the modern Western social context. Internationally, children work both in households and for pay. Jo Aldridge’s study on British children who act as caregivers to physically and/or mentally ill or disabled family members shows not only that they are capable of assumedly “adult” responsibilities but also that they sometimes experience benefit from performing them: “Children’s enjoyment and achievement can be both enhanced and compromised by their caring activity. In a number of research studies, children have said that they gain a sense of well-being, a feeling of being needed and having achieved something positive through their caring roles.”⁶² This research contradicts assumptions that all labor is to children’s detriment, that it is universally difficult to convince children to perform necessary household tasks, and that children are not or should not be responsible.⁶³ Child labor continues in a variety of social contexts, but is either not labeled as such or is vilified as unavoidably exploitative. This is especially evident in the cultural imperialism through which modern Western cultural constructions are promulgated internationally. Jo Boyden’s analysis of the globalization of childhood states, “Under colonial rule and the more recent influence of the United Nations and international legislation on children’s rights, the images of childhood favoured in the industrial North have been

60. Lynn K. White and David B. Brinkerhoff, “Children’s Work in the Family: Its Significance and Meaning,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 43, no. 4 (Nov. 1981): 789–98 (792–93).

61. *Ibid.*, 796.

62. Jo Aldridge, “All Work and No Play? Understanding the Needs of Children with Caring Responsibilities,” *Children and Society* 22 (2008): 253–64 (260).

63. *Ibid.*, 254.

exported to the South. The view that childhood is a fixed notion, determined by biological and psychological facts rather than culture or society is explicit in children's rights legislation. The rights lobby is at the forefront of the global spread of norms of childhood which are integral to the history and culture of Europe and North America."⁶⁴ Cultural constructions of the priceless-ness of children and childhood, which assume they do not work, are certainly not universal, but they are increasingly pervasive. In the modern world, although child labor is far from absent, it is so broadly denied and maligned that the priceless-ness of childhood is sometimes assumed even when it is not acted upon.

Anneke Meyer's research on modern English speakers' use of childhood in moral rhetoric illustrates the extent to which cultural understandings of childhood innocence influence both speech and understanding.⁶⁵ She argues that the rhetoric of childhood innocence constructs children as inherently virtuous by suggesting that such ideas do not need to be defended: "The linguistic terms 'child' and 'children' can become explanations in themselves because they invoke ideas of children being special, sacred and innocent beings who are extremely valuable and virtuous."⁶⁶ Therefore, adults feel free to use children and childhood as a kind of moral shorthand for the cultural constructions of innocence they imply.

Meyer's analysis of legal documents, media, and focus groups has led her to conclude that Western English-speakers perceive childhood innocence and lack of knowledge even where they themselves have noted evidence to the contrary. Members of Meyer's focus group, for example, asserted that children are inherently nonsexual, saying, "I believe in childhood . . . and if you believe in childhood . . . and if you believe in kind of childhood being *innocent* then . . . and *innocent* being part of a *non-sexual* . . . kind of life," even after describing the ways in which their children express their sexuality. "My daughter's obsessed with her . . . vagina, and she's two and a half!" These contradictory statements evidence perceptions so pervasive so as to overcome the results of personal experience.

Meyer points out that the adult rhetoric of childhood innocence and vulnerability perpetuates the same; protecting children from danger produces children who are unaware of danger. She argues, "The discourse of innocence is uniquely able to conceptualize and produce children as both structurally *and* innately vulnerable. By presenting children as lacking a range of social skills

64. Jo Boyden, "Childhood and the Policy Makers: A Comparative Perspective on the Globalization of Childhood," in James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (1990 ed.), 197.

65. Anneke Meyer, "The Moral Rhetoric of Childhood," *Childhood* 14 (2007): 85–104.

66. *Ibid.*, 100.

(e.g. being street-smart, able to judge dangerous situations), the discourse of innocence constructs vulnerability as directly deriving from the being of the child. Innocence also produces children as structurally vulnerable, for instance by encouraging protectionist legislation, but this kind of discursive effect is rarely acknowledged.”⁶⁷ The pervasive rhetoric of childhood innocence presents itself as universal, making scholars who participate in modern Western cultural constructions of childhood susceptible to assumptions that such rhetoric functions in the same way across class and international boundaries, and would have been just as present in the ancient world. Yet the Western cultural shift from value to pricelessness took place for a limited population over two thousand years after the formation of the Hebrew Bible. Recognition of this cultural divide has great potential influence on modern American readers’ comprehension of ancient texts.

The contemporary perspective reflected in White and Brinkerhoff’s work on children’s labor in the home, Aldridge’s study on children who care for adult family-members, and Meyer’s exploration of perceptions of childhood stand in contrast with the preindustrial economic value of children that is evidenced throughout the long history of childhood and continues in many places to this day. If privileged modern Western interpreters read the assumedly universal priceless child into biblical child characters and metaphors of childhood, anachronism is unavoidable. Awareness of this distinction can avoid such a consequence, lending greater nuance to a reading of the Bible in its ancient social context.

BIBLICAL STUDIES AND BIBLICAL CHILDHOODS

Entering into a conversation with childhood studies suggests several new developments to be explored toward child-centered biblical hermeneutics. Just as attention to children and childhoods has opened up new areas of study within a variety of fields, it can lead to new insights in the academic study of the Bible. These range from new uses and approaches to preexisting methods within the field to entirely new ways of exploring the biblical text. In this book, I will focus my attention on the impact of childhood as a social construct on biblical studies.

Because childhood is a construct, ancient understandings of this concept would have differed from modern ones. The understanding that childhood is socially constructed makes it clear that the assumptions about children and childhood under which biblical scholars function differ from those that would have been at work in the biblical world. This recognition in itself is a significant

67. *Ibid.*, 90.

contribution to biblical studies. Young people as portrayed in the Bible cannot be assumed to have been children in the way that adult scholars of any modern culture have been socialized to understand children to be. Even on the rare occasion that a character's age is specified in the text, this will not by necessity correspond with the developmental stage determined by the modern Western social sciences' studies of modern Western children for the reasons described above. Rather, the young people portrayed in biblical texts are the creations of ancient authors with different sets of assumptions about what young people are like, how they mature, and at what stages in their life they would have been most likely to reach ancient goals for maturity. The social construction of childhood can therefore have a great impact on biblical exegesis, as well as on scholarly understanding of the ancient world.

Diachronic differences in cultural understanding of the nature of children and childhood affect the ways one interprets texts. If, for example, a modern reader believes children to be naturally innocent because they lack understanding, experience, and reason, he will read this to be the requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven Jesus describes to his followers in Mark 10:15, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (NRSV). Because cultural constructions are pervasive, many assume them to be universal, but they are not. As the social history of childhood reflects, assumptions of childhood innocence developed over a thousand years after the composition of the Markan text. Reason is a post-Enlightenment value, and it was not until after the industrial revolution that child labor laws encouraged a separation of children from the kind of life experience that threatens their perceived innocence. Rather, Mark's readers would have functioned under entirely different cultural constructions of childhood, almost unrecognizable as childhood from a modern perspective. Children were marked not by their innocence and need for protection but by their lowly social status. This difference in cultural understanding makes for a very different requirement set forward for Jesus' followers.

The texts in the Hebrew Bible do not include such straightforward commands to childlike behavior. Yet the broad impact of the contrast between ancient and modern constructions of childhood is nevertheless significant. Children are ubiquitous in the Hebrew Bible both as characters and as figures of speech. A clearer understanding of ancient conceptions of childhood can be invaluable in nuancing scholarly comprehension of the ancient authors' purpose in using children as characters and metaphors and their potential impact on ancient audiences.

Among the more significant differences between modern and ancient understandings of childhood is the nature of the value of a child. For many in the modern Western world, children's value is strictly emotional. To place an economic value on a child is considered crude, even obscene.⁶⁸ This cultural construction corresponds with the assumption of children's innocence. Within this conceptualization, children are perceived to be set apart from adult concerns, particularly financial concerns, with the understanding that adults are responsible for protecting children from awareness thereof.⁶⁹ Although some would dispute that this construction of childhood is realistic even in situations of extreme privilege, the ideal prevails. However, the history of childhood reveals that even the ideal, let alone the enactment of separating children from economic concerns, is a recent development that would have been foreign in the ancient world⁷⁰ and therefore to the authors of ancient texts.

DEFINING CHILDHOOD USING MORTUARY EVIDENCE

It would be irresponsible to talk about ancient Israelite children without attempting to examine the boundaries that defined childhood as a social category in ancient Israel. One cannot accurately ask, let alone answer, generational questions of any culture while assuming anachronistic definitions of the age and ability range that defines each stage. Neither modern legal definitions nor contemporary developmental theory is universal, and therefore neither can be blindly applied when considering the ancient world. Naomi Steinberg has used Norwegian sociologist Ann Solberg's term "social age" to discuss developmental categories in the biblical world, pointing out that "in contrast to the definitions of childhood that are constructed around chronological age, some cultures define childhood by what work or activities a child does."⁷¹ In looking to detect the boundaries of ancient childhood, archaeology and comparative ethnography in combination with textual evidence provide clues to how a culture defines differences in maturity and life stage.

Mortuary evidence proves particularly useful in discerning how ancient Israelites delineated infancy, childhood, and adulthood. David Ilan's work on Middle Bronze Age burials at Tel Dan points to three primary burial types corresponding with these three life stages. A fourth burial type is singly attested

68. Meyer, "Moral Rhetoric of Childhood," 96.

69. *Ibid.*, 100.

70. Steinberg makes a similar argument in *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible*.

71. *Ibid.*, 17.

and appears to correspond with the adult burial type that fits its contents. He describes this typology in ascending age order. “Four basic burial types have been recognized in the Middle Bronze Age layers at Tel Dan, (1) jar burials, (2) built cist tombs, (3) built chamber tombs and (4) a single shaft burial.”⁷² The jar burials at Tel Dan contain solitary cadavers up to age two or three, whom I will call infants inside a buried jar with assorted burial goods. Built cist tombs, more elaborate forms of simple graves, hold cadavers from age two to age twelve or thirteen, whom I will call children, usually buried singly with their burial goods. Multiple people over the age of twelve or thirteen, whom I will call adults, are interred with their burial goods in the shaft burial and most of the built chamber tombs at Tel Dan. One exception also includes one or two younger children (one under the age of five and one between eight and twelve years of age). Although jar burials and built cist tombs are often near family built chamber tombs, they are not inside them at Tel Dan.

The age delineation in these three categories of Middle Bronze burials at Tel Dan is striking. It speaks to symbolic differentiation among three distinct age categories, but the distinction does not appear to be drawn on strict age lines. Two-year-olds, for example, are multiply attested in both jar and built cist tombs. However, the ages of two or three and twelve or thirteen do correspond with life changes that are marked as rites of passage in many cultures. Because the bodily changes that prompt these rites are biological, they cannot be made to correspond exactly with a certain age. Therefore, I suggest that the deceased’s having completed a particular rite with its accompanying life change prompted the differences in burial types.

Mayer Gruber has argued that weaning took place at the age of two or three in ancient Israel. Extended breast-feeding would have provided not only a form of sustenance for young children but also a form of birth control for their parents.⁷³ Weaning at this time is attested in 2 Maccabees 7:27, in which a mother says to her son, “I carried you nine months in my womb, and I nursed you for three years.” The weanings of Isaac and of Samuel are noted in Genesis 21:8 and 1 Samuel 1:24 respectively. Isaac’s weaning is marked by a celebration: “The child grew and was weaned and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.” Samuel’s weaning is also significant, as it marks the time when his mother fulfilled her vow and “brought him to the house of the

72. David Ilan, “Mortuary Practices at Tel Dan in the Middle Bronze Age: A Reflection of Canaanite Society and Ideology,” in *Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Stuart and Anthony Green Campbell (Oxford: Oxbow, 1995).

73. Mayer I. Gruber, “Breast-Feeding Practices in Biblical Israel and in Babylonian Mesopotamia,” *JANESCU* 19 (1989): 61–83.

Lord at Shiloh, although the child was still young.” In both cases, the biblical text recognizes the importance of the event. The correspondence between the common age of weaning and the shift in age-based burial practices suggests that the two are closely related.

Twelve or thirteen is frequently understood to be the approximate onset of sexual maturity and thus of the ability to participate in the perpetuation of the family.⁷⁴ However, like constructions of childhood, understandings of adolescence have changed across cultural histories. Indeed, some would argue that it is a modern invention. However, Augustine notes the stage in his *Confessions*.⁷⁵ In her survey of the history of adolescence, Barbara Hanawalt’s review of the varied research on the topic concludes, “Modern Western Europe did not invent adolescence, but it did alter its definition.”⁷⁶ However the transition from childhood to adulthood was defined in the ancient world, the physical changes in children’s bodies would have been unmistakable. At this time, for example, girls experience menarche as a visible sign of their fertility. These changes are often accompanied by rites of passage for both girls and boys. Although events of this nature, if practiced, have left no physical evidence for the archaeological record, the shift in burial practices at Tel Dan appears to correspond loosely with the years in which it may have occurred.

One question that remains is what the symbolic significance might be of these three forms of burial. Family tomb burial communicates that adults join their ancestors at death. Cist burial closely resembles burial in a tomb but differs in that the mostly individual remains are not “gathered to their fathers”⁷⁷ in a family tomb. This distinction suggests that prepubescent children, who cannot procreate and thereby contribute to their ancestral heritage, are therefore excluded from the family tomb.

Jar burial points to yet another notable difference. Only the age demographic likely to be preweaned infants are buried in jars at Tel Dan. This is not merely because only infants fit in jars. Adult jar burial, accomplished with “two jars placed mouth to mouth or unusually large jars,”⁷⁸ is attested elsewhere

74. References to puberty in the Bible are thin on the ground, but Garroway (“The Construction of ‘Child’ in the Ancient Near East,” 164–80) has interpreted Exod. 21:7–11, traditionally interpreted to be about selling a daughter as a slave, to describe a man giving his daughter before she is of marriageable age with the expectation of marriage once she reaches sexual maturity, evidencing an awareness of the transition to sexual maturity and marriageability.

75. Augustine, *Confessions* 2.6, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 26–27.

76. Barbara Hanawalt, “Historical Descriptions and Prescriptions for Adolescence,” *Journal of Family History* 17, no. 4 (1992): 343.

77. Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 20:24, 26; Jth. 16:22; 1 Macc. 14:30.

in the Levant but not in the central highland. This suggests a direct correlation between weaning and jar burial at Tel Dan. The celebration of Isaac's weaning and Samuel's dedication to work at Shiloh at his, along with ethnographic evidence of children's beginning household labor at this transitional time,⁷⁹ suggests that weaning marked a time when children began to have a degree of independence and agency. Prior to weaning, they are bound to their mothers for sustenance and therefore more closely associated with them. Indeed, certain isolated burials in the Bronze Age Transjordan evidence infants buried in a woman's arms, presumably the mother.⁸⁰ I would therefore concur with both Ilan⁸¹ and Garroway⁸² that jar burial has greater womb symbolism than other forms of burial. The placing of a deceased infant in a jar symbolically places him or her back in the womb to which she or he remains connected as preweaned.

Admittedly, Tel Dan is only one site, and Middle Bronze dating is too early for Israelite settlement. Although later settlements evidence these different forms of burial, they are not as clearly delineated by age.⁸³ Not only has Garroway's dissertation, however, found that this pattern is prominent in published reports on the areas surrounding Iron Age Canaan,⁸⁴ but also the yet unpublished fieldwork of Jill Baker, Emmanuel Eisenberg, Amir Golani, Raphael Greenberg, Aren Maeir, Sarit Paz, and Joe Zias reveals the continued prominence of jar burial for infants and tomb burial for children in Iron Age Canaan.⁸⁵ The space between infancy as defined by jar burial and breastfeeding, and adulthood as defined by the onset of sexual maturity, suggests a potential age range between two or three and twelve or thirteen as the culturally defined boundaries of childhood in the Middle Bronze through Iron Age Levant and potentially in ancient Israel.

Here, again, it becomes important to differentiate between children and childhood. Whereas ancient children cannot be consulted, the surviving textual evidence reflects ancient constructions of childhood and adulthood. These ancient constructions are key in understanding the meanings certain life stages

78. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

79. Moni Nag et al., "An Anthropological Approach to the Study of the Economic Value of Children in Java and Nepal" *Current Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (June 1978): 293–306.

80. Garroway, "The Construction of 'Child' in the Ancient Near East," 254, 255, 257.

81. Ilan, "Mortuary Practices at Tel Dan," 135.

82. Garroway, "The Construction of 'Child' in the Ancient Near East," 283–87.

83. Moshe Hartal, "Tel Dan North," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot: Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 118 (2006). [AQ: Are there page numbers available for this article?]

84. Garroway, "The Construction of 'Child' in the Ancient Near East," 252–77.

85. *Ibid.*, 277–83.

carry in the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore foundational to the development of child-centered biblical criticism to draw attention to the ancient Israelite and neighboring constructions of childhood that are embedded in the meaning of biblical texts.

CHILD LABOR AND CHILD VALUE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The culture that produced the Hebrew Bible certainly predated the shifts in constructions of childhood and practices with children that Aries, Zelizer, and others trace, but we cannot assume linear progression in constructions of childhood, particularly with significant geographic and cultural distances. The biblical world itself offers multiple proofs that—however attached parents may have been to their offspring—children in that culture were understood to have had economic in addition to emotional value. The subsistence agricultural context of the Iron Age Levant would have required the labor of the entire family, including children, making a notable contrast with the social context Zelizer describes and modern Western readers experience.

Children's work in subsistence agricultural families is far from mere household "chores" or "apprenticeship" activities. It is a vital contribution to the familial economy. King and Stager's suggestion that "boys were better help on the family farm than girls, who would assist their mothers around the house"⁸⁶ is an inaccurate, Westernist evaluation of the essential household tasks performed by women, older girls, and young children of both genders. All work, regardless of age or gender, was valuable and essential for familial survival. What is more, boys likely did not to work in gendered groups with men until around the onset of sexual maturity, at which point they would no longer have been children.⁸⁷ Contrary to King and Stager's assertion, Carol Meyers suggests that children "eased the burden of female labor, which probably consumed more total hours per day than did the male-specific tasks."⁸⁸ As true as this description may be from a woman-centered perspective, cross-cultural research reflects that many household tasks typically labeled "women's work" are often "children's work" in a subsistence agricultural economy.

Just as ethnographic studies have identified traditionally gendered tasks, other studies have also discovered traditionally "aged" tasks. In Indonesia, for example, labor is divided into "a series of subtasks completed by a labour

86. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 42.

87. Carol Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 27.

88. *Ibid.*

force structured according to age and gender. In local culture, strength and risk taking are the traits of men's work, whereas patience and carefulness are the skills that characterize jobs taken by women and children."⁸⁹ By applying modern ethnographic research on subsistence agricultural societies, researchers can discern which tasks are most frequently designated "children's work." Scholars observing the division of labor in subsistence agricultural societies have found that the care of animals and younger children are often "children's work." Although child care has often been assumed to be the purview of women, a study on children's work practices in Java reported, "There are certain types of work in which the children . . . spend a considerable amount of time, although not necessarily more than adults. Child care is one such activity."⁹⁰ The same study revealed that animal care is a form of work often designated to children of all ages. "Among directly productive activities, animal husbandry is one in which younger children participate as much as older ones."⁹¹ Firewood gathering also ranked among the tasks most frequently performed by young people. In this way, both the ethnographic evidence and the tools used for these tasks become evidence of ancient children's lives.

Insights such as these point to potential ways in which archaeologists might discern which tools would have been used by children. The mangers and other implements of animal husbandry found in Israelite homes⁹² are likely to have been (in part if not exclusively) children's tools, as are cradles and other items used in child care. Kathryn Kamp has called for miniature tools to be regarded as such rather than as toys.⁹³ However, in the absence of miniature tools, one cannot assume that children did not use tools. Rather, the absence of child-sized tools implies that children's work involved the use of cumbersome, adult-sized tools. Kamp has also done work in American archaeology on child-sized fingerprints fired into pottery as evidence of child-created products.⁹⁴ Rona Avissar-Lewis⁹⁵ has begun looking into such evidence in ancient Israelite material culture.

89. María Florencia Amigó, "Small Bodies, Large Contribution: Children's Work in the Tobacco Plantations of Lomboc, Indonesia," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (March 2010): 34–51 (38).

90. Nag et al., "Anthropological Approach," 295.

91. *Ibid.*, 294.

92. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 34.

93. Kathryn A. Kamp, "Where Have All the Children Gone? The Archaeology of Childhood," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 8, no. 1 (2001): 18.

94. *Ibid.*, 17.

95. Rona S. Avissar-Lewis, "Childhood and Children in the Material Culture of the Land of Israel from the Middle Bronze Age to the Iron Age" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2010).

VALUABLE CHILDREN IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Further evidence of ancient children's value can be found in the text of the Hebrew Bible. Economic value of children is particularly prominent in the ability to sell children, as described in Exodus 21:7-11 and assumed in 2 Kings 4:1-7 and Isaiah 22:2-3. A more subtle example can be found in 1 Samuel 8:11-17, in which Samuel responds to the people's request for a king. Most of the problems of monarchy that the author puts in Samuel's mouth are economic concerns. Kings take a portion of agricultural produce, including **הטובים שדותיכם** ("the best of your fields and your olive orchards") in verse 14, **יעשר וקרמיכם זרעיכם** ("tithes from your grain and your vineyards") in verse 15, **ואת־חמוריכם הטובים ואת־בחוריכם ואת־שפחותיכם ואת־עבדיכם** ("your male and female slaves and the best of your cattle and donkeys") in verse 16, and **יעשר צאנכם** ("tithes from your flocks") in verse 17. Each of these things is clearly property, but the list of things a king will take begins in verses 11-13 by saying that the king will take both your **בניכם** ("sons") (11) and your **בנותיכם** ("daughters") (13). In the Bible's ancient context, offspring are chief among the most valuable agricultural property that a king might threaten. The text does not raise objection to the king's forcing sons and daughters to work, or to the kinds of work they would be doing for the king. Just as with the crops, animals, and slaves in the following verses, the problem is that that by taking them at all, a king takes away from a family's already slim livelihood.

Agricultural produce such as crops and animals also compose sacrifices to YHWH in the Hebrew Bible. Human agricultural produce appears to be an exception. In several texts, YHWH claims not to desire child sacrifice (Jer. 7:31-32; 19:5-6). Biblical texts often connect child sacrifice with foreigners, leading scholars to interpret it as a religious polemic.⁹⁶ Deuteronomy 12:31 utilizes the practice of child sacrifice as the most extreme example of how terrible the worship of other gods is, **כי לאלהיהם באש ישרפו ואת־בנותיהם ואת־בניהם גם כן** ("For they would even burn their sons and daughters with fire to their gods"). Francesca Stavrakopoulou has argued, "In naming child sacrifice explicitly (and not any other practice), child sacrifice is not only presented as the most abhorrent of all forms of foreign deity worship, but it appears to function here as a

96. Otto Kaiser, "Den Erstgeborenen Deiner Söhne sollst du mir geben: Erwägungen zum Kinderopfer im Alten Testament," in *Von der Gegenwartsbedeutung des Alten Testaments: Gesammelte Studien zur Hermeneutik und Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Volkmar Fritz, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, and Hans-Christoph Schmitt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 142-66 (148-52).

conceptual shorthand for all that is repugnant to YHWH. . . . The essence of this prohibition is quite clear: it states perfectly plainly that child sacrifice is a foreign practice which leads to expulsion from the land.⁹⁷ This sentiment is repeated in Deuteronomy 18:9-14, and the practice of child sacrifice is repeatedly attributed to foreigners such as King Mesha of Moab (2 Kgs. 3:26-27) and the Sepharvites (2 Kgs. 17:31).⁹⁸ Sacrifice to Molech is frequently cited as a foreign worship practice (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; 1 Kgs. 11:7; 2 Kgs. 23:10; Jer. 32:35). Ezekiel does not mention the foreign god Molek but alludes to the same practices associated with Molek in 16:20-21, 36; 20:31; and 23:37-39.

Yet the redemption of the firstborn appears to be an acceptable, ritualized form of child sacrifice.⁹⁹ Roland de Vaux sees this ritual as a recognition of absolute dependence on YHWH, as does Michaela Bauks.¹⁰⁰ YHWH lays claim to all firstfruits of agricultural produce, including plants, animals, and children (Exod. 13:1-2, 12-13; 22:29; 34:19-20; Num 18:15-18; Neh. 10:35-39). The ritual, however, substitutes five shekels (Num. 18:18), an entirely financial sacrifice, for child sacrifice, making it a completely economic sacrifice more similar to that of crops or animals. Although children are valuable like other agricultural produce, they are also too emotionally valuable to become sacrifices. Their social value is neither solely emotional nor solely economic. The substituted amount is unlikely to be the accurate value of a child's labor until his majority, let alone the labor he will continue to perform as an adult family member, but it differs most drastically from the huge sums of money Zelizer attested courts awarding in damages for an emotionally priceless child!¹⁰¹ The Bible's attestation to this ritual evidences children's economic value in spite of the taboo against their sacrifice.

97. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, BZAW 338 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 148.

98. Stavrakopoulou also notes that several Yahwistic kings, including Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:3) and Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:3-6) engage in child sacrifice and are condemned for doing so. See Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice*, 148-79, for more on the complexity of the biblical perspective on child sacrifice as a foreign practice.

99. Ritualized human sacrifice as a substitute for actual human sacrifice is also attested in Euripides's *Iphigenia among the Taurians*. Jan Brenner has noted parallels between Isaac and Iphigenia in her article, "Sacrificing a Child in Ancient Greece: The Case of Iphigeneia" in *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretation*, ed. E. Noort and E. J. C. Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 21-43.

100. Roland de Vaux, *Les sacrifices de l'Ancien Testament*, CahRB 1 (Paris: Gabalda, 1964), 65. Michaela Bauks, "Theological Implications of Child Sacrifice," in *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Karin Finster busch, Armin Lange, K. F. Diethard Römheld (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 65-86, 85-86.

101. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 151-60.

Both the subsistence agricultural social context of the Hebrew Bible and a variety of biblical texts point to children as economically valuable in the cultural context that produced the biblical text. Subsistence agriculture requires the labor of every member of the family, making children economically useful. This continues to be reflected in the multiple threats to children in the Bible, including slavery and sacrifice. By recognizing children's value as an aspect of the ancient context of Scripture, interpreters will be able to read the breadth of Scripture with increased nuance.

CONCLUSION

Childhood studies has great promise for contributing to biblical studies. Its most prominent insight, that both childhood and adulthood are culturally constructed, can assist exegetes in avoiding anachronism when seeking to understand biblical children as characters and metaphors. By being attentive to the gleanings of childhood studies, biblical studies can continue to grow as an interdisciplinary field and learn yet more from the primary text on which it centers.

The knowledge that children had economic value in the ancient world is critical to the sociohistorical context of the Hebrew Bible. Unlike modern Western children, offspring in the ancient world created wealth as valued laborers. This distinction can inform scholars' understanding of biblical texts. In the following chapters, I will look more closely at texts from the Hebrew Bible that assume economic valuing of children where fertility and infertility, education and enculturation, and the loss of a child are concerned.

My first chapter will focus on (in)fertility as a frequent trope throughout the Hebrew Bible. By juxtaposing the modern emotional struggles prospective parents experience with the economically compounded ones of a subsistence agricultural economy, I will highlight the ancient significance of this theme. Utilizing case studies on Genesis 29–30 and Isaiah 54, along with a review of the barren matriarch narratives and other infertility themes, I will point to the particular ways in which the necessity of children for survival in the Hebrew Bible's ancient context gives each of these texts meaning beyond the emotional associations modern readers have with children and childhood.

In my second chapter, I will expand my argument for the value of children from that of biological reproduction to that of cultural reproduction in the ancient world. I will argue that multiple texts within the Hebrew Bible evidence a preoccupation with the education/enculturation of children, communicated most clearly in the repeated command to teach children. This command is present both in Psalm 78 and across the Pentateuch, in which I

will argue it acts as a part of a redaction layer drawing together the Moses and ancestral traditions. Just as biological reproduction is vital for the survival of the subsistence agricultural family, for a threatened people, most particularly in the context of diaspora, education across the generations is vital for communal survival.

Finally, I will argue that biblical rhetoric of child death, suffering, and rejection in the Hebrew Bible differs from the modern moral rhetoric of childhood suffering and protection. Thousands of years prior to the emergent cultural dominance of childhood innocence, references to suffering and dying children would not have evoked the same moral outrage at an attack on an inherently virtuous, “innocent” person. Rather, as argued in the previous chapters, children and childhood in the ancient world were primarily associated with communal survival. Therefore, threats to children would have been an assault on the community, not as form of moral rhetoric, but as a rhetorical attack on an entire people and their future.