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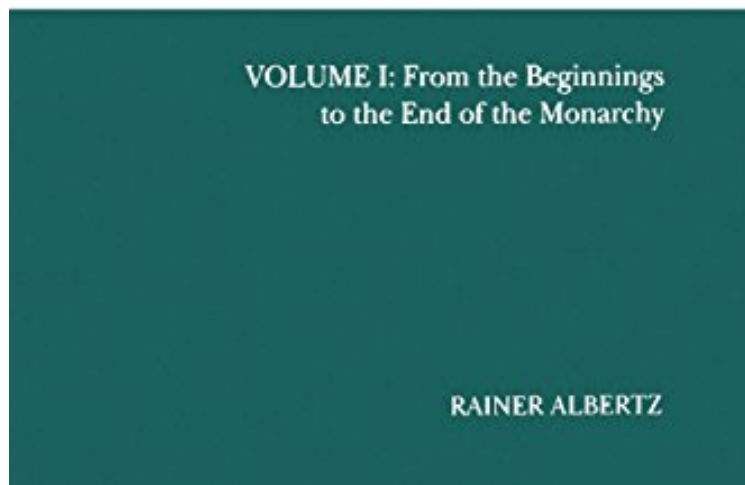
## **A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy**

*Rainer Albertz*

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### **A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period**



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**Rainer Albertz : A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Volume I: From the Beginnings to the End of the

## Monarchy:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The story behind the story of the Bible  
By Paul Vito  
A deeply researched and well thought-out examination of how Israelite religion evolved in response to social, political, and economic changes. I bought this volume because I had already read volume 2 and really liked it. I decided to begin with volume 2 because it covers the period closer to that of my own epic in progress, and I thought that volume 2 was so good that I wanted to go back to see what events led to the initial conditions of volume 2 (which takes up the story at the beginning of the Babylonian exile), but also just to enjoy the way the author fits the pieces of the puzzle together. I was not disappointed. After a chapter in which the author discusses the history of research into "Israelite religion" (a term chosen with care to distinguish it from the religions of the "Hebrews," the "Canaanites," and others), he launches into an examination of the religion in the period before the state, that is, until around 1000 BC. According to the author, Israelite religion arose from a collision between two social groups: one, the "Exodus group," consisted of a relatively small band of refugees from forced labor in the Nile delta led by a charismatic rebel named Moses; the other, much larger group was formed by people who had come to occupy the hill country of Palestine, having decided to abandon life in the cities of Canaan. Both of these groups were actuated by a desire for freedom and social equality, but it was the Exodus group that had an encounter with the god Yahweh, who was seen as their liberator and savior in their escape from Egyptian domination. Yahweh, in throwing off their overlords and leading his people to safety, acted as a warrior-chieftain would have done, and established himself as unique among gods in associating himself with a people and not with a place (the theology of Zion as the abode of God would come much later). The message of Yahweh as liberator and champion of equality found ready ears among the people of the Palestinian hill country, and when the still rudimentary cult of the nomadic Yahweh was augmented with the existing beliefs and practices of Canaanite religion still held by the hill people, Israelite religion was truly born. Rainer Albertz carries on the story from there, shrewdly reading the Bible in light of the best understanding of which parts were written when, and by whom, and drawing on archeology and historical sources to fill in the gaps as well as possible. He also makes use of other scholars' theories, weighing these carefully and supporting not necessarily those that are the most current or popular, but those in which he sees the most cogent case being made. In the nature of things he must draw inferences and even speculate here and there, but it is always done in a cautious and reasonable way, seeking the best fit with all the evidence. In volume 1 we see how Israelite religion was shaped by the egalitarian customs of the tribal society in which it arose, and the shock waves that went through it as a result of the arising of the monarchy--an institution that was always shunned by the tribes, who had broken away from the Canaanite cities in large part because of the injustices imposed by their monarchies. These same injustices, and perhaps worse ones, arise also in Israelite society, in particular its progressive division into rich and poor classes. Under the rigorous provisions of ancient credit laws, more and more family farmers dropped to the condition of landless laborers and even of debt slaves, classes of people unknown in the prestate tribal society. When some observers perceive that Yahweh religion is being used to perpetuate these injustices, the phenomenon of socially critical prophecy is born. Later these social and religious critiques will form the basis of the first moves toward systematic religious reform, which will become a factor in the later monarchy. Volume 1 ends with a look at the attempted reform by Gedaliah, who was installed as governor of Judah after its fall to Babylonia. Working with the prophet Jeremiah, Gedaliah tried to use the upset in the flow of government to implement the earlier Deuteronomic reforms that had been only partly enacted. The project came crashing to a halt when Gedaliah was murdered by a member of the royal house and Jeremiah was forced into exile. God moves in mysterious ways. Reading this book has greatly enriched my appreciation of the Bible. I have read other books about ancient Israel--books about daily life, about history and archaeology--but with this book, and its companion volume 2, I feel much more that I have got the story behind the story of the Bible. For these volumes focus on Israelite religion, and it is because of religion--not history or politics--that the Bible is still such an important book. If you want to deepen your understanding of the Old Testament, these two volumes might very well be the best help you can find.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant, readable synthesis  
By J. M. Walker  
This is the best synthesis of the understanding held by Christian scholars of the formation and message of the Hebrew Scriptures (aka Old Testament) I know of. It brings together decades of scholarship into a coherent and compelling account. Although the book rewards knowledge of modern scholarship, it is written so clearly that an educated layperson could benefit from reading it.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Hitting the Target  
By A Customer  
This book seems to me to deliver as promised. It is a book for those more academically-inclined, but that is obviously its target audience. One should refrain from devaluing a work because its intended readership is not what one wants it to be. It is good to be "technical" at times. It can be a healthy growth experience to be challenged in one's reading sometimes.

This book, the first of two volumes, offers a comprehensive history of Israelite religion. It is a part of the Old Testament Library series. The Old Testament Library provides fresh and authoritative treatments of important aspects of Old Testament study through commentaries and general surveys. The contributors are scholars of international standing.

About the Author Rainer Albertz is Professor of Old Testament at the University of Munster in Germany.