

GENESIS

A COMMENTARY

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BRUCE K. WALTKE

WITH CATHI J. FREDRICKS

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Genesis: A Commentary

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**Marjorie Elizabeth Mullan Fredricks and
Robert William Fredricks — heroes of the faith
and
The memory of Louise Daab Waltke —
who by faith, though dead, still speaks**

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Preface

An extended process of research and collaboration led to the creation of this commentary. The foundation of exegetical notes was laid in the late 1980s when Bruce prepared Genesis notes for the *New Geneva Study Bible*. We are most grateful to the Foundation for Reformation for their permission to use these notes as the starting basis for this commentary. The primary theological reflections and expanded notes focusing on literary analysis were developed when Bruce subsequently taught Genesis at Regent College. In 1997 Bruce and Zondervan realized that the combination of these notes, literary analysis, and theological reflections had the makings of an excellent commentary that would enrich people's understanding of this book of beginnings.

Here Bruce brought Cathi, his teaching assistant at that time, into the project to collaborate with him on the writing, editing, and organizing. Cathi, a former English teacher, seemed a good fit for the project, able to contribute not only to the writing and editing but also to the concerns of literary analysis and of women in biblical studies.

When he wrote his original lecture notes, Bruce analyzed Genesis with a structure of books, acts, and scenes in an effort to capture the literary nature of the text and to help his students grasp the structure and flow of Genesis. As this unusual approach proved effective for helping students study the book, Cathi and Bruce worked together to hone and expand the literary analysis. Cathi provided a skeleton draft of the book. Then, as inevitably happens when one begins a project of this magnitude, Bruce determined that significant additional research was needed to cover the detail of Genesis adequately. He made extensive additions to the literary analysis, exegetical notes, and theological reflections. Cathi edited the whole, making it more readable, probing Bruce with challenging questions, and improving the overall flow by paying special attention to the plot and structure of the narrative. The introduction to the commentary was written by Bruce, including his adaptation of his essay "The Kingdom of God in Biblical Theology."¹ Utilizing Bruce's biblical theology notes, Cathi wrote the section on poetics. The continual process of dialogue and collaboration led to the commentary in its present form.

¹This essay on "The Kingdom of God in Biblical Theology" will appear in a forthcoming book, *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

It is our hope and belief that the combination of literary analysis, exegetical notes, and theological reflections will be particularly helpful to pastors and lay leaders to teach and preach Genesis. As explained in the introduction, following the design by the author of Genesis, we have outlined Genesis by a prologue and ten books (*tôlêdôt*). At the beginning of each book we have set out the key theme and outline of the book. In an attempt to capture the literary flow of the narrative and for ease of analysis, we have further divided Genesis into acts and scenes. This nomenclature is arbitrary, since the author of Genesis did not work in the structures of a modern play. Nevertheless, we believe our divisions are true to his representation of Israel's history and helpful for demarcating narrative units. The Literary Analysis highlights the major literary features of each act and scene and should provide a helpful starting point for the reader. The analysis is by no means exhaustive nor conclusive. Rather, we have attempted to model a literary approach to Genesis. As readers enter Genesis, it is our hope they will discover its rich literary treasures, uncovering many other possible structures and techniques.

The Exegetical Notes are best read with a Bible in hand. Based on the NIV text unless otherwise noted, they are intended to provide useful summary and explanation. Particular words and phrases that have significance or require historical, social, or geographical clarification are highlighted. The Theological Reflections expand upon the themes of Genesis, drawing connections with the rest of Scripture and making application to the church and the Christian life.

We are indebted to many people for their time, counsel, and assistance in finalizing the detail of this book. We could not have asked for a more talented bibliography crew. Jonathan Bird, Daniel Clark, Matthew Freeman, Otto Guggemous, Poul Guttesen, Bruce Jeffery, Dorothy Kieft, Andrew Lewis, Carol McMahan, Janet Somes, and Kara Wenzel were a pleasure to work with. We would especially like to thank Megan Brown, Peter Chamberlain, and Keith Hyde, who were extraordinary in the giving of their time and talents. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Bob Buller and Verlyn Verbrugge for their careful and critical editing of the final manuscript. Bruce gladly acknowledges his unending dialectic with the community of readers—writers, teachers, and students—whose ideas he has absorbed and integrated as his own. The footnotes point the reader to some of these sources, but in truth they are too many and too interrelated to credit properly. Cathi would particularly like to thank Kimberly Fredricks, Dorothy Kieft, and Kara Wenzel, along with many other friends for their support during the lengthy process of writing and editing.

Abbreviations

Primary Sources

<i>b. Ned.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Nedarim</i>
<i>b. Taʿan.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Taʿanit</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Jewish Text</i>
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Bible
REB	Revised English Bible
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch

Secondary Sources

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969.
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969.
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ASORDS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>

<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>EBD</i>	<i>The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by Allen C. Myers. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FOTL</i>	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner; trans. and ed. under super- vision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>IBD</i>	<i>The Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by J. D. Douglas et al. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1980.
<i>IBHS</i>	B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.
<i>IDBSup</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume</i> . Edited by K. Crim. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>ILR</i>	<i>Israel Law Review</i>
<i>ITC</i>	International Theological Commentary
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NBD	<i>New Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer. 2d ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1982.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 11 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–.
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.
<i>TNBD</i>	<i>The New Bible Dictionary</i> . Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996.
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., and B. K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

Introduction

TITLE AND TEXT

In conformity with the ancient Near Eastern practice of naming a book by its first words, the Hebrew title of the book of Genesis is *b'erē'sît* ("in the beginning"). The English title, on the other hand, is a transliteration via the Vulgate (*Liber Genesis*) of the Greek title, probably taken from 2:4, *genesis* ("origin, source, race, creation"). Happily, both titles are appropriate, for this book deals with beginnings *and* origins, broadly of the cosmos (1:1–2:3), of humanity and the nations and their alienation from God and one another (2:4–11:32), and of Israel (12:1–50:26), God's new initiative to save the world.

This commentary is based on the codex of Samuel son of Jacob (ca. A.D. 1000), who "copied, vowel-pointed and Massoretically annotated this codex of the sacred Scripture from the correct manuscript that the teacher, Aaron son of Moses Ben-Asher, redacted . . . and that constitutes an exceedingly accurate exemplar."¹ In a few instances another text or ancient version, such as the Greek Septuagint (LXX), is preferred to this oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible.²

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The Basic *tôlêdôt* Structure³

After the prologue representing the creation of the cosmos (1:1–2:3), the author of Genesis introduces ten new divine initiatives in salvation history with a *tôlêdôt* heading (i.e., "the account of the line of X") and transitions linking these developments:

¹Frontispiece of Leningrad Codex B 19^a. This codex is the diplomatic text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

²See Waltke, "Reliability," *NIDOTTE*, 1:51–67.

³Based on the work of earlier scholars, I. Kikawada and A. Quinn (*Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1985], 47–48) argue that the Primeval History had the same epic structure as the early second millennium B.C. Mesopotamian epic of Atrahasis (i.e., "The Exceedingly Wise"). That epic consists of a creation narrative, three threats to human existence (plague, famine, and flood), and a resolution, interspersed with references to numerical increase. That structure, they argue, is reflected in Gen. 1–11: creation narrative, three threats (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the Flood), interspersed with genealogies (2:4; 4:1–2, 25–26; 10:1–32; 11:10–26). Both narratives address the question whether humanity can survive various threats to its existence. In the Atrahasis Epic, population increase is a major problem for the gods; they resolve it by putting threatening checks

The account of the line of the heavens and the earth	2:4–4:26
Transition (4:25–26)	
The account of Adam’s line	5:1–6:8
Transition (6:1–8)	
The account of Noah’s line	6:9–9:29
Transition (9:18–29)	
The account of the line of Noah’s sons	10:1–11:9
Transition (11:1–9)	
The account of Shem’s line	11:10–26
Transition (11:26)	
The account of Terah’s line	11:27–25:11
Transition (23:1–25:11)	
The account of Ishmael’s line	25:12–18
Transition (25:1–11) ⁴	
The account of Isaac’s line	25:19–35:29
Transition (35:23–29)	
The account of Esau’s line	36:1–37:1
Transition (37:1)	
The account of Jacob’s line	37:2–50:26
Transition to the book of Exodus (46:2–50:26)	

Contrary to what one might expect, the accounts are not essentially about the titular ancestor but about his descendants. For instance, the accounts of the lines of Terah, of Isaac, and of Jacob are principally about their offspring: Abraham, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Israel, respectively. In addition, in order that “the account of Noah’s line” might pertain to both Noah and his sons, the author intercalates this third account into the second by completing 5:32 in 9:18. Further, the heading of the first account is an ad hoc literary creation. Obviously the inanimate heaven and earth cannot give birth to Adam, but he has no human parentage. Finally, these *tôlêdôt* headings introduce two types of literature: short genealogies—linear (accounts 2, 5) and segmented (accounts 7, 9⁵)—and extended narratives (accounts 1, 3, 6, 8, 10).

on it. In the biblical account, human sin threatens humanity’s existence. God blesses humanity to multiply but repeatedly intervenes to see it fill the earth according to his intention. Inferentially, God resolves the potential overpopulation problem by scattering people over the breadth of the earth. D. Garrett (*Rethinking Genesis: Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991], 111–13) argues that Genesis as a whole has the same thematic pattern, including a prologue (Gen. 1–11), a triadic narrative that describes a threat to the hero (Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph), and a conclusion, with transitional genealogies between these narrative divisions (11:27–32; 25:12–18; 36:22c–40; 46:8–27). But the structural analogues between the Atrahasis Epic and Genesis 1–11 are not totally convincing.

⁴The final details concerning Abraham’s children, the settling of Abraham’s affairs, and his death (25:1–11) at the conclusion of the preceding book function as a transition to both the accounts of Ishmael and of Isaac.

⁵The segmented and linear genealogy of 36:9–43 is a later addition to Ur-Genesis. See structure in literary analysis of Book 9.

The fourth account, the so-called Table of Nations, is a mixture of these two literary forms.

The Alternating and Concentric Patterns of the Ten *tôlêḏôṭ*

Building on the studies of Umberto Cassuto, Michael Fishbane, and J. M. Sasson,⁶ Gary Rendsburg notes that the first five *tôlêḏôṭ*, which pertain to humanity as a whole, are arranged in a “parallel” (better: “alternating”) structure and the last three narrative *tôlêḏôṭ* in a concentric structure, divided by two short genealogical *tôlêḏôṭ*.⁷ He groups the first five under the heading “Primeval History” and gives the others their popular content labels (see below). He backs up this analysis by noting other poetic devices, such as key words, that give coherence to the sections.

Section	Extent	Structure
Primeval History	1:1–11:26	alternating
Abraham cycle	11:27–22:24	concentric
Linking material	23:1–25:18	parallel with 35:23–36:43a
Jacob cycle	25:19–35:22	concentric
Linking material	35:23–36:43a	parallel with 23:1–25:18
Joseph cycle	37:2–50:26	concentric

Below is an adapted summary of Rendsburg’s analysis of the main cycles. The first and third narrative *tôlêḏôṭ* are modified below in a large measure from David A. Dorsey:⁸

The Primeval History: alternating structure

A Creation story: first beginning; divine blessing 1:1–2:3

B Sin of Adam: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness;
curse 2:4–3:24

C No descendants of murdered younger, righteous
son Abel 4:1–16

⁶U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part 2: From Noah to Abraham*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 296; M. Fishbane, “Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle Gen 25:19–35:22,” *JJS* 26 (1975): 15–38; idem, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 50–62; J. M. Sasson, “The ‘Tower of Babel’ As a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History (Gen. 1–11:9),” in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. G. Rendsburg (New York: Ktav, 1980), 211–19.

⁷G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986). This commentary uses the terms *alternating structure* for units of literature arranged in parallel (e.g., ABCA’B’C’), *chiastic* for those structured around a single center or pivot (e.g., ABCB’A’), and *concentric* for those arranged around a double center (e.g., ABCC’B’A’). By contrast, Jerome T. Walsh reverses this definition of chiasmic and concentric (*1 Kings* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1996], xiv).

⁸D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 55, 60.

- D Descendants of sinful son Cain 4:17–26
 - E Descendants of chosen son Seth: ten generations from Adam to Noah 5:1–32
 - F Downfall: unlawful union 6:1–4
 - G Brief introduction to Noah 6:5–8
- A' Flood story: reversal of creation; new beginning; divine blessing 6:9–9:19
 - B' Sin of Noah: nakedness, seeing/covering nakedness; curse 9:20–29
 - C' Descendants of younger, righteous son Japheth 10:1–5
 - D' Descendants of sinful son Ham 10:6–20
 - E' Descendants of chosen son Shem: ten generations from Noah to Terah 10:21–32⁹
 - F' Downfall: rebellious union (Tower of Babel) 11:1–9
 - G' Brief introduction of Abraham, through whom God will bless humanity 11:27–32¹⁰

The Abraham Cycle: concentric pattern

- A Genealogy of Terah 11:27–32
 - B Promise of a son and start of Abraham's spiritual odyssey 12:1–9
 - C Abraham lies about Sarah; the LORD protects her in foreign palace 12:10–20
 - D Lot settles in Sodom 13:1–18
 - E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily 14:1–24
 - F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael 15:1–16:16
 - F' Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac 17:1–18:15
 - E' Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer 18:16–33
 - D' Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab 19:1–38
 - C' Abraham lies about Sarah; God protects her in foreign palace 20:1–18
 - B' Birth of son and climax of Abraham's spiritual odyssey 21:1–22:19
- A' Genealogy of Nahor 22:20–24

⁹The alternating structure is violated here to link closely the account of Shem's descendants with the account of Terah's descendants, the lineage that saves the nations from Babel's curse.

¹⁰The introduction to Book 6 is a janus between books 5 and 6, between the Primeval History (Gen. 1–11) and the Patriarchal History (Gen. 12–50) (see below, Literary Analysis of Book 6).

The Jacob Cycle: concentric pattern

- A Oracle sought; struggle in childbirth; Jacob born 25:19–34
 - B Interlude: Rebekah in foreign palace; pact with foreigners 26:1–35
 - C Jacob fears Esau and flees 27:1–28:9
 - D Messengers 28:10–22
 - E Arrival in Haran 29:1–30
 - F Jacob’s wives are fertile 29:31–30:24
 - F’ Jacob’s flocks are fertile 30:25–43
 - E’ Flight from Haran 31:1–55
 - D’ Messengers 32:1–32
 - C’ Jacob returns and fears Esau 33:1–20
 - B’ Interlude: Dinah in foreign palace; pact with foreigners 34:1–31
 - A’ Oracle fulfilled; struggle in childbirth; Jacob becomes Israel 35:1–22

The Joseph Cycle: concentric pattern

- A Introduction: beginning of Joseph story 37:2–11
 - B Jacob mourns “death” of Joseph 37:12–36
 - C Interlude: Judah signified as leader 38:1–30¹¹
 - D Joseph’s enslavement in Egypt 39:1–23
 - E Joseph savior of Egypt through disfavor at Pharaoh’s court 40:1–41:57
 - F Journeys of brothers to Egypt 42:1–43:34
 - G Brothers pass Joseph’s test of love for brother 44:1–34
 - G’ Joseph gives up his power over brothers 45:1–28
 - F’ Migration of family to Egypt 46:1–27
 - E’ Joseph savior of family through favor at Pharaoh’s court 46:28–47:12
 - D’ Joseph’s enslavement of Egyptians 47:13–31
 - C’ Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler 48:1–49:28
 - B’ Joseph mourns death of Jacob 49:29–50:14
 - A’ Conclusion: end of Joseph story 50:15–26

COMPOSITION AND AUTHORSHIP

Who is the literary genius of this artistic masterpiece, which, like a Bach fugue, counterpoints these patterns of structure with plot development? To answer that question one must broaden the discussion to address the authorship and composition of the first five books of the Bible, for the book of Genesis opens up the Pentateuch, which all agree has been edited as a unity. Although a good case can be made that Moses authored the essential shape

¹¹This analysis is based on J. Goldin, “The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 27–44 (see also the commentary below on Gen. 38).

of Genesis and of the Pentateuch, he clearly did not author the extant text in our hands. To understand the book's composition and authorship it is helpful to consider at least three stages in its development.

Moses and Ur-Genesis

The Pentateuch attributes large portions of its content to Moses. At Sinai the Lord gives him the great legal codes of the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:2–23:33; 34:11–26) and the cultic laws and Holiness Code of Leviticus (Lev. 1:1; 27:34). On the journey from Sinai to Moab the Lord gives Moses more instructions, as recorded in Numbers 1:1; 36:13. At Moab Moses expounds the law in his three addresses embedded in Deuteronomy (1:5–4:40; 5:1–26:19; 30:2–20), along with the covenant blessings and curses (Deut. 27–28), his song (31:30–32:43), and his last words (33:1–29).

Jesus and his followers likewise assume this point of view (Matt. 8:4; Luke 16:31; 24:27, 44; John 1:17; Acts 3:22). Jesus says Moses gave the Jews circumcision (John 7:22; cf. Acts 15:1). The regulations of circumcision are given *extensively* in Gen. 17:9–14, not in Lev. 12:3, which suggests that Jesus thought of Moses as the author of Genesis.

Furthermore, Moses is said either explicitly or implicitly to have written some sections of the Pentateuch (e.g., Ex. 24:12; 34:27). The putative Deuteronomist, who during the exile composed the final draft of Deuteronomy–Kings but not Ruth, also cites his law as written down (Deut. 28:58; 29:20–21, 27; 30:10; 31:19, 24; Josh. 1:8; 8:31, 34; 23:6; 1 Kings 2:3), as do the postexilic Chronicler (2 Chron. 23:18; 25:4; 31:3; 35:12) and Nehemiah (8:14; 10:34, 36). The exilic and postexilic writers refer to the Pentateuch as the Law, the Law of Moses, the Book of Moses, and the Book of the Law of Moses (2 Chron. 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh. 8:1). Jesus refers to Exodus as the book of Moses (Mark 12:26).

To many English readers these late titles signify that Moses wrote the extant books of the Pentateuch, but more probably they are conventional ways of referring to the Pentateuch's content and aim to underscore its authority, not the authorship of the book's extant form.

Moses' superb training, exceptional spiritual gifts and divine call uniquely qualified him to compose the essential content and shape of Genesis and of the Pentateuch. Walther Eichrodt, who wrote a classic theology of the Old Testament, contends that Moses is best described as founder of the theocracy to bring in a new world order.¹² As such, Moses of necessity would have given Israel its prior history, meaning, and destiny as well as its laws. Every political and/or religious community must have a memory of its history that defines and distinguishes it. Genesis also reports the origins of

¹²W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 290–91.

the nations who are destined to come under Israel's rule (e.g., ch. 10). Furthermore, the historical narrative of Genesis repeatedly and emphatically explains that Israel's God, the God of creation and the Lord of history, has called Israel to take possession of Canaan and from that basis to bless the nations (e.g., 12:1–3; 15; 17). Finally, it also foretells the future of the tribes on the basis of their past history (e.g., ch. 49).¹³ In sum, the founder of Israel is the most probable person to transpose its national repository of ancient traditions into a coherent history in order to define the nation and its mission. His noble vision stirs the imagination and calls upon its audience to order itself according to that memory.

Having been highly educated in Pharaoh's court as the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:1–10), in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth dynasty (ca. 1400–1300 B.C.), Moses had unique access to the ancient Near Eastern myths that show close connections with Genesis 1–11. For example the Atrahasis Epic and the Sumerian flood story, both dated earlier than 1600 B.C., parallel very closely the thematic content of Genesis 1–11.¹⁴ The Sumerian king list, similar to the pattern in Genesis 5–11, includes a list of antediluvian kings with extravagantly long reigns (cf. Gen. 5), then a mention of the flood (cf. Gen. 6–9), and then postdiluvian kings with much shorter reigns down to ca. 1980 B.C. (cf. Gen. 11:10–27).¹⁵ The creation account in Genesis 1 has parallels with the early second millennium B.C. Babylonian account of creation, the *Enuma Elish*.¹⁶ The closest comparison that can be made with Genesis 2–3 is with the Adapa myth. Adapa was summoned to heaven and offered the bread and water of life. Having been warned by his personal god to reject such an offer, he declined.¹⁷ The Genesis account of the Flood also finds striking parallels in ancient Near Eastern myths (see commentary on Book 3). These myths, against whose worldview Genesis 1–11 is in fact a polemic, were known after Moses' time, so the parallels do not establish Mosaic authorship of Genesis 1–11,¹⁸ but they also existed before his time and Moses had a unique opportunity to know and rebut them.

Moses' training as a budding official in Pharaoh's court also would have given him firsthand education in the ancient Near Eastern law codes. For instance, the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22–23:19) shows too much resemblance to the Code of Hammurabi (ca. 1700 B.C.) to have arisen independently from it; on the other hand, their differences are too great to support a theory

¹³J. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch As Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 34–37.

¹⁴G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), xxxix–xli.

¹⁵ANET, 265.

¹⁶A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963).

¹⁷ANET, 76–80.

¹⁸J. Van Seters (*Prologue to History: The Yahwist As Historian in Genesis* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992]) thinks that Genesis 1–11 has an affinity with Greek antiquarian writing of the late first millennium as well as with Mesopotamian sources.

of direct dependence upon that code.¹⁹ Furthermore, Mendenhall, using the work of Korošec, shows that the book of Deuteronomy has formal similarities with Hittite suzerainty treaties (1400–1250) at the time of Moses.²⁰

Finally, as the greatest of Israel's prophets, Moses would also have had the ability to draw upon God's omniscience and omnipresence in the retelling of Israel's historical traditions (cf. Num. 11:25; Deut. 34:10–11). With his extraordinary gift, confirmed by his spectacular signs and wonders, he was eminently qualified to usher his audience into the heavenly court at the time God created the cosmos (Gen. 1) and to reveal what the Almighty and other humans thought, felt, and intended (6:6, 8; 13:13; 25:34b). In a segue, let it be noted that the real hero of Genesis is the Lord and that, if the stories in Genesis about him are not inspired by heaven, they are fictitious. Thus Sternberg rightly comments: "Were the narrative written or read as fiction, then God would turn from the lord of history into a creature of the imagination, with the most disastrous results."²¹

Sources of Ur-Genesis

As a historian Moses would have used sources. One of them is noted in Genesis 5:1: "the written account [*sēper tōl'ē dōt*] of Adam's line."²² Elsewhere the Pentateuch cites the Book of Wars (Num. 21:14). Similarly, ancient Near Eastern narrators commonly used sources to compose their work.²³

Literary source critics, however, gainsay the biblical authors' claim to Mosaic authorship of the portions attributed to him, although allowing a kernel of Mosaic material in some of them. Citing the presence of varying divine names (i.e., Yahweh [English versions, "LORD"] and Elohim ["God"]) and other vocabulary in combination with changes in style, doublet accounts of the same event, and differences in theology, they won a broad consensus for about a century (1880–1980) that a redactor in the postexilic period pieced together four formerly continuous documents to compose the present work: J (Yahwist, 950 B.C.), E (Elohist, 850 B.C.), D (Deuteronomist, 620 B.C.), and P (Priestly Code, ca. 500 B.C.). The critics originally dated these

¹⁹S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1911), 418–25.

²⁰G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955), 24–50.

²¹M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 32.

²²Evidence exists of varying sources for the genealogies of Genesis. In Gen. 26:34 and 28:9 the wives of Esau are Judith, Basemath, and Mahalath. In 36:2 they are Adah, Oholibamah, and Basemath. The differences probably reflect different sources, and we can only speculate why they differ. In Gen. 11:10 Arphaxad is the only named son of Shem. In 10:22 he is Shem's third son. These are readily harmonized but also may reflect different sources.

²³J. Tigay, "The Evolution of the Pentateuchal Narratives in the Light of the Evolution of the *Gilgamesh Epic*," in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, ed. J. Tigay (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 20–52; idem, "Conflation As Redactional Technique," in *Empirical Models*, 53–94; idem, "The Stylistic Criterion of Source Criticism in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern and Post-biblical Literature," in *Empirical Models*, 149–74.

sources by the assumption of a simplistic evolution of religion and by putting strictures upon the prophetic gifts so that the patriarchs' alleged prophecies were in fact composed at the time of their fulfillment. Accordingly, the prophecies in Gen. 27:40 and 49:1–27 were dated to the early monarchy. New data and approaches, however, have recently seriously disrupted this consensus.

Variations in divine names are now well attested in ancient texts with no prehistory, and their variation in the Pentateuch can be explained as meaningful. For example, Yahweh is used when God's covenantal relationship with Israel is in view, but Elohim is used with reference to his universality over all the nations. Rendsburg notes that the use of Elohim from Gen. 17:3–22:24, in contrast to its absence in 11:27–16:16, occurs appropriately in connection with the name change from Abram ("Exalted Father") to Abraham ("Father of a Multitude of Nations").²⁴ Nevertheless, it is possible that this meaningful difference already existed in the source material.

There are also doublets in the Pentateuch that represent the same event from different points of view. For example, Genesis 1 views the creation of humanity as male and female under divine blessing, but Genesis 2–3 represents it from a sociological perspective as a husband and wife alienated from God's blessing by their disobedience. Traditional source critics also think that the repetitions such as the "sister-wife" stories (12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:7–11) represent conflicting variants of a single historical event. But new literary critics, who prefer to consider the text's strategy rather than its strata, explain these repetitions as type-scenes. Ancient audiences loved and looked for repetition and parallels in a unified narrative to emphasize a point.²⁵ The source critics' parade example of a contradictory doublet is P's claim that Yahweh was not known to the patriarchs (Ex. 6:3), which contradicts J's claim that they knew the name Yahweh as early as Enosh (Gen. 4:26) and gainsays its repeated use in Genesis (e.g., 12:8; 28:13). Eslinger, however, notes that Exodus 6 does not say that the patriarchs did not call upon the name *Yahweh*. He argues that the passive construction "I was not known as Yahweh" is a variant of the active construction, "you will know that I am Yahweh." This "recognition formula" refers to the manifestation of the divine name through miraculous interventions and is common only in Exodus and Ezekiel (more than fifty times).²⁶ In the former God manifests his miraculous intervention through history; in the latter, through prophecy.²⁷ Nevertheless, two presentations of the same event in connection with the other

²⁴Rendsburg, *Redaction*, 106.

²⁵R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47–62; T. L. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 55; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 59.

²⁶R. M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 362.

²⁷C. Eslinger, "Knowing Yahweh: Exodus 6:3 in the Context of Genesis 1–Exodus 15," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 188–98.

criteria, such as attested in Genesis 1 and 2, give the appearance of being derived from different sources. Moreover, some repeated situations, such as the different identifications of Esau's wives (26:34; 28:9; cf. 36:2) and the two accounts of Benjamin's birthplace as Bethlehem and Paddan Aram (35:16–19, 22b–26), are hard to harmonize and appear to belong to different traditions. Notably, however, these two glaring examples of apparent contradiction involve genealogies, a literary form that is notorious for establishing family relationships and not historical accuracy.

Variations in vocabulary and style may be due to differing literary genres, which by definition have different styles and call for differing vocabulary. But recognition of these differences, for whatever reason, is important in lexical studies. For instance, *'ādām* signifies "humanity" as male and female in Genesis 1 but refers to the man/husband in Genesis 2.

In reality, the tools form and tradition critics use to trace the history of a given text or source from its earliest oral stage through to its commitment to writing and finally to its redaction into the present text of Genesis have proved woefully inadequate. After almost a century of research, their practitioners have failed to reach any consensus. After surveying the present state of pentateuchal criticism, Gordon J. Wenham concludes: "Today there is . . . no consensus. 'Every man does what is right in his own eyes.'"²⁸

Literary source critics now tend to expand the content of J at the expense of E and to merge them together; in any case, there is still a consensus that J was an originally independent and continuous document. Such scholars tend to think, in contrast to form critics, that the Tetrateuch (Genesis–Numbers) escaped any systematic editing by the Deuteronomist, who clearly edited Deuteronomy through Kings in the Hebrew canon. Cross and others deny P ever existed as an independent narrative document.²⁹

Moreover, scholars have dismissed the notion of a simplistic evolution of Israel's religion, thereby undermining the basis of dating the documents, and now recognize that all the alleged documents contain ancient traditions and archaic material. Following Y. Kaufmann, Israeli and American Jewish scholars such as A. Hurvitz, M. Haran, J. Milgrom, and M. Weinfeld argue that P may be contemporary with J and thus precede D.³⁰ Because the scribes archaized, modernized and smoothed the text, it is extremely difficult to date the sources scientifically. Judgments regarding these literary matters are just that and carry no conviction for the wary.³¹ Thus Rendtorff writes, "It must be conceded that we really do not possess reliable criteria for dating

²⁸G. J. Wenham, "Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. D. W. Baker and B. T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 116–44.

²⁹F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), 293–325.

³⁰Documented by Wenham, "Pondering," 134 n. 62.

³¹See *IBHS* §1.4.1.

of the pentateuchal literature.”³² In addition, J. G. McConville has offered a serious challenge to the traditional linking of the D document to the Josianic reform (622 B.C.), the anchor point for the traditional dating of the documents. According to him, “Deuteronomy generally legislated for conditions which characterized a considerably earlier period than Josiah,” and its “laws are consistently compatible with Deuteronomy’s self-presentation as speeches on the verge of the promised land.”³³

In addition, historical and textual evidence supports an earlier date for the so-called Tetrateuch than the Exile. First, those books are written from the viewpoint of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt, not from the viewpoint of its exile in Babylon.³⁴ In Genesis the Lord predicts Israel’s enslavement in a “country not their own” (15:12–16), and its author draws his history to conclusion with the entrance of the tribes into Egypt, where Moses single-handedly will forge them into a theocracy. In Genesis and Exodus the author faults the Egyptians for innocent Israel’s troubles there, but the Deuteronomist finds Israel guilty of bringing the exile upon itself.

Furthermore, preexilic biblical writers at the least knew the content of the Pentateuch. For instance, in Psalm 8 David (ca. 1000 B.C.) puts the creation account of Genesis 1 into the form of a psalm. Moreover, the prophets are now generally regarded as reformers, not innovators, as traditional source critics once thought.³⁵ The prophets’ austere messages of judgment rest on the lofty ethical laws of the Mosaic Code; their consoling messages of hope, on God’s unchanging covenant with the patriarchs. Hosea and Micah, who are among the earliest writing prophets, according to their superscriptions (ca. 750–700 B.C.), mention Abraham, Jacob, and Moses and allude to the contents of both Genesis and the Pentateuch (Hos. 12:12–13; Mic. 6:4; 7:19–20).³⁶ Cassuto classifies Hosea’s allusions to the Pentateuch into six categories: patriarchal narratives, the Exodus story, the Decalogue, the biography of Moses, Deuteronomy 11:13–21, and 33:1–43.³⁷ Finally, the pre-Samaritan Pentateuch text was probably modernized at the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, which means that the archaic text type of the Pentateuch preserved in the masoretic tradition must be much older.³⁸

In sum, one may plausibly and most simply identify Moses as the author of the so-called J and hypothesize that he used fragments of diverse material,

³²R. Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, trans. J. J. Scullion (JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 201.

³³J. G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (JSOTSup 33; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 155.

³⁴The reference to Babylon and Assyria in Gen. 10:10–11 is part of the book’s intention to explain the origin of the nations surrounding Israel.

³⁵J. Van Seters’s view that the Torah is modeled on the prophets is rejected by most (*The Life of Moses: The Yahwist As Historian in Exodus-Numbers* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994]).

³⁶Many critics, however, reckon the verses cited in Micah as later additions to that book.

³⁷U. Cassuto, “The Prophet Hosea and the Books of the Pentateuch,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 1:79–100.

³⁸B. K. Waltke, “Samaritan Pentateuch,” *ABD*, 5:938.

which have been traditionally denominated as P, to construct the skillfully unified Ur-Genesis.³⁹ It is also possible that Moses himself later interpolated alleged D material into his finished composition (e.g., Gen. 26:5), even as Muhammad secondarily interpolated material into the Koran.⁴⁰ In any case, the overall artistry of the whole and its parts, in spite of the few apparent contradictions, show that the author carefully used his sources in an integrated and sustained literary imagination, not as a redactor who crudely patched his material together.

Post-Mosaic Additions: The Implied Author and Audience

If one assumes the Mosaic authorship of Ur-Genesis, anachronisms such as the mention of Dan (14:14) and the reference to the kings of Israel (36:31)⁴¹ show that the scribes, the official revisers of the text, modernized and supplemented as needed the putative Ur-text of Moses. It is conceivable that they added the second account of Esau's line (36:9–29) and introduced the interlude about Judah (ch. 38) into the so-called Joseph Story during the united monarchy. The historical books as a whole, including Genesis, are probably anonymous in part because they were living texts in the hands of the scribes, who kept the text current for the people of God.⁴²

Thus it seems best from a literary point of view to retain the book's own anonymity and to think of its implied author rather than its real author. Although a foundational Mosaic authorship is probable, it is not unquestionable from the text itself. The extent of scribal revisions, though probably minimal, cannot be determined. The identification of Moses as the author of the Law is important from a religious point of view, but his authorship of Genesis and the Pentateuch is not important from a literary viewpoint. More important from this viewpoint is the narrator's evaluative point of view that can be determined from the text itself without considering anything extrinsic to the narrative (see "Poetics and Narrative Theology" below).⁴³ For these reasons this commentary will refer to the unknown final author as "the narrator" and pay little attention to his uncertain sources.

Similarly, since the specific audience is not named, it is best to think of an implied audience. The book does not name a specific narratee because it was written for the universal people of God who share the narrator's evaluative point of view (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The real hero of Genesis is the Lord, and

³⁹Wenham (*Genesis 1–15*, xxxvii–xlv) argues in detail that P is an ancient source used by J as the final editor-author.

⁴⁰G. Widengren, *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets* (Uppsala: Universitets Arsskirff, 1948), 10, 49.

⁴¹See also a-Mosaica in Gen. 11:31; 12:6; 19:38; 22:14; 32:31–32; 34:7; 47:11, 26; Ex. 11:3; 16:35; Num. 12:3; 21:14–15; 32:34; Deut. 1:1–5; 2:10–12, 20–23; 3:9, 11, 13b–14; 4:41–5:1a; 10:6–7, 9; 27:1a, 9a, 11; 28:68; 29:1a; 31:1, 7a, 9–10a, 14a, 14c–16a, 22–23a, 24–25, 30; 32:44–45, 48; 33:1; 34:1–4a, 5–12.

⁴²Waltke, "Reliability," *NIDOTTE*, 1:53–54.

⁴³M. A. Powell. *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 5.

its stories pertain to the origin and life of the covenant community under the God of Israel. The New Testament often cites the book of Genesis using the present tense and the first-person pronoun “we,” not third-person “they,” and relates its content to the church.⁴⁴ This should leave little doubt about the implied audience of this portion of Scripture.

HISTORICITY AND LITERARY GENRE

The question that must now be raised is whether Israel’s memory is historically reliable. Is Israel’s faith based on historical fact or on fiction? Is Abraham the creation of faith or the creator of faith?⁴⁵ The narrator’s inspiration from God, who cannot lie, is sufficient to guarantee its truthfulness without other historical corroboration, but the author of Genesis represents himself as a historian, not as a prophet who receives visions of events. He gives an essentially coherent chronological succession of events, using the Hebrew narrative verb form. He validates his material as much as possible by locating his story in time and space (e.g., 2:10–14), tracing genealogies (e.g., 5:1–32), giving evidence of various sorts that validate his history (e.g., 11:9), and citing sources (5:1). According to Brevard Childs, following W. F. Albright and John Bright, the narrator’s reference to “this day”/“today” (19:38; 22:14; 32:32; 47:26) is “a formula of personal testimony added to, and confirming, the received tradition.”⁴⁶ The narrator’s evidence will not satisfy the demands of modern historiography, but it shows that he intended to write real history, not myth or saga or legend. Although historical critics rule out as historically credible his theological interpretation of history, their antisupe­rnatural assumptions do not disprove empirically the prophetic narrator’s account of God’s hand or interventions in history.

From the viewpoint of modern historiography, internal evidence within the Pentateuch supports the narrator’s inferred claim to represent what really happened. The religious practices of the patriarchs both remarkably agree and at the same time considerably disagree with the religious practices Moses commands. For example, on the one hand, Noah without explanation distinguishes between clean and unclean animals (presumably the same as specified in the law) before the law was given (6:19–7:3). On the other hand, the patriarchs worship God under different names, such as El Olam (“the Eternal God,” 21:33) and El Shaddai (17:1), that never recur in the Torah, aside from Ex. 6:3. In addition, contrary to the Mosaic law and without the narrator’s censure, Jacob erects a stone pillar (*maššēḇâ*, Gen. 28:18–22),

⁴⁴For example, limiting oneself to just the first ten verses of the book of Genesis, compare Gen. 1:1 with Heb. 11:3, Gen. 1:3 with 2 Cor. 4:6, and Gen. 1:6–9 with 2 Pet. 3:3–5.

⁴⁵Cf. J. Goldingay, “The Patriarchs in Scripture and History,” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 30.

⁴⁶B. S. Childs, “A Study of the Formula ‘Until This Day,’” *JBL* 82 (1963): 279–92. B. O. Long confirmed Childs’s study in his Yale Ph.D. dissertation, later published as *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* (BZAW 108; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968).

Abraham marries his half-sister (Gen. 20:12), and Jacob simultaneously marries sisters (Gen. 29:15–30; cf. Deut. 16:21–22; Lev. 18:9, 18, respectively). Moreover, as Sarna notes, “freedom of testation in disregard of natural seniority, as practiced by Isaac and Jacob, is illegal and invalid according to the provisions of Deuteronomy 21:15–17.”⁴⁷ Were the stories faked, one would expect the author of the Pentateuch to ground his law in the created order or in ancient traditions and, at the least, not cite data that could possibly undermine his teaching. These religious traditions are ancient, having been neither tampered with nor contrived.

Sarna also notes that “the practice of accompanying oath-taking by the gesture of placing a hand ‘under the thigh’ of the adjurer never recurs.” He adds, “of the thirty-eight names by which the patriarchs and their families are called, twenty-seven are never found again in the Bible.” Again, “only in Genesis Hebron is called Mamre, and only there is Paddan-aram mentioned.”⁴⁸ The Kenites and Kenizzites head the list of the ten nations who are to be displaced by Israel at the time of their conquest (15:19). Nevertheless, Israel is never said to have fought against these tribes. Quite the contrary, the Kenites are later represented as befriending Israel (Judg. 1:16; 4:11, 17; 5:24; 1 Sam. 15:6) and the Kenizzites, one of whom is faithful Caleb, are absorbed into Judah (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6, 14; 1 Chron. 4:13). Finally the cataloguing of the patriarchs’ sins rules out classifying these traditions as hagiography. “The cumulative effect of all this internal evidence,” says Sarna, “leads to the decisive conclusion that the patriarchal traditions in the Book of Genesis are of great antiquity”⁴⁹ and so implies their historical authenticity.

The internal evidence is supported by texts uncovered at Mari, Nuzi, Alalakh, and Ugarit from the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 1950–1550 B.C.) and slightly later, though no text has yet been found mentioning the patriarchs. The social customs and legal procedures attested in these texts parallel those in the patriarchal traditions. After sifting the data, M. J. Selman cites “thirteen social practices of the patriarchal narratives to be legitimately illustrated and supported from a variety of historical contexts in the ancient Near East.”⁵⁰ In light of the internal evidence for the early date of these practices, Selman adds, they are better situated in the early second millennium B.C. horizon than in the first millennium. Some data uniquely belongs to the earlier horizon. For instance, Selman notes, “in Genesis 25:23, the Hebrew term for the eldest son is not the usual *b^ekor* but *rab*, which is used here only in this sense. The cognate Akkadian word, *rabu*, is also used by itself of eldest son, but so far has turned up only in tablets of the mid-second millennium.”⁵¹

⁴⁷N. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary 1; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xvi.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, xvii.

⁵⁰M. J. Selman, “Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age,” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, 91–139.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 135.

K. A. Kitchen documents several other features in the patriarchal narrative that fit *only* the Middle Bronze horizon. This is true of the price of a slave at twenty shekels of silver (Gen. 37:28), of the form of treaties mentioned in Genesis 14:13; 21; 26; and 31, and of the alliance of Mesopotamian kings in Genesis 14. Prior to and after that time a single power ruled the area.⁵² In sum, the cumulative evidence does not prove the historicity of the patriarchal traditions, but it does validate it.

POETICS AND NARRATIVE THEOLOGY

Sternberg argues convincingly that the *inspired* narrator aims to produce a work that is historical, ideological, and aesthetic.⁵³ The preceding section argues that the narrator's interests are historical. This section demonstrates that his interests are also inseparably didactic and aesthetic. Unlike a geometry textbook that may aim to be only didactic, *Genesis* is literature because it communicates doctrine in an artful way; it is ideological art. The narrator uses words not as a stick but as a web. He teaches by telling stories. This section analyzes how he persuades as he prescribes through his stories his worldview. Poetics deals with the rhetorical techniques that all biblical writers employ to communicate meaning; narrative theology is derived from the application of poetics, along with other methods, to the narratives.

Levels of Signification

In the work of interpreting a text, one must take note of different levels of signification. One may define twelve levels in the biblical text, moving from smallest to largest.⁵⁴

12. book/composition
11. sections/cycles
10. acts or phases
9. scenes or episodes
8. scene parts or incidents
7. frames/speeches
6. sentences
5. clauses
4. phrases
3. words
2. syllables
1. sounds

⁵²K. A. Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *BAR* 21 (March/April, 1995): 48–57, 88–95.

⁵³Sternberg, *Poetics*, 156.

⁵⁴Adopted and adapted from J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 2 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 4.

Levels 1 and 2 involve sound and sense. For example, Gen. 27:36 reads: *'t bkr̄tī lq̄h whnh 'th lq̄h br̄ktī* ("My birthright he took, and look, now he has taken my blessing"). The sound play between *beḵōrātī* and *birkātī* in the outer frame of the chiasm effectively links Esau's complaint that Jacob stole "my birthright" and its correlative "my blessing." Likewise, in Gen. 9:6, as McCreesh notes, "The repeated sound patterns in the chiasm *šōpēḵ dam hā'ādām bā'ādām dāmō yiššāpēḵ* ('whoever sheds the blood of a human being by a human being his blood will be shed') phonically represent the reversal of fortune described."⁵⁵

Levels 3–6 are typically treated in Hebrew grammars and syntaxes.⁵⁶ Scenes (level 9), sometimes referred to as episodes, develop the smallest units of plot development that display a significant level of independence from the context. For example, the Abraham cycle contains a number of scenes: the call of Abraham (12:1–9), Abraham's exodus in Egypt (12:10–20), Abraham and Lot separate (13:1–18), and so on. In order to observe the overall dynamic of the story, the scenes can be batched into *acts* (level 10). The scenes in Genesis 12–15 belong to an act that develops the motif of land, the scenes in Genesis 16–22 to an act developing the motif of seed. The thematic analysis of scenes and acts is often validated by other poetic devices such as key words, inclusios, and so forth (see below). For example, the act from Genesis 16–22 begins "Sarai . . . had borne [Abram] no children" (16:1) and draws toward a conclusion by noting, "Sarah . . . bore a son to Abraham" (21:2). A scene plot consists of incidents, and these in turn of dialogues and frames (levels 7–8). The ten *tôlēdôt* sections function as cycles in Genesis, marking the book's major divisions in tracing God's program of bringing the seed of the Serpent under the dominion of the elect seed of the woman. The meaning of the whole book (level 12) is discussed below ("Theme of Genesis and Biblical Theology").

Modern literary criticism has done much to uncover the techniques by which the skillful narrator of Genesis has masterfully woven this story. The writer of Genesis has obviously not related every event and detail of the beginning of history and the beginning of the people of God. Thankfully he did not try to produce such an unreadable and unimaginative report. Hexter explains, "The historical record which is all too exiguous is also paradoxically all too full. In order to make human character stand clear of the clutter of routing action . . . [the historian has to] practice the art of discerning and reporting the telling detail, the illuminating incident, the revelatory remark."⁵⁷ The narrator of Genesis has selected the particular stories of Genesis to explain what it means to be the people of God. He has told

⁵⁵T. P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense: Poetic Patterns in Proverbs 10–29* (JSOTSup 128; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 76.

⁵⁶See *IBHS*.

⁵⁷J. H. Hexter, *Doing History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 167–68.

them in such a masterful way that the heroes of faith emerge as literary icons inspiring the audience to emulate their faithful actions. The readers participate in the story, experiencing with the characters its message, challenge, and exhortation.

The studies of poetics and narrative criticism examine how the narrator has so effectively shaped a story and seek to uncover the layers of meaning within the text. Simplistically, poetics is the grammar of literature, the study of the techniques and devices an author uses to convey meaning in a text; narrative criticism is the application of poetics to narrative. With the tools of these studies the exegete can discern the narrator's evaluative point of view that governs the work as a whole. The reader can enter the narrator's, and thereby God's, world and life views.

Poetics

Adele Berlin defines the study of poetics as “an inductive science that seeks to abstract the general principles of literature from many different manifestations of those principles as they occur in actual literary texts.” Its essential aim is not “to elicit meaning of any given text” but rather “to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled.” Thus, “poetics is to literature as linguistics is to language.” In essence, poetics is the grammar of literature. We must first know *how* a text means before we can know *what* it means.⁵⁸

Just as the rules of grammar change from era to era and language to language, literary methods also change. The narrator's different social and historical setting from that of the contemporary audience creates gaps in the latter's knowledge and understanding of the author's intention, gaps that must be carefully bridged. The task of the Bible student is to discern the “rules” employed in a biblical text as evidenced by that text. This task necessarily involves a heuristic spiral. One approaches the text with ideas about its techniques and principles, which the text then proves or disproves. Thus begins the dialogue with the text that leads the careful listener to learn how the text communicates.

The use of poetics in interpreting the biblical text produces certain implications and expectations. One of the first things noted by literary critics is that biblical authors use words sparingly—each word counts. Therefore, the exegete's attitude should be that every feature in the text is there for a reason and needs to be explained.⁵⁹ So, for example, from this vantage the exegete is not primarily concerned with how the change of divine names in Genesis 1 and 2 may reflect different sources but with what function the

⁵⁸A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 15.

⁵⁹A. Bonchek, *Studying the Torah: A Guide to In-Depth Interpretation* (Northvale N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996), 15.

change has in the development of the story. As noted, the different names express different aspects of God's character and rule. In Genesis 1 *'ēlōhîm* (God) refers to God's transcendence over the world, while in Genesis 2–3 *yhwh* (LORD) speaks of God's immanence with his elect. When the narrator combines the two names, he makes a bold assertion that the Creator God is the Lord of Israel's history. Just as God ordered creation, he orders history. All is under God's sovereign control, guaranteeing that Israel's history will end in triumph, not in tragedy.

The recognition of the poetic features in the biblical text helps the reader to identify the narrator's interpretive lens. By determining where his emphasis, criticism, and approval lie and where they do not, we are given insight into the narrator's evaluative viewpoint. Identifying that evaluative viewpoint, his world and life view, is the goal of those who want to listen to and apply the text. Below is a sampling of some of the poetic devices frequently employed by the narrator of Genesis.

Key Word (Leitwort)

Martin Buber coined the term *Leitwort*, meaning "lead word" (referred to in this commentary and other literary works as "key word"). He identifies this lead or key word as "a word or word-root that is meaningfully repeated within a text, or a sequence of texts or a complex of texts; those who attend to these repetitions will find a meaning of the text revealed and clarified, or at any rate made more emphatic."⁶⁰ Such words provide focus, meaning, or emphasis in a text.⁶¹

So, for instance, the narrator plays with the word *šāyid* "game" in the story of Isaac. Genesis 25:28 literally reads "Isaac loved Esau because of *the game in his mouth*." This foreshadows Isaac's defining moment of failure in Genesis 27, when he seeks to bless Esau, not elect Jacob, because his moral taste has become so dulled by his sensual appetites. The narrator punctuates the tale of blessing in Genesis 27 with the words "game" (*šāyid*), repeated eight times, and "tasty food" (*maṭ'ammîm*), repeated six. Isaac is said to "love tasty food" by Rebekah, Isaac himself, and the narrator. The repetition makes the point apparent: Isaac's love for his sensual taste has distorted his spiritual taste (cf. 26:35).

Refrain

A refrain is a repetition of a phrase or sentence. In addition to emphasizing a point, it also helps to divide material. Although this literary technique

⁶⁰M. Buber, "Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in *Scripture and Translation*, ed. M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, trans. L. Rosenwald and E. Fox (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 114.

⁶¹Note: These key words may not always be apparent in the English versions. Good English style requires that the translator use different English words to render the same Hebrew word. Other than reading the text in Hebrew, a reader must rely on a more word-for-word translation than the NIV.

is most noticeable in poetry, it also operates in narrative. For example, the refrain “The account of the descendents of . . .” (*tôlêḏôṭ*) divides Genesis into its ten books tracing God’s new initiatives in salvation history.

Contrast

Writers use contrast when they associate or juxtapose things that are dissimilar or opposite. Bonchek writes, “It has been said that a sign of the creative individual is his ability to perceive the differences in similar things and the similarities in different things.”⁶² Biblical writers masterfully contrast similar scenes and events. Alter uses the term “type scene” to refer to a frequently repeated scene. The similarities of such scenes allow the narrator to highlight both the similarities and differences. One notable type scene is “meeting a bride at a well.” The contrast between the meeting of Abraham’s prayerful servant and Rebekah (Gen. 24) and the meeting of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 29:1–12) highlights the lack of prayerfulness and spiritual astuteness in Jacob’s life. Whereas Abraham’s servant begins and ends his meeting with prayer and judges Rebekah on her hospitality, Jacob never prays at the well but instead shows off his brute strength to lift the well stone. His assessment of Rachel is based solely on her beauty.

Comparison

Comparison is an association or juxtaposition of things that are alike or similar. Here again we see the narrator’s skillful use of similar scenes and events. The similar stories of the jeopardizing of the matriarch by Abraham and Isaac highlight important comparisons between father and son. On different occasions both father and son act duplicitously and their wives are taken into the harems of foreign kings, only to be protected by God’s intervention. Just as Sarah is protected in Abimelech’s harem, Rebekah is protected. Just as the Philistine king makes a treaty with Abraham at Beer-sheba, a Philistine king makes a treaty at Beersheba with Isaac. The comparison demonstrates that Isaac has the same blessing as his father.

Logic and the Law of Reciprocity

The narrator brings order to the text and connects events and scenes through cause and effect. Jacob deceives Isaac through the latter’s blindness of sight (Gen. 27:18–24). Laban deceives Jacob through the “blindness” of night (29:25). The story of Joseph’s being sold into slavery, where Judah deceives his father by telling him to “recognize” the bloody tunic (37:32–33), is followed by the story of Tamar’s deception of Judah and her demand to “recognize” your staff (38:25). A sense of poetic justice often governs the narratives.

⁶²Bonchek, *Studying*, 59.

Climax/Intensification

Texts commonly reflect escalating action, a sense of movement from the lesser to the greater. This is evident in the first six days of creation in Genesis 1. These days are divided into two triads arranged by intensification. Both vegetation and humanity, symbolizing the fertility of life, were considered pinnacles of creation in the ancient Near East. The first triad ends climactically with the creation of vegetation; the second, the creation of humanity.

Patterns⁶³

The narrator uses structural patterns in connection with the elements in all twelve levels of signification. Of the many patterns used by biblical writers, the most common in Genesis are alternating (also called symmetrical), concentric, and chiasmic. Examples of the alternating and concentric patterns are seen above in the structure of the *tôlêdôt* cycles. So, for instance, the elements in the Primeval History are set out in an alternating structure, the Abraham cycle in a concentric pattern. With regard to the symmetrical pattern, Walsh explains, "Parallel patterns tend to invite comparison of the parallel sequences and of the individual parallel elements. Comparison often reveals progression, but not necessarily opposition or contrast, between the parallel components."⁶⁴ In the concentric pattern, the first series of elements usually pertain to the plot's rising tension or action, and the second series to its resolution or falling action. The chiasmic pattern is similar to the concentric, but unlike the concentric it has a single central element, the turning point or "pivot." Sometimes the respective elements on either side of the pivot contrast. Pratt illustrates the turning-point pattern from Genesis 15:7–21.⁶⁵

- A Problem: Abraham's request regarding promised land of Canaanites (15:7–8)
- B Rising action: Covenant ceremony is begun (15:9–11)
- C Pivot: Abraham receives promise in a dream (15:12–16)
- B' Falling action: covenant ceremony is completed (15:17)
- A' Resolution: God states covenant to give Abraham the land of Canaanites (15:18–21)

In all three patterns there is a delightful sense of balance in the arrangement of the elements and a sense of the Sovereign's order in history.

Janus

Janus, named from the Roman god of doorways with one head and two faces looking in opposite directions, is a term applied to a literary unit that

⁶³For a more detailed and helpful analysis see R. L. Pratt Jr., *He Gave Us Stories* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990), 179–230.

⁶⁴Walsh, *1 Kings*, xiv.

⁶⁵Adopted from Pratt, *He Gave*, 201.

looks back and forth to unite the units before and after.⁶⁶ The transition passages at the end of each *tôlêdôt* (e.g., 4:25–26; 6:1–8; 9:18–29, etc.) are janus sections.

Generalization and Particularization

Generally a narrative moves toward explication that becomes either more specific or more comprehensive. The movement of the first four chapters of Genesis is an example of particularization. Whereas the prologue concerns creation on a cosmic level, Book 1 focuses on the first human beings.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing refers to the inclusion of material in one part of the narrative that serves primarily to prepare the reader for what is still to come. As noted before, the mention of Isaac's taste for wild game, at the time a seemingly gratuitous comment, is actually a foreshadowing of Isaac's failure to exercise divine wisdom in blessing his boys.

Summarization

A summarization is a synopsis or abridgment of material that is treated more fully elsewhere. For example, Gen. 2:1, "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array," is a summarization of the entire preceding chapter.

Inclusio

Inclusio refers to a repetition of features at the beginning and the end of a unit. An inclusio may function to frame a unit, to stabilize the enclosed material, to emphasize by repetition, or to establish a nexus with the intervening material for rhetorical effect. In Genesis 16, the narrator uses the terms "Abram," "Hagar," and the verb "to bear" to form an inclusio around the scene, "Hagar and Ishmael Rejected" (Book 6, Act 2, Scene 1).

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar" (16:1).

"Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael" (16:16).

This repetition frames the story and emphasizes Sarah's barrenness, particularly in light of her failed attempt to engineer her own solution. As noted above, *Abram/Abraham*, *Sarai/Sarah* and *bore* also form an inclusio around the entire act.

Intercalation

Intercalation is the insertion of one literary unit into the midst of another. For example, as mentioned above, by completing 5:32 in 9:18 the third

⁶⁶January, which looks back to the old year and ahead to the new, takes its name from this god.

tôlêḏôṭ, “The account of the line of Noah’s line,” is intercalated into the second so that the third might pertain to both Noah and his sons.

Irony

Irony, which broadly refers to incongruity, has many forms. Dramatic irony—when the reader and/or certain characters are aware of important elements unknown to other characters—often reduces the ignorant person to a joke. A classic example is blind Isaac blessing Jacob disguised as Esau, thus establishing God’s purpose and defeating the patriarch’s interest. Lot is an especially hapless figure of irony. Wanting wealth and comfort, he chooses the seemingly glamorous city Sodom and ends up in poverty and incest in a cave.

Narrative Theology

Definition and Hermeneutics

Narrative theology is, among other things, a specific application of “poetics” to narrative. Narrative is a representational form of art. Narrative criticism is an attempt to observe, analyze, and systematically classify how narratives represent their objects, how they tell their stories to communicate meaning. A narrative represents character(s) and event(s), often in distinct settings, whose interaction constitutes plot. Fewell and Gunn note, “Narrative communicates meaning through the imitation of human life, the temporal ordering of human speech and action. It constructs a verbal world that centers on human characters, their relations, desires, and actions in time.”⁶⁷

Narrative criticism distinguishes between story (i.e., the brute facts) and discourse (i.e., the artistic representation of the facts). “Story,” Powell explains, “refers to the content of the narrative, what the narrative is about.”⁶⁸ Behind the narrative lie the actual or imagined characters and events that the narrative seeks to portray. According to Powell, “Discourse refers to the rhetoric of the narrative, how the story is told. Stories concerning the same basic events, characters, and settings can be told in ways that produce very different narratives.”⁶⁹ Discourse is similar to fiction. Both the historian and fiction writer generate a mood stance, such as reflection, exploration, edification, celebration, cathartic cleansing, and/or sheer delight. The biblical historical books are both history and literature.

Through his discourse the narrator leads his audience, God’s universal covenant community, to absorb his world and life views. He motivates the audience to surrender its own thought system and life forms in order to enter God’s world and to be carried along by the flow of his interpretative report.

⁶⁷D. N. Fewell and D. Gunn. “Narrative, Hebrew,” *ABD*, 4:1023.

⁶⁸Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 23.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

By inviting the readers to become insiders, the narrator teaches implicitly more than explicitly; he catches readers off guard and exposes them to thoughts and worldviews that might otherwise be met with hostility. Because personhood emerges as life unfolds, the possibility of grasping personal identity arises more readily by seeing another's life whole and clear. The biographies of Genesis are historical "metaphors," often inspiring literary "icons," enabling the reader to compare and construct his or her own life. Moreover, God may be comprehended more readily in his involvement in a person's life than in the nontemporal, abstract theological categories of a systematic theology.

Evaluative Viewpoint

Before analyzing the agencies and means by which the narrator communicates his world and life views, let us remember that his narrative operates on two levels: the historical facts of the story and the narrator's representation of the facts, the discourse. As a result there emerges four evaluative points of view. On the factual level, there is God's viewpoint versus those of the human characters. On the discourse level there are the narrator's viewpoint and that of his audience whom he tries to win over to his point of view. In truth, however, the narrator has the final word. We only know of God's viewpoint and that of the characters within the story to the extent that the narrator records them, and we may assume that he selects and expresses their words in such a way that he communicates his point of view. All contributes to the narrator's intention to win his implied audience over to his inspired viewpoint. Ultimately, however, he is expressing God's viewpoint for he is God's inspired prophet-historian.

Listed below are some of the narrative techniques employed in Genesis to provide insight into the inspired narrator's evaluative viewpoint.

Through Agents and Direct Statement

The narrator communicates a point of view through many agencies and means, the most common of which are delineated below.

God's point of view. When God speaks in the biblical narrative, it is always reliable. At the beginning of Genesis, God communicates mostly in theophany; later to the patriarchs, mostly in visions and dreams; at the end, through providence. Whereas theophany is unambiguous, vision, dreams, and especially providence are less clear. The narrator expresses God's point of view in a variety of ways:

- by direct quote (see Gen. 2:18; 7:1; 22:15–18)
- by the narrator's direct statements about God (see 6:6, 8; 13:13)
- by providence and actions. Although providence is ambiguous, God's providential ordering of the affairs of his people does provide insight into his evaluative viewpoint

Direct statement of narrator's point of view. The narrator's viewpoint is also reliable because he speaks as an inspired spokesperson for God. The audience knows the events and characters of the Bible only as the narrator represents them. It sees and hears only through the narrator's eyes and ears. He is an a priori category constituting the sole means of knowing the story. The covenant community hears and accepts his inspiration; unfortunately, those outside the community sometimes deconstruct his interpretation in order to empower their own world and life views in place of his. The narrator is usually hidden in the story but occasionally steps outside of it to address the audience directly. Thus, in Gen. 16:6 the narrator judges Sarah's actions against Hagar in the direct statement, "Sarah mistreated Hagar." Regarding Esau's sale of his birthright, the narrator says, "Esau despised his birthright" (25:34b). Sometimes he uses retrospects: "So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived" (19:29). Other times he uses prospects: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife" (2:24).

Indirect statement of narrator's point of view. Sometimes the characters within the story, the actual participants in the narrative, express the narrative's evaluative viewpoint.

- Hero's words: The main character may declare a truth about God. So Jacob, who prior to this point rarely spoke of God, declares, "the God of my father has been with me" (31:5).
- Agent's words: Even one who is not the hero of the narrative may confirm a viewpoint expressed by the narrator. For example, Abimelech says to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do" (21:22).

Without confirmation by other means, it is sometimes difficult to determine if the participant is reflecting the narrator's viewpoint, for even the great heroes of faith are flawed.

Through Poetics and Other Techniques

The narrator also communicates an evaluation of the events, characters, and settings that constitute his discourse in several other ways besides the poetic techniques analyzed above.

Hints of style. The narrator's choice of vocabulary is often a subtle but important clue to his viewpoint. The subtle but crucial difference between Abel's sacrificial gift of "fat portions from some of the *firstborn*" and Cain's gift of "*some of the fruits of the soil*" indicts Cain's tokenism and explains why his gift was unacceptable (Gen. 4:3–5).

Gaps. A *gap* is an intentional omission, whereas a *blank* is an inconsequential omission. The gap of the expected book entitled the *tôlêḏôṭ* of Abraham (i.e., Isaac's narrative) is glaring (compare the *tôlêḏôṭ* of Terah [Abraham's

narrative], the *tôlêḏôṭ* of Isaac [Jacob's narrative], and the *tôlêḏôṭ* of Jacob [Joseph and Judah's narrative]). This obviously intentional gap stands as an implicit judgment against the miracle child who in his later years gives himself over to sensual pleasures at the expense of spiritual discernment.

Anachrony. With this textual feature the narrator tells the story out of order or withholds information, revealing it later for dramatic effect. By this method the narrator reveals the meaning of place and temple in the story of Jacob's Bethel dream (Gen. 28:10–22). At the story's beginning the narrator reports that Jacob arrived at "a certain place," essentially calling it a "no-place." But this no-place becomes the axis of heaven and earth, God's presence transforming it into a place of meaning. At the end of the story (28:19), the narrator anachronistically identifies this place as Luz, a thriving Canaanite city. By this anachrony the narrator suggests that Luz has to be emptied of its Canaanite grandeur and be reduced to a no-place before it can be seen as God's house.⁷⁰

Through Characterization

The narrator employs a variety of techniques to help the reader evaluate a character, whether that character is God, a supernatural being, or a human being.

Outer description. Biblical narrative rarely describes someone's appearance. Consequently, when it does it has a purpose, usually serving the plot. Esau is described as "hairy," Jacob as smooth. These descriptions explain the goatskin in Jacob's ruse to steal the blessing.

Direct characterization. In rare occasions the narrator breaks the frame to make his evaluation of a character unambiguous. Thus in a direct statement he says, "The serpent was more crafty," "Noah was a righteous man," and so forth.

Revelation of a character's thoughts. The narrator's disclosure of Esau's thoughts (27:41) reveals the extent of his hatred for Jacob and the covenant family (see also Gen. 8:21; 18:17; 37:34). The Lord gave Leah children because he "saw" that she was not loved (29:31), and years later "God remembered Rachel . . . and opened her womb" (30:22).

Direct speech. Usually the narrator relies on the human character's direct speech for portrayal. For example, Adam's only words prior to the Fall are words about his wife: she is my equal. His speech indicates the robust solidarity he feels toward his wife before sin hinders their relationship (see also Gen. 17:17; 30:2; 31:31). Jacob confesses to the Lord, "I am unworthy" (32:10), and "I am afraid" (32:11).

Action. Noah's tender care of the dove returning to the ark (Gen. 8:9) reveals him to be a gentle conservationist, living out God's love for creation.

⁷⁰J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2d ed. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 69.

Speech and actions. Upon his return from the field, famished Esau pleads, “Red stuff, red stuff!” (lit., 25:30). Then the narrator encapsulates his actions, “He ate and drank, and then got up and left” (25:34). In other words, Esau is man of immediacy and reaction rather than reflection and wisdom.

Contrast. In some cases character is revealed by contrasting one person with another. For example, Jacob is contrasted with Esau. Despite all his flaws, Jacob values the birthright. Esau does not.

Naming. Often the name or descriptive phrase used for a character either identifies the narrator’s perspective on the person or reveals something about the speaker. Thus the weak “Jacob” is later renamed “Israel” to reveal his new strength. Bonchek points out the shifting names for Dinah in Gen. 34:1–4. In 34:1, when she goes out to visit the women of the land, she is called “the daughter [of] Leah.” In 34:2, when she is treated as an object and raped, she is referred to simply as “her,” “her,” “her.” In 34:3, when Shechem wants to marry Dinah, she is called “the daughter of Jacob”; when he wants to woo her, “a young woman” (lit.). In 34:4 when Shechem speaks to his father about her, he refers to her as “child” (lit.).

Through Plot

The plot structure typically consists of an exposition or introduction, a rising tension, a climax or peaking of the tension, and a resolution and denouement. Biblical narratives often begin with exposition, preparing the narrative. Bar-Efrat explains: “The situation at the beginning of the action is presented in what is usually called the exposition. This serves as an introduction to the action described in the narrative, supplying the background information, introducing the characters, informing us of their names, traits, physical appearance, state in life, and the relations obtaining among them, and providing the other details needed for understanding the story.”⁷¹ It may also set forth the problem or tension. The story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22) opens with two sentences of exposition, which not only establish the setting but also explain that this unusual scene is directed by God’s desire to test Abraham.

The plot tension is often structured by a pattern such as the ones highlighted in poetic techniques above and/or by summarization and particularization. The protagonist, the leading character (whether good or bad), is displayed and developed in the plot’s rising tension usually in conflict with the antagonist, the leading character arrayed against him or her. Often God’s sublime character is displayed in the denouement: he keeps his promises, rewards the faithful, punishes the evildoer, graciously overlooks the foibles of his people, and so. The evaluative viewpoint is often seen in how the story turns out.

⁷¹S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Bible and Literature Series 17; JSOTSup 70; Sheffield: Almond/JSOT Press, 1989), 111.

Through Scenic Depiction

Sometimes the description of the scene correlates with a character's situation and provides a clue to the narrator's perspective. For example, the setting sun marks the beginning of Jacob's flight to Laban as he enters a dark period of testing (Gen. 28:10–11). At the end of those twenty long years, Jacob limps toward home as the sun rises above (32:31).

Through Symbols

The narrator may use symbols and imagery to depict a character's state. In the life of Jacob, stones, such as the pillow-cum-pillar of Bethel (Gen. 28), mark significant moments. The story of Jacob features stones, that of Joseph features robes. Such palpable objects symbolize something of a character's social and/or spiritual situation.

Law of Parsimony

As the careful exegete approaches the text, one principle will guide him or her well: the law of parsimony, which states that the simple, yet most comprehensive, interpretation is preferred over the complex and circumscribed. Bonchek remarks, "An interpretation that resolves several difficulties in the text in one fell swoop is not only more elegant, it has the ring of truth." For instance, Rashi and Ibn Ezra both suggest explanations for why Joseph imprisons Simeon in Gen. 42:24. Citing Genesis 34, where Simeon and Levi massacre Hamor, Shechem, and their city, Rashi argues that they have a violent nature and thus "it was Joseph's intention to separate him from Levi, lest the two of them conspire to kill him." However, based on Reuben's speech in 42:22–23, Ibn Ezra reasons that Joseph has probably just learned that Reuben was not responsible for his enslavement and that now Joseph assumes that the next eldest Simeon must be responsible. In contrast to Rashi's explanation, which requires leaps and unstated allusions to much earlier material, Ibn Ezra's explanation fulfills the law of parsimony for its simplicity, rationality, and its ability to make sense of the connection in verses 22–24.⁷²

THEME OF GENESIS AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY⁷³ —————

Introduction: The Kingdom of God

The theme of Genesis and its subordinate motifs are best understood in light of the whole Bible. So, one must ask, what is the entirety of the Bible all about?

⁷²Bonchek, *Studying*, 16.

⁷³This section of the introduction has been adapted from the essay by B. K. Waltke in "The Kingdom of God in Biblical Theology," *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology*, ed. D. W. Baker. (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

The kingdom of God is a central tenet in the teachings of the Lord Jesus and plays an important role in Paul's teaching. Although the expression "kingdom of God" never occurs in the Old Testament and its equivalents are relatively rare and late,⁷⁴ the concept informs the whole. The Primary History, which traces Israel's history from the creation of the world (Gen. 1) to the fall of Israel (2 Kings 25), is all about what the New Testament calls "the kingdom of God."

Though composed of many earlier blocks of writings, the Primary History in its final form consists of two great collections. The Pentateuch (Genesis–Deuteronomy) traces the history of Israel from the creation of the cosmos to Israel's being perched on the threshold of entering the Promised Land. The so-called Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–Kings)⁷⁵ continues that history from Israel's entrance into the land to its exile from it. The lynch pin of the Primary History, binding together these two great histories, is the book of Deuteronomy. Paradoxically, Deuteronomy is both the capstone of the Pentateuch and the foundation stone of the Deuteronomistic History. This is so because the core of the original book of Deuteronomy is Moses' three addresses to Israel, his song about Israel's future course of history, and his blessings on the tribes of Israel. To these the Deuteronomist during the Exile added fifty-six verses in order to incorporate the core within the narrative of his so-called Deuteronomistic History. Through this double authorship it becomes the janus or transition book that binds together the two great documents of the Primary History.

This history is the backbone of the Old Testament. The superscriptions of the prophetic books, of the Psalms, and of Proverbs are set within the context of this history. Just as in the case of other heuristic theological schemes, such as the Trinity, it may be possible to identify a theme in the Old Testament, such as the kingdom of God, even though the term itself is not used.

Paul Drake draws two conclusions about Jesus' use of the phrase. First, it has a historical dimension: "The kingdom comes at the end of time as the culmination of everything that has happened from the creation until now."⁷⁶ Second, this eschatological reality has a legal dimension. God exercises the authority of a sovereign in a realm where his subjects obey his commands. Citing the Lord's Prayer, Drake defends the conclusion "that the synoptic tradition understands the kingdom of God as the establishment of God's sovereignty over the human race."⁷⁷ The Matthean version reads, "your king-

⁷⁴Psalms 22:29 [Eng. 28]; 103:19; 145:11–13 [4x]; Obad. 21; Dan. 2:44; 3:33 [Eng. 4:3]; 4:31 [Eng. 34]; 6:27 [Eng. 26]; 7:14, 18, 27; 1 Chron. 17:14; 28:5; 29:11; 2 Chron. 13:8.

⁷⁵Joshua 1 is a pastiche of Deuteronomy; Judg. 2:6 repeats Josh. 24:28, but in a chiasmic structure bringing closure; 1 Samuel 8 brings closure to the period of the judges; and 1 Kings 1–2 brings the so-called "succession narrative" begun in 2 Samuel 9 to closure. We need here only to observe this unity, not debate how it came to be.

⁷⁶P. Drake, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," in *The Kingdom of God in 20th Century Interpretation*, ed. W. Willis (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1987), 67–79.

⁷⁷Drake, "Kingdom," 71.

dom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:10–11). The Lukan version, however, reads, "your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread" (Luke 11:2), lacking the petition, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Matthew probably added "your will be done" to explicate the petition for the coming of the kingdom.⁷⁸ Drake, however, fails to differentiate adequately between God's universal kingdom and the particular kingdom in view in the Lord's Prayer. By the former, theologians mean God's activity in exercising his sovereignty over all things, even giving the nations their pagan deities (Deut. 4:19). By the latter, Jesus Christ meant God's activity in establishing a realm in which his subjects obey *ex animo* his law.

In the Primary History, God's kingdom mostly takes the shape of national Israel, a political state with geospatial boundaries in contradistinction to other nations. The principal concern of the Primary History is the irruption (i.e., the breaking in from without), not eruption (i.e., the breaking out from within), of God's righteous kingdom through the political state of Israel.

The Call of Abraham (12:1 – 3): The Key to the Primary History

D. J. A. Clines demonstrates that the episode recounting God's call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) expresses tersely and succinctly the theme of the Pentateuch.⁷⁹ In truth, it also presents the scheme for understanding the Primary History. God's seven promises to Abraham pertain to three expanding horizons, from God's call to Abraham to disassociate himself from his family (12:1), to God's making him into a nation of blessing (12:2), to God's blessing the whole earth through him (12:3). On the part of Abraham and his nation, they bless the earth only to the extent that they submit themselves to God's moral law. Elsewhere God says, "For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18:19). The nations, on their part, qualify themselves for this blessing by recognizing that Abraham and his obedient nation are possessed of God's power to mediate abundant and effective living and then by praying for God's blessing upon Abraham and his nation.

In order to unpack this idea that God is establishing his moral rule over the earth through national Israel, it is helpful to analyze it into its four constituent motifs. A nation consists of a common people, normally sharing a common land, submissive to a common law, and led by a common ruler. The book of Genesis is concerned principally in identifying both the people who submit to God's commands and the land that sustains them. The rest of the

⁷⁸R. Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 73–74.

⁷⁹D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

Pentateuch focuses mainly on God's law, while the Deuteronomistic history (especially, Joshua–Kings) develops the theme of the nation's ruler.

First Motif: The Seed

Genesis sometimes uses the metaphor of "seed" for human offspring. Fundamental to that metaphor is the notion of reproduction "after its kind." To oversimplify the matter, just as the seed of plants and trees produce according to their kind (Gen. 1:11–12), so human seed grows according to the type of person that produces the seed. In the beginning God creates humanity in his image, that is, as his regents to represent his rule on earth. In the temple-garden of Eden his first word to humanity is a command. They must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That famous tree symbolizes the ability to discern good (i.e., what advances life) and evil (i.e., what hinders life). Such knowledge belongs to God alone because, as Agur inferentially argues in Prov. 30:1–6, one must know comprehensively in order to speak absolutely about what is good and bad.

However, finite humanity in Adam and Eve refuses to accept this limitation and transgresses the established boundary. Tempted by Satan to doubt God's goodness and the truth of his word, with an illicit reach of unbelief and defiance against God's rule they eat the forbidden fruit, making themselves their own lawmakers apart from God. As God has threatened, they become alienated from God and from one another. In response to their rebellion in setting up a rival kingdom, the gracious Sovereign intervenes by changing Eve's religious affections so that she will love God and submit to his rule and hate Satan who defies it. Addressing Satan, God says, "*I will* put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and hers" (Gen. 3:15). From then on humanity is divided broadly into two spiritual races, though both physically reproduce Adam and Eve. The seed of the woman as seen in Abel reproduces her love for God, and the seed of the Serpent as seen in Cain reproduces his spiritual enmity against God.

The book of Genesis is all about this seed of the woman. It is structured by means of linear genealogies to trace this holy seed from Adam and Eve to the twelve tribes of Israel (see "Excursus: Genesis Genealogies"). A decisive development in this theme occurs in God's call of Abraham. God elects Abraham and his offspring who reproduce his faith to represent God's moral rule and to mediate God's blessing to all the tribes and nations of the earth. In a binding covenant God obligates himself to make Abraham and his circumcised seed the unique representatives of his blessed rule. His promise to make them as numerous as the stars of heaven is fulfilled at the time of Israel's conquest of the Holy Land (Gen. 15:5; Deut. 1:10). God's covenant with faithful Abraham in Genesis 17 explicates in a fresh way the Lord's promise in Gen. 12:3 to bless all nations through Abraham's offspring. Now

God declares, “I am going to make you a father of many nations . . . and kings will come from you” (lit., Gen. 17:5–6).

God’s promise to make Abraham a father of many nations should be understood, on the one hand, in a purely biological sense. Through Hagar, Abraham physically “begets” the Ishmaelites (see 17:20; 21:13; 25:12–18); through Keturah, the Midianites, among others (25:1–4); and through Isaac and Rebekah, the Edomites (see 25:23; 36:1–43). This interpretation is validated by the genealogies of Keturah (25:1–4), Ishmael (Book 7, Gen. 25:12–18), and Edom (Book 9, Gen. 36). On the other hand, the promise should also be understood as a reference to the nations that reproduce his faith; this cannot be said of the Ishmaelites, the Edomites, or the descendants of Keturah. Significantly, whereas God says that kings will come from Abraham’s loins, God does not say that of the nations Abraham will father. The psalmist supports this interpretation. He anticipates the nations becoming part of the people of God by rebirth: “I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me—Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush—and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’ . . . The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born in Zion’ ” (Ps. 87:4–6).

Turning to the New Testament, Jesus essentially severs the link between the people of God and Abraham’s physical offspring. At the end of Matthew our Lord asserts his authority over all nations and commissions his disciples, not old Israel, to make disciples of the nations, teaching them to obey everything he had commanded them (Matt. 28:18–20). Similarly, Mark records a scene where Jesus’ physical mother and brothers symbolically stand outside the house where he is teaching. To those seated in the circle around him he asks, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking at this same group of people he declares, “Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:33–35). In Luke, Jesus forecasts through the parable of the tenants that God will take the vineyard (i.e., the right to be the people chosen to mediate his moral rule) away from Israel and give it to the Gentiles (Luke 20:9–19). In John Jesus speaks of having other sheep (i.e., the Gentiles) who “are not of this sheep pen” (i.e., physical Israel, [John 10:16]).

Paul and Barnabas fulfill what Jesus predicts. Abraham’s physical offspring had the first opportunity to represent God’s rule and mediate the blessing (Acts 3:25), but when the Jews, for the most part, reject the gospel, Paul turns away from them to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 18:6). By the second century the church was composed almost entirely of Gentiles. In Galatians, Paul refers to the seed God covenanted to give Abraham as finding fulfillment both uniquely in Jesus Christ and collectively in all, Jew and Gentile alike, baptized into Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:15–29). In Romans, Paul interprets God’s promise to make Abraham a father of many nations in the sense that they reproduce his faith. The church at Rome undoubtedly had representatives

from many nations at that center of the Roman Empire. To them the apostle writes, “the promise . . . [is] guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations’” (Rom. 4:16–17). In Rom. 16:20 the apostle probably identifies the promised seed of the woman with the church at Rome, which represents the nations subject to his rule: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” However, in that letter Paul also teaches that God is not yet finished with Abraham’s physical progeny. God always retains a remnant among them who also reproduce Abraham’s faith. Indeed, the apostle implies that they may again become the dominant group among the people of God (Rom. 11). Finally, using language reminiscent of Gen. 15:6, Rev. 7:9 envisions “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, and people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb,” praising God.

In sum, under the old covenant Abraham’s spiritual seed is mostly, but not exclusively, reproduced in Abraham’s physical offspring. Under the new covenant his spiritual seed is reproduced mostly, but not exclusively, among the Gentiles.

Second Motif: The Land

When God creates the world, he gathers the primeval waters to let dry land appear, and in it he causes all kinds of vegetation to grow. In this way he provides both space for the representatives of his rule to live and food to sustain them. More particularly, he places his earthly rulers in a garden, that is, in an enclosed, protected area where the flora flourishes. This garden represents unique territorial space in the created order where God intends human beings to enjoy bliss and harmony with him, one another, the animals, and the land. God is uniquely present in this temple-garden, but humanity loses this temple when it sets up its rival kingdom. Later, when God calls Abraham to become a great nation, he promises to give Abraham’s offspring the land of the defiled Canaanites.

Just as God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 explicates the promise in Gen. 12:3 to make Abraham and his seed a blessing to the nations, so his covenant with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 15) explicates his promise in 12:2 to make him into a great nation. God reckons Abraham’s faith in the Lord’s promise to give him innumerable offspring as qualifying Abraham to become the recipient of an irrevocable land grant, idealized as extending from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:6–19). In this land flowing with milk and honey, his people will be protected and sustained. This land promise is fulfilled progressively several times but never consummated. God initially fulfills the promise through Joshua (Josh. 21:43–45), but not completely (Josh. 13:1–7); through David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:20–25; Neh. 9:8), but still not completely (see Ps. 95:11; Heb. 4:6–8; 11:39–40).

In the New Testament the land theme undergoes a paradigm shift similar to that of the seed theme. As the physical aspect of the seed was mostly dropped in favor of the spiritual, so also the physical aspect of land is downplayed in favor of its spiritual significance. The paradigm shift can be inferred from the fact that the term *land*, the fourth most frequent word in the Old Testament, is never used in the New Testament with reference to Canaan. Indeed, the Old Testament's use of the term *land* with reference to Canaan is resignified to encompass the whole earth in Matt. 5:5 and Rom. 4:13.⁸⁰ Neither Christ nor his apostles ever teach that dispersed ethnic Israel will again return to Canaan.⁸¹ Rather, for them *Canaan* seems to function as a type of the Christian's life in Christ, both from a historical or chronological perspective and from a conceptual perspective. As Wright explains, "According to Hebrews [13:14], the only thing which we do not have is an earthly, territorial city."⁸²

Regarding the historical aspect, one notes a number of important parallels between Israel and the church and their relationship to the "land." (1) Israel is saved from slavery and death in Egypt under the tyranny of Pharaoh; the church is saved out of the slavery of sin and death in the world under Satan. (2) Israel is delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb and by the wind at the Red Sea; the church is delivered by Christ the Passover Lamb and by the Spirit (Acts 2; 2 Cor. 5:17). (3) Israel is baptized with Moses in the sea and feeds on manna on its pilgrimage to the land; the church is baptized in Christ through water and feeds upon Christ the true manna from heaven (John 6; 1 Cor. 10:1–4). (4) Israel is tested in the wilderness before inheriting the land; the church suffers in its wilderness on the way to the celestial city where Christ is the light. (5) Israel finally enters the land, but they will not enter its antitype without the church (Heb. 11:39–40).

Significant parallels between the two "lands" also exist on the conceptual level: (1) both are a divine gift (Gen. 15:7, 18; Deut. 1:8; Rom. 6:23); (2) both are entered by faith alone (Num. 14:26–45; Josh. 7; John 3:16); (3) both are an inheritance (Deut. 4:20; Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:14);⁸³ (4) both uniquely offer blessed rest and security (Ex. 23:20–31; Deut. 11:12; 12:9–10; 28:1–14; Matt. 11:28; John 1:51; 14:9; Heb. 4:2–3); (5) both offer God's unique presence; (6) both demand persevering faith (Deut. 28:15–19; Heb. 6; 10); (6) both have an already-but-not-yet quality (see Heb. 11:39–40; Rev 21:1–22:6).

⁸⁰In the latter case, Paul changes the *eres*: (LXX: *gē*) of Gen. 12:1 to *kosmos*, meaning "whole world."

⁸¹See W. M. Blanchard, "Changing Hermeneutical Perspectives on 'The Land,'" Ph.D. dissertation Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1986), 38.

⁸²C. J. H. Wright, "A Christian Approach to OT Prophecy concerning Israel," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purpose of God*, ed. P. W. L. Walker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 18–19.

⁸³See the discussion on fellowship in C. J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of the Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1983).

Garrett eloquently develops “alienation” as a primary theme of Genesis.⁸⁴ Sinful Adam is expelled from the garden, and the depraved human race becomes scattered and dispersed into warring nations. Abraham must separate himself from his family, and he and his descendants live as sojourners in Canaan. Jacob is an alien wherever he goes, alienated as he is from his brother in Edom and from his Aramean uncle. Later, because of the violence of his sons, he becomes a stench in the land (Gen. 34:30). Joseph is ever an alien. His story begins with his brothers hating him and selling him as a slave into Egypt, where he is a man without rights. Says Garrett, “When Joseph dies, his body lies strangely out of place in a coffin in Egypt.”⁸⁵

Garrett thinks that the promises of God only mitigate this theme of estrangement and homelessness. In fact, however, God’s promise to establish his kingdom through his grace that overcomes human sin is the governing theme of Genesis. God promises a seed that will destroy the Serpent, entailing that through it humanity will regain the Paradise it lost. Abraham is sent to bless the alienated nations. The narrator develops the cycles of Abraham, Jacob, and his sons in a concentric pattern to teach that true Israel strives and prevails (see “Structure and Content” above). The seed is born and raised from the dead, and Sarah is buried in the land as an anchor that holds Israel’s future. Prayerless Jacob is in exile in Paddan Aram, but he returns as a prayerful saint with his sons, all twelve, the biblical number denoting government. The book ends with Israel in Egypt but with the promise that Joseph’s bones will be carried back to the Promised Land. Thus, although alienation lurks on every page, God’s resolve to establish his kingdom victoriously marches through the book.

Third Motif: God’s Rule

If Genesis presents God as making an irrevocable covenant with the patriarchs to make of them a nation to be a light to the Gentiles, Exodus–Deuteronomy represent Israel as accepting God’s covenant or laws to become that light to the nations. In connection with transforming the twelve tribes of Israel into a nation, God gives the people a covenant setting forth in detail their religious and ethical obligations. Not surprisingly, in that context Israel for the first time calls God “King” (Deut. 33:3–5; cf. Ex. 15:18; Num. 23:21) and God refers to Israel as “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). All Israel is a priesthood (i.e., separated as holy to mediate between God and the nations) by virtue of its obedience to God’s covenant.

Although the motif of God’s rule is not as dominant in Genesis as in Exodus–Deuteronomy, Genesis does make important contributions to it. First,

⁸⁴Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 233–35.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 234.

prior to God's mediation of his laws to Israel through Moses, God makes known his laws through the general revelation of conscience (and occasionally through special revelations such as theophanies and visions), showing that through it God rules all people (see Gen. 4:7; 6:9; Rom. 2:1–12). Second, Genesis also teaches that, apart from God's grace, humanity on its own, even in the ideal environment, cannot and will not submit itself to God's law (Gen. 3:6; 8:21). Third, Abraham by faith keeps even the Mosaic law (Gen. 15:6; 18:19; 26:5), since his faith is a gift of God that entails regeneration (3:15; Eph. 2:8–9). In short, Abraham participates in the provisions of the new covenant before God administers his kingdom through that means of grace. Apart from that gracious enabling, natural Israel cannot and will not keep the law (Deut. 31:29; Josh. 24:19–27).

The old Mosaic covenant threatens the nation with exile, should they break their covenant obligations. Eventually the longsuffering God sends disobedient Israel into exile, but in that connection he promises to make a new covenant with them. The new covenant does not replace the eternal substance of the Mosaic law as expressed in the Ten Commandments and summarized by Jesus in terms of love for God and for one's neighbor. Rather, it replaces its mode of administration. Among many differences between the two styles of administration, suffice it to note here that the old covenant was effected through the blood of animals, the new through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. The old covenant was written on rock and copied in ink, while the new is written on the heart by the Spirit (Jer. 31:33–34; 2 Cor. 3:3). Finally, Israel obligated itself to keep the old covenant, but God obligates himself to keep the new (Heb. 8:6).

In sum, God now reckons the church, because it is baptized into Jesus Christ, who is the true Judah and Israel, as the recipients of the new covenant (cf. Heb. 8). Thus Peter says to a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:9–10). In a similar vein, Paul calls the church "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). With respect to the third motif, one must conclude that Christ administers this "nation" (i.e., the church) by means of the new covenant.

Fourth Motif: The Ruler

Prior to the establishment of the monarchy as recorded in Samuel, the Primary History regards God as the sole ruler of his kingdom. When the people ask for a king, the Lord regards it as a rejection of his rule over them as their king (1 Sam. 8:6–8). Nevertheless, with the institution of kingship in the days of Saul, the Lord hands over the rule of Israel to a human king, which

by definition entails dynastic succession.⁸⁶ The Chronicler even speaks of the king as sitting on “the throne of the kingdom of the LORD” (1 Chron. 28:5), though God still maintains his ultimate rule by choosing the king through prophetic designation (Deut. 17:15) and by retaining the right to transfer the kingship from one house to another if a king fails to adhere to God’s moral standards as expressed in the Mosaic law. Selman comments, “If God has a kingdom to give, then he too must have a kingship of his own, and one that is of a higher order than that which is . . . entrusted to Saul, David, or Abijah. . . . God was directly involved with this one, specific, earthly kingdom, and through it he, as well as the human king, worked out his royal purposes.”⁸⁷ Thus, after the rejection of the Benjaminite Saul, the Lord anoints David from the tribe of Judah as king and fulfills Jacob’s prophecy that Judah will rule his brothers and subdue the nations (Gen. 49:8–12). Moreover, God’s covenant with David promising that his house will rule God’s kingdom forever lays the foundation for the future course of history (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17; Ps. 89). It also fulfills, confirms, and supplements the Abrahamic covenant, which was first introduced in Genesis.

In fulfilling the Davidic covenant’s promise to give the nation rest from its oppressors, the Lord inferentially fulfills his promises to Abraham. For example, when Solomon assumes his father’s throne, Abraham’s seed has become as numerous as “the dust of the earth” (2 Chron. 1:9), “the sand on the seashore” (1 Kings 4:20), and “the stars in the sky” (1 Chron. 27:23), the standards of comparison for the multitude of Abraham’s promised offspring (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:17).⁸⁸ David’s military victories, also promised in the Davidic covenant, expand the kingdom that Solomon inherits from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21), the dimensions promised in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 15:18).

In addition to being linked in terms of promise and fulfillment, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are remarkably similar in style and content. Both are the Lord’s grants as rewards to faithful servants, yet their eternal dimensions far exceed their investments in a single lifetime. Both occur in a nocturnal vision, see into the remotest future, and reshape the course of history. Moreover, both pertain to the beneficiaries’ seed and land. The center of attention in both is the son from the body. God’s covenant with Abraham promises him an eternal posterity, his covenant with David an eternal dynasty. In addition, David’s dynasty mediates the kings whom the Lord promises to give from Abraham’s and Sarah’s own bodies.⁸⁹ Fokkelman argues that the choice of “from your own loins” (*mimmē’êḳā*) in 2 Sam. 7:12

⁸⁶T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel* (New York and Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 7–25.

⁸⁷M. J. Selman, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament,” *TynBul* 40 (1989): 161–83.

⁸⁸O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 58.

⁸⁹B. Mazar, “The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis,” *JNES* 28 (1969): 75.

links the two covenants, for it is the sole occurrence of the term since Gen. 15:4. Thus Mendenhall rightly comments, “In David, the promise to the patriarchs is fulfilled and renewed.”⁹⁰

Although both covenants are unconditional with reference to their enduring seed as an institution, the enjoyment of their provisions by their sons as individuals is conditioned on their obedience to the Mosaic covenant. Their descendants experience the benefits of the covenants only to the extent that they are loyal to the Lord and obey his law.

The grant that David’s house will rule God’s kingdom forever lays the foundation for the messianic hope. J. J. M. Roberts explains, “The . . . claim that God had chosen David and his dynasty as God’s permanent agent for the exercise of the divine rule on earth was the fundamental starting point for the later development of the messianic hope.”⁹¹ Thus Israel’s kings are always regarded in a general way as God’s *messiah* (literally, “anointed”). Their prophetic anointing publicly designates them as God’s chosen, consecrates them as God’s property, bestows authority on them, and equips them for the task.

But the term takes on a narrower meaning in connection with the Exile. This development can be seen in the use of the Psalter. The Psalms augment in an idealistic way the royal ideology associated with the historical king. The Psalter envisions God’s son, as the king was called, as endowed with justice and righteousness, and as such his rule extended from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Ps. 2, 72). For the psalmist, the king stands in God’s stead: “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever” (Ps. 45:6 [Eng. 7]). These songs celebrating the king are like royal robes with which Israel drapes each successive son of David at his coronation, but none has shoulders broad enough to wear them. Shakespeare says of Macbeth, when he is exposed as Duncan’s traitor, “How does he feel his title hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe upon a dwarfish thief.”⁹² The Psalter’s giant robes hang loosely on David’s dwarfish successors, though some, like Hezekiah and Josiah, have broader shoulders than others. After Jehoiakim, the psalmists’ hope for an ideal king slips off the stooped shoulders of David’s successors, leaving Israel with a wardrobe of magnificent purple robes waiting for an Anointed One from David’s house worthy to wear them. Thus during the Exile the royal Psalms—and most of the Psalter—were referred to a coming, hoped-for son of David. At this point the term *Messiah* acquires its specifically eschatological and strict sense vis-à-vis the expected king and deliverer of Israel. That hope for this ideal king is also

⁹⁰G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant,” *IDB*, 1:718.

⁹¹J. J. M. Roberts, “In Defense of the Monarchy: The Contribution of Israelite Kingship to Biblical Theology,” in *Ancient Israelite Religions: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. P. D. Miller Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 378.

⁹²*Macbeth*, 5.2.20–22.

augmented in the prophetic literature and heightened in the apocalyptic literature and in the intertestamental Jewish literature (200 B.C. – A.D. 100).⁹³

In the fullness of time God sent his Son incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Here was a son of David with shoulders broad enough to wear the Psalter's magnificent robes. At his birth an angel of the Lord proclaimed, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ [Messiah] the Lord" (Luke 2:11). John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:19–34), and the disciples confess him to be the Messiah (Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; John 11:27). Furthermore, John writes his Gospel that his audience might believe that Jesus is the Christ. The words of Jesus and his works bear witness to his deity and are all done in truth, righteousness, and justice. He is the one who will reign forever and ever, the only one worthy to rule over all humanity.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ's offer of the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels brings the expectation of the Primary History that God will establish his moral kingdom over the nations through national Israel to its fulfillment. On the other hand, in the New Testament God's kingdom now transcends the geospatial boundaries of national Israel. The people of the kingdom are now no longer primarily Abraham's physical progeny but the nations themselves. The theme of land has been "Christified." His law is no longer written on rock tablets housed in Jerusalem but inscribed by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of all the subjects of this kingdom. Finally, the king's throne is no longer in earthly Jerusalem but in heavenly Mount Zion, from which the King of kings and Lord of lords administers his kingdom through the Holy Spirit. May God use us to hasten the day when at the name of Jesus Christ every knee will bow and confess that he is Lord and so submit to his rule.

⁹³See M. de Jonge, "Messiah," *ABD*, 4:785–86.