David L. Petersen

Genesis

A Commentary

WJK Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville • Kentucky

"This sure-footed, clear, and stimulating commentary will give students of Genesis new insight and new questions on page after page. It is naturally a radically different work from the previous volume on Genesis in this series by Gerhard von Rad, which has been an exegetical and theological resource for over sixty years. It will thus open the eyes of readers to seeing Genesis anew in light of the way critical theories look at Genesis in the twenty-first century."

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and David Allan Hubbard Professor Emeritus
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"David L. Petersen provides readers with an insightful commentary that employs a combination of literary and social-scientific methodologies that have grown out of earlier models of source, tradition, form, and redaction criticism. He reads Genesis as a family narrative that explains how the ancestral family grew into a people in its relationship with G-d within the context of creation, and he points to the role of the *tôlədôt*, "generations," formulas that trace the ancestral family's history throughout the book. Petersen's volume is a worthy successor to the earlier work of Gerhard von Rad."

—Marvin A. Sweeney, Professor of Hebrew Bible,
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"David Petersen's *Genesis* is the work of deep integrative intelligence. Petersen's commentary builds upon historical-critical questions in service of the larger matter of Genesis as literature, a book about family on the way to nationhood. The family is besieged by problems of infertility, domestic violence, and generational power struggles. Resonant with contemporary issues and eminently readable, this commentary is a must for scholars and of interest to a broad audience of readers."

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Professor Emerita of Old Testament,
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"David Petersen presents a fresh and methodologically diverse approach to the book of Genesis. His commentary is informed by recent developments in the study of the Pentateuch and provides an accessible way to read Genesis, not only as a prologue to the Moses story but also as a book in its own right. A more-than-timely replacement of Gerhard von Rad's predecessor volume in the Old Testament Library!"

—Konrad Schmid, Professor of Hebrew Bible
and Ancient Judaism, University of Zurich

"Petersen's commentary on Genesis provides a readable evaluation of this foundational book, drawing it together from the perspective of family and geography. His approach is primarily literary with close attention to ancient Near Eastern parallels and text-critical variants. It is a welcome addition to the literature on Genesis and as such will be an asset for scholars, clergy, and those interested in studying the narrative accounts of Israel's origins."

—Victor H. Matthews, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament
and retired Dean of the College of Humanities and
Public Affairs, Missouri State University

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PREFACE

I have been thinking regularly about the book of Genesis for over fifty years, having published my first article devoted to texts in that book in 1973. Those fifty years have seen many changes in the field of Hebrew Bible studies. In the 1970s, source criticism, tradition history, and form criticism undergirded much so-called higher-critical study of the book. That is no longer the case. Attention to redaction criticism, which pushes beyond the division of the text into earlier components, has enriched the field. And, since the early 1970s, a myriad of newer approaches, particularly those informed by literary analysis and social-scientific studies, have become prominent. I hope this commentary not only reflects some of the strengths of earlier approaches, but also incorporates important perspectives that have emerged since the last third of the twentieth century.

I owe a debt of gratitude to innumerable individuals. Perhaps most important are the students with whom I worked at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Iliff School of Theology, and Emory University. They invariably posed questions that pushed me to think in new ways about familiar texts. And I want to thank colleagues from whom I learned, not only in their publications, but also in sessions at professional meetings of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research, the Society of Biblical Literature, the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, the Colloquium for Biblical Research, and the OTFS. I am deeply grateful to William P. Brown, my Old Testament Library editor, who graciously invested so much time and effort on this volume. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to colleagues at Westminster John Knox Press—Dan Braden, S. David Garber, and Tina E. Noll—for their careful work on this project. Needless to say, I am responsible for the shortcomings present in it.

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Fort Collins, CO

ABBREVIATIONS

//	parallel to; Gen 12:3 // Num 24:9; poetic line // parallel poetic line
×	times
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BCE	before the Common Era
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 1983
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BR	*Biblical Research*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
c.	century
ca.	circa
ch(s).	chapter(s)
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CEB	Common English Bible
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
Dtr	Deuteronomistic
ed.	edition
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
et al.	*et alii*, and others
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FIOTL	The Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* By Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–99
HBAI	Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel
HC	Holiness Code (Lev 17–26)
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. By Michael O'Connor and Bruce K. Waltke. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990
ICC	International Critical Commentary
i.e.	*id est*, that is
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
J	Yahwist source
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
lit.	literally
LXX	Septuagint
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
n(n).	note(s)
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIDB	*New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld. 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009
NIV	New Internation Version

NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTFS	Old Testament Fishing Society
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTR	Old Testament Readings
OTS	Old Testament Studies
P	Priestly source
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
SymS	Symposium Series
Syr	Peshitta/Syriac
tg	targum
ThWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum alten Testament*. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973–77
v(v).	verse(s). Keyed to MT. Alternates within brackets fit English Bibles.
viz.	*videlicet*, namely
vs.	versus
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
Vulg	Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
x	an unspecified person, thing, quantity
YHWH	Represents Hebrew consonants for Yahweh, LORD
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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INTRODUCTION

Genesis is a book. That claim might seem odd, but Genesis has rarely been examined and interpreted as a book. Genesis has sometimes been viewed as a collection of diverse sagas (e.g., Gunkel), but little, if any, attention was paid to the collection as a whole. Similarly, Genesis has routinely been construed as a collection of "documents" or "sources," attributed primarily to three different authors or traditions that extended into other books in the Tetrateuch (e.g., Speiser), or beyond (so von Rad). However, such analysis rarely examined the relationship of the sources, especially the extent to which a later source, such as the Priestly source (P), may have been a response to or a critique of an earlier one. Moreover, it was often the case that one source, the Yahwist (J) in the case of von Rad, received special attention. Finally, Genesis has regularly been treated as an entity of three discrete sections: primeval history (Gen 1–11), patriarchal literature (12–36), and the Joseph story (37–50). Such a division does not naturally move to a consideration of the fifty chapters as one literary work. None of these approaches led to an analysis of Genesis as a book.

This situation was primarily a function of the methods being used by those scholars who studied the Hebrew Bible. If one thought about Genesis from a form-critical perspective, then the presence of small stories, genealogies, or myths would receive the lion's share of attention. Similarly, if a scholar approached Genesis from the perspective of the documentary hypothesis, then it would be natural for that individual to focus on the diverse documents present in that book. Indeed, the documentary hypothesis offered yet another rationale for not treating Genesis as a book. The dominant form of the documentary hypothesis insisted that three of the classic sources extended from Genesis through at least Numbers.[1] Therefore Genesis as a literary unit was in principle unimportant if one were focusing on these narrative strands that extended well beyond Genesis. As a result, one would not think that Genesis—or Exodus, for that matter—would exist as a separate piece of literature.

1. For a convenient allocation of the sources in the Pentateuch, see "The Translator's Supplement: Analytical Outline of the Pentateuch," in Noth 1972, 261–76.

There are, however, two elements that hold the book together: (1) a social structure, the family; and (2) the so-called *tôlədôt* (descendants) formula, both of which attest to the importance of family as a unifying element in Genesis (see Arnold 2009, 4–6.) As early as chapter 2, the early account of creation, the book explicitly features the world of the family ("father," "mother," and "wife" in Gen 2:24), an element that continues to the end of the book, even as the family becomes a people. According to the initial chapters of the book, humanity is created to exist within the structure of a family, consisting first of a spousal pair (implicitly in 1:27, explicitly in 2:24) and then growing as progeny are born. The lives of primeval families are recorded in Genesis 3–10: the brothers Cain and Abel, Lamech and his wives, the minor deities marrying human wives, and Noah with his sons.

Then, beginning with Gen 11:27, the families of ancient Israel stem in linear fashion from earlier lineages in the ancient Near East. Three extended families predominate in the family literature (Gen 12–36): Abram/Abraham, Lot, Hagar, Ishmael, Sarai/Sarah, and Isaac; Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob; and Jacob, Laban, Rachel, and Leah. From this perspective, the final portion of the book (Gen 37–50) highlights one of Jacob's children, Joseph, and his role in the complex dynamics of Jacob's family with his twelve sons and one daughter (the story concerning Dinah, Jacob's daughter, may be found in ch. 34).

The prominence of family throughout the book is complemented by a redactional device, the *tôlədôt* formula (*tôlədôt* is a plural noun meaning "descendants" or "generations"), which has been used to integrate various portions of the book. The formula comprises the phrase "these are the descendants of x" (Gen 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The formula, normally attributed to a Priestly editor, appears five times in the primeval account, five times in the family literature, and once at the beginning of the Joseph story. And it occurs just before certain descendants are identified. For example, Gen 25:12 reads, "These are the descendants of Ishmael." Immediately thereafter a genealogy provides the names of Ishmael's children. Less typical and more theologically creative is the first occurrence of the formula (Gen 2:4a). The formula identifies the descendants of "the heavens and the earth," which here refers to the humans identified soon thereafter in that chapter. For this author/editor, humans are to be construed as progeny of the world—"the heavens and the earth"—created in Gen 1. In sum, these formulae, brief though they are, reinforce the importance of family and lineage as entities that exist over time through the creation of progeny. The narratives, genealogies, and reports that they introduce depict families with diverse structures. But the constant is the presence of descendants, as well as the complex relationships among them. Genesis is a book about humans in familial life, including its diverse structures and its values.

The *tôlədôt* formula, which points to one generation of a family following another, belongs to the world of genealogies, which are so important in Genesis.

Crüsemann was surely correct when he wrote, "The genealogies, . . . which pervade all of Genesis, form something like the skeleton of this book, a stable framework which holds together and carries all other parts" (1996, 59–60). The *tôlədôt* formulae underscore the importance of these genealogical-familial connections. Steinberg put it well when referring to Gen 12–50: "Genealogy reflects family succession which moves action forward and is the redactional device used by P to organize family history into narrative cycles" (1989, 41).

The book of Genesis concludes with the primary family, the patrilineage of Abraham, being transformed into something other than a family. This transition is presaged by texts such as Gen 12:6; 17:16; 28:13, which look forward to a time when the authors of these verses imagine that Israel will become a nation and that kings will stem from that family. This transformation becomes especially clear as one reaches the end of the book. The notion of the sons of Israel (i.e., of Jacob) now includes the political vocabulary of tribe: "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel" (Gen 49:28). And in the final chapter, those who still reside in Egypt are characterized by yet another political term, "people": "in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today" (Gen 50:20 NRSV). Though families will reappear in other biblical books (e.g., the family of David), family per se will never have the pride of place that it possesses in this first biblical book.

The Family in Genesis

Genesis is a book that describes humanity through genealogies. According to the structure of vertical genealogies present in the book, all humanity is related to a common source (so, e.g., Gen 5). Over time, humanity grew and became geographically and culturally diverse (Gen 10). Concomitantly, the deity's interactions with humanity began to narrow, focusing initially on Shem, one of Noah's sons, then next on his scion in the tenth generation, Terah, and finally on one of his three sons, Abram/Abraham. With this narrowing, the book focuses on a genealogy that branches out among the descendants of Terah and the literature about them.

Beginning with Abram and Sarai, the family encounters challenges to its survival. At the outset, even before they have become immigrants in a foreign land, the genealogist reports that Sarai is infertile, a status that will jeopardize the family's ability to become "a great nation" (Gen 12:2). After the genealogy in which that report appears, the first story narrates the family confronting the threat from a famine. When Abram and Sarai travel to Egypt, Sarai's status as a matriarch in Israel is further threatened by being taken into Pharaoh's household. Once that challenge has been surmounted and the family has returned to the land of Canaan, having survived the famine, Sarai proposes the strategy of polycoity—with Abram having sexual access to both Sarai and her servant

Hagar—to enhance the chances that an heir may be born. With the birth of Ishmael, the strategy proves successful. However, Sarai then has a child, a situation that results in the removal of Hagar and Ishmael from Abram and Sarai's household. (I am indebted to Steinberg's work in this analysis of the family in Genesis [1993]).

The challenge of infertility has been resolved but has resulted in the creation of a potential successor to Abram other than Isaac. The genealogist resolves this problem by reporting that Ishmael marries an Egyptian wife. According to the genealogies in Genesis, an acceptable spouse must come from the patrilineage of Terah (a practice known as patrilineal endogamy). This will hold true for the legitimate heirs of Abraham. Isaac marries Rebekah, the daughter of Betuel, who was the son of Nahor, one of Terah's sons. The same will be true for the wives of Jacob, who were daughters of Laban, the brother of Betuel. Adherence to this system will stop with Judah and Simeon, who marry Canaanite women, and Joseph, who marries an Egyptian wife. This change is consistent with the transition from Israel as a family to Israel as a people at the end of Genesis.

The ensuing generation with Isaac and Rebekah as parents encounters the same problem of infertility, though it is resolved quickly. But a different challenge for the family ensues: the presence of twins. Although Esau is the firstborn, Jacob becomes the heir. The rationale for this deviation from the norm is provided in both narrative and genealogy. In fact, there are two narratives: one that recounts Esau selling his birthright to Jacob, and another recounting that Jacob and Rebekah maneuvered Isaac into granting his blessing to Jacob rather than the expected Esau. If that were not enough, the genealogist reports that Esau married twice outside the patrilineage of Terah, when he selected Judith, a Hittite woman, to be his wife; and when he married Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, who was half Egyptian.

The final family, that of Jacob, involves a formal marriage between one man and two wives who are sisters, sororal polygyny. If one possessed only the bare genealogical data without the narratives in Genesis, one might assume that this was a strategy designed to produce an heir when the first daughter to marry was infertile, a rationale used in other cultures where sororal polygyny is practiced. However, the pre-Priestly author offers a story according to which Jacob's marriage to two sisters is a function of Laban's chicanery and a putative custom of having the older daughter be the first to marry. This family also attests to the practice of polycoity, since Jacob has sexual access to the servants of the two sisters.

It is interesting that the polycoity and sororal polygyny were both successful in addressing the problem of fertility. But they also resulted in antagonism between the mothers, a not surprising real-world consequence. And in the family with only one wife, there was even more serious animosity: that between the twins Esau and Jacob. Though the family of Abraham has managed to

maintain itself over time, the interpersonal relationships between the women who have borne children to the same man and between siblings, whether twins or not, are fraught.

The existence of the family also faces another challenge: domestic violence. The issue first arises in the primeval history as Cain kills Abel. It reappears in the family literature: in a story likely written by a post-Priestly author, the narrator reports that a father has been commanded by God to kill his own son (Gen 22). This story demonstrates that, in the Israelite mindset, even a parent could endanger the life a child (one is, of course, reminded of Jephthah and his daughter in Judg 11, as well as Saul's threat to Jonathan in 1 Sam 14:44).

Before the narrative involving Abraham and Isaac, Abraham and his nephew Lot find themselves in serious conflict (Gen 13) due to the growth of their flocks and the inability of the area where they are living to accommodate them. Abraham proposes that they move apart, that they distance themselves, so that there is no strife between the two of them. This stratagem of distancing will recur throughout the book.

The dynamics between Jacob and Esau are clearer. Esau hates Jacob because he garnered both his birthright and blessing. As a result, he intends to kill Jacob after Isaac has died. Jacob escapes this fate by traveling to the household of Laban. The narrators provide two rationales for this trip: (1) to find a wife, and (2) to escape Esau's anger. The second involves a strategy to avoid violence: distancing, which was also in play when Sarai told Abram to remove Hagar and Ishmael from their household. This same strategy of distancing will obtain when Jacob anticipates encountering Esau (Gen 32–33). Jacob is worried that Esau still wants to kill him, so he first adopts a strategy of presenting a gift to Esau, an act that, if the gift is accepted, will create an obligation upon Esau (see Mauss 1954). Though Esau did not want to accept the gift, Jacob was successful in convincing him to do so. Later in the narrative, when Esau proposes that he travel with Jacob, Jacob manages to distance himself from Esau in order to avoid the violence that he fears. Jacob adopts two strategies, gifting and distancing, in order to avert violence from the hand of Esau.

The Jacob-Laban narrative (Gen 29–31) presents another moment of potential violence. Jacob and his wives decided, at the deity's behest, to flee from Laban's household and to return to the land of Canaan. When Laban pursued and caught up with them, he told Jacob, "It is in my power to do you harm." But God has appeared to Laban, telling him "not to say a word to Jacob, either good or bad" (31:29). In so doing, the deity has protected Jacob, even as Jacob is trying to distance himself from Laban. Then, at the end of the Jacob-Laban chapters, they make a covenant, one element of which is identifying a boundary—marked by a stela and a pile of stones—that neither of them will cross. Jacob and Laban enact a formal distancing that will prevent any possibility of violence or mistreatment in the future.

The potential for domestic violence is also clearly in play within the Joseph novella. Joseph's brothers want to kill him because of the dreams that he has reported to them and their parents. This potential for fraternal violence was averted when Reuben "distanced" Joseph from his brothers (37:21–22). Soon thereafter, Judah adopted this same strategy of distancing when he proposed to sell Joseph to some Ishmaelite traders (vv. 26–28). Moreover, this same Judah was ready to have his widowed daughter-in-law burned to death because she became pregnant (38:24). He thought she had become a prostitute when, in fact, he himself has unknowingly impregnated her due to her ruse of securing an heir. Here the potential for domestic violence was avoided when Tamar was able to prove to Judah that her actions are defensible. Then a negotiation backed with evidence—the signet that she has acquired from him—between Tamar and Jacob precludes domestic violence.

In sum, throughout the book of Genesis, families confront numerous recurring challenges to their very existence: famine, the search for a proper spouse, infertility, and conflict, even the threat of domestic violence. And, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, the family of three generations adopted various strategies to address these challenges: marrying within the patrilineage of Terah, using various forms of marriage in order to provide for an heir, and distancing in order to prevent domestic violence. Formal agreements, gifting, and negotiation also played a role in keeping members of the family from being killed.

Literary Perspectives

If source-critical discussions of Genesis dominated in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, literary study of biblical texts provided a new and major lever for the study of Genesis beginning in the latter part of the twentieth century. In its first manifestation, literary study of Genesis focused on the "forms" of literature present in the book. Not surprisingly, such work was called "form criticism." And it involved the attempt to identify the genres present in the book. Analytical categories such as saga and legend belonged to that enterprise. Coats, for example, proposed the following classifications: saga, tale, novella, legend, history, report, fable, etiology, and myth (1983, 5–10). But that exclusive focus on genre later gave way to a broader study of the book. If Genesis were thought to be literature, one could presumably study it, searching for not only genres, but also plot, characterization, and the like. The work of Robert Alter (1996) is exemplary in this regard. This commentary has benefited from such insights.

The book of Genesis presents readers with remarkable literary diversity. The most basic distinction is that between poetry and prose. At the outset, it is important to note that the boundary between Hebrew prose and poetry is not always clear. For example, though the Masoretic Text does not print Gen 1:27

in stichometric fashion (viz., printed out in parallel lines), the NRSV construes these verses to be poetry, though the NJPS translation, following the MT, does not. There is, however, a general consensus that, apart from 1:27 and a few other places, poetry is relatively rare in Genesis. There is only one long poem (Gen 49). Both it and all other poetic texts share one essential feature: they convey direct discourse. If one includes Gen 1:27 in the list, there are fourteen instances of poetry. Of those fourteen, six convey the speech of the deity (Gen 1:27; 3:14–19; 8:22; 9:6; 16:11–12; 25:23) and eight report speech of humans (2:23; 4:23–24; 9:25–27; 14:19–20; 24:60; 27:27–29, 39–40; 49:2–27). In many cases, the presence of poetry highlights the speeches in question. They often come at pivotal points in the respective texts, often near the end or at a high point in a report or narrative. For example, Adam breaks out in poetry when God shows him the woman who has just been created (2:23). Or the pre-Priestly version of the deluge account concludes with a brief poem in the mouth of the deity, affirming that the natural order will perdure (8:22).

Three primary prose genres populate the book: narratives, reports, and genealogies. The latter two require less discussion than does the first. Genealogies are prominent throughout Gen 1–36. They derive from various authorial hands, including both the pre-Priestly and Priestly tradents. Further, there are two basic forms of genealogies: so-called vertical and horizontal (or branching-out) genealogies (see the foundational study of Wilson 1977). A vertical genealogy moves from a progenitor down to someone many generations later. That latter individual garners status or identity by being able to trace descent from an earlier ancestor. Genesis 5 stands as a classic example of a vertical genealogy. Noah, due to his genealogy that traces his origins back to the primal human (through Seth, not Cain), becomes a likely candidate to be the flood survivor. By contrast, a horizontal or branching-out genealogy typically spans few generations but encompasses many individuals in one (or a few) generation(s). The genealogy that lies behind the poetry in Gen 49 involves only one generation, that of Jacob's sons. But it is clear that the genealogy is concerned with their relative statuses. The same may be said for the so-called Table of Nations (Gen 10). That genealogy includes at most four generations, as with the three sons of Noah, their sons, and their grandsons, and in one case, their great grandsons. This genealogy maps the world, reporting, among other things, who is closer and further from the line out of which Israel emerges.

The report is a second type of prose literature. Those texts that I will construe as reports have often been treated as narratives. However, texts such as Gen 9; 15; 17; and 35 include no arc of tension or problem that needs to be resolved. The basic elements of plot are absent. Such prose texts chronicle activity but do not involve a story per se. The making of a covenant is a classic example of what can transpire in a report (Gen 17). Movement from one place to another, replete with itinerary, is another standard topic for a report (Gen 12:4–9). From

a source-critical perspective, it is interesting that the Priestly hand is regularly associated with many of these reports.

Narrative prose is more frequent than are either genealogies or reports. Moreover, that prose has been the subject of much analysis, especially by those who worked from the aforementioned form-critical perspective. Early on, Hermann Gunkel argues that the primary literary component present in Genesis was the short *Sage* (1964). (The German noun *Sage* was then translated in English as "legend," an unfortunate rendition, since *legenda*, prose accounts about holy places or people [e.g., Gen 28:10–22], are quite different from the narratives in Genesis that Gunkel analyzed.) Typically ranging from ten to twenty verses, a *Sage* contained few characters, focused on action (verbs were prominent), often involved the family, and had little use for general description (few adjectives). Gunkel maintained that this kind of literature originated in an oral story-telling environment. Over time, *Sagen* (plural for *Sage*) told about an individual were collected, creating so-called cycles of *Sagen*. Hence, one could refer to the cycle of *Sagen* about Abraham or Jacob. Numerous scholars challenged Gunkel's claim that these *Sagen* were the result of oral composition. As a result, the term *Sage* is no longer used prominently in study of Gen 12–36.

Gunkel used the term *Sage* to describe not only the short narratives about the patriarchs and matriarchs; he used it as well to construe the literature in the primeval history, so-called primal legends (in contradistinction to "patriarchal legends," which populate Gen 12–36). This move was unfortunate since there is minimal generic similarity between the literature in Gen 1–11 and that in Gen 12–36. Gunkel himself recognized that there was myth-like material in the early chapters of Genesis, though he, and others, thought it was not "pure myth" (1997, xiii). Based on current definitions of mythographic literature, there is good reason to construe some episodes in Gen 1–9 as mythic literature.

There is yet another literary category relevant for the study of literature: "family literature" (Petersen 2005a, 11–14). For the purposes of this commentary, I refer to Y. Ru (1992), who has identified the genre of a family novel and discerned four critical characteristics: (1) family novels depict a family chronology in a realistic fashion; (2) family novels devote major attention to familial rites within the broader context of traditional communal life; (3) family novels focus on conflicts within the family; and (4) family novels possess a unique form. That form comprises a "long, forward-moving vertical structure," the family chronology, with a horizontal component, intrafamilial relations at any one time. Genesis 12–36 includes all four of these elements. As a result, I use the term "family literature" to describe these chapters (and reserve the term "novella" for Gen 37–50).

Thus far I have suggested a macrogeneric distinction (poetry vs. prose), assayed three basic forms of prose (report, genealogy, and narrative), reviewed scholarly literature regarding several relatively small-scale forms of narrative

(*Sage*, legend), and suggested that portions of Genesis may be construed as family literature. There is, however, one more distinction of critical importance to the study of Genesis. Though Genesis has often been construed as a book having three basic parts, typically primeval history, patriarchal literature, Joseph novella, I maintain that it is preferable think about *four* basic components: primeval history; Abraham and Sarah saga; Jacob, Rachel, and Leah story; and Joseph novella. The chapters devoted to Abraham and his family, on the one hand, and Jacob and his family, on the other hand, are sufficiently different in their literary structure, the nature of the families, and their respective theologies to be viewed as distinct from each other within the book. And it goes without saying that the primeval history and the Joseph novella are even more different from these just-mentioned bodies of literature.

Formation of Genesis

Analysis of the formation of Genesis has been embedded in the broader discussion regarding the origins of the Pentateuch. To a large extent, that discussion has been heavily influenced by source criticism: the notion that the Pentateuch is made up of four different sources or traditions (or "documents," hence the phrase "documentary hypothesis"). Of the four classic sources (J [Yahwist], E [Elohist], D [Deuteronomist], and P [Priestly]), the typical consensus reported that D was primarily to be found in the book of Deuteronomy. Hence, one would expect to find only J, E, and P in the Tetrateuch and especially in Genesis.

The predominant form of the source-critical hypothesis held that these three sources extended throughout the Tetrateuch. If one looks at a standard chart according to which each verse of the Pentateuch is allocated to a source, J, E, and P were to be found in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. (Leviticus was attributed entirely to various Priestly hands.) This, at least, was the view that held sway in standard introductions written in the twentieth century and is widely reported in basic works even today.

There were, however, two other versions of the source-critical hypothesis: the supplementary and the fragmentary theories. On the one hand, proponents of the former view maintained that there was one primary form of Israel's origins and that it was supplemented by one and another addition over time. The most significant supplement stemmed from the hands of the Priestly school. However, there was no independent Priestly version of Israel's story. Rather, one and another priest added material to enhance the earlier version. On the other hand, advocates of the fragmentary hypothesis claimed that the overall story reported in Genesis through Deuteronomy developed out of what were originally separate literary complexes. There were no sources (e.g., that of the Yahwist) that extended throughout Genesis, much less on through the Tetrateuch. Nor was there an early primary narrative that lies behind the Tetrateuch.

Rather, those who argue for the fragmentary hypothesis think that, for example, the story about Joseph emerged as something distinct from either that which preceded it and that which followed it. The same may be said for narratives concerning the primal Israelite families and that which transpired at Sinai. These originally distinct "fragments" were later integrated, possibly by the Priestly editors, yielding the form of the Tetrateuch that one reads today. In sum, there were three distinct models by means of which scholars thought about the formation of the Pentateuch: the documentary, supplementary, and fragmentary hypotheses.

In my judgment, it is possible to combine the latter two views. It appears likely that the pre-Priestly material in the primeval history (Gen 1–11) developed independently from the pre-Priestly literature in Gen 12–36. Similarly, the literature associated with Abraham and Jacob each developed in separate fashion. The same may be said for the Joseph novella. It too was not of a piece with the pre-Priestly material elsewhere in Genesis. These large sections can be viewed as "fragments," which were at some point put together to create the book of Genesis. This view of the formation of Genesis relies upon the work of many scholars, but most notably Rolf Rendtorff, who published a seminal study in 1977 that laid the groundwork for much recent work on the formation of the Pentateuch (see the English translation in 1990). In that work, Rendtorff argued that there were no sources that extended across the boundaries of Pentateuchal books. What was thought to be a "J" source was, instead, a series of originally independent literary complexes, such as the primeval history or narratives about Jacob, which were collected and supplemented by what had been known as "P." This notion of "fragments" makes it difficult to think about a narrative strand (e.g., a Yahwistic source) that extends throughout the book, or even between any two of its four parts. I follow Rendtorff's lead in this commentary. (For a recent and comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Carr 2020).

If Rendtorff and others were correct in thinking that Genesis is made up of a series of originally distinct literary collections, then it is natural to ask: who integrated them? One important response to that question has been the Priestly school, a group of authors, who over time synthesized and added to the earlier materials. In some cases, they probably created an alternative version to a text they inherited. This seems to be the situation with the flood narrative. In other cases, they introduced traditions that already existed but had not been used by the pre-Priestly authors, such as the views of the creation of the universe present in Gen 1. But in either case, what the priests introduced may be understood as a supplement to an earlier tradition or text, often offering an alternative or providing a different angle of vision or evaluation of creation, as in Gen 1 and 2, or a different perspective on the character of Jacob. In the latter case, P presents a more "respectable" Jacob than does the basic story. In many ways, P is a challenge to the prior traditions. The Priestly author seems to be inventing an

alternative to what has come before. To this extent, Genesis is a book involving differing versions of various traditions (e.g., the significance of the flood, the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, or the character of Jacob).

If one couples a literary assessment with a discussion of P in the formation of the book, it quickly becomes clear that one major difference between the earlier material and P is the absence of narrative material in P. The Priestly literature is replete with long reports (e.g., Gen 1; 17; 23), short notices (11:32), genealogies (Gen 5), and itineraries (11:31), but P creates few if any stories. Moreover, P adds or corrects details in prior narratives, notably in the flood narrative, but offers no narratives of its own. Rendtorff identifies two basic types of Priestly literature in Genesis: (1) chronological notes about the age of a person at one time or that person's lifespan; and (2) "theological" passages that include the name El and the language of blessing: the promise of progeny and land. For the sake of completeness, one may add the *tôlədôt* formulae to the list of Priestly composition in Genesis.[2]

Another important feature of what has been known as P is its composite character. This situation is well-known in another biblical book, Leviticus. There, in chapters that concern all manner of ritual matters that would have been part of the Priestly purview, one may discern two distinct bodies of literature: (1) the one associated with P, as found prominently in the books of Genesis and Exodus; and (2) the so-called Holiness Code (HC). The former is apparent in Lev 1–16; HC is found primarily in chapters 17–26. (For a classic treatment, see Milgrom 1991, 42–52; 2000, 1325–56.) One may therefore ask if what has been designated as P in Genesis is similar to either of the corpora present in Leviticus. On the one hand, for example, the rite of circumcision, which appears prominently in Gen 17, is mentioned only in the P portion of Leviticus (12:3). On the other hand, the notion of a seventh day as having special significance is present in Lev 19:3, 30; 26:2, which belong to the Holiness Code. The notion of that seventh day being "made holy," reflecting the idea of temporal holiness, is similar to the ideas of spatial holiness as found in HC: the land that Israel occupies is holy (see Milgrom 2000, 1353, 1399, who articulates "the doctrine of the 'holy land'"). In sum, what has been known as P in Genesis may well stem from different Priestly groups and their respective theologies, as those are known in Leviticus and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

Of even greater import is the likelihood that the Priestly author(s) responsible for literature in Genesis is (are) different from the Priestly author(s) who wrote and/or collected prescriptive documents elsewhere in the Tetrateuch. Rendtorff argued that a Priestly redactor was responsible for reworking and integrating earlier texts, namely, those concerning the primeval period, especially creation

2. For an insightful analysis of P as an author, see McEvenue 1971. He notes, e.g., the prominence of repetition and an interest in data, such as reports about lifespan or the date of an event.

and the Noachian covenant and the "patriarchal period," with special attention given to Abraham (Rendtorff 1990, 192–194; 1993). More to the point, this activity did not continue beyond the first six chapters of Exodus. That means while one may focus on the "Priestly texts" as a distinct body of literature in Genesis (and Exod 1–6), one does not include texts such as Exod 25–31; 35–40; Leviticus; and Num 1–10.

The Priestly writer in Genesis regularly offers an alternative and challenge to the earlier literature. (On the Priestly writer in Genesis, see Petersen 2010, 39.) Genesis 1 offers a far more positive view of creation than is present in Gen 2–3, especially as creation in the latter devolves in chapter 3. The Priestly version of the flood enhances the scale and length of the flood and makes it more significant by introducing a covenant at its conclusion. Genesis 10, a Priestly text, thinks differently about human and especially linguistic diversity than does Gen 11. Genesis 17 radically revises the picture of the covenant in the early portions of Gen 15. The Priestly writer offers a more favorable portrait of Jacob than does his predecessor.

In considering programmatic issues, "one may discern three ways in which the Priestly material coheres: two covenants integrate the primeval history with the ancestral literature, the Priestly compositor advocates a number of rituals, and the *tôlədôt* formulae integrate both Priestly and pre-Priestly literature throughout Genesis" (Petersen 2010, 34). Noteworthy are the rituals—the Sabbath, the prohibition of consuming blood, and circumcision—all of which could and would have been practiced in exile. The Priestly writers in Genesis are interested in addressing the situation of the postexilic Yahwist communities: those in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and in Syria-Palestine. They describe norms and rituals that could be practiced in all three places. That Priestly texts could derive from such diverse places should not surprise, since priests resided in all three environments: Jeremiah, who came from a priestly lineage in Anathoth but concluded his life in Egypt; Ezekiel, who lived near Nippur (Mesopotamia); and Zechariah, who was likely an exile who had returned to the land.

I now offer some brief comments about the four primary sections of Genesis, each of which derives from a different hand and reflects a different process of composition.

Primeval History

To understand the origins of Gen 1–11, one must place it within the context of other ancient Near Eastern literatures devoted to the primeval period. The most important text for this purpose is the Atrahasis myth, a text that reports both the creation of humanity and the flood as an attempt to annihilate the human race. This account, composed early in the second millennium BCE, would have been known by an Israelite author during the first millennium. In fact, it is difficult

to imagine that an Israelite scribe, intending to compose a primeval account appropriate for his culture, could avoid narrating these two episodes together: the creation of humanity and the flood.

As a result, one may hypothesize that Israelites inherited the pattern of creation of humanity and flood from their cultural heritage. That inheritance was enhanced by the addition of narratives regarding Cain and Abel, Lamech, and the sons of God and human women. These all belong to or reflect the primeval period before the flood, which marks the break between that era and the age in which humans now live. The early account included episodes regarding humanity in the postflood period (e.g., the drunken Noah, tower of Babel), narratives that include reference to the entities that Israel knew, such as Canaan and Babylon. The author/compiler of this majestic work created an Israelite primeval history in which one God, YHWH, was responsible for the creation and preservation of humanity.

To these stories, the Priestly author prefixed a report about the origins of the cosmos, one that included a second account of humanity's creation. Moreover, the Priestly author skillfully integrated an alternative version of the flood account, one that magnified its scale and significance. In addition, Priestly hands included a genealogy that offers a new lineage for humanity, one that can be traced to Seth, and a comprehensive genealogy that depicts the progeny of Noah and his sons. The combined early and Priestly texts that follow the flood narrative recount the process by means of which Israel emerges from those who survived the flood.

Family Literature

The family literature of Genesis (chs. 12–36) does not bear the same strong impress of ancient Near Eastern forebears present in chapters 1–11. Here the Israelite authors exercised much freer hands at the outset. At the risk of oversimplification, chapters 12–36 are made up of two basic literatures, those associated with Abraham and Jacob respectively. The account involving Abraham involves a more complex process of growth than does the literature dealing with Jacob. For the purposes of distinguishing the two corpora, I identify an Abraham and Sarah saga in contradistinction to the Jacob, Rachel, and Leah story.

The Abrahamic collection is made up of some early stories focusing on the family and issues germane to its existence: the viability of the family (Gen 12); familial conflict around issues of land and its effects (Gen 13; 19); whether an heir will be born and the complications of polygyny (Gen 16; 18; 21). Apart from the portions devoted to Lot, the primary focus is on Abram/Abraham's immediate family; his wife, Sarai/Sarah; her servant, Hagar; and their two sons. Those narratives have been supplemented by the Priestly hand at several crucial points (Gen 17; 23). Finally, there have been some further additions, often

exploring significant theological issues. Westermann (1985, 121–36) characterized some of these as "theological narratives" (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 18:17–33; 22:1–19). To these, Golka (1978) added Genesis 23–24. Golka correctly noted that not all of the texts were truly narratives. Of these texts, only chapters 22, 23, and 24 are really stories. In addition, though Golka thought each of the traditional Pentateuchal sources was represented in this list, it now is possible to argue that, perhaps with the exception of Gen 23, all these texts stem from post-Priestly hands, from authors interested in exploring the theological implications of various elements in the Abrahamic saga. That some more recent scholars (e.g., Warner 2018) have identified so-called Deuteronomistic elements in the Abrahamic material is consistent with the general thesis that post-Priestly biblical authors have interpolated material into the Abrahamic saga.

Study of post-Priestly additions to the Abrahamic saga has continued unabated. Rofé has made a convincing case that Gen 20 should be dated to the postexilic period (1990). Köckert has argued that Gen 20–22 is, in its entirety, a post-Priestly supplement at the end of the Abrahamic saga. Other sizable post-Priestly literature includes Gen 18, 20, and 22 (see, e.g., Köckert 2015, 157–76). In these chapters, which derive from different authorial hands, authors offer theological reflection occasioned by the earlier literature. For example, the author of Gen 20 offers a rereading of Gen 12:10–20 that wrestles with the question of the "piety" of a foreign ruler. The issue becomes explicit in Gen 20 with reference to "the fear of God" in a foreign land. Both the Priestly and post-Priestly expansions of the Abrahamic saga demonstrate how rich and seminal this biblical figure had become.

Though the origins of the literature regarding Jacob (Gen 25:19–36:43) are no doubt complex, that story in its biblical form involves a "tight" structure. The literature associated with Jacob and Esau occurs as bookends, with the sojourn of Jacob with Laban (chs. 29–31) in the middle. The nocturnal scenes of Jacob at Bethel and Peniel (28:10–22; 32:22–32) stand both immediately before and then after Jacob's time in Paddan-Aram. There is minimal compositional depth. The plot, which might be characterized as flight and return, involves an initial set of scenes in the patrimonial household, flight that includes an encounter with the deity, sojourn in the ancestral land, return that includes another encounter with the deity, and settling in the ancestral land (for a more elaborate version of this structure, see Fishbane 1975, 15–38). Though the story addresses familial issues, they are unlike those in the Abrahamic saga, where the immediate family, especially husband and wife, was front and center. In the Jacob material, fraternal relations and the extended family play a primary role. There is little evidence that any of these crucial episodes belong to a hand other than the pre-Priestly writer. Moreover, there have been minimal additions by the Priestly hand (the most significant is Gen 35:9–15) and no supplements comparable to the post-Priestly theological literature associated with Abraham.

The Joseph Novella

Genesis 37–50, the Joseph novella, stands in marked contrast to the three foregoing bodies of literature. Excluding the Judah and Tamar story (Gen 38), the novella covers thirteen chapters, which is longer than either the Abraham saga or the Jacob story. There is the complex theme of how a family falls apart and then achieves a modicum of restoration. Characters, not only Joseph but also Judah and even Potiphar, are developed. Complex individual scenes make up a larger whole (e.g., ch. 40). There is a consistent literary style throughout. Complex literary techniques such as flashbacks are in play (e.g., 41:9–13). Recurring motifs appear: dreams (chs. 37, 40, 41), a focus on garments (37, 39, 41), and meals/food (37:25; 43:1–2; 43:31–34), and Joseph's weeping (43:30; 45:2; 50:17). The author is interested in describing human emotions and psychological processes (42:21, 28; 43:30; 45:1, 3, 26).

Von Rad noted that the Joseph novella is in some way related to the wisdom tradition present in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Joseph is in trouble when he violates wisdom norms (Prov 16:18). And he succeeds when he follows wisdom norms (Prov 14:35a). Moreover, the novella seems to affirm the theological stances of orthodox wisdom literature (Proverbs), especially that God is in control of human events (Gen 45:5–8; 50:20). And yet God remains hidden from human actors (Prov 20:24; 16:9).

These similarities between the Joseph novella and Israelite wisdom literature need to be read with nuance. Michael Fox writes, "Joseph's wisdom is evident in his ability to interpret dreams, in his practical shrewdness and planning ability, and in his fear of God" (2012, 261). However, Fox also notes that wisdom in these chapters of Genesis is less the result of human analysis and reflection, as is the case in Proverbs, and more the result of God-given knowledge, something shared by the book of Daniel (M. Fox 2001, 26–41).

Ultimately, the ways in which these four bodies of literature were configured into one book remain lost in the proverbial mists of antiquity. Still, the general contours of the formation are reasonably clear: individual stories, reports, and genealogies were collected into groups associated with the primeval history, Abraham, and Jacob. A Priestly hand modified especially the first two (primeval history and Abraham) by adding new literature and, in so doing, competing perspectives about creation, the flood, and the figure of Abraham. Later hands integrated the foregoing by inserting the *tôlədôt* formulae and theological reflections, most notably in Gen 22–24.

Historical Background

Attempts to date the various literatures present in the book have generated no scholarly consensus. (For a comprehensive overview of this topic, see Hendel

2012, 51–81). Some arguments have focused on dating one or another portion of the book (e.g., attempting to date the "patriarch literature"). Appeals to date features such as specific legal customs (e.g., naming a younger son as heir) or religious practices (such as invoking the name "El") have yielded no identifiable period of composition. Other scholars, following one classic form of the documentary hypothesis, have tried to identify the dates of composition for the Yahwist, the Elohist, and the Priestly strands. In the twentieth century, many of those who held to such hypotheses maintained that the Yahwist should be dated to the tenth century BCE and the Elohist to the ninth century. This strategy, however, has foundered following challenges to the very existence of the Yahwistic and Elohistic traditions (see, e.g., Römer 2006, 9–27).

A more recent debate about the dating of Genesis involves an assessment of the language in which Genesis is written. Scholars who study Biblical Hebrew have long observed that many texts in the Hebrew Bible are composed in a similar fashion, such as the Hebrew present in Genesis being virtually identical to that present in the books of Kings. Texts that are more recent, such as Ezra-Nehemiah, present different grammatical features, whether morphological or lexical. Genesis–Kings uses the vocabulary of classical Hebrew, and Ezra-Nehemiah use late Biblical Hebrew, with some Aramaic passages. Since Genesis belongs to the style of classical Hebrew, which was almost certainly used during the monarchic period, some scholars have claimed that much in Genesis should be dated to the preexilic period. However, others have observed that classical Hebrew, like the much later Ecclesiastical Latin, was used long after it was first introduced. So Genesis, though certainly different from Ecclesiastes and (to a lesser extent) Ezra-Nehemiah, could well have been written in the Persian period. Yet discrete elements in the book were likely written in an earlier period. Genesis 49 contains elements of Hebrew written before the so-called classical style (so Hendel 2012, 52–54).

Still, even though it has proved difficult to identify the time during which Genesis was composed, it is possible to maintain that two portions of the book (i.e., the Priestly material and the Joseph novella) were composed during the Persian period. And since the Priestly material was composed in response to earlier material, one must infer that the pre-Priestly material was formulated at an earlier time. Such a judgment implies that some of the primeval history or the family literature was probably composed before the first deportation from Jerusalem in 597 BCE, most likely after the defeat of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BCE. This was a time of cultural ferment when many from the Northern Kingdom moved to Judah, causing significant growth in Jerusalem. Still, attempting to find historical allusions in Genesis to that (ca.) 125-year period is difficult. (Some scholars seek the references to a "tower of Babel" in that historical context [e.g., George 2005–2006, 75–95].) In sum, I agree with the judgments of Thomas Römer: "The most secure date for the existence of

Pentateuchal texts is the Persian period. . . . As for P, a Persian period dating is still the best option" (Römer 2016, 370).

If the Priestly texts in Genesis are rooted relatively early in the Persian period, then the post-Priestly texts are likely to have been added somewhat later, in the fifth or early fourth centuries BCE. Römer has convincingly argued that the story of Joseph is a post-Priestly addition to the book (2015, 185–201). The Joseph narrative, reflecting the experience of exile, was likely written in the early Persian period. However, Römer observes that the Priestly editor never refers to the Joseph material, strongly suggesting that a later editor introduced the narrative into Genesis after the Priestly additions to Genesis had been made. The purpose of the novella is to introduce "a voice from the Diaspora" into the book, which received its final form in the late Persian period.

Nonetheless, rather than fixating on these theoretical dates for composition, it is more important to observe the ways in which much in the book addresses concerns for Yahwistic worshipers during the exilic and postexilic periods, both to those who returned to the land and especially to those who remained in exile, whether in Egypt, Babylon, or elsewhere.

Religious and Theological World

Religious rites and practices feature throughout the book of Genesis, though those present in the family literature (Gen 12–36) are distinct from those in the primeval history and the Joseph novella. In the primeval history, there are overt references to sacrifice (4:3–4; 8:20) in the pre-Priestly narratives. In both cases, animals are sacrificed, though in the first one, there is an offering of agricultural produce as well. The pre-Priestly author also reports that humans began using the name of YHWH before the flood (4:26). By contrast and with the exception of the prohibition of the consumption of blood (9:4), the Priestly author makes no overt claims about the presence of religious practice before the time that God chooses the family of Abraham. As for the latter portion of Genesis, the Joseph novella includes little mention of religious practices. The Priestly writer recounts Jacob commanding his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah (49:29–33). Joseph offers a less detailed comment about his funerary rites (50:24), though he was ultimately interred at Shechem (Josh 24:32).

Things are quite different in Gen 12–36 for a variety of reasons. The ancestral family is now in the land of Canaan and living in or near sites that would have been well-known to authors of these literatures. One may make a number of observations. (1) With the exception of the idiosyncratic Gen 14, there is no group of ritual specialists. And even in that chapter, the priest is not a member of the Israelite patrilineage. (2) Ritual sites are often at or near cities (e.g., Bethel in 12:8; 28:18–19; 35:6; Mamre in 13:18; Beersheba in 21:33; Shechem in 33:18–20). (3) Various ritual installations are constructed, especially altars

(12:7–8). Moreover, trees are planted (21:33) or mentioned (12:6; 13:18; 35:1–4) at the aforementioned sites. Stelae are also erected (35:19–20; 28:18, 22). (4) Life-cycle rites are important: circumcision and especially funerary practices. Burials routinely occur at a place owned by the family: Sarah (23:19); Abraham (25:9–10); Isaac (35:27–29), Rebekah, and Leah (49:31), but Rachel is interred near Ephrath (35:19). (5) Manipulation of dietary products: anointing with olive oil (28:18) and the consumption of foodstuffs: bread (31:54) or bread and wine (14:18). (6) Rites involving blood are important: circumcision (ch. 17) and animal sacrifice (15:7–17; 22:13; 31:54). (7) The use of icons is present: teraphim or "household gods" (31:19) and "foreign gods" (35:1–4). (8) Prayer, direct address to the deity, is rare: that of Abraham's servant (24:12–14) and Jacob (32:9–12) are parade examples. The brief report, "Abram . . . invoked the name of YHWH" (12:8; 13:4), suggests that it may have been a well-known practice. Vows, another form of religious discourse, are also present (e.g., 28:20–22). (9) The practice of a tithe is attested for both Abram (14:20) and Jacob (28:22). (10) The piety is conservative. When Jacob is ordered by God to go to Bethel (35:1–4), he requires the members of his family to divest themselves of their "foreign gods" and earrings. Instead of destroying them, he buries them carefully under an oak. This form of respectfully retiring a ritual object no longer in use is common to many cultures and reflects respect for the holy. (For a study of religious rites practiced by families in the ancient Near East, see van der Toorn 1996).

Clearly, ritual sites were important in the world portrayed in the family literature. There is no dominant or central shrine, though Bethel is the most frequently mentioned toponym. Even though many altars are built, reference to sacrifice on them is rare. Some of the practices occur only in post-Priestly texts, namely sacrifice, though 31:54 is an exception, and prayer. There is no reference to the calendrical rituals of the Priestly tradition, nor to the noncalendrical rituals, such as the sin offering. The authors were walking a fine line; on the one hand, they wanted to convey a world in which the family members were involved in legitimate religious practices; on the other hand, those authors could not portray them enacting religious life as it had been authorized in Sinai covenant.

The overt theological language in Genesis is diverse. And this is true in at least two ways. As early as the first chapters of Genesis, readers encounter "God" (1:1, *ʾĕlōhîm*), YHWH Elohim (2:4b, *yhwh ʾĕlōhîm*), and YHWH (4:1, *yhwh*). These differences have regularly been explained by appeal to the source-critical hypothesis, according to which the Priestly source uses Elohim because the Priestly writer thought that the divine name YHWH had been revealed at Sinai (Exod 6:2–3), and hence it should not appear in his literature until that point. The name YHWH, by contrast, appears in the earlier texts, which up until recently had been labeled J, the Yahwistic account. The dual name

YHWH Elohim was probably used in Gen 2–3 as a way of providing a transition between chapters 1 and 4, where the individual names are used.

The pre-Priestly and Priestly authors, who use these two names, offer differing pictures of the deity. For over a century, standard handbooks have taken the anthropomorphic YHWH in Gen 2–3, who molds humanity from earth and breathes into *ʾādām*'s nostrils, to be in contrast with the transcendent Elohim, who says, "Let there be . . . ," and something is created. Put simply, these two authors have differing ways of understanding the nature and behavior of the deity. More recently, biblical interpreters have used literary-critical perspectives and focused on God as a character, sometimes allowing the distinctions between the authorial hands to stand, including the conception of God in the Priestly source, and other times trying to formulate a composite that incorporates all the literary diversity (see, e.g., Humphreys 2001).

There is, however, another distinction in the way the Israelite deity is understood in Genesis: "the God of the fathers" and "El" (see Cross 1973 and Smith 2002 for a discussion of these two formulations). First, the God of the fathers. Genesis 31 reports that Laban and Jacob make a covenant. During the ceremony, each of them takes an oath by the God of his father. Laban swears by the God of Nahor (brother to Abraham), and Jacob swears by the God of Abraham. Both Laban and Jacob are part of a religious tradition that involves deities associated with a clan. Each clan or lineage identifies a deity with a revered ancestor. In this case, the ancestors are Nahor and Abraham, and the deities would be known, respectively, as the God of Nahor and the God of Abraham. In this case, each person swears by his own clan deity. To make matters more interesting, the text reports that Jacob swears "by the Fear of his father Isaac" (31:53). The noun *paḥad*, often translated as "fear," may well be the proper name of the ancestral god associated especially with Isaac. Similar names appear with Abraham: *māgēn*, or "shield" (Gen 15:1); and with Jacob: *ʾăbîr*, or "bull" (49:24). Over time, these three appellations fall out of use such that Israelites can speak of "the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3:15). Clearly, the book of Genesis reflects the notion of a God who is related to this specific family and hence can be called the God of their fathers, a form of religion apt for a book that focuses on the family.

Elsewhere in Genesis, there is a different vocabulary and form of religion. At least ten texts use the name El when referring to Israel's God in association with particular places: El Elyon, "God Most High," at Jerusalem (14:18–22); El Roi, "God of seeing," at Beer-lahay-roi (16:13); El Shaddai, "God Almighty," at Mamre (13:18; 17:1; 18:1); El Olam, "Everlasting God," at Beersheba (21:33); El Shaddai, "God Almighty," at Beersheba (26:33; 28:3, 10); El Bethel, "God of Bethel," at Bethel (31:13); El Elohe Israel, "God, the God of Israel," at Shechem (33:20); El Bethel, "God of Bethel" (35:7); El Shaddai, "God Almighty," at Bethel (35:11); El Shaddai, "God Almighty," at Luz (48:3). It

is noteworthy that most, if not all, of these texts are attributed to the Priestly source. Fortunately, due to the discovery of the Canaanite Ugaritic texts (14th c. BCE), readers now know to whom the name "El" refers.

El was the Canaanite high god. He functioned as creator and judge and officiated from a divine council. And there were other Canaanite gods, including Baal, who was deemed anathema to "orthodox" Yahwistic religion. But there was no such comparable polemic against El. In fact, Israel's God, YHWH, shared traits of El. YHWH, too, was viewed as the creator of heaven and earth. YHWH was also a cosmic judge. And YHWH, like El, presided over a divine council, most notably in 1 Kgs 22, Isa 6, and Job 1–2. The presence of the name El and the epithets associated with him in Genesis suggest that Israelite authors thought it appropriate to use this diction for their God, YHWH. Of particular interest is the presence of epithets for El and the association of these epithets with a city or shrine (see Cross 1973, 47). This suggests at least two things about the Priestly author's mindset: (1) that the name El was associated with an urban shrine, and (2) that the diverse names were due to the way El/YHWH was known at that place. The presence of different epithets in the practice of Marian devotion (e.g., Mary of Lourdes, Our Lady of Almudena) may serve as an analogy. If that analogy holds, there may have been a distinctive image at each of the shrines at which El/YHWH was venerated.

One may therefore conclude that at least two forms of religious discourse are present in Genesis, one involving the god associated with a lineage, and another with a deity known as El. Clearly, both were deemed acceptable by those who composed the book. In fact, a text such as Gen 49:25 demonstrates that a poet could use both of these vocabularies to depict Israel's God: "by the God of your father, who will help you // by Shaddai, who will help you." (The appellation Shaddai is used of El elsewhere in Genesis, as in 17:1.) The presence of such diverse theological language reflects understandings of Israel's early religious history from the perspective of someone writing many centuries after that putative period.

It also remains possible, though risky, to comment about the conceptual theological world present in Genesis. It is risky because all too often categories taken from the world of systematic theology have been inappropriately imported as tools to study religions from the Neo-Assyrian and Persian periods. To avoid this problem at the outset, the reader may use diction present in the text. The most prominent term to appear is "covenant," a word and notion used by the Priestly writer in Gen 9 and 17. (The notion of covenant is also present in Gen 15, a text attributable to multiple authors. See comments.) So, at the outset, one may identify the Priestly author in Genesis with an overt theological interest, as expressed in his theology of covenant.

The Priestly writer presages his version of the flood by announcing that God will make a covenant with Noah (6:18) and then, in the postflood scene in

chapter 9, God does such. The covenant exists as a promise that God makes not only to Noah and his family but with all faunal life, as represented by the animals preserved on the ark. In fact, the parties are restated in 9:13 to be God and "the earth." It is a promise that God will never again deploy a flood in an attempt to destroy life on earth; it is to be an "everlasting covenant" (v. 16). Moreover, the covenant has a sign: the (rain)bow that God places in the heavens. The scope of the Noachian covenant is worldwide. Its guarantee for the continuation of "all flesh" holds for all people. Such a promissory note fits the world in which the Priestly author wrote, one in which Yahwists were now living in Egypt and Mesopotamia as well as in Syria-Palestine. God was protecting all of those places and peoples, a sentiment also to be found in the book of Jonah.

The second Priestly covenant occurs in Gen 17. There, God makes a covenant with Abraham. It too involves promises: Abraham will have numerous heirs, so much so that kings and nations will be his descendants. Moreover, God will grant the land of Canaan to his descendants. This dual promise of progeny and land is intended to perdure: regarding his offspring, it will be an "everlasting covenant" (v. 7), and the land will be a "perpetual holding" (v. 8). This covenant, too, includes a sign: the rite of circumcision. However, unlike the Noachian covenant, Abraham has certain responsibilities. He is to be "blameless" (v. 1, the same word the Priestly writer uses to characterize Noah in 6:9), and he along with all the males of his household must be circumcised.

The covenants depicted by the Priestly writer are formal promises; he also records promises of a less formal sort. Many scholars have identified a "theology of promise" in Genesis, one that focuses on the lineage of Terah (e.g., Westermann 1980). Though there has been debate about which element is primary, land or progeny, both are regularly featured together, and both are passed from Abraham to Isaac and thence to Jacob. Such language of covenant and promise is primarily to be found in texts written or edited by priests.

The discourses of covenant and promise are the primary theological categories in the book of Genesis. Yet it is possible to comb through various texts and try to formulate concepts such as a theology of creation or a theology of sin found throughout the book. But these attempts are frequently problematic since they import vocabulary and conceptual categories foreign to the Hebrew text. (However, see Kaminsky 2012, 639–43, for a helpful discussion of "corruption," a topic that in many other studies would be treated under the topic of "sin.") Alternatively, one might focus on the Priestly source and try to summarize the theological perspectives present there. For example, the Priestly author uses the diction of "be fruitful and multiply" ten times in Genesis. No other author in the Hebrew Bible does so (for a discussion, see King 2009, 85–87). This concern about the population growth of humans, and more especially Israelites, is consistent with a restoration of the Yahwistic community after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

To suggest that texts other than those attributable to priests lack theological interest would, of course, be difficult to sustain. As the earlier discussion of the formation of Genesis has suggested, there are two other primary bodies of literature, the early or pre-Priestly texts, such as Gen 2–3 in the primeval account, and the post-Priestly texts, such as Gen 20 and 24. In both literatures, theological issues are worked out within the context of a story. For example, Gen 2–3 offers not only a report about the creation of faunal and human life but also a narrative about how humans will respond to the presence of a certain tree (or trees) and a prohibition that they not eat from one of them. It seems licit to think that the early author of Gen 2–3 is exploring the way in which humans will respond or be related to their God, an issue of significant theological import. Or, in Gen 20, the second of the so-called wife-sister stories, a post-Priestly author addresses a theological question concerning whether Israelites can trust someone when they live in a foreign land. The issue is couched in explicit theological language: "the fear of God." Through narrative and dialogue, the author offers an affirmative answer to this issue, which was of critical importance when Yahwists were forced to live outside the land after the fall of Judah. As these two examples suggest, each narrative or report can raise a discrete or distinctive theological issue. As a result, in this commentary I have often focused on addressing theological issues on a smaller scale, exploring the theological implications of a particular report or story rather than attempting to identify themes that might occur more broadly throughout the book.

Geography

It may seem strange to include reference to geography in an introduction to the book of Genesis. But place looms large in the world of these fifty chapters. In chapters 1–11, authors address a vast scale, "heavens and earth," a cultural map of the world (Gen 11), and a world divided by rivers (2:10–14). On occasion, their vision narrows to a garden in/of Eden (2:8; 3:23), the mountains of Ararat (8:4); and a plain in the land of Shinar (11:2). In Gen 11:27–50:24, the map becomes smaller. At the outset the book refers to Ur of the Chaldeans (Mesopotamia), but Terah soon leaves there and moves to Haran (in Syria, northeast of Damascus). From then on, there is movement between the land of Canaan and into Syria and back again, to Gerar and back again (twice), and to Egypt and back again, with a final trip to Egypt that leaves them outside the land of Canaan at the end of the book.

People and the literature in which they appear are often associated with specific places. In the family literature, Jacob is associated with the cities of Bethel (28:11–22; 35:9–13) and Shechem (33:18–20), as well as the central portion of Israel. There is also a tradition of Jacob residing with Laban in Paddan-Aram (28:2) and Peniel (32:31), which is east of the Jordan River but much closer

to Bethel and Shechem than is Paddan-Aram. This stands in contrast with the localities connected with Abraham. He appears more frequently in southern areas or cities, such as Negeb (12:9; 13:1), Gerar (20:1), Mamre and Hebron (13:18; 18:1), Machpelah (23:17), Beersheba (21:31), and, of course, Egypt (12:10). The German word *Ortsgebundenheit*, literally, "bound to a place," reflects that phenomenon. According to the world described in Genesis, Israel's two primary patriarchs belonged to two different regions, each of which would be associated with one of the ensuing nations: Jacob with Israel in the north, and Abraham with Judah in the south. Many scholars think that the literature concerning these two individuals emerged separately in these two regions and that the respective literatures important for the two nations emerged there.

It is also important to recognize that the theologies expressed in the book were also influenced by geography. As the study of El epithets (see above) has shown, El was known by a distinct liturgical name, depending on the place at which a shrine was located. The name El was coupled with a place name, such as El Bethel (Gen 35:7). Moreover, one might infer that the god of father Abraham might have been of special importance in Hebron, whereas the god of father Jacob would have been at home in Shechem.

Even more important than the relationship of individuals or the deity to a specific geographic region is the motif of geographic movement throughout the entire book. This obtains for all four sections. In the primeval history, humanity is forced to leave the garden. In the next chapter, Cain, after killing his brother, is consigned to being "a wanderer on the earth" (4:12, 14). Thereafter, humanity begins to build cities, but the deluge that ensues requires that Noah and his family escape death by floating on the seas (Gen 6–8). The postflood world is one in which humanity settles, but by the end of Gen 11, humanity is scattered "over all the face of the earth."

The family literature begins with Terah migrating from Mesopotamia to Syria. That movement continues when, following God's command, Abram travels to Canaan. Soon after arriving, he moves to Egypt to survive a famine. Subsequently he settles in the land of Canaan, living near Mamre (13:18). But again, he leaves the land, traveling to Gerar (20:1) to seek food during another famine. After returning to the land, he lives near Beersheba (21:32). Later, when Sarah dies, the family has been living near Hebron (23:2); near there, Abraham is able to purchase land for her burial and for later burials. Throughout his life, Abraham is moving not only within the land but away from and back to it.

Jacob's journeys are different, but they also involve movement within and away from the land. In order to survive his brother Esau's murderous wrath and to find an appropriate wife, Jacob leaves the land and goes to Paddan-Aram in Syria, where other members of Terah's patrilineage lived (28:2). On the journey to Syria, Jacob spends time in Bethel (28:19); on the way home with his family and flocks, he stays east of the Jordan at Penuel. From there he leaves for

Shechem, where he purchases land (33:19). After residing in Shechem, God commands Jacob to move to Bethel (35:1) and settle there. However, the family leaves Bethel and moves to Ephrath (35:16), apparently near Bethlehem. Only later are readers told that Jacob's sons are pasturing his livestock near Shechem (37:12). So again, the family literature depicts another patriarch residing outside the land and moving about within it. There is no permanent geographic place except for one plot of land secured by Abraham as a burial plot and a field that Jacob buys.

Like the foregoing individuals, Joseph undertakes several journeys. The first one is against his will: he is taken away from the land of Canaan and sold as a slave in Egypt. While there, he resides in multiple locations, including Potiphar's house, prison, and his own house (44:14). Once he achieves status in Egypt, he is able to travel freely throughout the land (41:46). His second journey is occasioned by the death of his father. He fulfills his father's charge that he be buried in the ancestral cemetery at Machpelah. Once the interment has taken place, Joseph and his family return to their homes and herds in Egypt. (Unlike the family literature, and with the exception of the phrase "the land of Goshen," the Joseph novella does not list many toponyms to identify places where Joseph either resided or visited.)

At the end of the novella, Joseph has been joined by Jacob and his household, that is, emergent Israel. An Israelite writer identifies sixty-six people, "not including the wives of Jacob's sons" (46:26), who have come to Egypt at Joseph's invitation. The author is clear. The "numerous people" (50:20) are now residents in Egypt. They have voluntarily left the land of Canaan and are now living in the fertile land of Egypt (Exod 16:3; Num 11:5). The crisis of famine reported in Gen 12 along with Abram and Sarai's move to Egypt is recapitulated when Jacob and his family migrate to Egypt during another crisis caused by the lack of food.

In sum, geographic movement is a hallmark of the book. There are movements away from, such as from the garden, from the soil (4:14), from the plain of Shinar, the Ur of the Chaldees, Haran, and finally from the land of Canaan. Humanity, and then nascent Israel, is always departing. But there are also oscillations of being in the land of Canaan, leaving, and returning—to Egypt, Gerar, and Haran. There are also, of course, uncountable movements within the land. These movements of departing, leaving, returning, and finally leaving lie at the heart of the family's experience. Yet the promise of progeny to the family, though threatened, continues to be realized; the promise of land remains only a hope. Such movement makes much sense for a book written during the Persian period, when many Yahwists lived outside the land, and some would remain so forever. Thus it is not surprising that the book holds an interest in religious behavior that could take place both inside and outside the land, practices such as circumcision, prayer, and Sabbath, practices that could stand apart from a

central shrine or a temple. Moreover, it goes without saying that these rites could all have been practiced by families in their homes.

Hebrew Text

The Masoretic Text (MT) printed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (*BHS*) serves as the basis for this commentary. The MT group of texts is known for "careful copying, fine quality, and antiquity of its text in most of the biblical books" (Tov 2012, 26). Genesis is one of those books. Nevertheless, Genesis, as with all handwritten manuscripts, has been subject to human error. Such errors are not random. As Hendel comments, "All scribes at all times and places make certain predictable types of errors, most of them accidental, including such commonplaces as graphic confusion, dittography, and haplography" (Hendel 1998, 40). An example of graphic confusion, due to two Hebrew consonants that look alike, may be found in Gen 2:12, where a *waw* in the MT should be a *yod* in the word *hahêʾ* (see Hendel 1998, 40–41 for a list of such errors in Gen 1–11). Most such instances do not provide problems for the commentator. This commentary discusses these issues, when appropriate, in the notes that follow each translation.

The text of Genesis does not present text-critical problems of the sort present in more complicated biblical books. Jeremiah offers numerous instances in which the LXX reads a shorter text than the MT, attesting to the likelihood that the LXX preserves an earlier form of the book than does the MT. Classic examples include Jer 33:14–26 and 51:44b–49a, neither of which is featured in the LXX. The commentator must routinely wrestle with these differences. In contrast, the books of Samuel in the MT contain many instances in which the MT is shorter than the LXX (e.g., 1 Sam 31:1). The DSS provide evidence that these shorter readings often derive from accidental abbreviations in the MT text, such as 1 Sam 10:27b: though present in 4QSam^{a}, it is missing in MT. Unlike the books of Jeremiah and Samuel, ancient texts and versions of Genesis do not offer this sort of consistently different readings from the MT.

Also unlike those two biblical books, for which there is evidence from the LXX and the DSS, another ancient text is important for the text critic: the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP). As a result, those trying to understand the ancient textual traditions must assess two complete manuscript traditions, LXX and SP, along with the fragmentary texts from Qumran (DSS). In order to do so, the interpreter must have a general understanding of how these three bodies of evidence are associated and the way they relate to the MT.

The oldest biblical manuscripts that attest to Genesis are the nineteen fragments discovered at Qumran (Crawford 2012, 353–73). They attest to a form of the biblical text that may be described as "Proto-Masoretic," that is, they offer no substantial and consistent differences from the Masoretic Text. The

Samaritan Pentateuch, which like the DSS was written in Hebrew and is thus a text and not a translated version, offers occasional readings that preserve a more original form of the Hebrew text than does the MT. In such instances, the MT's readings typically derive from scribal errors. For example, in Gen 22:13, where the MT has "a ram behind," SP reads "one ram." The copyist whose work is preserved in the MT misread a *dalet* (d, ד) for a *resh* (r, ר) (so Speiser 1964, lxxii). The SP can, therefore, be a useful resource for identifying a few readings that are not present in the MT.

The SP is also known for a variety of features, most notably the focus on Mount Gerizim as the site of legitimate Yahwistic worship. This concern is evident in Deuteronomy, though not in Genesis. Less significant elements do appear in Genesis, which Tov has characterized as "Small Harmonizing Alterations" (Tov 2012, 82–83). For example, in Gen 7:2, where the MT reads, literally, "a male and his mate," SP reads "male and female," a change that attempts to make this verse conform to the diction present in 1:27; 5:2; 6:19; 7:3, 9, 16. Such changes were, Tov maintains, designed "to remove internal contradictions or regularities from the Torah text that were considered harmful to its sanctity" (Tov 2012, 82).

The most important version for the textual critic is the LXX. Though some interpreters have suggested that the LXX represents more of an interpretation than a translation, recent scholars have consistently maintained that the book of Genesis in LXX is a "lexically and syntactically strict, quantitative representation of its source text" (R. Hiebert 2007, 1); or, as Hendel puts it, LXX is a "literalistic translation of a Hebrew *Vorlage*" (1998, 17.). Nonetheless, in some places LXX (and SP) differ from the MT. For example, in Gen 2:2 the LXX and SP read "the sixth day," which is almost certainly a change introduced in both an ancient text (SP) and version (LXX) to avoid giving the impression that the deity was working on the seventh day. Genesis 1:9 presents a different situation among the ancient manuscript evidence, one in which a reading *longer* than the MT is present in both the LXX and the DSS: "And the waters that were under the sky gathered together into their place, and the dry land appeared" follows immediately after "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place. And so it happened." The LXX and DSS provide a report about the fulfilling of the command, a case of harmonization based on the presence of such reports on other days during which something was created, as in 1:12 (for a different assessment, see Brown 1993). Tov has concluded that the LXX's Genesis and Deuteronomy offer evidence of harmonization more so than any other feature (2012, 136).

For the commentator, the most significant text-critical issue in the book of Genesis arises in Gen 4:8, where both the LXX and the SP have Cain saying, "Let us go out into the field," a sentence absent in the MT. (Unfortunately, the DSS do not preserve this verse.) The reading in LXX and SP would lead one to think that Cain is guilty of premeditated murder; MT's reading would

likely lead to a judgment of manslaughter. Most scholars think that the speech was present in the original narrative and that it was deleted due to accidental omission of a word or phrase. (Hendel deems it a case of parablepsis [1998, 128].) This text is the exception, however. There are no divergences between the MT and other witnesses (i.e., DSS, SP, LXX) of comparable importance for the interpreter of Genesis.

The genealogies in Gen 5 and 11 present a special case, since the chronologies attributed to both pre- and postdiluvian ancestors vary significantly between the ancient witnesses. The current state of research suggests that ancient scribes were concerned to address inappropriate implications and inconsistencies presented by chronologies in the MT. For example, in Gen 5, Methuselah lived 969 years according to the MT and LXX; but he lived only 720 years according to SP. The date in SP means that Methuselah died *when* the flood began; the longer lifespan means that Methuselah would have been alive during the flood, an implication that the SP tradition wanted to avoid. A similar situation occurs with Gen 11:32 MT, which lists Terah's lifespan as 205 years. Because Abram departs from Haran when he is 74, according to the Priestly author, Terah would be 145 at the time, leaving him alive well after Abram moves further into Syria-Palestine. From a narrative perspective, Terah should have passed from the scene by that time; SP solved that problem by reducing his lifespan to 145 years, having him die when Abram leaves his father's household. (For a thorough discussion of the evidence in the MT, LXX, and SP for chapters 5 and 11, see Hendel 1998, 61–80.) In sum, though there are occasional scribal errors in the MT of Genesis, instances in which textual criticism must weigh the evidence from both ancient texts and versions, the MT provides an excellent basis for the translation and comments provided here.

COMMENTARY

Genesis 1:1–31
"When God Began to Create the Heavens and the Earth . . ."

Brevity, repetition, and majesty are hallmarks of these verses, known as the Priestly account of creation. Few reports about the creation of the cosmos and of humanity have been achieved within the space of a mere thirty-four verses. The report is astonishing when one compares it to the much lengthier accounts from the ancient Near East. It is even remarkable when compared to Gen 2:4b–25, which requires twenty verses to narrate just the creation of fauna and humanity. Numerous elements are repeated throughout the account in Gen 1 (e.g., "and so it happened"), a stylistic feature that both emphasizes their place in the account and calls attention to other features that are different, such as the absence of declaring something "good" on the second and seventh days. The word "God" appears thirty-five times (a statistic that includes Gen 2:1–3, the remainder of the Priestly account of creation). There is a dominant character in Gen 1: the deity. That character persistently serves as the subject of active verbs: calling into existence, dividing, making, naming, seeing, blessing, and sanctifying. Clearly, the author has focused on the preeminent role of the deity. Nonetheless, once the created order is in place, entities that have been created will need to act. For example, both the luminaries and humanity need to govern (vv. 16, 26, 28).

This report highlights two primary structures of the cosmos: geography and time. Interpreters have typically paid more attention to the former rather than the latter. As for the geography, the author depicts the movement from the preexistent earth and watery deep to the structure in which the waters have been separated and put in their respective places, light and the heavenly objects have been called into being, the seas and earth have generated life, the earth has become habitable for land creatures, and humans have been created. As for time, the temporal building blocks of dusk and dawn, due to the presence or absence of light, delineate the notion of a day. These categories of dusk, dawn, and day, which make up a twenty-four-hour period, are used in a formula that

is repeated throughout the first six days of creative activity. Their absence on the seventh day signifies that a new category is now emerging: the week; and within that week the seventh day achieves special promise when, in Gen 2:3, God makes it holy. This sanctification of the seventh day is an act that sets the stage for Israelite ritual practices on the Sabbath, religious observances involving, among other things, the cessation of work. Such practices on the Sabbath were especially important after the temple was destroyed in 587 BCE and remained significant for those Jews living in Egypt and Mesopotamia even after the Second Temple was constructed.

This account of creation includes ideas distinct from those in the earlier creation narrative, in Gen 2–3. It clearly has a broader purview: the entire cosmos rather than "the earth" of the following chapters. But the Priestly writer seems interested in doing something more than simply enlarging the canvas in which creation is depicted. This author wants to moderate or challenge some of the earlier traditions, an element that reappears throughout the book of Genesis. To this extent, Genesis includes a theological dialogue between various Israelite authors. For example, the prior author refers to humans who, soon after they were created, made decisions that would lead to their expulsion from the garden (Gen 3). In contrast, the Priestly author offers a "higher" view of humanity in Gen 1; humans are created as similar to God and charged with governing the universe that the deity has created: they have a greater responsibility than caring for a garden. Although the prior author has described the world of human habitation as "pleasant" (2:9), the Priestly author offers a stronger claim: "everything" is "very good" (1:31). Other similar distinctions abound.

1:1 When God began to create the heavens and the earth[a]—**2** the earth was
empty wilderness, the watery deep was dark, and a wind from God swept
over the water—**3** God said, "Let there be light!" And there was light.
4 God saw that the light was good. Then God separated light from dark-
ness. **5** God named the light "Day," and the darkness he named "Night."
There was dusk and there was dawn, the first day.

6 God said, "Let there be a vault within the water; let it separate some
water from other water." **7** God made the vault and separated the water
that was under the vault from the water that was over the vault. And so it
happened. **8** God named the vault "Sky." There was dusk and there was
dawn, the second day.

9 God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place;
then let dry ground appear." And so it happened.[b] **10** God named the dry
ground "Earth" and the gathered water "Seas." God saw that it was good.
11 God said, "Let the earth yield vegetation, seed-bearing plants and fruit
trees with their own distinctive seeds." And so it happened. **12** The earth
produced vegetation, seed-bearing plants and fruit trees with their own

distinctive seeds. God saw that it was good. **13** There was dusk and there was dawn, the third day.

14 God said, "Let there be luminaries in the vault of the sky to distinguish the day from the night. Let them be markers for significant events,[c] for festivals, and for days and years. **15** Let them be luminaries in the vault of the sky to provide light on the earth." And so it happened. **16** God made the two great luminaries, the brighter light to rule the day and the dimmer light, as well as the stars, to rule the night. **17** God placed them in the vault of the sky to provide light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and the night, and to distinguish light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** There was dusk and there was dawn, the fourth day.

20 God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures and let the birds fly over the earth up in the vault of the sky." **21** God created the giant sea monsters and all the living creatures, the ones that wriggle as they swarm in the water, of every kind, and all the winged birds, of every kind. **22** God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and become numerous. Fill the waters of the seas. Let the birds be numerous on the earth." **23** There was dusk and there was dawn, the fifth day.

24 God said, "Let the earth produce living creatures of every kind: domestic animals, things that crawl, wild animals of every kind." And so it happened. **25** God made the wild animals of every kind, domestic animals of every kind, everything that crawls on the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 God said, "Let us make humans in our image, similar to us. Let them govern the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the domestic animals, over all the earth, and everything that crawls on the ground."

27 So God created the earth creature[d] in his image.
In the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful, become numerous, fill the earth, and take charge over it. Govern the fish of the sea, the birds in the heavens, and all living things that crawl on the ground." **29** God said, "I give to you all the seed-bearing plants that are on the earth and all the trees that bear fruit and that have seeds: they will be your food. **30** Moreover, to all the wild animals, to all birds in the heavens, and to everything that crawls, to everything that breathes, all green plants will be their food." And so it happened. **31** God looked over everything that he had made; it was very good. There was dusk and there was dawn, the sixth day.

a. The absence of a definite article precludes the traditional translation, "In the beginning." Furthermore, comparable texts narrating creation, both biblical (Gen 2:4b–7) and extrabiblical (i.e., Enuma Elish, Atrahasis), begin with temporal clauses.

b. The LXX continues, "And the water that was under the sky was gathered together, and dry ground appeared."

c. Cf. 2 Kgs 20:8–11; Isa 8:18; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7–8, 22; 66:19.

d. In v. 26, the noun *ʾādām* is indefinite. Here it is preceded by the definite article.

[1:1–13] The Priestly author has offered a report that commences with deep ambiguity, even though the grammar is clear (v. 1 is a temporal clause, v. 2 is a circumstantial clause, and v. 3 is the main finite clause). Although the report focuses on what is being brought into being (the temporal clause), it also reports things that exist *before* God's creative activity (the circumstantial clause). Therein lies a virtual paradox: God will create "the earth," but "the earth" is present before God sets to work. Moreover, both "the empty wilderness" and a "wind from God" exist before God speaks. It is as if some form of matter—an empty, wild earth and dark, watery depths—were needed as the matter out of which the earth and the heavens will be made. Darkness was necessary as a counterpart for the light that soon appears. And wind-whipped waves serve as a point of contrast to the firmly fixed and tiered universe that is about to be created.

Verses 3–5 announce the creation of light and what comprises a twenty-four-hour period. God calls light into existence; cf. Ps 33:6 for the motif of creation by speaking. However, even before there is reference to the elements that comprise the day, the deity values light as "good." What remains unclear is whether darkness is not "good," or whether light is good only because it allows for the sequence of darkness and light, constituting a day. In any case, the deity not only speaks but also "separates," hence the action narrated in 1:6–7. The word "day" is used in two ways in 1:5. In its first occurrence, day means "daytime," the illumined portion of a day; in its second occurrence, day means a twenty-four-hour period of time, including daytime and nighttime. Not only that, the Priestly author includes reference to the transitional times: dusk and dawn, calling attention to the way darkness emerges and then light ensues. It goes without saying that the final phrase also serves the interest of the Priestly author, for whom the daily round of sacrifices is a constitutive part of ceremonial practice (Num 28:1–8).

Concern for the basic structure of the universe undergirds 1:6–8. If 1:3–5 depend upon the presence of darkness in the pre-creation state, verses 6–8 presuppose the presence of water in that same *time before time*. It is into those waters that the deity calls for and then makes (this is the first time in Gen 1 that the deity "makes" something) a heavenly vault, a round dome that is probably thought to be made of hammered metal. (The vault is also referred to several times in Ezekiel 1, where it is described as "shining like crystal" [v. 22], a depiction consistent with an object made of polished metal.) Here again, there is a constitutive act of separation, allowing for waters both above and below

the vault. Once it is in place, the God names the vault "Sky." (This "name" can also be translated "Heavens"; the noun is plural in form but functions as a singular noun.)

The third day (vv. 9–13) is more complex than the preceding ones. There are two distinct acts: the congealing of the waters and the emergence of vegetation. It is as if the writer needs to compress earlier traditions about the creation of more than six acts into a scheme of only six days. The deity spoke, whereby the waters were amassed into a single place and dry ground appeared—two passive verbs that deemphasize the role of the deity. That role is, however, emphasized in yet a third moment, that of naming: "Earth" and "Seas." The former word has already appeared in the description of the pre-creation state. Although 1:2 refers to water twice, this is the first time that the word "Seas" is used (v. 10).

The focus in these verses is not, however, on seas but on earth. (The report will return to "seas" in v. 22.) As a compliant partner of the deity, the earth is an entity that generates vegetation. Moreover, though two different types of flora are described, plants and trees, the author states that they have a common element: the production of seeds. This emphasis on seeds is likely a subtle polemic against ancient Near Eastern religions that included rites designed to enhance agricultural fertility. The Priestly writer claims that Israel's deity created a world in which the earth would naturally yield agricultural bounty over time as plants and trees themselves provided for the next generation of such flora. In contrast to the pre-Priestly account, the Priestly author describes the trees as benign. Trees bear fruit that is available for human consumption with no prohibitions. For the Priestly author, it goes without saying that such flora are available for consumption by both animals and humans, a situation that will change with the postflood world (Gen 9:3). The two different components of the third day result in a twofold construal: both Seas and Earth are deemed "good" (vv. 10 and 12). The Seas receive the same commendation as does the Earth, even though the latter has pride of place on day three.

The first three days of creation are distinct from the next three in that the first ones involve acts of naming: Day, Night, Sky, and Earth. The first two names involve the structure of time, whereas the second two reflect the physical structure of the cosmos. Unlike the pre-Priestly account of creation in Gen 2, only the deity names things in Gen 1 (cf. 2:19).

[14–31] During these three days, God populates the structures that have just been created.

In 1:14–19, the fourth day, the deity returns to the act of separation, as was the case on the first and third days. The return to the first day focuses on the significance of illumination. Although God has already separated light from darkness and named them Day and Night (vv. 4–5), God now repeats that act of separation, underscoring it by the presence of distinct luminaries, one for the day and one for the night. They are not only to distinguish day from night but

also to rule over the day and night, a motif of governance that will reappear in 1:26, 28. Since both the sun and moon were understood to be deities in ancient Near Eastern religion, this claim of the Priestly writer is striking in its proximity to such beliefs. However, the claim in 1:17 also involves a limitation on the power of both the sun and moon: each has dominion only during one portion of a twenty-four-hour period.

The sun and moon will also be a means for communicating between the deity and humans. The word translated here as "significant events" appears in texts such as 2 Kgs 20:8–11, which includes an omen that is created by the sun apparently moving backward (cf. Josh 10:12–13, where both the sun and the moon are part of the omen). In ancient Mesopotamia, eclipses were recorded as omens (cf. Isa 13:10). The word "festivals" refers to religious rites (Lev 23:2, 4, 37, 44), rituals specified for times often defined by day, week, and month. These are "festivals of the LORD" (Lev 23:2). The stars are something of an afterthought, though it is clear that biblical authors knew the identity of various astral constellations (e.g., Amos 5:8; Job 38:31). As was the case with days one and three, the report about the fourth day includes the commendation and enumeration formulas.

Verses 20–23 describe the fifth day and the creation of fauna. They belong to the two realms signified on day two, the waters and the space created by the vault. Contrary to some translations (e.g., NRSV), the sense in 1:20 is different from that in 1:11 and 24. In those two verses, the image is of a generative earth. In 1:20, however, the verb refers to the physical behavior of aquatic creatures, teeming or wriggling, not to the waters producing the aquatic creatures. The waters and the air over the earth are the places in which these forms of animal life move and have their being. However, neither the waters nor the air "bring forth" the animals. For whatever reason, perhaps because aquatic creatures and birds live at a remove from humanity, the Priestly writer intends that the faunal life created on day five be distinct from life created on day six.

The deity responds to the presence of fauna by offering a verbal blessing (v. 22). The blessing is odd, however, since it is made up of a series of imperative verbs: be fruitful, become numerous, fill, and be numerous. Genesis 1:28 and 9:1 offer a similar combination of blessing and imperative verbs. It is as if the deity has created the capacity for animals and humans to propagate, which constitutes the blessing, yet both animals and humans need to be admonished to take advantage of that capacity.

Day six involves the creation of earthbound animal life and humans. They are, however, created in vastly different ways. With 1:24–25 and the creation of animal life, the Priestly author returns to the role of the earth as generative, as was the case on day three. The fauna created on this day fall into three categories: wild animals, small life such as beetles, and domestic animals. There is no hierarchy. Since at this point in the Priestly conception of the universe, animals

have not yet been granted to humans as food, domestic animals were not rated more highly than insects. Moreover, what is created on both days three and five, earthbound flora and fauna, are both deemed good, but neither are blessed. What the earth produces is good but not blessed. (The Priestly writer offers a more inclusive view of nonhuman faunal life than does the author of Gen 2, who mentions neither ocean-dwelling fauna nor insects, but only animals and birds apparently considered appropriate as companion to the earth creature.)

Things change when the Priestly writer moves to the creation of humanity. Perhaps the most striking difference from the foregoing language is the presence of first-person-plural language: "Let us." This reference to the divinity as plural reappears in the primeval history, though in pre-Priestly literature (3:22; 11:7). This language almost certainly reflects the notion of a divine council (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19–23; Isa 6; Job 1) in which the supreme deity is surrounded by minor deities, otherwise known as "the sons of God" (e.g., Job 1:6). One might ask why, only at this point in Gen 1, does this entity appear. The answer is probably to be found in the "social" character of humanity, as symbolized by the male/female distinction, which does not allow for the notion of an originally sexually undifferentiated creature that is present in Gen 2. Hence, if humanity is to be created in some way similar to the deity, then the deity must perforce have a social quality. The Priestly writer followed the lead of the pre-Priestly literature and included reference to the divine council to suit his purposes. However, that Priestly writer uses it only once. In 1:27–31, the deity acts solely as a singular agent.

Although the Priestly writer uses the divine council as an image for divine plurality, that writer also uses the diction of an "image," a physical representation, to convey the character of the similarity between God and humanity. Just as a sculptor can model clay to make it appear like a specific human being, so in some way humanity will be similar to the deity, though again this is an analogy. The Priestly writer reuses this same language in Gen 5:3 to describe the way in which a son can be like his father, though here a real physical reality is in play. The more metaphorical usage in the ancient Near East, according to which a king is an image of God, is similar to that in Gen 1. The word translated here "similar to" pushes in this same direction, a more general notion of similarity that could be physical (e.g., Isa 40:18), but could refer to a nonphysical correspondence. The notion of humanity as being in the image of God, as would be a king, and the command to govern give this text a distinctly political cast. Humanity is to serve as a divinely appointed governor or regal figure. As noted earlier, the notion of governance appears twice in Gen 1; astral objects, the sun and moon, and humanity are both given authority over others: the former over day and night, the latter over floral and faunal life.

Much has been made of the literary style of 1:27. It appears to be poetry, as in this translation and many contemporary versions. The Masoretic Text

does not construe the verse as poetry nor does the NJPS translation. However, there is a reason to think that 1:27 works as poetry, and that has to do with the issue of "number." The first two lines of the "poetry" refer to an individual, *hāʾādām*, the earth creature. (The Priestly writer uses the same word in Gen 2:7.) In the second line, the author uses a singular pronoun, "him." The final line, however, uses a plural pronoun. This refinement is typical of Hebrew poetry in which the second or third line in a parallel structure offers a more specific or developed version of what was said in the initial line. Though it may sound prosaic, 1:27 may be restated, "So God created the earth creature, . . . but God really created the earth creature as something more than an individual; they are male and female." Here the Priestly author is offering a different notion of human plurality than the one in Gen 2. Here Gen 1 claims that human plurality is the initial state, what God intended; it is not the result of an attempt to find a companion for the earth creature, a companion not part of the initial created order. According to the Priestly writer, after divine reflection, the communal deity created communal humanity.

The word "create" (*brʾ*, 1:27) often refers to something that only God can do (cf. Josh 17:15). Though elsewhere in the OT, God is described as creating the stars (Isa 40:26) or the wind (Amos 4:13), the Priestly writer here reserves God's act of creation (*bārāʾ*) for humanity, though to be sure the word appears in the very first verse of Gen 1, where God's creative activity involves everything that is created. However, although throughout the chapter God "makes" things, the deity "creates" only here during the seven-day sequence of creation.

In a chapter that can be remarkably laconic, there is striking repetition. God speaks within the divine council (v. 26), and then, much of what is said in that speech is stated directly to humanity in 1:28. There are, however, differences between these two speeches. The notion of governing is supplemented by the diction of "taking charge" (v. 28), a verb that elsewhere in the OT refers to rape (Esth 7:8) or enslavement (Neh 5:5). This diction no doubt reflects the writer's experience of the ways monarchs ruled in the ancient Near East. Apart from the relationship of these two speeches, the blessing involving fertility that appeared in verse 22 is reiterated in verse 28.

God's second speech specifies what every form of animal and human life should eat. The purview of this speech is captured by the sevenfold repetition of the Hebrew word *kol*, "all" or "every." All plants and trees are available for all animals and all humans to eat. By implication, with such a widely available vegetarian diet, no animal or human needs to be a carnivore. Furthermore, and again by implication, humans can eat from any tree, because all trees that produce fruit or nuts are available for food. This claim stands in strong contrast with the view expressed in Gen 2–3, naming two trees with fruit that was not to be eaten (2:17; 3:22). Here again, the Priestly author is providing another view of what creation involves and what its implications are for human behavior.

Verses 29–30 of Gen 1 offer an interesting revision of the role of plants yielding seeds. Earlier (vv. 11–12) seed appeared to function for propagation; now the Priestly writer makes clear that these seeds, along with the plants themselves, are specifically intended as food for animals and humans, created on the sixth day. Verse 30 also incorporates diction used by the author of Gen 2. According to this pre-Priestly account, the deity breathes the "breath of life" into the clay statue that he has molded. The Priestly writer reuses this phrase, "breath of life," but broadens its application. In the Priestly view, humans share the breath of life with animals. As a result, both humans and animals are given the same source of food.

The commendation formula at the end of Gen 1 moves beyond the one in verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25. This formula in 1:31 refers to everything (*kol*) that God has made, not just what has been created since the preceding commendation formula in 1:25. The Priestly writer's hallmark is his judgment that the creation is "good," and at the end of the sixth day, it has become "very good." One senses that the Priestly writer is offering a claim that might cut against those Israelites who, having read Gen 2–3, might think that the created order is flawed since it so quickly leads to various forms of disarray due to what is created on the sixth day. Here the Priestly author is offering a summary judgment about all that has been created on days one through six.

The Priestly writer's presentation of creation appears to be linear, moving from the first to the sixth day. But there is another literary technique present in the chapter, that of pairing: between days one and four, days two and five, and days three and six. The first pairing focuses on light. Light or illumination takes place on the first day. Then the heavenly luminaries are created on day four. The second pair involves water. On the second day, the waters are divided and ordered into two places. Then the fifth day sees the creation of life in the waters, along with birds. The final pair highlights land, with the emergence of dry land on day three and the creation of life that dwells on the earth, both faunal and human, on the sixth day. It is as if the writer wants to avoid saying everything about one of the three topics at one time and instead prefers to circle back and readdress the topics of light, water, and dry land. This symmetry is complete at the end of the sixth day, and as such it highlights what will stand outside that symmetry of three pairs, namely, the seventh day, which appears in chapter 2.

Genesis 2:1–25
YHWH God Molds the Earth Creature

Genesis 2 comprises the conclusion to the Priestly account of creation, the first of the so-called *tôlədôt* formulae ("these are the descendants . . ."), and the beginning of the early narrative recounting the creation of humanity. As such, the chapter is utterly diverse. Even the early narrative itself (vv. 4b–25) is complex, involving a story whereby man and woman are created plus a report about a river that flows from Eden and then diverges into four major tributaries. At the outset of the chapter, the Priestly writer offers the final element in his account of creation, which stands outside the symmetrical pairs of light (days one and three), waters and sky (days two and four), and earth (days three and six) in Gen 1 and, as such, has special significance. It is the only feature in creation that is deemed holy (2:3). By including this final element to conclude the first creation account, the priest has done nothing less than create a temple of time and in time, the Sabbath, likely at a time after the First Temple has been destroyed.

The Priestly account of creation focuses on organization and structure; the primary account in Gen 2 highlights relationships, of which there are four primary ones: God and humanity, humanity and ground, male and female, and humanity with animals.

2:1 Then the heavens and the earth and all their cohorts were finished.
2 God finished the work he had been doing on the seventh day.[a] He stopped on the seventh day from all the work he had been doing. **3** God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God stopped from all the work of creation.[b]

4 These are the descendants of the heavens and the earth after they had been created.

On the day that YHWH God made earth and heavens, **5** before there was shrubbery in the field on the earth and before any of the grasses of the field grew, since YHWH God had not yet made rain fall upon the earth and there was no human to cultivate the ground, **6** when instead a spring bubbled up from the earth and irrigated the entire surface of the ground, **7** then YHWH God molded the earth creature from bits of earth. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life so that the earth creature came to life. **8** YHWH

God planted a garden in Eden, to the East. There he put the earth creature
that he had molded. 9 YHWH God made all the trees that are beautiful to
see and good for food grow up from the ground. The tree of life was in the
center of the garden, as was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out from Eden to irrigate the garden. From there it
splits and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it
flows throughout the land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 The gold
from that land is pure; fragrant resin and gemstones are also found there.
13 The name of the second is Gihon; it flows throughout the land of Cush.
14 The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. The fourth
river is the Euphrates.

15 YHWH God took the earth creature and settled him in the pleasur-
able garden[c] to cultivate it and to care for it. 16 YHWH God admonished
the earth creature, "You may eat from any tree in the garden, 17 but from
the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat. On the day
that you eat from it, you will certainly die."

18 Then YHWH God said, "It's not good for the earth creature to be
alone. I will make a companion appropriate for him." 19 So YHWH God
molded from the earth all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky and
brought them to the earth creature to see how he would name each one.
And whatever the earth creature called every living creature, that was its
name. 20 The earth creature gave names to all the domestic animals, to
the birds of the sky, to all wild animals. However, he did not find[d] a com-
panion for the earth creature.[e] 21 So YHWH God made the earth creature
fall into a deep sleep; he was sound asleep. Then he took one of his ribs
and closed up the flesh where it had been. 22 YHWH God fashioned the
rib that he had removed from the earth creature into a female and brought
her to the earth creature. 23 Then the earth creature said,

"This time: bone from my bone,
flesh from my flesh.
This one shall be called 'Female,'
since this one was taken from a 'Male.'"

24 As a result, a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his
wife, such that they become one flesh. 25 The two of them were naked but
the earth creature and his wife were not ashamed.

a. SP, LXX, and Syr read "sixth day," almost certainly a revision of the original "seventh day," since that text appears to violate the notion of the seventh day as a day of rest.

b. The Hebrew is difficult: lit., "because on it he stopped from all his work, which God created to do."

c. Traditionally, "garden of Eden," though the sense of Eden as a toponym is absent here. The word "Eden" can also mean "pleasure" or "bliss."

d. Or "a companion for the earth creature was nowhere to be found." The Hebrew verb "find" is not passive.

e. MT does not include the definite article, so the Hebrew word could be translated "Adam."

[2:1–3] The repetitive style so familiar in chapter 1 continues. The first two clauses (vv. 1–2a) stand in parallel formation such that they border on the poetic. Moreover, the passive verb in the first sentence is striking: it emphasizes not the agency of God as creator but the completed character of the earth, heavens, and their cohorts. The work of creation has run its course and come to an end. The term here translated "cohorts" has traditionally been rendered elsewhere by "hosts," which normally designates military forces (e.g., 1 Sam 17:45). This noun apparently refers to all that was created along with the heavens (e.g., the stars, the earth, vegetation). As a result, the next clause, which reports that the deity finished working on the seventh day, seems odd. Perhaps there was some final finish work to be done, but that would be all. But then, in an implicit play on words, God "stopped" (*šbt*) on the seventh day, a day that would become known as Sabbath (*šbt*), though that noun does not appear here. Nonetheless, the root significance of the Sabbath as a stoppage from work resides in these verses. One could say that verses 2–3 function as an etiology for the institution of the Sabbath as a ritual practice. It is built into the nature of time through which the cosmos moves. If, as many scholars think, the Priestly account of creation was formulated during the so-called exilic period, focus on the Sabbath would have been especially salient. Since the temple had been destroyed in 587 BCE, the Sabbath provided a ritual focus, equally available to those who lived outside and inside the land. Even after the Second Temple was built, the Sabbath remained important to those without immediate access to it.

Up until this point, God's creative activity has focused not only on the construction and population of the cosmos but also on the notion of time. With the appearance of light on day one, it is possible to construct the basic unit of calendrical time: the day. Subsequently, with the creation of the heavenly luminaries, other units of time emerge: festivals and years. Now the deity returns to the basic unit of time and blesses the seventh day. This is, of course, not the first act of blessing. Earlier, God has blessed marine and avian life (1:22) and humanity (1:28), though, interestingly, not the earth creatures. In those two cases, the act of blessing is followed by the admonition to "be fruitful and multiply." No such overt admonition is present in 2:3. Nevertheless, the connotation of blessing as expressed in Gen 1 may follow the same verb in 2:3: a day that has been blessed may be fruitful time. But then, the deity goes further by making that seventh day "holy." In this new cosmos, there is nothing else created holy—only the recurring seventh day. Throughout the Old Testament, strikingly, only in this verse is God the subject of this particular form of the

verb: to make holy. Elsewhere, Moses, Samuel, and Solomon make people (Jesse by Samuel, 1 Sam 16:5), objects (tabernacle and its contents by Moses, Lev 8:10), or a place (the temple's middle court by Solomon, 2 Chr 7:7) holy. In Gen 2:3, the deity does something different: God makes a unit of time sacred. Interestingly, God does not deem the seventh day to be "good," a characterization that God has offered about light (1:4), earth and seas (1:10), the earth and vegetative growth (1:12), heavenly illumination (1:18), marine and avian life (1:21), animal life (1:25), and human life (1:31). The holy classification and the moral (or aesthetic) category of good do not necessarily overlap.

With the sanctification of the seventh day, the deity creates the notion of a week, though, as with the noun Sabbath, the noun "week" does not appear in these verses. In fact, the Hebrew word for week, *šābûaʿ*, rarely appears in the OT (Gen 29:27; Lev 12:5; Jer 5:24; Dan 10:2). Nonetheless, the notion of a seven-day period during which one is to work for six days and then stop on the seventh is fundamental to the notion of the Israelite Sabbath (e.g., Exod 34:21). Without the "stop" or Sabbath, there would be no week, as Israel understood that category theologically. The notion of the Sabbath as a time for rest is developed elsewhere in Priestly literature (so Lev 23:3).

[4a] This half verse was introduced as a transition between the Priestly and pre-Priestly accounts of creation and as an introduction to the latter. The so-called *tôlədôt* formulae—*tôlədôt* means "descendants" or "successors"—appears eleven times in the book of Genesis, five times in the primeval history (2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10) and five times in the family literature (11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9) and once in the Joseph story (37:2). In all instances, the formula stands immediately before the material it introduces. For example, the descendants of Ishmael are listed immediately after the formula, "These are the descendants of Ishmael" (25:12). Hence, readers should construe 2:4a as an introduction to what follows, identifying those "descendants" as humanity. Humans are, in this editor's eyes, the progeny of the heavens and the earth, a claim that is not out of line with the pre-Priestly account of humanity's creation since humans are created out of earth.

[**4b–9]** The Priestly author has wisely used the diction of "day" throughout Gen 1 to complement this earlier account, which begins with the word "day." It is possible that the Priestly author created the dual divine name, YHWH God, which appears throughout Gen 2–3, as an attempt to smooth the transition from the use of Elohim in Gen 1 to the use of YHWH in Gen 4 and following. If that is the case, it is a relatively rare instance in which an earlier account has been modified by a later editor or author.

The diction and word order of "earth and heavens" (v. 4b) is consistent with this account's focus on the earth, just as the later author's phrase "heavens and earth" (1:1; 2:1) fits with that individual's concern to describe the creation of the entire cosmos.

The pre-Priestly author used a grammatical formulation—temporal clause (v. 4b), circumstantial clause (vv. 5–6), finite verb (v. 7)—that also appears in ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation: Atrahasis and Enuma Elish. The Priestly author in 1:1–3 replicates this pattern. The pre-creation state in 2:5–6, as does the Priestly account, presupposes the existence of the earth, though not in the form that ancient Israelites knew it. The word "earth" appears three times and "ground" two times in 2:5–6, indicating the stage on which the action in chapter 2 will play out. The earth in 2:5 is an earth without much: without flora of various sorts, without rain, and without humans. What does exist is water, a feature shared by the Priestly report, though it is not the cosmic or heavenly deep of Gen 1:2 but a spring that irrigates the entire earth, literally, "the face of the ground," a phrase that the Priestly writer reworked into the "face of the waters" (1:2). Of these three elements that are lacking, the pre-Priestly account narrates the beginning of plantings and the creation of humans, but not the creation of rain. The pre-Priestly author will, however, report the presence of rain in chapter 7.

The deity acts by "molding" the earth person from bits of topsoil on the ground. As is well known, this involves a wordplay in Hebrew. The earth creature, *hāʾādām*, is created from *hāʾădāmâ*. That wordplay underscores the close connection between humans and the earth out of which they are created, which they will farm and care for, and to which they will return. Again, as is well known, the verb (*yṣr*) and related noun are used elsewhere to describe the work of a potter (Isa 29:16) or worker of metal (Isa 44:10). In Gen 2, however, the statue is "inspired" by the deity with "the breath of life," a phrase that the Priestly writer will appropriate in 1:30 to describe the life force shared by humans and animals.

YHWH God then engages in agriculture by planting a garden, which is really an orchard. This writer knew the tradition of a "garden of God" (cf. Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; 31:8), which is also associated with the toponym "Eden." The word "Eden" can also mean pleasant or blissful (so Ps 36:9 [8]; Jer 51:34). This dual meaning of "Eden" helps explain why the writer can refer to a garden *in* Eden (Gen 2:8) and a garden *of* Eden (2:15), a phrase that could also be translated "pleasurable garden." According to Ezekiel 31, the garden of God was known for its trees, specifically cedar, fir, and plane (v. 8), as well as more generally, "the trees of Eden" (v. 18). Yet none of the trees in Ezekiel 31 bears edible fruit or nuts.

In Gen 2:9, the pre-Priestly writer builds on this tradition of trees in God's garden by commenting on all the trees in general and by identifying two trees in particular, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The trees in general are characterized by their beauty and their ability to produce edible fruit and nuts. The capacities of the two specific trees are apparently to offer immortality (3:22) and a special kind of knowledge. Although beautiful

trees are part of the tradition of God's garden, these other two trees are not. Earlier creative activity is rehearsed when God makes the trees come up from the ground: both the earth creature and trees share that point of origin.

Oddly, despite the prominence of the two trees in this narrative, they receive little or no attention elsewhere in the OT. The phrase "tree of life" does appear in Prov 11:30, though it does not function there as a potential source of immortality as it does in Gen 2–3. Moreover, the phrase "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" appears only in Gen 2. Hence, one must ask what the author meant by this phrase. Knowing about good and evil is a topic that appears elsewhere in the OT. There is an age at which people do not know how to distinguish between "good and evil" and/or act on the basis of that distinction (so Deut 1:39; Isa 7:15–16). Only as they grow do they gain that ability (e.g., David in 2 Sam 14:17). In fact, this text, designed to flatter David, characterizes such an individual as a "messenger of God." Similarly, Solomon prays that he might be granted the ability to "discern between good and evil" in order to govern well (1 Kgs 3:9). Interestingly, as one ages, like Barzillai in 2 Sam 19:35 (MT, v. 36), one can lose the ability to discern between "good and bad" (so Speiser 1964, 26).

These texts suggest that a person can gain the capacity for moral judgment and ethical action by dint of maturation. Moreover, it is something that God can grant, as to David and Solomon. By way of contrast, the tree in the garden offers access to such a moral capacity in an unnatural way: by eating rather than by growing or receiving a divine grant. Isaiah 7:14–16 makes a comparable point, namely, the child Immanuel will mature at preternatural speed such that he will be able to choose the good and refuse the evil while he is still eating baby food. Normally, that would not be true for any individual. Hence, simply gaining the ability to know good and evil is probably not the reason that God prohibits eating from that tree. Rather, the deity admonishes the primal couple not to acquire improper access to such knowledge by eating from the tree of good and evil.

Both the pre-Priestly and the Priestly accounts of creation envision a place where plants grow. For the former, it is a garden; for the latter it is everywhere on the land (Gen 1:29). Clearly, the Priestly writer intended to offer a more comprehensive account of origins, one not limited to a specific place.

[10–14] This section about rivers appears intrusive. With the exception of the words "Eden" and "East," which are general in their own rights, this account names specific rivers, countries, and valuable items that would have been traded throughout the ancient Near East. It is as if reference to a river that flows out of Eden has triggered the impulse to include a report explaining what became of the waters that flowed over "the entire surface of the ground" (2:6). Only two (Tigris and Euphrates) are known. The situation of the three countries is clearer (oddly, the fourth river named, the Euphrates, is not associated with a country). Havilah is related to Ishmael and land to the east (Gen 10:7; 25:18), whereas Cush refers to Nubia and/or southern Egypt.

The initial description of the primal river is strange. It flows *from* Eden *to* the garden, a description at odds with the understanding that the garden is in Eden. This apparent confusion may result from an attempt to integrate the notion of a spring that flows out over the ground, the water necessary to irrigate the garden, with major rivers of the ancient Near East. Reference to gold and a semiprecious stone recalls the description of God's garden in Ezek 28:13. Onyx and gold are mentioned there, though fragrant resin is not (cf. Num 11:7).

[15–25] One senses that 2:15 builds on verse 8, placing the earth creature in the garden, but the garden has changed. It is now a pleasurable garden, not identified as a garden in a specific place. That pleasurable garden requires tending: hence the task of the earth creature is to work and take care of it.

Direct discourse commences in verses 16–17. (Cf. the Priestly account in which direct discourse was prominent early on, beginning in 1:3.) The deity both permits and forbids. The deity permits the consumption of arboreal food. Interestingly, the Priestly writer later expands the source of vegetarian food to plants as well as fruit/nuts/seeds (1:29–30). Neither writer, however, conceives that humans are initially carnivores. The prohibition involves one of the aforementioned trees, the one that involves knowledge of good and evil. The prohibition also includes a penalty: capital punishment (cf. Gen 20:7; Exod 19:12; 21:12; Lev 20:10; and 1 Sam 22:16 for this meaning of the infinitive absolute followed by a finite verb).

In Gen 2:18, the report becomes a narrative, one with direct discourse. The deity, in his second speech, offers the judgment that the creature is alone and needs a companion. Unlike the first speech (vv. 16–17), it is not at all clear that the deity is addressing the earth creature. Instead, the speech appears to be a soliloquy. The earth creature is apparently not privy to this speech. Yet again, the deity creates while using earth (so also vv. 7, 9). Humans are linked to both animal and plant life, since all three are created out of or from the ground. God creates birds of the sky and wild animals. (The Priestly writer will incorporate the phrase "birds of the sky" [1:30] and recast wildlife, "animals of the field," into wild animals, "animals of the earth" [1:24].)

Verses 19–20 focus on the role of the earth creature as one who gives names. The fleshing out of creation is collegial: the deity makes, and the earth creature names. In the process of naming, wildlife becomes domesticated, shown in verse 20, a fact that demonstrates the power of naming. Nevertheless, this process did not yield the appropriate companion for the human. As indicated in the above translation and note, it is not altogether clear *who* determined that there was not an appropriate companion. The preferred translation imputes that judgment to the deity. In no case does the text imply that the human makes this decision.

To fashion the needed companion, the deity departs from the prior three modes of creation out of the ground. In what appears to be an act of surgery, he uses the earth creature as the source for the companion. This act of creation

elicits a new verb, to build or fashion something (*bnh*). The deity moves from being a potter to more of a woodworker. In so doing, the problem of finding no appropriate companion is resolved: a female (*ʾiššâ*) to complement the earth person, who is now described as a male (*ʾîš*), another wordplay in Hebrew that underscores the intimate connection between male and female. The world of gender distinction now exists. The Priestly writer includes similar language highlighting sexual distinction in his poem (Gen 1:27). However, he integrates that notion with the image of God rather than highlighting the importance of "flesh," as does the pre-Priestly author, who focuses on the distinction between genders.

The climax of the account occurs in the first speech given by the earth person (cf. the poem embedded in 1:26–28, although there it is voiced by the deity), a poem celebrating the successful outcome of attempts at forging a companion. Immediately following the earth creature's speech, the author provides an etiology for familial relations and the strong bond between spouses. The author introduces new categories: father, mother, wife, and, implicitly, husband. Moreover, this author reports that the man leaves his parents so that he can embrace his wife. Such does not suggest that he lives with his wife's family (matrilocality) or, necessarily, that he moves away from the physical dwelling of his parents, but rather that the spousal relationship involves the creation of a new social and emotional bond that will prove to be more powerful than the one between parent and child.

The etiology for these roles may occur here because of the presence of the word "flesh" in both 2:23 and 24. In the final verse, one is tempted to translate "embarrassed," but the Hebrew verb *bwš* has a stronger sense, that of shame (v. 25). The notions of "nakedness" and "shame" set the stage for what will follow in the next chapter.