I. Introduction

The book of Genesis addresses the most profound questions of life. Who are we? Why are we here? And, more to the focus of Genesis, who is God, how does God relate to the universe, and what are the origins of God's chosen people, Israel? Many cultures, ancient and modern, have produced similar philosophical speculations about the nature of God, humanity, and cosmic origins, but none has left the impact on world history and thought as enduring as that of Genesis.

The book is comprised of two large blocks of material, the Primeval History (Gen 1–11) and the ancestral narratives (Gen 12–50).[1] These have been linked together in order to express a certain theological perspective, intended to establish the background necessary for reading the rest of the Pentateuch and beyond. Essential to that perspective in Genesis is the careful identification of the national God of ancient Israel, Yahweh, with the Sovereign God of creation as well as the self-revealing, promise-giving, and covenant-making God of Israel's ancestors. The God encountered in Genesis is therefore also the God of the plagues, the exodus from Egypt, the covenant, the law, the monarchy, the prophets, and the exile and restoration. Genesis is preparatory to a larger story.

This commentary will hold two commitments in focus related to methodology. (Unless the reader is especially interested in questions of method or composition, it may be advisable to skip the rest of this introduction and move directly to the commentary itself.) The first commitment has to do with the literary genre of the book of Genesis in light of scholarship on ancient Near Eastern literature generally. Gains

[1] Although originally, the flood may have constituted the end of the primeval age; Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 80–82. Others contend that Gen 1–9 is an individual unit, or that the ancestral period must include the genealogy of Shem (11:10–26). See respectively, W. Malcolm Clark, "The Flood and the Structure of the Pre-Patriarchal History," *ZAW* 83 (1971): 184–211, and Naomi A. Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 41–50. Because of the symmetrical arrangement of the *tôlĕdôt* structuring clauses (see below), I have used the traditional division between Gen 1–11 and 12–50 here.

in our understanding of comparative materials from the ancient world have shed light on Genesis, affecting the way we read both the Primeval History and the ancestral narratives. The literary position of the Primeval History is unique in biblical literature because it has no local *co-text*, or immediately preceding materials to aid the reader in understanding. Thus the ancient Near Eastern comparative materials are all the more important for understanding the socio-historical realities of Genesis. Without belaboring the details of these comparative methods, this commentary will summarize key conclusions concerning the Primeval History's arrangement of themes common to other ancient cultures along a time continuum using cause and effect.[2] Such an approach demonstrates how these materials have been transformed in the biblical account, altering their original meaning and import. The implications of such an approach will broaden the reader's appreciation for the importance of these chapters in ordering the theological world of ancient Israel.

The identification of the ancestral narratives as Israel's proto-historical, national epic will likewise yield important results for our interpretation of the book.[3] The book of Genesis has been categorized largely as a composite of myth and legend since the days of Hermann Gunkel. Such an identification has tended to preclude subsequent scholarship from regarding the Yahwist, and the book of Genesis as a whole, as a work of history. More recently, John Van Seters has demonstrated that the Yahwist was first and foremost a historian, and by investigating the roles of myth, legend, and etiology in ancient history writing, he has also demonstrated that Genesis is "a type of antiquarian historiography concerned with origins and a national tradition of people and places."[4] So although the ancestral narratives are not the same type of history writing we know in the Deuteronomistic History, such as in the Court History (2 Sam 9–10; 1 Kgs 1–2), they are nonetheless far from myth and legend. They may rightly be identified, therefore, as Israel's proto-historical writings, or a national epic account of origins.

[2] Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981): 513–29, esp. 528; and Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," *HAR* 9 (1985): 227–51, esp. 231. Both reprinted in Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura, eds., "*I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood*": *Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11* (SBTS 4; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 129–42 and 143–68 respectively.

[3] Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Abraham Malamat, "The Proto-History of Israel: A Study in Method," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and Michael P. O'Connor (ASOR Special Volume Series 1; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 303–13.

[4] John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 22. However, I find his comparisons with Greek and Mesopotamian historiography of the first millennium BCE inadequate foundation for his late date of the Yahwist as a prologue for the Deuteronomistic History. See Bill T. Arnold, "History and Historiography, OT," *NIDB* 2: 833–37.

The second methodological commitment of this commentary is the importance of combining traditional historical-critical scholarship (source, form, and redaction criticism) with more recently developed synchronic approaches (narrative criticism and discourse analysis) as a means of closing the gap between today's reader and an ancient book like Genesis. A predilection to any single method (which characterizes many biblical commentaries) occasionally results in mechanical readings that may strip a text of its voice. It is my belief that a balance between older diachronic approaches and the newer synchronic readings will be most effective, especially for drawing out the significance of a text for contemporary clergy or students. Thus, I have attempted to strike a balance in the use of the various methodologies, old and new alike.[5]

The complexities of combining synchronic and diachronic approaches for biblical books are numerous. Many positions are possible along a continuum between those who, on the one hand, use redactional and diachronic historical studies of a text as a means of defining the structure, and on the other hand, those who investigate structure and synchronic relationships with little regard for the compositional history of the text. As a means of revealing my approach in this commentary, and therefore avoiding a complete philosophical defense for this approach (which requires a monograph instead of a brief commentary), I simply assert here that I favor an approach that reads the text twice, once for its compositional history as a means of informing the second reading, which emphasizes the synchronic structure of the whole.

In this manner, and in the interest of saving space, I will not rehearse the complex issues related to the original sources of Genesis, but will discuss them only briefly below (see "composition" pp. 12–18). My primary task in this volume, therefore, will be to comment on the text as we have received it. I will occasionally refer to the "narrative" of Genesis, by which I mean the macro-structure of extended portions of the book. By "text" I mean a particular pericope or selection of text under consideration, often a given chapter or group of chapters. Upon occasion, the fruits of traditional historical–critical research have an important bearing on the interpretation of the canonical or final shape of the text. So for example, the relationship between the two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 is sometimes misunderstood because the phrase "these are the generations of . . . " (so important

[5] I am not the first to make this case, of course; cf. David L. Petersen, "The Formation of the Pentateuch," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future. Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker*, eds. James L. Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent H. Richards (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 31–45; Hoftijzer prefers the terms "structure" and "compositional/redactional history" to "synchronic" and "diachronic" respectively because of ambiguous ways in which these terms are used; Jacob Hoftijzer, "Holistic or Compositional Approach? Linguistic Remarks to the Problem," in *Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Johannes Cornelis de Moor (OtSt 34; Leiden, New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 98–114.

in the canonical shape of the book) is taken as a *sub*scription of chapter 1. In this case, the unit breaks are 1:1–2:4a and 2:4b–25. However, if we take the expression as the priestly *super*scription of the second creation account (traditionally identified as Yahwistic) and assume rather the units to be 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25, we have a new understanding of how the chapters are complementing each other.[6] The priestly editor has intentionally produced a coherent structure that stresses the continuity between the two accounts. Thus for example, the divine mandate of the first account ("fill the earth and subdue it" 1:28) is unpacked in the purpose clause of the second ("to till it and keep it," 2:15). The two have been tied together by the redactional process so that we must read them together in light of each other, producing a kind of binocular perception of the creation. And so, both a redactional, diachronic reading, and a canonical, synchronic reading are useful for understanding Genesis.

My procedure throughout has been to read each text in the Hebrew original with these methodological commitments in view, checking the Greek of the Septuagint and other versions as appropriate for textual clarity. At this initial stage, I drew up my preliminary comments before turning to the text of the NRSV itself, as well as a series of other commentaries on Genesis, several leading monographs and other secondary literature in order to provide the reader with an up-to-date interaction with the scholarship as much as possible. I have attempted to honor the original insights of others where appropriate without burdening the reader with unnecessary footnote references.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Genesis is one of the most intentionally structured books of the Bible. Here I will survey the uses of a specific structuring device used to create its literary unity, as well as overview several of the book's main features.

The unique tôlĕdôt structuring device. The final editor of the book has used a clearly discernible structuring clause, to arrange the book into eleven panels of texts, placed side-by-side in a continuous whole (the first panel, 1:1–2:3, does not use the device). This structuring device is comprised of the term *tôlĕdôt*, "offspring, descendants; (family/clan) history," in the clause "these are the descendants of [personal name]" to introduce each new portion of the text.[7] The origins of the expression are most

[6] F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (1973), 302; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 145.

[7] Specifically, this clause is found in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2. The first example is exceptional because "heavens and earth" occurs instead of a personal name. Another alternate has "sons of [personal name]" instead of the personal name itself, and the occurrence in 5:1 is exceptional because the phraseology is slightly different, "This is the list of the descendants of Adam." The clause is repeated in the text devoted to Esau's descendants (36:1,9), yielding a total of eleven occurrences of the expression in Genesis.

likely to be found in the use of genealogies (see pp. 9–10), but we have good reason to assume it was expanded intentionally by the editor of the book of Genesis in order to bring order to the whole (see commentary at 2:4 pp. 54–55).

Although the issues are quite complex, it seems reasonable to assume the *tôlĕdôt* clause was originally used to designate the descendants of a single individual in genealogical fashion.[8] As a noun pattern of the verbal root *yālad*, "to father, give birth to," the plural noun *tôlĕdôt* refers to that which is generated or produced by the individual in question. Uses in which it refers to the "generations" of heaven and earth in more metaphorical fashion (2:4) are therefore most likely derived from the genealogical uses. The particular occurrence in 5:1 is different from others in the addition of the word "list" ("document, scroll" *sēper*), which may reflect the most ancient title for such genealogies and suggests that the other *tôlĕdôt* clauses in Genesis are derived from this one. The distinctive genealogical style introduced at 5:1 is continued in Shem's genealogy (11:10–26) and implies that together they were once part of a very ancient genealogical "document" (*sēper*), which was used by priestly authors to periodize primeval times, first from creation and the Eden narratives to the flood, and then from the flood to Abram.

This more natural genealogical use of the *tôlĕdôt* clause has been adapted to a narrative format by the editor at 6:9 in order to return to a thread related to Noah: "Noah was a righteous man." This narrative thread was dropped at 5:32 in order to include notations on intermarriage between the sons of God and human daughters, along with additional reasons for the great flood (6:1–8). Similarly, the *tôlĕdôt* clause of 10:1 is likely an editorial link, since v. 1b appears to be original to the source behind this text.[9] In this way, it seems likely that the *tôlĕdôt* clauses themselves, with the sole exception of 5:1, were an invention of our priestly redactor (see pp. 16–18).

While the *tôlĕdôt* clauses probably originated as introductions to genealogical lists, they are at times used in Genesis to introduce narrative portions as well. Thus Genesis is comprised of two types of materials, narrative accounts and lists of various sorts, especially genealogies; these might conveniently be termed *narrative* and *numerative* texts.[10] The *tôlĕdôt* clause is twice followed by temporal clauses, both to narrate creation (2:4 and 5:1), and three times followed by descriptive nominal clauses (6:9; 11:10; 37:2). Others are followed by simple narrative verbal clauses, at

[8] A demonstrative introduces the identification nominal clause, "these *are the generations of*," and the progenitor's name follows *tôlĕdôt* in a construct state, "of Terah," for example. In several cases, the ancestor's name is doubled immediately after the clause, as in "... these are the descendants of Terah ... Terah was the father of Abram ..." (11:27, cf. 6:9; 11:10; 11:27; and similarly 36:1–2).

[9] And perhaps following naturally from 6:10 before it.

[10] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 3. His original, *Erzählung* and *Aufzählung*, makes for more catchy alliteration than in translation; Claus Westermann, *Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament: Genesis*, eds. Siegfried Herrmann and Hans Walter Wolff (Volume I/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsverein, 1974), 4.

times as part of the genealogical birth announcements (e.g., "Terah was the father of Abram . . . ," 11:27). The result of the combined narrative and numerative uses of the *tôlĕdôt* clause is an organization of the book into ten panels of material, eleven counting the creation overture in 1:1–2:3, arranged as follows:

2:4a	*tôlĕdôt* of heaven and earth	2:4b–4:26
5:1a	*tôlĕdôt* of Adam	5:1–6:8
6:9a	*tôlĕdôt* of Noah	6:9–9:29
10:1a	*tôlĕdôt* of Noah's sons	10:1–11:9
11:10a	*tôlĕdôt* of Shem	11:10–26
11:27a	*tôlĕdôt* of Terah	11:27–25:11
25:12a	*tôlĕdôt* of Ishmael	25:12–18
25:19a	*tôlĕdôt* of Isaac	25:19–35:29
36:1a	*tôlĕdôt* of Esau (again at 36:9a)	36:1–37:1
37:2a	*tôlĕdôt* of Jacob	37:2–50:26

These ten portions are devoted equally to (1) the origins of the universe and the early history of humanity, and (2) the prehistory of the Israelite nation preserved in the account of the ancestral family. Thus five *tôlĕdôt* clauses are used to provide genealogical structure for the Primeval History (1:1–11:26), while five are devoted to the ancestral narratives (11:27–50:26). The materials of Genesis are disproportionately focused on the ancestral narratives, while at the same time, the equal distribution of the *tôlĕdôt* clauses provides a certain symmetry to the whole. Indeed, it is possible that the fivefold symmetry in the two portions of Genesis is related to palistrophic or chiastic structure known to be present elsewhere in Genesis, or to be compared to the fivefold division of the Pentateuch itself.[11]

The alternation between *tôlĕdôt* for numerative purposes and *tôlĕdôt* for narrative purposes, or between genealogy and narrative in Genesis, may be compared to watching a movie on DVD in the privacy of one's home.[12] The genealogies are times when we "fast-forward" through the story, getting only the barest of minimum details in quick summation, except on occasions when the editor slows down enough to highlight certain particular features, such as Enoch's exemplary walk with God, or Nimrod's impressive urban accomplishments (5:22–24 and 10:8b–12, respectively). In fast-forward mode, we get only name, length of years, list of children, and perhaps death. The narratives, by contrast, move along at a deliberate pace – at times even in "slow motion" – because the details of the narrative are so important. The effect is an overarching narrative trajectory, intentionally established by the editor using the *tôlĕdôt* clauses in order to give the impression of a slow and gradual narrowing

[11] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 59, and on the *tôlĕdôt* clauses generally, 58–59 and 99–100.

[12] I owe this metaphor to J. G. Janzen, *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 12–50* (ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

focus, with fewer and fewer participants, accenting the particularizing effects of the blessings of God.[13]

Origins – primeval and ancestral. The book of Genesis is about beginnings. It begins with God because God himself has no beginning. But the origin of everything else apart from God is explained here. That is to say, this book explains the origins for everything the Israelites believed important for understanding their salvation history, and therefore Genesis provides what is needed for reading the rest of the Bible. In general, this includes cosmic origins and Israelite origins. The Primeval History describes the origins of the universe and God's plan to relate to it, and especially to humans, while the ancestral narratives present the origins of the nation Israel.

These two portions of Genesis – the cosmic origins of the Primeval History and the Israelite origins of the ancestral narratives – work in introductory, concentric circles, drawing the reader ever closer to an understanding of God's relationship first with the cosmos generally, and then with God's chosen people, Israel. The ancestral narratives in particular, the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, including the story of Joseph embedded near the conclusion, provide an essential ideological foundation for what follows in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (e.g., Exod 2:24; Deut 1:8; 34:4). The saving acts of Yahweh on Israel's behalf (the plagues of Egypt, the miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds), and the covenant at Mount Sinai were based on the ancestral covenant and its intentions for the nation Israel. While there is little mention of the events of the Primeval History in the Pentateuch, Gen 1–11 form an important introductory role as well, not just for the Mosaic religion of ancient Israel but for the rest of the Bible.

We should not be surprised by a lack of connection between the people, places, and events of the Primeval History on the one hand, and what we might call verifiable history in contemporary research on the other. The very nature of the material as Israel's mytho-historical literature, devoted as it is to the origins of the universe, make it impossible to find such historical traces. The literary genre "mytho-historical" in no way identifies these chapters as myths or mythical, but rather draws attention to the way in which themes previously regarded simply as mythological are arranged along an historical time line using cause and effect.[14]

Attempts to find historical traces in the ancestral narratives have been no more fruitful. Against the trend of much scholarship of the past three decades, it has been argued recently that Genesis preserves traces of Israelite heritage extending back to the Bronze Age (3200–1200 BCE).[15] Such historical traces, it is alleged, locate Israel's

[13] Josef Schreiner, "*tôlĕdôt*," *TDOT* 15:582–88, esp. 586.
[14] T. Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," esp. 528.
[15] Daniel E. Fleming, "Genesis in History and Tradition: The Syrian Background of Israel's Ancestors, Reprise," in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, eds. James K. Hoffmeier and A. R. Millard (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 193–232.

identity in social categories that are not uniquely Israelite, but rather are pre-Israelite in origin and attested in the ancestral traditions of Genesis. Specifically the tradition of ancestral roots in northern Syria is currently inexplicable from the perspective of an Israelite living in the first millennium BCE. Rather, the identity of an ancestral homeland in Syrian Haran in the north presents a tantalizing connection with the tribal confederacies known from the Mari texts, especially the southwestern division of a confederacy known as Binu Yamina, which spanned all of modern Syria.[16]

Yet the first attested extra-biblical reference to "Israel" dates from the very end of the Bronze Age.[17] This fact, together with the absence of archaeological or epigraphical evidence for Israel's existence before the thirteenth century BCE, and the apparent origins of these ancestral traditions in the Iron Age (especially Iron I, 1200–1000 BCE), have led historians to conclude that Israel's history begins in, and only in, the Iron Age. Understood in this way, the ancestral traditions narrated in Genesis reflect only the Israel of the Iron Age, and not that of the Bronze Age, which it purports to narrate. Thus the period of the ancestors disappears altogether.[18] However, when the biblical sources are subjected to standards demanded of other ancient Near Eastern texts – assuming proper critical precautions when reading distinctly literary reformulations of oral traditions such as the ancestral narratives, but at the same time not requiring of the biblical materials standards demanded nowhere else – the Israelite traditions about origins in the Bronze Age must be taken seriously. So, for example, when first-millennium Assyrian and Babylonian historians speak of a religious and cultural (and indeed, ethnic) continuity with their origins in the Bronze Age, today's historians typically give credence to such textual claims.[19] In the same way, traces of Israel's earliest history are likely contained

[16] For details of this potential background for Israel's ancestors, and further exploration of the possible connection between biblical "Benjaminites" with Mari's Yaminites and the city of Haran, see Daniel E. Fleming, "Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory," *RA* 92 (1998): 41–78, esp. 59–73; and again, Daniel E. Fleming, "Genesis in History and Tradition."

[17] James K. Hoffmeier, "The (Israel) Stela of Merneptah," *COS* 2.6:40–41.

[18] M. P. Maidman, "Historiographic Reflections on Israel's Origins: The Rise and Fall of the Patriarchal Age," in *Hayim and Miriam Tadmor Volume*, eds. Israel Ephʿal, Amnon Ben-Tor, and Peter Machinist (ErIsr 27; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), 120–128. And so some today date the Pentateuch quite late, perhaps as late as the third century BCE; e.g., Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 433.15; New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

[19] William W. Hallo, *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions* (SHCANE 6; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 314–15. Although several socio-cultural features of the early second millennium BCE have been overstated as parallels with the ancestral narratives, others continue to warrant our attention as potential recollections of memories preserved through oral traditions, as argued recently by Amihai Mazar in Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (SBLABS 17; Leiden/Atlanta: Brill/Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), esp. 57–59.

in the Genesis traditions of Mesopotamian roots and sojourns in Syria–Palestine and Egypt. Although historical details of these Bronze Age origins are currently beyond our grasp and will no doubt continue to be debated, we have good reason to look to the Bronze Age for Israel's beginnings. But given what we know about these historical periods currently, the most we can hope for is to establish a plausible setting for the events of the ancestral narratives in light of the broad contours of ancient Near Eastern social and political history.[20]

Genealogies. Such a book of origins, organized as it is with the *tôlĕdôt* structuring device, has a great interest in genealogies. Genesis contains two types of genealogies: the "linear" or vertical genealogy, which traces a single line of descent, and "segmented" or horizontal genealogy, which traces various descendants. The form of the genealogy depends upon its function in the text. So, for example, "the descendants of Adam" are listed in a linear genealogy through ten generations from Adam to Noah, in which a single son is named for each descendant and only passing reference is made to "other sons and daughters" (5:1–32). The genealogy then segments at the tenth generation in order to introduce all three sons of Noah, who became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (5:32). By contrast, "the descendants of Noah's sons" are presented in a segmented genealogy, listing the sons according to their families, languages, lands, and nations, in order to describe the human race in the post-flood era (10:1–32).[21] It is possible to trace through this system of genealogies in Genesis a line of descent for all of humanity through twenty-five generations from Adam to the children of Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelite clans and families, thus creating a literary framework or skeleton for the entire book.[22]

Anthropologists have contributed to our understanding of the role of genealogies in the Bible by identifying processes of "divergence," "invergence," and "segmentation."[23] As this relates to the book of Genesis, each patriarch is the father of other children who are not part of the Israelite ancestry and who become the ancestors of other people groups in the known world. Through this process of differentiation, or *divergence*, the book gives explanation to other populations in a kind of ethnic

[20] J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (1992), 126–29.

[21] Among many resources on biblical genealogies, see especially the following: Yigal Levin, "Understanding Biblical Genealogies," *CurBS* 9 (2001): 11–46; Sven Tengström, *Die Toledotformel und die literarische Struktur der priesterlichen Erweiterungsschicht im Pentateuch* (ConBOT 17; Lund: Gleerup, 1982); Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (YNER 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ronald S. Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9–13; and Richard S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature," *Bib* 70 (1989): 241–54; repr. in R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura, *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood* (1994), 58–72.

[22] Frank Crüsemann, "Human Solidarity and Ethnic Identity: Israel's Self-Definition in the Genealogical System of Genesis," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett (Biblical Interpretation Series 19; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 57–76 esp. 58–60.

[23] See especially the important work of Karin R. Andriolo, "A Structural Analysis of Genealogy and World View in the Old Testament," *AA* 75 (1973): 1657–69, esp. 1657–63.

map of the world, and explains further the way Israel related to those populations. In distinction to this use of genealogies to describe the world's populations in a process of branching, Israel's lineage itself is traced through a straight line, from Adam to Jacob through *invergence*. In each generation, only one son continues the Israelite ancestry. This process is used in Genesis to present and discuss each of the "other" descendants of Israel's ancestors first before picking up the descent line of interest. Once the promised seed begins multiplying, this lineal process of alternating divergence and invergence ends with the segmented genealogy of Jacob, whose twelve sons become the twelve tribes of Israel. The lineal descent gives way to twelve sub-units in a single generation, and from that point forward, *segmentation* becomes primary in Genesis (cf. 29:31–30:24). Once the children of Jacob are born, the genealogical focus of the book is on the branches of the ancestral family, all considered *within* the covenant blessing of Israel's ancestry, rather than certain branches that are excluded (e.g., Ishmael, Esau). Through this process of segmentation, all the tribes are equally part of the Israelite nation, which illustrates that the covenant blessings are becoming a reality.

The Bible's genealogies are thus a means of providing social identification for a person or people group, making important assertions about identity, territory, and relating them to others in the narrative.[24] In a sense, such genealogies are more natural to the ancestral narratives, and so it has been suggested that the use of the genealogies in the Primeval History of Gen 1–11 was continued from their use in Gen 12–50 as a means of overlaying formal literary structure upon otherwise disparate and in some cases, unrelated materials.[25] Whether or not this is indeed the case, the genealogies of the Primeval History may be said to replace the role of theogonies, or the birth of the gods, in ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation. In other words, divine birthing, parenting, and the succession of births (sky-god and earth-god, fresh-water god and salt-water god, etc.) all play an important role in ancient cosmogonies throughout western Asia. But in Gen 1–11, these are replaced by genealogies of humankind's earliest ancestors.[26]

Etiologies. Etiology may be defined as "a narrative designed in its basic structure to support some kind of explanation for a situation or name that exists at the time of the storyteller."[27] The term "etiology" may thus be applied to any narrative giving the past, historical reason for a present reality (the present of the author), and is a

[24] Gary N. Knoppers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah," *JBL* 120 (2001): 15–30, esp. 18.
[25] C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (1984): 8–9.
[26] On the nature of theogonies in ancient Near Eastern creation myths, see Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 73–83 and pp. 45–47 below.
[27] George W. Coats, *Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 10; Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* (BZAW 108; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968).