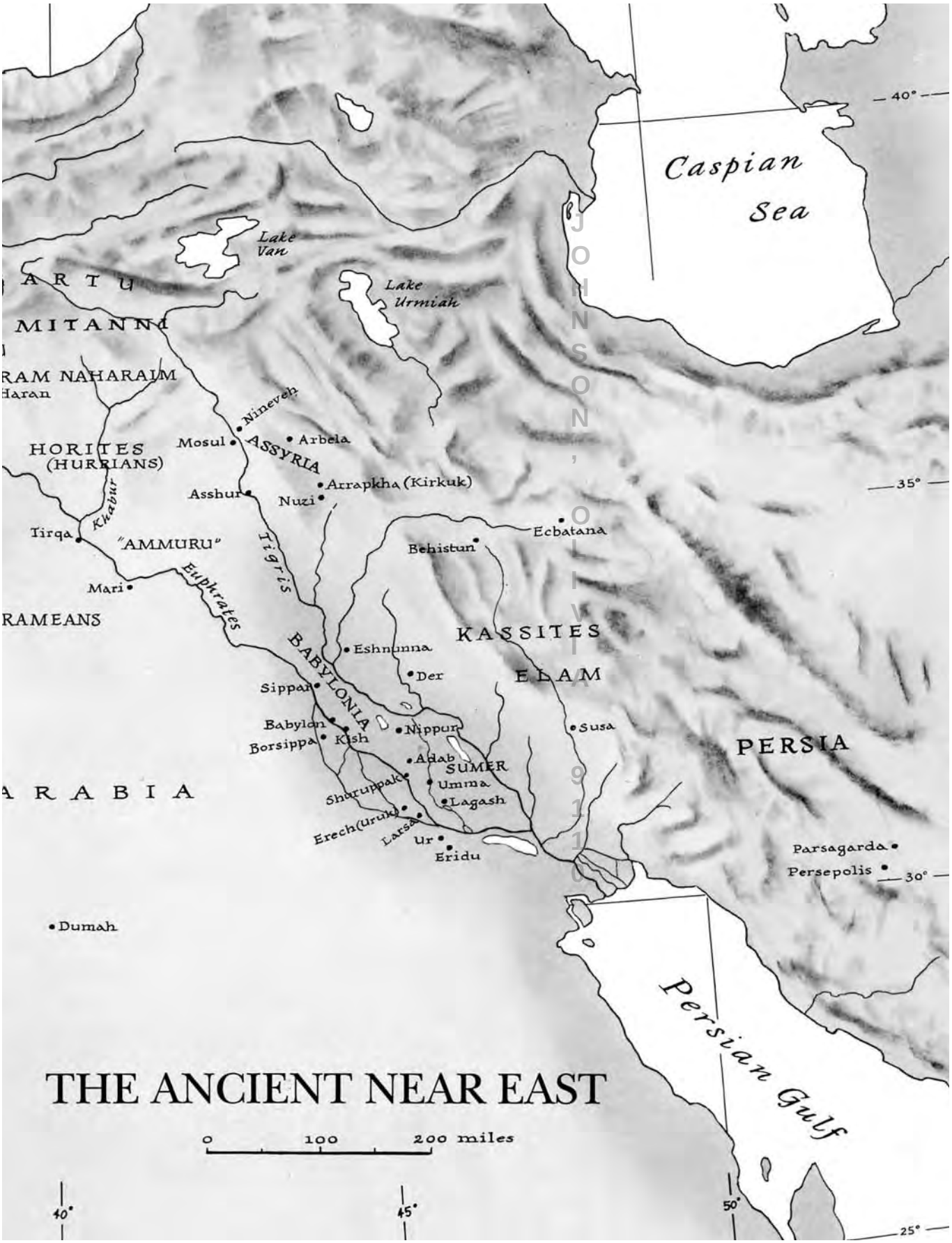
The Old Testament Story

JOHNSON, OLIVIA

9110



THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Ninth Edition

The Old Testament Story

John H. Tullock
Professor Emeritus
Belmont University

Revised by

Mark McEntire
Professor of Religion
Belmont University

JOHNSON LIVIA 9110

Prentice Hall
Boston Columbus Indianapolis New York San Francisco Upper Saddle River
Amsterdam Cape Town Dubai London Madrid Milan Munich Paris Montreal Toronto
Delhi Mexico City Sao Paulo Sydney Hong Kong Seoul Singapore Taipei Tokyo

CHAPTER

1 The Book and Those Who Study It

Timeline

1200 B.C.E.	First mention of Israel on the Merneptah Stele in Egypt
500 B.C.E.	Approximate date for the completion of the final form of the Torah
200 B.C.E.	Approximate date for the beginning of translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek
100 C.E.	Approximate date for the closing of the Hebrew canon
400 C.E.	Approximate date of the copying of the Vatican and Alexandrian Codices of the Septuagint
1000 C.E.	Copying of the Leningrad Codex
1450 C.E.	Invention of the printing press by Gutenburg and the production of the first printed Bible
1535 C.E.	First complete English translation of the Bible by Coverdale
1611 C.E.	Completion of the King James Version of the Bible

Chapter Outline

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter serves as an introduction to the academic study of the Old Testament. The first task is to define *Old Testament*, a task that becomes more difficult when we realize that different religious communities understand and use this collection of literature in different ways. The next step is to describe the process by which the Old Testament came into being, a task that can only be hypothetical at many points because of a lack of evidence. The remainder of the chapter describes how scholars of various types approach the Old Testament, by examining different methods of reading, and how the historical study, including archaeology, is applied to the understanding of the text.

THE OLD TESTAMENT: WHAT IS IT?

Definition

The Old Testament is a set of texts that originated among the people who, at differing times in their history, have been called Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews, and which became their sacred scriptures. The Old Testament is actually a library of books, produced over a period of more than a thousand years (1200–200 B.C.E.).[1] This was the Bible that was known to Jesus, the Apostles, and members of the early Christian church—especially in the period before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 C.E., when the church was still viewed as another Jewish sect. After 70 C.E., the collection of Christian writings (which began with some of Paul's letters and the earliest of the Gospels) began to be viewed as sacred. And thus having the status of scripture, Christians began to refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Covenant or the Old Testament and their sacred writings as the New Covenant or the New Testament. They took the term *covenant* from the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31–34).

"Tell me a story" is the frequent plea of a child. It is through stories that we transmit to our children our values, our family traditions, and much of our view of life. So it has always been with humankind, and so it was with ancient Israel. Its stories took many forms: the accounts of the creation of the universe and of people, its legal system, the oracles of its prophets, the songs of its singers, and the wisdom of its sages. All these are part of the Old Testament story.

The Literary Forms That Carry the Story[2]

NARRATIVE. In our culture, we normally expect narrative to be the means of communicating a story. Thus, we are not surprised that much of the Old Testament is made up of narrative material. Readers soon discover, however, that stories that come from a very different time and place follow very different conventions. One of the most striking examples is the lack of descriptive language in these stories. The most important human character in the Old Testament is Moses. He dominates four large books, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, yet there is not a word about his physical appearance. Readers are not told whether he is tall or short, large or small, or has blue eyes or brown. The stories of the Old Testament have a density and economy about them that makes them significantly different from most contemporary written stories. The story of Cain and Abel, in Genesis 4:1–16, is one of the most powerful and influential stories in all of Western culture, yet it is slightly less than 200 words long in Hebrew and was translated to slightly less than 400 English words in the King James Version of the Bible. John Steinbeck's classic novel, *East of Eden*, is in many ways a modern retelling of the Cain and Abel story, and in its most commonly published form is nearly 700 pages long.

The narratives in the Bible often make use of, or are supplemented by, other literary forms such as laws, songs, genealogies, and lists. Yet these forms are woven into the narrative in such a way that they become a vital part of it. Narrative is the principal literary vehicle from Genesis through 2 Kings, in major portions of the prophetic books, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

Jonah, and Haggai, and in the less familiar books of the Old Testament, such as 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and Ruth.

What is unusual about all this is that narrative was not a common literary device in other surviving literature from the ancient Near East. Outside of legal codes, most of what is known about its gods, goddesses, legendary heroes, and kings is told in poetry. Poetry's primary function is to impart a sense of emotion and praise for its subject, while narrative serves to give the stories a sense of time and place, to flesh out their characters, and to impart a sense of the flow of life to what is being told.

There are at least two stories in the Old Testament that are told twice, once in prose narrative and once in poetry. The first is the crossing of the sea by the Israelites as they were pursued through the wilderness by Pharaoh's army, after their escape from slavery in Egypt. Exodus 14 tells the story in prose, then the Israelites, led by Moses, sing the "Song of the Sea" in Exodus 15, which tells the story again in a different way. The powerful poetry of Judges 5 conveys the sense of celebration for the LORD's delivery of Israel by the hand of Deborah from a powerful enemy. This "Song of Deborah" is preceded by a prose account of the same story in Judges 4.

LEGAL MATERIALS. The Old Testament contains numerous sets of laws, which have been placed into the narrative of the exodus from Egypt and the journey through the wilderness. Closer examination of these laws later will reveal that they seem to come from different times and places, but their placement within a story provides a powerful and dynamic way of preserving and presenting legal material.

POETRY. One would naturally expect Psalms and the Song of Songs to be poetry. What might come as a surprise to those who have not used modern translations of the Bible is that large portions of the books of the prophets are also in poetic form. The line between poetry and prose is not always clear. They are perhaps better understood as two ends of a continuum rather than two distinct categories. The first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1, is typically understood as prose, and is printed that way, but careful reading of this text reveals that it has many of the qualities of poetry.

WISDOM LITERATURE. Although wisdom literature—Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes—is almost entirely in poetic form, it is a special category because of its subject matter. It discusses matters of everyday life in a way that is not closely connected to specific religious traditions and ponders difficult, philosophical questions about suffering and the meaning of existence. In structure, it ranges from extended wisdom poems to one-line proverbs. Except for Chapters 1 through 2 and 42:7–16, Job is an extended poetic drama in the form of a dialogue between Job and his friends, followed by two speeches by God. The book of Ecclesiastes is a mixture of prose and poetry.

The Crucial Event

As it stands now, the Old Testament starts at the beginning of all things—the Creation—but this order is probably not how the story of Israel was first told. Throughout the Old Testament, the one theme that continually appears is the Exodus. This was the supreme event in Israelite history. Israel became a people through this event and those that followed. Thus, it is commemorated in song, in story (Exodus to Deuteronomy), and in numerous references in Psalms (such as 66:6; 68:7–18; 78:11–55; 114; 135:8–12; and 136:10–22), as well as in other places in the Bible. A classic summary of the Exodus story is found in Deuteronomy 26:5–9:

> You shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God

> of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

The Exodus event made Israel aware of itself as a people with common experiences that united them. Just as a baby first notices its fingers and toes, leading to the awareness of itself as a person, so Israel became aware of itself as a people. When the "Who am I?" question is answered, there inevitably follows the question, "Where did I come from?" The "Aramean" in Deuteronomy 26:5 is Jacob, whom all Israelites came to understand as their ancestor.

When people begin to ask these kinds of questions, they begin to look at their history. So Israel, in times of literary activity, had historians who gathered together the memories and traditions of the people and began to weave them into a story. In this story, they not only explained their own origins in the Exodus, but also carried that explanation back through the patriarchs to the origin of the human race and even to the universe itself. As the nation grew, the history was expanded and revised, either in written or oral form. Then, when the tragedy of the Babylonian Exile struck and it looked as though not only historical materials, but also the words of the prophets, the wisdom materials, and the songs of the people might be lost, a concerted effort was made to gather together and preserve the literary heritage.

HOW IT BEGAN

How did the Old Testament come to be written? Did someone just suddenly decide, "I'm going to write the Old Testament"? Or was it a more complicated process?

To answer this question with certainty is impossible. A New Testament writer, for whom the Old Testament was the Bible, spoke of how "Holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God" (2 Pet. 1:21). Yet even that statement, setting forth the conviction that God was the initiator of the process that led to the writing, also suggests that the development of the Old Testament was an historical process. The following is a suggested scheme of how the Old Testament may have been developed.

First the Event

Nothing happens without a cause; something must trigger it. The Old Testament grew out of the events and circumstances of the life of the people of Israel. Although the Exodus and related events served as the catalyst for the development of the sacred literature of the Israelites, many events before and after that crucial event contributed to the material resources from which the Old Testament was constructed.

Then the Story—the First Interpretation

First, things happened. The people to whom things happened told others about their experiences. Just as every family has a fund of stories about various relatives, much of the Old Testament is composed of stories that came from the oral tradition of the people who were to be known as Israel. Not all the stories, however, were based on actual events. Some stories, known as **etiologies,** for example, were created to answer "why" questions. Other stories, like Jotham's fable about the trees (Judg. 9:7–15), or Samson's riddle (Judg. 14:14), were told to make a point. Telling the stories over the centuries also had its effects on their nature and their subsequent interpretation. The study of how literary texts are interpreted is called **hermeneutics.**

Then the Reinterpretation

When things happen to us, we interpret them in the light of existing circumstances. Later, however, as we look back, we may view a particular event in an entirely different way than we did when it happened. Time and circumstances may have given us a different insight into its significance for us. For instance, an event once seen as a disaster may later be looked on as something very positive and meaningful for us.

Then the History—the Continuing Interpretation

The Old Testament grew from such hindsight. At some point in the life of Israel as a people, someone, or a number of someones, looked back at the past and concluded that God had been at work in the lives of the people—calling their ancestors out of paganism, making himself known to them, leading them from the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys to Palestine and eventually into Egypt and bondage. But even that bondage, a disaster by most normal standards, was God's way of preserving the Israelites as a people. God raised up a leader, Moses, and prepared him, as the adopted son of the Egyptian princess and as a Midianite shepherd, for the difficult job of leading a band of slaves and a mixed multitude of others into the Sinai desert, there to weld this motley group into a people united in covenant to God.

Furthermore, God led them to a land—a land that had been promised to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After a long and difficult period, the land became theirs. But their troubles were not over. After many years of struggle to achieve some kind of national unity, they finally settled on a monarchy as the kind of government they would have. After a sputtering start under Saul, the storytellers describe a remarkable growth during David's time, when the nation reached its greatest territorial limits, enabling it to withstand any challenge. Solomon gained the fruits of his father's success, enjoying a time of peace and great economic prosperity. Yet, he sowed seeds of discontent that would come to full flower under his son Rehoboam, whose unwise policies resulted in the kingdom's splitting into two separate states.

For two centuries, the two parts of the once proud kingdom of David limped along—sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies. At times, in their periods of friendship, they combined forces to bring a measure of prosperity to their people. But for most of the time, they were like pawns, toyed with by the great powers of the time—Egypt and Assyria. Finally, in 721 B.C.E., Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was blotted out of existence by the Assyrian giant who destroyed its cities and deported all that was left of its upper classes, replacing them with foreigners who were to intermarry with the poor people left in the land, producing the Samaritans.

Judah, the Southern Kingdom, struggled on for just over a century, but it too fell, this time to Babylonia, the nation that had succeeded Assyria as the terror of the Near East.

As had been the case with Israel, most of the members of Judah's surviving leadership were deported, but different factors were at work that allowed the people to keep their identity. The prophets had warned that such an occurrence was likely if Judah persisted in its wrongdoing. Seemingly, the stability of the government in the south gave the people a greater sense of unity, aiding them in holding together in the time of national disaster. Then, too, the Babylonians seem to have contributed to the situation by settling the people in communities in which they could follow the advice of the prophet Jeremiah and live as normal a life as possible (Jer. 29).

In response to the trauma of the Exile and the threat of annihilation, Jewish scholars began in earnest to collect and shape the literature of the people. Although history writing may have begun earlier, the Exile gave the work a new sense of urgency. Along with the writing of history, poetry was collected, the law was codified, and the words of the great prophets were arranged and

preserved. Much of the Old Testament as we now know it took shape during the Exile and immediately afterward.

With the people now convinced of the importance of the preservation of their traditions, the period following the Exile, while not a time of glory, was a time of collection, preservation, and interpretation that reached its climax in the final canonization of the Old Testament early in the Christian era.

HOW IT DEVELOPED

The Process

Did the process of forming the literature of the Old Testament begin during the Exile? The answer most certainly is "No." The development of the Old Testament may be compared to a river and its tributaries. A river does not begin full sized. Rather, it is a combination of dozens of smaller streams that have joined together to form the river. So it was with the Old Testament. Some will be quick to point out that it began with God. Even so, God worked through human agents, and it is the work of these human agents that is being discussed. The common belief that God directly dictated the words of the Bible is called **plenary verbal inspiration.** This view is not assumed here.

The first tiny streams were the oral traditions: the poems of victory, the stories of the ancestors, and the memories of great events that were treasured, gathered, and passed on for many generations. These oral treasures were the means by which families preserved their values and their sense of who they were. Not only did they remember heroes, they remembered villains as well. Both played roles in events the community deemed important. Thus, the people preserved the stories—from exalted stories, such as that of the call of the patriarch Abraham from the paganism of Ur of the Chaldees, to less than exalted stories, such as the account of how Jacob outwitted both his brother Esau and his father, Isaac, to secure the birthright and the blessing. The most frequently told story of all, however, was that of God's marvelous delivery of their ancestors during the flight from Egypt. The storyteller was the teacher and the story was the medium through which he taught.

At shrines in which clans (extended families) gathered for worship, the stories were combined into larger units to form cycles of tradition, each with its own distinctive point of view. Finally, someone conceived the idea, through what religious people call *inspiration*, that the stories of God's dealings with the people needed to be written down or put into a complete story so that they could be preserved.

The Written Story

Exactly when the smaller streams of tradition were combined to form a connected story is a matter of dispute. Scholars of a more conservative bent argue for a date as early as the time of Moses. Others see the smaller streams of tradition continuing either in an oral or a written form until the time of David and Solomon. They say it was during this period that the first attempts were made to write a history of Israel. The process continued until the post-Exilic period and embraces not only the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy), or Torah, but also all the major historical books: Joshua through 2 Kings, as well as 1,2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

According to this view, the stream of tradition that began with the Exodus stories was chosen as the mainstream. To it were added the stories of the *ancestors* (people like Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel) and the stories of the Creation. This edition of the history of Israel (characterized by referring to God by the personal name YHWH and designated by scholars by the letter J) was largely composed of materials from the southern part of Israel. It flowed on for a hundred years or so, until it was joined by another stream of materials from the northern part of

the country identified by the use of a more general or "family" name for God—*Elohim* (E). These materials started with stories about Abraham, but they became so mingled with the mainstream that it is difficult to determine just how much each contributed to the total volume.

The next tributary was of such volume and force that it became dominant in the historical materials. During the reign of Josiah, king of Judah (640–609 B.C.E.), the *book of the law* was found in the temple when repairs were being made (2 Kings 22:8). Scholars conclude, on the basis of the religious reforms that followed and that seem to be based on the contents of the book of the law, that this book was essentially the book of Deuteronomy. Some argue that Deuteronomy was written less than one hundred years before its discovery. Yet, it is usually agreed that a major part of the materials it contains is from an earlier time.

Like a river whose whole character is changed by the joining of a major tributary, so the character of the presentation of the history of Israel is changed by the reform growing out of the discovery of the Deuteronomic materials (D). Beginning particularly with the book of Judges, Israel's history is interpreted in a distinct fashion. It is viewed as following a cycle: Israel *sins, judgment* comes through the oppression of an enemy, Israel *repents,* God raises up a leader to *deliver* the people from their enemies. To see a clear example of this, read Judges 3:7–11. Less obvious examples are found in the history of the monarchy (1,2 Sam.; 1,2 Kings).

The exile in Babylon (586–538 B.C.E.) and the years following saw a floodtide of materials enter the stream. Because the danger of the extinction of the people brought a new reverence for the sacred traditions and a zeal for preserving the sacred literature, the people established a unifying symbol. *Torah*—now expanded to mean not only the Pentateuch, but also the history and sayings of the great prophets, the wisdom of the sages, and the sacred songs of the people—gave them a sense of unity and purpose that was to enable them to survive many centuries of adversity.

Just as today, when the dangers of losing natural beauty have led to government action to preserve some streams as scenic rivers, so the Jews moved to preserve their most meaningful literature by designating it as sacred. The final contributors to this literary river were the priests of the Exilic and post-Exilic periods. They gave the material its final form (P) through an editorial process and through collecting those books known as the Writings, which include the last edition of the history as found in 1,2 Chronicles, plus Ezra and Nehemiah. All that remained was the climax of the process of canonization sometime prior to 100 C.E. So, as the river finally reaches the ocean, the Hebrew Bible became the possession of the world through the Jewish community and its major offspring, Christianity.

The Final Product: The Canon[3]

The word ***canon*** originally referred to a reed used for measuring, such as a yardstick. When applied to literature, it has come to mean a body of writing that, for religious folk, is held to be sacred because *it contains God's message to the faithful.* The process by which these books achieved that status is thus called *canonization.* For Jews and Christians alike, then, the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, is sacred literature.

THE HEBREW CANON. Although the process of canonization took place over a long period of time, the following approximations are commonly used:

1. 400 B.C.E. The *Torah* (Genesis through Deuteronomy), or Law, achieved sacred status.
2. 200 B.C.E. The *Nebi'im,* or Prophets, became canonical. There was a twofold division of the Prophets:
   a. The Former Prophets—the books of Joshua, Judges, 1,2 Samuel, and 1,2 Kings.
   b. The Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve, generally known to Christians as the Minor Prophets.

3. 100 C.E. Not later than this date, the *Kethubim*, or Writings, had achieved canonical status. These include Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Lamentations, 1,2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Esther, and Daniel.

The question might legitimately be asked, "Why were these books included and not others?" That there were others is abundantly clear. The Dead Sea Scrolls alone had manuscripts and fragments of nearly a thousand religious writings, while other Jewish sects developed their own sacred books. Basically, two tests determined what books would be in the Old Testament canon. These primarily were the tests of time and usage. The literature, oral and written, which continued to speak to the believing community over the years, was judged to have the breath of Divine about it. Admittedly, the survival of the community that used the literature also had to be a factor in the development of the canon.

A common assumption is that the rabbis of Jamnia, an academy established by Johanan ben Zakkai after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., declared the canon closed around 100 C.E. This assumption is increasingly challenged today because it drastically oversimplifies the issue. By that time the vast majority of Hebrew canon had been determined. At most there may have been some remaining disagreement about a few books. The most disputed were probably Song of Songs, Esther, and Ecclesiastes. All three of these books are part of the collection known as the *Megilloth* (Festival Scrolls), which are traditionally read as part of synagogue services on the days of Jewish festivals. The regular use of these books on festival days was likely a major factor in favor of their canonization. Books that just missed the canon likely did so because of the language in which they were written. The Wisdom of Solomon and II Maccabees were likely written originally in Greek. Sirach and I Maccabees were probably first written in Hebrew, but by the first century C.E. the Greek translations of these books had become dominant and the Hebrew versions may have disappeared. Obviously, books that existed only in the Greek language could not be included in the Hebrew canon.

THE GREEK CANON (Septuagint). The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, used by the Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt, differed from the Hebrew canon as to what books should be included in the *Kethubim.* It contained some fifteen extra books or additions to books in the Hebrew canon: 1,2 Esdras; Tobit; Judith; the additions to the Book of Esther; the Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach; Baruch; the Letter of Jeremiah; the additions to the book of Daniel; the Prayer of Manasseh; and 1,2 Maccabees. Roman Catholic Christians include these within their canon. Various groups of Orthodox Christians accept these and a few additional writings, such as 3,4 Maccabees and Psalm 151, as part of their canon. Some readers within these traditions attempt to chart a middle course between these ways of conceiving the canon by referring to these writings, which are in some canons but not others, as **deuterocanonical**.

The **Septuagint** influenced the great fourth-century scholar Jerome in preparing his Vulgate translation, which became the standard Latin version of the Bible for many centuries. Thus, both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles include the Apocrypha in their canon. Although other Christians do not consider the books of the Apocrypha canonical, most modern translations include them, because they are studied for their contribution to understanding the history of the period in which they developed.

THE WORK OF SCHOLARS

How do we know that the Old Testament developed in this or any other way? That it exists is ample evidence that it developed somewhere, somehow, and at some time. Because there are no time machines to transport us back through the ages to watch the Bible being written,

Canon List

Hebrew Canon	Greek Canon/Catholic Old Testament	Protestant Old Testament
24 Books	46 Books	39 Books
Law	Genesis	Genesis
Genesis	Exodus	Exodus
Exodus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Leviticus	Numbers	Numbers
Numbers	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Deuteronomy	Joshua	Joshua
	Judges	Judges
Former Prophets	Ruth	Ruth
Joshua	I Samuel*	I Samuel
Judges	II Samuel	II Samuel
Samuel	I Kings	I Kings
Kings	II Kings	II Kings
	I Chronicles	I Chronicles
Latter Prophets	II Chronicles	II Chronicles
Isaiah	Ezra	Ezra
Jeremiah	Nehemiah	Nehemiah
Ezekiel	Tobit	Esther
The Twelve	Judith	Job
	Esther (plus Greek additions)	Psalms
Writings	I Maccabees	Proverbs
Psalms	II Maccabees	Ecclesiastes
Job	Job	Song of Songs
Proverbs	Psalms	Isaiah
Ruth	Proverbs	Jeremiah
Song of Songs	Ecclesiastes	Lamentations
Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs	Ezekiel
Lamentations	Wisdom of Solomon	Daniel
Esther	Sirach	Hosea
Daniel	Isaiah	Joel
Ezra-Nehemiah	Jeremiah	Amos
Chronicles	Lamentations	Obadiah
	Baruch	Jonah
	Ezekiel	Micah
	Daniel (plus Greek additions)	Nahum
	Hosea	Habakkuk
	Joel	Zephaniah
	Amos	Haggai
	Obadiah	Zechariah
	Jonah	Malachi
	Micah	
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

*The Greek tradition actually refers to the books of I and II Samuel and I and II Kings as I, II, III, and IV Kingdoms.

we must depend upon those who can discover and interpret clues about its beginnings and growth.

But the following questions arise: "Why go to all that trouble?" "Why not just accept it as it is?" Those who ask such questions probably would agree that one needs to understand the Old Testament—or the Bible as a whole, for that matter—as much as possible. Just as we can understand others better if we understand their background, so we can understand the Bible better if we understand its background. If we study the results of their efforts, all types of biblical scholars can contribute to our understanding of the Bible. These include textual specialists or theologians, form critics or archaeologists, literary historians or redaction critics, those who look at particular parts, or those who try to look at the message of the Bible as a whole. We need, then, to describe briefly some (but not all) of the kinds of scholarship that are used to aid us in understanding and interpreting the Bible.

Textual Criticism

First are those scholars whose concern is the biblical text itself. Sometimes called *lower criticism,* the concerns of **textual criticism** are of basic importance to all who study the Bible seriously for any reason, because no one possesses a single original copy of any book of the Bible, either from the Old or the New Testament. The oldest complete copy of any Old Testament book is a manuscript of the book of Isaiah, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which dates to about the time of Christ. This means that the original copy of the book of Isaiah was written several hundred years before the Dead Sea Scroll Isaiah was copied. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, contain less than half of the contents of our Old Testament. The oldest complete copy of the TANAK in Hebrew is a manuscript commonly called the Leningrad **Codex**, which was written around 1000 C.E. Modern versions of the Old Testament are essentially translations of this manuscript. There are two virtually complete manuscripts of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, that were written in the fourth or fifth century. Modern translators also consult these manuscripts when doing their work.

In addition to the ancient Greek translation in the Septuagint, the **TANAK** was translated into other ancient languages, such as Aramaic and Syriac. Aramaic translations of individual books and collections of books are called *Targums.* No copies of these translations written earlier than the Middle Ages exist. The most significant Syriac translation is called the *Peshitta*, but, again, the oldest existing copies are centuries removed from the actual translation process. Because these Aramaic and Syriac translations contain significant amounts of elaboration and are not represented by reliable early manuscripts, they play a minor role in modern Bible translation. They are most significant as indicators of how early faith communities struggled to understand and use the Bible.

Although the lack of availability of ancient manuscripts of the Bible is a problem, there are more copies of biblical manuscripts than of any other kind of ancient manuscript. There is far more manuscript evidence for the prophets of Israel than there is for Plato and Aristotle. That such a profusion of manuscripts exists creates something of a problem, however, in that they differ in places. Investigating such differences requires the talents of the textual scholar. Through a vast knowledge of the ancient languages, the textual specialist is able to compare the various manuscripts and thus better estimate what the original copies said. It should be pointed out that most of the variations in the text involve only about 5 percent of the total material.

Literary and Historical Studies

In the second place, there are scholars who study the text from the literary and historical standpoint. Although there is a great degree of unanimity about the aims of textual criticism, there is far less agreement about the result or, in some cases, even the need for literary or higher criticism.

Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher

Countless persons over many centuries are responsible for the dedicated and painstaking work that has made it possible for us to have the Old Testament available today. Perhaps nobody is a better representative of these persons than Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher. Aaron was a member of a famous family of scribes and lived during the tenth century of the Common Era. The members of this family were the most prominent members of a large group of scribes called the *Masoretes,* whose work spans much of the Middle Ages. Before the work of the Masoretes, there was no standard way to write copies of the Hebrew canon with the necessary markings of vowels, accents, and punctuation required for understanding it. Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher labored all of his life to produce a standardized system for making copies of the text, all of which were handwritten because the printing press would not be invented for another 500 years.

Two codices produced by the Ben Asher family, the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex, are our best representatives of the Hebrew text that lies behind our Old Testament. The Leningrad Codex is our oldest complete copy of the Hebrew scriptures and modern versions of the Old Testament are, more than anything else, translations of this book. This codex is believed to be a copy of another codex that was written by Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher himself. We know little else about the life of this man, but if you can find a copy of a Hebrew Bible, imagine sitting at a rough desk by candlelight, with a pen and an ink bottle, making copies of this text for most of your life. On the other hand, we do know that Aaron Ben Moses Ben Asher lived in Teberias, on the beautiful western shore of Lake Genesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee, so he and his family had a pleasant setting in which to do their important work.

Literary and historical studies are directed toward three basic concerns: source (was there an author or authors?), form (in what form or style was the composition written or spoken?), and history (how did the present book develop?).

The first concern can be illustrated by the question "Who wrote the Pentateuch?" Perhaps no other question in biblical studies has evoked a wider variety of responses than this one.

MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP OF THE PENTATEUCH. Many readers are aware of the idea that Moses wrote the **Pentateuch,** the first five books of the Bible, but they may be unaware of the source of this assumption. A few texts in the Pentateuch (e.g., Exodus 17:14 and Deuteronomy 31:9) refer to Moses writing something, but it is unclear what he was writing. At some point in Israelite tradition, it became common to refer to the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy as "the books of Moses." It is unclear what this phrase originally meant. It could have been an acknowledgment that Moses is the main character throughout most of the Pentateuch. It also became common practice in Israelite tradition to associate written collections with famous figures of the past, for example, the book of Psalms with David, or the Wisdom Literature with Solomon. Mosaic authorship of the

A Text-Critical Problem

I Samuel 13:1 presents a problem for anyone studying the Bible, because manuscripts differ in what they say at this point in the text.

The Standard Hebrew (Masoretic) text says:

> Saul was _____ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned over Israel for two years.

Some Greek (Septuagint) manuscripts omit 13:1 entirely, while others say:

> Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned over Israel two years.

Some Syriac manuscripts say:

> Saul was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned over Israel.

This manuscript situation raises numerous difficult questions. Why does the Hebrew text not give Saul's age at the beginning of his reign, and should English translations supply one of the numbers from the other ancient versions? Could all of Saul's reign, as presented in I Samuel, really have taken place in only two years, or has part of the number been omitted? In the Christian Bible, this issue is complicated by the report in Acts 13:21 that Saul reigned for forty years. How should a contemporary version of the Bible present the problems associated with this number?

Pentateuch thus turns out to be a tradition of unknown origin. Because of this, it is difficult to construct rational arguments for or against this idea. The simple observation that this material does not look like something that a single person wrote has led to other questions and proposals about who may have written it and, more importantly, how and why it may have been written.[4]

THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch began to be questioned as early as the twelfth century by certain Jewish rabbis. Then, in the 1700s, two individuals, H. B. Witter, a German pastor (d. 1711), and Jean Astruc, a French physician (d. 1753), noticed the alternation of the divine names *Elohim* in Genesis 1 and YHWH *Elohim* in Genesis 2. Others then noticed, among other things, third-person references to Moses; repetitions (Gen. 12, 20, 26; Exod. 20, 24; Deut. 5); and differing names for the same place or person (Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb; Jethro and Reuel).

The resulting process of **source criticism** led to the classical expression of the Documentary, or JEDP Hypothesis, in the late nineteenth century by Julius Wellhausen, a German biblical scholar. It proposed that Israel's history was written in four stages:

J. A history using YHWH as the principal name for God, written in the time of Solomon or shortly thereafter.

E. A history using *Elohim* as the principal name for God, written around 750 B.C.E.

D. A history influenced by the finding of the Book of Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah (621 B.C.E.). This history is generally dated around 550 B.C.E.

P. A history written by the priests around 450 B.C.E., adding legal materials related to worship and geneological lists.

In this scheme, P typically represents a writer, or writers, with priestly concerns, who produced their own material and compiled other materials to mold the books of the Pentateuch into something close to their present form. Although this hypothesis possessed tremendous explanatory power, it suffers from a number of weaknesses. Two of these are its exaggerated sense of certainty about a historical framework based on little evidence and its reliance on a developmental view of Israelite religion. In these and other aspects, the Documentary Hypothesis was very much a child of its time in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

MODIFICATIONS OF WELLHAUSEN'S VIEWS. Another German scholar introduced the first important modification of Wellhausen's views. Instead of emphasizing completed documents, Hermann Gunkel shifted the emphasis to the building blocks of those documents—the oral stories, poems, legal materials, wisdom sayings—that the author(s) used to put the final product together. This is called *form criticism*[5]—the study of the smaller units that make up the larger text. Form critics look for the distinctive types of speech patterns that characterize a certain kind of life situation. For example, a person who has had a lifetime involvement in sports, either as a fan or as a participant, is likely to use figures of speech from sports to describe other aspects of life. So, one might say after failing to achieve a goal, "I struck out!"

Israel's prophets, familiar with the legal activity they saw taking place at the city gate, were fond of using legal language to describe God's judgment of the people. As an illustration of this, read Micah 6:1–8, in which is found an indictment (6:1–2); the case presented against the defendant (6:3–5); the defense (6:6–7); and the verdict (6:8).

A further challenge to Wellhausen came from a group of Scandinavian scholars led by Ivan Engnell. Coming from a culture in which oral literature was a part of the heritage, Engnell and his group challenged Wellhausen on two points: (1) the age of the materials and (2) the nature of the "documents." Wellhausen proposed that each of the "histories" (J, E, D, or P) reflected the time in which it was written, whereas Engnell and his colleagues argued that the basic materials from which J, E, D, and P were developed were much older than the documents themselves, having been a part of the oral tradition of the Israelite people (see the Song of Deborah and Judges 5 as examples). Even the so-called documents could have been passed down in oral form before being recorded in written form. This, in turn, has led to an area of study that attempts to trace the history of these traditions.

REDACTION CRITICISM. Redaction criticism studies how various sources were combined into larger units. Three kinds of sources were used: written, oral, and what might be called *editorial additions*. The redactor was a theologian with a message shaped by the units of material that were selected and by the narrative transitions that were added. An example of this would be the story of David's life (1 Sam. 16 to 1 Kings 2:12 and 1 Chr. 10:1–29:30). Although the Chronicler's history repeats much of the material found in 1 Samuel and 1 Kings, there are important omissions—for example, David's affair with Bathsheba. By the Chronicler's time (the post-Exilic period), David was seen as the ideal king, so much so that the Jews envisioned a new day when a new David, the Messiah, would come to deliver Israel from its enemies. So, the redactor, or editor, saw no good purpose in bringing up David's indiscretion with Bathsheba.

More Recent Trends in Old Testament Studies

A marked shift in emphasis has occurred in Old Testament studies in recent years. There has been a movement away from examining the pieces that make up the literature to examining the finished

product. This has taken two forms in particular: (1) studies that examine the text for its literary merit and (2) studies that center on the question of what the finished text had to say to the particular audiences to which it was addressed.

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE. Differing from earlier works, the Bible as a whole is examined as a work of literary force and authority. It is seen as a work that demonstrates "the remarkable ingenuity of biblical authors" in creating literature that is so entirely credible that it shaped the minds and lives of intelligent men and women for two millennia and more. The text is not only read for its beauty but also for its meaning as a whole.[6] In this textbook, there are introductory paragraphs before each Old Testament book that discuss the literary aspects of that particular book, because most, if not all, of the thirty-nine books in the Protestant Old Testament have a discernible organization as pieces of literature. Before each book is studied, this textbook will attempt to illustrate its structure.

One additional problem concerns the treatment of books that appear in pairs or as part of a larger group. These include the books of Samuel, the books of Kings, the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Book of the Twelve. Each of these groupings appears to have been originally perceived as a single work or scroll. This is why the Hebrew Bible counts only twenty-four books in its contents rather than thirty-nine, even though its contents are identical to those of the Protestant Old Testament. In these cases, the discussion will attempt to give attention to both levels of structure—that of the individual books and that of the scroll containing the whole grouping.

CANONICAL CRITICISM. The Bible shares the aim of those who study it as literature, insofar as it emphasizes the canonized text. But it differs in that it assumes that a given segment in its final form was designed to speak to problems of that time. As one well-known critical scholar recently asked, "Should we not ask what the final author (or authors) of the *book* wanted to tell the reader?"[7] The redactor or editor was much like a student writing a dissertation. A subject is selected, and sources are examined and selected to support the thesis being proposed. Thus, the editors or redactors were theologians who had something to say, who selected the materials from available sources, and, when needed, created materials that supported the point or points that were to be made in the finished product.

THE SOCIOHISTORICAL APPROACH. There is growing interest in how common folk lived. Sources for this approach include physical remains, such as garbage pits and village ruins; written sources, including the biblical texts and texts from similar ancient sources; and comparisons with similar present-day societies. A major problem that this approach has to deal with is this: In comparing Israelite society with other societies, just how similar is the society in question to ancient Israelite society? Furthermore, most archaeological evidence is mute and thus is subject to often conflicting interpretations. Despite these problems, this approach makes valuable contributions to our understanding of Israelite society.[8] In addition to *sociohistorical* approaches that may not differ significantly from other historical ways of studying Old Testament texts, some sociological methods make more deliberate use of data from contemporary societies. For example, observations about the lives of modern exiled people may shed light on texts that are about or were shaped by the Israelite experience of exile, and studies of modern nomadic cultures may help us understand biblical stories, like Genesis 12–36, that present nomadic characters and settings.

DEVELOPERS OF THE FINISHED PRODUCT. Present-day scholars emphasize the role of three major groups in the development of the narrative materials in the Old Testament (Genesis–

Numbers; Deuteronomy–2 Kings; 1,2 Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah). First, the priestly redactors are credited with giving Genesis through Numbers its final form, because, apart from Genesis, much of the material is concerned with legal and cultic matters—the areas of special interest to the priest. Second, the Deuteronomistic editors are seen as responsible for Joshua through 2 Kings, with Deuteronomy being the bridge between the Genesis–Numbers narrative and what is commonly called the *Deuteronomic History*. The latter influence may spill over into the narrative portions of Jeremiah. Another group of historians produced an alternative vision of Israel's history from the Creation to the Exile in the books of Chronicles. These historians are sometimes referred to collectively as the Chronicler. The story of Israel after the Exile is continued in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are often linked to Chronicles.

ARCHAEOLOGY AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING

Archaeology is increasingly in the news. Whether it is the report of the inscriptional reference to the "house of David,"[9] the uncovering of a complete city gate in the ancient Canaanite city of Laish,[10] or the making of popular movies that portray a breed of archaeologist that is as outdated as the horse-drawn carriage, archaeology is a subject that draws attention.

Because *archaeology* is a term that is often misunderstood, certain questions should be examined: "What is archaeology?" "How does the archaeologist know where to dig?" "What digging methods are used?" "What is the value of archaeology?"

Basic Matters

THE PURPOSE OF ARCHAEOLOGY. Contrary to the popular image of an archaeolgist as a fortune hunter, archaeology is a serious scientific discipline dedicated to the search for truth about ancient cultures by studying the material remains of those cultures. Remains may be such simple things as broken pottery, animal bones, seeds, remains of buildings, and, if the archaeologist is fortunate, written materials. Biblical archaeologists in particular are interested in the peoples mentioned in the biblical story, and especially the Israelites. Even here, the archaeologist does not set out to prove the Bible. Instead, the purpose is to shed light on the Bible by trying to understand its peoples and their culture more thoroughly.

THE PRACTICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY. Sites in biblical lands are called **tells**. These are flattopped hills, built up over centuries of construction and destruction on basically the same site. Such sites were limited in number because of the lack of available water sources. The discovery of how to make lime plaster made possible the development of cisterns—cavities dug into the soft rock and then plastered to make them waterproof so that rainwater could be stored in them. This made it possible to build in an area that previously had been inaccessible. The important city of Samaria was one such site.

The tell is divided into squares, each one measuring 5 meters by 5 meters. For two reasons, only selected squares are excavated: (1) the limits of financial resources and manpower and (2) the need to leave areas for later scholars to examine when increased knowledge may lead to a more accurate evaluation of what is found. As the selected squares are excavated, only a few inches of soil are removed at a time. The sides of the square are kept as straight as possible, and adjoining squares are separated by a dirt wall, or *balk*. This is essential in determining the various levels of occupation. Any important finds are photographed, and charts are kept depicting their exact location in the square.

Formerly, the emphasis was on digging such areas as the city gate, because this was the center of governmental functions; the areas in which worship was carried on; and the homes of the city's rulers—palaces and monumental buildings. Present-day archaeologists, while not ignoring these important features of tells, are turning more and more attention to the dwellings of the common people to determine how they lived and the types of societies they had.

One way to accomplish this is through a combination of ethnology (the study of contemporary peoples and their cultures) and archaeology (the study of ancient peoples and their cultures). The contemporary peoples live in traditional societies, using methods that have changed little throughout the centuries. On Cyprus, until the 1950s, grain harvesting used methods like those spoken of in the Bible (Isa. 41:15–16). Ethnoarchaeology "not only provides technological details . . . useful in archaeological interpretations," but also shows how that technology fits "into people's lives and what they thought of it."[11]

THE SKILLS AND TOOLS OF ARCHAEOLOGY. The basic tools of the trade are hand tools, because excavation must be done carefully and systematically. Such small tools as trowels, hand picks, and a variety of brushes are used to carefully expose the finds. Earth that is removed is sifted for smaller items that might escape visual detection. Interpretation of what is found involves many scientific disciplines—physical and cultural anthropologists to study physical changes and social organizations; paleobotanists and paleozoologists to study the remains of ancient plant and animal life, to name but a few.

Various types of electronic gear are increasingly important. The computer is used for recording and analyzing data, while ground-penetrating radar, echo sound, and other such techniques are used for at least two purposes: to determine those areas in which digging would be most fruitful and to detect underground structures, which would prohibit digging altogether or where there is neither time nor resources available to dig.[12]

Such electronic tools are useful especially in area surveys, a major emphasis in present-day archaeological work. In years past, such surveys consisted of examining surface features of tells. Judgments were made on the basis of such features as to the occupants of the tell and when they occupied it. With modern electronic tools, a much wider range of data can be collected, leading to much sounder judgments about the nature of a given site.

DATING WHAT IS FOUND. One of the early techniques for dating was developed by two pioneer archaeologists, Sir Flinders Petrie and William F. Albright. They noticed that pottery found at the same level in different tells over an area had the same basic features. From this, they developed a method of dating, based on the changes in pottery. Epigraphical dating is based on written materials and involves the changing styles of letter formation. Broken pottery was the most convenient material upon which to write, particularly in Israel. Formerly, it was scrubbed to discover writing, but now it has been discovered that simply dipping it in water is the better method.[14] The carbon-14 test can be used on any plant-based samples of surviving materials. For example, both epigraphy and carbon-14 tests were used to date the Dead Sea Scrolls.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS. These scrolls are undoubtedly the most famous archaeological discovery of the twentieth century. It began in 1947 when a Bedouin boy found the first manuscripts in a cave near the Dead Sea. When experts recognized their value, a systematic examination was made of other caves in the area, leading to the discovery of a veritable treasure of both biblical and nonbiblical manuscripts. This discovery made available manuscripts or portions

Important Discoveries

The following are a few examples of discoveries that have had an impact on biblical studies:[13]

The Rosetta Stone. This trilingual inscription, discovered in 1801 by an engineer in Napoleon's army, made possible the translation of thousands of previously unreadable Egyptian inscriptions. Although its impact on the interpretation of the Bible is indirect, it nevertheless gave insight into the history of a people who were intimately involved with the Israelites.

The Gilgamesh Epic. In the mid-nineteenth century, Austen Henry Layard, a British explorer, discovered an ancient Assyrian library at Nineveh. Later, while translating the clay tablets, George Adam Smith, a young assistant at the British Museum, came across a flood story that had remarkable parallels to the biblical flood story. Unfortunately, the tablet was broken. Subsequently, Smith returned to the site of the discovery and, within five days of digging, found a tablet containing the rest of the story. This story, whose hero is Utnapishtim, predates the biblical story, suggesting that the biblical storyteller was familiar with it and used materials from it for his own purposes.

The Beni Hasan Mural. This wall painting, found in a large rock-hewn tomb near the village of Beni Hasan, 150 miles north of Cairo, dates to the early nineteenth century B.C.E. The painting portrays a group of Asiatics who have come to Egypt either to trade or to seek mining rights. Where in Asia they originated is unclear, but the picture suggests the types of trading relationships described in the stories of the patriarchs in Genesis.

The Gezer High Place. Discovered by R. A. S. Macalister in 1902, this site has been interpreted as dating from times ranging from 2500 B.C.E. to 1600 B.C.E. It consists of a series of ten upright stone pillars and a large rectangular block of stone with a depression cut into its top. Although the purpose of the basin is something of a mystery, the most likely explanation for the upright stones is that they served as witnesses of some sort of covenant ceremony, like the one described in the story of the confrontation of Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:43–54; see also Josh. 24:25–27).

The Tel Dan Inscription. The Tel Dan Inscription now consists of three fragments from what was likely a larger stele produced by or for an Aramean or Syrian king in the ninth century B.C.E. The pieces were found in 1993 and 1994 in the excavation of a mound identified with the ancient city of Dan in northern Israel. Most interest in these fragments results from the appearance of the phrase "house of David" on one of them. If this is a reference to the biblical King David, or at least to the royal dynasty in Israel that traced its origins to him, then it is the oldest such reference outside the Bible by several centuries.

of manuscripts of every Old Testament book except two, some of which are 1000 years older than previously known manuscripts. In addition, there are manuscripts from nearly 1000 nonbiblical books.

The Value of Archaeology

A major aim of archaeology is to discover as much as possible about ancient peoples. Ideally, the archaeologist does not set out to prove anything, but tries to let the evidence speak for itself.

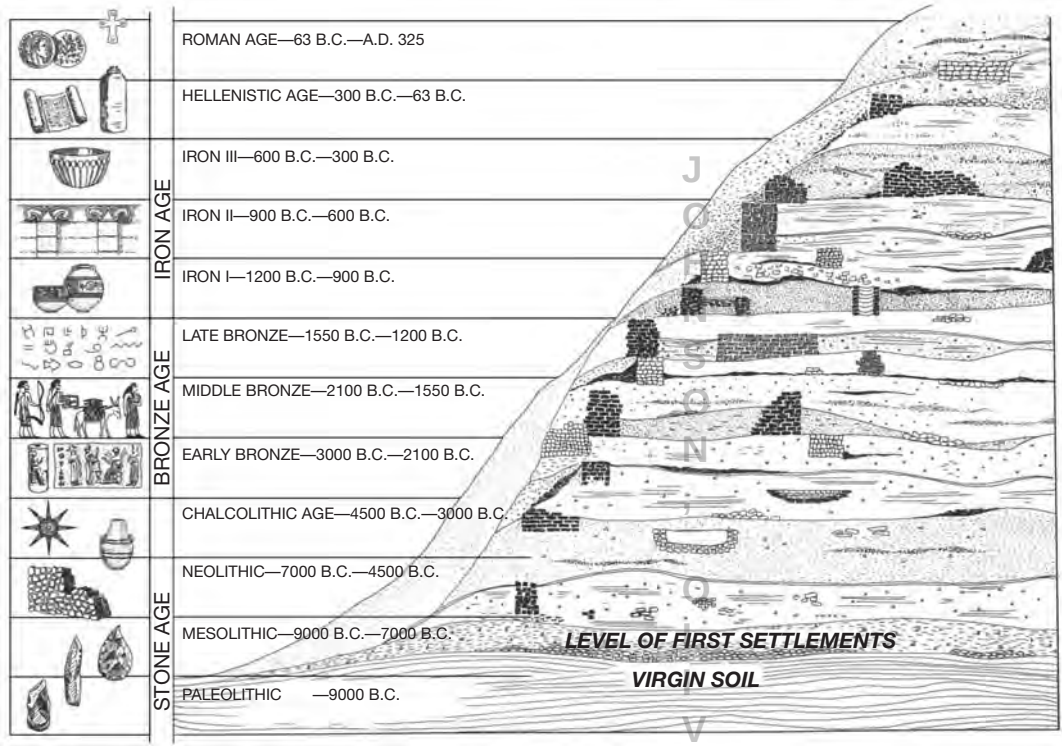


FIGURE 1–1 Cultural and archaeological ages of the past in Palestine. This illustration shows how a tell was built up by layers, over the centuries, as cities were built and destroyed. From *Compass Points for Old Testament Study* by Mark H. Lovelace. © 1972 by Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

Sometimes it speaks for what is described in the Bible, at others it is neutral, and at still others it is contrary to what the Bible describes. If one turns up written materials, the task of interpretation is clarified somewhat. Most of the evidence that is found, however, is mute. That is the reason why often in archaeology, two interpreters will take the same evidence and reach seemingly opposite conclusions.

Despite these limitations, because of the work of archaeologists, we know more about the lives of the peoples of biblical times than we discern from reading the Bible alone. We know the kinds of houses they lived in, their customs, what languages they spoke, the foods they ate, and even how they made out property deeds. More importantly, we are far richer in the manuscript evidence for biblical books, and our ability to understand these texts is far greater, thanks to archaeological discoveries. All in all, archaeology has proven to be a useful tool in biblical interpretation.

WHY STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT?

People study the Old Testament for a variety of reasons. Many people study it as an aid to understanding our language and culture, because much of our great literature has been influenced by Old Testament themes and figures of speech. Even nonreligious people read such Old Testament books as Job, Proverbs, or Psalms with appreciation for their literary merit.

FIGURE 1–2 The Gezer High Place.

But for devout Jews and Christians alike, there is a sense of the sacred about the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. They view it as inspired literature—inspired on a higher and different level from other great literary works. But even so, there are differences as to how the Bible is inspired. Some hold that every word in the original manuscripts was dictated by God to persons whose only function was to write them down in the idiom of their own time. Others view biblical inspiration as a process in which persons encountered the Divine in their everyday living and wrote down their reaction to that encounter.

Such a view would say that God's power is unlimited and surely includes the power of self-revelation and that inspiration is the human reaction to God's self-revelation. The biblical writers' ability, however, to understand what God was revealing definitely was limited, and that limitation is reflected in what is written about what God has done or is doing in the world. The Old Testament mirrors the strengths and weaknesses of those people whose experiences are portrayed, including their understanding and misunderstanding of the nature of God and of God's will for their lives. For instance, the Christian apostle Paul accepted slavery as part of his world and gave instructions about how slaves were to behave. Today, we do not accept, nor do we believe that God approves of, slavery. What has changed—God's will about slavery or our understanding? The obvious answer is that God has not changed—rather, our understanding of God's will has changed. But even in the realization that a biblical character could misunderstand God's will, we learn one of the great lessons of our faith—that we, too, are prone to error but can still be effective servants of God. This is part of what has been called *progressive revelation.*

FIGURE 1–3 Archaeological sites. Artwork by Margaret Jordan Brown from *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible.* © 1990, courtesy of Mercer University Press.

Key Terms

Codex, *10*
Hermeneutics, *4*
Pentateuch, *11*
Plenary Verbal Inspiration, *6*
Source Criticism, *12*
TANAK, *10*
Tell, *15*
Canon, *7*
Septuagint, *8*
Textual Criticism, *10*
Etiology, *4*
Deuterocanonical, *8*

Study Questions

1. What is the Old Testament, and how did the term originate?
2. What do the abbreviations B.C.E. and C.E. mean?
3. Why is it unusual that the Old Testament has so much narrative material?
4. Why did the Israelites begin their story with the Exodus?
5. How were the early traditions about Israel developed and passed on from generation to generation?
6. What are etiologies, and what is their purpose?
7. What were the high points of Israel's story beginning with the Exodus and ending with the Babylonian Exile?
8. What is the meaning of the term *TANAK?*
9. How did the Septuagint affect the way various Christian groups view the biblical canon today?
10. What is the basic concern of textual criticism?
11. What are the three major concerns of literary and historical studies of the biblical text?
12. What forms of evidence are cited to argue for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy)?
13. What major shift in emphasis has taken place in Old Testament studies in recent years?
14. What three groups of redactors or editors have most source-critics identified as being responsible for the final form of the major narrative complexes of the Old Testament?
15. What is the basic purpose of archaeology?
16. How are archaeological dig sites selected?
17. What are some ways in which modern technology is making a contribution to archaeology?
18. What are the strengths and weaknesses in using archaeology in biblical interpretation?
19. Learn at least one important fact about each of the archaeological examples given in this chapter.
20. How does the inspiration of other great literature differ from the inspiration of the Hebrew Bible? Or does it?

Endnotes

1. In keeping with more recent practices, B.C.E., "before the Common Era," and C.E., "Common Era," will be used in this text instead of B.C. and A.D.
2. For this insight, I am indebted to Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, "Torah as Narrative and Narrative as Torah," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future—Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker.* Edited by James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 14.
3. On the problem of the formation of the canon, see John J. Collins, "Before the Canon: Scriptures in Second Temple Judaism," in James L. Mays et al., *NIB*, I, 225–241. For a look at how the differing order of the Hebrew Bible by Jews and Christians affects the interpretation of various books, see James A. Sanders, "'Spinning' the Bible: How Judaism and Christianity Shape the Canon Differently," *BR,* XIV, 3 (June 1998), 22–29. For a discussion of the development of the Bible as a written work, see William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
4. For a more thorough discussion of issues surrounding Mosaic authorship, see Mark McEntire, *Struggling With God: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 8–11.
5. *Critic* and *criticism* are used here to mean "one who analyzes" or "the analysis of" the materials for the purpose of coming to a better understanding of them. It does not imply a destructive purpose.

6. James L. Crenshaw, "The Bible as Literature," *MDB,* 515–519, is a good survey of this field of study. Two books that use this approach are Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, *Introduction to the Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987), and Brian Peckham, *History and Prophecy: The Development of the Late Judean Literary Traditions* (New York: Doubleday, 1993).
7. A major work based on this interest is Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period.* Translated by John Bowden (Louisville, KY: Westminster–John Knox Press, 1994), 2 vols.
8. Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Daily Life in Bible Times* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), is a comprehensive work on this aspect of biblical life.
9. "David Found at Dan," *BAR,* 20, 2 (March–April 1994), 26–39.
10. Avraham Biran, "The Discovery of the Middle Bronze Gate at Dan," *BA,* 44, 1 (November 1981), 139–144.
11. John C. Whitaker, "The Ethnoarchaeology of Threshing in Cyprus," *NEA*, 63, 2 (June 2000), 62–63. Both *NEA*, 63, 1 and 2 (March and June 2000), are devoted to articles on ethnoarchaeology.
12. A fascinating example of this is described by Dan Bahat, "Jerusalem Down Under: Tunneling Along Herod's Temple Wall," *BAR,* 21, 6 (November–December 1995), 30–47. See also Thomas E. Levy, "From Camels to Computers: A Short History of Archaeological Method," *BAR,* 21, 4 (July–August 1995), 44–51, 64. Chris Scarre, "High Tech 'Digging,'" *ARCH,* 52, 5 (September–October 1999), 50–56, presents a fascinating look at the use of electronic technology in modern archaeology.
13. James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 39f.
14. For a number of these examples, I am indebted to Michael D. Coogan, "10 Great Finds," *BAR,* 21, 3 (May–June 1995), 36–47.

CHAPTER

2 The Geographical and Historical Settings for the Old Testament Prior to 1200 B.C.E.

Timeline

3000 B.C.E. Beginning of the **Bronze Age**
2800 B.C.E. Rise of the Sumerian Empire
2300 B.C.E. Rise of the Akkadian Empire
1800 B.C.E. Frequent guess about the time of Abraham and Sarah
1700 B.C.E. Beginning of the Hyksos period in Egypt and the possible arrival of Joseph in Egypt
1400 B.C.E. Height of Ugaritic culture
1300 B.C.E. Rule of Pharaohs Seti and Ramses II in Egypt
1200 B.C.E. Merneptah Stele mentions Israel at the Beginning of the **Iron Age**

Chapter Outline

I. The Ancient Near East
II. Mesopotamia
III. Asia Minor
IV. Africa
V. Syria-Phoenecia
VI. Palestine

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter Two draws a historical and cultural map of the geographical area in which the Old Testament story takes place. The discussion moves generally in an arc from east to north to west and then focuses on the area in which Israel is found in more detail. Israel exchanged much with the other cultures identified in this chapter. For example, nearly every type of literature found in the Old Testament has matching material in the documents from these other cultures. By the end of the chapter, a setting for the Old Testament is established, and material is revealed from these other cultures that assists our understanding of the Old Testament.

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In a remarkable photograph taken from the *Gemini XI* spacecraft in 1966, the biblical world from **Egypt** to Mesopotamia is captured in one magnificent view. One is struck by the dry, barren look that characterizes much of this area, called the Near East. And dry it is. Deserts abound—the Arabian Desert is on the east, the desert of the Sinai Peninsula is to the south, and the great Sahara in the north of Africa pushes its way right up to the banks of the Nile River in Egypt. In early times, there was settled life only where there were rivers. These rivers furnished water for drinking and for irrigation, which made possible the development of agriculture. Other regions might have, in the occasional oasis, enough water for nomadic herdsmen, but these oases were so far apart that desert travel was limited until the domestication of the camel. Nomads, until late in the second millenium B.C.E., traveled by ass or by donkey and thus were limited in their range.

The watered areas of the Near East form a roughly crescent-shaped pattern known as the **Fertile Crescent.** This fertile strip of land begins in the east at the Persian Gulf and runs northwestward, taking in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. North of this region, high mountains form a barrier between the rivers and what we know today as southern Russia. **Mesopotamia**, the name given to this region, literally means "in the midst of, or between, rivers." The mountains continue in the northwest, separating Mesopotamia from Asia Minor and the Mediterranean Sea.

The center of the Fertile Crescent was Syria-Palestine, a narrow band of fertile land caught in a vise between the Arabian Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. All the major roads from Africa to Asia passed through this narrow strip of land, thus making it a prize to be seized by the great powers of the time.

The southern end of the crescent was Egypt, the land of the Nile. Isolated from other major civilizations by deserts and distance, it developed one of the earliest, most powerful civilizations.

MESOPOTAMIA

3000 to 2000 B.C.E.

THE SUMERIANS. These people, named for their major area, **Sumer,** occupied a number of city-states that dominated the lower Mesopotamian region from 3150 to 2350 B.C.E. and again from 2060 to 1950 B.C.E. In this later period, Ur, one of the truly great cities of the ancient world, was dominant. The Sumerians invented the earliest known form of writing (**cuneiform**) and introduced counting by sixties (the method we use to count seconds and minutes). They were conquered by the Elamites.[1]

Gilgamesh

Archaeological expeditions in Mesopotamia in the nineteenth century produced a large collection of ancient texts that tell stories of a great hero named **Gilgamesh.** This epic figure likely has some connection to an actual king of Uruk named Gilgamesh, but the significance of the literary hero far outweighs that of the historical king. The mother of Gilgamesh was a goddess and his father was a human, so he resembles the half-human, half-divine giants described in Genesis 6:1–4.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh torments his subjects until they call upon the gods to save them. The gods send a wild man named Enkidu who wrestles with Gilgamesh until they become friends and companions. Together they battle and slay the great Bull of Heaven, but Enkidu dies soon after this great feat. Devastated by the loss of his friend, Gilgamesh wanders the earth. One of his heroic acts during this wandering period involves the killing of a group of lions.

Most startling to readers of the Bible is the story of the flood that took place near the end of the Epic of Gilgamesh. In this flood story, which precedes the biblical story by many centuries, Utnapishtim is the figure who survives the flood on a boat along with his family and animals he has gathered. The gods decide to flood the earth to kill all of the humans because the humans are so noisy that the gods cannot sleep. Utnapishtim receives instructions on how to survive the flood. The biblical story of Noah obviously resembles the flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh, but the relationship between the two is difficult to determine. The end of the epic sings with sadness about the loss of the glorious hero, and the people give great offerings for his burial.

THE AKKADIANS. The first empire builder was Sargon of Akkad, who interrupted the Sumerian dominance of Mesopotamia in 2350 B.C.E., establishing an empire that would last until 2180 B.C.E. His people, the Akkadians, were Semites, a people from whom the later Israelites came. The Akkadians moved northwest into Mesopotamia from the Arabian Peninsula. Their language and literature continued to dominate Mesopotamia through their heirs, the **Babylonians** and the **Assyrians.** Through archaeology, that language and literature have come to us, furnishing a wealth of knowledge about the religious and cultural life of the region.

2000 to 1500 B.C.E.

THE AMORITES (ARAMEANS). These people, known as *Westerners*, were originally seminomadic tribesmen from Arabia. In the 200 years after 2000 B.C.E., they appeared all over the Fertile Crescent, causing great disruptions. After some time, they settled down, building new towns in northern and western Palestine and establishing two strong states in Mesopotamia around 1800 B.C.E.—Mari, located in the northeast, and Babylonia, in south-central Mesopotamia. Babylonia's most famous king was Hammurabi, best known for his famous law codes. From Mari, we have the Mari Tablets, which shed light on many patriarchal customs.

Like the Akkadians, the Amorites were Semitic people. Their invasion of the Fertile Crescent occurred during the general time of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

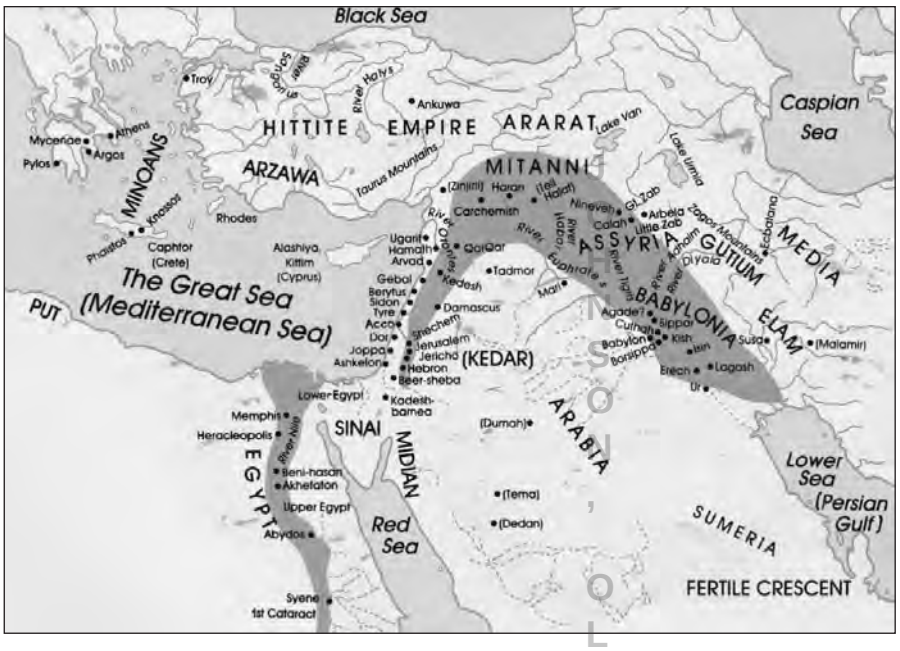


FIGURE 2–1 This map of the ancient Near East illustrates the Fertile Crescent, which extends from the Persian Gulf in the east to Canaan in the west. Artwork by Margaret Jordan Brown. © Mercer University Press.

What has been learned about the Amorites through archaeology fits in well with the descriptions of the lifestyle of the patriarchs.

THE HURRIANS. The Amorite states also passed away, succeeded by the Hurrians, or *Horites* as the Old Testament calls them. They absorbed the Amorite population into a state called *Mitanni*, and they also absorbed much of the Amorite culture. Fortunately, many of their writings were preserved on clay tablets at Nuzi, one of their major cities. The discovery of these tablets has helped clear up many obscure passages in the Old Testament.

1500 to 1000 B.C.E.

ARAMEANS AND HABIRU. Again, as had happened 500 years before, the Fertile Crescent was overrun by seminomads from Arabia. Among them were people referred to as *Apiru* or *Habiru*. Who they were has been the subject of much discussion. They appeared in many roles—as outlaws, as hired soldiers or mercenaries, as slaves, and as seminomadic wanderers. The similarity of their name to the word *Hebrew* makes it tempting to say that they were the Hebrews. However, references to the Habiru come from places all over the Fertile Crescent, so they cannot be one and the same as the Hebrews. *Habiru* refers to a much broader range of people. On the other hand, the Hebrews seem to have belonged to the same class of people. In other words, not all Habiru were Hebrews, but the Hebrews seem to have been Habiru. They were a social class from which the Hebrews came.

ASIA MINOR

THE HITTITES. Although it actually lay outside the bounds of the Fertile Crescent, **Asia Minor** was to play a very influential role in biblical history, especially in the Christian era. For many years, however, it was thought that it had little or no role in Old Testament history. Now we know that central Asia Minor was the center of the Hittite Empire. The **Hittites** are known in the Old Testament as the "sons of Heth." Their capital was Hattusa. They pushed down from Asia around 1400 B.C.E. into what is now known as Lebanon and Syria, having won the area from the Mitanni. Their greatest threat was to the power of Egypt, which controlled Palestine during that time.[2]

AFRICA

3000 to 2000 B.C.E.

THE EGYPTIANS. The part of Egypt comprising the fertile area—a narrow strip of land along the Nile River—looks like a crooked tree with a fan-shaped top representing the Nile Delta. There the river breaks up into many branches before entering the Mediterranean Sea. This delta region was a tempting target for hungry nomads throughout biblical history, because its well-watered lands produced food and pasturage in abundance, while other areas were devastated by drought.

At the same time, Egypt's separation from the rest of the Fertile Crescent by the land bridge of Palestine and the Sinai Desert enabled its civilization to develop with a minimum of interruption from outside forces. This early period, before 2000 B.C.E., was the time of the building of the great pyramids.

2000 to 1000 B.C.E.

THE EGYPTIANS. Genesis 12:10–20 tells the story of Abram (Abraham) taking his family to Egypt. This kind of emigration was common at that time. It also came at the time when the Fertile Crescent was experiencing invasions by the Amorites, the Semitic tribesmen from Arabia.

From 1720 to 1570 B.C.E., Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, or "foreigners." The Hyksos were among the first to use chariots and cavalry units for warfare. They also built cities with a distinctive kind of protective wall. These walls had a steep slope, or *glacis,* extending from the base of the wall, which made it difficult for aggressors to attack the wall. The Hyksos kingdom included both Egypt and Palestine.

The Hyksos were overthrown by the eighteenth Egyptian dynasty, founded by Ahmose I. In the centuries that followed, the Egyptians dominated Palestine. Their rule there was opposed by the Hurrian (Horite) kingdom of Mitanni, or *Naharin.* Later, the Hittites took control of the Hurrian Empire, but Egypt was still able to control Palestine proper until late in the 1200s B.C.E. Egypt's last great rulers were Seti I (1308–1290 B.C.E.) and Seti II (1290–1224 B.C.E.). These pharoahs are often associated with the Hebrew Exodus from Egypt.

THE CUSHITES. The word **Cush** appears in the Bible for the first time in Genesis 2:13. It is the location of one of the four rivers that flows out of the Garden of Eden. The name of the river, the "Gihon," is a traditional name for the Blue Nile, which is located in the area of Africa known today as Ethiopia and the Sudan. Cush next appears in Genesis 10:6 as one of the sons of Ham, along with Egypt and Put, again indicating an African identity for this place and corresponding group of people. In 10:8, Cush is identified as the father of Nimrod, which creates some confusion, because this "larger-than-life" character is associated with both African and Mesopotamian cities,

territories, and people. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, Cush was regularly rendered as "*Aithiops*," so the Greek translators apparently associated this word automatically with an East African location, related to the area we refer to today as Ethiopia.[3] Cush and the Cushites began to appear in Egyptian records in the early second millennium B.C.E. These terms clearly refer to a territory and group of people to their south, with whom the Egyptians had a long record of interactions.[4]

Cush, as a territory, and the Cushites, as a people group, appear in the Old Testament a total of fifty-four times, and their precise identity remains somewhat ambiguous. This takes place on a personal level, when a dispute arises in Numbers 12 between Moses and his siblings, Miriam and Aaron, over Moses' marriage to a Cushite woman. This woman's name is never provided by the text, leaving her identity uncertain. The named wife of Moses, Zipporah, is identified in Exodus 2 as a Midianite. All of these examples would seem to confirm that the ancient Israelites encountered these people regularly, but that their origin was a mystery to the biblical writers, and that they may have even used this sense of ambiguity and mystery deliberately. The lack of precision with which this term is used and understood in the biblical tradition has led David Tuesday Adamo to argue that the best English translation for these words that denote an area and a people group south and west of Egypt should be "Africa" and "Africans."[5]

SYRIA-PHOENICIA

3000 to 2000 B.C.E.

Syria, bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Arabian Desert, is the northern portion of the land bridge connecting Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Egypt. Its southern boundaries during the period of the Israelite kingdoms varied from period to period, but generally were marked by Mount Hermon, whose melting snows furnish water for the major sources of the Jordan River.

Because Syria was part of the corridor connecting the continents, its population varied with each new outbreak of migration and conquest. Until recently, no major civilization was known to have existed in Syria before 2000 B.C.E. Now, however, the discoveries at Ebla in northern Syria have radically changed that assessment. Ebla seems to have flourished in two periods, the first of which was from 2400 to 2250 B.C.E. During this time, it was strong enough to challenge the empire of Sargon of Akkad, who ruled the first great Near Eastern empire. The first period of Ebla's prosperity ended when the city was conquered and burned by the Akkadian ruler Namar-Sin. Ebla flourished again between 2000 and 1600 B.C.E., as is evidenced by the discovery of an elaborate palace complex. It is certain that the eventual decipherment and translation of thousands of tablets found in the Ebla excavations will add much to our knowledge of ancient Syria in the second and third millennia. The initial suggestion, however, that they would have great significance for Old Testament studies now seems to be far less certain.[6]

2000 to 1000 B.C.E.

The southwestern coast of Syria, known in biblical times as *Phoenicia* and *Lebanon*, was one of the major strongholds of the Canaanite populations so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. Because the area possessed the finest natural harbors on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, coupled with an abundance of fine timber and a lack of agricultural land, its economy was based on the sea. The Phoenicians developed a merchant fleet that became, in effect, the navy and merchant fleet of the Israelite kings David, Solomon, Omri, and Ahab, who

FIGURE 2–2 The Sphinx and the Great Pyramid—symbols of the grandeur of ancient Egypt. Courtesy of H. Armstrong Roberts.

had trade agreements with the local kings, especially the kings of Tyre. In addition, Israelite building programs used Phoenician architects, craftsmen, and vast quantities of the famous cedars of Lebanon.

Farther north lay the city of Ugarit, a center for Canaanite culture and learning around 1400 B.C.E. Here were discovered the Ras Shamra texts, which, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, opened up new areas of understanding in Old Testament studies. These texts provide us with a direct view of many of the elements of the Canaanite religion that early Israelites might have encountered and that many biblical texts may address.

The most famous of all Syrian cities was, and still is, Damascus, which was already an old city in the time of the patriarchs. Through it passed the traders, wanderers, and armies of the ancient world.

PALESTINE

Its Importance

Possibly no geographical area in the Western world holds a greater fascination for more people than Palestine. For three great religions, it is the Holy Land. Its strategic location made it the object of a continual tug-of-war among the ancient empires. Each one coveted its territory, not

because it possessed vast land or rich resources, but simply because anyone going anywhere north or south in the ancient Near East had to cross Palestine to get there. On the west, the barrier was the Mediterranean Sea. Although some small ships sailed its waters, it was not a major means of travel for many centuries. To the east lay the vast reaches of the Arabian Desert, virtually impassable to the donkey-riding traders of early times. The famous ship of the desert, the camel, did not come into common use until after 1000 B.C.E. Thus, all land traffic between Africa, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia was funneled through Palestine. This area is also referred to as the **Levant**.

Geographical Features

As one moves eastward from the Mediterranean coastal area, four major divisions of the land are evident. First is the *coastal plain* itself. The plain, broader in the southern region, becomes narrower, generally speaking, as one goes north. In the south it is known as the Plain of Philistia after its most famous inhabitants, the **Philistines**. They were a seafaring people who settled there, either after having been repulsed in an attack on Egypt or as mercenaries placed there by the Egyptians after being conquered by them.[7] They had five major cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath. Not until David's time was the area under Israelite control.

The northern border of the Philistine territory was the Yarkon River, one of the few free-flowing streams in Palestine. From the Yarkon north to Mount Carmel was the Plain of Sharon, covered in biblical times by forests. It, too, came under Israelite control rather late.

Mount Carmel, a major landmark jutting out into the Mediterranean, divided the Plain of Sharon from the Plain of Acco, or Acre, a much smaller plain extending northward to the "Ladder of Tyre," where, once again, the mountains meet the sea. This latter feature marked the boundary at times between Israel and its northern neighbors. While David controlled the Plain of Acco, Solomon had to give it up to pay his building debts to Hiram, king of Tyre. The second major division as one moves eastward is the *central hill country.* In the north, the hills of upper Galilee vary in height from 2000 to 3000 feet, whereas lower Galilee (farther south) has hills of 2000 feet or less. Separating the Galilee hills and the Carmel range is the flat triangular Plain of Megiddo. On this plain stood the powerful city of Megiddo, one of the great cities of the ancient Near East.

As one moves southward, the mountains become progressively higher, pierced occasionally by valleys running west to east. This region is known as the *hill country of Ephraim* in much of biblical history. Farther south, it becomes the *hill country of Judah.* This region actually has two parts: (1) the Shephelah, an area of low-lying hills, and (2) the plateau on which Jerusalem is located. Separating the Shephelah and the Judean plateau is a north–south valley that made approaching the plateau from the coastal plain especially difficult. There are basically four approaches: (1) the Valley of Aijalon, which is the easiest and most famous; (2) the Valley of Sorek; (3) the Valley of Azekah; and (4) the Valley of Elah. The last three were more narrow and deep, making major movements, such as by armies, more difficult. In biblical times, if whoever controlled the plateau also controlled the Valley of Aijalon, many of the major defensive problems were solved.[8]

South of Judah, the hill country begins to decrease in altitude. In the south is the Negev, an area of rather flat land, primarily suited for raising sheep and limited agriculture. Beyond the Negev lies the Sinai Desert.

The third division, the *Jordan Rift,* is a deep scar in the earth that stretches from the base of Mount Hermon in the north all the way through Palestine and eventually into East Africa. In

Palestine it is the channel for the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee (its only large body of fresh water), and the Dead Sea (one of the world's most unusual lakes).

The Jordan, appropriately named the *down-rusher,* is formed from a number of smaller sources—the primary ones being the Snir, the Dan, and the Banias Rivers—that rise near Mount Hermon. In earlier times, the Jordan flowed into Lake Huleh—a swampy area now drained for

FIGURE 2–3 The highways of Palestine.

FIGURE 2–4 Coral reefs such as these, and a lack of deep water, effectively prevented the Israelites from developing seaports.

agriculture—before dropping rather rapidly into the Sea of Galilee. By the time the Jordan reaches the Sea of Galilee, it is already more than 600 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. From the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is 65 miles, but by the time the waters of the Jordan reach the Dead Sea, they have traveled 135 miles because of the meandering nature of the stream. Unlike the Nile and the Tigris–Euphrates Rivers, whose waters give life to the land through which they pass, the Jordan's waters have contributed little, until modern times, to sustain life along its path. There were two reasons for this. First, unlike the other river valleys, the Jordan River valley was formed by earthquake, not carved out by the river itself. Because instead of deep, rich loam that is characteristic of valleys carved by rivers, the Jordan Valley soil is not suitable for agriculture. Second, the Jordan floods at the wrong time of the year, which causes it to wash away any crops planted along its banks (see Josh. 3:15). These and other reasons also prevent the Jordan or its valley from being used for travel.

At the deepest point of the Great Rift Valley through which the Jordan River flows lies the Dead Sea, whose surface is more than 1300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. The Dead Sea is a taker, giving up nothing without a struggle. As a result, it has such a high concentration of natural pollution that very little life can exist in its waters.[9] South of the Dead Sea, the Great Rift Valley is known as the *Arabah.* Rising gradually from the Dead Sea, it eventually begins to slope downward again until it reaches the Gulf of Aqabah, an arm of the Red Sea.

The fourth division of the land is the *Transjordan Plateau.* To the north opposite the Huleh Valley and the Sea of Galilee was the region known in biblical times as *Bashan.* The ownership of Bashan, known for its fine cattle, was under constant dispute between the Israelite kingdoms and Syria. It is often referred to in contemporary political language as the *Golan Heights.* The territory known as Gilead in the Bible was on the east side of the

Jordan River, across from the hill country of Ephraim. The Jabbok River, another major tributary of the Jordan, ran through it. It was at one of the fords of the Jabbok that Jacob had his famous wrestling match (Gen. 32:22–32). The hill country of Gilead descends to form a broad plateau area. Traditionally called *Moab,* it bordered the Dead Sea and was ideal sheep country. Its broad, flat plains are broken only by an occasional stream, the chief one being the Arnon River.

The Brook Zered, which enters the Arabah at the southern end of the Dead Sea, was the traditional border between Moab and Edom. The Edomite territory was more rugged and less suited to pastoral or agricultural development than the other parts of Transjordan. This area often went for long periods with no major settlements. Those who did settle there were famous as traders and merchants.

FIGURE 2–5 The Negev, lying between the sown land and the desert, was the home of pastoral groups such as the Amalekites.

FIGURE 2–6 An aerial view of the Jordan River as it follows a serpentine path to the Dead Sea.

Major Roads

The chief value of Palestine to the ancient world powers lay in two major roads that crossed its territory. The more important road was called the *Way of the Philistines* or the *Way of the Sea.* In Roman times, it was called the *Via Maris.*[10] As its name suggests, it followed the seacoast as it ran northeastward from Egypt, passing through the important Philistine cities of Gaza and Ashdod. As it neared the northern boundaries of the Philistine territory, it had to swing eastward toward the foothills to avoid the swamps caused by shifting sands that blocked the Yarkon River. Proceeding northward, it passed through the Carmel range near Megiddo and across the plain, skirting the Sea of Galilee and crossing the Jordan near Hazor, the largest city in ancient Palestine. From there, it continued northeastward through Damascus and on to Mesopotamia.

The desire to control this road was motivated by two things—power and money. The Via Maris was the major invasion route followed by armies from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Asia Minor. The nation controlling this road beyond its borders could expect greater safety for its empire. Furthermore, the caravans that traveled over it were made to pay for that privilege, thus providing a rich source of revenue for the country that controlled it.

To a lesser degree, the same was true of the major north–south route east of the Jordan River—the King's Highway. Beginning with a major trans-Sinai route from Egypt to Edom, the King's Highway proceeded northward until it, too, came to Damascus. It was this route that Israel followed in part as it came out of the desert to invade Palestine.

Although not of international importance like the Via Maris and the King's Highway, a number of secondary roads were important for travel within the land. Perhaps the most significant

FIGURE 2–7 The King's Highway, a modern road in Jordan, runs along the same path as the ancient road the Bible calls by this name in Numbers 20:17.

of these was the route that ran through the hill country, connecting such strategic points as Shechem, Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Beersheba. A major cross-country route ran from the Plain of Acre through Megiddo and on to the Jordan River, through the Valley of Jezreel. In the south, routes into the central hill country followed the Valleys of Aijalon and Elah.

Key Terms

Asia Minor, *27*
Assyria, *25*
Babylonians, *25*
Bronze Age, *23*
Cuneiform, *24*
Cush, *27*
Egypt, *24*
Fertile Crescent, *24*
Gilgamesh, *25*
Hittites, *27*
Iron Age, *23*
Levant, *30*
Mesopotamia, *24*
Philistines, *30*
Sumer, *24*

Study Questions

1. What is the Fertile Crescent, and why is it so significant to the world of the Old Testament?
2. Explain the significance of the following groups of people: Sumerians, Akkadians, Amorites, Hurrians, Arameans, Habiru, and Hittites.
3. What was the importance of the Nile River for ancient Egypt?
4. Who were the Hyksos? What role might they have played in the early history of Israel?
5. Why was the discovery of Ebla important?
6. Why are Ugarit and the Ras Shamra texts important for Old Testament studies?
7. What are the four major divisions of Palestine from west to east?
8. How did the Shephelah function in biblical times to protect the area of Judah?
9. Why was the Jordan River of little positive importance in Old Testament times?
10. What were the two major north–south roads in ancient Palestine, and why were they so important?

Endnotes

1. William W. Hallo, "Sumerian Literature: Background to the Bible," *BR,* IV, 3 (June 1988), 29.
2. A complete issue of *BA,* 53, 2 and 3, (June–September 1989) is devoted to articles on the Hittites.
3. For a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Robert Houston Smith, "Ethiopia," *ABD,* II, 665–667.
4. See the description of this group and other African groups appearing in the Bible in David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: Christian Universities Press, 1998).
5. Ibid., 35–37.
6. For a comprehensive summary of the Ebla discoveries, see Robert D. Biggs, "Ebla Tablets," *ABD,* II, 263–270. See also Stephen M. Hooks, "Ebla," *MDB,* 225–227.
7. For opposing points of view on this issue, see Bryant G. Wood, "The Philistines Enter Canaan—Were They Egyptian Lackeys or Invading Conquerors?" *BAR,* XVII (November–December 1991), 44–52. Wood argues that the Philistines were conquerors. See also Itamar Singer, "How Did the Philistines Enter Canaan?" *BAR,* XVIII (November–December 1992), 44–46. Singer argues that they were Egyptian mercenaries.
8. Harold Brodsky, "The Shephelah—Guardian of Judea," *BR,* III (Winter 1987), 48–50.
9. Harold Brodsky, "The Jordan—Symbol of Spiritual Transition," *BR,* VIII (June 1992), 34–43, 52.
10. Barry J. Beitzel, "The *Via Maris* in Literary and Cartographic Sources," *BA*, 54, 2 (June 1991), 64–75, argues that *Via Maris* referred to an east–west road rather than the major north–south coastal road.

CHAPTER

3 Israel Looks at the Beginnings

Timeline

2200 B.C.E. Beginning of the Middle Bronze Age

2050 B.C.E. Approximate date of resurgence of the Sumerian Empire

1800 B.C.E. Frequent guess concerning the time of Abraham and Sarah

1700 B.C.E. Beginning of the Hyksos period in Egypt, possible arrival of Joseph in Egypt, and approximate date of the production of the Code of Hammurabi

1500 B.C.E. Beginning of the Late Bronze Age

Chapter Outline

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The book of Genesis commands greater attention than any other book in the Old Testament, so it deserves its own chapter in this text. As the first book in the canon, it sets the tone for the Bible, establishing many of its characteristic ways of speaking and telling stories. Genesis draws an opening portrait of the creation of the world and then leads the reader from the odd and distant primeval world to the seminomadic Near East of the Israelite ancestors. Genesis will introduce these great ancestors, such as Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Joseph, and will introduce the idea of covenant, which will define the people of Israel. By the end of the book, we will find our way with these ancestors to the land of Egypt, the place where the thrilling events at the beginning of the book of Exodus will take place.

THE PRIMEVAL COMPLEX

Genesis 1–11 is a strange kind of literature. It contains a story with a talking snake and magic fruit. In many of its texts God seems to have human body parts, performs human actions, and interacts with human beings much as another human being might. Heaven and earth appear to be directly connected, so that God and other heavenly beings can move back and forth naturally between these two realms. Genesis 1–11 pays very little attention to geography. Few of its events happen in identifiable places. It also treats time differently, often paying little if any attention to the passage of time and assigning life spans of hundreds of years to its characters. Scholarship has struggled to find an adequate name for Genesis 1–11. The adjective *primeval* seems fitting and is widely used, but the choice of a noun for it to modify is more difficult. Some use the term *history*, but this literature does not look like history as modern readers tend to understand it. The use of *Primeval Narrative* has become quite common, and can be useful, but not all of this material is narrative—there are also poems and lists. We have chosen the term *Primeval Complex*, because it is vague enough to include all of the literary types that appear in this collection and because it points to its diverse nature.

Part of the strangeness of this literature may be attributed to its age and to the way it originated as oral material and was transmitted in oral form for many centuries. The character of this material also performs an important literary function, though. It gives these opening chapters of the Bible a distant, long-ago feel. These stories are not happening in the world that is familiar to us. A literary construct like this allows the book of Genesis to deal with some vital theological issues that would be difficult to address in a literary world that functions like the one in which we live. Perhaps the most important of those theological issues is Creation, which requires speech about a Divine character who is active and visibly present in the world in a way that is different from our experience.

The cultural environment of the ancient Near East produced many different traditions about creation. One of those stories probably originated with the people known as the *Akkadians,* who lived in Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C.E. This tradition was revised and passed on by the Babylonians, and so it is often called a Babylonian creation story or is simply labeled using the first two words of the text, *Enuma Elish.*

Genesis is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title for this book—*bereshith.* This Hebrew phrase means "in beginning." Genesis not only introduces the Pentateuch, or Torah, but the whole of the Hebrew Bible, or TANAK. TANAK is a word formed by using the first letters of the name for the three divisions of the canon: *T*orah, *N*ebi'im, and *K*ethubim.

Genesis naturally falls into two parts: chapters 1–11, the Creation, the Fall, and the consequences of the Fall; and chapters 12–50, the patriarchs or ancestors of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Whoever was responsible for the final form of this book obviously had access

The Literary Structure of Genesis

Note: A boxed section like this, explaining the literary structure of each of the twenty-four books of the Hebrew canon, will appear near the place where discussion of that particular book begins. The format of a survey textbook like this often places the discussion of a biblical book in multiple places and combines it with discussion of other books. These sections are designed to provide a relatively brief, cohesive description of the overall shape of the biblical books all in one place.

The book of Genesis may appear to be just a sequence of loosely connected stories or a collection of major cycles of stories about people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Is there a sense of organization to the whole book? Over the past few decades, a general consensus has emerged concerning this aspect of the book of Genesis. The common understanding is that Genesis is deliberately organized around a framework of genealogies. There are ten specific genealogical notices, which begin with the formula *'aleh toledoth*, "these are the generations of. . . ." The genealogies introduced in this way appear in Genesis as follows:

2:4	the heavens and the earth
5:1	Adam
6:9	Noah
10:1	Noah's sons
11:10	Shem
11:27	Terah (the father of Abram/Abraham)
25:12	Ishmael
25:19	Isaac
36:1	Esau (this line about Esau is repeated in 36:9)
37:2	Jacob

This series of genealogies traces the formation of the people of Israel right down to their primary identification as children of Jacob/Israel. The genealogies also serve to send off the other branches of the human family and to differentiate them from Israel. Thus, Genesis becomes a giant ethnography or *people picture* that defines Israel and its place in the world among all of the other groups of people known to them.

The book of Genesis is also typically divided into two distinct halves, although they are not equal in length. The first part consists of Genesis 1:1–11:26 and is often called the *Primeval Narrative*. Because this section contains a great deal of nonnarrative literature, it will be called the *Primeval Complex* in this book. The second half of Genesis, 11:27–50:26, has frequently been called the *Patriarchal Narrative*, but because of its nonnarrative elements and its inclusion of important female characters, it will be called the *Ancestral Complex* in this book. Five of these genealogies listed above are found in the Primeval Complex and five in the Ancestral Complex. This fivefold structure may be related to the fivefold structure of the Torah or Pentateuch. Within each of these sets of five, the middle section is the longest. Within the Ancestral Complex, the first, third, and fifth sections are long. These long sections stand at the beginning of the three major sets of stories about Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and his wives, and Joseph. In each case, the set of stories is about the youngest son of the person named in the genealogical notice.

11:27–25:11—The stories of Abraham (son of Terah) and Sarah

25:19–35:29—The stories of Jacob (son of Isaac), Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah

37:2–50:26—The stories of Joseph (son of Jacob)

The genealogies function as a framework that identifies people groups and summarizes the passage of many generations in very little space. The stories within this genealogical framework

provide a close-up view of the people and events in which Israelites ought to be most interested.

These kinds of literary patterns appear to be present at many levels of the book of Genesis, from the whole book down to the internal structure of individual units. What this larger structure demonstrates is that the final composer of the book of Genesis deliberately shaped the book for a number of purposes. Perhaps the most prominent purpose is to answer the question "Who are the people of Israel, and how are they related to all of the other peoples of the world?"

Another feature that holds the book of Genesis together as a cohesive literary work is the phenomenon that may be called *linked stories*. There are several sets of stories that are very much alike. Some of them involve what interpreters call *type scenes*, in which different characters seem to be acting out the same, or a very similar, set of actions. These linked groups of stories include:

Drunken Father and Disrespectful Children (9:18–28, 19:30–38)

Wife–Sister Deception (12:10–20, 20:1–18, 26:1–12)

Endangering the Son (21:8–21, 22:1–19)

Birth of Twins (25:19–28, 38:27–30)

Finding a Wife at the Well (24:1–33, 29:1–14)

Confusion of Siblings (27:1–29, 29:15–30, 48:1–22)

Despite the length of the book of Genesis and the huge diversity of materials it contains, a sense of familiarity is created by the stories so that the reader might often get the sense of having been in this place before. The book of Genesis closes with the death notice of Joseph, a literary unit reminiscent of descriptions of the deaths of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and other important characters in other parts of the book.

to a variety of materials—creation stories, genealogical lists, flood stories, sagas, and other popular stories. Priestly concerns are evident in emphases on religious ceremonies, such as covenant making and circumcision (Gen. 17). The primary purpose of the book is theological—that is to say, relating that Israel was brought into being by the LORD God, the Creator of the Universe.

The Israelite Understanding of Creation

The Old Testament is filled with references to Creation. Such is the case of Psalm 104:1b–8, in which God is described as follows:

You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters.
You make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind.
You make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.
You set the earth on its foundations,
so it shall never be shaken.

You cover it with the deep as a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

The concepts used by the Psalmist reflect images present in the world of that time. Other Creation texts can be found at Psalm 74, Proverbs, Job 38, and Isaiah.

The influence of Israel's world can best be seen, however, in the Genesis Creation story. Both Genesis 1:1–2:4a and the *Enuma Elish* speak of the watery chaos, covered by darkness, that precedes the work of Creation; they follow something of the same order of Creation—firmament, land, sun and moon, humanity—and in each, the Creator rests after the work is finished. But, as is often true, the agreements in detail are not nearly so significant as the differences. After all, all humans are similar—their differences make them unique.

GENESIS 1:1–2:4A. This account of Creation, the product of centuries of theological reflection, was put into its final form by the priestly theologians of Israel. Well aware of other Creation stories, they expressed the conviction that the God of Israel was the only God and the Creator of the visible universe.[2] In the myths, the gods arose out of the creative process. This was not so for Israel. God did not arise from Creation—God was the Creator! There is no speculation about God's beginning; Israel assumed that God was and always had been. Thus, the emphasis in Israel's Creation story is more on God than on what was created.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1) is a summary statement of all that is to follow. God (called *Elohim*) is *transcendent* (separated from the material universe) and powerful (God speaks and things come into being). There is no struggle to bring order to chaos, but the majestic God calls things into existence. Like the notes of a symphony, certain phrases appear and reappear—for example "and God said," "God called (named)," "God saw that it was good," "God made," "And there was evening, and there was morning."

There seems to be a conscious effort to counter the Near Eastern Creation myths. In contrast to the struggle waged between Marduk and Tiamat, God is in complete control of Creation. The heavenly bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars (1:14–19), worshipped as gods by Israel's neighbors—are created (1:14). They get their light from God, not from their own powers. Furthermore, the earth, looked upon as the mother goddess by many ancient people, has no power to give life except as God commands (1:21). Finally, humanity, the last act of Creation, is made in God's image and is commissioned by God to be the caretaker of Creation (1:26–27).

For two reasons, the statement "Let *us* make humankind in *our* image and after *our* likeness" (1:26) is one that has drawn much attention (1) because of the personal pronouns *us* and *our* and (2) because of the meaning of the expression *image of God.*

Three possible explanations of the use of the plural pronouns are advanced: (1) Because the word for God (*Elohim*) is a plural form, the use of the plural pronoun is expected. The problem with this explanation is that *Elohim* is used in other places with the singular pronoun. (2) It is simply the equivalent of "Let's do it," as if to say, "I will do it" (Isa. 6:8). (3) God is pictured as a king, addressing a **heavenly court**, or council, expressing to those who serve him what he wants done.[3]

The meaning of the expression *image of God* has caused much ink to be used. That the ancient Hebrews thought of God as having certain physical traits cannot be denied, because

Enuma Elish

This ancient poem describes how the gods were the offspring of Tiamat and Apsu in chaos. Later, there was warfare among the gods and goddesses, caused by the fact that Apsu (the lover of Tiamat) had been killed by Ea. Tiamat vowed to get revenge on Ea. Ea trembled in fear at the possibility of having to face Tiamat, so he turned to Anshar, his father, for advice. It was decided that Marduk, the strong man of the gods, would face Tiamat. As his price for taking on that responsibility, Marduk demanded first place among the gods. Anshar, mortally afraid of Tiamat, agreed.

Taking along the four winds to help him, Marduk went out to meet Tiamat. She came out at him with her mouth open, intending to devour him. That was her fatal mistake. Marduk unleashed the four winds, which entered her mouth, blowing her up like a balloon. Then Marduk took his sword and sliced her into halves like a grapefruit. He used the upper half of her body for the dome of the heavens and the lower half to create the earth. They then killed her latest lover, Kingu, and made human beings out of his blood.[1]

numerous references are made to such traits in the Old Testament. The temptation is to see *image* and *likeness* in these terms, but it surely goes more deeply than a physical image. One aspect of the image seems to lie in the fact that humankind, like God, who is the ruler over all Creation, is given power to rule over the earth. The privilege of naming the animals signifies power over them. Another aspect of the image of God must lie in the fact that humankind is endowed by God with intelligence and the power of creativity.

GENESIS 2:4B–2:25. In reading this version of Israel's Creation story, the first thing to notice is that God is referred to as the "LORD God" (2:4) (Hebrew: *YHWH Elohim*). Some would call this the *Yahwistic* version of Creation, as it uses Israel's personal name for God, *YHWH*. Its simplicity and directness seem to indicate that it is much older than the more highly developed account in 1:1–2:4a. The main interest is the creation of humanity, which is placed first. The creation of the world is already assumed to have taken place.

The patterned kind of story found in 1:1–2:4a is missing in this account. Furthermore, God's creative acts are described in human terms. To say that "the LORD God *formed* man from the dust," "*breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life," "*planted* a garden," and "*took* the man and *put* him in the garden" is to speak in what is called *anthropomorphic language*—that is, to describe God in human terms. God is pictured as acting in human ways as he made human beings, talked with them, and, like a concerned father, disciplined them when they did wrong (Gen. 3).

Just as an exalted view of God in Genesis 1:1–2:4a (which theologians call *transcendence*) is needed, so that God will be reverenced and respected by the worshiper, a more personal view of God (a view that theologians speak of as *immanence*) emphasizes God's nearness to and concern for the worshiper. These two views of God must be kept in proper relationship to each other. If transcendence is overemphasized, God becomes so far removed so as to have little or no interest in humankind. An overly transcendent view makes any personal relationship with the Deity a farce.

On the other hand, an overly humanized Deity can lead to overfamiliarity, with the result that God becomes a "big Daddy" or "the man upstairs." Extreme humanization of God also makes the Deity irrelevant. A balance between the two extremes more nearly represents the biblical view.

The man, created by God from the dust of the earth and given life by the breath of God, is not created for idleness. Instead, he is placed in the garden that the LORD God has "planted" and given the responsibility for its cultivation (2:15). As tenant, he has privileges, but he also has responsibilities. The man, from the first, has his "dos" and "do nots," and the major "do not" is "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17). He is given power over the animals, symbolized by the privilege of naming them (2:19–20); but power does not satisfy the basic human need for companionship. So woman is created, and man is complete (2:23). Made for each other, they have nothing to hide (2:25).

The First Family

Genesis 2 ends with a wedding of sorts, so it is possible to see Genesis 3 as the beginning of the story of the first family. However one understands the events in the garden story in Genesis 3, it is plain enough that one of the effects of God's pronouncement of curses is the imposition of a pattern of strained hierarchy on family life in 3:16. This strain is evident in many places: The woman and the man are isolated in their tasks of child rearing and agriculture (3:16–19), the first two children born into this family will have to compete for God's approval (4:1–17), and the generational lines that descend from this family in the genealogies of 4:17–24 and 5:1–31 will continue this competition in a world of limited resources. Of course, this competition is also built into the nature of storytelling. It is not possible to continue to tell the story of everybody, as the human population expands. The narrator must choose to focus attention on some and not others. This narrative necessity runs parallel to the limitations that arise when God chooses some persons as recipients of covenant, blessing, and protection and does not choose others.

TRANSGRESSION (GEN. 3:1–24). The glory of human beings is also their undoing. Created in God's image, their *hubris* (pride or arrogance) moves them to substitute their judgment for that of God. This sense of pride underlies the appeal of the serpent to the woman when he tells her that if she eats the forbidden fruit, she will "be like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). The ancient storyteller had a marvelous understanding of human nature. His description of the forbidden fruit's appeal to Eve's appetite ("good for food"), to her sense of beauty ("a delight to the eyes"), and to her sense of pride ("the desire to make one wise" 3:6) shows how well he understood the nature of temptation. If he lived today, he probably could make a fortune in advertising.

The woman falls for the serpent's line so quickly that she is hooked before she realizes what is happening. The man, no less gullible than the woman, falls for the same line. Suddenly, they are ashamed of what they see in each other, so they try to cover their nakedness with clothing made of leaves (3:7).

Discovery of disobedience brings God's displeasure. Because humans want to be like God, they have to take responsibility for their action. Now they hide from God, who created humanity and gave them paradise (3:10). As a further result of their disobedience, they are banished from the garden and separated from God. Work becomes a burden, and life loses much of its joy (3:17–20).

The biblical writer here has given his view of humanity's basic problem in relation to God. Adam (humankind) wants to be God, but the Creator cannot and will not yield his unlimited authority to His Creation. Humans have been given as much power as they can handle wisely. To give them more would be disastrous to them, so limits have to be established (3:24).

CAIN AND ABEL (GEN. 4:1–26). No single story has had a greater impact on human consciousness in Western civilization than that of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3,

Cain Murders Abel

The story of what is often understood as the first murder has long fascinated readers. Once Adam and Eve have left the Garden of Eden, Genesis moves quickly to the story of their first two sons. Although most readers make some assumptions, the text offers no reason why Abel's offering is well regarded by God and Cain's is not. Part of the key to this problem is in the literal reading of the text. God "looks upon" Abel's offering but does not "look upon" Cain's. This is most likely the language of blessing, and likely means that Abel was successful and Cain was not. This situation elicits the jealousy that complicates the story in 4:5. The most troubling element of the story is that God speaks to Cain and warns him about the dangers of sin and this "burning" that threatens him, but God does not speak to Abel to warn him about the murderous intentions of Cain.

Abel, whose name means "emptiness" or "breath," is gone from the text as quickly as he appears. His purpose in the story is to be killed. Genesis 4 offers a genealogy for Cain but not for Abel. With no offspring, Abel is not remembered and has no continuing life. It even appears that Abel's would-be genealogy has been absorbed into Cain's when Abel-like names appear in Cain's genealogy in 4:20–21. One of the most striking elements of the story is God's statement in 4:10 that "the blood(s) of your brother cry out to me from the ground." Many centuries later, the Mishnah would contend that the plural form of *blood* in this verse indicates that Cain also murdered all of the potential offspring of Abel, all of whom cry out to God from the ground.

There are many theories about the meaning of this story. Is it about the threat settled agriculture and technology pose to the nomadic, herding way of life? Notice that in Genesis 4:17–26 Cain is a city builder and his offspring includes the first iron worker, Tubal–Cain. Many popular western movies address this same tension between free-range herders and ranchers or between ranchers and "sodbusters." Is the story an attempt to portray farmers as villains who deserve to have their land taken away from them? Others have read the story as a typical example of sibling rivalry, so that Cain is the Bible's version of Romulus, who killed his twin brother, Remus, and founded the city of Rome. The book of Genesis will continue to play with the fascinating dimensions of the relationships between brothers all the way through the book.

but the nearest rival may be the story that immediately follows it in Genesis 4. Cain and Abel have taken on gigantic metaphorical identities in our culture, and this first story of murder in the Bible often functions as a lens through which we view much of the conflict and violence in our world. The story of these two brothers is mysterious and difficult to bring into focus. No overt reason is given for God's failure to "look upon" the offering of Cain. One can only observe that the favoring of Abel matches the consistent preference for younger brothers in Genesis and the identification of Israel with persons who had a seminomadic, sheepherding lifestyle. This latter observation reveals that this conflict is much larger than just competition and jealousy between two brothers. It is a struggle between two ways of life, wandering and settling, which has gone on in virtually all parts of the world from the earliest time about which we know.

God's concern for Cain may be the most surprising element of the story. God speaks to Cain both before and after the murder, and, despite the punishment that falls upon Cain, there

seems to be a note of redemption at the end of the story. This redemption appears to take hold in the following genealogy of Cain in 4:17–24, as the first murderer becomes the first city builder and his descendants become the first musicians and metal workers. There is an enormous amount of creativity embodied in this family line that will so soon be forgotten. The redemption that looked so promising comes to an end with the ominous presence of Lamech at the end of this genealogy, who reminds the reader of Cain's identity as a murderer in 4:24.

When Seth is born to Adam and Eve in 4:25, he is declared to be a replacement for Abel, but he really replaces both of his older brothers, as he becomes the son through whom Adam and Eve's family line will continue in Genesis 5.

FROM ADAM TO NOAH (GEN. 5:1–31). The narrator ties the stories of Creation to the story of the Flood by "the list of the descendants of Adam" (Gen. 5). This genealogy rapidly moves the reader from Adam to Noah, like a literary fast-forward mechanism. Note the similarities between the names in this genealogy and those in the Cain genealogy of Genesis 4:17–22. The development of these lists is a complex and mysterious issue that cannot be fully resolved. They now play a significant literary role in the text of Genesis. The long life spans in this genealogy, for example, help create a sense of distance between the world of the reader and the misty world of the primeval past.

Flood Stories and the Flood (Gen. 5:32–9:19)

Flood stories are a part of the traditions of many peoples. The biblical Flood story (which properly begins with the introduction of Noah and his sons in 5:32) shares common features with two accounts of a great flood in Mesopotamia—the Gilgamesh Epic and the Atrahasis Epic.

THE GILGAMESH EPIC. Gilgamesh, the hero, seeks the secret of eternal life. He goes to Utnapishtim, who tells him how the gods tried to destroy humanity with a great flood. Ea, one of the gods, had warned Utnapishtim, who escaped by building an ark. The flood was so great that even the gods themselves thought they were going to be destroyed.

When the waters receded a bit, the ark landed on Mount Nisir. Utnapishtim sent out a dove and a raven to see if the waters had receded sufficiently for him to leave the ark. When the flood was over, he made a sacrifice:

> ***The gods smelled the sweet savor,***
> ***The gods crowded like flies about the sacrifice.***[4]

THE ATRAHASIS EPIC. This epic, first published in 1922, also comes from the Babylonians. Like the biblical account, it starts with a creation story. The people are so numerous and noisy that the gods decide to destroy them. A number of solutions are tried—plague, drought, famine—but none is satisfactory. Finally, a flood is called for, after which a new kind of world will appear, in which various means will be used to control the population.[5]

THE BIBLICAL FLOOD STORY (GEN. 5:32–9:19). The story of the marriage of the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" (6:1–4) serves as the background for the biblical account of the Flood because it illustrates the conclusion reached in 6:5:

> ***The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.***

The reference to the "sons of God" reflects an ancient belief that marriage between divine men and human women produced a race of giants (6:4). Here the older story is given new meaning by serving as an illustration of the depths of human sinfulness that result in the Flood.[6]

That Israel also had at least two different flood traditions can be seen when one separates the passages using LORD from those using *God*.[7] Each series of passages tells a story of the Flood. The two have been blended without regard to duplications.[8]

Numerous attempts have been made to confirm the Flood story through archaeology. None of these attempts has been conclusive, including well-publicized attempts to find the **Ark**.[9] The importance of the Flood story does not depend on the archaeologist, or on anyone else for that matter. The ancient storyteller did not let variations in the traditions he received deter him from his purpose of weaving these materials together to say what he wanted to say about God. For him, the story of Noah is a vehicle to tell about (1) God's judgment on sin, which had so affected Creation; (2) God's concern to preserve what was begun in Creation; and (3) God's reaching out to humankind in covenant.

Unlike the Atrahasis Epic, in which people had become so numerous and noisy that the gods decided to destroy them, Israel's theologians see destruction resulting from corruption that arises from people's abuse of the created order. The covenant brings law and structure to society where such has not existed before. The shedding of blood especially is singled out as taboo.

It seems that, for the priestly theologians, this polluting of the land by the shedding of human blood may well have been the "wickedness" that led to God's desire to start anew.[10]

THE COVENANT (GEN. 9:1–17). Noah represented a new beginning. Like Adam, he was told to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (9:1, 7), but earth was no longer a paradise where people and beasts lived in harmony—the beasts feared humans, who were made master over them. Humanity, which had shed blood so freely, was now made accountable in a more stringent way for the shedding of blood (9:6).

God made a covenant, or contract, with Noah and his descendants that said that humanity would never again be destroyed by a flood. This covenant, or agreement between parties, was initiated by God, not Noah, and was evidence of divine mercy extended to the survivors of the Flood. The rainbow was given as an everlasting symbol of the contract between the Creator and His creatures (9:8–17).

The Noah narratives end with the story involving a drunken Noah pronouncing a curse upon one of his sons who saw him naked. Somehow the curse fell upon his grandson, Canaan (9:18–27). Curses such as this were believed to have the power to carry out what was threatened. Blessings given at special times of life were believed to have this same power.

Again, the narrator inserted a genealogy (Gen. 10) to introduce a new segment of the story. One purpose was to say something about the geography of the ancient Near East sometime in the period of the second millennium (2000–1000 B.C.E.). A second purpose was to express the author's conviction that the human race was in unity growing out of its descent from Noah. This serves, then, as a background for what follows in Genesis.

The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9)

Humanity was united not only in language (11:1), but also in its determination to rebel against God. This rebellion took the form of building a tower to reach the heavens, where the challenge to God could be made (11:4). The rebellion was nipped in the bud, however. People lost their ability to communicate with one another when their language, which had bound them together,

became a barrier—a babble that began with **Babel**. The ancient Israelites probably saw the great *ziggurats,* or pyramidlike towers, in Babylon, built originally as worship centers for Babylonian deities. From those edifices, they concluded that this had caused God to confuse people by giving them many languages instead of one.

Summary of the Primeval Complex

Genesis 1–11 contains a collection of literature that is unclear in scope and chronology. The genealogies serve to tie this collection together, and there is some coherent sense of a struggle between God's intent for Creation and the behavior of human beings. Another issue that arises multiple times is the struggle between a settled lifestyle and a wandering, nomadic existence. The texts dealing with settled life, including agriculture, technology, and city building appear to view it negatively. This way of life is associated with Cain (4:17–24), Nimrod (10:8–11), and the builders of the Tower of Babel (11:1–9). This final story in the Primeval Complex seems to be God's ultimate judgment on settled life. The people of Babel are scattered against their will. This scattering clears space both on the land and in the text for the emergence of a new set of characters. The family of Abraham and Sarah fit the nomadic, pastoral ideal, and the book of Genesis will narrow its scope to focus on the members of this particular family, the great ancestors of the people of Israel.

THE ANCESTRAL COMPLEX[11]

As the character first known as Abram is introduced in Genesis 11:27, the manner of storytelling changes as distinctly as the content. The remainder of Genesis tells the stories of Israel's great ancestors—Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Joseph. In this part of Genesis, the flat characters and vague geography of Genesis 1–11 give way to highly developed personalities and a recognizable landscape. Even some of the characters who are sent off, away from the Israelites, such as Hagar and Esau, are more carefully drawn than any of those who appeared in the Primeval Complex. It is reasonable to suppose that the kinds of people, places, and events in this part of Genesis would have been very familiar to the first readers of this book. Traditionally, this part of Genesis is often called the *Story of the Patriarchs.* This designation accurately reflects the dominance of the male characters in the stories, but it ignores the significant presence of the female ancestors. Paying appropriate attention to the female characters, while acknowledging that the text of Genesis is patriarchal in nature, provides a significant challenge for any interpreter.

The Time

There is no universal agreement as to the dating of the time of the ancestors. Yet, the names, customs, and mode of life seem to fit into what is known of the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. They seem to be connected to the rise of Amorite influence in this region. Although there is no absolute proof for these conclusions, evidence seems to point to the probability that these stories are, in the main, authentic memories about real people. Abraham's journey from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 12) usually is associated with the movement of the Amorites from Mesopotamia into Palestine in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C.E.[12]

Joseph, the last of the four major figures in Genesis 12–50, is often associated with the Hyksos rule in Egypt. The Hyksos were foreign rulers of Egypt who conquered the country in the eighteenth century B.C.E. and established a dynasty that ruled for more than 150 years. Like

the Hebrews (as the Israelites were first known), the Hyksos had among them many people of Semitic origin. They made extensive use of chariot warfare. They built cities whose fortifications included walls with a steep ramp, or *glacis,* designed to prevent easy approaches to the walls. If Joseph did come in this period, the patriarchs would be dated from about 2000 to 1550 B.C.E.

Their Lifestyle

The picture given of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is that of people who habitually moved about. Yet, it was not an aimless wandering; instead, they seem to have followed a yearly cycle based on the availability of pasturage for their flocks. During the dry season, they would move into the empty spaces in the central hill country, where, among other things, they could graze in the cut-over grain fields. There they remained until the rains came. They might even have planted a grain crop on unclaimed land to be harvested when they returned, after the grasses in the Negev had died out. For this reason, they were not **nomads** in the modern sense of the term. Their chief beast of burden was the ass or donkey. Camels were not yet in general use.[13]

In contrast to our limited families of today (consisting of parents or a parent and, on rare occasions, a grandparent or grandparents included), the patriarchs were heads of extended families consisting of wives, children, relatives of varying degrees, and servants—most of whom undoubtedly were slaves. A man's wealth was measured in terms of the number of wives, sons, and cattle he possessed (see Job 1). For all these persons, the patriarch was the chief decision maker. He determined who his sons married and which of his sons would succeed him as patriarch. It was customary for the eldest son to become the patriarch, but it was not always so.

Abraham and Sarah, the First Ancestors

To discover what Abraham and Sarah were like some 4000 years ago is no easy task. Although numerous stories have them as the major characters, they lack many of the ingredients necessary for the writing of history. These narratives, called *sagas,* have real people at the core, but what we can actually learn about the details of their lives is quite limited. No dates are given, and no events that can be confirmed in an independent study are mentioned. No archaeologist has dug up a tablet saying "Abraham slept here." Nevertheless, we do have the biblical stories—stories that at least suggest that behind those stories was a great personality claimed by three great world religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Our purpose is to learn from the stories as they are.

FROM UR TO EGYPT (GEN. 12). The stories of the ancestors are religious history. Persons, places, and events are secondary to what the LORD is doing through those persons, places, and events. Abraham (called Abram until Gen. 17:5), a native of Ur of the Chaldees in southeastern Mesopotamia (on what is today the Persian Gulf), moved to Haran in northwestern Mesopotamia while he was still in the clan of Terah, his father. There, Terah died and Abraham became the patriarch (11:31–32).

In Haran, life took a new direction. Abraham was called by the LORD to leave the familiar faces of his kinsmen and the well-watered areas of northwestern Mesopotamia to go to a new land that the LORD would show him. It was a promise that carried with it universal meaning. Abraham would receive the blessing of a land, numerous descendants, and divine protection; and through him, all the nations were to be blessed (12:1–3). This promise was repeated with differing emphases a number of times in the Abraham stories (Gen. 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:7–21; 17:1–21).

Although the biblical narratives present Abraham as a man of God, they certainly do not present him as a perfect saint. Driven to Egypt by famine in Palestine, he persuaded his wife to lie

about her relationship to him, resulting in her being chosen for the Pharaoh's harem. This action brought a plague upon the Egyptian people. Somehow, when Pharaoh realized what had happened, he sent them away with their belongings. Of course, this story foreshadows the Exodus story in some way, but it also raises some difficult questions. Why did the Egyptian people suffer for Abraham's misbehavior? How did Pharaoh know the cause of the plague? Was Sarai forced into an adulterous relationship because of Abraham's cowardice? This story will be replayed later in the lives of Abram (Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah).

In Genesis 20:1–18, Abraham again told a foreign king, Abimelech of Gerar, that Sarah was his sister. Abimelech was warned by God in a dream, however, before he became involved with Sarah. Because he was obedient to the dream, no illicit relationship developed and the people of Gerar did not suffer from a plague. In addition, we and Abimelech are informed that Sarah is Abraham's half-sister, thus his deception involved a half-truth rather than an outright lie. Notice that this version of the story resolves the questions raised by the earlier story. One last difficulty remains, however. Why does Abraham gain wealth in each of the stories because of his deception? One new problem is raised in this telling of the story. Why is a foreigner portrayed as the one who receives the divine message and responds to it obediently? This story will be played out one more time in the life of Isaac. Stay tuned.

CONFLICT AND COVENANT (GEN. 13–16). Abraham settled in the Negev, the southern region of Judah, between the sown land and the desert region of Sinai. Here, possibly as a caravaneer (i.e., a trader), he gained great wealth in the form of herds of animals. Conflict between his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot arose, causing a parting of the ways. Lot chose the well-watered valley of the Jordan, while Abraham chose the hill country. Conflict and crisis brought a reaffirmation of the promise from the LORD of numerous descendants and possession of the land (13:14–17).

Another kind of conflict is described in Genesis 14. Abraham appears as no ordinary desert chieftain, but as one who was powerful enough to challenge the rulers of the area. Lot, captured in warfare between a group of kings, was carried off to northern Syria. Abraham, with his personal army of 318 men ("born in his house"), rescued Lot. On his return, Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the king of Salem (later known as Jerusalem). The name used for God was *El Elyon,* "God Most High." His later descendants could point to Abraham's association with Jerusalem when it became David's capital city to validate their claim to it.[14]

Social and physical conflict is followed by mental conflict (15:1–21). No child had blessed the marriage of Abraham and Sarah. Their only heir was a foreign slave, Eliezer of Damascus, whom Abraham adopted as his heir. Such a custom is known from the Nuzi tablets (about 1500 B.C.E.). Abraham agonized about his lack of a son by Sarah, and the LORD reassured him. Then followed a strange ceremony.

A sacrifice was made, but not on the usual altar. Instead, the larger animals were cut in half, the halves being laid on the ground opposite each other. As the sun sank in the west, Abraham went to sleep. The vision came as a dream. The LORD spoke of the Egyptian sojourn. A smoking pot and a flaming torch passed between the split animals, and the covenant was made. The boundaries of the land, essentially as they stood in the time of David, were described to Abraham.

Domestic conflict arose when, in keeping with custom, Sarah gave Abraham her maid Hagar as a secondary wife, or **concubine,** so that Hagar could have a child for her by proxy (16:1–15). Hagar's instant fertility gave her a feeling of superiority over her barren mistress (16:1–4). Hagar then had to flee from the wrath of Sarah. Hagar's son, Ishmael, was said to have been the father of the Ishmaelites, who roamed the southern desert areas of Palestine (16:5–15).

THE COVENANT AND CIRCUMCISION. Here, one finds another view of the covenant. First, another name for God is used. He is *El Shaddai,* "God Almighty" (17:1).[15] Then, Abraham, called Abram to this point, is now called Abraham, "the father of a multitude" (17:4). In addition, *circumcision* (the cutting off of the male foreskin) is described as the symbol of the covenant with God. Sarah (formerly Sarai) also underwent a name change, and assurance was once more given that she would be the mother of Abraham's heir and successor as patriarch. All these elements suggest the emphases one might expect of the priests, causing this to be considered by many as the priestly version of the covenant story.

THE PROMISE OF NEW LIFE AND FOREBODINGS OF DOOM (GEN. 18–19). The promise of a son and heir to Abraham finally moved toward its fulfillment. The patriarch looked out from his tent one day to see three strangers approaching. True to his cultural sense of courtesy, he invited them in and gave them water to wash their dusty, tired feet. He spread for them "a morsel of bread," which in reality was bread, cheese, milk, and meat (18:1–8). In the story of the three strangers, the narrator described a **theophany**—the appearance of the divine to a human being.

The divine visitors had some good news and some bad news. First, they told Abraham that in the spring Sarah would bear a child. This struck Sarah, who was well past the age of childbearing, as somewhat ridiculous. Her giggles, as she hid behind the tent door, reached the ears of the divine messenger, who heard her and gave her a gentle rebuke (18:9–15).

Then came the bad news. Abraham was told of the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, the licentious cities in the Dead Sea area, where Lot lived. Despite Abraham's plea (18:16–23), judgment fell and only Lot and his two daughters escaped (19:1–23).

The description of the destruction of these cities suggests that an earthquake occurred, which resulted in the sinking of the land. The fire and brimstone were burning gases and sulfur, both common in this region (19:24–29). Geologists have proposed that a massive earthquake "liquified the rocks and the soil the cities were built upon, toppling all the buildings." The site was then covered by the waters of the Dead Sea.[16]

The last picture of Lot is a sad one. Old and drunk, he is debauched by his own daughters (19:30–38). The result of these incestuous unions is the birth of two sons, Moab and Ammon, who bear the names of two of Israel's neighboring enemy nations. Among other things, this story is surely a jab at the characters of these two nations.

ISAAC AND ISHMAEL (GEN. 21). After the second incident involving Sarah and a foreign king (Gen. 20:1–18), the long-expected child, Isaac, was born. Conflict again arose between Sarah (old enough to be her son's great-grandmother) and Hagar (Abraham's slave wife and mother of Ishmael). Jealousy forced Hagar to flee so that Isaac would have preeminence. Here again, the word used to refer to the divine being changes to *Elohim,* "God." In yet another narrative concerning conflict with a local chieftain, Abimelech, the term *El Olam* (the "everlasting God") is introduced. The shifting of terms may indicate that these are parallel traditions, that is, the same story coming from different tribes or clans. This could be especially true of the Sarah–Hagar conflict stories.

THE TEST (GEN. 22). The high point of the Abraham drama was played out on a mountain "in the land of Moriah." Later, according to tradition, Solomon's temple would be built on this site. The passage emphasizes that "God tested Abraham" by commanding that Isaac be offered as a sacrifice to God. Abraham obeys, but at the climactic moment, just as he is about to take his son's life, his attention is drawn to a ram caught in a nearby thicket. The ram serves as the sacrifice instead. In Jewish tradition, this episode is called the Akedah story. ***Akedah*** refers to the "binding" of Isaac.

Three possible interpretations have been offered for this incident. Some see it as a parable, the point of which is that God does not require human sacrifice. That this interpretation has some validity is seen by the fact that human sacrifice never played the important role in the Israelite religion that it did in others. A second interpretation sees Isaac as representing Israel and its relationship to God. The dominant interpretation, however, sees it as enshrining Abraham in the history of religion as the man of faith, revered by three great world religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[17]

SARAH'S DEATH AND BURIAL (GEN. 23). When Sarah died, a burial place had to be bought. Abraham went to the village elders and engaged in a typical bargaining session, complete with flowery phrases and exaggerated gestures. Finally, a purchase price was named—after the owner offered to "give" the land and the cave of Macpelah to Abraham, and, in the process, obligated Abraham to buy more property than he wanted. Today, the traditional site of the burial at Hebron is a sacred site to both Muslims and Jews.

A WIFE FOR ISAAC (GEN. 24:1–25:18). Before Abraham died, he had to ensure that Isaac had a wife. The custom of the parents choosing a bride for their son is still practiced in some cultures. Abraham sent his trusted servant Eliezer back to Haran to find a wife for Isaac. Here, we are introduced to the wily Laban, the brother of Rebekah, Isaac's future wife. Although the storyteller credits the LORD with pointing out the right girl, Laban was quite willing to give up his sister when he saw the rich gifts Abraham had sent for the bride price (24:53–61).

As in Genesis 1–11, a genealogy is used to summarize and conclude the Abraham story (25:1–18).

Isaac and Rebekah

Of all the patriarchs, Isaac receives the least attention. He is pictured as an introvert—a shy, quiet, meditative person dominated by the stronger personalities around him. Such a person was Rebekah, his wife. The choosing of Rebekah as Isaac's wife and her subsequent domination of her husband receives more attention in the tradition than does Isaac himself (24:15–61; 25:20–24; 26:6–11; 27:5–17).

One of the stories about Isaac is suspiciously like those about Abraham. Like his father, Isaac led the people of Gerar to believe that his wife was his sister (26:6–11). This time, Abimelech discovered the deception not by a divine dream, but when he saw Isaac and Rebekah behaving romantically toward each other. Again, trouble was avoided, and this time Isaac did not receive financial reward for his deception. He was blessed economically by the LORD at a later time (26:12–13). The troubling aspects of the second telling of the story are thus avoided in the third telling. This series of related stories, like others in the Old Testament, probably indicates the incorporation of parallel collections of material into Genesis and other books of the Bible. Notice, however, that in the final form of Genesis, the parallel versions of the story function in sequence to resolve some of the difficulties raised by this tradition. Be sure to pay attention to how the related stories of Jacob tricking people and being tricked are interwoven into the story of his life.

As in the past, the covenant was reaffirmed also with Isaac (26:1–5; 23–25). He did not have to wait as long for an heir as did Abraham, however.

Jacob, the Supplanter

Most of the stories about Jacob are the kinds of stories one prefers to tell about a relative who is long since dead. If he were alive, one would only whisper about his escapades at family gatherings and hope that the neighbors had not found out about the wayward son's latest caper.

JACOB AND ESAU. Jacob was a twin of Esau. Esau was born first, but Jacob's later reputation as a schemer was such that the tradition arose that he had hold of Esau's heel when Esau was born, trying to pull him back so Jacob could come out of the womb first (25:19–26).

Esau was an outdoorsman and a man who lived by impulse. Jacob, on the other hand, was more like his father, but with the cunning of his strong-willed mother. Esau, as the elder of the two sons, was first in line to be the patriarch. In addition to the birthright, one had to secure the blessing of the patriarch as he approached death in order to have the right to succeed him (25:27–28).

The blessing was important because the spoken word, in primitive societies, was viewed as having much more power than it has today. The ancients believed that a blessing or curse carried with it a sort of self-fulfilling power. Neither was given lightly, nor were they taken lightly. The blessing was greatly desired, and the curse was greatly feared.

It was for this reason, then, that Jacob—in trying to get the right to be patriarch himself over the firstborn Esau—had to secure both the birthright and the blessing. He had failed to get out ahead of Esau, but that was not his last attempt to get ahead of him!

BUYING THE BIRTHRIGHT (GEN. 25:29–34). The **birthright** was his first goal. Esau, slave of his appetites, fell into Jacob's trap like a hungry bird. Coming from an exhausting and probably futile hunt, Esau smelled the red bean soup Jacob was cooking. When he asked Jacob for food, Jacob set a high price—Esau's birthright. Esau, listening more to his hunger pangs than to his head, agreed. And so, on a solemn oath, Esau sold Jacob his future for a bowl of bean soup (25:33).

STEALING THE BLESSING (GEN. 27:1–45). But the birthright was not enough. Jacob still had to have Isaac's blessing. On his side, he had a very powerful ally—his mother, Rebekah. Isaac favored Esau, perhaps because he saw in him those characteristics of strength and self-confidence that he lacked and secretly longed to have. Isaac, as the saying goes, enjoyed poor health. Troubled by eye disease (a common malady in the Near East) and other ailments (either real or imagined), he feared that death might overtake him at any time. He decided, therefore, that the time had come to pass on to his older son the responsibility of being patriarch. Calling Esau in, he gave him instructions to prepare for him a dish of wild game and bring it to him. Then he would bless Esau (27:1–4).

As Esau left to hunt game, Rebekah (who overheard the conversation) immediately gave Jacob instructions to kill a young goat and bring it to her. Taking the goat, she made stew, dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes, and put fresh goat skins on Jacob's arms and neck so that he would look hairy, like Esau (27:5–17).

When Jacob went to Isaac, claiming to be Esau, Isaac was suspicious because the voice did not sound right. If it were Esau, he had returned rather quickly. Calling Jacob to him, Isaac felt his now-hairy arms and neck and ate the savory stew. As he kissed Jacob prior to giving the blessing, he smelled his clothes. The voice was Jacob's, but the body odor was Esau's! And so the blind Isaac—deceived by his sense of taste, touch, and smell—blessed the deceiver. Jacob left with a blessing that Isaac could not take back, even though Esau soon came in and Isaac learned the truth of what had been done (27:18–45).

JACOB ON THE RUN (GEN. 27:46–28:22). Rebekah, having overheard Esau's threats to kill Jacob, immediately persuaded Isaac to send Jacob to her brother Laban's house in Haran to escape the wrath of Esau. Taking the road north through the central hill country, Jacob came to a place in the barren, rocky hills north of present-day Jerusalem. Using one of the numerous

limestone rocks for a pillow, he tried to get some sleep. In a dream, the LORD appeared to him, saying:

> I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring will be like the dust of the earth . . . and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. (28:13–14)

Jacob was awed by the experience. But even though he set up a memorial stone, he only committed himself to serve the LORD as his God if he returned to his father's house safely (28:18–22).

JACOB AND LABAN: AN AMATEUR VERSUS A PROFESSIONAL (GEN. 29:1–30).[18] On coming to the territory of Laban, Jacob met his cousin Rachel at the well used for watering sheep. One look was all it took! He fell hopelessly in love with Rachel. Laban, being a shrewd man of the world, sized up the situation. Before Jacob knew it, he was committed to working seven years for the privilege of marrying Rachel, because he had no money for the bride price. What seems to have been involved here was a kind of herding contract in which Jacob agreed to work as a herdsman for Laban for seven years in return for the privilege of marrying Rachel.

The seven years passed swiftly, but when Jacob went forward to claim his wage, he received a shocking surprise. Custom decreed that the veiled bride be brought to the groom's tent under the cover of darkness. So Jacob saw his new bride only *after* the honeymoon night was over. His bride was not Rachel! It was her unattractive older sister Leah.

Jacob, with murder in his eyes, was pacified by his new father-in-law with the promise that when the seven-day celebration of his marriage to Leah was over, he could marry Rachel. Of course, after the second wedding to Rachel was over, he had to work an additional seven years to pay for her (29:27–30).

JACOB AND LABAN: THE TABLES TURNED (GEN. 30:1–31:55). The years passed, and Jacob, the father of many children, had learned well his lessons from Laban. Getting Laban to agree to let him have any animal that was not white, Jacob used a mixture of folk medicine (30:37–39) and shrewd observation to cause more of the animals to be born spotted, speckled, or black. While Laban was away, Jacob gathered his family and flocks and left the territory. Laban followed in angry pursuit when he found out what had happened. Before he caught up with Jacob, God appeared to Laban in a dream and told him not to harm Jacob (30:40–31:24).

As a result, when he caught up with Jacob, Laban could only bluster and accuse Jacob of stealing his household idols (31:30). Possession of such symbols gave the possessor claim to the family property.

Rachel, however, not Jacob, had taken the idols. Although her reason is not given, she may have taken them to get back at her father, who had not given her a proper dowry at marriage. A woman's dowry was her social security in her old age. When Laban came searching for them in her tent, she was seated on a camel's saddle in which the idols were hidden. She kept him from finding them by saying she could not rise because "the way of women is upon me" (31:35). In this narrative, there are two new ways of referring to God. In 31:42, God is called the "*God of my father,* the God of Abraham, and the *Fear of Isaac.*"

In parting, a memorial stone was set up and a solemn oath calling on the "God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, [to] judge between us" (31:52–54) was taken. This ceremony, a kind of covenant, was sealed by the oath taking and the sharing of a meal. It was

basically a plea to the gods, as guarantors of the covenant, to keep an eye on Jacob and Laban so that they would not cheat each other again (31:25–55)![19]

JACOB AND ESAU: A MAN FACES HIS PAST (GEN. 32:1–33:20). The biblical narrative did not gloss over the weakness of the ancestors. It was not so with Abraham, nor was it so with Jacob, whose sons gave their names to the twelve tribes of Israel. The narrator believes in divine retribution, that is, that evil will be punished. Abraham's lies to the Egyptians concerning Sarah resulted in expulsion from Egypt to face the risk of starvation in the famine conditions of Palestine. Likewise, Jacob's past came back to haunt him.

Traveling down the King's Highway, the major north–south route east of the Jordan, Jacob realized he would soon enter the territory of Esau. First, Jacob sent messengers to Esau to tell him he was coming (32:2–5). When he received word that Esau, with an army of 400, was coming to meet him, he divided his forces and flocks, hoping that an attack on the forward group would give the second group a chance to escape (32:6–8). The prayer of a man facing death and destruction was quite different from the prayer of the brash young man who had stolen his brother's blessing (28:20–22).

Another part of Jacob's strategy was to send an impressive gift to Esau. But even this was not enough to still his fears. We are told of a strange experience in the night when Jacob wrestled with a man (32:13–24). This, in part, suggests a theophany (an appearance of the divine), but it also suggests that Jacob's inner struggle was reaching a climax.[20] From the experience, Jacob derived a new name (Israel), symbolic of a changed man. So that he would remember the experience, he received an injury that caused him to limp (32:25–32).

Jacob was the picture of abject humility when he met Esau. Surprisingly, Esau (now a prosperous desert chieftain) was generous to the brother who had cheated him. They parted, Esau going south to Seir and Jacob going west into the hill country near the ancient city of Shechem (33:1–20).

TROUBLE AT SHECHEM (GEN. 34). In a rare story about a woman, the narrator tells of the rape of Dinah (Jacob and Leah's daughter) and the subsequent vengeance taken by Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons. The story is of interest for two reasons: (1) Levi is mentioned as a secular tribe, indicating that this story is quite old, because in later history, Levi is the priestly tribe. (2) It is believed that this story is included here to indicate why Shechem did not have to be conquered by the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. This would be because some of the Jacob tribes remained near Shechem and did not go to Egypt.[21]

BACK TO BETHEL AND TWO GENEALOGIES (GEN. 35–36). The major stories in which Jacob plays a leading role end with the story of his return to **Bethel**, where he had experienced God's presence some twenty years or more earlier. His wives were instructed to put away foreign gods in preparation for worship (35:2), just as Joshua was to do to the tribes of Israel many years later (Josh. 24). Next, another story of Jacob's name change is associated with worship at Bethel (35:9–15). Finally, there is the account of Rachel's death. The cycle of stories, as is true throughout Genesis, is brought to a close by extended genealogies of Jacob (35:16–29, with the note that Isaac finally died!) and Esau (Gen. 36). Jacob's story is interrupted by the story of Joseph and the beginning of Egyptian bondage.

Joseph: A Wise Israelite Succeeds in Egypt

The story of Joseph takes the form of a novella, or miniature novel. It is as if the storyteller has taken the Joseph traditions and sketched a novel he is going to write. He introduces his hero, Joseph, and the villains, his brothers. Then Joseph goes through a series of reverses and advances,

FIGURE 3–1 "The same night he arose . . . and crossed the ford of the Jabbok" (Gen. 32:22). This site on the Jabbok River is the traditional site of Jacob's nighttime struggles prior to meeting his brother Esau.

climaxing with a suspense-filled scene where Joseph, the prime minister of Egypt, reveals his identity to his brothers, who thought he was long since dead.

The stories concerning Joseph differ in many ways from the stories of the patriarchs. First of all, they have certain of the characteristics of wisdom stories in the Near East: (1) the theme of the stories is that goodness is always rewarded and evil is always punished, which is a major theme of the book of Proverbs; (2) the theme of the oppressed righteous man who overcomes all obstacles and comes out on top, particularly because he possesses the wisdom to interpret dreams, is like that found in the stories concerning Daniel.

A second difference in these stories concerns how God communicates with Joseph. Here there are no divine messengers—no theophanies. Instead, God guides Joseph through the events and circumstances of life.

A third major difference is in the background reflected by the Joseph stories. It is an Egyptian background. The names of the characters, the bestowing of the signet ring and the gold chain as symbols of Joseph's office, and the emphasis on dreams—these and other matters are known from Egyptian records to be characteristic of Egyptian civilization.

Finally, these stories differ in that they are more than a collection of stories. Here, there is a more unified single story, without the repeating of similar stories, as was true in the Abraham–Isaac–Jacob cycle of stories. The only interruption is for the Judah–Tamar story (Gen. 38).

A FANCY COAT AND ANGRY BROTHERS (GEN. 37:1–36). Joseph, the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons, was his father's favorite. He relished the position, lording it over his older brothers by showing off his fancy clothes and telling them of dreams in which he came out superior to them.

Rough shepherds that they were, they decided to take drastic action to squelch their obnoxious younger brother. Some wanted to kill him, but Reuben prevailed, and they put him into a pit in the dry country instead. Reuben had secretly hoped to rescue him later. Instead, Joseph was sold to a caravan, either to the Ishmaelites (37:25, 27) or Midianites (37:28, 36). (Here is one of the few places that the text shows a blending of traditions.) Eventually, he was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh.

JUDAH AND TAMAR (GEN. 38). A rather uncomplimentary story about Joseph's brother Judah interrupts the Joseph narrative. Judah failed to observe the law of custom regarding his obligation to give his widowed daughter-in-law another of his sons as her husband. The purpose of the *law of the levirate* was that the name of a husband who died without a male heir should have his name preserved in the naming of the first son of his widow's second marriage. The second husband was to be his brother or his nearest surviving relative. This arose from the fact that there was no belief in life after death in that time, and one could only continue to exist through his sons. Judah, having failed to give his daughter-in-law a proper husband, was subsequently tricked by Tamar into having a child by her by playing the role of a prostitute. When Judah found out that she was pregnant, he accused her of prostitution, only to find out that he was the one who was guilty of having sexual relations with her. The reason this story is here is not clear, but it does fill in a time gap in the story of Joseph. See the legal discussion of this custom in Deuteronomy 25 and the only other dramatization of it in the book of Ruth.

JOSEPH LOSES ANOTHER CLOAK AND LANDS IN JAIL (GEN. 39:1–20). Years passed, and Joseph was put in charge of Potiphar's business. Mrs. Potiphar tried to seduce the handsome young servant. He refused her advances and, as he ran away, she seized his cloak and yelled, "Rape!" As a result, Joseph landed in jail.

JOSEPH THE PRISONER AND INTERPRETER OF DREAMS (GEN. 39:21–41:56). Joseph, ever the man of responsibility, soon became a trusted prison aide (39:22). When the king's butler and baker, imprisoned because they were in disfavor, had strange dreams, Joseph interpreted them correctly. As predicted, the butler was restored and the baker was hanged. The butler forgot Joseph after promising to reward him (40:1–23).

Then the Pharaoh began to have strange dreams. When all of Pharaoh's wise men failed to interpret them, the butler finally remembered Joseph. Joseph was called before the Pharaoh and interpreted the dreams, predicting that Egypt would have seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. The Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's wisdom that the former chief prison trusty was made prime minister of Egypt. He was put in charge of the preparations for the great famine (41:1–56).[22]

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS AGAIN (GEN. 42–45). The famine came. Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, not realizing that their obnoxious younger brother was now Egypt's chief grain salesman. They did not recognize him (42:8), but Joseph knew them and began a series of tests to find out what sort of characters they now were. First, he accused them of being spies (42:9). Vowing their innocence, they agreed to leave one of their number (Simeon) as a surety until they could return home and bring Benjamin, their younger brother, with them, as Joseph demanded. On the way home, they found all their money in their grain sacks (42:1–38).

When the continuing famine forced the brothers to make a mandatory return trip to Egypt, Joseph's demand that Benjamin be brought aroused strong objections from the aged Jacob. To win his father's reluctant approval for the trip, Judah solemnly vowed to Jacob that Benjamin

would be kept safe at the cost of his (Judah's) own life (43:9). When they arrived in Egypt with Benjamin, Simeon was released. Following Simeon's release, the brothers were invited to eat in Joseph's house, with Benjamin receiving special treatment (43:34).

Joseph's testing of the brothers was not at an end, however. He gave orders that when they made their grain purchases, his personal cup was to be hidden in Benjamin's sack. Joseph's soldiers then pursued them and brought them back, and the missing cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Judah, who had played such a prominent role in disposing of Joseph many years before, made a stirring plea for his younger brother, citing the drastic effect the failure of Benjamin's

Lists of the Twelve Sons of Jacob or Twelve Tribes of Israel

The Old Testament presents fifteen lists of tribal names. They vary significantly in order and slightly in the number of tribes included. All of the lists are provided for a purpose within the biblical narrative. Below is a list of the texts where these can be found.

Genesis 29:31–30:24—This text contains the birth accounts of the first eleven sons in chronological order: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Joseph. The birth of Benjamin is reported in 35:16–21.

Genesis 35:23–26—The twelve sons are presented within maternal groups: Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun), Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin), Bilhah (Dan and Naphtali), and Zilpah (Gad and Asher).

Genesis 46:8–27

Genesis 49:2–27

Exodus 1:2–4

Numbers 1:6–15—Most of the lists in Numbers omit Levi, because of its priestly status, but they divide Joseph into two tribes, Ephraim and Mannaseh, still producing a total of twelve.

Numbers 1:17–47

Numbers 2

Numbers 7:12–83

Numbers 10

Numbers 13:1–16

Numbers 26:5–51

Numbers 34:16–29

Deuteronomy 27:11–14

Deuteronomy 33:6–29—A poem called the "Blessing of Moses" speaks of the tribes in this order: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Joseph, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphtali, Asher. The movement of Benjamin and the omission of Simeon are the most noticeable differences from the initial list in Genesis.

A sixteenth list can be constructed from the land allotment procedure in Joshua 13–22. Like all of the lists above, this one indicates that the negotiation of status and relationships among the tribes was likely a complex, ongoing process in ancient Israel.

return would have on their father (44:18–34). Joseph, now convinced that his brothers had suffered enough, revealed his true identity to them (45:1–4). Rather than blaming them for their mistreatment of him, he interpreted it as the providential work of God, who had sent him to Egypt to preserve them all (45:7).

THE FAMILY IN EGYPT (GEN. 46–50). The brothers returned to Palestine and brought their father to Egypt. His meeting with the Pharaoh involved some verbal sparring to determine who was the elder of the two. Because Jacob was the elder, he had to pronounce a blessing on the Pharaoh (47:7–12). Some see this as evidence that the Egyptian ruler was a Semite, as was Jacob, because a native Egyptian would not seek blessing from a Semite—he would have instead held him in contempt. This would have taken place, then, during the Hyksos rule (1720–1570 B.C.E.), because they were Semites.

Genesis ends with the blessing of Jacob's sons (Gen. 49), the story of Jacob's death and burial, and, finally, Joseph's death, preceded by his request not to be buried in Egypt (Gen. 50).

GENESIS IN RETROSPECT

The Ancestral Complex was composed by later historians from traditions from different times and different places. The many names for God that have been noted, the different versions of the same story, the different emphases in the accounts of the covenant, and the shifting back and forth of certain personal names (Jacob, Israel) all indicate something of the variety of sources that were used. But to concentrate on the differences would be to miss the main purpose the writers had in mind. Like Genesis 1–11, Genesis 12–50 has much to say about God and His divine relationship to the world but more particularly to a people—Israel.

A vast array of literary techniques has served to bring the reader of Genesis from a vague and unfamiliar primeval world to a more certain and recognizable one. Most significant perhaps is the movement from those who walk and talk with God (Eve, Adam, and Enoch) to those who speak directly with God (Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac) to those guided by dreams and intuition (Jacob, Leah, Tamar, and Joseph).[23]

The later Israelites were convinced that they were a people divinely chosen to fulfill God's purpose in the world. That choice was embodied in a particular man, Abraham, and was symbolized by the covenant, a binding contract between God and Abraham that involved Abraham's loyalty to God and God's blessing of Abraham and, through him, his descendants. The covenant was reaffirmed to each succeeding patriarch, but it also demanded their commitment to it. Thus, Jacob had to be purified through long years of subjection to the wiles of Laban and the frightening confrontation with Esau before he could be called Israel, "prince of God." The writers knew that God had to work through imperfect people, because those are the only kind of people available. Through the long years, God was preparing (1) a person, (2) a family, and (3) finally, a people to serve the divine purpose in the world.

Key Terms

Akedah, *50*
Ark, *46*
Babel, *47*
Bethel, *54*
Birthright, *52*
Concubine, *49*
Covenant, *38*
Genealogy, *44*
Haran, *48*
Heavenly Court, *41*
Nomad, *48*
Theophany, *50*

Study Questions

1. What does the statement "The primary purpose of Genesis is theological" mean? Does that exclude other purposes?
2. How does the biblical Creation story differ from other creation stories?
3. Compare the portraits of God in 1:1–2:4a to those in 2:4b–3:25. What do they say about Israel's understanding of God?
4. Identify (a) *Enuma Elish,* (b) Atrahasis Epic, (c) Gilgamesh Epic, (d) covenant, and (e) ziggurat.
5. What is the theological importance of the biblical Flood story?
6. If one assumes that the Tower of Babel is an etiology, what "Why?" questions would it answer?
7. What factors contribute to a dating of the patriarchs in the period from 2000 B.C.E. to 1500 B.C.E.?
8. The patriarchs were heads of extended families or clans. What does this mean?
9. How are the covenant accounts in Genesis 13:14–17, 15:17–21, and 17:1–21 alike, and how do they differ?
10. Many readers have noticed that Genesis 14 looks and sounds quite different from the material surrounding it. What unusual features are present in this chapter?
11. What is the nature of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar?
12. If Abraham were living today and attempted to sacrifice his son, how would you view it? Why should your view be different in the light of his times?
13. What is a theophany? How are theophanies portrayed in the book of Genesis?
14. How did Abraham respond to his prolonged inability to produce an heir with Sarah?
15. How do you account for the similarities between the stories about Sarah and the Pharaoh (Gen. 12:14–20), Sarah and Abimelech (20:1–18), and Rebekah and Abimelech (26:6–11)?
16. In a good Bible dictionary, read about *blessing* and *curse.* What part do these play in the Jacob–Esau stories?
17. Why do you suppose the biblical storyteller glorifies Jacob's deceptive ways?
18. How can one understand Jacob's willingness to work for Laban for such a long time?
19. What result, other than a change of name, came from Jacob's experience at the Jabbok River?
20. How do the stories about Joseph differ from other patriarchal stories?
21. Why is Joseph usually associated with the Hyksos rulers of Egypt?
22. What reason does Genesis 45 give for Joseph's experiences?
23. What literary features distinguish Genesis 12–50 from Genesis 1–11?

Endnotes

1. For all the gory details, see James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures (ANE)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 30–39.
2. Compare the view of God here with that found in Isaiah 40:12–31.
3. See 1 Kings 22:19–23; Zechariah 3:1–2; and Job 1–2. For a good discussion of this problem, see Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 53ff. See also Edward M. Curtis, "Image of God," *ABD,* III, 389–391.
4. Pritchard, *ANE,* 70.
5. Wilford G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), is the most recent translation.
6. For an extended discussion of the matter, see Ronald S. Hendel, "When the Sons of God Cavorted with the Daughters of Men," *BR,* III, 2 (Summer 1987), 8–13.
7. God (Priestly version): 6:1–4, 9–22; 7:11–8:5, 13–19. LORD (Yahwist version): 6:5–8; 7:1–10; 8:6–12, 20–22.
8. See Vawter, *On Genesis,* 115, for a list of duplications.
9. For a serious discussion of wood samples for Mount Ararat, see Lloyd R. Bailey, "Wood from Mount 'Ararat': Noah's Ark?" *BA,* 40, 4 (December 1977), 137–146. On the significance of the Flood story, see, by the same author, *Noah: The Person in History and Tradition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).
10. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9," *BA,* 40, 4 (December, 1977), 147–155.
11. For two somewhat contradictory, yet related, articles on the background of the patriarchal age, see

Kenneth Kitchen, "The Patriarchal Age: Myth or History?" *BAR,* 21, 2 (March–April, 1995), 48–56, and Ronald Hendel, "Finding Historical Memories," 59, 70–71. For a radically different view, see J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).

12. For a contrary view suggesting that Abraham came from Asia Minor, see Cyrus H. Gordon, "Where Is Abraham's Ur?" *BAR,* III, 2 (June 1977), 21–22, 52.
13. For this and other characteristics of patriarchal life, see Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1988), 1–32.
14. For a discussion of the relationship of Genesis to the rest of the Abram cycle, see E. A. Speiser, "Genesis," in *AB,* 1, 105–109.
15. On the meaning of this and other names for God in Genesis, see Ranier Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period,* I, John Bowden, translator (Louisville, KY: Westminster–John Knox Press, 1994), 29–32.
16. This report on an article by Graham Harris and Anthony Beardow was written by Associated Press reporter Edith M. Lederer, "Geologists Say Quake Destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah," *The Chattanooga News-Free-Press,* December 19, 1995.
17. For the many ways this passage has been interpreted, see Robin M. Jensen, "This Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac—How Jews and Christians See Differently," *BR,* IX, 5 (October 1993), 42–51; and another alternative by Lippman Bodoff, "God Tests Abraham," op cit., 53–56, 62.
18. Martha A. Morrison, "The Jacob and Laban Narratives in Light of Near Eastern Sources," *BA,* 45, 3 (Summer 1983), 155–164, is an excellent article on the Jacob–Laban stories. In addition, Samuel Dresner, "Rachel and Leah: Sibling Rivalry or the Triumph of Piety and Compassion?" *BR,* VI, 2 (April 1990), 6, points out that the names of Leah's sons reflect the desire to be loved by her husband, while the names of Rachel's sons reflect her desire to be a mother.
19. Gordon Tucker, "Jacob's Terrible Burden," *BR,* X, 3 (June 1994), 20–28, argues that Jacob felt that his oath to Laban was the cause of Rachel's premature death, as well as his problems with Joseph and Benjamin.
20. Jack Miles, "Jacob's Wrestling Match: Was It an Angel or Esau?" *BR,* XIV, 5 (October 1998), 22–23, makes an interesting argument that it was Esau with whom Jacob wrestled.
21. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987), 62f., suggests that the story of Dinah was told by the Judahites to embarrass the tribe of Ephraim and that the story of Judah's incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 37) was designed to embarrass the tribe of Judah.
22. Nahum M. Sarna, "Exploring Exodus: The Oppression," *BA,* 49, 2 (June 1986), 70, points out that the Joseph stories fit well into what is known as the Hyksos period (1720–1570 B.C.E.). "The Second Intermediate Period in Egyptian history is marked by a strong Semitic presence."
23. See the discussion of this pattern of changing interaction with God in Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 78–80.