The Beginning of the End: The Eschatology of Genesis

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Program of Religion in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the book of Genesis as a functioning literary whole, orienting post-exilic Persian-era Judeans toward their ideal future expectations. While many have contrasted Genesis’ account of origins with the prophetic books’ account of the future, this work argues that Genesis narrates Israel’s origins (and the world’s) precisely in order to ground Judean hopes for an eschatological restoration. Employing a speech-act linguistic semiotics, this study explores the temporal orientation of Genesis and its indexical pointing to the lives and hopes of its Persian-era users. Promises made throughout Genesis apply not only to the characters of traditional memory, but also to those who preserved/ composed/ received the text of Genesis. Divine promises for Israel’s future help constitute Israel’s ongoing identity. Poor, sparsely populated, Persian-ruled Judea imagines its mythic destiny as a great nation exemplifying (and spreading) blessing among the families of the earth, dominating central Palestine in a new pan-Israelite unity with neighboring Samaria and expanding both territory and population.

Genesis’ narrative of Israel’s origins and destiny thus dovetails with the Persian-era expectations attested in Israel’s prophetic corpus—a coherent (though variegated) restoration eschatology. This prophetic eschatology shares mythic traditions with Genesis, using those traditions typologically to point to Israel’s future hope. Taken together, Genesis and the prophetic corpus identify Israel as a precious seed, carrying forward promises of a yet-to-be-realized creation fruitfulness and blessing. Those who used this literature identify their disappointments and tragedies in terms of the mythic destruction and cursing that threaten creation but never extinguish the line of promise. The dynamic processes of Genesis’ usage (its composition stretching back to the pre-exilic period, and its reception stretching forward to the post-Persian era) have made Genesis an etiology of Israel’s expected future—not of its static present. Because
this future will be fully realized only in the coming divine visitation, Genesis cannot be attributed to an anti-eschatological, hierocratic establishment. Rather, it belongs to the same Persian-era Judean synthesis which produced the restoration eschatology of the prophetic corpus. This account of Genesis contributes to a canonical understanding of Second Temple Hebrew literature; prophetic scrolls and Pentateuchal (Torah) scrolls interact to form a textually based Israelite identity, founded on trust in a divinely promised future.
Dedication

Dedicated to my wife Adrienne Huddleston, whose encouragement made this project possible.
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List of Abbreviations

BI: Biblical Interpretation
CBQ: Catholic Bible Quarterly
JBL: Journal of Biblical Literature
JBQ: Jewish Bible Quarterly
JETS: Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JJS: Journal of Jewish Studies
JQR: Jewish Quarterly Review
JSOT: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JTS: Journal of Theological Studies
RB:  *Revue Biblique*


RQ:  *Restoration Quarterly*

SBL:  Society of Biblical Literature

SJOT:  *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*

SJT:  *Scottish Journal of Theology*

VT:  *Vetus Testamentum*

ZAW:  *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
1. Introduction

1.1 Beginning at the End: The Question of Genesis’ Eschatology

My interest in the question of Genesis’ eschatology first began at the end, with the exciting contribution of Second Temple eschatology to the study of Christian and Jewish origins.¹ Yet Second Temple texts dominated by eschatological expectation—texts such as Enoch, Daniel, and the War Scroll—themselves share an interest in reading eschatologically the symbols and language of earlier Hebrew literature, including Genesis’ account of creation and of the ancestral promises.² I applied for a Doctor of Philosophy in Hebrew Bible largely because I wondered what the eschatology of Israel looked like in earlier periods, and what sorts of continuity or discontinuity might exist between earlier forms of eschatology and the eschatology attested in Hellenistic-era or Greco-Roman sources.

This question of the origins and growth of Hebrew Bible eschatology is under-explored. Most recent scholarship on Hebrew-language eschatology has focused on Daniel, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other late (and largely apocalyptic) literature. Paul Hanson’s seminal study, now some decades old, describes both a “prophetic” and an “apocalyptic” eschatology; but in the intervening years hundreds of articles have been published on the latter and surprisingly few on the former.³ In fact, Hanson himself fatally undermines his story of how apocalyptic grew out of

prophetic conceptions by endorsing a rather dubious polarization of myth versus history, social change versus divine action, official religion versus prophetic hope. Such dichotomies do not encourage the search for eschatology in most of the Hebrew Bible. True, a growing literature recognizes that priests as well as prophets advance “proto-apocalyptic” expectations, and that myth and history are thoroughly intertwined in Israelite literature. Yet this realization has not always been taken to its logical conclusion, namely, that one can explore the eschatology of any part of the Hebrew Bible canon (not just of Daniel and a few of its “proto-apocalyptic” precursors).

A barely-examined assumption that the Pentateuch is uneschatological seems to dominate Pentateuchal studies. So Eckart Otto can argue that the prophetic corpus and the Pentateuch lie rather closer to one another than has generally been acknowledged but then comment (as an undisputed aside) that the two types of literature remain incompatible when it comes to the theocracy-versus-eschatology dichotomy. Rainer Albertz’s major history of Israel, in a similarly

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4 Two particularly helpful responses to Hanson which critique these polarizations are Stephen Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); *KEFB*, ed. Lester Grabbe and Robert Haak (London: T & T Clark, 2003). See especially John Collins, “The Eschatology of Zechariah,” in *KEFB*: 74-84. Although Collins argues that the apocalyptic and prophetic must still be kept separate, he reduces that distinction to a few relatively minor elements (especially the general resurrection of the individual dead; see Collins’ “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” *CBQ* 36.1 [1971]: 21-43). Meanwhile, he concedes that prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology are both thoroughly steeped in myth and history, in divine intervention and in social-political struggle.

5 See for example the extraordinary claim of Walter Schmithals (The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation [trans. John Steely; New York: Abingdon, 1975], pp. 79-80) that post-exilic eschatology is inconsistent with the “Old Testament.” (I owe this citation to Oswalt, “Recent Studies,” pp. 292-3.)


unsupported aside, claims that “we can see from P” that “the majority of the priestly college were still opposed to prophecy.”⁹ Frank Crüsemann calls the Pentateuch “unprophetic,” stipulating that what he really means is that it is “uneschatological, even anti-eschatological.”¹⁰ Standing in the background of much of this literature is Otto Plöger’s dichotomy of *Theocracy and Eschatology*¹¹; Eckart Otto cites Plöger and Hanson as his only support for the so-called conflict between eschatology and theocracy, and Plöger’s work also seems to influence Crüsemann and Albertz.¹² Joseph Blenkinsopp, perhaps more than any other, discusses Plöger’s theoretical underpinnings (largely Weberian) and applies them to the relationship of prophecy and Pentateuch, finding (with some nuances) a basic disjunction between the two corpuses.¹³

Not a few scholars have pointed out the weaknesses of Ploger’s sociology.¹⁴ Yet its influence makes itself felt more broadly than in the handful of scholars who explicitly accept this

adaptations of Genesis (e.g., that the title to Levi in Jub 32 builds on Abraham’s title to Melchisedek in Gen 14:17-20), Crawford without discussion summarily states that Jubilees’ theme of eschatology simply adds something “not present” in Genesis itself.


¹⁴ Davies (“Social World,” pp. 257-8) calls it “untenable,” noting how “Daniel and the Qumran community deny the dichotomy of Plöger and Hanson: they seem to have combined quite harmoniously a reverence for the
theocracy/eschatology dichotomy. Specifically, I am not aware of recent examinations of the Pentateuch (or any of its parts) which adequately discuss eschatology; the state of the question is largely silence.\footnote{While it is difficult to prove a negative, I may note that standard articles on eschatology do not have a section on the Pentateuch’s eschatology (see David Petersen, “Eschatology—Old Testament,” \textit{ABD} vol 2, pp. 575-9; Stephen Cook, “Eschatology of the OT,” \textit{New International Dictionary of the Bible} vol 2: 299-308; Hans-Peter Müller, “Eschatology: Old Testament,” \textit{RPP} vol. 4, pp. 534-9); nor do standard books on the Pentateuch have an index reference for the term eschatology (see, e.g., Jean-Louis Ska, \textit{Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch} [trans. Pascale Dominique; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006]). Articles such as Müller’s “Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung der biblischen Eschatologie,” \textit{VT} 14 (1964): 276-93 which attempt to find the Ursprung of Eschatology in the Messianism of Gen 49:10, work on historical assumptions (not least about the Davidic court) that are, perhaps, as dated as the Weberian sociology of Plöger. (See discussion of this article in Hans-Christoph Schmitt, “Eschatologische Stammesgeschichte im Pentateuch: zum Judaspruch von Gen 49,8-12,” in idem, \textit{Theologie in Prophetie und Pentateuch: Gesammelte Schriften}, ed. Ulrike Schorn and Matthias Büttner [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001]: 189-99, pp. 194-5.) Müller’s later \textit{RPP} article has dropped any discussion of Gen 49 or indeed the Pentateuch. Admittedly, Donald Gowan’s \textit{Eschatology in the Old Testament} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) does cite passages from Genesis alongside other Hebrew Bible passages; but on the whole this book provides little more than a useful topical arrangement of citations. Gowan does not even begin to address the sorts of historical and literary questions necessary to account for a single book’s eschatology (or lack thereof), nor does he even mention the sorts of challenges voiced by Plöger, Blenkinsopp, Crüsemann, and Albertz.} This silence is particularly striking because categories like \textit{hope} or \textit{promise} dominate several treatments of the Pentateuch, and of Genesis in particular.\footnote{See, e.g., David Clines, \textit{The Theme of the Pentateuch} (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978); Devora Steinmetz, \textit{From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis} (Louisville, Kent: Westminster/ John Knox, 1991); Diana Lipton, \textit{Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). Notice that this follows the tradition of Gerhad von Rad, \textit{Theologie des Alten Testaments} (München: C. Kaiser, 1960-61).} But these treatments, often literary or theological in character, bypass the historical question about how the Pentateuch’s \textit{hope} relates to the prophetic scrolls’ \textit{eschatology}. One may ask whether using one word (“hope”) when talking of the future-orientation of one corpus, and another word (“eschatology”) when talking of the future-orientation of another corpus, obscures the fact that Persian-era Judean literature attests to various sorts of Pentateuchal and prophetic expectations.

Might not two such future-oriented bodies of literature, (re)shaped in the same tiny province in the same general period of Persian rule, testify to a common conversation about Judeans’ future-oriented identity? This question is particularly pressing precisely because Hellenistic- and Roman-era texts clearly use both Torah and Prophets as a source for their rich eschatology (see my section 5.4).

In this work, I try to supply what seems to me to be lacking: a full investigation, taking into account both literary and historical evidence, of the eschatology of a single Pentateuchal book. I select Genesis from the rest of the Pentateuch for several reasons. First, it presents a manageable literary whole, a coherent vision of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel that (because its narrative chronology is pre-Moses) stands apart from Exodus through Deuteronomy. Second, Genesis gives the Pentateuch’s most extensive account of Yhwh’s promises to the ancestors, promises that are particularly foundational for Israel’s ongoing eschatology. Third, Genesis’ juxtaposition of Israel’s story with the mythic beginnings of the cosmos provides fruitful resources for the eschatological notion that Yhwh’s relationship to Israel would be worked out on a larger, cosmic scale. Fourth and finally, Genesis contains a few intriguing passages, embedded in its prominent blessing and cursing speeches and poems, that may hint at a coming victory in quasi-messianic language. Admittedly, these passages are

17 See here Ehud Ben Zvi, “Looking at the Primary Hi(story) and the Prophetic Books as Literary/Theological Units within the Frame of the Early Second Temple: Some Considerations,” Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament (1998): 26-43, p. 33. He claims that the primary historical narrative (Genesis through Kings) has a basic view of Israel as a “future hope,” a perspective that also “pervades the prophetic books, which were also composed, in its [sic] present form, by the ‘literati of Yehud.’”


19 See, e.g., Clines, Theme; Nickelsburg, “Eschatology.” See the evocative (but brief) treatment in Brevard Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 150-2 on “The Canonical Function of the Promise” in which “the individual stories of the Fathers have now been framed within a bracket of eschatology.”
ambiguous, and Crüsemann is not alone in rejecting the idea that they are properly eschatological. But it is still telling that, even when explaining them away, Crüsemann selects his possible Pentateuchal counter-examples from the book of Genesis.  

Finally, I must express my appreciation for two significant exceptions to the recent deafening silence on Pentateuchal eschatology. The first exception is Hans-Christoph Schmitt. In a series of articles he examines Genesis 49 and other pertinent passages in light of new models of Pentateuchal scholarship (especially the works of Rolf Rendtorff and of Hans Heinrich Schmid, whose formulations are still influential). Schmitt discusses a late Pentateuchal layer (i.e., belonging to the Persian-era redaction of the Pentateuch as a whole) which is fully compatible with the prophetic spirit and which addresses prophetic-style eschatological hopes. The second exception is John Sailhamer, who builds on Schmitt’s work. Sailhamer conducts a sophisticated analysis of three major Pentateuchal poems (Genesis 49, Num 24, and Deut 32) which serve in their current form as an eschatological framework of the Pentateuchal narrative as a whole. Together, I find that Sailhamer and Schmitt give a solid answer to the question of Genesis’ eschatology; my study will work backward from their conclusions, filling in the necessary argumentation to give their observations (I hope) wider acceptance. I will also work forward from

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their brief discussions and extend their insights about the eschatology expressed in the book of Genesis.

1.2 Between Linguistic Semiotics and Biblical Studies

1.2.1 Bridging the Gap between Historical and Literary Readings

An inquiry into Genesis’ eschatology cannot begin and end with a literary analysis of the book’s explicit information about an end (*eschaton*). On the surface, Genesis’ most clearly predictive passages (15:13-16; 46:4; 49:1, 10; 50:24-25) refer to events of ancient memory, that is, to Israel’s tradition of an exodus from Egypt and subsequent settling of twelve tribes. To probe beneath this surface, one must ask whether Genesis’ hopes have ongoing significance for its users’ ongoing futures, with an eschatological force. This is not only a literary question—although I do hope to identify literary clues that Genesis’ hope is not fully realized in Israel’s memory, but rather points to expectations that remain future. It is also a question of usage, a reading of the book’s *situated* meaning for those who produced and received it at specific points in history (see further below). Keith Grüneberg asserts that “One understands the promise of blessing for Abraham/Israel (12:2) without needing to know whether the original audience heard it as a promise that their current predicament would be transcended or as assurance that their current prosperity was divinely ordained.”24 The purpose of this section is to make the case that, on the contrary, “one understands” this verse, and the rest of Genesis, precisely through considering how real audiences “heard” Genesis as assurance or promise—or, perhaps, both.

In this section I will attempt to provide some of the theoretical (linguistic and semiotic) underpinnings for attempting such a historical-rhetorical reading, building on a particular tradition of constructivist linguistics (explained more fully in my section 1.2.2) and of Peircean or nonstructuralist semiotics (explained more fully in my section 1.2.3). Most crucially, I am arguing for an understanding of language that may help bridge the fault-line that sometimes exists between literary and historical studies of biblical texts. Nonstructuralist linguistic semiotics situates literary readings within a historical world of meaning. Ellen van Wolde makes the case that because “each instance of meaning giving is incorporated in a flow of preceding and succeeding meaning givings,” the literary question of what a text means cannot be divorced from the historical question of what the text has meant. Purely linguistic analysis has no integrity as a self-contained game; textual meaning depends upon the historical, social processes that create the “semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages.” Texts only have meaning when linguistic signs are incorporated into their users’ “earlier interpreted” semiotic lives—their “experience of world and life.”

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25 In general nonstructuralist linguistic semiotics, unlike structuralist or poststructuralist linguistic semiotics, investigates language’s effects on those who use it rather than focusing on text-internal structures or text-external ideologies.


28 Van Wolde, Semiotic Analysis, pp. 46-7. The same insight, also inspired by Peirce, is spelled out by Umberto Eco, “Peirce and the Semiotic Foundations of Openness: Signs as Texts and Texts as Signs,” in his The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 175-99, esp. p. 186. Eco also observes (p. 193) that “signs cannot give us a direct acquaintance with objects, since they can only prescribe to us what to do in order to realize their acquaintance,” i.e., “point” or orient toward them. On the primacy of indexicality for Peircean semiotics see Edna Andrews, Markedness Theory: The Union of Asymmetry and Semiosis in Language (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).
Structural analysis may note correspondences within the text (or between texts), but at most these suggest potential avenues for interpretation. The actual social-historical context allows language to point beyond the inner-textual world toward “reality as [the users] know it.” Thus on the one hand “the structure of the text” lacks any “normative or absolute value” in the “never ending process of interaction between the text and the reader.” On the other hand, the text has real effects upon readers precisely through its (structured) effects, viewed not as free-standing literary facts but as rhetorical markers of situated usage. A linguistic semiotic model does not over-privilege the reader as sole determiner of a text’s meaning, but suggests that historical and literary studies need one another.

One important consequence of this historical-literary unity is a de-emphasis on etic descriptions (those that depend on scholars’ outsider-perspectives) and a re-emphasis on emic descriptions (those that depend on users’ insider-perspectives). Trying to understand how an ancient text affected ancient readers requires that one ask about its effects upon those who enter the text’s rhetorical world, setting aside (at least for the moment) any modern notion of objective

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29 Van Wolde, Semiotic Analysis, pp. 58, 47.
31 Van Wolde, Semiotic Analysis, p. 210. She is arguing here against Algirdas Greimas (Sémantique Structurale, Recherche de Méthode [Paris: Larousse, 1966]), whose structural style of analysis she borrows but makes subservient to a Peircean focus on the reading process. The resulting conception is not too distant from Childs’ canonical approach, defined as an attempt “to work within that interpretative structure which the biblical text has received from those who formed and used it as sacred scripture”—to “study the features of this peculiar set of religious texts in relation to their usage within the historical community of ancient Israel” (Introduction, p. 73; emphasis mine).
In a helpful essay, Ernst Wendland distinguishes between genre as an emic category, “grounded in actual usage and related to shared experiences,” and structural discourse-type as an etic category. His distinction relies on the insight that socially situated genre-expectations (not verbal structures alone) provide the key to meaning, precisely because these genre-expectations account for the users’ response to the literary text.

Wendland here challenges a traditional practice of etic structural analysis which discerns patterns in the words-on-a-page evidence but takes little account of the people who use these words. This practice may invoke the original author, who “implanted hints... within usually ignored dimensions of language... guiding the reader to author-selected points of

\[33\] Watts ([Reading Law](p. 133)) argues that in investigating ancient usage, some modern literary reading practices are less than useful (e.g., the hermeneutics of deconstruction, suspicion, and fragmentation). Antti Laato ([History and Ideology in the Old Testament Prophetic Literature: A Semiotic Approach to the Reconstruction of the Proclamation of the Historical Prophets](Coniectanea Biblica OT Series 41; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996), pp. 321-96) makes the same point, with more sophistication. He applies Peircean semiotics to a reading of the prophetic scrolls, and concludes that the process of making and testing hypotheses about an ancient text’s meaning begins with an attempt to understand the reading effects of the text if taken on its own terms, as it would be accepted by an “I-reader” attuned to “ideological categories native to the text.” Only then can one engage in a second-order investigation as an “M-reader,” pursuing modern questions about the text’s production (e.g., its prehistory) that lie outside the sphere of its effects.

\[34\] For this characterization of discourse analysis/text linguistics, see Susan Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Waynesboro, Ga: Paternoster, 2003), pp. xxvi, 131, and 162; Kirk Lowery, “The Theoretical Foundations of Hebrew Discourse Grammar,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter Bodine (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 103-130; and Bo-Krister Ljungberg, “Genre and Form Criticism in Old Testament Exegesis,” in *BHDL*: 415-33. Note Groom’s (approving) description of a text-linguistic attempt to “discover as much meaning as possible from its [the text’s] linguistic form,” coupled with her telling admission that “the meaning obtained... is a product of modern linguistic analysis” with no direct connection to the meanings of ancient authors or readers (p. 163). Barbara Green ([Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction](Atlanta: SBL, 2000), p. 136) critiques her own earlier work for being “wholly text-centered” and giving too little account of “historical and readerly issues,” even while insisting that such “formalist” work is indeed useful when it serves as a “springboard” to issues of “greater depth.”
significance.” But it does not really explain why authors would choose ineffective (“usually ignored”) strategies to guide readers. Wendland, on the other hand, locates “key aspects of an author’s theme or purpose” in “devices, such as metaphor and sarcasm, which strongly stimulate” the audience’s “perceptions, feelings, moods, and attitudes.” One may note that such devices are prominent and evocative, not “usually ignored.” Even where structural markers are subtle, they do not function as cryptic, overlooked codes but as familiar conventions. Such conventions trigger genre-associations from audiences’ experience, associations which in turn guide the reading protocols of a specific text.

Genre analysis thus raises the very questions which structural analysis attempted to bypass: What were ancient Hebrew genre-expectations and literary conventions? Wendland, well aware that we know less than we might wish about ancient cultures’ genre usage, commends an “etic-emic” combination which employs structural analysis in order to correct form criticism’s


40 Significantly, when Ljungberg (“Genre,” p. 420) proposes abandoning “situational/ pragmatic text-external meaning,” it is precisely because he thinks form criticism cannot establish an extratextual setting “with any accuracy.” Similarly, Lowery (“Theoretical Foundations,” pp. 103-5, 118) characterizes discourse analysis as the successor to a form criticism that “failed” because “biblical data to answer such questions [of historical context] are sparse” and therefore “entire classes of questions simply cannot be answered, including many of anthropological and psycho-social concern.” Tova Meltzer (“Stylistics for the Study of Ancient Texts: Wanderings in the Borderlands,” in Discourse Analysis, ed. Bodine: 131-51, p. 131) notes that for “linguists and literary critics whose chief informants are ancient texts, ‘style’ is an especially slippery and elusive concept.” For an account of some of the ways that form criticism has changed over the decades to respond to such criticism, see Newsom, “Spying,” and the essays in The Changing Face of Form Criticism in the 21st Century, ed. Marvin Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
“speculative and idiosyncratic reconstructions.” Wendland’s point seems to be that structural analysis of an actual text may indeed take priority over any purely hypothetical text type (form) or its unrecoverable social prehistory (*Sitz im Leben*); but at the same time only human situations—even if partially reconstructed—can give the structural pattern meaning. The accessible (etic) data requires some attempt at an (emic) explanation. Christo van der Merwe makes the same point, suggesting a “text-pragmatic method” which “concentrates on a synchronic description of textual units to determine their communicative structures,” but then employs this synchronic description as a step toward the larger diachronic goal of reconstructing a “presumed communication situation.” Again, the accessible text guides one’s account of the often-inaccessible pragmatics (the communication situation in which the text produces effects for specific users).

Both Wendland and Van der Merwe thus attest the necessity, yet also the difficulty, of bridging between literary shape and historical usage. Literary-critical approaches merge with historical-critical approaches when the “final form” is read in “a particular historical horizon.” Scholars need not abandon the investigation of “flesh-and-blood” authors or readers; put differently, they need not be satisfied with text-immanent (ideal or implied) authors and readers “entirely fabricated by the dictates of the text.” On this score it is interesting that both James

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41 Wendland, “Genre Criticism,” p. 383.


43 James Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). Similarly, Patricia Willey (*Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* [SBL 161; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997]) speaks of using “literary theory to ask unapologetically historical questions” (p. 7) because “recovering a text’s context is indeed crucial for understanding its message” (p. 1). Note Willey’s reliance (pp. 2, 66-7, 75) on Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination*.

Watts and James Trotter critique Edgar Conrad for a literary approach to biblical studies which focuses narrowly on text-internal “implied readers,” without describing “how this implied reader compares to any real readers.” Both Trotter and Watts suggest that “reader-response” must account for the real responses of historically located readers; rhetorical criticism must take into account the social-historical particularities of those who are using the rhetoric.

In the semiotic-linguistic terms which I discuss further below, language is always both locution (what words say) and illocution/ perlocution (what words do); the object of linguistic analysis is neither words nor sentences, but fully situated speech acts. For this reason, even when biblical scholars lack historical information about ancient contexts of usage, the literary evidence (letters and words) means little outside an imagined historical setting. As Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood argue, most literary/ rhetorical readings actually depend upon such imagined historical settings—even when (or especially when) the historical imagining is unacknowledged and unargued. Thus the implied reader/ author is often merely a “ceremoniously renamed” historical reader/ author; biblical reader-response criticism in biblical studies is itself challenges any account “of the text as existing within a hermetic, Alexandrian textual universe, which has no connection with actuality.” Brett and Said point to the formalism of various structuralist, literary, and linguistic studies.


46 Trotter, Reading Hosea, pp. 29-31; Watts, Reading Law, p. 131. Watts here relies directly on Bakhtin’s Dialogic Imagination as a spur to contextualizing speech in a specific context. I reject here Grüneberg’s attempt (Abraham, pp. 5-6) to honor the “text’s rootedness in its original context” (including social conventions and “genre competence”) but then explicitly set aside all consideration of the ancient authors or readers. Do not ancient authors and readers constitute ancient contexts?


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“an exercise in historical criticism performed in a wig and dark sunglasses.”

Admittedly, it is no less true that the historical reader/author may in turn be an implied reader/author in its own disguise. Literary accounts of implied readers implicitly rely on (a certain reading of) the text’s historical situation, and reconstructions of the historical situation implicitly rely on (a certain reading of) the text’s literarily constructed implied readers.

In my judgment, the best scholars can do is to bring both processes of imagination into the light, not pretending either that the text speaks for itself or that we know more than we do about the ancient contexts that help give it meaning. The literary data, along with other pertinent historical information (Trotter speaks of “textual and artifactual remains”), can suggest a reconstructed setting for ancient texts—no matter how “partial, provisional, and speculative” such reconstructions may prove. In the end, perhaps both the implied audience and the historical


50 Here I will give two brief examples. The first is Gordon Wenham (Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002]) who discusses biblical narrative’s “implied readers” in order to distinguish a rhetorical-literary ethic from the actual ideologies of historical users. Yet Wenham’s implied Pentateuchal readers are not simply the literary addressers who (at the end of Genesis) are assured that they will return from Egypt or (in the second half of Exodus) are instructed to build a tabernacle. Rather, they are Israelites living under David’s reign—a reconstruction that owes as much to Wenham’s historical hypotheses as it does to the Pentateuch’s ostensive literary address. The second example is Rainer Albertz (History 2), who painstakingly attributes Pentateuchal strands to specific social-historical locations. Yet these social locations—the “middle class,” the “coalition of Deuteronomists and wealthy landowners,” and so forth—are not directly derived from any archaeological or historical record, but rather from Albertz’s understanding of what the textual rhetoric intends. I am not here criticizing either Wenham or Albertz, but merely noting that both scholars inextricably intertwine a literary-rhetorical investigation (implied readers) and a social-historical investigation (reading situation)—whether or not this is how they describe their own work.

51 Trotter, Reading Hosea, pp. 32-33; see also pp. 16-18. William Schniedewind (“Prolegomena for the Sociolinguistics of Classical Hebrew,” Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 5, n.p., online [2005]) also emphasizes the significance of archaeology for fleshing out the sociological-historical contexts for linguistic analysis of ancient Hebrew texts.
audience are over-simplifications, best combined into a complex—and suitably tentative—account of plausible audiences reconstructed by combining historical and literary evidence. A careful reading of real potentialities within the text, but also within the historical record, guides hypotheses about who might have used these texts, why, and how. Scholars, in other words, can reconstruct the “implied” and the “historical” audience in transparent conversation, lest what is not discussed should predetermine what is discussed.

Throughout this work, when I refer to the audience or audiences of Genesis I am always thinking of plausible audiences. The text itself can presume, invite, or specify certain reading contexts; historical accounts, informed by archaeological evidence, can flesh out these literary suggestions. Even in the face of inadequate information, some usages of ancient texts are surely more likely than others. I envision a three-level process for discerning plausible audiences, roughly following Peirce’s three-part interpretant (see my section 1.2.3). First, every text has the possibility of meaning (immediate interpretant), diverse possible reactions invited by the text’s rhetorical features: how it might be read. Second, every text has actual instances of meaning (dynamic interpretant), discrete responses from each user elicited in the concrete particularity of each reading: how it is read. Third and finally, most texts produce a stabilized habit of meaning (final interpretant), a canalized consensus of shared reading practices guiding (and guided by) ongoing re-usage of the text, limiting (though not excluding) idiosyncratic responses: how it is supposed to be read. In my view, an adequate reading of plausible audiences requires some

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52 For canalization in the practice of language, see my section 1.2.2. Note that my phrase “supposed to” presumes some community that is doing the supposing, not a rigid linguistic, historical, aesthetic, or ethical rule.
account of all three levels: the text’s potentiality, historical diversity, and convergence in cumulative usage.  

Finally, before turning to what I have learned from constructivist linguistics (section 1.2.2) and from Peircean semiotics (section 1.2.3), I wish to distinguish my approach from that of Ellen van Wolde. Van Wolde has shown considerable expertise in Peircean semiotics, as well as an impressive master of cognitive linguistics; in each case she emphasizes the way that the linguistic/semiotic methodology combines text with context.  

Ironically, however, in van Wolde’s first volume she explicitly decides to bracket out contextual, reader-world pragmatic effects and consider only “the intratextual phase of the interaction process.” Her latest book is overwhelmingly intratextual word-study; while she does at one point list archaeological data about ancient gates (when analyzing the root שער), I searched in vain for any situated account of a pragmatic purpose for reading/writing about gates (or anything else). Her narrow analysis of Genesis 1:1-2:3 focuses on the root ברא and omits any textual or extratextual connections (e.g.,

53 Burke Long (“Readers, Reading, and Biblical Theologians,” in Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology, ed. George Coats and Burke Long [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977]: 166-86) makes the important point that although the canonical approach led by Childs resembles a literary approach to the biblical text (in that both approaches are interested in the final form and its literary-rhetorical structures of meaning), literary critics are by training fond of multiple, innovative, and idiosyncratic readings—while the canonical approach more often emphasizes ways that tradents guide and limit possible readings. But one can think of important exceptions on either side; James Sanders is famous for seeking canonical multiplicity of meaning (e.g., Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984]); “Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon,” in Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G Ernest Wright, ed. Frank Cross, Werner Lemke, and Patrick Miller [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976]: 531-60), and some literary critics (e.g., Umberto Eco, Interpretation and Overinterpretation [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992]) have tried to exclude certain misreadings precisely by pursuing consensual audience responses. Interesting is Bruce Chilton’s call (“Biblical Authority, Canonical Criticism, and Generative Exegesis,” in The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders, ed. Craig Evans and Shemaryahu Talmey [Leiden: Brill, 1997]: 343-55) for a “generative exegesis” as a successor discipline to canonical criticism, one more attuned to dynamic development within the canonical tradition.


55 Van Wolde, Semiotic Analysis, pp. 71, 212.

56 Van Wolde, Reframing, pp. 72-103.
Deutero-Isaiah’s usage of the same root); her extensive account of Genesis 34 ignores not only the writing/reading contexts but even related material within Genesis (49:5-7). In general, van Wolde seems to be discussing what biblical language means in a near vacuum. This shortcoming (along with possible ways around it) has been uppermost in my mind in formulating the current study.

1.2.2 Texts as Living Artifacts: Andresen and Constructivist Linguistics

“A poem should not mean/ but be,” writes Archibald MacLeish, concluding “Ars Poetica.” A poem is “equal to/ Not true,” in the sense that equivalences between sign and object—between “an empty doorway and a maple leaf” and “all the history of grief”—do not translate into true (or false) propositions. Pablo Neruda’s poem “Arte Poética” speaks of a “rush of objects that call” (un golpe de objetos que llaman), “a ceaseless movement” (un movimiento sin tregua), and “a confused name” (un nombre confuso). This dynamic view of language, indeterminate in its reference but insistent in its invitation for active response, challenges the code-theoretical conception of language as a stream of encoded information. Meaning develops dynamically in an intricate temporal web of social meaning-making, spurring a wide range of implicatures that impact a text’s various speakers and hearers, writers and re-writers, readers and

60 See Bakhtin’s critique of structuralism and its “finished monologic utterance”: for Bakhtin, language is always a response, and “readers . . . participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text” (Dialogic Imagination, p. 253).
repeaters. The last several decades of biblical studies represent the variegated attempt of biblical scholars to respond to the complex conception of language implicit in poets like MacLeish or Neruda. Although biblical scholars have always been interested in textual context as well as content, a thorough account of the functions that texts serve, and of the interests of those who use them, has made real strides in recent scholarship.

Throughout this study, I highlight the usage of Genesis in order to describe the overlapping ways that authors and readers (and redactors, copyists, tradents, and listeners—among others) contribute to the text’s meanings. I follow the lead of Julie Tetel Andresen, who

61 Trotter (Reading Hosea, p. 22) helpfully notes the shared emphasis in various literary critics (e.g., Stanley Fish, Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989]; Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978]; and the essays in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism, ed. Jane Tompkins [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980]) on the reading event as a process which creates meaning. Thus the weakness of code-theorism (where a prior meaning, residing in the mind of the speaker or writer, is encoded in language) is actually quite similar to the weakness of subjective constructionism (where a prior meaning, residing in the mind of the reader or listener, is imposed on language). Neither approach recognizes the way that the language process creates meaning, in concrete communication events (speech acts) of speaking/writing/hearing/reading. Similarly, van Wolde (Semiotic Analysis, pp. 24-6; see pp. 34, 208) argues that Peircean semiotics provides a middle ground between the “Scylla of object-oriented realism” (the referential fallacy) and the “Charybdis of static subjectivism” (the mentalist fallacy), locating textual meaning in the complex situations of real human usage. Neither text (“structure”) nor reader (“context”) determines a symbol’s meaning for Peirce, but rather the interaction between subject and object, the negotiation between texts and their users to create meaning. Textual structures operate precisely by their effects upon readers; they provoke, invite, or compel reactions.

describes a process of “languaging” in which speaking and listening are not discrete and sequential activities but rather coexist in complex and mutually-reinforcing linguistic influence. Thus I will try to trace some of the historical effects that Genesis had on the various people who produced, received, or preserved it. In doing so I pair the historical question of authorial usage (What did Genesis’ authors intend to convey about eschatology?) with the equally historical question of readerly usage (What did early readers find in this text that impacted their eschatology?). As discussed above, either question requires historically disciplined imaginative construal, since scholars have no unmediated access either to authorial intention or to readerly reception. Instead we have the text, in the shape(s) in which we find it, as indirect testimony to a range of possible intentions and possible receptions. Yet Andresen’s dynamic linguistic model suggests that a text is not, after all, a self-contained literary world—any more than it is a referential mirror of historical realities—but rather an artifact of the social practices of producing/reading/receiving/preserving written literature.

63 Julie Tetel Andresen (Linguistics Reimagined: Language Study for the 21st Century [forthcoming]). Throughout this section I interact with Andresen’s unpublished work, which (along with numerous conversations) has helped form my thinking about constructivist linguistics. All ill-informed conceptions remain my own.

64 David Tracy (A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible, David Tracy and Robert Grant [London: SCM Press, 1984], p. 156) argues that a text’s interpretation begins with the “history of [its] effects,” noting that each language “carries with it the history of the effects, the traditions . . . inevitably present in that language.” Bakhtin makes the point that words “inhabit all the contexts where they have been used” and thus language always involves “contextual overtones” (see Green, Bakhtin, p. 47). For a similar account of reception as a historical study, see Hans Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (trans. Timothy Bathi; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp (“Brief Comments on John Collins’s The Bible After Babel,” in “The State of the Field of Hebrew Bible Study: In Conversation with John J. Collins, The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age (Eerdmans, 2005),” ed. David Carr, Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 6, n.p., online [2006]) argues that synchronic studies must exist within “a larger informing diachrony.” He cites Roman Jakobson and Jurij Tynjanov (“Problems in the Study of Literature and Language,” in Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985], p. 26) and their critique of de Saussure’s synchrony. Grüneberg (Abraham, pp. 3-4) calls a “final-form” reading “synchronic” but not “achronic.”

65 As I will explain further below, by artifact I mean a tool which humans construct and whose very existence bears witness to the social contexts of its usage. I do not think it is helpful to view such tools as frozen in time or dated to a discrete stratum of the past, so in that sense my approach to texts is not at all archaeological.
For Andresen, every spoken word witnesses to the layered context in which real-world people found this combination of sounds to be meaningful and, indeed, useful. A word is just a sound until a community, through countless concrete interactions between speakers and listeners, has given that sound enough “uptake” to stabilize meaning in a predictable mechanism of social behavior. The words “please” and “pass” and “salt” mean what they mean because I can predict what will happen when I say, “Please pass the salt.” This process of stabilization or habituation is called canalization, a term borrowed from the biological study of causation; “grooves” in a causal mechanism produce a more limited, predictable set of outcomes from a near-infinite causal matrix. Given all of the variables of situation/personality/environment, canalization explains why users who share a linguistic framework (vocabulary, syntax, and so on) but also a social framework (dining practices, polite cooperation, and so on) can predict responses to a statement like “Please pass the salt.” Misreadings occur less because of sheer ambiguity than because users can always choose to transgress (or cross-apply) the canalized linguistic scripts—as when my son pretended the salt was a football and tried to “pass” it to me.

In general all spoken or written language depends upon a well-canalized history of languaging; every text witnesses to the layered contexts in which real-world people found this set of marks on a page to be meaningful and, indeed, useful. When literature transgresses these canalized linguistic scripts, it also utilizes the expectations which the canalized scripts provide.

For this reason, linguistic evidence can never be isolated or objectified, but only studied within

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67 On Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” and other examples, see Semiotics and Linguistics in Alice’s Worlds, ed. Rachel Fordyce and Carla Marello (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994).
the full complex “weave” of human “being, knowing, and doing.” In fact, texts are as embedded in dynamic social behavior as any other artifact which an archaeologist might discover. Every tool discovered at a dig witnesses not just to the craftsperson(s) who made it but also to the concrete tool-using practices that produced, received, and sustained it. Archaeologists cannot actually view ancient people farming or weaving, but imagine these practices by examining ancient plows or looms—a historical imagination carefully controlled by various sorts of evidence, not least a detailed study of the artifact’s qualities, of the context(s) in which that artifact is found, and of the artifact’s similarities to other tools used elsewhere (taking into account inevitable chronological, geographic, and/or cultural differences). Those studying ancient texts employ a similar historical imagination, recognizing that their text-artifacts also attest a set of concrete, social, dynamic text-using practices.

In this connection it is also worth noting that the texts which comprise the Hebrew Bible are living artifacts, tools which are still being used in unbroken tradition from the time of composition up to the present. In this sense, the biblical scholar is not just an archaeologist (although even archaeologists may inquire about an artifact’s ongoing tradition of usage, i.e., the history of effects in which this ancient tool impacted later tool-using practices). It goes without saying that the unbroken tradition of Hebrew Bible usage involves all sorts of transformations, some bigger and some smaller. But in contrast to Akkadian or Ugaritic texts, used for a period of years and then buried under the literal sands of time, Genesis did not have to be exhumed. Its

68 Andresen (Linguistics) borrows this language from Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living (Boston: Reidel, 1980).

69 The word “sustained” is particularly important to my thinking, since one consequence of not using certain tools is that one ceases to continue to manufacture and preserve such tools. The mere possibility that one might use a plow to hammer in a nail, or a loom weight to prop up a chair, may not significantly impact the “final interpretant” canalization in which specific tool-making and tool-using practices converge into a sustained tradition. This should challenge the occasional postmodern suggestion that a text lends itself equally to any usage.
usage has been so continuous that its reception history is not in this sense an “afterlife” (as implied by the German word Nachleben\textsuperscript{70}) because it never died at all. Genesis’ reception involves a constant stream of text-using practices, preserving as well as transforming its meaning from one generation to the next.\textsuperscript{71} This continuously developing usage of Hebrew Bible texts is hard to ignore if biblical scholars follow Andresen’s advice and inquire about the particularity of the concrete phenomena which they are studying. Genesis itself remains a poorly defined conceptual lump unless one focuses tightly on its instantiation in tangible artifact-manuscripts, whether Hebrew (Massoretic and other texts) or Greek (Septuagintal and other versions).

Study of such manuscripts soon involves one in a rather complex study of the communities and practices that influenced each copy’s current form.\textsuperscript{72} Whether one is untangling the relationships between medieval readings and the Tendenz of translators, or comparing the diverse readings attested from more ancient evidence (most notably the Dead Sea Scrolls), one constantly bumps up against a tradition of ongoing re-usage. I suggest that the study of Genesis is not the search for an inaccessible Ur-text (or for the intentions in authors’ minds), but rather the examination of centuries of meaningful usage. Scholars cannot access the source of this living stream of meaningful use, but only the various inter-related manuscript-artifacts which the stream

\textsuperscript{70} I owe this insight to William Brown, personal conversation.

\textsuperscript{71} See here the formulation of Mark Hamilton, “The Problem of History in Old Testament Theology: A Review Essay,” \textit{Restoration Quarterly} 50 (2008): 197-211, p. 204: “diverse points of view” both within “the Bible” and among its readers (Jewish or Christian) “share a genetic relationship,” complicating any absolute distinction between “‘what it meant’ and ‘what it means’” This set of “discrete, yet interconnected traditions functioning for a community of readers that the text itself helps create” distinguish this corpus from “ancient Near Eastern texts excavated by archaeologists.”

has borne along.\footnote{Confusingly, even in scholarly works, the word text refers sometimes to an imagined original, sometimes to actual manuscripts, and sometimes to reconstructions produced by scholarly analysis. Again, each successive generation transforms but also preserves Genesis’ textual contexts and meanings; there is no sharp discontinuity, no crucial point at which the text’s original life ends and its afterlife begins. Cf. Susan Groom (Linguistics), who acknowledges “variegated transmission” with “social aspects” that result in “textual multiplicity” (pp. 17-18); the “history of transmission” reflects the work of “previous interpreters,” and each “form of the text” may therefore have a “particular Sitz im Leben” (p. 136). She cites H. Orlinski (“The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation,” Prolegomenon to C. D. Ginsberg, Introduction to the Masoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible [New York: Ktav, 1986], p. xvii): “There never was, and there never can be, a single fixed masoretic text of the Bible! It is utter futility and pursuit of a mirage to go seeking to recover what never was!” Unfortunately, in practice Groom (like too many other biblical scholars) proceeds to seek to “recover” the “text as constructed by the author” while treating diverse witnesses as “deviations from the MT” (see, e.g., pp. 19-20, 27, 84, 100, 163).} There is, especially, no way of getting behind the history-of-effects process, since all analysis is based on what that process has preserved.

Andresen’s refusal to split speaker from listener also reminds me that Genesis’ complex, continual textual usage lies behind as well as in front of its composition. Long before Genesis reached its current compositional form, most of its stories had already been used (passed down, copied, recited, and reworked) for centuries. Whoever first put pen to parchment in a form that we would recognize as Genesis was therefore receiving as much as composing, reading as much as writing.\footnote{Interestingly, even John Calvin (Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, trans. John King [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], pp. 58-9), in assuming Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, also assumes that Moses is receiving/rewriting older traditions and stories to write Genesis.} Because textual contexts are dynamic and continuous, no single context is privileged over all others. One cannot freeze this moving-picture of meaning-making and textual usage on a single frame and call this the “original form,” with an attendant “original author” and “original audience.”\footnote{Such language appears historicist rather than historical, and calls attention away from the evidence toward speculative constructs. Antiquarianism—biblical studies as an inquiry into “original” linguistic codes or “original” social forms—unjustifiably excludes the study of ancient texts’ continuous history of meanings. So for example Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensvard (Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts, vol 2 [London: Equinox, 2008], p. 100) state that the “form of the biblical texts was in constant flux. In this context, the question of the ‘original date’ when a biblical book was composed is anachronistic and irrelevant.”} Nor is there a “final form”; even after Genesis’ compositional form had largely stabilized, concrete texts always differ, pointing to a variegated and still-developing tradition.\footnote{R. Walter Moberly (The Theology of the Book of Genesis [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p. 40) notes that within canonical approaches to the text, the term “final form” (with its seeming naïveté toward textual change) may be less useful or even “comprehensible” than the term “received form.” I would add that concrete}
this study I will focus on Persian-era Judea as a formative context for Genesis’ composition as well as its reception, without ignoring earlier and later stages in the dynamic process of usage. I hope to show that eschatological hope is an integral part of what the Genesis synthesis meant in its effects on users in the Persian period and onward. But I also hope to show that this Persian-era synthesis can be understood in a way that is connectable with—rather than cut off from—all of the later eschatological usages of Genesis, beginning in the late Second Temple interpretations and continuing until today.

To summarize, Andresen has helped me to view language—hence texts, hence the book of Genesis—as “an emergent product of multiple inner and outer causal factors,” at once a cause of and an effect of the complex, situated social processes of usage which produce/ receive/ sustain it. To the extent that Persian-era Judeans constructed their beliefs, hopes, and identities by writing and rewriting Genesis, one may also say that Persian-era Judeans inherited their beliefs, hopes, and identities by reading and rereading Genesis. Both processes feed into one another in what Andresen calls a “structural coupling” between the linguistic text-artifacts and their contexts of usage.

receiving communities read multiple received forms. See here James Bowley and John Reeves, “Rethinking the Concept of ‘Bible’: Some Theses and Proposals,” Henoch 25 (2003): 3-18, esp. p. 10. I owe this citation to Portier-Young (Apocalypse, p. 221), who speaks of both “diversity of ancient text forms” and “continuity between earlier text forms and the ones known today.”

As a rule of thumb, I consider the content that is shared among the various manuscript witnesses to Genesis—LXX, MT, and other—to provide the best guide to its plausible Persian-era literary shape, while acknowledging that the specific manuscript variations which Persian-era users encountered are impossible to reconstruct. Sidnie Crawford (“The Use of the Pentateuch in the Temple Scroll and the Damascus Document in the Second Century B.C.E.,” PentT: 301-17) concludes from Qumran evidence that harmonizing Pentateucal texts, of the kind sometimes called pre-Samaritan, go back to the 4th century B.C.E.; that the Pentateuch was completed in the 5th century B.C.E.; and that new works based on the Pentateuch emerged in the 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E.

1.2.3 Signs and Their Usage: Peirce and Nonstructuralist Semiotics

Charles Peirce’s most lasting contribution has been his **complexifying** of the meaning-making process. Rather than merely analyzing language (and other signs) as a straightforward code for some sort of meaning, he has interrogated the nature of signs, split the object of the sign (what it refers to) from the interpretant of the sign (what meanings it produces), and categorized various intricate sorts of relationships between sign and object, sign and interpretant, and object and interpretant. Throughout, Peirce follows a general tripartite noetic model which (among other things) frustrates the dichotomous, either-or frame of more dyadic reconstructions.

So, for example, Peirce complexifies the age-old discussion of how signs relate to objects by suggesting that all signs relate to their object **with respect to their “ground”** in three ways: they resemble it (iconicity), they point toward it (indexicality), and they conventionally represent it (symbolism). Language is largely conventional (symbolic), but Peirce suggests that it simultaneously sets up real iconic resemblances and—especially—real indexical gestures toward objects in the (linguistic and extra-linguistic) environment. In the process, Peirce amends the naïve realism of most sign-object discussions by recognizing that the real object of a sign is not an objective physical-world referent, but rather the users’ semiotic understandings to which the sign relates. “Apple,” in other words, does not refer directly to any real-world apple, but rather

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refers to English-speakers’ apprehension of apples—the aggregate of English-users’ experiences with objects-perceived-as-apples. For this reason, Yuri Lotman is able to show that the “semiosphere”—an ongoing practice of sign-usage—precedes and gives shape to any discrete usage of language, forming language’s Peircean “ground.”

Even more complex is Peirce’s interpretant, which represents not the object to which the sign refers, but rather the understanding which the sign produces. This understanding/interpretation of the sign is itself a new sign—and hence gives rise to its own new interpretant, in a potentially infinitive generative process. Peirce analyzes dozens of categories of interpretant, but his most important (triadic) distinction is between immediate interpretants (the mere potential for meaning, a first impression which invites further reflection), dynamic interpretants (the actual process of response in which each user relates the sign to her whole world of experience), and final interpretants (the canalized interpretive consensus which forms an ongoing habit of interpreting the sign a certain way). All three types of interpretant constitute the sign’s meaning, that is, its total effect upon users in the ongoing process of interpretation. Importantly, this meaning/interpretant cannot be reduced to information content; it includes the entire change in “mind and behavior,” the entire lived response which discourse exists to produce.

Roman Jakobson, who acknowledges his own debt to Peirce, spells out the insight that discourse is not simply informative. Perhaps most influential is his description of six “functions” of speech, each tied to a specific aspect of the communication event (context, message, addressee, ...}

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83 Van Wolde, *Semiotic Analysis*, pp. 27, 39, 47. Similarly, Eco (“Semiotic Foundations,” pp. 191-2) locates Peircean meaning in users’ embodied responses to signs, citing Pierce’s definition of the final interpretant as “a tendency to behave in similar ways under similar circumstances in the future” (5.487, 5.491). As Eco (p. 194) reads Pierce, “to understand a sign is to learn what to do,” and language is aimed not at our understanding alone but at our whole “way of acting within the world.” I suggest that this “way of acting within the world” is inextricably bound to identity.
addressee, contact, and code): the *referential* function describes something in the context of speech, the *poetic* focuses on the message itself, the *emotive* (or *expressive*) expresses the attitude of the addresser, the *conative* elicits a response from the addressee, the *phatic* serves to maintain contact, and the *metalinguistic* discusses the code. While the referential function has often been the chief focus of traditional biblical studies, it is hardly an overstatement to suggest that specialized schools of biblical studies can be correlated to one of the other five less explored functions (literary structuralism = poetic, rhetorical criticism = emotive, reader-response = conative, and so on). Note that Jakobson’s point is not to inspire a parlor game of categorizing each bit of speech (*this* sentence is phatic, *that* statement is informative, and so forth) but rather to sensitize linguists to the fact that language comes in interactive speech acts that serve (at minimum) all six functions simultaneously. In fact, even Jakobson’s model may be too simple. Bakhtin, for example, suggests that literary texts include a multiplicity of overlapping and sometimes contradictory messages, precisely because such texts incorporate previous voices (often from other cultural and traditional sources). Each such voice carries with it its own referential, poetic, emotive, conative, phatic, and metalinguistic function.

In a rather different way, Lotman doubles Jacobson’s six-functioned speech act by suggesting that the same message, spoken at the same moment, may operate differently for its various simultaneous audiences. He calls special attention to one often overlooked fact about any speech act: speakers are influenced by their own utterances, and so the addresser is also an

84 Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics.”
85 For discussion of these approaches to the Bible see essays in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. McKenzie and Haynes.
86 For some interesting uses of Bakhtin’s “hybridity” model in biblical studies, see, e.g., Brett, *Genesis: Watts, Reading Torah; Green, Bakhtin*; and essays in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL, 2007).
87 Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, pp. 11-19.
addressee (alongside any other possible addressees). According to Lotman, some texts seem especially designed for self-address; they do not convey information from one person to another, but they allow a person to mull over information that she already possesses. A literary or religious text functions precisely this way because it “does not add to the information we already have, but . . . transforms the self-understanding.” Here Lotman alludes to the relationship between language and identity; in van Wolde’s words, discourse “comes to function not only as something which the reader gives identity to, but also as something by means of which the reader gives identity to himself.” Language usage—including the usage of written texts—serves an orienting purpose, not merely the exchange of information. The pragmatics of the speech act affect (and are affected by) both social actions and social identity, which are ultimately constitutive of each other.

The formulations of Peirce, Jakobson, Bakhtin, Eco, and (especially) Lotman all highlight the generative nature of language-use—the way that interpretation follows a process of meaning-making, as each interpretant functions as a symbol in its own right and therefore births ever new symbols. This insight brings me to Roland Barthes, who sharply contrasts “philological or historical” analysis of the “objective structure of the text” with semiotic analysis of texts’

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89 Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, p. 30. Lotman calls such works “I-I” rather than “I-s/he,” and notes that they are marked formally by such features as rhythm, repetition, and artful textual structuring—features that are certainly prominent in Genesis. Lotman is building on Lev Vygotskii’s account of children talking to themselves in order to reorient themselves, especially when puzzled or frustrated (Thought and Language [trans. Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar; Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1962]). See also Lotman, “The Text and the Structure of Its Audience,” *New Literary History* 14.1 (1982): 81-87.

90 Van Wolde, *Semiotic Analysis*, p. 66; repeated verbatim on p. 213.

91 See, e.g., Andresen, “The Behaviorist Turn.”
“signifying volume.”

In Barthes’s view “traditional” biblical scholars focus on “where the text comes from (historical criticism)” or “how it is made (structural analysis),” but a semiotic approach will examine “how it explodes, disseminates: according to what coded avenues it goes.” The literary structures within the text do not constitute meaning; they are at most useful clues to the effects of reading this text. Barthes’s own analysis considers (however imperfectly) both structure and context; his semiotic interest in textual effects builds on other sorts of comparative and historical information. Thus he does not reject traditional historical criticism per se, any more than he ceases to use structuralism; rather, he challenges any account of the text’s history that ignores its function, or any account of the text’s function that ignores its history. His shorthand for this complex investigation is the word “effects.”

Finally, in that reading effects “disseminate” or “go” or “unfold” in a dynamic process over time, subsequent readings of the same text have powerful semiotic significance. As a result, no account of reading is complete without careful attention to rereading and rewriting, repeated usage of the same material. Rereadings can approach each part of the text with an awareness (memory) of the whole, significantly increasing the text’s implicature. Rewritings can make use of centuries-old traditions and apply them to current concerns. Lotman even suggests that when the exact same text is reread over time, the text changes: the cultural contexts in which it has been


93 Barthes, “Wrestling,” p. 247. Barthes speaks (perhaps a bit playfully) of an interpretation’s “cultural ambiguity” or “indecision” being distressing to the theologian, but savored by the textual analyst (p. 251).


read are folded into its cumulative meaning.⁹⁷ Received tradition (what Michael Fishbane calls trādītum) and ongoing usage (what Fishbane calls trādītīo) interact in a dynamic feedback system of ever-increasing semiotic power.⁹⁸ Re-readers have increasing leverage to impose their own experiences or identity upon the text; simultaneously re-used texts have increasing leverage upon readers, whose experiences and identity have already been impacted by the text and its various usages. The more a text is reread and reused within the same community, the more opportunities that community will have both to try out new interpretations and to stabilize a canalized (final interpretant) habit of interpretation.⁹⁹ The rhetorical effects of re-reading may, for all of these reasons, differ significantly from the rhetorical effects of simply reading.¹⁰⁰

1.2.4 A Disclaimer

As I study Genesis in situated, diachronic perspective, I must acknowledge that I as a reader am also influenced by my own contexts and concerns. This is true even when I am trying to describe earlier usage of Genesis with maximum historical integrity and minimum

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⁹⁷ Lotman, Universe of the Mind, p. 18 (using Shakespeare’s plays as an example); cf. pp. 36-53.


⁹⁹ Eco, Interpretation and Overinterpretation, describes the ongoing process of re-interpretation within a community in Darwinian terms: the “fittest” interpretations are those which reproduce (influence others to read similarly) while “unfit” interpretations are those which are not taken up by others. He also notes that rereaders tend to adjust their own earlier (mis)apprehensions, either because they now notice more about the textual effects or because they are influenced by other extratextual factors—not least the input of fellow-readers.

anachronism. Pseudo-objective historicism has been challenged on various grounds, driven by inter-related contemporary agendas (feminism, post-colonialism, environmentalism, and the like) as well as more traditional faiths (Jewish, Christian, Islam, or other). I am not unsympathetic to any of these projects, and certainly do not pretend to be value-neutral. I am (in no particular order) a Christian, a white male, an American, an ordained preacher, a graduate student, and a member of the wealthy middle class. I am also (in no particular order) ashamed of the ways Christians have oppressed Jews by means of tendentious biblical interpretation, ashamed of the way that white males have oppressed women and people of color by means of tendentious biblical interpretation, ashamed of the way Americans have oppressed people of other cultures by means of tendentious biblical interpretation, ashamed of the way that preachers have oppressed laypeople by means of tendentious biblical interpretation, ashamed of the way that academics have oppressed non-academics by means of tendentious biblical interpretation, and ashamed of the way that wealthy middle-class readers have oppressed the poor by means of tendentious biblical interpretation.

Clearly, this set of identities and of shames place me in an interpretive quandary. I can only proceed by denying the notion that philosophical, ideological, and theological questions must always be resolved before looking at historical and textual evidence. Just as contemporary commitments inform our examination of the past, so evidence from the past informs our contemporary commitments. The question of how Persian-era readers received Genesis and

101 My conception of “historical integrity” is itself shaped by my contexts and assumptions—though it need not be any the worse for that. C. S. Lewis (An Experiment in Criticism [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961]) defends the attempt to glimpse others’ viewpoints, rather than project our own, when encountering texts ancient or modern. Mark Brett (“The Political Ethics of Postmodern Allegory,” in The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R., David Clines, and Philip Davies [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995]: 67-86) discusses the ethical implications of reading ancient texts with a special emphasis on ancient or modern contexts. Either way, ethics suggest an openness to listen beyond our own self-interest.

102 See, e.g., To Each Its Own Meaning, ed. McKenzie and Haynes.
question of how modern readers receive it interlock; but for this very reason such questions can be approached from either direction. One dissertation cannot pursue all of the ways that past understandings shape the present, and present understandings shape our account of the past, in the centuries-long semiotic process of Genesis’ meaning-making.\(^\text{103}\) My investigation cannot heal the damage of tendentious interpretation; I can only offer my efforts in the hope that they will prove useful to those engaged in various sorts of interpretive healing. (Those who do not think that carefully investigated interpretation can be a positive resource, or who do not care about ancient usages of Genesis, will probably not read this dissertation at all.)

A full account of Genesis’ eschatology would, as I envision it, require a series of volumes discussing the reception of Genesis by various communities in various ages—not just the Persian period but centuries of later usage, largely (but not exclusively) among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The master-volume (which would in some senses build on, but in some senses underlie all of the others) would discuss how Genesis and the various strands of its millennia-long reception inform diverse communities’ eschatology in the present. While my study cannot cover all of this ground, I do attempt to remain connectible to a wider investigation than my own (rather than presuming that historical/literary investigation of Persian-era usage answers all of the important questions). In my final chapter I offer a few possible contemporary implications of Genesis’ Persian-era eschatology, in the spirit of modest suggestions for further reflection.

Finally, my apologies go out to two possible pairs of readers. The first pair consists of the reader interested in eschatology (who may be tempted to ask why Genesis?) and the reader interested in Genesis (who may be tempted to ask why eschatology?). I hope that this pair of

\(^{103}\) For one excellent overview of modern concerns, centuries-old religious traditions, and Genesis’ own textual content, see Moberly, Theology. For a good example of the historical and theological issues that can be raised by a single verse, see J. Richard Middleton, The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1 (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).
readers will find that studying a less-than-explicitly eschatological work helps situate eschatology in a broader exegetical perspective—and that the category of eschatology illuminates Genesis’ emphasis on hope. The second pair of readers who deserve an apology are the reader who (understandably) wishes I had said rather more about the controversial topics which inform my exegesis, topics such as linguistic semiotics and the history of Persian-era Judea, and the reader who (even more understandably) wishes I had said rather less. I hope that this pair of readers will discover that attention to methodology and context bears exegetical fruit—and that even my simplified treatment of very complex issues presents a fair picture of the state of the pertinent linguistic, literary, and historical scholarship.

1.3 Overview and Working Hypotheses

1.3.1 The Nature of My Study

After covering all of this theoretical ground, I must admit that in many ways my study will resemble other thematic studies of Genesis, which often discuss both literary and historical issues. I believe, however, that my understanding of how and why literary and historical accounts influence one another does significantly impact my approach to Genesis’ earliest meanings and usages. The question of Genesis’ eschatology involves a series of related investigations, ranging from literary shape to historical context, from diachronic changes in usage to intertextual relationships with other literature (e.g., the prophetic corpus). Specifically, I attempt to situate my literary investigation by using three main categories of historical evidence:

- the historical situation of Persian-era Judea, and especially of those who used Hebrew literature to frame a future-oriented identity as Israel (see, especially, chapter 3);
• the intertextual interaction between Genesis and other Persian-era Hebrew texts, especially the eschatology of the prophetic corpus (see, especially, chapter 4); and
• the diachronic development of Genesis’ eschatology, a continuous semiotic progression from pre-Persian sources to post-Persian interpretations (see, especially, chapter 5);

In general, I offer the rest of this book as an attempted reading of Genesis’ hope, and of the Persian-era Judean communities which developed that hope in conversation with prophetic expectations.

From what I have said so far, it should be clear that I am adopting two working hypotheses—perspectives which I accept advisedly, but without attempting a full proof. The first hypothesis is that Genesis is a composite text, whose material was significantly reworked or shaped in the Persian era. The second hypothesis is that Persian-era Judea evidences a broad conversation about eschatology, not least in its prophetic corpus, which stakes Israel’s identity on its future expectations. These two working hypotheses will receive more discussion in later chapters, but deserve initial clarification here at the outset of my work. Each hypothesis is, of course, open to contestation, and I do not here engage the full debate either about the Pentateuch’s composition or about the proper definition of eschatology. Perhaps those who are prepared to accept my working hypotheses, however, will find these hypotheses partially confirmed by the coherence that they lend my account of Genesis’ eschatology.

1.3.2 First Hypothesis: A Composite Pentateuch in the Persian Period

Jean-Louis Ska has succinctly but, in my view, persuasively made the case that Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are distinct parts which together constitute a five-
book Pentateuch. Konrad Schmid argues that in the Persian period a Pentateuchal Torah underwent editorial work which brought its various parts (from Genesis to Deuteronomy) into conversation with each other, and which distinguished it from the books of Joshua through Kings.

Meanwhile, although the chronology of the Pentateuch’s composition is scarcely settled, most proponents for either a very early or a very late date have not won a wide following. I follow much modern scholarship in positing both a pre-exilic written nucleus to the Pentateuch and significant compositional growth occurring in the early part of the Persian period—coalescing into a recognizable Pentateuch perhaps as early as the late sixth century, perhaps as late as the early fourth century. Merely as one example of the sorts of arguments that have been adduced, I point to Albertz’s discussion of “The Canonical Alignment of the Book of Joshua,” demonstrating a chain of influence from the very latest layers of the completed Pentateuch, to some editorial work in Joshua (bringing that book into conversation with the Pentateuch), which is then cited and re-used by early layers in Chronicles. Admittedly, such evidence is circumstantial, but it does suggest that the main compositional work on the Pentateuch was

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107 Genesis’ composition does not have a single discrete date of closure, as discussed above. The stabilization of its compositional form was “finished” when subsequent rewritings introduced only minor differences—the sorts of differences that still exist between various extant manuscripts. Editorial work did not cease entirely during the Persian period, but I posit that the content of Genesis shared by all ancient witnesses (MT, LXX, and other) is roughly the shape of Genesis that existed, and was used, in the 5th century.
accomplished by the fourth century at latest—and, moreover, that the Pentateuch influenced those writing Hebrew-language Yahwistic literature.  

I presume, then, that Genesis was used by Persian-era Judeans, and that this usage overlapped with (or closely followed) compositional/redactional work that brought forth the main lines of Genesis’ extant form. I therefore investigate Genesis’ eschatology in terms of the conditions of Persian-era Judea and those who were using (preserving, editing, composing, reading, or listening to) Hebrew-language literature at this time. I interact with historical-archaeological accounts of life in Persian Judea, as well as with the other Judean literature of this period, in my attempt at a historical reconstruction of Genesis’ eschatological significance for a specific set of fifth-century Judeans. As I have suggested above in my methodological section, a plausible account of reading effects (from the audience’s point of view) crucially informs a plausible account of compositional intention (from the writer’s point of view). In general, writers compose their work precisely with an eye to its effects upon readers.  

Yet the widespread hypothesis of the Pentateuch’s composite authorship may challenge any simple account of Genesis’ contextual meaning for a specific set of readers in a specific time. Biblical scholars have sometimes split the usage/reception of the Pentateuch from its intention/authorship, suggesting that no single author foresaw or intended the actual text which eventually

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110 For discussion of how writers write with a very clear idea of how real (plausible) audiences will respond to their texts, see for example A Sense of Audience, ed. Kirsch and Roen. One can generally presume that a text’s effects do not occur by accident, and that some set of authors (even if it these are redactor-authors) intend the work to function as it does; see here Fish, Doing What Comes Naturally, p. 15, discussed in Brett, Genesis, pp. 11-14. On the other hand, Grüneberg (Abraham, pp. 3-4) suggests that “final form criticism” can analyze the “normal reading process” while bypassing entirely the notion of an author’s or redactor’s purpose. (He references the so-called “intentional fallacy,” discussed by John Barton, Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984], pp. 147-51; Anthony Thistlethwaite, New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading [London: HarperCollins, 1992], pp. 559-62.)
emerged—for example, the combination of one literary source (J/E?) with another (P?). They might challenge the notion that I can locate Genesis’ material in any single setting, including the Persian period, if its constituent literary parts were composed over the course of centuries. Yet there are also considerable problems with attempting a situated reading of any of these sources—of reconstructed documents in reconstructed settings. The wide-ranging compositional models now in play make it rather difficult to describe the setting and function of any single source. J has collapsed, for many if not most, into one or more “pre-P” layers which may come from the Davidic court (if there was a Davidic court) or from the Babylonian exile. P differs significantly depending on whether one views it as a source in its own right, as a redaction of earlier sources, or as a sequence of layers (some pre-exilic). Finally, the extent and nature of “post-P” has spawned a growing literature, including suggestions that well-known “P” or “J” passages (such as Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3) consist primarily of additions that postdate the combination of the Pentateuchal two sources.

Bewildering complexity does not absolve historical studies from considering compositional issues. At the same time, historical caution might commend the practice of working from evidence that we do know directly (the extant Pentateuch, attested by countless


114 See Ska, Introduction, pp. 161-4. Despite the sometimes disparaging critique (mounted by “literary” and “canonical” readers) that compositional sources remain speculative and disputed, it is not always clear that literary or canonical (synchronic) construals are less speculative or less disputed.
manuscripts) rather than evidence we do not know directly (putative Pentateuchal sources). Just as importantly, even if we did know what distinct sources looked like and when each was used, we would still have to give a credible account of how and why those sources transformed/merged to form Genesis. Otherwise, the story of Genesis’ composition has been truncated; the history of its effects has not been taken to its necessary conclusion. Earlier sources may have differed from Genesis as it now stands, but the meaning of those sources—the history of their effects—is wrapped up in the larger story of the growth of Genesis. If we do not know who was influenced by each hypothesized stratum of Genesis, we do know that these documents (if they existed at all) have affected subsequent generations precisely through the Pentateuchal synthesis that took them up and made Genesis. Redactional activity, whether driven by theological and artistic genius or merely by pragmatic (imperial?) necessity, gave birth to this particular shape in which the stories/traditions/sources have been melded.

For this reason, I suggest that source-critical analysis becomes truly diachronic when it is viewed not as a crazy-quilt of discrete compositions with disparate and unrelated theological points, but rather as a dynamic web of reception and adaptation within an ongoing tradition. To focus attention on Genesis as it eventually came together is not to suggest that the final redactor is some literary and theological genius who made all of the preexisting material fully his (or her?) own; nor is it to suggest that on religious or literary grounds we can merely take the extant text and ignore the history of how it got there. But it is to suggest the high probability that from at least the Persian period, readings have not focused on compositional strands in isolation, but on

115 Both Ska (Introduction, p. 145, with references to writers like Rendtorff, Blum, and Carr) and Watts (Reading Law, pp. 132-3, citing Knierim, Blenkinsopp, and Bakhtin) argue that literary/sympathetic readings precede historical/compositional inquiries. Already in 1978 Rudolph Smend (Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978], p. 11) recommends proceeding “from the relative certainty gradually to the, as a rule at least, uncertainty” (vom relativen Sicherheit . . . schritt weise zum, in der Regel wenigstens, Unsicherheit). On this whole question see Synchronic or Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis, ed. Johannes de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
the compositional whole called Genesis. Historical study can fairly ask what this compositional whole likely meant to the Judeans who read, received, copied, and preserved it. In putting the issue this way, I am not just shifting the question of authorial intention from the original composers to the later editors. Rather, I am suggesting that authorial or editorial intention are ultimately subsumed into the intentionality of the whole community that (re)wrote, (re)read, and preserved the text—i.e., the whole community of usage.

All of this is to say that while I focus on Genesis’ compositional whole, I do not conceive of my project as “synchronic” for the simple reason that I am interested throughout in the ever-diachronic process through which Genesis material was used in ever-shifting contexts. I presume throughout the importance of careful accounts of earlier stages in this process. I also presume the importance of careful accounts of later stages in the ongoing life of the text through...

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Laato (History and Ideology) rightly notes that the M-reader’s analysis of “text production” is separate from the I-reader’s interest in “text reception” (p. 322); in fact, “the M-reader’s way of reading . . . is to deconstruct the I-reader’s coherent, ideological reading” (p. 377). There is no evidence that ancient users organized their readings by source-critical criteria, arranged by date of origin; they probably received individual passages in a larger literary context, whether that context is aural familiarity with the tradition (see Foley, Immanent Art) or scribal appreciation for the structure of written texts.

Brett (Genesis, pp. 11; 22-3) argues that those who use traditional material “intend” both the material they contribute and the material they preserve; thus each contributor’s Tendenz is found not just in that layer of additions, but in the whole preserved mass of tradition. On the other hand, those who rewrite earlier traditions can preserve material with which they actually disagree; see, e.g., Bernard Levinson, Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Fishbane (Biblical Interpretation, pp. 536-43) suggests that traditio both preserves and transforms the traditum; redactional work includes both “tendentious manipulation” and “non-manipulative amendment and elaboration,” keeping traditum and traditio in “dynamic interaction, dynamic interpenetration, and dynamic interdependence.” But the resulting whole—the literary gestalt of older and newer layers—has its own voice; see here, e.g., The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 1987). See also Crusemann’s admission (Torah, p. 357) that “many, perhaps even most passages are formed out of completely different traditions and texts into amazingly concise (certainly not accidental or awkward), rational entities.”

For one description of the synchronic reading approach, see Turner, Announcements, pp. 13-19. On p. 17 Turner notes that his reading of each passage excludes any consideration of how “subsequent narratives both inside and outside the book may utilize material from Genesis,” and hence ignores some of the most importance evidence of how ancient people actually read this material.

I especially rely on Carr, Reading the Fractures, since Carr himself attempts to combine diachronic and synchronic methodology.
subsequent centuries. In chapter 5 I interact with some major compositional theories without attempting (for reasons of space) to fully assess the evidence for and against each proposal. Without solving the Pentateuch’s thorny source-critical problems, I will argue that its identity-forming hope—its eschatology—is in fact one of the main forces which contributed to the formation of the Torah. In the cumulative process of combining traditions and shaping cultural memory, hope is itself a “decisive integrating factor.”

1.3.3 Second Hypothesis: Prophetic Eschatology in the Persian Period

If most scholars locate significant redaction of the Pentateuch in the Persian period, most scholars also suggest that Israel’s prophetic corpus was being edited and extended in the same period. In chapter 3, I will review evidence that Judea’s Persian-era population was not very large, and that only a small fraction of this population was (re)writing and (re)reading Hebrew literature in order to construct a Yahwistic identity as Israel. I therefore suggest that Persian-era Judeans who (re)wrote and (re)read Genesis did so in close conversation with other Hebrew literature of the period, including (but certainly not limited to) the emerging prophetic corpus. I will therefore revisit those studies which drive a wedge between Pentateuch and prophecy, and specifically between (theocratic) Pentateuch and eschatological prophecy. I will suggest that the Hebrew literature which survives from the Persian era unsurprisingly shares not only a Yahwistic

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120 See, e.g., Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).


122 See, e.g., Grabbe, “Jewish Historiography.” Throughout, I will mainly relate Genesis to the prophetic corpus (Latter Prophets) rather than to the Prophets (Nebi’im) as a whole; many scholars have explored the relationship between the Pentateuch (especially Deuteronomy) and the Former Prophets (Israel’s canonical history), as well as the relationship between the Former and Latter Prophets.

123 See, e.g., Otto, “Scribal Scholarship.”
identity for Israel, but also an identity-forming expectation for Israel’s future. Even if the relationship between Genesis and prophetic eschatology involves tension, contradiction, or competition, that relationship still sheds light on the usage of Genesis in a time when the prophetic eschatology was itself being preserved and extended. I will especially focus on a set of Persian-era hopes that I call restoration eschatology, whose prophetic expression shares prominent motifs with the narratives of Genesis.

Here I prepare for this whole discussion by explaining what I mean by the word eschatology, an often-disputed term. For the purposes of this study I define eschatology as expectation for 1) a future action of God, 2) depicted in mythic expression, which 3) transforms the community and the world, and 4) resolves broad conflicts such as oppression, sin, or death. The end implied etymologically in eschatology need not mean the end of history (a phrase which is often hard to assess) but the end of Israel’s unfolding story—what Kelly calls the “consummation of the divine purpose.”124 Specific instances of eschatology, in fact, describe this end in various ways: as the end of the nation, of exile, of evil, of death, of the current physical world, and so forth. I am influenced by Henning Graf Reventlow’s search for “a definition [of eschatology] suitable to the Old Testament” and “rooted in the history of exegesis” (rather than of systematic theology) which must therefore speak, not of an “end of the world,” but of 1) divine action, 2) a sudden change in circumstances, and 3) finality.125

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124 Brian Kelly (Retribution and Eschatology, p. 135) distinguishes this “general definition” from Mowinkel’s “specific definition”—eschatology as a non-historical end to the world order. See here Sigmund Mowinkel, Psalmstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwäs und der Ursprung der (Amsterdam: Schippers, 1961 [1920]), esp. pp. 211-324. Petersen (“Eschatology—Old Testament”) speaks of eschatology’s expectation of a “new state of reality,” a suitably ambiguous phrase (in some predictions, he suggests, the exile itself is a negative “new state of reality”).

I have attempted to keep my notion of eschatology flexible; some eschatological passages, for example, may suggest a sudden or discontinuous end, but others may demonstrate both continuity and discontinuity; some degree of finality may coexist with ongoing possibility for change.\footnote{Walter Harrelson, in an interesting little essay entitled “Christian Misreadings of Basic Themes in the Hebrew Scriptures” (Quarterly Review 2.2 [1982]: 58-66), reminds us that eschatology in the Hebrew Bible, no less than eschatology in the New Testament, combines a forward-pointing “not yet” with a proleptic “already.”} In fact, those who think eschatology requires sharp and final discontinuity often locate this discontinuity in the dichotomy between “historical” versus “mythic” change—a dichotomy which only obscures the diverse and interconnected options for construing history, myth, and the future.\footnote{For discussion—including a critique of Hanson for playing “myth” off against “history”—see Lester Grabbe, “Introduction and Overview,” KEFB: 2-43; J. J. M. Roberts, “Myth versus History: Relaying the Comparative Foundations,” CBQ 38 (1976): 1-13. Bill Arnold (“Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalyptic,” in Oxford Handbook of Eschatology, ed. Jerry Walls [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]: 23-39, pp. 23-5) describes OT eschatology as a “trajectory of promises” proceeding from “God’s role in Israel’s history.” Brevard Childs (Myth and Reality in the Old Testament [London: SCM Press, 1960], esp. pp. 65-9, 74-9) can speak both of a prophetic demythologization and of a real blending of “myth” and “history” in the prophetic literature; his work gives a helpful overview of such classic authors as Gunkel (Schopfung und Chaos) and Eichrodt (Theologie des Alten Testaments [5th ed; Gottingen: 1957]. Although James Barr (“The Meaning of ‘Mythology’ in Relation to the Old Testament,” VT 9 [1959]: 1-10) and Roland de Vaux (“Les combats singuliers dans l’Ancien Testament,” Biblica 40 [1959]: 495-508) draw a sharp distinction between Israel’s “historic” worldview and the “mythic” worldviews of surrounding cultures, more recent authors have found in Israel a living myth. Cf. already John Collins, “The ‘Historical Character’ of the Old Testament in Recent Biblical Theology,” CBQ 41 (1979): 185-204; John Day, God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 189; Fishbane, Biblical Myth, pp. 4-7, 19, 56-7; Robert Oden, “Myth and Mythology,” ABD 4: 948-56; and, above all, Batto, Slaying the Dragon. I find puzzling Albertz’s references (History vol. 2, p. 583) to the “anti-mythical tendency” of “official Yahweh religion.”} Moreover, such a dichotomy often ignores the increasing recognition that no Hebrew Bible material, up to and including Daniel, envisions an otherworldly or ahistorical end.\footnote{See, for example, Alice Bellis, “The Changing Face of Babylon in Prophetic/ Apocalyptic Literature: Seventh Century BCE to First Century CE and Beyond,” in KEBF: 65-73, pp. 71-72: biblical “apocalypses are as much rooted in historical reality as the earlier prophetic books are.” See also Lorenzo DiTommaso, “History and Apocalyptic Eschatology: A Reply to J. Y. Jindo,” VT 56.3 (2006): 413-18.} Klaus Koch argues that prophetic eschatology is “an eschatology within history, not an eschatology at history’s end”; human history does not “break off,” although it takes “an essentially new direction, which will be brought about by Yahweh’s creative intervention.”\footnote{Klaus Koch (The Prophets [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], p. 199). I am struck by the insight of Stephen Dray (“The Land: A Forgotten Element in Biblical Hope,” Evangel 2.1 (1984):2-4, p. 3): “the prophetic expectation . . .}
the other side, when Yair Hoffman includes in his definition of eschatology the words “miraculous” and “supernatural” (words that do not translate well into Hebrew), his subsequent exegesis repeatedly bumps up against the impossibility of determining whether any prophetic passage is “literal” (hence miraculous?) or “metaphorical” (and thus the metaphor’s real referent is non-miraculous?).

Maintaining a modern Western distinction between natural and supernatural may seriously distort the prophetic viewpoint on sociohistorical events; hence every “non-supernatural” event becomes a “usual, natural future phenomenon.” In my view, prophetic literature describes future events in mythic language precisely in order to deny that such events are “usual” or “natural”; Judah’s Babylonian destruction is the same kind of event as a world-destroying flood, and its Persian restoration is the same kind of event as the legendary parting of the Red Sea. Admittedly, as scholars “we can identify the hopes of the prophet in realistic historic terms . . . even though they are conceived in mythological terms.” But in doing so “we” are imposing our own viewpoints, rather than noticing the close ties that our sources make between

remains stubbornly ‘this-worldly’ even if it necessitates a dramatic event of cosmic renewal”—precisely because that hope is oriented toward the land of Israel.


131 Hoffman, “Eschatology,” p. 78. Moreover, I confess myself perplexed by Hoffman’s confident assertion (p. 91) that a passage which seems eschatological (Jer 31:31-6) uses mythic language as “rhetoric rather than conceptual assertion.” One may reference here Job Jindo (“On Myth and History in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology,” VT 55.3 [2005]: 412-15) who documents the pervasive presence of mythic language in the prophetic literature, but then claims that this language is only a “form of expression”; only apocalyptic has “mythic thought.” What evidence do we have about ancient “thought” except the forms of expression in which it comes to us?

the historic and the mythic or heavenly, the literal and the metaphoric.\textsuperscript{133} Given such difficulties, I judge it best to evaluate the evidence on its own terms, using the word \textit{eschatology} rather loosely for a wide variety of future-expectations. I do believe that it is helpful to notice what these expectations have in common; metaphorical or not, they tend to use mythic language of the coming transformation, treating it \textit{as though} the divine sphere were breaking in from beyond history.

This is true whether or not these events are also political-historical.\textsuperscript{134} I find it telling that passages about specific moments in history (the Cyrus poetry predicting the fall of Babylon, the Haggai and Zechariah oracles anticipating a Davidic restoration under Zerubbabel, and even the possible reference in Zechariah 9 to Alexander’s approach) \textit{seem} to be describing a more dramatic future change. Even if one can distinguish here the original oracle from the editorial addition,\textsuperscript{135} surely the evidence suggests that those (re)reading and (re)writing such oracles viewed their \textit{specific} hopes (from the latest historical crisis) as only one expression of a \textit{generalized} expectation for dramatic transformation. In general, then, it is nearly impossible to distinguish the supernatural from the natural. It is much easier to instead show that a given oracle

\textsuperscript{133}Grabbe, “Introduction and Overview,” p. 17. Perhaps ancient writers and readers did not themselves know what they hoped for; they might expect (ahead of time) a literal upheaval in the heavens and still be able to assert (after the fact) that the predicted signs had occurred in the rise and fall of nations. In the midst of such interpretation and re-interpretation, it is hard to know how much transformation of meaning is occurring—and whether to assess this transformation as persuasive or forced. I am not impressed by the attempt to sweep aside these after-the-fact interpretations under the slightly condescending rubric “cognitive dissonance”; see Dale Allison, “Jesus and the Victory of Apocalyptic,” in \textit{Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God}, ed. Carey Newman (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity, 1999): 126-41.

\textsuperscript{134}See here Neujahr’s complaint (“Royal Ideology”) that prophetic eschatology cannot simply refer to any future events; he thus rejects Hanson’s category of “prophetic eschatology,” e.g., of Zechariah 1-8 (see Hanson, \textit{Dawn}, p. 11). But Hanson has shown that Zechariah reveals “divine plans for Israel and the world . . . unfolding in the divine council”; this is a mythic image with cosmic significance, \textit{even if} Hanson himself translates Zechariah’s message into “plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality.”

\textsuperscript{135}See here especially the works of Albertz, including “The Thwarted Restoration” and (on Zechariah 9) \textit{History}, Vol. 2, pp. 567-8. Hoffman (“Eschatology,” pp. 81-3), comparing the LXX of Jer 25:15-33 with the extant Hebrew texts, argues that a later editing process has re-written the original prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar’s conquests in Jer 25:15-33 into a more “mysterious” destruction of all nations.
has cosmic (rather than merely local) significance, or that it uses mythic (rather than merely everyday) portrayals of the future, or that it brings a final (rather than partial) resolution. I will make the case that cosmic, mythic, final resolutions do cohere conceptually in Persian-era prophetic (re)writings in a way that is recognizable as eschatology—and that Genesis itself invokes those cosmic, mythic, final resolutions in the ways that it has put together the story of Israel’s and the world’s origins.

1.3.4 Ending at the Beginning: Previewing My Argument

To summarize and simultaneously anticipate: I am arguing that Genesis is indeed eschatological, holding out a hope for divine transformation without which its story of Israel’s beginnings (and the world’s) remains incomplete. I will pursue this argument not only by exploring possible future-oriented passages within Genesis, but also by exploring Genesis’ dynamic meaning, its sociohistorical setting in Persian-era Judea, and its interaction with Persian-era prophetic eschatology.

In this chapter, I have begun my argument with a brief review of scholarship, some methodological reflections from the fields of semiotics and linguistics, and a brief discussion of two working hypotheses which lie behind my study. Many of these considerations, including my semiotic-linguistic reflections, will remain in the background for the rest of the book. They remain apparent in the way I will repeatedly talk about users and plausible audiences, rewriters and rereaders, of Genesis—reconstructed by a combination of literary-rhetorical and diachronic-historical investigation.

In chapter two I will lay out Genesis’ modes of temporal orientation with an eye to literary clues that the text is speaking to the situations of Genesis’ plausible historical audiences. In other words, I will examine possible ways that Genesis may extend its inner-textual timeframe
into the extra-textual timeframe of its actual users. Part of this discussion will involve some suggested genre categories (etiology, myth, and scripture), precisely because genre conventions help guide Genesis’ audiences to appropriate the book’s temporal orientation. I will suggest that several of Genesis’ literary characteristics seem to orient its users to their own past, present, and future. Ultimately, this orientation results in strong ongoing expectations.

In chapter three I give a historical overview of Judea in the Persian period, with particular attention to Judeans’ usage of the Pentateuch and other Hebrew literature. Here I emphasize the historical and archaeological picture of a small, mainly rural province, with strong but ambiguous ties to the powerful Persian Empire. I also describe the slowly-developing urban and administrative center at Jerusalem, where the rebuilt temple helped sustain important cultural traditions—in part by preserving and extending a variegated Hebrew literature. I suggest, however, that these Hebrew writings seem designed to bring together a variety of Judean groups and viewpoints (not only priestly interests) in an attempt to form a united Israelite identity, one which reaches out to diaspora-Judeans and to Samarian heirs of the northern tribes as well. I conclude by defending the close connection of the Pentateuch and the prophetic corpus in Persian-era usage.

Chapter four reviews the development of Persian-era prophetic restoration eschatology, and then outlines some of the most prominent shared motifs between this prophetic eschatology and the book of Genesis. I argue that intertextual connections, whether or not they indicate direct literary influence, suggest how Persian-era audiences could have used Genesis and the prophetic books together. Since most of the references to Genesis material in the prophetic corpus occur precisely in the context of restoration eschatology, these references can help guide a plausible eschatological reading of Genesis by its Persian-era (re)readers and (re)writers.
In chapter 5 I most intentionally explore the dynamic nature of Genesis’ meaning. I approach this dynamism in three stages: dynamic production, dynamic rereading, and dynamic reception. In the first category I suggest some major compositional theories about Genesis’ production, noting how the rewriting of Genesis over time has contributed to its unfolding eschatological meaning. In the second category I give some examples of how sustained interaction with Genesis’ text (rereading and reflection) tends toward a more future-oriented understanding than might be apparent from a single reading. This is true both for narrative episodes (e.g., Genesis 2-3) and for specific verses (e.g., Genesis 50:20). In the third category I gather evidence from post-Persian texts, such as Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon, and show how these retellings witness an early tradition of understanding Genesis eschatologically.

Chapter six provides a literary profile of Genesis’ eschatology. I examine narrative patterning which indicates a sustained promise-oriented conception of the future. I also explore in depth an opening poem (3:14-19) and closing poem (49:1-28) of Genesis, finding in each a guide to the eschatological future. It is here that I will review and summarize Genesis’ overall eschatological ethic, a reading strategy based on trust in the promises of Yhwh whose fulfillment still remains very much in the future.

My epilogue briefly presents some questions for further analysis—questions about the ongoing usage of Genesis in light of its eschatological ethic. Perhaps these topics will suggest future areas for study, in connecting Genesis’ Persian-era eschatology with various communities’ ongoing expectations and theological concerns.
2. Future Orientation in Genesis

2.1 Bridging Story-World Time and Users’ Time

2.1.1 The Importance of User-World Cues

A visitor to the Smithsonian enters the building and immediately confronts a large, colorful museum map. The map’s bright images and descriptive phrases vie for the map-user’s attention. Some sections of the map (especially the dramatically-portrayed dinosaur exhibit) may excite emotions. Some aspects of the map (not least the symmetrical design of the entire building) may engage the intellect. If the museum visitor happens to be a postmodernist, she may even devote attention to what the map doesn’t show. But sooner or later, the map-user will likely focus on a single icon, neither the most emotionally exciting nor the most intellectually stimulating, but possibly the most useful in guiding this tourist’s use of the map and all it contains: the small arrow labeled You Are Here.

In this chapter I examine the literary-rhetorical function of Genesis, asking how it orients users toward their own future. How did Genesis’ (re)writers and (re)readers attempt to bridge between the text-internal story world and the text-external user-world? One might approach such a question from any number of angles—for example, historical hypotheses about Genesis’ setting or (alternatively) literary analyses of its thematic structure. While I will later pursue both of these strategies, I find it useful to begin my inquiry by examining Genesis’ most explicit temporal cues—those moments when the text most clearly breaks off from narrating the story world and alerts the audience, You Are Here. I am following Mikhail Bakhtin’s advice to approach a work of literature (and, especially, its impact upon users, its means of relating “actual and fictional
worlds") through that works’ presentation of space and time ("chronotope"). Thus I begin in this section by tracing some of Genesis’ most explicit and prominent temporal cues, tracing their spatial and (especially) temporal connections with the world of Genesis’ audience, in order to prepare for a longer discussion of Genesis’ genre and overall temporal orientation.

In linguistic-semiotic terms, the cues I discuss here are called *indexical*, i.e., they point the user from the text toward something in the user’s own world. Thus they provide crucial guidance in constructing an *interpretant*—the effect of the text on users’ subsequent identity, cognition, and behavior (see my section 1.2.3). Ellen van Wolde calls Genesis’ indexical markers “readerly world cues” because their reference is not text-internal but gestures toward a world of readers or audiences projected by the story. Audiences will follow such cues to guide their understanding, not just of the narrated events, but also of their own experience. Such indexical clues also provide the most explicit traces of the temporal orientation of the producers of Genesis—writers and editors, no less than audiences, sought to connect their usage of Genesis (in their case, composition and redaction) with the world of their experience. If van Wolde’s “readerly world cues” are also *writerly* world cues (*You Are Here* signs capture the map-writer’s intent even as they guide the map-reader’s interest) perhaps one should call them *user-world cues*. All sorts of users (re)wrote and (re)read Genesis in ways that oriented them to their own experiential world, bridging story-world time and user-world time. Genesis’ user-world cues provide important hints at this indexical function.

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2.1.2 From Narrative Time to Narrator’s Time to Users’ Time

Genesis’ most explicit and prominent user-world cues occur where the narrator of Genesis interrupts the past-tense narrative in order to speak of conditions that continue to this day (to this day, 26:33; 32:33[32 in English]; 47:26) or to today (to today, in Gen 19:37, 38; 35:20; simply today, seems to have the same sense in Gen 22:14). Admittedly, in Genesis can also refer to a past (narrative) day, often with the word (7:11, 13; 17:23, 26; 39:11), but the addition of the preposition gives it a contemporizing force. In a classic study, Brevard Childs examines this phrase throughout the Hebrew Bible (MT), where it occurs 84 times; he concludes that in direct speech it “marks a terminus from the point of view of the speaker,” and that outside of direct discourse it is at least quasi-etiological, applying the contemporizing force (e.g., of a naming-formula) from the point of view of the narrator who is now the speaker.

The three times Genesis uses the full phrase, it occurs in close proximity with the explanatory phrase (therefore; see 26:33, 32:33[32], and 47:22). Together, these two attention-getting discourse markers interrupt (or conclude) the events being narrated and reflect on the ongoing consequences of those events. Genesis usually uses in direct discourse (see

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3 Note that in 48:15 this contemporizing force applies to the “contemporary” moment when Jacob speaks the phrase. See next note.

4 Brevard Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until This Day,’” JBL 82.2 (1963): 279-92. Childs’ distinction between seeming etiology and “genuine etiology” is, in this article, a historical point about whether the this day phrase was a “focal point about which the traditions cluster” (p. 289). Childs notes, contra Gunkel, Alt, and Noth, that this day has often been added later, and thus provides little historical data about the Sitz im Leben of the preliterary tradition. Yet even when used for other reasons (e.g., as a “confirmation” that a received tradition remains valid in the redactor’s day; see pp. 289-92) the phrase still contemporizes, and still draws attention to the way the story world correlates with the narratorial present. It is in this larger sense that I will call all such material “etiological”—a category which I explore at greater length in section 2.2.2.
Gen 19:8; 20:6; 33:10; 38:26; and 42:2) or in naming formulae (discussed further below); the five other occurrences (Gen 2:24; 10:9; 26:33; 32:33[32]; 47:22) all direct attention away from narrated events to the narratorial present (three, for example, signal a change from vav-relative imperfects to imperfects; see Gen 2:24; 10:9; 32:33[32]).

5 I suggest, then, that therefore and to this day draw attention to two separate temporal horizons, the story world past and the narrator’s present. The passages in which they occur establish an etiological relationship between narrative time and narrating time (the timeframe in which the narrator addresses the projected audience). The story-world narrative is told as though its purpose were to establish, explain, or orient conditions that continue up to the narrating present. So, for example, 2:24 does not seem to refer to marriage practices within the story timeframe, since Adam and Eve do not have parents to leave. Similarly, 32:33[32] references the ongoing dietary practices of Israelites in the narrator’s time, not of Jacob’s story-world family. Even more clearly, 26:33 explicitly notes that Shibah the well is not yet Beersheba the city. Obviously, Genesis keeps this day and the timeframe of its characters’ actions distinct, two separate temporal horizons.

These two temporal horizons meet, however, in the underlying continuity of developing history. The narrator’s time still contains the same pillar (35:20), the same place names (22:14), the same Egyptian statute (47:26), and the same proverbial sayings (22:14) that were established

5 Although grammarians differ in their analysis of the form I call vav-relative imperfect (historically a relic of the preterite), for a user-based analysis it is enough to recognize that this form predictably signals completed action (ancient translators consistently render it with a Greek aorist) and indeed past-time narration; meanwhile, imperfects without the vav generally signal uncompleted action.

6 I set aside the quasi-allegorical suggestion that leaving father and mother corresponds to the disobedience/expulsion from God’s presence as a necessary prerequisite to human maturity and procreation. See van Wolde, Semiotic Analysis, pp. 216-19; idem, “Facing the Earth: Primaeval History in a New Perspective.” in The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives, ed. Philip Davies and David Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 22-47. Such readings seem to ignore the connections between Gen 2:24 and other etiological summaries within Genesis, and thus are subject to Umberto Eco’s critique (Interpretation and Overinterpretation [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 65) of “hermetic” readings insufficiently controlled by the “internal textual coherence” of a literary work.
in story time. In fact, Genesis may distinguish between narrative story-time and narrator’s story-telling time primarily in order to emphasize how the first leads into the second. Instructive here is Genesis’ use of אָז, at that time, in 4:26. Rather than referring to conditions that are over and done, this verse tells how an ongoing practice (invoking Yhwh) first began. Genesis similarly narrates how various other activities began (root חלל), all of which continue in the narrator’s time: the multiplication of humanity (6:1), viniculture (9:1), and the military arts (10:8).

Other temporal markers also call attention to conditions which begin in Genesis’ own narrative but will persist continuously. So for example עוֹלָם (forever), a word denoting temporal extension into past or future, functions to deny any temporal end to God’s promise and (especially) covenant. Even a simple phrase like דַּי נַפְרוֹ (no longer or never again) references a permanent change in conditions, one that implicitly continues up to the narrator’s time. The point of this story, it seems, is not simply to tell how things once were. Nor, as Childs warns, does the story exist simply to tell why things are as they now are. Rather, Genesis’ temporal horizons impact one another, the past explaining the present and the present confirming the story about the

7 The word אָז occurs outside direct discourse (cf. 24:41; 49:4) only twice more (12:6; 13:7), each time to inform the audience that the Canaanites (and Perizzites) were at that time in the land. Genesis’ readers have long noticed that such a narratorial aside seems to imply that for Genesis’ author/ redactor, these peoples no longer occupy the land. Yet even these phrases do not just describe the past’s uniqueness; they also launch a progression from story-time to narrating-time, a process by which Israel comes to displace the Canaanites.


9 In 8:21, 9:11, and 9:15 the change is in God’s response to human evil, promising to never again flood the earth; in 17:5, 32:29, and 35:10 the change is in a character’s name, who will henceforth be known by the new name. Laurence Turner (Announcements of Plot in Genesis [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990], pp. 40-41) discusses this construction (with references), noting situations in which it means never again versus no longer.

10 Childs, “A Study of the Formula.”
past. From both directions, Genesis tightly binds the world of the story with the (much later) world which the narrator directly addresses.

Significantly, however, Genesis does not bring the story all the way down to the this day in which the narrator speaks. Its refusal to specify when the narrator is speaking raises the question: when is “this day”? Admittedly, various editors might have intended different answers to this question, but one may still ask what the audience of Genesis as a whole will make of this repeated phrase—and of the whole question of the timeframe that the narrator is addressing.

In literary terms, the implied narrating time is of course a fictive construct, but in Genesis this fictive construct is too underdetermined to give a satisfying text-internal description of this day. Meanwhile, a purely historical reading may identify this day as one or more moments in Genesis’ composition, pieced together from various clues. But in the process of proposing historical scenarios, such readings may perhaps miss the impact of this day language on Genesis’ audiences. In my judgment, Genesis’ composers and editors say so little about the narratorial timeframe precisely in order to avoid being trapped into a single fixed moment. By evoking extra-textual reality with a light touch, Genesis allows the audience to fill in the specific characteristics of this day not from historical clues but from their own changing contexts. An open-ended, underdetermined temporal horizon places both narrator and addressee in the timeframe of Genesis’ latest audience, whenever that might be.

In all probability, the phrase this day has the effect of alluding to the ongoing time of all Genesis’ actual audiences. The word this is, after all, inherently deictic, defining its object by pointing rather than by specifying characteristics. Such a strategy asks the reader to look around (literally or conceptually): what is being pointed at? Moreover, readers receive a story’s material in roughly the same temporal sequence and pacing which the narrator chooses to give it; thus the
literary construct of narrator-time has a real affinity with the extraliterary necessities of reading. For this reason, shifting attention from the narrated timeframe (of story-world events) to the narrating timeframe (of narratorial speaking) gestures toward the timeframe of the audience’s timeframe (of reading/hearing). In short, narratorial asides are one (not the only) natural place to look for a text’s address to real-world audiences. Genesis’ unelaborated this day gestures toward a world which need not be, indeed cannot be, described—the open-ended and ongoing world of successive audiences.

Genesis’ this day passages project, not just any audience, but an audience that observes (or is called to observe) specific practices. One may even suggest that the composers of Genesis, who were themselves preserving earlier traditions, construed themselves (no less than their readers) as people addressed by this material—that is, called to be the sort of audience that would find these stories applicable. Some of these practices are common to all humans, such as marriage (2:24); others are more distinctive, such as circumcision (chapter 17) or dietary customs (32:33[32]). When Genesis portrays this day as descended from story-world characters and events, the users’ own identity (composers’ no less than readers’) becomes a consequence of mythological and etiological origins. In Genesis the story constitutes the audience, at least as much as the audience constitutes the story. As a result, Genesis’ orienting strategy does not completely depend on identifying a single time period for writers or readers, but rather presumes continuity between the story-world timeframe and ongoing generations who use this text. I hasten to add that what I am calling Genesis’ orienting strategy (its likely impact upon the audience its

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stories project) must be tested against Genesis’ historically situated contexts of usage (its actual impact upon the audiences who used it). In my next chapter I examine one such historical context, finding that (re)writers and (re)readers did indeed use Genesis in order to describe their own ongoing identity, locating themselves as the ostensive addressees of this particular narrator. The user-world cues I have been tracing may provide, then, a small window into Genesis’ larger project of orienting its audience’s “world beyond the story.”

Finally, before turning to a discussion of genre, I wish to point out one final indexical strategy which helps cement the bond between the world of the text and the actual world of its early users: proper names that refer simultaneously to textual characters/places and to extratextual peoples/places. The reference to this day in 32:33 explicitly reminds the audience that Israel is both a man (Jacob renamed) and a nation, and that בְּנֵיִשְׂרָאֵל (see also 42:5; 45:21; 46:5, 8; 50:25) refers both to Israel’s (Jacob’s) children within Genesis and to the Israelites using Genesis. When Genesis 48:20 says that a blessing will be invoked by a people called Israel, it reminds the users that they are Israel—or, perhaps, attempts to constitute them as Israel. When 49:28 refers to the preceding predictive poem as a fitting blessing for the twelve tribes of Israel, it transparently signals the story’s concern to use Jacob’s 12 sons (narrated characters) to orient an ongoing, user-world awareness of (or expectation of) a 12-tribe Israel. All proper nouns are indexical (pointing toward, rather than describing, a person or place), but Genesis’ names

\[13\] Hugh White, Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 103. White thinks this is accomplished primarily through an “extraordinary recursive movement” driven by divine address, received simultaneously by characters and by the actual authors and readers. See my section 2.2.4.

\[14\] Note here Genesis’ usage of the naming formula נקכ, therefore [one] named, which seems to indicate the ongoing result of the naming, therefore X was called or even therefore X is called. See translations and commentaries on Gen 11:9; 16:14; 19:22; 21:31; 25:30; 29:34; 31:48; 33:17; 50:11; by contrast, נקכ in 29:35 and 30:6 narrate the past event in which therefore she [the mother] named.

\[15\] See also Gen 34:7, where the phrase “outrage in Israel” evokes the user-world people Israel, not the narrative-world character Israel; compare Deut 22:21; Josh 7:15; Judg 19:23-24; 20:6, 10.
often contain complex layers of indexicality, with three different levels of reference: textual Israel, traditional or cultural memory of Israel, and ongoing experience of present-day Israel.\textsuperscript{16} Genesis’ \textit{this day} formulae direct users to conflate these three horizons, suggesting that Ammonites and Moabites (19:37-8), Egypt and Pharaoh (47:26), belong simultaneously to text \textit{and} traditional memory \textit{and} ongoing experience.

\subsection*{2.2 Genre as a Guide to Genesis’ Temporal Orientation}

\subsubsection*{2.2.1 Introduction}

So far, I have traced a few of Genesis’ explicit user-world cues and found hints that Genesis’ impact on its plausible users includes a sense of continuity between story world and user-world; conditions that exist \textit{this day} are \textit{descended} from conditions that pertained \textit{back then}. I also noticed that Genesis’ proper names may refer to the textually described character, place, or group while simultaneously suggesting an extra-textual awareness (cultural memory \textit{and/or} ongoing experience) of that character, place, or group. Together, these two sorts of user-world cue point to one of Genesis’ most prominent overarching literary strategies: eponymy, which merges the textually-described ancestor with the ongoing group of present experience. Rhetorically, all audiences tend to link textual characters with extra-textual people who share

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Cf. John Foley (\textit{Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic} [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]) on “traditional referentiality” and the audience’s “encyclopedia of reference” as key dynamics in the construction and reception of traditional (especially oral) epics. See also Marc Brettler, “Memory in Ancient Israel” in \textit{Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism}, ed. Michael Signer (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001): 1-17. The extent of readers’ extratextual familiarity with the people and places named in Genesis doubtless varied according to the time and place where the text was used.
\item \textsuperscript{17} The same three-fold reference applies to textual Bethel, Egypt, Philistines, and other proper names; traditional memory of those places or peoples; and ongoing experience of them.
\end{itemize}
some of the same characteristics (Cain represents all murderers, and Ham all disrespectful children). But eponymy canalizes a much closer rhetorical link between eponymous characters and particular communities of users. The literary convention of eponymy, then, is a guide to Genesis’ genre; it belongs to a category of texts which orient users to their own identity and relationships, through the use of traditional stories.

Genre, at least in the linguistic semiotic tradition, refers to reading protocols that are closely tied to a text’s chronotope (narrative space-time).18 A text’s genre suggests a global reading strategy which impacts its temporal orientation. Such reading strategies, of course, depend on the reading situation as well as the words on the page, the pragmatic effects as well as the rhetorical structures; thus a full account of Genesis’ genre would require more knowledge than we possess about the reading protocols of ancient users (see my section 1.2.1, and my attempts to discuss Genesis’ ancient contexts of usage in chapter 3). But this chapter’s initial survey of Genesis’ future orientation requires some discussion of Genesis’ possible genre, based on rhetorical indicators.

I will not attempt to determine a single genre classification, but rather calls attention to several related ways of construing Genesis’ overall orienting strategy—its genre. My three broad proposals (etiology, myth, and scripture) are meant to be suggestive, and I hope none is particularly controversial. Any work dominated by eponymy, with explicit scattered this day formulae, is at least in some sense an etiology. Any work which discusses primordial time, divine character(s), and cosmic destruction (see Gen 6-8; 19) is at least in some sense a myth. And any work which so clearly guides a community through divine address, with special interest in the community’s relationship with and response to its deity, is at least in some sense scripture.

2.2.2 Etiology

Much has been written about etiology in Genesis, exploring the origins of the stories and their possible relationship to etiological traditions that grow up (usually in oral form) around specific places or customs.\(^1\) Here I simply bypass this whole discussion, addressing instead the way that Genesis as a whole (perhaps through secondary editorial additions) functions as an etiology, explaining the world in which the audience lives. Already in section 2.1, I have noted Genesis’ most explicitly etiological-sounding language (to this day and, in a narratorial conclusion of an episode, therefore). In my sections 2.3 and 2.4 I will trace possibly etiological language (especially in the conclusions of episodes) throughout the book of Genesis. Some examples are more clearly etiological than others, but I argue that Genesis’ prominent etiological language (especially near the beginning) serves to prompt its audience to read etiologically even when the text lacks any explicit etiological markers. It is because readers have been alerted to an ongoing correspondence between the narrated past and the ongoing this day that they will read a story like Genesis 19:24-26 (Lot’s wife transformed into a pillar of salt) etiologically—perhaps in terms of the ongoing reality of salt formations around the Dead Sea (see Wisd Sol 10:6-8).

Genesis’ comprehensive etiological genre, in other words, guides users to expect the story world and the user-world to mutually interpret one another.

It is important to note here that the ancient Near Eastern literary tradition of etiology goes beyond just-so stories explaining random curiosities. Etiology can be a subtle ideological tool for

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\(^1\) See Childs, “A Study of the Formula”; idem, “The Etiological Tale Re-examined,” VT 24.4 (1974): 387-97. In the latter work, he notes the tendency of etiology to throw interest on “the end of the narrative,” the ongoing results which are assumed, even if there is no mythological explanation for current reality (a technical sense of etiology which Childs thinks seldom applies to the Hebrew Bible). Burke Long (The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968], pp. 56, 87) agrees that Genesis etiologies are seldom “a focal point for extensive tradition” and need not serve the oral legitimizing functions assumed in (e.g.) Friedmann Golka, “Aetiologies in the Old Testament” parts 1 and 2, VT 26.4 (1976): 410-28 and VT 27.1 (1977): 36-47.

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organizing highly contested social realities. So it is unsurprising that Genesis 1-11 presses etiologies of commonplace realities like crawling snakes or rainbows into the service of a meta-etiolo-
ylogy of humanity’s struggle with the natural world (3:14-18) or God’s forbearance toward straying humans (9:12-17). Genesis as a whole portrays Israelites’ family relations, Yhwh-worship, and food laws as the inevitable consequences of their mythic beginnings—as natural as land and water, day and night. But although these are presented as typical, one cannot assume that they were uncontroversial elements of the audience’s everyday world. Etiologies can be creative, inviting readers into a new way of seeing their newly storied world.

The Eden story, for example, does describe commonplace elements of ancient life (farming is toilsome and childbirth perilous). But as I will argue at greater length in chapters 5 and 6, this is only part of a larger invitation to conceive of humanity’s state as one of exile from a primordial garden (viewed as a sacred source of life). Users will recognize and identify with the deep but troubled relations that emerge between humans, God, and the land. Similarly, the ancestral narratives and their naming-formulae do describe commonplace facts about Israel’s geography—its wells and its towns, its tribes and its neighbors. But this is only part of a larger invitation to conceive of Israel’s land as simultaneous gift and promise, spotted with concrete reminders of a promising God and of Israel’s distinctiveness from its neighbors. Genesis’ etiologies have, in fact, a double significance. Read from a vantage where nations are irrevocably scattered, the Babel story merely explains current affairs; but read from within a hegemonic

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21 This assumption is implicit when Gordon Wenham (Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002], pp. 28 and 32) relates Genesis etiology to “experiences of the typical Palestinian peasant.” He cites Carol Meyers, Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). As I will discuss in chapter 3, Israelite family relations (especially between north and south), food laws, and even Yhwh-worship were deeply controversial in the world of its Persian-era users.
empire that attempts to curtail cultural and linguistic diversity, the Babel story has much to say about the future of imperial pride. The promise not to destroy the earth (8:21-22, 9:8-17) is only a truism—unless such destruction seems imminent. The assurance of seed (e.g., 15:5) takes on new meaning when a community becomes all too aware that its generation may be the last.

In other words, etiology has the latent potential to break out as a promise. The stability of creation “promises that disintegration will not have the last word.” The temporal ordering of creation (climaxing in Sabbath) assures that times and seasons will be maintained, or (if now suspended) will be restored (see Daniel 7:25). Etiology is therefore not just about the way that the past connects with the present, but also about the way that past moves through the present to the future; not just about what is, but also about what ought to be. Even if at one stage in their prehistory the etiologies of Genesis explained or legitimated a particular present, they have been compositionally reshaped to point “beyond the narrative world.” Throughout Genesis, etiology is prescriptive, naturalizing a specific ideological stance, a specific way of being that merges theology, identity, ethics—and hope.

2.2.3 Myth: Narrative of Orientation, Family Story, and Utopia

2.2.3.1 Myth as Narrative of Orientation

From its very first line (“In the beginning God created”), Genesis evokes a storytelling tradition with shared conventions and stereotyped content (see, e.g., Genesis’ much-discussed

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connections to the Enuma Elish, Atrahasis, or the Epic of Gilgamesh). While this storytelling convention has many names, perhaps the most common is myth. Thus, calling attention to Genesis’ mythic nature not only helps describe Genesis itself, but also helps to situate Genesis among the literatures of surrounding cultures—as well as highlighting correspondences to mythic material elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

Unfortunately, the meaning of myth is fiercely disputed. Some commentators identify specific episodes of Genesis as myth (e.g., Gen 6:1-2, or—outside the first eleven chapters—19:24-26), others apply the genre to Genesis 1-11 as a whole, while still others are comfortable treating the ancestral narratives as national-origin myth which proceeds rather seamlessly from cosmogonic myth (already in 9:25-11:26 the shift from creation/flood to people-origins is firmly on its way). Barr attempts to cut the Gordian knot by describing myth as “the sort of thing we find at Ugarit,” but even the major Ugaritic narrative poems show quite a range, from stories about gods (the Baal cycle) to royal legends (Keret) to hero stories (Aqat). Genre tends to be fluid, and I see little evidence that either Ugarit or Israel made sharp distinctions between myth, saga, epic, and the like. Genesis’ discourse may shift from 1-11 to 12-50, but it is unclear that the mythic ceases at chapter 12; both sets of stories similarly describe divine conversations, visitations, and destructions. Attempting to parse the mythic from the non-mythic on the basis of


25 David Clines (The Theme of the Pentateuch [Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978], p. 77) notes interpreters’ difficulty deciding where the primeval history ends; see the ambivalence of Gerhard von Rad (Genesis: A Commentary [tran. J. H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], pp. 152, 154, and 161-2).

26 Cited in Fishbane, Biblical Myth, p. 25.
“realistic” or “historical” elements only raises a variety of perplexing worldview questions (e.g.,
the question of what counts as realistic/historical, and how one distinguishes natural from
supernatural).\footnote{See discussion in Lester Grabbe and Robert Haak, eds., \textit{KEFB} (London: T&T Clark, 2003).} It has often been noted that ancient users of Genesis may have answered such
questions in ways that are hard for modern interpreters to appreciate. It has been less often noted
that people in every age, including our own, do not necessarily have clear or uniform answers to
such questions.

One characteristic of myth, perhaps a defining one, is that whatever its content, the main
purpose of the story seems less a matter of \textit{reference} than of \textit{orientation}. Primordial beginnings,
transcendent realms, spirit beings, and other mythic elements seem to resist any straightforward
answer to the question of reference—of whether the events literally occurred, and how one would
know if they did. Audiences who read Genesis as straightforward description run into intractable
problems (whom did Seth marry, and who built the cities among which Cain wandered?). The
ease with which mythic stories were borrowed, combined, and transformed in the ancient Near
East may suggest that the referential function of such language was secondary.\footnote{Batto, \textit{Slaying the Dragon}; Oden, “Myth”; Ricouer, “Guilt”; Rogerson, \textit{Myth}.} Precisely
because mythic characters, places, and events cannot be easily located in the observable world,
they can function as open-ended orienters for exploring larger questions about reality. (See, e.g.,
Roland Barthes’ witty observation that “Jacob is . . . a ‘morpheme’ . . . Israel’s election is the
“messages” but as orienting “codes”—“not records of particular events, but schemas for organizing messages.”})
Once myth is defined in this way, the connection between Genesis 1-11 and the rest of
the book (and Pentateuch) becomes clearer. Stories of national origin are in this sense just as
mythic as cosmogonies; they also allow for borrowing, combination, and transformation,
precisely because they are less about referential information than about the ongoing orientation
toward reality which they provide. It is in this sense that the promise to Abraham (like the exodus
itself) functions as national myth, and does so regardless of one’s stance on the historical
accuracy of the account.\textsuperscript{30} Such traditions are often expressed in the \textit{register} of myth, or
combined with more traditional mythic topics\textsuperscript{31}—just as the ancestral promise motif has now
been so seamlessly joined to the traditional mythic stories of cosmogony and flood. Martin Buss
describes Genesis as “narratives of orientation,” and this seems to me to capture the essence of
this genre.\textsuperscript{32}

If myth is narrative of orientation, one crucial question is how the mythic chronotope
(narrative space-time) connects to the timeframe of those who are being oriented. When Bakhtin
describes a special epic chronotope of “absolute past of national beginning” (a description that on
the surface seems apropos of Genesis) he thinks of this past as completely static, with no sense of
progression between story-world past and readerly present.\textsuperscript{33} Bakhtin’s main area of
interpretation is the novel, not the epic, but his suggestion is not too far from some thin readings

\textsuperscript{30} Judah Goldin (\textit{The Song at the Sea} [New Haven: Yale, 1971], p. 13) argues that this is the perspective of
the Shita: “no reader of the Shita’s ten chapters can fail to recognize that what is astir in the minds of the tannaitic
savants is not only—one may dare to say, not mainly—the event in ancient history, but also the immediate
and poignant reflections produced by the historical reminiscence, itself recurrently revived in their, the Sages’, times.”

\textsuperscript{31} Discussed at length in Batto, \textit{Slaying the Dragon}.

\textsuperscript{32} Martin Buss, “Dialogue,” \textit{Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies}, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL,

\textsuperscript{33} Bakhtin, \textit{Dialogic Imagination}, p. 182. Compare Simon Parker’s argument (\textit{The Pre-Biblical Narrative
Tradition: Essays on the Ugaritic Poems Keret and Aqhat} [Atlanta: Scholars, 1989], pp. 55-6) that the Ugaritic epic
\textit{Keret} (one of the closer ancient parallels to Genesis) occurs in “time as experienced by ordinary people (as distinct
from some cyclical mythic time or magically suspendible or reversible time), but not at any defined point in the
community’s awareness of its past.”
of myth as *unchanging* legitimization of a single, static present.\(^{34}\) While some individual stories (especially in Gen 1-11) may have encouraged such a view at some point in their (pre-) history, their current presentation within the compositional whole of Genesis is anything but static. Genesis 1-11 confronts its users as a *progression* of stories and genealogies, each “descended” (*toledot*) from the one before, leading into subsequent times. I have already described how the progression between mythic past and ongoing present is one of the main orienting strategies of Genesis; it strongly suggests that the users are still part of the same narrative sequence, and thus are still progressing toward an ending that matches their mythic beginnings.\(^{35}\)

### 2.2.3.2 Myth as Orienting Family Story

Defining myth broadly as *narratives of orientation* may also illuminate other proposals for talking about Genesis’ genre, without leaving behind the traditional perception of Genesis as myth. Amanda Mbuvi, for example, proposes reading Genesis not as myth but as *family stories*. This proposal seems very helpful in describing some types of Genesis material (marriages, births, sibling rivalries, family survival) that span the entire book; even the cosmogony and the flood have been subtly recast to emphasize family.\(^{36}\) It also may help call attention to some of the overarching themes of Genesis, from descent/generation (seed, fruitfulness, and *toledot*) to

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\(^{34}\) Seth Kunin (*The Logic of Incest* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], pp. 19-48) discusses whether myth must be static, as some structuralists have maintained.


ecological survival and prosperity (for the world, but especially for specific lineages and families). I will explore such themes further in later chapters, especially chapter 6. For now, I wish to point out that Mbuvi’s proposal is useful precisely to the degree that Genesis is compared not to any anecdotes about relatives, but precisely to those family stories that function as mythic orientation. In the end, perhaps family story—like epic or saga or myth itself—is simply another way of talking about the meta-orientation which Genesis’ narratives provide for their users.

As Mbuvi notes, the orientation found in family stories has a certain temporal complexity. Such stories can flatten out historical distances by virtue of family continuity: any single generation becomes exemplary of all generations, and descendants are present in their ancestors. The same sorts of stories can, however, also portray considerable temporal depth. Present experience stands on the shoulders of family history, and any individual’s concerns are merely one episode in a multigenerational weave that sends out tendrils into that individual’s past, present—and future. For this very reason, family stories also serve to guide future choices by means of past traditions. They operate on the principle that each new condition, each new challenge, does not confront a blank slate but a rooted people, a people that knows who it is precisely because it knows where it has come from and (simultaneously) where it is going.

2.2.3.3 Myth and Utopia

Genesis, even while orienting the user-world of ongoing experience, also seems at times to project a different world—a world qualitatively unlike the world that users inhabit. This, it seems to me, is a special function of myth: it allows one to posit a distinct world, separated either temporally or spatially from user-world experience, for the very purpose of illuminating and orienting user-world experience. Visions of the distant past or the heavenly space portray
relations as they might be, or once were, or ought to be—not necessarily as they are. So mythic discourse lends itself to utopian reflections, positing a glowing heavenly court or a golden national past that contrasts—to powerful effect—with the present order. Even family stories are fond of evoking the “good old days” as an alternative reality or utopia, one that relativizes or critiques current conditions.\(^{37}\)

In Genesis 12-50 the utopian element is, perhaps, muted; these stories are grounded in a familiar land (not “no place”), and they describe the ancestors as struggling through conditions that are far from ideal. Yet even the ancestral portion of Genesis gives occasional glimpses of the way the users thought the world should be:

- Abraham, promised that he will be a great nation with a great name, appears in one episode as an honored and powerful force in international affairs, defeating several kings and gaining the gratitude of other kings (Genesis 14). Since he achieves all this with no conscription, standing army, or military alliances, the picture may be a utopia of how life ought to work (but generally does not).\(^{38}\)

- Isaac, promised the divine blessing, appears in one section as a super-farmer whose wells always find water and whose seeds always sprout a hundredfold, impressing all onlookers

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\(^{38}\) The prophetic scrolls emphasize Israel’s ability to prevail without a standing military and without forming military alliances—an ideal connected with the idea of trusting Yhwh. See, e.g., Is 31:1; cf. also Deut 17:16.
(26:12-14; see 26:16, 22, 28-29). This utopian picture shows how the blessing ought to work (but generally does not).

- Jacob, promised divine protection in his sojourning, seems invulnerable to a cheating father-in-law, vengeful brother, and angelic wrestling opponent; each turn of events rebounds to further his blessing. His life, despite hardships, may give a utopian presentation of how divine protection should function.

- Joseph, whose dreams echo the divine promise of greatness, rises from prison to life-giving administration of the Egyptian empire—a utopian prominence that Israel should, but seldom does, experience.

Such tales of success are less typical than paradigmatic, less realistic than ideal. They provide an alternative to the familiar world in which Israel was tossed about on the waves of armies and alliances, contending with agrarian unproductivity, at the mercy of economic or military oppression, and far from the centers of imperial power. They are, in a word, utopian.

Genesis’ utopian myth is even stronger in the primordial section, where the first few chapters trace a downward progress from the creative purpose (the world as God first intended it) to conditions more like the user-world present. Curse, sin, corruption, violence, and destruction enter the world, bringing fundamental changes (not least a shortened human lifespan and an increasingly adversarial relationship with nature—see, e.g., 3:15, 17; 4:11-12; 9:2-3). The

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original garden stands out both as a symbolic representation of Israel’s cult (and land), and as a spatially inaccessible no-place where God walks and the tree of life grows.  

Steven Schweitzer lists Genesis 2 among the utopian visions of the Hebrew Bible, and notes that most of these (see especially Ezekiel 40-48) are explicitly eschatological. In the next chapter I will explore parallels between prophetic utopian visions and the book of Genesis; for now, I merely echo Schweitzer in suggesting that utopian discourse tends to provide social critique, challenging the status quo and laying out an ideal alternative reality—one which the community of use sees itself as awaiting, and contending for, through proleptic practices.

2.2.4 Scripture

2.2.4.1 Textual and Extratextual God

If (as David Carr has said) space and time in Genesis revolve around God’s presence, there is no secular way of accounting fully for Genesis’ chronotope. Authors such as Philip Davies have rightly emphasized the fact that “religious” usage of Israel’s literature was part and parcel of other (economic, social, political) purposes; but this is because these categories of human experience overlap, not because religion is a mere cipher for other, more basic functions. Whatever problems modern readers might have taking God seriously, Genesis’ ancient users

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42 Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 131.

seem to have doubted neither the reality of the divine nor the permeation of the divine into every facet of human life.

In fact, *Yhwh* is an especially interesting example of Genesis’ proper names that refer *both* to narrative characters *and* to familiar inhabitants of the user-world. Van Wolde is surely right in claiming that Genesis does not introduce this God as a previously unknown deity. In fact, Genesis presumes from the very beginning that statements about God will be understood without explanation or introduction, not least because such statements relate immediately to users’ ongoing life of worship and prayer, trust and obedience. While literary readings may attempt to define *Yhwh* merely as a text-internal character of Genesis, it is difficult to imagine an ancient usage of Genesis that does not presume a prior pragmatic experience with this God.

At the same time, it is not the case that the divine name simply points to a being known and experienced independently of Genesis. Rather, over years and generations of usage and re-usage, Genesis itself shapes and conditions its users’ practices of worship and prayer, trust and obedience, within which God is known. This is what it means to be scripture; Genesis, no less than the more legal parts of the Torah, sets up a way of living in relationship to God. In other words, experience with God presumes prior usage of Genesis, even as Genesis presumes prior experience with God. *Yhwh* is a structural coupling between textual (experience of) God and extratextual (experience of) God, shaping and being shaped by each other—just as *Israel* is a structural coupling between textual Israel and extratextual Israel, shaping and being shaped by

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44 Van Wolde, *Semiotic Analysis*, p. 118. Note that Genesis 2-3 consistently uses “*Yhwh* Elohim” (יְהוָה אֱלוֹהִים) together (20 times, with only one other occurrence in the Pentateuch; elsewhere largely in a few Psalms and in Chronicles). Thus, Genesis’ audience encounters at the beginning of the book pressure to read these two names as referring to the same entity; this equation precedes (in the progression of the Pentateuch) any attempts to define “*Yhwh*” and to situate the specific use of this name for God (Ex 2:14, 6:2-3). Readers of Genesis are not, I suggest, prompted to disentangle the usage of these (or other) divine names; it is enough that “in the beginning God,” a God also known as *Yhwh*.  

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each other. To paraphrase Barthes, Genesis is a morpheme and Israel’s ongoing life with God is its message.\textsuperscript{45} Such structural coupling of text with faithful life is, I suggest, at the heart of what various communities mean by “scripture.”\textsuperscript{46}

Genesis marks itself as scripture by presenting God, not simply as another story-world character, but as the source of unconditioned address whose words speak to the audience as much as to the inner-textual characters.\textsuperscript{47} Creation (Gen 1-2) is the ongoing action of God, not just a narrated past event (see, e.g., Ps. 104:30). For that matter, God repeats the creation commission (\textit{be fruitful and multiply}) more than once (Gen 1:28, 9:1, 7), perhaps to remind readers that this commission is by its nature addressed to each new generation. God’s hallowing of the seventh day, God’s blessing of Abraham and his descendants, and other divine actions in Genesis leap off of the page into the lives of users. Thus when I explore Genesis’ contexts more closely in the next chapter, I will presume throughout that Genesis was shaped and preserved by users who commend the book as a textual resource for seeking God’s ongoing will—not just a record of what God said, but a witness to what God says and guide to what God will continue to say.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Barthes, “Wrestling,” p. 255; see my section 1.2.3. Martin Hengel (“The Scriptures and their Interpretation in Second Temple Judaism,” in \textit{The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context}, ed. Derek Beattie and Martin McNamara [Sheffield: JSOT, 1994]: 158-75, p. 175) says that “Judaism ‘created’ the holy scriptures, but it would be even more correct to say that God’s word created Israel and the holy scriptures Judaism.”

\textsuperscript{46} Childs (e.g., \textit{Introduction}) has most famously insisted on the historical appropriateness of reading the Old Testament, and its parts, as Scripture. He has been most famously resisted by James Barr (e.g., \textit{Holy Scripture, Canon, Authority, Criticism} [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983]). See, for example, Childs’ review of Barr’s book (\textit{Interpretation} 38.1 [1984]: 66-70) under the headline “Childs versus Barr.”

\textsuperscript{47} See here especially White, \textit{Narration and Discourse}.

\textsuperscript{48} Various scholars who have thought hard about the Hebrew Bible as canonical writing emphasize this ancient conviction—discernible in the editing and preservation of the individual works, as well as in their collection—that the tradition is continually applicable and always contemporary. See Michael Fishbane, \textit{Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); and the works of James Sanders (e.g., “Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon,” in \textit{Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G Ernest Wright}, ed. Frank Cross, Werner Lemke, and Patrick Miller [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976]: 531-60) and of Brevard Childs (e.g., \textit{Introduction}). I would suggest, however, that the temporal dynamics of canon is not just twofold (past tradition and present contemporizing), but threefold (past tradition, present contemporizing, and future expectation). Perhaps this is part of what Chapman (\textit{Law and Prophets}) means by emphasizing the way that canon is “generative”—not just of new texts, but also of new meanings and new hopes.
2.2.4.2 *Torah and Legal Instruction*

The legal understanding of the Pentateuch is written into its name, *Torah*, often taken to signify Law or law-like Instruction.\(^{49}\) This understanding, however, fits Genesis slightly less well than the Pentateuch’s other four books. James Watts suggests that the Pentateuch, in putting story (Gen 1 – Ex 19) before law (Ex 20 through Leviticus, and much of Numbers and Deuteronomy), follows an ancient convention of prefacing narrative to legal instruction.\(^{50}\) Even if Watts is right about this pattern, it is somewhat odd to think of audiences experiencing Genesis’ 50-chapter narrative (not to mention all of the stories in Exodus – Deuteronomy) as merely introductory, stylistically equivalent to the Prologue to Hammurabi’s Code.

Genesis itself includes a few legal-instruction fragments, most notably 9:4-6 (tying the prohibition of eating blood, and capital punishment, to a Noahic respect for life) and 17:10-14 (tying instructions about circumcision to a rather expansive covenant with Abram that explicitly enfolds non-Israelites—foreign slaves and Ishmaelites). Elsewhere, however, Genesis at most foreshadows later law (typical is 2:3, which prepares for Sabbath but issues no instruction concerning it). Most divine instructions in Genesis apply to the specifics of a character’s life, with no legal force for the audience (chapter 22 is, perhaps, the most obvious example). The prohibition-command in Genesis 2-3 may symbolize the Mosaic law, but it certainly has little direct instruction for Genesis’ users.

Some divine commands, most notably the creation-command of Genesis 1:28, seem to use the imperative mode to present a sort of “transposed promise”; such “authorizations” assure

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\(^{49}\) See Ska (*Introduction*, p. 139: “the Pentateuch presents itself as a normative text for Israel’s life.”)

\(^{50}\) James Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). In this schema, the final parts of Deuteronomy also follow the same ancient convention, in which “concluding sanctions” follow the legal material.
the people as they act toward their future. Similarly, the programmatic imperative to Abraham in 12:1 does not function as a command for the audience, requiring them to leave their home; but those who do find themselves cut off from birthplace or family experience this imperative as a promise, assuring them that their exile (like Abram’s) can serve the divine blessing.

In general, then, Genesis seems more interested in promise than in law. True, it does prominently thematize the obedience of Noah (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16) and of Abraham (see 21:4). Abraham’s compliance with God’s charge, commandments, statutes, and laws (מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי וְחֻקּוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי) becomes (in 26:4-5) a basis for the ongoing covenant. But however much mileage later Jewish tradition would make of this isolated statement, it remains rather unprecedented in the book of Genesis. The similar statement in 22:16-18 also predicates the covenant on Abraham’s exemplary obedience (because you have done this matter [כִּי טִמֵּית הַמָּשָׁרָה אֲשֶׁר הָעַבְרָר] and because you have obeyed my voice [כִּי זָכַּרְתִּי בְקֹלִי])—but hardly to any generalized law. On the contrary, Genesis 22 is the most glaring example of how the book values a response to God that cannot be generalized or made into a legal principle.


Finally, it is worth noting that the category of blessing and cursing, so prominent in Genesis (the root בּרָכָּה alone occurs more than 70 times), can function as a legal category. This is true not only throughout Deuteronomy, but also in Exodus (see 20:24, 23:25), Leviticus (see 25:21), and Numbers (see 5:18-27). Perhaps the narrative blessings and cursings of Genesis evoked, for Israelite audiences, their own ongoing experiences of performing/receiving/witnessing cultic blessings and cursings (see Num 6:23-7; Deut 27-28)—an integral part of any life following the Torah of God. If so, Genesis would have reminded its users precisely of the parts of their legal and cultic traditions that point most explicitly toward the future consequences of obedience and disobedience.

2.2.4.3 Human Response to Scripture

As Buss notes, texts which recount divine address raise the question of human reception—that is, responses such as ritual or obedience, prayer or listening. If Genesis’ users interact with this text as Scripture, this means that they hear in it the voice of God; it also means that the text guides them in their response to God. Genesis’ narratives do carry their own ethics, just as the legal material of Exodus through Deuteronomy has a narrative shape. What response to God does Genesis-as-scripture encourage?

For a book so focused on divine blessing and promise, Genesis may subsume all human response (including obedience and worship) under its larger concern for trust in God’s promises, or (put differently) reception of God’s blessing. In the Noah story, for example, it is unclear

55 For an attempt to take narrative (especially in Genesis) as instruction, see Wenham, Story as Torah; for the narrative quality of Pentateuchal law, see Frank Crüsemann, The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law (trans. Allan Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 331.
whether righteousness is a precondition of Noah’s divine favor or the goal to which Noah is called.\textsuperscript{56} What is clear is that Noah’s righteousness manifests itself through concrete obedience that is not moral, legal, or cultic, but is emphatically responsive to the plan and (future-oriented) purpose of God.

In the same way Genesis 22:16-17, which praises Abraham’s actions in offering up Isaac, does not exactly commend this sort of inimitable obedience for Genesis’ users—the story shows no interest in the question of how one would recognize the divine voice if it called one to forsake all law and decency. Nor is this narrative primarily about the need to give one’s all in worship; God, not Abraham, ultimately supplies the sacrifice. R. Walter Moberly compares Genesis 22 to 2 Samuel 24:24, \textit{I will not offer burnt offerings to Yhwh my God that cost me nothing}; but in Abraham’s ordeal on Mount Moriah he does not literally lose anything at all. Moberly is right in viewing the two endings of the story as separate layers, but both share a temporal divide between Abraham’s actions (past) and God’s action (extended into the future). Yhwh \textit{will provide} in 22:14, and Yhwh \textit{will bless} in 22:15-18. The later ending surely connects God’s promises with Abraham’s obedience, but it is strangely silent about any need for future generations to obey.\textsuperscript{58} In contrast, verse 14 \textit{does} explicitly enjoin a clear, ongoing, user-world response to the story. This response is not obedience so much as trust, a perpetual confession (based more on Isaac’s survival than on Abraham’s obedience) that \textit{On Yhwh’s mountain it will be provided}. Readers

\textsuperscript{56} W. Malcolm Clark ("The Righteousness of Noah," \textit{VT} 21.3 [1971]: 261-80) suggests that Noah’s righteousness is precondition in P, but is a task to which Noah is called in J.

\textsuperscript{57} Moberly, “Earliest Commentary.”

\textsuperscript{58} See especially R. Walter Moberly, “Abraham’s Righteousness (Genesis 15:6),” in \textit{Studies in the Pentateuch}, ed. John Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1990): 103-130, pp. 126-29. It is the ancestor’s action which gives Israel its special status. In other words, the mountain is not named “Yhwh should be obeyed” or “Yhwh must be offered one’s all,” but “Yhwh will provide.” Thus even here, where obedience is most at stake (22:18b), God’s act of provision and blessing has more \textit{ongoing} relevance than human obedience.
identify here precisely with Abraham’s trust—a trust that is demonstrated in Abraham’s actions but also vindicated in God’s response and, even more, in God’s persistent will to bless.

On this reading, Levenson misstates when he says that the record of Abraham’s law-keeping (26:5) is “only one verse” in the same sense that the record of his faith (15:6) is “only one verse.” Whether one calls it faith or trusting obedience, the warp and woof of the patriarchal narratives involves a human reliance on the prior promise and blessing of God, in a context where commands or statutes are (at the least) muted. This does not mean, of course, that faith or trust are inimicable to the Pentateuch’s legal orientation; on the contrary, 22:16-18 and 26:5 reminds us that law-centered Israelites identified completely with Abraham, conflating his trusting responses with their own torah-obedience. Genesis’ hypothesized “faith editor” who added 15:6, like the “legal editor” who added 26:5 and 22:16-18, was only drawing attention to a principle inherent in most ancient Hebrew scripture. These minor additions are not systematic enough to wrest the book’s message back and forth, but rather attest the basic compatibility of Genesis’ prominent promise-orientation with two prominent themes in Israelite literature: obedience to commandments and trust in Yhwh.

So even if Genesis does not discourage legal obedience, it does seem to privilege a faithful response to God which stands behind and before any law—a righteousness that can be predicated of Abraham and even Noah, who did not (perhaps) know any law. Genesis rather boldly suggests that this quality of faithful response, presumed in the Pentateuch’s legal and cultic material, is also recognizable in the legally questionable actions of ancestors who erect

altars and pillars wherever they encounter the divine. Many of the ancestors (one thinks of Jacob) fail to exemplify moral or legal obedience, but they all respond in one way or another to the blessing and promise of God—praying, grasping, vowing, conniving, trusting, thanking.

As I will argue in section 6.5, perhaps Genesis orients its users most profoundly precisely by positing a story-world and user-world interaction between promising God and trusting Israel. Users join in Abraham’s trust (15:6), and therefore in his confession (grounds for an ongoing, user-world saying) that God will provide (22:14). They join in Jacob’s cry (a notable aside in a poem otherwise descriptive of his twelve sons’ future state) of patient waiting for God’s salvation (49:18); this cry itself echoes the ongoing worship-cry of Israelite expectation (see, e.g., Psalm 25:5). Genesis as scripture speaks of a people’s life before God, and that life uses past memories and present obedience as a springboard toward a future expectation, a trusting confidence in God’s promised blessing which still beckons them forward.

2.3 Reading through Genesis as Etiology: Genesis 1-11

2.3.1 Introduction

So far, my discussions of explicit user-world cues and of Genesis’ genre have both suggested, perhaps unsurprisingly, that Genesis functions etiologically. In exploring this insight, I here examine a multitude of possible etiological markers linking the story world with the establishment of some enduring user-world reality. I identify these etiological markers in two ways: by examining the ends of narrative episodes (where summaries often point to the user-world implications of the story), and by interrogating the text’s references to ongoing conditions (often by using eponymous names which relate to the user’ world). I begin with the early chapters of Genesis, whose particularly dense set of etiological markers sets a trajectory for the audience’s
response to the whole book. In section 2.4 I then examine Genesis 12-50, where etiological summaries are spaced farther apart (perhaps because the narrative episodes are longer).

2.3.2 Genesis 1:1-2:3: The Cosmogonic Preface and Sabbath-Etiology

Genesis’ first etiological conclusion occurs in 2:3. Up to this point the creation account has itself functioned as a meta-etiology, ordering ongoing components of reality—light and darkness, land and water and sky, plants and animals. The evening-morning refrains are an integral part of this organization, structuring not just space but time itself (see 1:14, where the heavenly bodies exist for signs, seasons, days, and years). Therefore it is not a complete surprise when the last verse of the account describes the blessing and hallowing of the seventh day. The completion of creation, already fully expressed in three different ways (1:31, God saw everything he had made; 2:1, the heavens and the earth were finished; 2:2a, God finished the work he had done), receives emphasis two final times with the identical phrase [God] rested from all the work he had done (2:2b and 2:3b). Between these two refrains the Sabbath is established: And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it (2:3a). Linked inseparably with the completion of creation, this phrase becomes a climax of cosmogony itself—the whole sixfold creation story has been driving toward the hallowed seventh day.

But the seventh day has little continuing significance within Genesis, which never again mentions the Sabbath. Genesis gives no indication why the seventh day is important, or what it

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61 I follow Keith Grüneberg (Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003], pp. 123-4) in considering the toledot pattern as Genesis’ “most significant structural marker,” one which separates units but also establishes their unity in a single (genealogical) progression; see Childs, Introduction, p. 158; Ska, Introduction, pp. 19-22. In addition to Ska and Grüneberg, see discussion of Terje Stordalen (“Genesis 2,4: Restudying a locus classicus,” ZAW 104 [1992]: 163-77) for a refutation of the older view that the toledot notice in Gen 2:4a concludes the earlier story; rather, like the other toledot notices in Genesis, it introduces a story of the first humans precisely as the “progeny” of the heavens and earth. Thus the first titled story-cycle is Gen 2:4-4:26, and Gen 1:1-2:3 precedes any single story-cycle and serves to introduce the book as a whole.
means to consider it as hallowed. From one perspective, then, this etiology of Sabbath may drive the reader to view 1:1-2:3 not just as the introduction of Genesis but as the introduction of the whole Pentateuch (in which the Sabbath features prominently). But from another perspective, 2:3 may prompt Genesis’ audiences to connect its meaning—and thus the meaning of the whole seven-day creation account—with their own ongoing experience of hallowed seventh days. On this reading, the whole creation prologue serves as an etiology for Israel’s user-world practice of keeping Sabbath.

2.3.3 Genesis 2:4-4:26: The First Humans and the Etiology of Marriage, Exile, and Yhwh-Worship

The toledot of heavens and earth (2:4-4:26) has multiple episodes and thus multiple etiological summaries. First God creates the primeval couple, separating created humanity into genders in response to Adam’s initial solitude. In 2:18, solitude is named not good, which stands out strongly after chapter one’s litany of creation as good; 2:20 re-emphasizes Adam’s problem, and this at last (גַּם) in 2:23 marks gendered humanity as its solution. The phonetic link between איש and אישה (man and woman) is attributed, in an etiological naming-formula, to the story of Eve’s creation out of Adam’s own flesh and bone. But the two words also mean husband and wife, and 2:24 uses the phrase גָּל (therefore) to draw attention to the etiological point of the story: husbands join wives as one flesh.

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63 Claus Westermann (Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, trans. John Scullion [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], pp. 233-4) claims emphatically that 2:24 speaks of personal relationship between genders, not institutional or social
Chapter three’s story of the forbidden fruit climaxes in etiological poetry (3:14-19) describing several ongoing reader-world realities, all under the rubric of curse/punishment. I discuss this section more thoroughly in my section 6.3. Here I may note that in conjunction with this poetry, the episode ends with the expulsion of humanity from the garden and an intriguing summary notice:

3:24: *Then he drove forth the human [Adam/ humanity]; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubs, and the flame of the flashing sword, to guard the path to the tree of life.*

This verse seems to evoke ongoing human experience; audiences who expect an etiological conclusion to their legendary stories will have little trouble reading the expulsion from Eden not just as a past event, but as a present part of humanity’s reality. Such an audience is invited to recognize its daily experiences (including, but not limited to, experiences highlighted in 3:14-19) as an exile, driven forth from sacred space and barred from the source of life.

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64 Translations are my own.

The story of Adam and Eve takes a new turn when the couple have children (4:1-2a); the story of their two children closes with 4:16, which strikingly echoes 3:24.66

4:16 And Cain went away from the presence of Yhwh, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

In its concluding notice (and ongoing consequences), the Cain story merely continues chapter three: Adam’s posterity is still east of Eden, still separated from sacred space. Away from the presence of Yhwh parallels the driving of Adam out of Eden and the blocked path to the tree of life. Nod (נוד) is a form of the same word used to name Cain as a wanderer (נוד, 4:12, 14); Genesis 4:14 uses the same verb for drive out (גרשׁ) as 3:24, and 4:11-12’s curse with respect to the land closely parallels 3:17-18. I suggest, then, that although Cain’s story may contain various etiological fragments (of sacrifice, of farmer/herdsman strife, of fratricide, of violence and retribution), 4:16’s summary highlights once again an ongoing state of exile from the face of Yhwh as the main etiological point.67

As with 4:1, 4:17 begins a new episode by recounting the birth of progeny. This new episode (4:17-26) is even shorter than the last, however, and contains various sorts of material. Cain’s city-building (4:17) is, perhaps, a less-than-positive etiology of urbanism arising because he was cursed from the ground. His mini-genealogy (4:17-22) describes the etiological origins of three ongoing, readerly-world occupations (herding, instrumental music, and metalworking). The narrative fragment about Cain’s descendant Lamech (4:23-24) returns to the theme of violence and possible retribution, with an explicit mention of Cain’s own experience (4:24), before a final

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66 I close the episode here not only because 4:16 seems to be a summary like 3:24, but also because 4:17 parallels 4:1 and thus (like it) seems to begin a new section.

67 It is unclear whether this situation is, in fact, heightened—by virtue of Abel’s death (nobody actually dies in Genesis 3), the slightly stronger-worded curse in 4:11-12 (compared to 3:17-18), or the fact that Cain is not only (like Adam) east of Eden, but also explicitly a wanderer.
two verses (4:25-6) shift to Adam and Eve’s third son and bring the whole toledot of heavens and earth to a close.

These final two verses give an important key to understanding the whole toledot of heavens and earth (2:4-4:26).

4:25 And Adam/ humanity again knew his wife, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for “God established for me another seed, in place of Abel, because Cain killed him.”

4:26a And to Seth, even this one, a son was born; and he named him Enosh.

4:26b At that time, people began to call on the name of Yhwh.

Seth’s naming-formula emphasizes how God established him as another seed, a vital scion to carry the story of descent forward. The account of Seth’s descendants belongs logically in the next toledot cycle, where the birth of Enosh is repeated (5:6) as part of the Sethite genealogy. Its inclusion in 4:26a, marked with the attention-getting הַוּה (even this one), suggests that Seth’s ability to carry on the line of descent is a key issue for Genesis. Calling Seth a seed highlights his genealogical significance, and raises the question of whether to regard him as the fulfillment of the earlier divine oracle to Eve which mentions her seed (3:15); I discuss this whole question in my chapter six. For now it is enough to suggest that Seth closes Genesis’ first toledot cycle with a sense of connection between past and future, as God establishes another seed to carry on humanity’s fruitfulness (see 1:28).

Finally, 4:26b is the last word of this cycle; it falls in the place of an etiological summary, reminding the audience that to call on the name of Yhwh (לִקְרֹא בְּשֵׁם יהוה) is not just a story-world

activity, but a regular part of the audience’s reality. The context gives no attempt to describe this invocation of Yhwh, suggesting an extratextual reference to the ongoing worship practices of Israel. Thus not only the account of Seth’s birth, but the whole sequence from garden to expulsion to fratricide to a new seed, is presented as nothing less than an etiology of the audience’s ongoing Yhwh-worship.

2.3.4 Genesis 5:1-6:8: Seth’s Line and the Etiology of Yhwh’s Favor

The *toledot* of Adam (5:1-6:8) does not hang together as a narrative cycle; it combines genealogy with narrative, and begins the Noahic flood story only to have Noah’s *toledot* begin rather abruptly in 6:9. Yet if the section does not show narrative coherence, its material does cluster together around the theme of divine favor and disfavor. From this perspective, 6:8 is a fitting conclusion:

6:8 *But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yhwh.*

The opening of this *toledot* emphasizes the divine favor toward Seth’s line: only his line (not Cain’s) explicitly carries forward God’s creative purposes for Adam/humanity. Thus 5:1-3 restates 1:26-8’s synthesis of the creator’s image, blessing, and naming, this time applying the motifs not to humanity/Adam, but to Seth specifically. In part the repetition functions as reassurance: despite intervening disruptions (disobedience, expulsion, and human violence) the creative purpose continues. In part, these verses serve to narrow the creative purpose to a blessing passed on specifically through Seth, the *other seed.* Correspondences between Seth’s genealogy

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69 For a similar wording see, e.g., 1 Kgs 18:24; Joel 3:5 [2:32]; Zeph 3:9. Throughout Genesis, of course, the practice is attested of Israel’s ancestors; see Gen 12:18, 13:4, 21:33, 26:25. For the difficulties of relating Genesis’ worship practices (“patriarchal religion”) with that of the rest of the Pentateuch (and hence its users?), see R. Walter Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
(5:1-32) and the earlier genealogy of Cain (4:17-24) relate these two lines of descent as parallel, alternate humanities. Thus while the Cainite Lamech exemplifies boastful violence (4:25, pointing back to 4:1-16 and forward to 6:11), Sethite Enoch exemplifies a life of closeness to God (5:21, pointing back to 3:26 and forward to 6:8-9 and even 17:1).  

Noah’s naming formula extends this section’s interest in the creator’s purpose and its possible disruption, alluding to Genesis 3 but hinting at relief from the primordial curse.

5:29 And he named him Noah, saying, “This one will bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, from the land that Yhwh has cursed.”

Interpreters have differed regarding how exactly Noah provides relief from human toil with respect to the cursed land; what emerges clearly through Noah’s story is his ability to receive/mediate grace in the midst of punishment. Noah’s establishment of viniculture (9:20), like the new provisions for meat-eating (9:3), are only part of Noah’s larger function as recipient and carrier of God’s favor.

This same curse-versus-favor motif may help explain 6:1-4, which (whatever else it means) continues chapter 3’s reflection on human mortality—6:3 is a sort of etiology of the human lifespan. (Gen 6:4 may indicate that the narrative fragment also serves as an etiology for a race or class of hero-warriors, the mysterious Nephilim, but gives no sign that these still exist in

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70 These characters parallel each other in that each is the seventh generation (from Adam), and each receives special narrative attention within his respective genealogy.

71 Genesis draws no explicit link between 9:20ff and 5:29, contra Clines, Theme, p. 71, and Grüneberg, Abraham, pp. 134-5.

72 Such a conclusion is tentative; the grammar may be read as a postponement of the flood for 120 years (see David Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Genesis 6:1-4) in the Context of the ‘Primaeval History’ (Genesis 1-11),” JSOT 13 [1979]: 33-46). One might expect 70 as the normal lifespan (cf. Psalm 70:10). But Deut 34:7 seems to presume that Moses dies precisely because “his life-span has reached the limit set by God in Gen 6:3” (Konrad Schmid, “The Late Persian Formation of the Torah: Observations on Deuteronomy 34,” JJFC: 237-51, p. 248). See also Helge Kvanvig, “Genesis 6,1-4 as an Antediluvian Event,” SJOT 16 (2002): 79-112.
the narrator’s or audience’s present. Similarly, 6:5-7 (whatever else it means) continues chapter 3’s reflection on disobedience as a disruption of the creative purposes of God. These passages provide a dark foil for Seth, Enoch, and Noah, who stand out as recipients of God’s favor and carriers of the creative blessing despite any curse. Ending Adam’s *toledot* with 6:8 creates a literary inclusio between grace-child Seth (5:1-3; cf. 4:25) and grace-child Noah (6:8; cf. 5:29). Thus 6:8’s mention, for the first time, of God’s favor or grace (*חֵן*) is an important aside that pertains to more than the story-world moment. It makes explicit Genesis’ recurring interest in divine favor, and simultaneously subtly presses the audience to self-identify with that favor. One might stretch the point and call 5:1-6:8 an etiology of grace.

### 2.3.5 Genesis 6:9-9:29: The Flood, Its Aftermath, and the Etiology of Covenant

The *toledot* of Noah (6:9-9:29) continues with the flood story, a story about uncreation and recreation. So for example 7:23a negatively echoes 1:22 and 28; verses 8:17b and 9:1 restore the original blessing. In my judgment, this story’s many fascinating details are overshadowed by the lengthy divine assurance which comes at the climax (8:21-9:17). One senses that the story ultimately speaks less to the possibility of worldwide destruction (6:9-8:20) than to the ongoing

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73 The narrative note *and also afterward* is ambiguous, and may temper the temporal distance created by *in those days*; Nephilim are mentioned in Num 13:33, which is itself temporally unclear (it may imply that the Anakite descendants of the Nephilim still exist, but not the Nephilim themselves). Clines, “Significance,” argues that the “sons of God” are rulers of semi-divine origin, and that in its current context (interacting with Gen 11:4; 12:1-3) the passage serves to critique the pride of these ancient heroes (cf. 2 Sam 7:9).

74 I intend this term, not as a theological blank check, but in the sense that Genesis itself gives—see 18:3; 19:19; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8; 10, 15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25, 29; 50:24. God’s *grace/favor* may imply the much-discussed category “election” (see, e.g., Joel Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2007]), a theme already present in 4:4-5 (see also 4:25), and more pronounced in the choice of Abram, of Isaac (over Ishmael), of Jacob (over Esau), and of Joseph (among his brothers). For a close exegetical study of Noah’s election in J, see Clark, “Righteousness of Noah.” Of course, *grace* also connects to *blessing*, a leitmotif that pervades Genesis.
rhythm of the natural order, lyricized in 8:23. In the flood’s conclusion, the continuity of creation and the defeat of chaos itself intertwine with elements of blessing (9:1), instruction (9:3-6), and covenant (9:8-17). This whole section is heavily etiological, sprinkled liberally with explicit cues of ongoing, user-world temporal orientation, such as never again (8:21; 9:11; 9:15), as long as (8:22), and your seed [descendants] after you (9:9), for eternal generations (9:12), and when[ever] the bow is in the cloud (9:16). Phrases like these, taken together, move beyond the narrated past into an open temporal horizon which audiences may readily associate with their own.

Etiological fragments give the origins of specific conditions that follow the flood, from meat-eating to rainbows. Thus the flood story guarantees the continuity of a user-world reality in which animals flee from human approach (9:2), humans are omnivorous (9:3), life and seasons persist (8:22; 9:9-11, 15), and rainbows continue to appear after storms (9:13-17). Importantly, Genesis presents these facts of life as the signs or conditions of God’s first all-inclusive covenant—a covenant not with one people-group but with all flesh that is on the earth (9:16-17).75 Read from the perspective of its conclusion, the flood story is, ironically, an etiology for the overarching divine commitment to creation. The primal Noahic covenant does not promise a specific grant but rather assures the permanence of creation itself: God will never again uncreate.76 Whatever else Genesis’ users may have thought about the eschatological nature of judgment, that judgment cannot include God giving up on the created world. (This does not,

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75 The story has made flesh (בָשָׁר) a catchword, repeated 14 times (6:12, 13, 17, 19; 7:15, 16, 21; 8:17; 9:4, 9, 11, 15-17).

76 With Grüneberg (Abraham, p. 134) I reject Rolf Rendtorff’s analysis of 8:21 (“Genesis 8:21 und die Urgeschichte des Jahwisten,” Kerygma and Dogma 7.1 [1961]:69-78) as an end to God’s earlier curse on the ground. As argued above, Genesis’ audience will most likely read chapter 3 as etiological of ongoing conditions, which certainly persist after the flood. Besides, contra Rendtorff, Genesis consistently mixes curse with blessing; they are not alternative chronological stages.
however, rule out eschatology in Genesis, since no Hebrew Bible eschatology—including that of Daniel— involves God giving up on the created world.

By linking the ongoing conditions of nature with Yhwh’s covenantal promises, Genesis naturalizes the promise-making and promise-keeping of God. God’s faithfulness to do what he promises is, in Genesis’ logic, demonstrated every time the seasons follow their order or the rainbow appears after a storm. Also striking is the way that the inevitable, ongoing conditions of nature are seamlessly linked with a human response, such as the quasi-legal etiologized instructions for eating flesh without blood (9:4) and punishing murder (9:5-6).

Noah’s toledot cycle also includes a shorter episode about Noah’s children, concluding with a poetic cursing/blessing (9:25-27) reminiscent of 3:14-19. The events of this story are unclear; interpreters cannot agree about who does what to whom, much less who is at fault in the episode. I suggest that interpretive weight should fall on the concluding poem, which clearly marks the whole episode as an etiology of the blessed condition of Shemites and the slavery of Canaanites. Surely Noah’s words are not directed merely to characters in the story, in which case cursing Ham rather than Canaan would be more to the point. Since no Canaanite serves a Shemite within Genesis (although the Hamite Hagar does serve the Shemite Sarah), this passage points beyond the story world and invites a wider application. Thematically, the poem raises the question of blessed and cursed lines of descent, evoking the conception of election already implicit in the Cain-Abel story (see 4:4-5) and in the entire toledot of Adam (5:1-6:8).

Just as the flood story involves both destruction (of most of the world) and an expansive assurance of ongoing life (for Noah and, in 9:9 and 9:12, his descendants), so the post-flood

family story distinguishes a cursed line from a blessed line. Thus, the Noah toledot as a whole seems interested in exploring two sides of God’s covenant relationship with creation—a covenant relationship that is ongoing and that results from story-world events, and so is (in this broad sense) etiologically established. That relationship is universally expansive (a covenant with all humans, indeed all life) but also fiercely particular (active in the blessing of specific lines of descent, and in the destruction or cursing of others).

2.3.6 Genesis 10:1-11:9: Table of Nations, Tower of Babel, and the Etiology of Peoples

If Noah’s toledot cycle ends with genealogical origins of ongoing peoples, a similar eponymous logic permeates the toledot of Noah’s children (10:1-11:9). Chapter 10’s table-of-nations genealogy, unlike the genealogies in chapters 4 and 5, concentrates on people groups already known to the users. Within this list a single narrative fragment stands out, giving an explicit etiology of a saying about Nimrod, the founder of both Babylon and Assyria (10:9). The genealogy’s ending makes its main topic explicit: the ongoing, readerly-world multiplicity of peoples on the earth.

10:32 These are the families of Noah’s sons, for their toledot, in their nations; and from these the nations spread out in the land after the flood.

The Babel narrative has the same topic, as its conclusion makes clear.

11:9 Therefore it is called Babel, for there Yhwh confused the language of all the land; and from there Yhwh scattered them upon the face of all the land.

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78 As with 22:14, it is unclear how to evaluate Genesis’ claim that the audience already uses this saying in its own world. Yet such a claim can justify itself, and even today there are communities who say, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord”—because Genesis tells them that this is their ongoing saying, they make it so.
Thus together 10:1-11:9 shares a single theme, the spreading/scattering of peoples/languages.

The Babel story casts the scattering of peoples not just as God’s will, but specifically as God’s reaction to imperial/Babylonian hubris.\footnote{For an argument that 11:1-9 focuses on the prideful attempt to “make a name,” see J. P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structuralist Analysis (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 17. Admittedly, the tower-builders are not clearly sinning, and the confusing of languages is not clearly a punishment. Yet it is hard to miss a note of divine displeasure in Yhwh’s response. Persian-era Judeans would certainly have known of the great ziggurats of Mesopotamia, and might satirize them as a failed bid for glory and/or unity. Grünberg (Abraham, pp. 131-2) notes that in the prophetic literature (e.g., Is 2:12-15) tall towers are natural signs of human arrogance. See Clines (Theme, pp. 69-70) for a discussion of the possible inclusio between Gen 3 and 11; both raise the possibility of threatened divine-human boundaries, provoking a response from God to protect those boundaries.} This suggests that the earlier fragment about empire-building/Babylonian Nimrod may also intend a subtle critique.\footnote{Mark Brett (Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity, [London: Routledge, 2000], p. 45-46) connects this pride to 10:8-10, where Nimrod (founder of Babylon=Babel) is a mighty warrior, resembling the men of the name (i.e., of renown) in 6:4.}\footnote{Carol Kaminski (From Noah to Israel: Realization of the Primaeval Blessing after the Flood [London: T&T Clark, 2004], pp. 141-2) finds evidence in the Table of Nations that the creation blessing has now been focused to the Shemite line in particular, just as earlier it was focused in the Sethite line. See esp. Allan Jenkins (“A Great Name: Gen 12:2 and the Editing of the Pentateuch,” JSOT 10 [1978]: 41-57, esp. p. 45), who connects Shem with the name in 11:4 but also the great name blessing of 12:1-3, and concludes that such correspondences “mark out the line of descent through which God in his grace would ensure a future.”}. Note here that chapter 10’s Japhethite and Shemite names are largely unfamiliar to the world of Genesis’ audience, while its Hamites include well-known exemplars of Israel’s oppressors (Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria) and rivals (Canaanites, Jebusites, and Amorites). Tentatively, then, this toledot seems to highlight the ongoing fact of oppression, imperialism, or enmity, connected with the ongoing fact of scattered peoples and languages.

### 2.3.7 Genesis 11:10-26: Shem’s Line and the Etiology of Abraham

The toledot of Shem (11:10-26) is the shortest toledot cycle yet; it is a linear genealogy with little express connection to the audience’s world. But in its final verse, right where the audience would expect an etiological summary, Shem’s toledot introduces Abram. This structural cue reminds the audience that Abram the newly-introduced character is also Abraham the revered...
ancestor. For those already familiar with the Abraham tradition, the genealogy of Genesis 11:10-26 presents itself as an etiology for Abraham.

All of Genesis 1-11 has led up to this point. The primeval process of generation/descent reaches a climax, one that is not explicitly marked in Genesis 1-11 but still stands out to audiences familiar with Abraham’s central role in the larger book of Genesis—and in their larger tradition.\textsuperscript{82} Such audiences will encounter 11:26, not as though they are being introduced to a new character, but as though they are (finally) reaching a well-known part of their own story, a cherished name that begins to bring home the general account of universal origins.

\subsection*{2.3.8 Preliminary Conclusions on Genesis 1-11}

Before going on to the Abraham cycle, it is worth summarizing some of the ways in which Genesis 1-11 as a whole links the primeval story world with the users’ own timeframe. First, various details of the natural world (crawling snakes, rainbows) and various ongoing facts about humans (marriage, mortality, ethnic diversity) find their origins and meaning in Yhwh’s storied interactions with creation. Second, the narrative of cosmic beginnings has a specific sequence, a seamless process of generation/descent (toledot) from the 7-day creation to the emergence of Abram. This process functions to situate Israel’s distinctive origins (Gen 12-50) in a broader etiology of the cosmos (Gen 1-11). Third, while the process of generation falls under the umbrella of God’s universal blessing (of Adam/humanity, of Noah and all his descendants), it

\textsuperscript{82} I am not claiming that audiences had any specific extra information about Abraham, external to Genesis, which affected their readings. But I do suggest that centuries of users have approached Genesis with a pre-formed familiarity with this father Abraham, “the rock from which you were hewn” (Is 51:11). Cf. Foley, \textit{Immanent Art}, for the importance of traditional referentiality. Grüneberg (\textit{Abraham}, pp. 125-6) argues that Abraham was well-known “at least by the post-exilic period,” with 42 biblical mentions outside Genesis, and that therefore the appearance of Abraham in Genesis represents a “significant shift in content” focusing on “Yhwh’s dealings with Israel in particular,” a shift “which hardly needed laboring in the work’s original context.”
also differentiates God’s favor toward specific lines of descent (Seth and not Cain, Noah and not the rest of pre-flood humanity, Shem and not Ham/ Canaan). Genesis 1-11 therefore prepares for the later stories of favor that differentiate Abram from Lot, Isaac from Ishmael, and Jacob from Esau. Even more, Genesis 1-11 suggests that God’s election (favor or blessing) can be more precisely identified as a *pathway for carrying God’s creative purposes into the future*. This is the narrative function of Seth, of Noah, of Shem—and of Abram and Sarai, of Isaac and Rebecca, of Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and of Joseph and (oddly) Tamar.

Together, the temporal orientation in Genesis 1-11 suggests that cosmology itself has a *telos*, to be found in the story of God and Israel—or, more precisely, in the story of God, Israel, Israel’s land, and Israel’s relations to the nations. The link between divine blessing and ongoing reality is a natural, inevitable, ongoing part of creation. Thus divine promises and blessings—such as those that drive Genesis 12-50—are, by extension, as irrevocable a part of ongoing reality as the natural order itself (compare Is 54:9-10).

### 2.4 Etiological Patterns in the Ancestral Narratives

#### 2.4.1 Etiological Focusing on Israel and Its Land

Genesis’ overarching etiological pattern undergoes a considerable focusing when its myths of universal beginnings progress to its more detailed saga of Israel’s distinctive origins. Starting with Abram, Genesis cues its audience to focus on an ever-tightening identity specifically as Israel. The characters are no longer stand-ins for humanity (Adam), or ancestors of
all nations; they relate with greater specificity to the presumed audience (Israel) and its immediate neighbors.\(^{83}\)

Thus in 12:2, God promises to make Abram \textit{a great nation}, a striking idiom in which Abram becomes (rather than merely fathering) a later, user-world people. Since this is the first articulation of the divine call/ promise to Abraham, even later references to Abraham as progenitor of a \textit{crowd} of nations (see 17:4-6, 16, 20) seem ancillary to his destiny to become a single people—one that is favored, great, blessed, and unique. Genesis 12:2 invites users to self-identify as Abram insofar as they already are, or wish to become, this special promised people. The Abrahamic promise echoes and re-echoes throughout the rest of Genesis, articulated with striking variety as well as striking repetition. Diverse wordings of the promise draw attention beyond the story-world characters to a user-world awareness of a special \textit{nation} (12:2, 18:18; 35:11; 46:3), a set of \textit{descendants/seed} (15:5, 18; 26:3), that will come from those characters. It is not just that Genesis’ cosmic concern with procreation/descent (1:22, 28) tightens to highlight a specific line of descent; this has already happened with Seth, Noah, and Shem. But from Genesis 12 on, the special line of descent becomes ever more closely tied to the user-world identity of the ongoing audience as \textit{Israel}. Genesis’ relevance to users’ experience is no longer limited to general human experience (marriage, mortality, rainbows), but becomes grounded in a particular people with its own particular names, customs, and stories.

The same focusing occurs in Genesis’ spatial orientation. The place-names in chapters 1-9 are elusive, with no clear-cut correspondence to specific places in the world of Genesis’ users.\(^{84}\)

\(^{83}\) For a balanced statement of this consensus in Genesis studies, see Grüneberg, \textit{Abraham}, pp. 125-6: although there is no major shift from Genesis’ prehistory to the story of the so-called ancestors, and although Abraham himself fathers more than one nation, still Abraham’s story begins a “distinctively Israelite history.” Cf. also Ska, \textit{Introduction}, p. 23.
Chapters 10 and 11 do name known peoples/places, but for a Judean audience these places may seem either exotically distant (Tarshish, Ninevah, Babylon, Egypt) or the stuff of legendary memory (Sodom and Gomorrah). In contrast, Terah’s family’s migration from Ur to Haran to Canaan (11:31-12:5) launches a new series of geographic references which map out a specific, familiar land. Genesis’ geography has thus moved from the exotic or universal (see, e.g., Gen 2:10-14, which geographically amalgamates Mesopotamia’s Tigris and Euphrates, Jerusalem’s Gihon, Ethiopian Cush, and Arabian Havilah) to the local and particular. Many of the ensuing place-names are marked by naming-formulae that highlight the ongoing existence of central Palestinian locations, known by the same (or a similar) name in the narrator’s or audience’s time.

It is unclear which of these places were still well-known to Genesis’ Judean users in any given period, but as a whole the locations are portrayed as part of the everyday land that the users continue to inhabit.

16:14—naming formula for Beer-lahai-roi, a well identified for the audience as between Kadesh and Bered
19:22—naming formula for Zoar, a town possibly known to some users
21:31/26:33—two parallel etiologies of the well-known town Beersheba, one marked by to this day
22:14—naming formula for a place (Yhwh-Jirah) combined with an etiology of an ongoing saying (marked by to this day) about an unnamed mountain of Yhwh, perhaps Zion/Jerusalem

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Scholars’ erudite attempts to track down the geography of Eden or Nod merely highlight how little extratextual knowledge Genesis’ audience probably had about such locations. So (rightly) Terje Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth—or Not?: Jerusalem as Eden in Biblical Literature,” in Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 28-57.

For Havilah, see Gen 25:18; for the Gihon, see 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chron 32:33, 33:14. Susan Brayford suggests that the LXX leaves Eden’s geography intentionally vague, but seems to read the Hebrew as referring to a center or base of the world—and the ultimate “source of [all] life-sustaining water” (Genesis [Boston: Brill, 2007]).

So Moberly, Theology, pp. 188-89.
23:9 (see 25:9-10)—a story establishing the site of Abraham’s and Sarah’s burial place, located near Mamre, which is identified for the audience as the well-known town Hebron.

26:20-25—naming formulae for several wells, possibly known to some users, along with the account of an unnamed well at the well-known town Beersheba.

28:19 (see 35:1-8, 15)—name etiology for the well-known town (and cultic site) Bethel, along with a note that it was earlier called Luz.

31:47-9—name etiology for border markers between Laban (Aram) and Jacob (Israel), linked to the later well-known border site of Gilead (here Galeed), named both in Aramaic and in Hebrew.

33:3[2], 11[10]—two slightly different name-etiologies (one implied) for the town Mahanaim, probably known to some users (see 2 Sam 2:8-9; 17:24-29; 2 Kings 4:14).

33:17—a name etiology for Succoth, possibly known to some users; marked by therefore (כֵּן לַעֲבוֹד).

33:20—a name etiology for the altar El-Elohe-Israel, set at the well-known town Shechem (see 33:18-19).

50:11—a name etymology for Abel-Mizraim, possibly known to some users, marked by therefore (כֵּן לַעֲבוֹד).

Elsewhere, in too many places to list, Genesis does not give an explicit name- etiology but does show its characters acting in locations well-known to later audiences; sometimes these familiar place-names occur in narratorial asides that link the story-world name to the audience-world name (see, e.g., 35:19, where Rachel is buried in Ephrath, that is, Bethlehem). Together, such spatial references serve not only to locate the story world but also to orient the users’ own space, reordering their geography to match the story. Everywhere they go, they will see concrete reminders of Genesis’ world of creation and election, of blessing and promising. This world becomes the world in which they themselves live.

87 This small passage marks most clearly Genesis’ awareness that a location may have different names for different groups. Many of Genesis’ prominent categories, such as “Canaan(ite)” and “Israel(ite),” make sense only from a certain perspective, one which Genesis invites its audience to adopt. Cf. Mbuvi, Belonging in Genesis.
2.4.2 Etiological Connections between Israel and the Nations

At the same time, the readerly-world cues in Genesis 12-50 do not abandon the book’s interest in the wider international world. The indexical aside of 47:26, tracing Egyptian customs to Israel’s story, reminds the audience that Genesis has never left behind the universal concerns of chapters 1-11.

Genesis 16:11 gives the etiology of the name Ishmael within a future-oriented poem that describes not just a story-world character, but also the ongoing Ishmaelites. The story conveys both closeness (e.g., 17:25, 25:9) and distance (e.g., 21:12-13) between the great nation Israel and the great nation associated with Ishmael (17:20, 21:18; see references to villages, encampments, princes and tribes in 25:12-18). Similarly, Genesis 19:37-8 introduces the Moabites and Ammonites, explicitly marked as peoples who continue to this day. Again, these neighboring peoples are closely related to Israel (through Lot) even when they are denigrated (by virtue of their incestuous origins). The character Esau is also Edom, a nation or people (25:23), with clans, inhabitants, and kings (36:1-43). He is clearly not the chosen son, and yet he is a gracious and generous twin who reconciles fully with the eponymous Israel. Genesis treats each of these story-world characters ambiguously, relating them to Israel’s ancestors while also distancing them from the full promise.88 This ambiguous relationship between the narrative characters orients Genesis’ audience to ambiguities in their relationships with neighboring nations.

The Joseph cycle works out Israel’s relations to an even larger world. Joseph, like Noah, must act to save the whole world, preserving life, blessing, and fecundity (see Gen 41:57). Joseph

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exemplifies, but also mediates, God’s life-giving purposes among peoples of other lands, but does so specifically as a bearer of Abraham’s promise. In this respect, Joseph forms a fitting inclusio with Adam.\(^9^9\) I will discuss this inclusio further, along with the thematically dense conclusion to the Joseph narrative, when I discuss Genesis’ overall eschatological profile (chapter six).

### 2.4.3 Naming Characters and Naming Users

Genesis 12-50, then, shows a continuing interest in the nations while focusing the narrative spotlight on the Israelites themselves. Throughout, naming formulae mark the etiological origins of readerly-world peoples.\(^9^0\) Throughout, story-world characters become ever more transparent stand-ins for the later peoples who will come from them. These literary techniques serve to re-orient ongoing reality; Genesis’ naming-formulae do not just explain where prominent people- or place-names come from; they also invite the audience to view those peoples and places anew in light of the story-world revelation of what their names really mean.

For example, Abraham’s renaming formula (17:5-6) ties his new name, Abraham, to his role as the ancestor of nations; a parallel notice is made in Sarah’s renaming (17:15-16). The fact that both Abraham and Sarah will produce not only peoples but also their kings (17:6, 16) seems to connect Sarah’s new name (Princess) with Abraham’s (Ancestor of Many). The covenant material between the two namings (17:7-14), however, speaks of a specific people (so 17:14) with a specific rule (circumcision) and a specific land. Still, Abraham as a character is neither named

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\(^9^0\) Jenkins (“A Great Name,” pp. 46-51) argues that these formulae are not only etiological, but also fulfill the Abrahamic promise of a *great name* (Gen 12:1-3).
as, nor treated as, a stand-in for Israel; he is part of Israel’s story yet lies before and beyond the particular naming of a single people.\(^{91}\)

Isaac is a transitional character in Genesis. Isaac’s naming-formulae (17:17-19 [see 18:12-15] and 21:3-6 [see 21:9]) do not focus on his own identity or his connection to any future people. Rather, they highlight his status as a sign of trust (or distrust) and fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) with regard to his parents—the disbelieving laughter when God promises, and the joyful laughter when God fulfills. (That Isaac stands for God’s promise to Abraham helps explain Gen 22—on which see my section 6.5—and Gen 24, which rounds out Abraham’s story by assuring his son a wife.) There is no \textit{toledot} of Abraham, no cycle of episodes about Ishmael or Isaac; rather, the \textit{toledot} formulae skip a generation, from Terah (11:27) to Ishmael (25:12) and Isaac (25:19). Ishmael’s \textit{toledot} (25:12-18) is pure genealogy, a series of names that focuses not on characters (Ishmael or any individual descendants) but on ongoing Ishmaelite \textit{villages} and \textit{encampments} and \textit{tribes}. It parallels the later genealogical \textit{toledot} of Esau (Gen 36), which also establishes ongoing \textit{clans} and \textit{chiefs} (cf. 36: 15, 18, 29, 29, 30, 40, 43). Thus Isaac’s naming falls between Abraham’s and Sarah’s naming (tied to a promise for future peoples, but designating characters rather than peoples) and the genealogical namings of Ishmaelites and Edomites (designating peoples rather than individual characters).\(^{92}\)

\(^{91}\) Passages such as Josh 24:3 or Is 51:2 give evidence of a sort of audience that would, in hearing or reading Genesis, immediately identify Abraham as an ancestor who belongs in a special way to Israel—even if Genesis simultaneously (and significantly) portrays him as progenitor to such people as Ishmaelites, Edomites, Midianites, and other such groups (see, e.g., Gen 25:1-4). In Genesis, Sarah is more precisely correlated with the audience’s own particularity; descent depends on the ancestress as well as the ancestor (see Tammi Schneider, \textit{Mothers of the Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis} [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008]). But even Sarah (like Isaac and Rebecca) is a matriarch of Edomites as well as Israelites; only with Jacob does the family line fully narrow to “Israel,” and only Rachel and Leah (with Zilpah and Bilhah) are matriarchs of the tribes themselves (see Ruth 4:11). See Mbuvi, \textit{Belonging in Genesis}.

\(^{92}\) Worth mentioning is Ishmael’s naming (16:11-12), which first reflects his mother Hagar’s experience (compare Isaac’s naming in 17:17-19) but then immediately describes the future character of his life.
The *toledot* of Isaac (25:19-37:1), mainly about Jacob, introduces yet another naming strategy. This story cycle is begun and carried forward by *doubled* namings—the twin brothers Esau and Jacob have two names apiece, one most closely relating to the story-world character and one pointing rather more strongly to an ongoing people that will come from him. Even before the twin sons are born, this double character—they are twin brothers, and also close-yet-conflicted neighboring nations—emerges in an etiological/predictive poem:

25:23 *And Yhwh said to her,*

*Two nations in your womb,*

*And two groups from your body will be separated.*

*And a group will be stronger than a group,*

*And the great will serve the little.*

Immediately the two receive their first names, Esau (25:25) and Jacob (25:26). Esau’s second name comes only a few verses later (25:30); he is Edom, Israel’s closest neighbor. In fact, even Esau’s first naming formula shows no actual interest in the name Esau, instead giving wordplays evoking the nation Edom and its region Seir. Compare אַדְמוֹנִי [25:25] and הָאָדֹם [25:30], two related words for *red,* with אֱדוֹם, *Edom,* first mentioned in 25:30; and compare שֵׂעָר, *hairy,* in verse 25:25 with Edom’s region שֵׂעִיר, *Seir,* first identified as such in 32:3. Clearly, 25:25 and 25:30 function as alternate etiologies for Esau’s identity as Edom the nation; Genesis pays comparatively little attention to Esau as Esau.

Jacob, unlike his brother, is a well-developed character whose initial name (גֲּקֹב, *one who “takes by the heel”*) receives its own etiology in 25:26.

25:26a *And afterward his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; and he is named Jacob.*
In that the Hebrew language seems to associate heel-grasping with supplanting or deceiving, this name drives much of Jacob’s story. He supplants his brother Esau in two separate ways (25:29-34 and chapter 27), deceives his father Isaac (27), and ultimately deceives and supplants his uncle Laban (30:41-42; 31:1, 16, 20, 26-27, 43). Of course, he is also subject to ironic reversals in which he is deceived or supplanted, especially by Laban (see 29:21-30 and 30:34-36) but also by his immediate family. Rachel deceives Laban her father (but also Jacob) with regards to Laban’s household gods in 31:19-35, Simeon and Levi deceive the Shechemites (but also Jacob) in 34:13-30, Reuben tries to supplant Jacob in 35:22, and ten of Jacob’s sons deceive Jacob in 37:31-35. There are even delightful literary ties between these stories: mistaken identity in 29:21-30 evokes chapter 27, and the deceptive goat-blood on Joseph’s robe in 37:31-5 echoes the deceptive goat-fur on Jacob in 27:15-16, 23. All of these interrelated stories tie Jacob’s fate to his original name.

It is unsurprising, then, that Jacob’s renaming as Israel is a high point in the cycle. 32:29[28] And he said, “Jacob will no longer be spoken as your name, but rather Israel; for you have struggled with God [gods?] and with men, and you have succeeded.”

This renaming is cast as a future-tense transformation of identity (no longer [לֹא עוֹד] plus imperfect). In the story world, this change is neither immediate nor absolute; the name Jacob is still used throughout Genesis, and the character may not be done deceiving (33:12-17 involves at the least an unfulfilled promise, at the most an eloquent lie). But the shift from Jacob to Israel is not simply about the story world; the naming-formula as Israel leads to Genesis’ first reference to the Israelites (בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל), an explicitly etiological verse which speaks of Israelite practices to this day (32:33[32]). The user-world people Israel is here formally introduced for the first time, after multiple earlier indirect references. As a result, just as the meaning of Jacob was the key to that character’s story, the meaning of Israel becomes the key to the people named Israel. The users
find themselves defined, here, as people who successfully wrestle with divine and human partners.

The same renaming of Jacob as Israel occurs again in 35:10, part of a larger summarizing conclusion to the *toledot* of Isaac. Chapter 35 is full of explicit references to Jacob’s earlier story. So 35:1, 3, and 7 refer back to 23:19-22, where God’s appearance to Jacob provides an etiology for Bethel and a worship pillar there; the episode is either repeated or re-narrated in 35:13-15. Another divine encounter in 35:9-12 not only repeats the renaming of Jacob as Israel (32:29[28]), but also repeats God’s affirmation of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob that 28:13-15 has already narrated. (Both passages, of course, evoke various promise formulae, most clearly God’s promise in 17:1-8 and Isaac’s passing of that promise to Jacob in 28:3-4). Finally, the concluding list of Jacob’s 12 sons in 35:23-36 repeats the individual namings in 29:32–30:24.

All these repetitions are traditionally explained as P versions of the earlier non-P accounts. But it is notable how they come together here at the end of the Jacob story, joined to new events that wrap up Jacob’s life—most notably the deaths of Rebecca’s nurse Deborah (35:8) and of Rachel while bearing Jacob’s last child Benjamin (35:16-20). Both events provide etiologies for ongoing memorial objects: Bethel’s oak *Allon-bacuth* [35:8], and Bethlehem’s pillar of Rachel’s tomb, still there to this day [35:20]. Chapter 35, then, closes the *toledot* of Isaac by closely uniting the story world with the audience’s world—through the re-renaming of Jacob as ongoing Israel, the re-repetition of the ongoing Abrahamic promise, the naming of ongoing memorials at (or near) Bethel and Bethlehem, and the re-listing of 12 sons whose names constitute the ongoing tribes of Israel.

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Genesis’ last narrative cycle, the toledot of Jacob (Joseph’s story in 37:2-50:26), narrates two particularly evocative naming-formulae. This whole cycle, in some sense its own novella with several ancient parallels, is also a fitting climax to Genesis (see my section 6.4.1 for Joseph’s ties to Gen 1-11). Here at its end, Genesis takes the final step of merging the account of story-world characters and the account of Israel and its tribes. Thus the last two (Joseph) tribes receive their naming-formulae in 41:51-2.

41:51-2 And Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh (מְנַשֶּׁה), for “God has caused me to forget (נַשַּׁנִי) all my trouble and all my father’s household.” But the second he named Ephraim (אֶפְרָיִם), for “God has made me fruitful (הִפְרַנִי) in the land of my affliction.”

As with the naming-formulae of the other tribes (29:32-30:24; 35:18), these names are explained in terms of the psychology of the parent in relationship with God (compare here also the naming formulae of Isaac in 21:3-6). But Ephraim’s and Manasseh’s namings are especially resonant within Genesis’ larger motifs. Each naming balances the positive and the negative. Manasseh represents both relief (caused me to forget all my trouble; compare Noah’s naming formula in 5:29) and exile (caused me to forget . . . all my father’s house; the nearest parallels are 12:1/20:13/24:7, of Abraham’s wanderings, and 28:21/31:30, of Jacob’s wanderings). Ephraim represents God’s blessing to make Israel fruitful (a pervasive theme throughout Genesis), but this fruitfulness too is in exile (the land of my affliction; compare Hagar’s affliction in 16:11 and Jacob’s in 31:42). Both etiological namings, then, define Joseph’s experience as an experience of mixed blessing and estrangement. These statements of blessing-in-exile cohere with central

94 Compare the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers (see Richard Steiner and Charles Nims, “Ashurbanipal and Shamash-Shum-Ukin: Tale of Two Brothers from Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” Revue Biblique 92.1 [1985]: 60-81). Even more, note resemblances between Joseph’s story and Daniel 1-6, Esther, and Nehemiah 1-2 (Lawrence Wills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990]).
theological statements in the Joseph story (especially 50:20, which I will discuss further in section 5.3.2). Surely Genesis’ ancient users read such statements as a guide for understanding their own experience, as Israel, in terms of blessing-in-exile.

Meanwhile, Ephraim and Manasseh join the list of Joseph’s brothers (48:6-7). The poetic blessing of Joseph’s two sons (48:15-16, 20) introduces a longer poetic blessing of all Jacob’s children (49:1-28). This chapter I will discuss at length in my chapter six. Here it is enough to say that Genesis at its end seems more concerned with tribes than with children, as is indicated (for example) by the concern to re-rank Ephraim and Manasseh in terms of their tribal prominence (48:13-14, 17-20) and to demote Reuben (49:3-4) and Simeon and Levi (49:5-7) to prepare for Judah’s tribal primacy. Fittingly, Jacob’s blessing of his sons climaxes with Genesis’ first explicit reference to the twelve tribes of Israel (49:28). Now that the people of Israel are fully on the stage, the story brings them back to the promised land for one last naming-formula (50:11) before leaving them in Egypt to await the exodus (50:24-25).

2.5 From Past to Present to Future

2.5.1 Past Fulfillment as Proleptic

Genesis, opening with the words “in the beginning,” initially connects to users’ sense of their past. In this past-orientation, which I call the memorial mode, Genesis describes precursors—precursors to the present order, precursors to present peoples, and above all precursors to the users themselves. Genesis’ story-world time, as argued above, is distinguishable from this day. At that time (הַיּוֹם) Canaanites were in the land (12:6, 13:7); previously, Bethel was named Luz (28:19) and Beer-sheba was simply Shiba (26:33). Genesis’ main storyline occurs in the users’ past.
Genesis’ stories, however, reach forward from the past. Genesis’ past projects its own future—sometimes an ongoing future (see further below, 2.4.2 and 2.4.3), and sometimes a sequence of discrete events progressing beyond Genesis’ own time but remaining past from the point of view of users. The clearest example of the latter is Genesis 15:12-16, which narrates a “certain” historical progression from Genesis (13a), through Exodus (13b-14), and into Joshua/Judges (16). In this *ex eventu* prediction (and also in 46:3 and 50:24-6) Genesis presumes a sequential unfolding of events (exodus, conquest, settlement) as narrated in the Pentateuch and beyond. The entire predicted sequence does not come all the way up to *this day*, but rather unfolds in the at that time of traditional memory—i.e., when the Canaanites were still in the land.

So Genesis connects with a larger past than the past which it narrates, a past that exists in the users’ sense of memory or tradition. Helpful here is Lotman’s analysis of the sort of text that function as a “condenser of cultural memory,” acquiring “semiotic life” precisely as “the meaning-space created by the text around itself enters into relationship with the cultural memory (tradition) already formed in the consciousness of the audience.” By referencing cultural memory Genesis presumes an audience whose past includes not just promises, but also fulfillments—an audience that can testify to the faithfulness of God. Already in the course of the story, characters are pictured looking back on their own history of fulfillment. The audience that

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96 Genesis thus assumes what Clines (Theme, p. 93) calls Israel’s “canonical history,” a shared Israelite “memory” in which Israel experienced its past “as a movement toward a goal that had been established by divine initiative.” But note that unlike Deuteronomy (see, e.g., 17:14-20, 30:1-5) Genesis makes only oblique references to the monarchy (17:6, 16; 35:11; 36:31; 49:10), and never explicitly mentions the exile at all.

accepts the exodus-settlement sequence as its past will resonate with Abraham acknowledging the promised birth of Isaac (see 21:2, fulfilling verses like 17:21, 18:10, or 18:14) or Jacob acknowledging Yhwh’s provision during his sojourn (32:10, fulfilling 28:15). They will resonate with passages like 47:27, where Israel is fruitful and multiplies (see also 50:20 and Exod 1:7) to partially fulfill the promise/expectation of 17:2 and 26:22 (and the primeval command of 1:28; 9:1, 7). Genesis portrays the past as a witness to the faithfulness of God in fulfilling promises.

Yet even this memorial mode of orientation has implications for the future. A story that starts at the cosmic beginning may rouse expectations for a cosmic end. As memory, Genesis sets a trajectory in which past promises and purposes of the creator God—toward creation, toward the nations, toward Israel—may evoke implications for the future. After all, the fulfillments that characterize the past are always proleptic. Isaac’s birth (21:2) is more than the birth of a single baby (no matter how eagerly awaited); it is significant precisely as a link toward a larger future of numerous descendants and a great nation. Jacob’s provision during his travels (32:10) has greater meaning than an individual’s prosperity; the camps he has grown into contain not just the flocks of a successful herdsman, but sons who represent the later tribes of Israel. The fruitful multiplication celebrated toward the end of Genesis (47:27) is the first-fruits of the numerous nation (see, e.g., 50:20) into which Israel has not yet grown.

In general, Genesis’ narrative progression portrays all past moments of fulfillment as steps toward a promise-fulfillment that remains unrealized. Genesis’ audience, like its characters, can celebrate proleptic fulfillments as signposts along a journey even if that journey’s destination

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Clines’ words (Theme) are “merely provisional” (p. 85) or “hitherto fulfilled only embryonically and inadequately” (p. 83); but proleptic fulfillments are not insignificant (“mere” or “inadequate”), although their very significance (like an embryo’s?) lies in pointing forward to further development.
has not yet been reached. God has already visited Sarah (root פקד in Gen 21:1) to grant the promised son, but Genesis ends with a strong awareness of Israel in a state of waiting for God’s future *visitation* (the same root in 50:24-25; see Exod 3:16). The past which Genesis narrates brings the reader only up to Egypt, that is to say, to a time of waiting (not without suspense) for further action from God.

One could, of course, read Genesis’ suspenseful ending as a mere plot device, connecting Genesis to Exodus but with no horizon beyond the past escape from Egypt and the past initial settlement. But Israelite literature consistently presents the Egypt/exodus experience as a recursive experience, a past which is never simply past. To speak of Egypt and exodus is to speak of exile and return (see, e.g., Hos 8:13; 9:3; 11:5, 11). Surely users of Genesis in the Persian period viewed the Babylonian exile (not yet fully ended) and the restoration of Israel (not yet fully completed) as a re-iteration of the same story, a re-living of the same cultural memory, that Abraham dreamed about and Joseph told his family to wait for. And in any period, Genesis’ users enter a story which looks forward to this past memory, aligning themselves with a perspective that expects exodus to follow exile until a final fulfillment of the promise emerges.

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100 See Marc Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (New York: Routledge, 1995), arguing that Second Isaiah attests a cyclical exodus-liberation view of reality, in which Israel consistently expects that “the cycle is about to turn”; cited in Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, p. 206. Steinmetz further argues (p. 210) that the temporal discrepancy between Gen 15:13 (400 years) and 15:6 (the fourth generation) serves to “shift the focus away from a particular historical situation” (Egypt is not mentioned) to a “typological,” open-ended reference to exile.
2.5.2 Present Fulfillment as Partial

If the memorial mode of orientation links Genesis’ story with users’ sense of the past, the *contemporizing* mode of orientation links the story to the ongoing user-world present. Gerhard von Rad reminds us that even if readers accept Genesis as memory—for that matter, even if they read a verse like 12:1 as an “actual fact about Israel’s beginning”—they must still acknowledge that Genesis is less interested in “representation of past events” than in contemporary application. Genesis 12 narrates “not only an event in her [Israel’s] earliest history, but also a basic characteristic of her whole existence before God.”\(^{101}\) The same could be said for every chapter of Genesis, which again and again brings Israel’s past into conversation with users’ contemporary experience as Israel.

From the very first, Genesis presents the very rhythm of ongoing time (see, e.g., 1:14) as an inevitable consequence of the book’s narrated beginnings. Given the book’s pervasive etiological thrust, most scholars understandably suggest that Genesis’ main purpose is to explain or structure the present for its users. The narrated past exists less to provide information (or speculation) about antiquity than to give a taken-for-granted, natural orientation to the audience’s current experience. So for example when Genesis’ longest and most explicit prediction (chapter 49) talks about יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶםנאֲשֶׁר (49:1—*what will happen to you*, an interesting idiom in which the future *meets* the addressees), from the audience’s viewpoint this phrase would most naturally address their own essential and ongoing nature as Israel’s tribes. In 49:26 Joseph’s blessing is even linked with the *eternal* (עולם) immutability of the hills.

So the generations of succeeding and changing Israelites are all, in the logic of Genesis, summed up as a unitary *seed* whose ongoing character is, at it were, latent in its DNA. Genesis implies a natural, ongoing order to Israel’s relationships with outsiders (see, e.g., 12:3c, 21:23-4, 27:29), with the land (either generally, as in 12:14-27, or in specific locales, as in 48:22), and with God (passages such as 17:7). These relationships ultimately intertwine with a projected natural, ongoing identity for Israel itself.\(^{102}\) Users would certainly connect this naturalized sense of Israel’s unchanging state with their own present experience. At the same time, Genesis does not only mythically orient unchanging conditions that are fully realized in the ongoing present, timeless as the eternal hills (49:26). Genesis also projects an unfolding story, a progression of changing states that will characterize Israel’s future (15:12-16), or Esau’s (see 27:39-40), or Issachar’s (49:14-15). God’s dealings with creation include appointed times for plenty and for famine (ch. 41), a *sequence* which moves *toward* promise-fulfillment. Therefore the present is seen through a double-vision, as a timeless and inevitable state of affairs and as a step (not necessarily the last) in the progressive story of God’s creative purposes.

Genesis highlights this double-vision of inevitable assurance and sequential expectation by thematizing *delay*. Genesis’ presentation is not promise-and-immediate-fulfillment, but promise-and-delay. Most of the Abraham cycle takes place in the delay between the promise of *seed/offspring* (12:7) and the birth of Isaac (21:1-3). Most of the Jacob cycle takes place in the delay between the promise of a safe return (28:15) and the account of that safe return (ch. 33, or finally in 35:1-15). Much of the Joseph cycle takes place in the delay between the dream of Joseph’s rise to prominence (37:7, 9) and the fulfillment of that dream (42:6, or finally in 50:18). For that matter, the ancestral section as a whole occurs in the delay between the promise of the

\(^{102}\) See Mbuvi, *Belonging in Genesis.*
land (12:7) and its projected fulfillment (50:24). Finally, Genesis itself occurs in the delay between the promise of fruitfulness (1:22, 28) and its partial achievement (47:27). Life, Genesis suggests, is an in-between time.\footnote{See Diana Lipton’s characterization of Gen 15 (Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], pp. 216-17): delay is “an essential element of God’s plan for patriarch and people.” Clines (Theme) considers delay an integral part of the Pentateuch’s theme of promise-fulfillment. Hugh White (“Desire and Promise in Genesis,” Word and World 14 [1994]: 178-85) argues that literally, desire drives the plot of most narratives, but delay of promise drives Genesis.}

In this in-between time, despite partial and proleptic fulfillments, a basic component of reality is the repeated occurrence of threats\footnote{For one example of this mistake see Gunkel, Genesis, p. 164. David Petersen (“Eschatology—Old Testament,” ABD 2: 575-9) talks about patriarchal promises as one of three sources of eschatology—but claims they point forward to “the time of the united monarchy” (he cites Gen 15:18-20), when the promises were fulfilled. Better is George Nickelsburg (“Eschatology: Early Jewish Literature,” ABD: 580-92) who notes that throughout Israel’s history the patriarchal promises described a “scenario that awaited fulfillment.”} to the promise. God’s creative purpose of fruitfulness is threatened by disobedience and violence, leading to the flood; the flood story begins by stressing the possible undoing of creation (Gen 6:7) and ends with a lengthy assurance that this threat will not have the last word (8:21-22, 9:8-17). Abraham’s promise of progeny is threatened by his and his wife’s age, by Sarah’s barrenness, by his own (groundless?) fears that lead him to imperil Sarah, and by the strange divine command to sacrifice Isaac. The very name Isaac calls attention to the laughter of disbelief (17:17; 18:12, 13, 15) as much as the laughter of surprised fulfillment (21:6). The Jacob story is similarly driven by threats to Jacob and his family, and the Joseph story by threats to Joseph and, ultimately, the whole family of Israel. If Genesis ends with Israel once more united, surviving, and thriving (47:27, 50:20), Israel is nevertheless in Egypt and thus (implicitly) still subject to recurring threats.

The literary motif of threat draws audiences’ attention to the way that their own present includes threats to the promise, calling for patient trust. Genesis does not just speak to a settled and united Israel, reflecting on the origins of the community’s present blessing.\footnote{It speaks to an}
Israel whose claim on the land, and status as a great nation, is tenuous at best. Genesis’ present, then, appears not as a static present of complacent satisfaction, but as a storied present caught in the tension between assured promise and threatened unfulfillment.

2.5.2 Genesis as Users’ Future

Finally, Genesis contains an expectant mode of orientation, connecting to audiences’ sense of the future. When I argue that Genesis’ most important mode of temporal orientation lies in its hopeful expectations, I am not denying Genesis’ prominent interest in legitimating Israel’s present (the contemporizing mode) by means of Israel’s past (the memorial mode). But I do believe that this orientation moves from past to present, and from present to future, in a way that ultimately points the users forward. A naturalized blessing or promise, tied (for example) to the continuing rhythm of nature or the recurrent appearance of rainbows, speaks not only to the stable present but also to the assured future. Genesis thematizes such assurance by the word eternal (אֵל עוֹלָם, 21:33), a past or future that extends indefinitely; this word describes the stability of God’s creation and covenant (9:12, 16; 13:15; 17:7, 8, 13, 19; 48:4), and ultimately describes God’s own identity (אֵל עוֹלָם, 21:33). Etiologized elements in Genesis—the hallowed Sabbath, the social convention of marriage, and even the specific dietary practices of the Israelites—are realities assured by their grounding in the audience’s past; but they are also realities assured for eternal continuity into the audience’s future. By building the present on the past, Genesis pictures a present that also progresses into the future.105

105 Fishbane (Biblical Interpretation, pp. 411-13) speaks of a “pervasive and culturally fundamental” textual usage in ancient Israel which “seeks to envision the future in light of the past”; the present is the “link between memory and hope,” and tradition is the “screen upon which national hope and renewal is contextualized, even imagined.”
Much of Genesis’ expectant mode of orientation derives from users’ ability to identify with its narrative characters. Every etiology contains, for those who adopt the story-world viewpoint, an expectant statement about the (past’s) future. Genesis’ readers will feel expectant to the degree that they sympathetically identify with story-world characters, sharing those characters’ temporal perspective. When users fall under Genesis’ literary spell they no longer stand in their own present, looking back on Adam or Abraham; they stand with Adam and Abraham, looking forward. Audiences, “once they had climbed into the Genesis story world . . . could identify their future with Abraham’s and Isaac’s future.”106 Throughout the Pentateuch memory is participatory, and users enter into the narrated experience of primordial blessing, Exodus-era deliverance, and a Sinai covenant made not with our fathers, but with us (so Deut 5:3). Within this mimetic framework, memory of how ancestors anticipated their future merges with present hearers’ anticipation of our future. When ancestors are promised that their seed will crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15) or inherit the Promised Land (Gen 12:7 and parallels), audiences—through eponymous identification—can see themselves as ongoing recipients of the promise.

Genesis’ mode of expectant identification, in which users sympathize with characters and appropriate those characters’ expectations as the users’ own, functions in a variety of ways. Would-be parents, for example, can read themselves into the procreative hopes and fears of the barren ancestress; displaced wanderers can identify with the anxiety-laden wishes of wandering Jacob (see 28:20-22). Yet Genesis’ pervasive eponymous language invites the audience above all to self-identify corporately as Israel, and thus to identify most closely with Israel’s corporate

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106 Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 229. Carr is attempting here to characterize proto-Genesis, but the same surely applies to Genesis’ later compositional form. See also Carr, p. 305: “the narrative future has become the audience’s future” (emphasis original).
hopes. This language of descent binds the audience together as “a genealogically structured promise-community,” one that shares “an ongoing promise history.” These tales do not just tell how individual ancestors meet challenges; they narrate how Israel as a community (or line of descent) is shepherded, through numerous threats, toward its heritage of promise. The struggles and successes of each individual, indeed of each generation, become in Genesis only one stepping stone in an ongoing lineage of destiny. Thus when audiences identify with the characters of Genesis, they identify precisely with a heritage of carrying forward divine promises.

Several literary features within Genesis tend to reinforce its mode of expectant identification.

- When Genesis combines the promise of seed (e.g., 12:2) with promises to the seed (e.g., 12:7), any audience self-identifying as seed stands with the ancestor as recipient of promise.
- When promises are made in a dream-sequence, the timeless reality of the dream world allows the readers of Genesis to stand with its characters as joint recipients of the dream report.

Genesis 15:12-16 especially speaks transparently to Israel’s exilic experience (viewed as a

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107 See Mbuvi, Belonging in Genesis, for an extended argument that Genesis’ Israel is a family-defined people, in family-defined connections with other peoples (indeed, all of creation). This suggests that the audience’s most powerful invitation is to see the future from a communal, familial perspective.

108 Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 307.


110 See Clines, Theme, p. 98: Genesis’ promises address descendants “no less directly than . . . their forefathers.”

111 Lipton (Revisions) calls such dreams “quasi-prophetic” because of their special relation to the audience’s situation.
new Egypt-exodus progression in, e.g., Is 11:16 and Jer 23:7-8). The ex eventu periodization of future history projects a perennial expectation that oppression will lead inevitably to (delayed) deliverance.

- When blessings are passed from parent to child, the blessings become recursive: each generation begins as the blessed child but goes on to be the parental blesser. Since Genesis’ parental blessings replicate the divine promises, each new generation of users begins as the recipient of God’s promises but ends by passing that promise on to the future. Genesis ends with a series of deathbed blessings (48:15-16, 20; 49:1-28; 50:24), artfully placed as an etiological conclusion to the whole book, suggesting that Genesis as a whole is the etiology of Israel’s ever-extended anticipation of blessing.

The impact of such literary features depends on the contexts in which Genesis is used. If 12-tribed Israel lives stably on its own land, the ancestral promise-stories may merely explain why things are the way they are. But if Israel’s tribes are disunited, threatened, or scattered, these stories have much to say about the future reconstitution of Israel. In future chapters, I will further examine the situation in which Genesis’ audience may have experienced this text, focusing on the Persian period as a likely setting for its compositional stabilization and (therefore) for the earliest usage of the book as it now stands. If one accepts this scholarly consensus, then exilic and

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113 Steinmetz, From Father to Son; so for example she claims (p. 147) that in Genesis “national and world history, future and past, are encapsulated in the patriarchs’ quest for the blessing and for a way to pass on that blessing to their sons.”
postexilic realities were pressing concerns not just for Genesis’ audience, but also for the editors/authors whose meanings are preserved in the words that survive as Genesis.\textsuperscript{114}

For now, it is enough to reiterate that Genesis does not present the promises as already fulfilled, but quite the reverse; any past fulfillment is proleptic of a future that still remains (for the characters, and also for the audience) a matter of ongoing hope. The present is a time of partial fulfillment but also of delay, trust, and expectation; each new experience is part of a storied movement toward fuller realization of the promises. Genesis does not specify whether fulfillment and expectation will \textit{always} remain in tension, or whether the logic of expectation requires a full and final conclusion; I will return to this question at the end of chapter six. Either way, Genesis’ orientation provides powerful impetus toward expectant hope.

\section*{2.6 Conclusion: Summary of Genesis’ Temporal Orientation}

To summarize, Genesis’ future-orientation is not confined to the possible predictive character of a few isolated passages, but comes from the total effect of the book’s interacting modes of temporal orientation. Genesis invites its audience to claim an identity formed by a particular history with God, an ongoing contemporary experience with God, and a confident expectation from God.\textsuperscript{115} Genesis functions as creative etiology, as orienting myth, and as

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{114} See Seebass, “Relationship of Torah and Promise,” p. 102: Gen 49 and Deut 33 take for granted a 12-tribe Israel in its land, which in the postexilic setting “thrusts the discrepancy to reality especially painfully into awareness.”
    \item \textsuperscript{115} Hugh White (\textit{Narration and Discourse}, pp. 108-9) comes to much the same conclusion—that Genesis is not only “historical” (narrating a timeframe prior to the act of narration) but also “simultaneous” (narrating a timeframe simultaneous with the act of narration) and even “predictive” (narrating a timeframe subsequent to the act of narration). This is because the promise (12:1-3, but also in its other expressions) “projects a future which not only goes beyond the end of the book, but goes . . . beyond the time in which the author was living.”
\end{itemize}
theological scripture, to ground Israel’s identity and its relation to God/ nations/ land in an ongoing, ever-extended promise. That promise, expressed as a procreative blessing of a promised people, enfold all future generations. The blessed child becomes in due course the blessing parent; audiences cannot play the role of the seed (fulfillment of past promises) without also inheriting the role of the seed-bearers (recipients of present promises, whose fulfillment still lies in the future). Past memory becomes contemporary experience, and contemporary experience becomes hope.

The quality of Genesis’ hope is defined by its multifaceted temporal orientation. The promised fulfillment has all the surety of something that already occurred (Israel did come to be a nation, living in the promised land) and all the immediacy of something that is now occurring (the audience sees itself as the promised great nation)—even as the promises remain statements about what God will do. The future is assured by past memory and by ongoing experience. Genesis brings users into a story whose ending is already known, since the divine intention has already been timelessly established in the natural always of myth. Yet simultaneously the progressive sequence of linear history suggests that the promise will work itself out in discrete but irrevocable stages—which by a sort of mirage become as clear and distinct in the future as in the retrospective past. One sees in Genesis’ predictions (especially 15:13-16 and 49:3-28) the roots of the apocalyptic prophecy ex eventu—not a mere literary technique, but a view of time in which the future can be laid out as clearly as the past in one grand sequence of unfolding divine purpose.116

116 Anathea Portier-Young (Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], p. 27) characterizes similar prophecies in Daniel, the Apocalypse of Weeks, and the Book of

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Genesis’ temporal orientation, weighted toward the etiological, emphasizes a past, present, and future that are predicated on God’s creative intentions. These intentions are illuminated by utopian hints of how the world is supposed to be—in both senses (how it ought to be, and how users suppose it to be). Lotman astutely notes that any cultural-linguistic picture of the natural or normal may cast a sort of spell, in which users overlook any disjunction between the portrait and real experience. I would argue, however, that literary portraits often have the opposite effect, highlighting disjunctions between the portrayed world and the experienced world. Current experiences that do not match the etiolized picture of Israel’s identity—experiences of exile from the land, of divided tribes, of threatened fruitfulness, of adumbrated blessing—create a tension which Genesis exacerbates (not least by its thematic interest in threats and delay) rather than clouding. Current expressions of the blessed life which fall short of the utopian/mythic ideal dissatisfy, and the world as it is begins to feel like a provisional state of waiting. Real-world experiences belong to the past (or “passing away”) stage of story time, the stage between promise and fulfillment; the present itself seems outdated, hopelessly behind the inevitable this day of fulfillment.

Experiences of non-fulfillment, then, do not invalidate the etiology but merely invite users to identify with Genesis’ characters in their pre-fulfillment reality, their trust and hope for God to bring about the etiolized state of affairs. In my next chapters I will examine further the

Dreams as “historical review, cast in the form of prophetic prediction, that at the same time interprets past and present . . . affirms God’s governance of time and the outworking of God’s plan in history, and gives hope for a transformed future.” Interestingly, Carr (Reading the Fractures, pp. 139-40) compares P’s legal material to later apocalypses, even calling this “ex eventu”—a category that suits Gen 15 even more clearly.

Lotman, Universe of the Mind, pp. 35, 128-9. Kunin (Logic of Incest, pp. 37-48) argues that the main goal of mythology is to cloud or disguise such disjunctions.

Seebass, “Relationship.”
contexts of disappointment which may have driven users to extend and deepen Genesis’ promises while applying those promises ever more closely to themselves. Experiences of fulfillment, in their turn, do not erase Genesis’ sense of expectancy but rather become proleptic foretastes of a future which remains promised. And both fulfillment and non-fulfillment take their place on a mythic-historic timeline measured not in years or centuries, but in ongoing hope. Thus hope becomes a fundamental principle of existence for those who name themselves as this Israel, in relationship with this God. A structural coupling emerges between an Israel defining itself as the recipient of certain promises (blessing, land, fruitfulness) and a God defined as the faithful promise-giver. With a God like this and an Israel like this, the present itself is only an aberration and a challenge—or, more positively, a partial step toward a more complete fulfillment of the promises that define not only the future, but also the present and the past.
3. Situating Genesis in Persian-era Judea

3.1 Introduction

An initial survey of Genesis’ temporal orientation (see my ch. 2) suggests that it invites users to connect the textual narrative with the extratextual world, and that in doing so it orients them toward their past, present, and future. This raises the question of how and when Genesis has actually been used, how Genesis’ future-orientation interacts with the expectations of a specific people in a specific period. In this chapter I describe an important setting for Genesis’ usage, Persian-era (539 – 333 B.C.E.) Judea (Achaemenid Yehud). Above (section 1.3.2) I have already outlined my working hypothesis that Genesis, in something quite like its present compositional form, came together in the Persian period. On the other hand, I consider Genesis’ compositional processes (see my section 5.2) to be too uncertain to date specific redactional layers. I rely on a near consensus that something like Genesis, in something like its current form, was used in the Persian period, without deciding which parts had already long existed and which parts were new.

In this chapter I will summarize some of the historical and archaeological information about the Persian period, giving special attention to the way that Hebrew literature (especially the Pentateuch) was used during this time. Current discussions about Pentateuchal composition and dissemination in the Persian period have important implications for Genesis’ eschatology; they raise issues such as the nature of canonical Yahwism, the attitude of Pentateuch-users toward imperial domination, and the inter-relationship of various Judean groups reflected in Hebrew literature. I will discuss some of the scholarship on these issues, along with a few of my own critical suggestions, in order to better locate a reading of Genesis itself.

I will conclude, specifically, that Judea in the Persian period was a poor rural province, with a sparse and mixed population. Hebrew textual usage was limited not only by Judea’s small size and lack of resources, but also by the tendency of literate elites to write in imperial Aramaic.
(the language of administration and commerce) more than in Hebrew. The one known institution likely to preserve and disseminate Hebrew literature, especially literature that is sharply Yahwistic, is the Jerusalem temple. On the other hand, although Judea’s Persian-era Hebrew texts are deeply influenced by priestly points of view, they do not restrict themselves to propagandizing on behalf of a specific priestly class or supposed theocratic hierocracy. On the contrary, they address a wide range of topics, and sometimes challenge as well as laud the priesthood. This suggests that these texts were used for some other purpose or purposes that go beyond mere priestly legitimation.

One likely suggestion is that much Persian-era Hebrew literature (including, but not limited to, the Pentateuch) exists to construct and/ or reinforce a textually defined identity as Israel. Although the textual witness to Israel’s identity is multivocal, it does present a rough overall profile, drawing together various groups (returnee Judeans, nondeported Judeans, diaspora-Judeans, and probably some Samarians\(^1\)) around a shared tradition of Israel’s relationship with Yhwh. Even more, much of this Hebrew literature grounds Israel’s relationship with Yhwh—and thus Israel’s very identity—in a remembered past and in an anticipated future. Significantly, the remembered past and the anticipated future are shaped by divine promises—promises that have been fulfilled and promises still awaiting fulfillment. Genesis, from this perspective, takes on a certain prominence as the most sustained account of the divine promises that constitute Israel. I suggest that the close connection between Israel’s identity and Yhwh’s promises helps explain Genesis’ pride of place at the beginning of the Pentateuch and (perhaps

\(^1\) Terminology for the Persian period has not been standardized. I reserve words like “Jews” and “Samaritans” for post-Persian identities, and use “Judean” and “Samarian” for inhabitants of (or those who, living elsewhere, still trace their roots to) the province Judea/ Yehud (יהודה) and Samaria (שומרון). My other distinctions (e.g., among diaspora, nondeported, and returnee Judeans) should be obvious. I use “Israelite” for Judeans and Samarians who were interested in a 12-tribe Yahwistic heritage (hence “Judean Israelite” and “Samarian Israelite”), without assuming that all or most of those in the provinces of Judea or Samaria were so interested.
later) of the developing canon. The same close connection also raises important questions about how Genesis interacts with other expressions of Israel’s promise-infused identity, such as the prophetic literature’s account of Israel’s eschatological destiny.

3.2 Persian-era Judea: An Overview

3.2.1 From Monarchic Judah to Provincial Judea

In the first decades of the sixth century B.C.E. the kingdom of Judah, whose political, economic, cultic, and text-producing capital was Jerusalem, came to an end. In 587-586 the neo-Babylonian empire conquered Judah, devastated Jerusalem, destroyed the Jerusalem temple, and carried a sizable minority of Judeans (in particular Jerusalemites, especially those connected to the royal court and state cult) into exile into Babylon. Admittedly, Judah had earlier been ravaged by Assyrian attacks and had long existed as a client state under Mesopotamian empires, and in 586 the land was certainly not left empty. Yet the neo-Babylonian attacks sufficiently

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4 James Trotter (Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Judah [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], p. 54) emphasizes that the late Judean monarchy had, for decades, “ruled at the discretion of” larger empires to whom it paid tribute; he cites 2 Kgs 23:33-34; 24:1,7, 17; 25:22. See the historical overview in Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in JIPP: 19-52, here 19-24, with sources.

dominate the textual and extra-textual evidence to warrant a significant distinction between the pre-exilic monarchic state and Judea’s history as a province.6

Importantly, no material evidence separates Neo-Babylonian Judea from Persian Judea, and a single sixth-century return under Cyrus is less likely than gradual waves of returnees lasting well into the fifth century.7 Communities of diaspora Judeans in Babylon and elsewhere continued through the Persian period and beyond.8 For my purposes, then, I see little value in following the scholarly tradition of distinguishing between exilic (587-539) and post-exilic (after 539) Judea. The whole life of provincial Judea from 587 on was post-exilic; it took place after, and reflected back on, the discrete exiling events of 587 – 586. The whole life of provincial Judea from 587 on was also exilic, in the sense that Judea’s former population remained scattered and its land under foreign rule.9 If I here examine Genesis’ usage in Judea (rather than Babylon) and

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9 Albertz (Israel in Exile) defines the “exilic” period such that it ends in 520, describing as “late exilic” literature that other authors call “postexilic.” I find it least confusing to call such texts “early Persian-era.”
during Persian rule (rather than pre-539), I am still interested in Genesis’ character as a document written very much with Judea’s continuing exile in mind.\(^{10}\)

At the end of the Iron Age, monarchic Judah had a population of around 110,000 people, left significant archaeological records of urbanization around Jerusalem, and produced a flourishing state-sponsored Hebrew-language epigraphy. Provincial Judea was significantly less urbanized, left behind significantly fewer luxury items, and stopped producing administrative Hebrew-language writing altogether.\(^{11}\) Some scholars have emphasized the relative continuity of life in Judea outside Jerusalem.\(^{12}\) But demography alone suggests otherwise; survey-based estimates suggest that Judea’s population shrank from 110,000 inhabitants in its late monarchical period to fewer than 30,000 in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian period.\(^{13}\) Lipschits and Tal emphasize that this sharp decrease in population (settlement) and in urban prosperity (luxury

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\(^{10}\) David Clines (The Theme of the Pentateuch [Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978], p. 98) has put this best: “exile was still a reality long after 539,” and so the Pentateuch, “even if it was composed after 539 B.C., is still an exilic work”—in fact, “whenever exilic Jews open the Pentateuch it finds itself.” In general, many of the suggested reasons for Judean disappointment—the lack of independent rule (e.g., an indigenous or Davidic monarch), the sparse habitation of Jerusalem and its environs, the scattered diaspora which never returned, and the harsh economic/agricultural realities of central Palestine—continue throughout the Persian era.

\(^{11}\) For a thorough discussion of epigraphy, luxury items, and other signs of a leisure class in late monarchical Judea (especially around Jerusalem), drastically reduced in the neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, see especially Jamieson-Drake, Scribes and Schools; Schniedewind, How the Bible Became a Book.

\(^{12}\) In addition to the sources in note 4 above, see Jon Berquist, Judaism in Persia’s Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 15-18. For a more nuanced emphasis on continuity in Judea’s archaeological record at the neo-Babylonian exile, see Ephraim Stern, Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538-332 B.C. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982; Heb. Ed., 1972), e.g., p. 229.

items, administrative-oriented sites) lasts well into the Persian period. The rural poverty of the area attested in various Persian-era texts (e.g., Hag 1:6, 10-11; 2:16-19; Zech 8:10; Mal. 8:12; Neh 5:1-5) seems to have been an ongoing fact of life (failed harvests, taxation, and debt accumulation are, in fact, perennial problems for ancient agriculturalists in various ages and settings).

With its southern territory (around Lachish) encroached upon by Idumea (Edom), and with Jerusalem itself in ruins, the center of gravity for Judea’s remaining population initially shifted to what had been northern Judah (or southern Israel), around Bethel and Mizpah. Some scholars have concluded that only with the repair of Jerusalem’s walls (mid-fifth-century) did the provincial administration of Judea move back from Mizpah to Jerusalem. Even after this development, Jerusalem remained only partially occupied throughout the Persian period. It seems to have chiefly served as an important link between Judean settlement concentrations to the south (from Bethlehem to Hebron, with some overlap with Idumean settlements) and to the north.

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16 See, e.g., André Lemaire, “New Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea and Their Historical Interpretation,” *JJPP*: 413-56, here pp. 418-20. Lemaire emphasizes that much of the land which Genesis firmly describes as Israelite in heritage—including sites such as Hebron, Mamre, and Beersheba—was dominated by Idumea rather than Judea throughout the Persian period.


These central Palestinian settlements consisted of rural farmers whose produce supported their own subsistence, temple-solicited tithes and offerings, imperial taxation (flowing through the Judean governor to the satrapy capital in Syria), and limited commerce with more urbanized regions along the Phoenician-dominated coast.

To Judea’s immediate north lay Samaria (formerly the kingdom of Israel), whose capital—also called Samaria—appears to have been significantly larger than any other city in central Palestine. The extensive scholarly literature on Samaria is beyond the scope of this study, but many Samaritans shared with the Judeans a common interest in the deity Yhwh, and in writing Hebrew; they may well have had an ongoing interest in the same sorts of proto-canonical textual traditions that were being gathered in Jerusalem. Archaeologically, the Persian-era temple on Mount Gerizim looks as though it is patterned after the slightly earlier rebuilt Jerusalem temple; if indeed its high-priesthood traces from the same Aaronic family of Joshua, this indicates possible rivalry but also considerable closeness.

Judea thus had, in the Persian period, several sorts of overlapping connections with diaspora-Judeans (in Babylon, Egypt, and elsewhere), with its closely-related neighbor Samaria, with more-distantly-related neighbors (such as Edom, Ammon, and Moab).
and Moab), and with powerful forces to the west (the Phoenician-dominated coast) and northeast (Syria). Judea’s challenge was to express its relations with each of these groups without giving up its own special claims.

3.2.2 Temple and Empire

Within the larger profile of provincial Judea, several developments can be traced to the first century of Persian (Achaemenid) rule, such as the sporadic return of some Judeans from Mesopotamia (late sixth to mid fifth century) and the repair of Jerusalem’s damaged city walls (mid-fifth-century). I would argue that the development that would prove most fateful for Judea’s ongoing history was the rebuilding of a Jerusalem temple to Yhwh (520 to 515 B.C.E.). The temple rebuilding project may have received special impetus from Judean returnees, especially if these returnees had ties to the Persian administration and therefore helped elicit imperial permission or support. Just as importantly, the goal of restoring the Jerusalem Yhwh-cult, and the success of that restoration project, may have been one of the chief reasons that diaspora Judeans returned to their homeland in the first place. Similarly, if the Jerusalem temple’s prominence was enhanced by the city’s mid-fifth-century wall repairs, it may well have been the existence of a major temple that motivated the Persians to locate a provincial capital in Jerusalem and (therefore) to wall and garrison the city.

23 Cf. the essays in Lipschits and Oeming, ed., JIPP.

24 See, e.g., Berquist, Judea in Persia’s Shadow; Kessler, “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists.”

In the monarchic state of Judah, the state-sponsored cult was in many ways an arm of the royal administration. After 587, the influence of the former monarchic aristocracy did not disappear overnight; Jehoiachin maintained a sort of court-in-exile (2 Kgs 25:29-30; Jer 52:31-4), although in Judea the appointed governor/ ruler at Mizpah was Gedaliah, a non-Davidide (Jer 40-41; 2 Kgs 25:22-6). If the assassination of Gedaliah by Ishmael (a Davidide) was a bid for restored Davidic power, it was unsuccessful. A generation later, the intriguing biblical portrait of Zerubbabel as both Achaemenid-appointed governor and Davidic scion suggests that in the early days of Persian Judea, heirs of the old Davidic court recovered some influence in Judea.

But for reasons which the historical record leaves unexplained, after Zerubbabel Judea has no further clear record of Davidic heirs or their retainers—only the Jerusalem temple and priesthood, which Zerubbabel helped to reestablish.

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26 See, e.g., Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* (AB 25b; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 70-76, suggesting that Haggai exists in part to reassure Judeans that the temple can function without its traditional association with the monarchy.


29 There is some intriguing evidence in Judean seals whose names may (but only may) correspond to Davidides mentioned in 1 Chr 3:19; see André Lemaire, “Zorobabel et la Judée à la lumière de l’épigraphie (fin du Vie s. av. J.-C.),” *RB* 103 (1996): 48-57, esp. 56-57; Eric Meyers, “The Persian Period and the Judean Restoration,” p. 508; discussed in Albertz, “The Thwarted Restoration,” pp. 8-9. In general, Albertz argues too strongly (largely on the grounds of supposed redactional stages in Haggai and Zechariah) that Persia cracked down on Zerubbabel and Davidides generally. Utterly speculative is his reading of silences in Haggai and Zechariah (regarding the temple’s consecration) as evidence that these two pro-Zerubbabel prophets were “silenced . . . or even killed.” In fact, Walter Rose (“Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period,” in *Yahwism after the Exile*, ed. Albertz and Becking: 168-85; idem, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* [JSOTS 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000]) disputes, on exegetical grounds, that Haggai and Zechariah ever promoted royal claims for Zerubbabel at all. The key texts are Hag 2:23 (kings wear signet rings, but what does it mean to be made like
Some suggest that the temple remained as closely linked to Judea’s provincial (Persian) administration as the seventh-century temple had been to Judah’s state (Davidide) administration; others emphasize the temple’s relative independence from Persian control. Even if, as Berquist suggests, the empire supported the temple as a sort of bribe (to offset demands that Judea help supply produce for a military expedition to Egypt), imperial involvement in temple proceedings need not have been extensive. Meanwhile, Zerubbabel’s support of the temple can be connected to his personal ambitions rather than Persian policy. Several scholars believe that the sources intentionally exaggerate Persia’s support for the Jerusalem temple for ideological reasons. Some priests may have wished to claim imperial backing (and, conversely, some imperial officials may

a signet ring?) and Zech 3:8, 6-9-14 (is the Zerubbabel, or a king still to come?). Against Albertz, it is worth emphasizing that we cannot know what has been “suppressed,” but only what was valued and preserved in written form. Trotter (Reading Hosea, pp. 97-8) follows Berquist (Judaism in Persia’s Shadow, pp. 62-4) in suggesting that Zerubbabel, as Persian governor, was never anti-Persian; the extant texts give no evidence of conflict, and since the Hebrew sources are only interested in his role in temple-building, their lack of any subsequent mentions are neither “mysterious” nor “ominous.”


For a measured discussion of this issue that deals with much of the literature, see Lester Grabbe, “The ‘Persian Documents’ in the Book of Ezra,” JJPP: 531-70.
have wished to take credit for the temple), without any systematic Persian influence on the Jerusalem cult.

Rainer Albertz, following Frank Crüsemann, reconstructs a whole range of Judean indigenous leadership structures: two Judean “councils,” one of priests/levites and another of elders (חתים) / nobles (חרים), and also a popular “assembly” (קהל). 34 On the other hand, Lisbeth Fried denies that Judeans held any authority in Judea, arguing extensively that the aristocracy was almost exclusively “foreign.” 35 In general, I would be surprised if Judea’s economy could support, besides the governors and their administration, an extensive additional set of indigenous nobles or officials. 36 Much here depends on how late (or idealized) the accounts in Nehemiah are judged to be; especially important is Nehemiah 5, where the “nobles and officials” belong to the “same people” as the oppressed Judeans (5:5; cf. 5:1). These may be employees of the governor’s provincial administration, who under Nehemiah (an atypical governor; see 5:14-15) are being encouraged to express a degree of solidarity with other Judeans that they did not normally feel. Or they may be a small group of landowners with little official role of their own.


When Yeb (Elephantine) sent letters to Jerusalem in 407 B.C.E., one was addressed to the Jerusalem governor and the other to a mixed group: high priest, other priests, and some Judean nobles. I tentatively conclude that the recipients of the second letter formed a single (diverse) locus of indigenous Judean leadership, subordinate to the governor and lacking his coercive authority. Tellingly, the biblical sources seem to contrast the mandatory imperial tax with the less regulated temple appropriations; Malachi 1:6-14 (esp. 1:6-8) contrasts the divine displeasure when one shirks cultic contributions with the more immediately ominous threat of the governor’s displeasure. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all describe the difficulties of persuading the population to support the temple economically (Hag 1:2-11, 2:15-19, Zech 8:9-13; Mal 3:8-12); the solution is religious and rhetorical appeal, not the use of force. Even Nehemiah, a governor who (as depicted) made it his business to support the temple, elicits something not unlike a voluntary agreement (Neh 10:32-9) which is easily neglected (Neh 13:10-14). None of these passages mentions civil punishments for disobeying the temple’s leaders, and none implies that Persia itself has generally concerned itself with temple offerings.

Finally, the odd vision about Joshua’s filthy clothes (Zech 3:1-5) may indicate a widespread view that the hereditary priesthood had been defiled by Jerusalem’s destruction and subsequent events (see also Hag 2:10-14; Mal 1:12). Similarly, Malachi 3:1-4, which may be Persian-era, sees the purity of the cult and its personnel as a matter for eschatological hope. It seems that those who worked in the temple did not go unquestioned, and that prophets could both challenge and (just as significantly) validate priests’ ability to minister to Yhwh. Nothing in the sources suggests that priests could merely issue orders to an unwilling population. Even Ezra, a


priest who (as depicted) claims a substantial imperial warrant (Ezra 7:25-26), in practice operates by the same sort of prophetic-style, persuasive diatribe that is so prominent in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.\(^39\) Of course, this may be because Ezra does not quite agree with the high priest or other ruling priests. But if so, this only highlights the fact that priests did not speak with a single authoritative voice.\(^40\) Eventually the priestly dynasty of Aaronide Joshua, which held uninterrupted sway from the late sixth through early second centuries, consolidated extensive economic and political power.\(^41\) But I suggest that the Jerusalem temple for most of the Persian period was a center for internal Jewish affairs rather than an imperial administrative center with coercive authority.

### 3.2.3 Hebrew Writing and Israelite Identity

Descriptions of Judea’s Persian-era conditions often overlook one significant clue: the complex bilingualism of provincial Judea.\(^42\) Persia drew no sharp lines between Judea and other provinces in the Over-the-River (Syria-Palestine) satrapy; patterns of kinship, language, and

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\(^{41}\) Watts, “The Torah as the Rhetoric of Priesthood,” in *PentT*: 319-31. The temple’s growing authority, especially regarding taxation, is attested mainly in the Hellenistic or very late Persian periods; see, e.g., Alexander Fantalkin and Oren Tal, “Relating Lachish Level I: Identifying Achaemenid Imperial Policy at the Southern Frontier of the Fifth Satrapy,” *JJPP*: 167-97, here p. 180. See also Deborah Rooke (*Zadok’s Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], e.g., pp. 239, 325, and 329) concluding that the high priestly office was quite limited until well into the Greek period.

(perhaps) religion seem to have informed the Persian-era notion of what constituted Judea.\textsuperscript{43} Meanwhile, the whole empire used Aramaic as the language of commerce and administration; unsurprisingly, the epigraphic evidence from Persian Judea testifies almost exclusively to Aramaic literacy, which seems to have dominated scribal education throughout the Levant.\textsuperscript{44} But although Hebrew as a written language could have easily died out altogether, it did not.\textsuperscript{45} Some group or groups preserved, edited, and extended a Hebrew literature that preserved material from the late Judean monarchy, but continued to be used and extended throughout the Persian period and beyond. In fact, even as evidence for everyday Hebrew writing and reading (in letters, receipts, and official documents) declines, the importance of Hebrew literary works only increases.\textsuperscript{46}

Sociolinguistically, this distinctive and persisting literary tradition implies powerful cultural forces: the usage of Hebrew, and specifically of a group of important Hebrew texts, became linked to a distinctive and persisting Judean (or, in many of the sources, \textit{Israelite})

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{44}{See Schniedewind, \textit{How the Bible Became a Book}, pp. 174-82; Kottsieper, “‘And They Did Not Care to Speak Yehudit’”; Polak, “Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community,” esp. pp. 592, 600, and 606. Even correspondence between Jerusalem and diaspora-Judeans about traditional (Yahwistic) practices took place in Aramaic; see here the correspondence between Yeb, Jerusalem, and Samaria (see above, note 37).}
\footnote{45}{Nehemiah describes families who did not bother to use the Hebrew language, and Judean crowds who needed Hebrew-language texts explained (or translated) for them. Kottsieper (“‘And They Did Not Care To Speak Yehudit’”) emphasizes that Neh 13:23-4 is not about the rise of bilingualism but about the possibility that an already bilingual population (in Hebrew and Aramaic) was beginning to become monolingual (knowing Aramaic only). For a careful argument that Persian-period Hebrew remained a spoken language (complete with significance influence from Aramaic), see Polak, “The Judean Speech Community,” esp. pp. 606-14.}
\footnote{46}{See Kottsieper, “And They Did Not Care to Speak Yehudit”; David Carr, \textit{Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature} (New York: Oxford, 2005). I follow Carr in using \textit{literary} and \textit{literature} to refer to long-duration, carefully crafted texts, excluding short correspondence, receipts, and other material that is primarily temporary, technical, or archival. This social use of long-duration material through time contributes to the formation of a (literary or religious) canon; see Carr, \textit{Writing}, pp. 275-91.}
\end{footnotes}
In fact, if the power of tradition for articulating Judean identity informs the choice to use written Hebrew in the first place, it may also inform the sort of written Hebrew which Persian-era Judeans used. Recent studies have suggested that the well-documented lexical and grammatical differences which distinguish SBH (“Standard Biblical Hebrew”) from LBH (“Late Biblical Hebrew”) do not, at least for Persian-era Judeans, represent chronological stages in the production of texts but coterminous stylistic choices which writers of a single time and place could produce. If so, Ben Zvi has plausibly suggested that scribes made the choice between styles of written Hebrew primarily on the grounds of identity-claims: SBH features were preferred for the core corpus considered most constitutive of traditional identity (although that core corpus might incorporate new additions), while LBH features were preferred for a second-tier corpus whose authority rests on its claim to reflect upon the first group of texts. Such


48 For an entrance into this debate, which still rages, see especially Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensvärd, Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts, 2 vol. (London: Equinox, 2008). This study presupposes and builds upon the large body of diachronically-oriented linguistic studies of SBH and LBH, especially by Frank Polak and Avi Hurvitz, even if it suggests a different interpretive framework.

hypotheses, although in need of additional testing, helpfully address the particulars of Hebrew-language textuality in terms of its ideological/theological purpose of constituting the identity of Israel.

In this context, the complex, self-contradictory nature of Pentateuchal legislation, and its combination with extensive non-legal narrative reflection, suggest that the purpose of Hebrew-language writing in this period is not (as Ska notes) to “regulate life” in the narrow legal sense. Rather, written traditions such as the Pentateuch serve to “define the conditions of membership in a specific community called ‘Israel.’” Law becomes yet another species of tradition, both received and constructed in an “ongoing process of negotiation . . . as a resource for constructing identity.” Ska somewhat oversimplifies Pentateuchal identity under two headings: the patriarchs (emphasizing genealogy, or “blood ties”) and Moses (emphasizing both the exodus experience and the law, or “rights and duties”). One may suggest that Genesis’ family stories establish more than mere “blood ties,” and the Moses story has a broader thrust than “rights and duties.” But Ska has made an important contribution to reading the Pentateuch, as a whole, as a guide to Israel’s identity. Above all, he recognizes that the identity which the Pentateuch helps establish is “directed toward the land” and, ultimately, to open promises. As I will continue to argue throughout, the Persian-era usage of the Pentateuch (in concert with other Hebrew-

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52 So Ska, Introduction, pp. 228-31 (see also p 15).
language texts) establishes an identity which is not present and given, but rather depends upon future events—not least the full and free settlement of the land.

Thus, while the Hebrew literature which survives was probably preserved and used by a Jerusalem-centered elite, and may indeed have originated in the context of the transfer of Judea’s cultic and cultural center from Bethel and/or Mizpah to Jerusalem, nothing in the Pentateuch suggests an interest in a purely Judahite identity apart from the full, twelve-tribed Israel. This twelve-tribed Israel exists only in the audience’s (idealized) past or (anticipated) future, not as an accessible reality for those who used these texts. By focusing on Israel, the Pentateuch witnesses a set of identity claims that reach out from Judea to diaspora Judeans in Babylon or Egypt, to families and communities that might identify as Judean in surrounding Palestinian provinces, and to some members of the related-yet-distinct “Israelite” province of Samaria. The Pentateuch, then, expands more limited identities that might focus on a single tribe, a single location, or a single uniform experience.

It is worth contrasting this Pentateuchal identity with the identity proposed by John Kessler for the Persian-era Judean golah “charter group,” based on the three “key elements” of shared ethnic roots, the experience of exile, and a “specific form of Yahwism formulated by the


55 For the Babylonian-diaspora flavor of much of the Pentateuch and Prophets, see, e.g., Frank Crüsemann, The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law (trans. Allan Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 290-301, 343-5. For possible Samaritan influence on the Torah (e.g., positive references to worship at Bethel and Gerizim, and a coyness about specifying the “one” approved sanctuary which Deuteronomy enjoins) see Christophe Nihan, “The Torah Between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua,” in PentT: 187-223. Nihan argues (pp. 213-16) that a reference to Gerizim in Deut 27:4 in the Samaritan Pentateuch (but also an Old Latin witness) is original (the MT is a later anti-Samaritan correction; Deut 27:4-8 seems to cite Exod 20:24-6, indicating that in this early form the Pentateuch recognizes Gerizim as legitimate but only under the provision for multiple altars (and hence not making claims to be the one centralized cite for worship). If Nihan is right, the Pentateuch has very delicately balanced the claims of other shrines against the presumed (but not explicit) centrality of the Jerusalem temple.
Golah.

The Pentateuch noticeably broadens each of these three elements. Its genealogical vision roots Israelite “ethnicity” in ancient and unverifiable (perhaps even fictive) ancestors culled from both southern and northern traditions, ancestors who could be claimed by any would-be Israelite. Its appeal to exile is metaphorical and variegated, merging return-from-Mesopotamia with exodus-from-Egypt to invoke a tradition that the nondeported can also share.

And its Yahwism integrates traditions preserved/developed in Babylon with traditions preserved/developed in Palestine—in Samaria as well as in Judea. The Pentateuch thus follows those sources which, while perhaps privileging the ideology of returnees, tend to conflate returnees

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58 Even before the exodus Abraham is a sojourner (גֵר) — see, e.g., Gen 23:4; cf. also the Jacob story in Gen 28-35. Ska, Introduction, pp. 169-70, argues that Abraham was originally claimed by nondeported Israelites (Ska cites Ezek 33:24) but that passages like Gen 12:1-4, 15:13-16 tie Abraham to the return of the deportees as well.

59 See Knauf’s extensive argumentation (“Bethel: The Israelite Impact”) that the Pentateuch, finished in Jerusalem, joins writings from the Babylonian Golah with writings preserved in Bethel — where Judeans (but also northern Israelites) carried on Yahwistic traditions between the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and its reconstitution. Knauf is especially helpful in highlighting various passages which describe slavery and oppression within the land, not only exile and return from exile.
with the nondeported.\footnote{Texts which suggest that Judea had been left empty (e.g., 2 Chron 36:20-21) may de-privilege the experience of nondeported Judeans, but they are also inclusive: if all Judea was deported (see, e.g., 1 Chron 6:15), any Judean is \textit{ex hypothesi} a returnee. Composite population lists (reflected in Ezra 2 and Neh 7) seem to include all Judeans on the roll of the return (Ben Zvi, “Inclusion in and Exclusion from Israel”; Sara Japhet, “People and Land in the Restoration Period,” in \textit{Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit}, ed. Georg Strecker [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1983]: 103-25, p. 114; Jonathan Dyck, “Ezra 2 in Ideological Critical Perspective,” in \textit{Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts}, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. [JSOTS 299; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000]: 129-45). The designation of Judeans as those who “return” (בֹּא, Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh 8:17) or “come” (נָעַל, Ezra 3:8) or “come up” (עָלָה, Ezra 2:1; Neh 7:6, 61) from captivity may therefore refer not only to the literal returnees from Babylon, but also to all who identify with this movement.}

\footnote{Passages most clearly critical of the nondeported are, interestingly, neither in Ezra-Neh nor in the Pentateuch, but in the prophetic literature (see, e.g., Ezek 11:14-21; 33; Jer 24; 29). But even in Jer 24, Albertz (\textit{Israel in Exile}, p. 323) believes that the entire 5th-century community is being viewed as \textit{though} it were descended from the \textit{golah}. Some have suggested that references to the “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” (Ezra 4:1) or “people of the land” (יָדָעַנֶּה, Ezra 4:4) intend to exclude all non-\textit{golah} inhabitants of Judea (Lester Grabbe, \textit{Ezra-Nehemiah}, p. 138; Antonius Gunneweg, “תַּנָּאֶס: A Semantic Revolution,” ZAW 95.3 [1983]: 437-40; Barstad, \textit{Myth of the Empty Land and “After the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’”). But יָדָעַנֶּה refers most often (as Gunneweg admits) to landowners; in Hag 2:4 and Zech 7:5 they are Judean landowners who support the temple with no sign of conflict (see especially Peter Bedford, \textit{Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah} [Leiden: Brill, 2001]). According to careful explanations in 4:2 and 4:10, these particular landowners are of non-Israelite extraction. Even if the text is inaccurate in associating them with Essar-haddon’s policy of importing mixed populations, I see no reason to assume that this group includes all nondeported (i.e., non-\textit{golah}) Judeans. It is just as likely to refer to outsiders brought in by the Persian satrapy to run central Palestinian estates (Fried, “The ‘\textit{אָמָה הַמִּדָּאשִׁים’}).


The trajectory of Hebrew literature seems to draw a maximal definition of Israel as Yahwists under the second temple’s orbit.\footnote{So Kessler, “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists,” p. 112, citing Ruth and Chronicles as examples; see also Uriel Rappaport, “Les juifs et leurs voisins,” \textit{Annales-Histoire, Sciences Sociales} 51 (1996): 955-74. Inclusive language is apparent in Ezra 6:21 (see Peter Bedford, “Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah,” \textit{VT} 52: 147-65, esp. p. 150) and in Ezra 6:3-5 and Neh 1:3 (see Sara Japhet, “Periodization: Between History and Ideology—The Neo-Babylonian Period in Biblical Historiography,” in \textit{JINBP}: 75-89).} At the risk of over-simplification, I suggest that nearly all extant Hebrew writings presume, promote, or create a broad-based, textually-constructed Israelite identity centered in Judea. At the very least, Persian-era Judeans knew and used late (if not final) versions of the Pentateuchal and prophetic corpuses, which in their current forms share four minimal characteristics: a religious interest in a special relationship with Yhwh, a geographic interest in a special land, an ethnic interest in a special family or genealogy, and a traditional interest in a special heritage of past events. As one might expect, each of these aspects...
of Israelite identity can be diverse and contested, both in the literature and in the experience of actual Judeans. Yet even disputes about how (and how tightly) to draw identity boundaries presume that there will one day be a single group seeking to be *Yhwh’s Israel*, with a claim to *Israel’s promised land*, descended from *the tribes of Israel*, sharing *Israel’s past.*

It may be impossible to ascertain precisely when (and for whom) this coupling of scriptural writings and (idealized) Israelite identity took hold. One pool of evidence comes from Yeb, where diaspora-Judeans corresponded with Jerusalem and Samaria about cultic practices in their own temple to Yhwh; surviving Yeb documents show no knowledge of (or interest in) any proto-canonical Hebrew literature. Yeb’s Judeans worship Yhwh, but can also swear by—and possibly worship—other gods as well; they never seem to mention Mosaic *torah* or prophetic words. Nothing in the correspondence implies that either Jerusalem or Samaria thought of the Yeb temple as an anomalous sect (see Cowley 32:9, where Jerusalemites approve the Elephantine

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63 So, for example, Ruth, even if it shows quite a different picture of endogamy than Ezra-Nehemiah, has the Moabite heroine make commitments to Israel’s God, family, and land (Ruth 1:16-17). See here Sebastian Grätz, “The Second Temple and the Legal Status of the Torah: The Hermeneutics of the Torah in the Books of Ruth and Ezra,” in *PentT*: 273-287.

64 See, e.g., Reinhard Kratz (“Temple and Torah: Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch between Elephantine and Qumran,” in *PentT*: 77-103, here p. 93) for a statement of the consensus that by 300 B.C.E. the Pentateuch is not only finished but central for all Judeans; from the third century B.C.E. onward, contending groups all seem to accept, interpret, and dispute about the Pentateuch, treating it as a shared authority. I also find telling the need for translations into Greek and (a little later) Aramaic, of the Pentateuch and then other scriptures. Such translations surely indicate that these texts are already being widely used—contra Arie van der Kooij, (“The Septuagint of the Pentateuch and Ptolemaic Rule,” in *PentT* 289-300), whose analysis of the LXX translation project begins with a weakly supported denial of diasporal readings of Torah (he cites Deut 31:11 and Neh 8:1-8). For a classic statement of the proto-canonical forces behind LXX translations see John Wevers, “Translation and Canonicity: A Study in the Narrative Portions of the Greek Exodus,” in *Scripta Signa Voci: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes, and Languages in the Near East Presented to J. H. Hespers*, ed. J. Vanstiphout (Groningen, Netherlands: Egbert Forsten, 1986): 295-303.

65 See Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, pp. 143-4, with sources; see, e.g., Cowley 22, where contributions are divided among Yahweh, Eshembethel, and Anahtbethel. Christoph Levin (“The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch,” *JBL* 126.2 [2007]: 209-30, p. 229) makes much of the contrast between the perspective of the Yahwist’s presupposition of exclusive Yahweh-worship and the situation in fifth-century Elephantine. As Mark Hamilton emphasizes (“Who Was a Jew?” p.108), the same individual in Yeb could be called both *Jew/Judean* and *Aramean* (Cowley 5:1; 6:2-4; 8:1-2; 9:2; 13:1; 14:3; 15:2; Kraeling 7:2; 2:2; 5:2; 11:2; 12:2-3). It may be significant that no extant document from Yeb uses the word *Israel* at all.
temple-building). One may suspect, then, that many Yahwists in diaspora, in Samaria, and even in Judea may not have known or cared about the standards of any Hebrew literature. But this possibility only highlights the fact that some group or groups did indeed link Judean/Israelite (idealized) identity with written, Hebrew-language Yahwistic traditions. Eventually this group succeeded in elevating these scriptures to special prominence in Judea and Samaria, and in disseminating these scriptures’ usage among diaspora-Judeans throughout the empire.

3.2.4 Hebrew Literature in the Context of Ancient Literacy

3.2.4.1 Limited Literacy and Structures that Support It

In recent years, biblical scholars have attempted to describe the ancient situations in which texts were produced and used, especially in a largely oral culture. The first area of consensus to emerge is that ancient literacy levels remained low, with roughly 1% of the population able to read and even fewer able to write. Of course, the ability to read and (especially) to write long literary texts has always been much rarer than minimal literacy. Because text-creating was an expensive practice (in materials and in skilled labor), it was carried

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66 For this analysis of the correspondence with Yeb I am indebted to Kratz, “Temple and Torah.” Aramaic ostraca seem to indicate a temple to “Yaho” in Idumea as well, which join Yeb and Gerizim as centers of Yahwistic worship co-existing with the second Jerusalem temple; see Lemaire, “New Aramaic Ostraca,” pp. 416-17.

67 I find suggestive the conclusions of Ephraim Stern (see, e.g., “The Religious Revolution in Persian-Period Judah,” JIPP; 199-205; idem, Material Culture, p. 158) that on purely archaeological grounds one can connect concentrations of Yahwistic names (in Judea and in Samaria) with the absence of polytheistic cultic sites and cultic objects—a significantly less mixed situation than prevailed in the seventh century. This is important because so many of the written Yahwistic traditions emphasize monolatrous Yahwistic exclusivism. On the other hand, Yahwistic theophanic names are on seals of Horus and Shamesh; see discussion in Morton Smith, “Jewish Religious Life in the Persian Period,” in The Cambridge History of Judaism, Vol. 1: Introduction; the Persian Period, ed. William Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 219-78.

out by city-dwelling scribes with surplus resources and/or connections to wealthy sponsors.\textsuperscript{69} The production, storage, and dissemination of texts generally required the support of powerful institutions such as the royal court and the state cult.\textsuperscript{70}

Hebrew literacy and the structures that supported it peaked in the late Judean monarchy, the acme of Judah’s urbanization, commerce, and epigraphic Hebrew (including monumental writing). By contrast, Persian Judea seems to have been a more rural and sparsely populated province without an indigenous royal court or a Hebrew-using administration. Unsurprisingly, Hebrew textual production seems to have diminished to the vanishing point in this era.\textsuperscript{71} Schniedewind goes so far as to challenge the very possibility of a thriving Hebrew literary tradition after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. At the same time, he cannot deny that written Hebrew continued in the Persian era, since Judeans in the early third century possessed a mass of Hebrew texts (narrative, poetic, prophetic, cultic, and legal) tracing back to earlier centuries. Schniedewind can only suggest that Persian-era Judeans preserved this material but did not compose much of it, and that epigraphic evidence of low Hebrew literacy levels contradicts the growing trend in biblical scholarship to date most of the Hebrew Bible to the sixth century or later.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Gary Knoppers and Paul Harvey (“The Pentateuch in Ancient Mediterranean Context: The Publication of Local Law Codes,” in PentT: 105-141, here pp. 128-9) note how ancient law codes often described agrarian concerns, but the setting for their collection and writing was almost exclusively urban.


\textsuperscript{72} Schniedewind, \textit{How the Bible Became a Book}, pp. 165-72; 178-82.
Yet Schniedewind seems to pass over the scribal effort required to recopy Hebrew literature in the Persian period, even if (as he thinks) the literature itself was produced during the late Judean monarchy. Scrolls do not last forever, and it is arguably no easier (or cheaper) to copy each text mechanically than to fuse them into a new, self-reflective, anthologized form—one that would likely require less valuable parchment than piecemeal copying of diverse originals. Schniedewind’s contrast between fifth-century literary “retrenchment” and seventh-century literary “creativity” is overdrawn.73 Few doubt that Persian-era scribes worked with established written traditions; where the late Judean monarchy produced abundant new forms precisely because more people were writing Hebrew for more purposes, the Persian period saw a sharpening of Hebrew textuality around a limited cluster of traditional literary concerns. But this sharpening (even if one wishes to call it “retrenchment”) did not make Hebrew writing less creative in the Persian period. Creativity costs little, and leaves little archaeological footprint. Even a handful of Hebrew writers could conflate existing Hebrew literature, rework and extend it, and promulgate the resulting writings within a small community hungry for a traditional identity.

In such a setting, the very lack of official sponsorship from a royal court or state cult (the sorts of institutions that promoted the seventh-century Hebrew literary explosion) probably encouraged Persian-era Judeans to invest authority in the writings themselves. This would explain the Pentateuch’s rhetorical shape as a self-authorizing appeal, relying on its internal persuasiveness as divinely spoken instruction. In an era when few could write or even read Hebrew, a special prestige clung to those few who worked to preserve, extend, and read (aloud) Israel’s traditional writings. The very lack of a monarchic infrastructure to support scribes—and

to enforce the content of their writings—meant that those who kept scribal Hebrew alive had to stake their authority on the numinous value of the writings themselves. Thus this period may have seen a significant step forward in what Schniedewind calls “textualization” of authority—not despite the lack of strong institutional endorsement, but because of that very lack.  

3.2.4.2 Ancient Oral Usages of Written Literature

To fill out this picture, one would have to imagine writings preserved and extended with an aural audience in mind, working within a long tradition of public readings. Ancient literacy interacted with orality more closely than does modern literacy, as scribes preserved literature that had been orally produced and shaped writings for oral performance. Ben Zvi speaks, appropriately, of a “symbiosis of literacy and orality.” As Loubser astutely points out, where ancient art depicts the reading of texts, the scene usually involves dancers, singers, and instrumentalists. Carr explores at length the ways that literacy does not replace but rather serves oral practices like memorization and recitation.

Of course, Carr believes that textual performance took place among literate elites, trained in a literate-oral program of education. But Carr’s primary evidence is comparative material,

74 See here Eskenazi, In an Age of Prose. I will return to this basic position again (section 3.4.2) after examining some important proposals for institutions that might have supported the Hebrew literary tradition.


mainly from Babylon and Egypt—large empires whose elite class was significantly larger than Judea’s even at its height, and especially under Persian rule. In Persian Judea, not only was the literate class small, but many “elite” scribal practices took place in the language of administration and commerce (Aramaic) but not in Hebrew. So perhaps the oral usage of Hebrew texts was aimed not just at potential administrators but also at the broader population. I suggest a partial parallel, not in the scribal practices of great empires like Egypt and Mesopotamia, but in the intriguing literary texts found at the small kingdom Ugarit—texts that despite their ties to the temple and the monarchy seem to express popular (along with elite) interests.

In other words, writing is not directly connected to oppressive structures just because it is writing. Perhaps the real “colonializing” move is to decontextualize texts from the situated practices in which they were performed and received—practices that in many instances empowered the audience. Literacy scholars have long appreciated the wide variety of specific, diverse social practices that accompany the use of texts in various settings; the education system that produces one sort of “literacy” may be quite different from that which produces another

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79 Carr, Writing.


82 So John Foley, “Indigenous Poems, Colonial Texts,” in OLCA: 9-35; see also Pieter Botha, “Cognition, Orality-Literacy, and Approaches to First-century Writings” in OLCA: 37-63. Claudia Camp (“Oralities, Literacies, and Colonialism in Antiquity and Contemporary Scholarship,” in OLCA: 193-217) makes the point that texts always bore multiple interpretations—some interpretations may have served the interests of the powerful, but others did not.
sort. And Knoppers and Harvey note that community law codes in the ancient Mediterranean context were regularly read publicly, in order to affirm their centrality as norms for the whole community. That such public reading is best attested in communities without a strong monarchical center may help explain why postexilic Israelite literature includes so many examples of public readings. Oral performance of traditional texts, perhaps with translation or commentary, could serve the formation of a wider community’s identity.

Much remains unknown about the specific sorts of oral performances of the Pentateuch. Campbell and O’Brien hypothesize that storytellers would expand its terse narrative episodes. Watts, on the contrary, pictures an oral performance of the Pentateuch as a whole; in his analysis the brevity of individual pieces is less pertinent than the shape of the whole narrative-plus-law complex. Both Watts’s analysis and that of Campbell and O’Brien stand in a long tradition that

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84 Knoppers and Harvey, “The Pentateuch in Ancient Mediterranean Context,” p. 132, 135, and 137. Examples include Neh 8:1-8, 13-18; 9:1-3; 13:1-3. This same practice, retrojected into earlier settings, may explain 2 Chron 17:7-9 and 2 Kgs 23:1-3 (see Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, pp. 41-2, with citations)—or, for that matter, Deut 1:5; 31:9-13; Josh 8:33-5. For the importance of community reading and (especially) of communal agreement to abide by the text (e.g., Neh 10:1-27) see Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, esp. p. 5.


86 Campbell and O’Brien (*Rethinking the Pentateuch*, p.17) cite Stephanie Dalley (Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], p. xvi) for a parallel hypothesis about the use of Mesopotamian written narrative outlines.

87 Watts, *Reading Law*, p. 30: the Pentateuch’s structures, despite a few self-contained episodes, “seem designed for public reading of the whole.” Watts does not, however, really explain how ancients would have performed such a large corpus (through condensation, or perhaps a cycle of repeated gatherings?). For their part, Campbell and O’Brien (*Rethinking the Pentateuch*) do not give sufficient attention to the Pentateuch’s arrangement as a continuous story; even if short pieces were used orally, audiences would have interpreted them in light of the overarching cycle (see Foley, “Indigenous Poems”; idem, *Imminent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* [Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1991]; Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, pp. 14-16). And if Watts’s portrayal of the Pentateuchal narratives as mere prelude to law is unpersuasive (Genesis’ powerful stories are no mere preamble to nomistic material), Campbell and O’Brien give no account at all for why story-tellers’ narrative outlines have been combined with a mass of legal or quasi-legal codes. For the significance of the narrative-law combination in the
interrogates the Pentateuch for information about social settings of (oral) use; but unlike form criticism’s interest in oral settings that predate the text, these authors exemplify a new interest in the social, oral usage of the written text. Thus they raise important questions about how the Pentateuch’s compositional seams, its doublets or internal contradictions, affected the oral performance of the finished produce. Did the lector, functioning perhaps as a creative storyteller, select among the conflicting details in order to present each audience with a slightly different version of the story? Or did the audiences accept self-contradiction as a rhetorical marker that the culture’s dissonant traditions all have a voice in the protocanonical synthesis? Either way, an avenue is opened for regarding the irregularities in the Pentateuch as functionally significant, providing clues to the text’s usage in its completed form as well as to the compositional process that lies behind it.

At minimum, Pentateuchal material serves to aid community reflection on topics of cultural and religious interest. The Pentateuch helps define Israelite identity, and this purpose is sustained through its various genres—which are never merely entertaining stories or merely assembled laws. The Pentateuch’s rhetorical strategy intentionally incorporates diverse types of material to ground a communal identity in a common instruction, a common worship, and a


89 Campbell and O’Brien, Rethinking the Pentateuch, pp. 15-19.

common experience—all united under the rubric of Yhwh’s involvement with Israel. In Genesis (see above, chapter two) Israel’s identity has a storied character—that is, past and present are not completely continuous, but involve a sense of progression from how things used to be to how things are today. This storied identity draws attention to future outcomes. So, for example, Watts’s suggested Pentateuchal narrative-law-sanction pattern means that both stories and instruction project an alternative set of future outcomes (sanctions are blessings as well as curses). \(^91\) The way in which Israel remembers its story (narrative) and lives by its regulations (law) will determine its future fate (sanction).

### 3.3 Pentateuch and Empire

#### 3.3.1 Imperial Authorization?

Behind Judea lay the Persian Empire, whose relationship to the Pentateuch has inspired a growing scholarly literature. \(^92\) *Imperial authorization* is a catch-all category that can include everything from official adoption of the Pentateuch as imperial law, to unofficial Persian contribution toward the expenses of local Judean writings. Many scholars now doubt that Persian authorities (probably unable to read Hebrew, and uninterested in what Hebrew writings said) would have provided any real censorship or guidance for the Pentateuch’s contents. \(^93\) Even more

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\(^{91}\) Watts, *Reading Law*, pp. 154-60.


\(^{93}\) See the essays *Persia and Torah*, ed. Watts.
unlikely is the notion of Persian enforcement of the Pentateuch; Persians could perhaps have enforced an abbreviated list of local legal traditions if they were translated into Aramaic, but not a five-scroll Hebrew opus whose legal material is often contradictory, and only comes after dozens of chapters of non-legal narrative.\textsuperscript{94}

Anselm Hagedorn explicates a more nuanced view of imperial authorization, in which “Persian presence and pressure triggers” social dynamics that produce the Pentateuch, and the empire is “therefore responsible for the shaping of the Pentateuch—even though Persia never officially sanctioned the process.”\textsuperscript{95} Similarly, Jon Berquist emphasizes that any Persian shaping of Hebrew literature would have had to be funneled though local, Hebrew-speaking agents; as his argument develops, it becomes clear that these “agents” may not be (in any straightforward sense) related to the Persian administration at all.\textsuperscript{96} Whether or not one calls this process authorization, Berquist and others have drawn attention to the fact that Judeans with the training, leisure, and resources to produce texts had more contact with Persian money and power than did their poorer neighbors. One would therefore expect a certain degree of cultural/ideological influence, perhaps within the framework of a pervasive imperial pressure to see the world as “Persian”—even in the absence of direct imperial involvement.

Some Judeans may have wanted to claim Persian authority for their local texts, and may even have been able to elicit a general torah-endorsement from one or more Persian officials.\textsuperscript{97} If

\textsuperscript{94} See Ska, Introduction, pp. 222-23.

\textsuperscript{95} Anselm Hagedorn, “Local Law in an Imperial Context: The Role of Torah in the (Imagined) Persian Period,” in Pent\textit{T}: 57-76, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{96} Jon Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization,” \textit{Semeia} 75 (1996): 15-35. This is not the place to critique the postcolonial lens that makes all “elite” (i.e., literate) Judeans into subtle agents of Persian control, but one must at least note that in Berquist’s lexicon all literature ever written is imperially authored, not just (specifically) the Pentateuch in Judea. (Confirmed in private conversation.)

\textsuperscript{97} See Watts, \textit{Reading Law}, p. 142, for the helpful distinction between writings enforced by Persian administrators, and writings whose “prestige” is enhanced by being associated with (various) power structures.
so, however, this endorsement makes little mark on the form of the Pentateuch, which does not name any Persian sponsors or publicize its backing by the reigning authority. Watts makes the fairly modest suggestion that Persian rule gave Judeans a “motivation for compromise”—that the mere existence of imperial power, not any specific directives from Persian administrators, suggested to the Judean scribes that their traditions ought to be consolidated. 98 While this is certainly possible, scholars such as Blum and Carr go too far when they suggest that Pentateuchal (P and non-P) traditions were so inherently contradictory that only strong external pressure could impel their authors to bring the sources together. 99 Judean editors may have had many reasons for bringing together traditions that (some) scholars judge ill-fitting, and external compulsion is only one possible motive. 100

Still, the point is well taken that Judea was not independent; it carried on its social, economic, and cultural life within the larger context of pervasive imperial control. The question is not how much influence Persia exerted (according to Horsley, the empire was “far more intrusive

Josephus (A.J. 12.240), even when discussing a royal (Seleucid) authorization of Judean ancestral law, distinguishes these laws from Seleucid law; according to Portier-Young (Apocalypse, p. 73), Judeans “were able to recognize that the laws rested on an authority external to the empire itself.”

98 Watts, Reading Law, pp. 137-43. He cites Blum, Studien, 357-60; Crüsemann, The Torah, 260-1. The same basic view is taken by Carr, “Rise of Torah”; Hagedorn, “Local Law.”


100 Konrad Schmid (“The Persian Imperial Authorization as a Historical Problem and as a Biblical Construct: A Plea for Distinctions in the Current Debate,” in PentT: 23-38, here p. 35) notes that non-Pentateuchal texts, such as Jeremiah, also bring together contradictory materials, a process that can be explained without recourse to “external pressure.” Carr (“Rise of Torah,” pp. 55-6) responds that the Pentateuchal synthesis of contradiction is “different”—but without explaining why. To my knowledge, no one has found an objective way to weigh the degree of contradiction/compatibility between sources or traditions, so as to compare the Pentateuch’s internal “tension” with that of other ancient works. Often missing in such discussions is any serious consideration of internal reasons that ancient Israelites found Pentateuchal sources compatible—including, perhaps, a theological conviction that all written Yahwistic traditions comprise the words of one God to one Israel.
than previously imagined”) but what kinds of intrusions it made into Judean affairs. Horsley’s examples include taxation, military occupation, and occasional forced labor; missing is any evidence of Persian involvement in Judean textual activity, cultic ritual, festal gatherings, or other local affairs. In fact, Hagedorn suggests that the strongest Pentateuchal indicator of Judea’s colonial situation is the way that the Pentateuch ignores Persia, focusing on local affairs; subject communities characteristically turn their attention inward, detailing quasi-legal instruction aimed at a circumscribed sphere of life, with only the sketchiest and most stylized hints at state or international regulations (see, e.g., Deut 17). Hagedorn’s analysis may understate the attention that the Pentateuch does give to Judea’s relations within the wider world of the nations. Its strength, in my view, lies in its recognition that imperial influence can produce many sorts of effects and reactions, which are not limited to those that the empire itself would intend or authorize.

3.3.2 Ezra-Nehemiah and Imperial Support for Torah

In the end, it is not the comparative evidence that makes scholars wonder whether the Pentateuchal Torah was authorized as Persian law. Despite the attempts to blur categories, there is little in common between ad hoc imperial decrees ratifying the decision of local officials and the hypothesized authorization of a document like the Pentateuch. Rather, it is the picture in Ezra-

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102 This limited involvement by Persia is emphasized by Hagedorn, “Local Law”; Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*; and Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy.” See Lipschits and Tal, “Settlement Archaeology,” for an archaeologically based case that Achaemenid involvement in southern Palestine increased for a few decades (roughly, the first half of the fourth century) as a response to Egyptian independence.
104 Schmid (“Persian Imperial Authorization”) tries to defend or revive the theory of imperial authorization, but does so only by paring it down to a mere “tolerance” for local “norms” by Persian officials. The word “norms” allows him to include all sorts of evidence that does not look particularly like the Pentateuch. As Knoppers and Harvey
Nehemiah, especially Ezra 7:25-6, which suggests to some that Persian authorities compelled Judeans to accept these particular traditions at this particular time. I do not have space to discuss here the many competing readings of Ezra-Nehemiah, whose value as a historical record of the Persian period is continually debated; but I do wish to make three points.

First, Ezra-Nehemiah’s picture of imperial support for Ezra’s Torah-teaching is probably exaggerated, and of a piece with the work’s exaggerated account of imperial backing for Judea’s temple (e.g., Ezra 6:3-8, 7:20-24). Probably these stories are idealistic or utopian. Because Judeans generally felt powerless to regulate their lives without imperial interference, they would emphasize any memories (real or constructed) of exceptional moments in which the empire aligned itself with their values. The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah resemble other “Jew in a foreign court” traditions; the imperial court (by God’s grace) offers temporary support, but still seems to symbolize threat (see Neh 2:2b and Ezra 4:17-22). Thus Ezra 7:25-6 does not mean that Judeans really obeyed Torah because otherwise Persia would punish them—any more than Daniel 3:29 (see also 6:26) means that Judeans worshipped Yhwh because otherwise Babylon would punish them. The average Judean may have known people who never bothered to obey Moses’ law, and suffered no prosecution—who prospered despite, or because of, their “impiety.” (This is, ("The Pentateuch in Ancient Mediterranean Context," p. 136) note, most evidence shows Persians authorizing local stipulations on a specific disputed issue, not a legal collection.

So Schmid (“Persian Imperial Authorization,” pp. 35-7), insisting that “Ezra 7 assumes the imperial authorization of the Torah” and that therefore the notion is not merely a modern scholarly invention.


See Lawrence Mills, The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990). Hagedorn (“Local Law,” p. 72) believes Ezra 7 is closest to the Letter of Aristeas, a much later etiology of an already authoritative Torah; so also Grätz, “Second Temple and the Legal Status,” p. 286. If so, the question is what the etiology exists to explain: does it presume only the reality of the Pentateuch’s status, but adorn this status with fictional imperial backing, or does it (with Crüsemann, The Torah, pp. 336-7) presume the reality of imperial coercion in following the Pentateuch, and adorn this with a story about Ezra? I suggest that Ezra 7 projects an ideal possibility even as it (possibly) explains a present reality.
I think, the logic behind lament Psalms such as Ps 37, e.g., vv. 1-2; see Job 21:7-14). Hebrew legal persuasion often emphasizes a different sort of consequence, i.e., social stigma and divine cursing.\(^{108}\) Ezra’s seemingly official authorization of *torah* is a story-world anomaly projecting (as do the stories of Moredecai, Esther, Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah) a perfect blend of imperial power and Judean faithfulness.

Second, Ezra-Nehemiah’s memories, even if utopian and exaggerated, contain a real truth about imperial power as it is viewed by those in the colonies. Imperial power is inconsistent; its interference in local affairs is intermittent and unpredictable. Like the weather, the empire may at any moment blow in blessing (favors and material support) or cursing (conscription and harsh regulations). Agrarian peoples have rites to manage the powerful and unpredictable weather, calling on rain or sun; in the same way, subject peoples have practices to manage their powerful and unpredictable rulers, bribing and petitioning and flattering. In both cases, the management may not be very effective, but at least the practices help to allay terrifying feelings of helplessness. A subject people can easily believe that its distant ruler, in a fit of generosity or grandiosity, might be moved by the tears of a cup-bearer or give a priestly scribe unprecedented support to teach scripture (Ezra 7:24-5; Neh 1:11-2:8). The distant ruler might, of course, just as easily endorse genocide against the Judeans, as in Ahasuerus’s approval of Haman’s decree (Esther 3:7-11). By publishing memories of imperial favor, exaggerated or not, Judeans might even preempt mid-level officials from interfering with local Judean affairs.\(^{109}\) When Israelites

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\(^{109}\) I owe the language of preemption to Hagedorn, “Local Law,” p. 73. In his view, Ezra-Nehemiah seeks to prevent Persian interference by imagining imperial support—quite the opposite of the idea that imperial agency produced this material. James Scott (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990]) discusses how attributing benevolence to the emperor can fuel resistance to imperial agents.
asserted that the heart of the king is in the hand of Yhwh (Prov 21:1) they most likely meant, not that royal decisions are divine, but that inconsistent royal power is as plastic to the divine will as are the elements themselves.

Third and finally, a better understanding of the function of written law in the ancient Near East, and particularly in Persia, may clarify the meaning of law (డתא) in Ezra 7:25-6. As Fried persuasively argues, ancient (and specifically Persian) practices of judging and administering make it unlikely that either the law of God or the law of the king (גּ וְדָתָא דִּי מַלְכָּאנדָּתָא דִי) in Ez 7:26) denotes the Mosaic Torah or any other Hebrew literature. There is no evidence that ancient judges ever used written codes in the process of judging, or that officials ever used such literature (as opposed to ad hoc decrees and official correspondence) in the process of administering. Ancient law codes seem to have functioned as icons of justice, academic explorations of complex norms, and/ or educative texts for the training of an administrative class. Such uses only indirectly informed the actual disposition of judicial cases or day-to-day policy enforcement; judges worked from a much looser sense of common law (conceived of, perhaps, as natural law). Judges might be required to enforce a short imperial edict, but not an extensive written code—much less a massive epic incorporating several law codes.

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111 The Persians notably lacked any collected law (the much-cited Demotic Chronicle was a translation project, not a Persian-sponsored codification as such). See Hagedorn, “Local Law”; Donald Redford, “The So-called ‘Codification’ of Egyptian Law Under Darius I,” in PT:135-59. Ska (Introduction, pp. 220-24; idem, “‘Persian Imperial Authorization’: Some Question Marks,” in PT: 161-82; idem, “From History Writing to Library Building,” in The PentT: 145-69, here pp. 146-7) thinks that Ezra had a royal decree that regulated temple polity, perhaps resembling a limited amount of Pentateuchal material. Conversely, Grabbe (“Law of Moses,” p. 112) thinks that Ezra was given authority to teach the Pentateuch, but that the references to judges and enforcement are later Judean rhetoric.
3.3.3 Genesis’ Attitude toward Empire

At stake in the imperial authorization debate is not just the historical question of whether Persia ever endorsed the Pentateuch, but the literary question of whether the Pentateuch is the sort of text that “could function well” as imperial law and Persian propaganda.\(^\text{112}\) The imperial authorization viewpoint ultimately reduces the Pentateuch to the sort of enforceable legal requirement that some read out of (or into) Ezra 7:25-6—a nomistic understanding of Torah that, in any case, ill fits Genesis.\(^\text{113}\) Even if the Persians authorized some sort of local Jerusalem-temple law, perhaps in the form of a letter or inscription published in Aramaic,\(^\text{114}\) this law is not the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch’s odd blend of narrative and instruction, of practical law and unenforceable idealism, of polity and utopia, is rather more than a Persian-enforced code of conduct for one of its subject peoples.

Similarly, the imperial authorization viewpoint reduces the Pentateuch to a literature of empire, endorsing and enacting Persia’s domination over Israel. This sort of reading may attempt to make room for a simultaneous element of resistance against foreign compulsion, but only as a secondary (perhaps unintentional) byproduct of the Pentateuch’s real (“colonizing”) function.\(^\text{115}\)

\(^{112}\) So Berquist, “Postcolonialism.” His reasons are not very compelling; for example, he mentions the “set boundaries” of Judea as somehow serving to curb any anti-Persian expansionism. This ignores the fact that the boundaries delineated in the Pentateuch and elsewhere are several times the size of the province of Yehud.

\(^{113}\) See here the argument in Carr, “The Rise of Torah,” p. 51, that Ezra’s construal of Torah “privileges its legal elements over others.” Grätz (“Second Temple and the Legal Status”) argues that Ruth’s “different attitude” toward the Torah, one that relies more heavily on narrative examples (especially from Genesis) than on Mosaic pronouncements, indicates that Ezra’s legal interpretation of the Pentateuch was only one attitude present in the Persian period—not the sole or even official view.

\(^{114}\) Josephus (\textit{Antiquitates Judaicae} 12:138-146) describes just such an authorization shortly after the Persian period; see discussion in Portier-Young, \textit{Apocalypse}, pp. 55-63.

\(^{115}\) So especially Berquist, “Postcolonialism.”
Here it is worth considering briefly Genesis’ orientation toward domination and resistance, an issue with considerable significance for evaluating its eschatology.\footnote{116}

1. First, some read Genesis as imperial propaganda because the ancestors’ exogamy seems to parallel the agenda of Ezra and Nehemiah—who may be agents of Persian interests.\footnote{117} Yet this logic requires that one make several dubious assumptions: first, that Ezra and Nehemiah tried to enforce a racial, endogamous vision of Israel’s distinctive “holy seed”; second, that this endogamous agenda derives from Persian policy; and third, that Genesis’ stories function to undergird that Persian policy. But it is just as likely that in Ezra 9:2, as in Isaiah 6:13, the “holy seed” (זֶרַע הָקֹדֶשׁ) suggests “a remnant in the face of widespread destruction,” with “smallness and vulnerability,” and “a potential for growth.”\footnote{118} Meanwhile, any Judean endogamy would be as likely to complicate Persian purposes as to enact Persian policy.\footnote{119}

Finally, in Genesis some patriarchs’ refusal to marry wives from foreign groups need not

\footnote{116} In addition to the evidence from Genesis which I present here, Ska (Introduction, pp. 222-3) lists other Pentateuchal passages which Persia would scarcely endorse: Deut 7 (the command to annihilate non-Israelite inhabitants of the land), Deut 20 (an extensive rule of war), Deut 17:14-20 (presuming an autonomous Judean king), Deut 26:19 and 28:1 (placing Israel above all other nations), and Num 22-24 (the Balaam oracles, which seem to include a militant proto-Messianism).

\footnote{117} So especially Brett, Genesis; Seth Kunin, The Logic of Incest (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); and Berquist, Judaism in Persia’s Shadow. All three rely heavily on Hoglund’s argument (Achaemenid Imperial Administration, esp. pp. 241-7) that the endogamy policy of Ezra and Nehemiah was a Persian imperial policy.

\footnote{118} So Tamara Eskenazi, “The Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah,” JIPP 509-29, p. 522, note 24. This matches Genesis’ use of “seed” to refer to the potential for growth and (more specifically) the creation mandate. Bob Becking (“Law as Expression of Religion (Ezra 7-10),” in Yahwism after the Exile, ed. Albertz and Becking [Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 2003]: 18-31, here p. 27) suggests that the “holy seed” combines two traditional depictions of Israel: the “holy nation” (e.g., Deut 26:18) and the “seed of Abraham” (e.g., Is 41:8; Jer 33:26; Ps 105:6; 2 Chr 20:7). Eskenazi (pp. 513-24) argues that the very language used for marrying foreign women in Ezra 10 (vs. 2, 10, 14, 17, 18) and Neh 13 (vs. 23, 26-27) highlights, not genetic mixing, but the loss of Judeans’ land and hence the ability of the Judean “seed” to multiply. Specifically, the hifil of ישׁב implies “settling” women; see also Ezra 10:44, where the MT and LXX (unlike translations imported from 1 Esdras) refer not to divorce/ sending away, but to children “placed” by the foreign wives (יַשֵׂם נְשָׁתָיו וְיֵשׁ מֵהָם נֶשֶׁר).

constitute endorsement of endogamy at all. As argued above (chapter 2), Israel’s ancestors do not model behavior for individual Israelites (who are not to sacrifice children, lie about wives, or cheat their brothers and fathers); rather, they exemplify God’s ability to bless the nation as a whole. Thus, the care to avoid a Canaanite wife in (e.g.) Genesis 24:7 signifies the danger of Israel as a whole merging with its neighbors—a threat somewhat less grave than the danger of Israel as a whole returning to Mesopotamia (24:6, 8). Interestingly, the technical language in which marrying a Canaanite might be considered disgraceful occurs only in 35:14, in an extremely ambiguous context.

2. Second, Genesis may have matched Persian interests in that it emphasizes peaceful relations, downplaying any militant response to oppression. So, for example, Israel’s eponymous ancestors choose discussion or even avoidance over fighting (e.g., Gen 13:2-13; 26:12-33; 27:41-5; 31; 33). Israel’s first ancestors were able to get along with their neighbors, with divine help in the event of sharp practices (e.g., Gen 26:5-33; 31:7-9, 42; 32:9-12; 34:5). In general Israel’s neighbors admire and enrich them, even after initial threats (e.g., Gen 14:17-21; 20:14-16; 26:16, 29; 30-31; 34:8-12—and, especially, 41:39-45; 45:17-20; 47:5-6). This

120 Kunin (Logic of Incest) gives a structuralist reading that reduces all of Genesis to structured oppositions between inside and outside, tying the whole mythic meaning to postexilic endogamy. But his reading ultimately breaks down the complex way in which Genesis interpenetrates the “inside” and the “outside,” distinctiveness and cooperative relations. Cf. R. Christopher Heard, Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-exilic Judah (Atlanta: SBL, 2001); Brett, Genesis; William Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Joel Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

121 The similar statement in Gen 27:46-28:1 is, in light of Jacob’s other pressing reasons for fleeing, little more than a diplomatic excuse. See Crüsemann (The Torah, p. 296) on Genesis’ endogamy as a family tradition (perhaps connected to “the solidarity of groups in exile”—so Claus Westermann, Genesis 37-50: A Commentary [trans. John Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986], p. 547), rather than divine proscription. Also, note that the characters that represent Israel as a whole (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are endogamous; the characters that represent constituent parts of Israel (Jacob’s sons) are not—Joseph has an Egyptian wife (41:50), and the text makes no special mention of Tamar’s origins (ch 38).

122 See discussion of Gen 49 in my section 6.4.

seems to challenge any assumption of foreigners’ malevolence.\textsuperscript{124} Abraham’s rescue operation (Gen 14) and the slaughter at Shechem (Gen 34) seem to be exceptions that prove the rule. In Genesis 14 Abraham does not participate in the initial military encounter, and when he later mounts a rescue operation on behalf of his nephew, he seeks no profit (14:22-24); the story ends with Abraham presenting tithes to a non-Israelite king of Peace (14:18-20). And the slaughter at Shechem is clearly blamed on only two of Jacob’s sons (despite 34:27), acting against their father’s wishes (34:30) in a way that demotes their permanent standing among the tribes (49:5-7). Genesis resembles here those Pentateuchal wilderness narratives in which Israel seeks to negotiate and not fight (Num 20:14-21; 21:22-3; cf. Deut 2:5-6, 9, 19, 26-30; Judg 11:14-20). Significantly, Abraham prays even for those who might be construed as enemies, oppressive Sodom and Gomorrah (18:22-33) and wife-snatching Abimelech (20:7, 17; compare Moses’ prayers for Egypt in the plague episode, Exod 8:9-12, 29-30; 9:28-33; 10:17-18). Jacob even blesses Pharaoh (47:7, 10). Moreover, in two major stories (Noah’s ark, and Joseph’s dreams) a righteous character is used by God to preserve all life (e.g., Gen 6:17-18; 41:57) in a way that does not set Israel against foreigners.

3. Third, Genesis does hint at connections with other parts of the Pentateuch, most notably Exodus 1-15, where foreign dominance is a more pressing problem. When Genesis points forward to the exodus-event (Gen 15:13-16; 46:3-4; 50: 24-5), it is difficult not to read this (expected) event as a timeless rejection of any forces that might enslave Israel. God rescues when a wife is threatened, whether or not it is the ancestor’s fault (12:10-20; 20; 26:6-11); God brings judgment when the outcry of a city goes up to the Lord (Sodom and Gomorrah, 

\textsuperscript{124} Brett, *Genesis*, pp. 52-3, highlights how the expectation of foreign violence in the wife-sister stories is itself a sort of blind spot of Abraham and Isaac; contrast Gen 12:12 with 12:18-19, 20:11 with 20:4-6, and 26:7 with 26:10-11.
18:16-19:29). The Joseph story mixes imagery of imperial favor with images of slavery and imprisonment. Genesis’ prominent promise of land seems itself to entail freedom; movement away from Israel’s land is portrayed as movement into (potential) slavery (Jacob’s service to Laban in Gen 29-31—see esp. 31:41—uses the same root, עבד, as the Israelite slavery in Gen 15:13-16). In the primordial history Cain’s curse, Noah’s flood, and (probably) the confusion of Babel’s language all demonstrate God confronting human violence or domination. Interestingly, the Hagar-Ishmael story (Gen 16; 21: 8-21) may imply that Israel itself (represented by its ancestors) can be the source of oppression from which God delivers; the same point may be (strangely) made in the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22).

4. Fourth, in Genesis God often delays his intended punishment (see above, chapter 2). Importantly, God’s intervention is inevitable even when God is waiting for the Amorites’ sins to warrant his response (Gen 15:13-16; 50:24-5). Genesis strongly implies, then, that real resistance, real reversal, real destruction of oppressive powers can be inevitable even when delayed. In the Persian period, this message surely applies to Achaemenid rule: even if Persia’s domination has not yet reached the point of intolerable oppression, the Pentateuch’s logic suggests that a benign ruler may be followed by one less benign (juxtapose Gen 47:5-6

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with Exod 1:8-22).\textsuperscript{127} Even more pointedly, Genesis suggests the possibility of experiencing Persian rule as enslavement.\textsuperscript{128}

In conclusion, then, the Judean attempts to rebuild with Achaemenid permission may be only proleptic of a postponed, more complete fulfillment of Genesis’ threefold promise of numerous progeny, political greatness, and control of expansive territory. Any momentary appreciation of Persian benefits (not unlike the benefits which Pharaoh provides Israel in Gen 47-50) does not undermine a long-term conviction that in God’s well-scripted future (see again Gen 15:12-16) Persian rule will not last forever. Persian centralizing arrogance, like that of Babel’s tower-builders, is fated to fade away into confusion; and any instances of Persian violence toward Israelites or even toward non-Israelites may evoke a new curse, a new flood, a new rain of fire from heaven. Oppressed strangers can always be angels in disguise, and judgment can break out at any moment. Granted, none of these images is militaristic; by waiting for God to act, Genesis

\textsuperscript{127} In passing, I find quite unimpressive Berquist’s repeated notion that the Pentateuch matches Persian interests because it is anti-Egyptian (see “Postcolonialism”; “Constructions of Identity,” pp. 65-6). Much Hebrew literature suggests that Egypt and Mesopotamia can share the same conceptual space as imperial would-be enslavers.

\textsuperscript{128} Compare Gen 15:13 with Ezra 9:9; Neh 9:36-7. I strongly question Carr’s notion (“The Rise of Torah,” p. 53) that in Ezra-Nehemiah the “picture of a formerly exiled community . . . of ‘slaves’ (גֲּבָדִים) to foreign kings” serves to “justify Persian domination theologically.” Would not an audience regard its own enslavement as a negative condition, one which (in light of Gen 15:13-15 and Exod 1-15) calls out for liberation? Brian Kelly argues (Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], pp. 210-11) that in Chronicles Persian rule over Judea is “a consequence of sin (which might be reversed by repentance),” not a permanent condition. While Trotter (Reading Hosea, pp. 90-119) follows Berquist (Judaisma in Persia’s Shadow) in emphasizing Judea’s loyalty to Persia because no overt rebellion broke out, Kessler (“Persia’s Loyal Yahwists,” pp. 106-7) more helpfully emphasizes the probability of Judean ambivalence toward Persian rule, experiencing the long-lasting trauma of forced deportation and the ongoing burden of taxation and conscription (see here Daniel Smith-Christopher, The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile [Bloomington, Ind: Meyer- Stone, 1989]; idem, A Biblical Theology of Exile [Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002]). Kessler also cites Pierre Briant (“Pouvoir central et polycentrisme culturel dans l’empire achéménide: Quelques réflexions et suggestions,” in Achaemenid History I: Sources, Structures and Synthesis, ed. Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenberg [Leiden: Nederlands Inst voor het Nabije Oosten, 1987]: 1-31, p. 15) to the effect that many subject peoples conceived of themselves, under Persia, as “an ethno-cultural community whose principles and goals were opposed to those of the Persians.” Kessler recognizes that resistance need not involve overt rebellion; Judean “provisional” or “interim” loyalty to Persia coexisted with a sharp sense of being dispossessed (he cites Ezra 2:1; Neh 1:3, 8:17).
may breed something other than active rebellion. But this alone scarcely makes the whole book (or the Pentateuch) congenial to Persian interests.

3.3.4 Subtle Construal of Imperialism and Resistance

Recent postcolonial approaches to Genesis, or to the Pentateuch more broadly, can find either a subtle ideological imperial agenda or a subtle ideological resistance agenda—or both.\(^{129}\) In general I find both possibilities plausible, even if I suspect that royal propaganda in the ancient world was generally explicit (such as the prologue to Hammurabi’s Code, or the Cyrus Cylinder) and had little reason to disguise itself. At the very least, one may note that attribution of a hidden royal ideology to ancient literatures remains contested.\(^{130}\) On the other end of the spectrum, it is rather difficult to verify that a passage qualifies as resistance language on the grounds that it presents the dominant ideology—but in a (purportedly) ironic tone.\(^{131}\) Finally, I see little value in deciding ahead of time that all ancient scribes are merely instruments of the powerful, or that subject peoples cannot express certain sorts of hopes.\(^{132}\) Surely it is far more useful to recognize a wide range of reactions to the colonial conditions, including various sorts of collaboration and (just as importantly) various sorts of resistance.\(^{133}\)

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\(^{129}\) See Brett, *Genesis* (emphasizing the resistance, but assuming a simultaneous imperialistic layer to the text’s meaning) and Berquist, “Postcolonialism” (emphasizing the imperialism, but almost reversing himself to admit the resistance “potential”).

\(^{130}\) See above, note 80.

\(^{131}\) See here Brett, *Genesis* (e.g., pp. 75-8); or, for a non-Biblical example, Margalit, “Legend of Keret.”

\(^{132}\) See Davies, *Scribes*; or the approving quotation of Albert Memmi (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* [trans Howard Greenfield; Boston: Beacon, 1991], p. 101) by Berquist (“Postcolonialism,” p. 21): “since colonized society does not possess national structures and cannot conceive of a historical future for itself, it must be content with the passive sluggishness of the present.”

\(^{133}\) See Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, for the best discussion of the variety of ways (including non-violent modes) that Judeans could resist empire, precisely through their use of eschatological texts.
The subtle, multivalent explorations exemplified by Berquist and Brett remain useful reminders that ancient texts (like modern texts!) could mean different things to different users, orienting in ways that feel oppressive to some and liberating to others. In fact, current theory suggests that texts themselves do not oppress, liberate, or promote ideologies—their users (or usages) do.\textsuperscript{134} I would, however, add that texts (like all tools) lend themselves to some usages more than others; the historical-literary project of reading ancient texts involves (among other things) evaluating fairly the semiotic resonances that suggest likely usage. Thus I do not argue in principle against the sort of creative and delicate symbol-reading which Berquist and Brett attempt, and which Crüsemann seems to adopt in a few important places—precisely where he links the Pentateuchal Torah with a pro-Persian (and hence anti-eschatological) ideology. I do insist, however, on asking whether other sorts of creative and delicate symbol-reading might better characterize the Pentateuch’s ancient usage.

For example, Crüsemann, Berquist, Watts, and Horsley (the last two citing the same few pages of Berquist) all suggest that the Pentateuch’s concern with the over-lordship of God implies a covert endorsement of the over-lordship of the Persian Empire.\textsuperscript{135} On this reading, the fact that the Pentateuch exalts God as a “higher authority” without explicitly contrasting God to the Persian “higher authority” means that deity and empire occupy the same conceptual space. If Judean users of the Pentateuch viewed Persia and Yhwh as functional equivalents, those users would scarcely countenance any eschatological reversal of the Persian status quo. This whole argument, however, begs the question: why should rhetoric that places Yhwh as supreme

\textsuperscript{134} See here the discussion in Mary Fulkerson, Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), e.g., pp. 17, 49, 107, 118-20, 229—citing a growing literature.

\textsuperscript{135} See Berquist, Judaism in Persia’s Shadow, pp. 134-9, cited approvingly in Watts, Reading Law, pp. 146-7, and Horsley, Scribes, Visionaries, pp. 22-23. Horsley claims that “the newly installed immigrant elite of Yehud identified their God’s purposes with Persian imperial purposes.”
authority, without mentioning Persia’s claim to the same ideological space, set up a semiotic convergence rather than a semiotic competition? Perhaps users of the Pentateuch chose to oppose the two higher authorities, not to merge them. This possibility becomes all the more likely if those audiences were familiar with Genesis’ primordial stories, which seem so distrustful of blurring human and divine categories (whether by eating a divinizing fruit or by building a tower to heaven).\textsuperscript{136}

Crüsemann suggests another, even more subtle reason for merging the Pentateuch with imperial (rather than eschatological) ideology. He begins with the exegetical insight that Pentateuchal instruction, especially in P, seems to provide guidance for a scattered and powerless Israel; so for example in Genesis (2:2; 9:2-7; 17:9-14) various rules (Sabbath, food laws, circumcision) do not require national power, land, or a functioning cult. By theologizing such torah-instructions, Crüsemann’s P provides a connection with God that is proleptic of God’s full presence in a shrine that is not yet (re)instituted.\textsuperscript{137} This is in marked contrast to Plöger’s P, which portrays the already-restored cult as a promise-realization so climactic that no future expectation remains.\textsuperscript{138} But ironically, Crüsemann’s complete reversal of Plöger’s exegesis ends up supporting the exact same sociological conclusion—a dichotomy of theocracy and eschatology in postexilic Judea. For Crüsemann, it is because P works out a torah for living in exile, under

\textsuperscript{136} For a careful reading of Genesis 1-11 against royal/imperial divinizing claims, see J. Richard Middleton, \textit{The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1} (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), and sources discussed there. If it is unlikely that Judean audiences would conflate Yhwh with Persia, more persuasive is Trotter’s suggestion (\textit{Reading Hosea}, pp. 151-2) that some Hebrew texts seek to conflate Yhwh with Persia’s god, especially under the name God of heaven (אֱלֹהִי מֵהָבָי; Aramaic מֵהָבָי); see Thomas Bolin, “The Temple of YHW at Elephantine and Persian Religious Policy,” in \textit{The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms}, ed. Diana Edelman (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1996): 127-42, here p. 127. This name for God, however, occurs only twice in the Pentateuch (Gen 24:3, 7) versus 12 times in Ezra-Neh.

\textsuperscript{137} Crüsemann, \textit{Torah}, pp. 283-301; see Ska, \textit{Introduction}, pp. 159-61, for a similar dating of P between 539 and 520 B.C.E.

imperial control, that P must come from a class which never bothers to look beyond the (imperially dominated) status quo.\textsuperscript{139}

Ultimately, Crüsemann decides that P (and indeed the whole Pentateuch) lacks the eschatological resistance that characterizes the prophetic literature because its “contemporary practice of Torah” presents a “contrast” (although, he admits, “a complementary opposite”) to the prophets’ “hope for an earth-shaking action of God.”\textsuperscript{140} This dichotomy between eschatological resistance and interim ethics belies the temporal complexity of Israelite literature, in which short-term provision can coexist with long-term hope for reversal. Genesis 47-50, for example, emphasizes the short-term benefit of living in Goshen (47:6), alongside the hope for a special visitation (50:24-5) that will bring the Israelites out. This hope-filled waiting is not unlike the eschatology of the prophetic corpus.\textsuperscript{141} Such waiting is not mere acquiescence; hope acknowledges the temporary and oppressive quality of current domination, contrasting it with the promised future. In fact, by undermining imperial ideology about the ultimacy and permanence of imperial power, hope makes space for various kinds of resistance.

Crüsemann has, in my judgment, helpfully described a real Pentateuchal emphasis on instruction that lies within the limited scope of provincial (or even diaspora) Judean possibility.

\textsuperscript{139} Crüsemann, \textit{Torah}, pp. 346-7. Together, Plöger and Crüsemann present a “heads I win, tails you lose” alternative; either because P assumes that the hopes have all come true, or because it doesn’t, P is non-eschatological.

\textsuperscript{140} Crüsemann, \textit{Torah}, p. 347. He cites the later Sadducees, but overlooks other groups—e.g., Daniel’s maskilim or Qumran’s Essenes—who combined torah-focus with eschatological and revolutionary rhetoric.

\textsuperscript{141} See, e.g., Jer 29:5-14, which combines an interim accommodation in Babylon with an eschatological message of return. Crüsemann’s sketch of postexilic prophecy (\textit{Torah}, pp. 346-7) depends heavily on Neh 6:6-7, where a (false) report suggests that prophets might encourage immediate rebellion; Albertz, “The Failed Restoration,” argues that the original messages of Haggai and Zechariah should be read in this light. But, of course, the possibility that some oral prophets, or even some (hypothesized) drafts of prophetic writings, agitate for immediate rebellion does not mean that all who prophesied in the Persian Period—much less all who preserved and reworked the prophetic corpus—took the same stance. In Albertz’s reconstruction, Haggai and Zechariah 1-6 were rather quickly reworked into the sort of message that they now appear to give—a message of future eschatological hope combined with present delay, a message quite compatible with the Pentateuch’s.
Again, note Hagedorn’s assessment that subject peoples focus on local affairs (in which they have maximum agency), and avoid the sort of open resistance that would bring them into conflict with the full might of their oppressors. In doing so, they are both submitting and (in a modest way) resisting—refusing to accept the imperial view that top-down power defines subjects’ lives. In fact, contra Crüsemann, Pentateuchal instruction for the provincial present is flavored by anti-imperial promises that Israel will be a great nation—not merely a restored Persian province. Nili Wazana discusses promises in Genesis (e.g., 15:18-21) and Deuteronomy (e.g., 1:7-8) that describe Israel’s borders as those of a great world power. The discrepancy with tiny Persian Judea must have been painfully obvious.

Of course, some ancestral promises (such as Gen 12:7; 13:14) do emphasize that Israel’s territorial claims are not unlimited, allowing neighboring nations their own territories. Genesis, and the Pentateuch more broadly, holds cooperative neighborliness in tension with Israel’s

143 Most helpful here is Scott, Domination. For a partial application of Scott to Genesis, see Brett, Genesis.
144 Nili Wazana, Kol gevulot Arets: gevulot ha-Arets ha-MaYaḥat be-maYaḥshevet ha-MiKra ‘al reKha ‘al ha-Mizraḥ ha-Hudum. (All the Boundaries of the Land: The Promised Land in Biblical Thought in Light of the Ancient Near East; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), pp. 95-122. Wazana shows at length that Sea (ים) and River (נהר) have cosmic (not merely cartographic) significance, echoing ancient claims to world dominion. In general, I am puzzled by Crüsemann’s suggestion (The Torah, pp. 348-9) that the Pentateuch pictures territorial expansion (remembered in Persian-era settings like Neh 9:7; Hag 2:4-5) only at the expense of Judea’s immediate neighbors (Edomites, Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites and so forth) without challenging Persia. This is rather like thinking that Texans could imagine themselves taking over Oklahoma and Arkansas while avoiding conflict with the United States government. Even worse is Blenkinsopp’s extraordinary suggestion that the Pentateuch ends before the conquest in order to “renounce claims to the land” (Joseph Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins [Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977], p. 80). I am at a loss to understand how anyone could read Genesis—much less Deuteronomy—and find no claim on Israel’s land. Superficially, the Pentateuch may seem slightly less militaristic in its claim on the land than, say, the book of Joshua—but only if one discounts Transjordanian conquest passages (e.g., Num 21, 31-2).
exalted destiny—just as it holds temporary accommodation in tension with an ongoing hope for future liberation. Patient strategies for living before God in an unfulfilled world, including cooperation with imperial rulers, coexist with provocative pictures of how things should be and still are not. For careful readers of Genesis, any involvement in the politics of the present is rendered penultimate and transitory by the powerful forward-looking endings of Genesis and of the Pentateuch itself (see section 5.2.1).

3.4 The Pentateuch and Judean Institutions

3.4.1 Parties and Priests

An influential tradition of scholarship reads Persian-era usage of Hebrew literature in terms of Judean groups or parties with competing interests, engaged in some sort of a power struggle.¹⁴⁷ As Ska has noted, many scholars refer to the Pentateuch as a “compromise.”¹⁴⁸ But if


¹⁴⁸ Ska, Introduction, p. 231. In Albertz, History 2, not only the Torah (pp. 467-8, 548) but (earlier) DtrG (pp. 388-9) and (later) Chronicles (p. 553) are all compromises. According to Fishbane (Biblical Interpretation, pp. 264-5 “the very fact of the Pentateuch” testifies to exegetical “controversies” in the face of the institutional breakdown associated with the exile—but, ultimately, to exegetical “compromise,” since all of its teachings become recognized as God’s word. See also Crüsemann, Torah, p. 351, who speaks of a canonical “tolerance” since God’s will is open-ended.
the texts themselves always reflect the results of the compromise, little direct evidence remains of
the putative independent textual perspectives that might have existed before they were joined. In
other words, caution is in order when using reconstructed (rather than real) sources to paint a
sociological picture of the past, especially when source critics (perhaps influenced by Marxist or
Weberian conflict theory) may presume the very conflicts that they then discover.149

According to the survey of historical and archaeological conditions presented above,
Persian Judea was poor and sparsely populated, which may suggest fewer well-defined classes
(not to mention competing parties) than would exist in more urbanized, commercial settings.
Most Judeans were farmers; some were cult personnel, who themselves may have also spent time
farming (see here Neh 13:10). Probably Judea needed only a few administrative officials, and
these positions were often filled by non-Judean Persian appointees. This does not mean, of
course, that Persian-era Judean culture had no internal struggles. Would-be officials, Judean or
not, no doubt competed for leadership. Farmers have always competed for land, and prophets for
influence. Priests in the re-established temple cult had to compete particularly fiercely for the few
posts that Judea’s meager offerings could support. Even villages have their own power-struggles,
at every level.

On the other hand, Judea was a poor province with limited literacy, in which
administrative and commercial advancement depended on the ability to write Aramaic (not
Hebrew). Such a setting suggests little reason for struggling groups to spend their time and money
producing or even preserving Hebrew literature. Trotter argues that Persian Judea had so few
literate members that these surely comprised a single “small group (circle? school?), not a variety

149 Chapman, Law and Prophets, p. 98.
of different and/or competing ‘schools.’” Thus, perhaps it is best to imagine various classes or interests coming together to exert their (disparate) influence on a single scribal group that preserves Hebrew literature. If several separate and unrelated social groups could not each support its own text-production system, far more credible is a single set of scribes with close ties (economic dependence, family relationship, and/or shared ideological allegiance) binding those scribes to the various strata of Persian Judea. Such a scribal group might write a literature of so-called “compromise,” aimed at audiences from more than one social location, from the very start.

So without tracing the multiple contested (and, I suggest, speculative) source-critical and socio-historical details, I accept the broad outlines of such authors as Blum, Crüsemann, or Albertz in connecting the Pentateuch to a confluence of perspectives, chief among which are the known Judean groups: priests and agriculturists. More dubious is the notion that these two groups each produced separate texts, and that their work can be “clearly distinguished from other contemporary social groups in Judea, e.g. the aristocratic-wisdom and eschatological-prophetic group.” The existence of several genres does not require multiple social groups, each producing (much less editing) its own literature; on the contrary, Judean wisdom and prophetic literature shows clear marks of priestly editorial influence.

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151 Blum, Pentateuch; Crüsemann, The Torah, pp. 342-3; Albertz, History 2, pp. 439-42.

152 Crüsemann, The Torah, pp. 342-3. Albertz, History 2, p. 439, notes that the third group (prophetic conventicles) are “difficult to fix.”

153 See Horsley, Scribes, Visionaries, p. 7, for a critique of the “idealist” mistake of moving from a text/ideology to a posited social group; various ideologies (e.g., wisdom and apocalyptic) are generally found intermixed. Gerald Sheppard, Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), suggests that not just the (later) Baruch and Sirach, but also such earlier passages as Qoh 12:9-14, Hos 14:10, Ps 1-2, and 2 Sam 23:1-7, thematize the confluence of Torah and Wisdom. Admittedly, these passages may
The most likely location for the usage of all of this Hebrew literature, but especially the Pentateuch, remains the Jerusalem temple.\footnote{Contra Kratz, “Temple and Torah,” who attempts to use Qumran as an example of the sort of “circles” that kept the Pentateuch alive outside the Jerusalem temple—while overlooking the fact that Qumranites were above all displaced priests who had left or been driven out from the Jerusalem temple. His suggestion that the Pentateuch may have originated in Samaria (and only later been brought to Jerusalem) is offered tentatively, with little attention to the questions this hypothesis raises.} In the absence of a monarchy, as Carr notes, “literacy is increasingly centered in the one institution still under continuing Judean control,” that is, the temple.\footnote{Carr, “The Rise of Torah,” p. 45.} Above, I questioned the coercive power of the Jerusalem temple, especially in comparison to the administrative apparatus of the Persian-appointed governor and judges. But the rebuilt Jerusalem temple, however tenuous its social control might have originally been, was certainly a center for the persuasive appeals that so characterize Hebrew literature. Such appeals need not have been univocal. Worshippers who gathered at the temple might have received instruction from priests—or from prophets, story-tellers, or scribes. Various temple-connected personnel could easily have propagated perspectives usually thought of as lay as well as clerical, prophetic as well as priestly, or agrarian as well as aristocratic. In later periods, when separate Judean parties are fully attested, the temple never functions as the sole province of a single Jewish sect, but rather as the contested-but-shared symbolic ground to which competing groups lay claim.\footnote{See Michael Stone, \textit{Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Israel from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Gabriele Boccaccini, \textit{Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History from Ezekiel to Daniel} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).} This same sort of situation, at an earlier and more formative period, may explain the rich variety of Hebrew texts that all (to some degree or other) show priestly influence.
Meanwhile, the influence of the priests themselves—and specifically of the dynasty of Joshua the (Aaronid) high priest—should not be overlooked. On this point, Watts makes three important points. First, this priestly family seems to have dominated cultic affairs in Judea, Samaria, and even in later diaspora communities (such as Leontopolis), providing Judeans and Israelites a centuries-long stabilizing leadership. Second, rhetorically a major (if not the only) “function of the Pentateuch was to legitimize the religious and, by extension, the political claims of priestly dynasties”; this is true whether the Pentateuch’s composition precedes those claims (as “ideological base”) or postdates those claims (legitimizing “an existing institution”). Third, Hebrew literature does not present “priestly rhetoric . . . in its own voice”; if the Pentateuch constitutes a legitimizing document, in it “priests . . . disguised their role . . . by hiding behind God and Moses and by casting their speeches in the distant past.”

This last point deserves, perhaps, rather more emphasis than Watts gives it. One can always claim that a textual voice (of God or of Moses) represents the “disguised” voice of a given group, in this case priests. But on the face of it, the textual characters who represent the priesthood would most naturally be the narrative priests: Aaron and his family, and (perhaps more indirectly) the serving Levites of the tribe to which he belongs. It is worth asking why the Pentateuch does not use Aaron as a narratorial voice, the way it does use Moses (and God). In fact, I detect in the Pentateuch ambivalence toward priests in general. Genesis, which depicts Israel’s eponymous ancestors making altars rather indiscriminately at various cultic sites, demonstrates little interest in professional priests—and a very mixed attitude toward Levi (Gen 34 and, especially, 49:5-7). Later in the Pentateuch, where Aaron appears, he is a decidedly weak

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158 For the thoroughgoing conflation of Aaronids and Zadokites—and the assumption that both groups are in some sense Levites—in the final versions of postexilic literature, see, e.g., Gary Knoppers, “The Relationship of the Priestly Genealogies to the History of the High Priesthood in Jerusalem,” JINBP: 109-134, esp. p. 129.

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figure, either echoing Moses or occasionally (and with disastrous results) departing from Moses’ instructions (see especially Ex 32; Num 12). If Leviticus highlights the installation of the first high priests (Lev 8-9), it follows immediately with a cautionary tale in which two of them are blasted by divine fire for departing from Moses’ instructions (Lev 10:1-6). Admittedly, each story of priestly unfaithfulness (see also Num 16) may specifically reflect Persian-era inter-priestly politics, but in the Pentateuch as a whole such stories also have a larger effect: they firmly subordinate the priesthood to the divine word (through Moses), which can judge priests just as it can other Israelites.

Watts admits that the Torah can critique members of what he calls “Joshua’s dynasty” (that is, Aaronic-Zadokite priests), but he minimizes this critique with the off-hand statement that such critique was never serious enough to remove this priestly family from power.159 Surely the evidence allows a third alternative between priestly legitimation and an attempt to overthrow Aaronids/Zadokites. I suggest a rhetorical orientation that is deeply (and sympathetically) interested in Israel’s cult, but which nevertheless seeks to regulate priesthood and to subordinate its primary concerns (performance of ritual and accumulation of offerings) to a new purpose: instructing the whole community in Mosaic Torah.160 Significantly, the Pentateuch combines technical material aimed at priests with educative material sponsored by priests.161 Ultimately, so-


160 See Watts, “The Torah as the Rhetoric,” p. 324. Not coincidentally, this matches the Pentateuch’s view that the king’s main purpose has less to do with war or administration than with the study and promulgation of Mosaic Torah (Deut 17: 14-20). Ska (“From History Writing,” pp. 167-8) compares 2 Kgs 23:2, 3, 21 to Ex 24:7, suggesting that this connection does not “royalize” Moses but rather “scribalizes” the king. Could it be that the priestly material in the Pentateuch is not hierocratizing Mosaic law but scribalizing the priesthood?

161 See Carr, “The Rise of Torah,” p. 45. At the Ugarit temple complex, some texts gave technical instructions for specific rituals combined with records of disbursement of temple offerings (see, e.g., Dennis Pardee, Ritual and Cult at Ugarit [ed. Theodore Lewis; Boston: Brill, 2002]); a very different sort of text (such as Aqhat or Keret) presented cult-connected myths for popular audiences (see Parker, Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition). The Pentateuch has both.
called “priestly rhetoric . . . doesn’t speak in its own voice” because the priests are made servants of a different, more fundamental authority.

The Pentateuch’s commitment to Israel’s cult is overshadowed by a prior, more fundamental commitment to Israel’s God. This at least is how I read Genesis, where the ancestors’ relationship with God requires no established cult, and where the theophany establishes the hitherto-unknown shrine (rather than the pre-existing shrine being able to condition where and how God will appear). The creation story’s presentation of the cosmos is indeed priestly or cultic; but arguably this means that the cult only instantiates a vision of holy order that is already inherent in all of creation. Particularly notable is the distinction between Genesis’ depiction of Levi and the extensive rewriting that these scandalous stories required in later times (cf., esp., Jubilees), when the priestly ancestor had to be valorized. During the Persian period, when the Pentateuch was emerging as an authoritative locus of Israel’s identity and relationship with God, Genesis remained stubbornly unwilling to reduce this identity and relationship to a cult-dependent community. So Ska suggests that even in P the “organization of the cult is an important stage, but it is not the final phase of the Israelites’ journey with God.” Israel is defined instead by a promise—a promise that existed before the cult (or monarchy, or any other Judean institution) and may therefore outlast it.

165 Ska, Introduction, pp. 149-50.
3.4.2 Text as Institution

The voice of the Pentateuch, precisely as a text speaking divine words that define Israel, cannot be reduced to the voice of any priest or party. I see little reason to restrict Pentateuchal articulation of Yhwh’s will to priestly pronouncements; torah exists primarily as a written authority that seems exalted even above the cult which (probably) sponsors it. ¹⁶⁶ Perhaps even the cult, so prominent in the Pentateuch, does not represent priestly interests alone—a functioning cult expresses, after all, the whole people’s closeness to God. ¹⁶⁷ Passages such as Leviticus 10:1-3 give the distinct impression that the cult is holy despite its priests, not because of them. Similarly, passages such as Deuteronomy 17:14-20 suggest that Israel is called to faithfulness alongside its leaders—not in order to serve their interests. In a sense the text forms its own institution, subordinating any priestly or secular leadership in postexilic Judea. ¹⁶⁸

The Pentateuch achieves this aim by uniting Judea’s (possibly competing) groups and providing them a common ground. Without devaluing the scholarly tradition of source-critical

¹⁶⁶ Ska (“From History Writing,” pp. 156-7) notes that crucial postexilic texts exalt the written law above the king and also above the cult; so in the literary presentation of Ezra-Nehemiah, Neh 8:1-18 (the proclaimed Torah) is more climactic to the restoration than Ezra 6:13-18 (the rebuilt temple). Ska also cites Ps 1; 19; 119; Sir 24:23-34; Bar 3:9-4:5; Jub 1:29; 3:31; 6:17; and 2 Kgs 22-23 (as already noted by Römer, The So-Called Deuteronomistic History, p. 53). Corrine Patten (“Layers of Meaning: Priesthood in Jeremiah MT,” in PiP: 149-76) traces a literary process in which Jer 1-25 condemns priests in an “internal” (priestly) critique, Jer 26-33 begins to distinguish prophet from priest, and Jer 34-45 replaces both priests and prophets with a new textual authority of the written word.


¹⁶⁸ I reject the anachronistic language of “democratization” of royal ideology in postexilic Hebrew literature (see George Nickelsburg, “Eschatology: Early Jewish Literature,” ABD vol. 2: 579-609; Frank Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973], pp. 345-6). Yet one may note parallels between the communal-consensus implied in these texts and Hellenistic city-state developments linked to the beginnings of Western democracy (Eskenazi, “The Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah”), Knoppers and Harvey (“The Pentateuch in Ancient Mediterranean Context,” pp. 136-7) argue that the rise of law-codes in establishing communal identity in Athens, Gortyn, and Rome was not democratic or egalitarian, but did represent a “diffusion of power” which encouraged negotiation. Kelly (Retribution and Eschatology, p. 188) shows that Chronicles highlights “consultation and collaboration”; he cites Japhet, Ideology of the Book of Chronicles (1989), pp. 417-27.
conflict theory, I suggest that a greater appreciation for the finished (extant) texts may highlight how “different groups came to an agreement” in order to “work out together a common document.” Knoppers and Harvey accept the existence of competing Judean parties, but suggest that the Pentateuch formed a “common” authority that “could be affirmed as foundational by all concerned.” Similarly, Albertz notes that the oppositions of various groups (as presented in the text) are “too crude”: the complex texts indicate criss-crossing alliances between priest and noble, priests and farmers, nobles and farmers, wisdom and Torah, and so on. Unlike some who speak of a Pentateuchal compromise, I do not attempt to parse outs its various elements among the putative opposing forces which may (or may not) lay behind its composition. Rather, I note that the Hebrew-language texts which survive enfold a range of alternatives, not set in opposition but offered as a single message belonging equally to all Israel. In other words, some Judeans in the Persian period—e.g., those most responsible for preserving and composing the Pentateuch—began to see the text itself as an authority which encompassed or integrated a variety of Judean perspectives.

Admittedly, any message claiming to speak to (and for) the whole community, no matter how polyphonic, may have struck certain Judeans as insufficiently reflective of their own interests. Prophets and priests alike may have felt constrained by this codification of Yhwh’s will,

169 Ska, *Introduction*, p. 231. Admittedly, my preference for such formulations may betray my own predilection for functionalist rather than conflict-theory sociology; but it is also based on the state of the evidence. Brevard Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], p. 78) notes that a community which “found its identity” in a text obscures “the sociological evidence most sought after by the modern historian”; Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 269-70) argues that sometimes the only Sitz im Leben which we can recover is the life-situation of Judeans reading texts. As an aside, I would draw attention to the assumption (see, e.g., Norman Gottwald, “Social Matrix and Canonical Shape,” *Theology Today* 42.3 [1985]: 307-321) that if one is being sociological (rather than merely theological) one will emphasize social conflict—as though the only social process worthy of analysis were the struggle of competing groups for power.


which restricts any religious authority from speaking for Yhwh in terms that do not conform to the written text.\textsuperscript{172} As an articulation of community norms, Pentateuchal Torah inevitably entails relative winners and losers, and certainly privileges those who could read and write the sacred texts. But this does not change the fact that Hebrew literature, taken on its own merits, attempts to address an inclusive audience rather than a single sub-group within Persian Judea. Granted, the “big tent” Israel of the Pentateuch does not include everyone; excluded are any inhabitants of Judea who identify as members of surrounding peoples,\textsuperscript{173} as well as any Judeans uninterested in monolatrous Yahwism and its distinctive practices.\textsuperscript{174} On these points (unlike some supposed details of political infighting), the Pentateuch’s construction of Israel is consistent and insistent. Of course, these are the very points on which the Pentateuch, by and large, agrees with other Hebrew literature that survives from this period.

All of this leads to a tentative conclusion: the Pentateuchal Torah is best seen, not as the product of a single institution or party, but precisely as a way of bringing people together under a shared textual authority. Hebrew-language Yahwistic traditions (including, at minimum, priestly and prophetic teachings) had been preserved in writing by the late Judean royal-temple complex, but this complex never fully recovered from the blow it received in 587.\textsuperscript{175} During the sixth and fifth centuries, royal/ imperial power came to be viewed as external to the Judean community and

\textsuperscript{172} Eskenazi, “The Mission of Ezra and Nehemiah,” p. 516.

\textsuperscript{173} E.g., the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites—peoples whom Genesis clearly marks off as related yet separate from biblical Israel. In Genesis, such peoples seem to share in some of the covenants, but not others; the sticking point is probably the divine grant of the promised land. See especially here Heard, \textit{Dynamics of Diselection}.

\textsuperscript{174} E.g., aniconism, eighth-day circumcision, and some (if not all) purity and dietary laws. I place endogamy on a separate level, since the Pentateuch includes both criticisms of intermarriage and approved examples of it; compare Isaac’s search for an Eber-ite wife with Joseph’s Egyptian wife. See also Moses’ non-Israelite wife in Ex 2:15-21; 3:1; Num 10:29; 12:1. Ezra-Nehemiah and Ruth may represent two alternative ways of handling the same shared material; see Grätz, “Second Temple and the Legal Status.”

its own traditions and language. Internal Hebrew-language traditions coalesced around a new authority, that of the text itself. So Watts, for example, argues that the rhetorical impact of the Pentateuch is best viewed as an attempt at solidarity in a time when indigenous Judean institutions lacked cohesion.\textsuperscript{176} Ska suggests that the growth of textual authority may seek to compensate, or substitute, for the missing indigenous monarchy. He makes the crucial observation that Israelite institutions of king, temple, and prophecy are \textit{linked}, and that texts like 2 Kings 22-3 are trying to elevate the text’s authority above \textit{all three}.\textsuperscript{177} From a broader comparative perspective, Brenneman suggests that canons do not arise in order to legitimate powerful institutions, but in order to preserve valued traditions precisely when the institutions are failing.\textsuperscript{178}

Carr asks an interesting question: why should this textual center of authority have so little to say about contemporary Israelite leadership? Why does the Pentateuch take the form of “nonroyal instruction placed outside the land in a distant past”?\textsuperscript{179} One possible answer is that the whole enterprise is an exercise in subtle misdirection, perpetrated either by the priests (discussed above) or by a shadowy group that has incurred various conspiracy theories—the scribes.\textsuperscript{180} But

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\textsuperscript{177} Ska, “From History Writing,” pp. 153-6.
\textsuperscript{179} Carr, “The Rise of Torah,” p. 44.
\textsuperscript{180} See Albers, \textit{History 2}, pp.559-61; Davies, \textit{Scribes and Schools}. Ska (“From History Writing,” pp. 168-9) emphasizes that Moses is depicted as a scribe; so is God (see Joachim Schaper, “A Theology of Writing: The Oral and the Written, God as Scribe, and the Book of Deuteronomy,” in \textit{Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach}, ed. Louise Lawrence and Mario Aguilar [Leiden: Deo, 2004]: 97-119). In my judgment, however, the case has yet to be made that ancient scribes consisted of a coherent, self-regulating and self-aggrandizing class, perpetrating a grand power-grab on an unsuspecting Judean population.
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in the ancient world scribes were seen as (and saw themselves as) intermediaries who wrote for some other interest—and in the Pentateuch, as I have argued already, this other interest is not merely priestly. The multiple passages that depict a community agreement to the torah (e.g., Exod 24:3-8; 2 Kgs 22-23; Neh 10) invite the hypothesis that Pentateuchal writers mediated acknowledged tradition—the will of the divine as accepted by a wider community. The community decision to ratify these words relegates the scribe to a mere witness—preserving words that the people accept as divine. The texts may be silent on contemporary politics, not out of some vague deceptiveness, but because they had authority to speak only of those hoary traditions which had earned the concurrence of the community as a whole.

Carr himself attributes the Pentateuch’s archaic focus to exilic prophecy’s interest in “pre-land traditions”; he cites Ezekiel (e.g., 20:1-26) and second Isaiah (e.g., 43:16-21 and 51:1-2). Carr does not, however, follow this line of thought to its logical conclusion: just as the pre-land tradition becomes in Ezekiel and Isaiah a source of hope for exiled Israel, so the entire postexilic prominence of Pentateuchal Torah functions to guarantee the expectations of the restoration community. Thus the literates who succeeded in carving out a text-based authority placed a textually-based hope at the authoritative center of their vision of Israel. Their text could then function as a “portable homeland” precisely so that this new center of Israelite identity and

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181 Crüsemann, *Torah*, p. 249 captures this dynamic well: in Deuteronomy, principles of God-given law are above both “democracy” and “rulers”—comparable to the modern view of “rights” or “constitutional principles.”

182 In the Pentateuch, ongoing diversity and controversy over “specific legal and religious practices” were less important than “community solidarity and identity” grounded in a shared past (Watts, *Reading Law*, pp. 136-7).


authority can be taken along on a journey toward the future homeland that remains Israel’s ultimate destination.

3.4.3 Pentateuch, Prophets, and Eschatology

My argument so far suggests that in many ways the Pentateuch resembles the prophetic corpus: both literatures are interested in proper worship, but the locus of authority is on its face not the temple priesthood but Yhwh’s will as expressed through a (prophetic) mediator—in the Pentateuch, Moses. Meanwhile, prophetic books show signs of priestly editing and connection with the Jerusalem cult. The persistent hypothesis of a prophetic “social group,” namely independent prophetic conventicles, has failed to adduce sufficient evidence. It arises in part from illegitimately confusing an orientation toward the future (eschatology), a genre of writing (books of oracles), an oral activity (prophetic proclamation), and a socio-economic class (so-called “eschatological” groups). But comparative evidence makes it clear that people of all classes can engage in eschatological expectations. Increasingly, scholars have recognized the close involvement of priests in later second-temple eschatologies, from Enoch to the War of the Jews.


186 For the growing consensus that Persian-period scribes with levitical or priestly ties edited both the Pentateuch and the prophetic works, a “complementary” redactional work firmly attached to the temple, see Reinhard Achenbach, “The Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Torah in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.,” in JFJC: 253-85; Christine Schams, Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon, pp. 132-8.

187 Blenkinsopp (“Social Roles of Prophets,” p. 53) citing Albertz (History 2, e.g., pp. 414-26 and 427-36) calls such prophetic schools “possible but speculative and subject to case-by-case verification”; Blenkinsopp goes on to make a tentative case (pp. 54-5) that a few texts in Is 65-6 may indicate a separate prophetic sect, although its literature has been rather thoroughly worked into a corpus that is far more “mainstream.” On p. 57 he suggests another group, the “signatories to the covenant” in Mal 3:13-18; I suggest that, literarily, this is a more mainstream group representing all who will agree to heed the prophetic message.

188 Stephen Cook, Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), esp. pp. 55-84. Chapman (Law and Prophets, p. 203) rightly separates the dubious historical view of prophets as a separate institution (“parallel to the monarchy and the priesthood”) from the textual, ex post facto portrayal of the prophetic message as a coherent unity.
Scroll; Zadokite circles seem responsible for so-called proto-apocalyptic passages in Ezekiel (38-39) and Joel. There is no reason to exclude the same sort of overlap in the production of the Persian-era Pentateuch.

Past assumptions about the opposition between priests and prophets are now being thoroughly questioned. As Stephen Chapman has noted, much of this discussion hangs on what it means to be “genuine prophets.” Blenkinsopp, for example, persistently uses the phrase “free prophets” (in a Weberian, charismatic, non-institutional sense). If eschatology only counts when it is totally opposed to the centers of power, if prophetic voices are only real if they are oral and anti-institutional, then the Pentateuch does not look much like prophecy—but neither does the Hebrew Bible prophetic corpus. Radically anti-institutional voices speaking ephemeral charismatic messages are, *prima facie*, unlikely to produce long-lasting written literature at all.


191 See esp. the in essays in *PiP*, ed. Lester Grabbe and Alice Bellis. So for example Ziony Zevit (“The Prophet Versus Priest Antagonism Hypothesis: Its History and Origin,” *PiP*: 189-217) examines the history of scholarship, finding the priest/prophet dichotomy to be built upon clear prejudices with little evidence; Daniel Fleming (“Prophets and Temple Personnel in the Mari Archives,” *PiP*: 44-64) shows comparative evidence of close alignment between cult personnel and prophets; and articles by Zvi (“Observations”) and Grabbe (“A Priest is Without Honor”) show the close integration of the priestly and the prophetic in Second-Temple textual production generally.


193 Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon*; idem, “Formation of the Hebrew Bible Canon: Isaiah as a Test Case,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee McDonald and James Sanders (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002): 53-67. Particularly interesting is Blenkinsopp’s blanket assertion (*Prophecy and Canon*, pp. 142-3) that the prophets’ “language about the nature and activity of God simply rules out the idea of a canon as it is generally understood” (italics mine; I am not sure how Blenkinsopp thinks the canon is generally understood). Contrast Meyers, “The Use of *Tora*,” where the prophets’ language about God has inspired and permeated the canon through and through.

194 See here the essays in *Writing and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, ed. Ben Zvi and Michael Floyd (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), esp. James Crenshaw, “Transmitting Prophecy Across Generations” (*Writing and Speech*: 31-44). Crenshaw suggests that the portrait of prophets as speaking a message (solely, or even primarily) for social change in their own day does not explain the transmission of prophetic messages. He also questions the assumption that prophetic *critiques* could not be sponsored by the powerful; Crenshaw’s reading of Mari texts suggests that ancient elites solicited and recorded expressions of the divine will that did not serve their own interests. Similar points about the writtenness (from the very first) of all Hebrew prophetic texts are made by Zvi, “Introduction”; Philip
Extant Hebrew prophetic scrolls survived because people with scribal training produced or preserved them, precisely as a lasting message for (not against) Israel’s institutions, aimed at guiding (not abolishing) Israel’s cult. Even if Blenkinsopp has rightly construed the “free” prophecy of the preexilic period, this construal has little to do with those who read, preserved, or extended prophetic writings in the Persian period. Those who used this corpus sought God’s will in the interpretation of prophetic writings, not in completely ab initio charismatic proclamation. The textualization of prophecy may have “routinized” or “domesticated” what Blenkinsopp calls “free” prophecy (such verbs are more emotive than descriptive), but it only increased the authority of prophetic messages and (especially) of prophetic texts.195

This textualized version of prophecy—in other words, the prophetic corpus itself—preserves a coherent (if variegated) vision of what it means to be Israel, in relation to Yhwh. The prophetic books seem to have been preserved and edited together, attesting the conviction that prophets of the one deity Yhwh spoke a message with shared contours.196 Those shared contours include, at minimum, a message of divine judgment and a hope of future restoration; I will examine both of these components at length below, in chapter 4. Here I prepare for the notion that the prophetic writings’ vision of Israel’s relation to Yhwh, a vision dominated by eschatology, was used in concert with the Pentateuch rather than as a contrasting alternative.


196 See, e.g., Alpertz (Israel in Exile, pp. 317, 227) for examples of how early Persian-era editors of the prophetic books influence one another.
Sociohistorically, I see no reason to divorce Genesis’ future-orientation from that of the prophetic books. Contra Plöger, Persian Judea does not divide cleanly between theocracy and eschatology. Plöger’s historical picture of a theocratic (and uneschatological) P rests in large part on his reading of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.\(^{197}\) His generalizations, however, run aground on more recent literary-historical analyses of Chronicles,\(^ {198}\) of Ezra-Nehemiah,\(^ {199}\) and of post-exilic prophecies (Third Isaiah, Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) as well.\(^ {200}\) Plöger has been highly influential; his formulation (and Hanson’s) often seems to be taken for granted by various scholars, despite some challenges.\(^ {201}\) Typical is Otto’s careful treatment of the close editorial

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\(^ {197}\) Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*. So also Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, p. 277; and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1955). All three claim that Chronicles must be non-èschatological because the temple-community fully realizes all hopes. Sara Japhet (Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought [Frankfurt Ahn Main: Peter Lang, 1989], p. 425) more accurately speaks of the stability (in Chronicles) of the “present world”; this may contradict some definitions of eschatology but not others. For discussion of Plöger’s reading of P, see my section 5.2.3.


\(^ {201}\) Plöger’s results are prominent in, e.g., Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon*; idem, “Formation of the Hebrew Bible Canon,” pp. 65-6. Variations which still preserve the eschatology-theocracy dichotomy occur in Odil Steck, “Strömungen theologischer Tradition in Alten Israel,” in idem, *Wahrnehmungen Gottes im Alten Testament*
interplay between prophetic scrolls and the Pentateuch, with some Persian-era writings ("postexilic Ezekiel" and Is 40-66) more congenial to the Pentateuch than others (Jer 26 and 36).

His evidence shows variation on how Mosaic Torah is construed as authoritative, but it is only his bare citation of Plöger and Hanson that supports his concluding contention that the prophets were still “united” over against the Pentateuch on the issue of theocracy versus eschatology.202

As depicted in biblical narratives, prophets occupy diverse socioeconomic settings, from royal counselors to village seers.203 Probably the three social settings most closely tied to prophecy are a) the royal court, b) the state-supported cult, and c) the religious conservatism of agrarian freeholders.204 Since Persian Judea lacked a royal court,205 the proposed Pentateuchal

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202 Eckart Otto, “Scribal Scholarship in the Formation of Torah and Prophets: A Postexilic Scribal Debate between Priestly Scholarship and Literary Prophecy: The example of the Book of Jeremiah and Its Relation to the Pentateuch,” in PentT: 171-84, esp. p. 183. Similarly, Blenkinsopp (Prophecy and Canon, pp. 87, 109, 120-4) admits that prophetic influence on the Pentateuch is great, but that nevertheless (for reasons based on Weber and Plöger) the Torah means the “eclipse of prophecy”—although prophecy is never rejected, only “reabsorbed into the institutional framework of the theocracy.” Albertz, who complicates somewhat Plöger’s bifurcated model, is still able to claim without any support (History 2, p. 455) that “we can see from P” that “the majority of the priestly college were still opposed to prophecy.” Albertz’s section on P (pp. 480-93) never mentions, much less documents, any opposition to prophecy.

203 See Robert Wilson, Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Blenkinsopp, “Social Roles of Prophets.”

204 I am following especially Stephen Cook, The Social Roots of Biblical Yahwism (Leiden: Brill, 2000), though the same points can be found in Blenkinsopp’s very different Prophecy and Canon. At the height of the monarchical states in Israel and Judah, classical prophets emerged whose traditional-agrarian concerns were not (as with the characters Elijah and Elisha) merely popular and oral, but who also used the tools of the elite (especially literacy, whether the prophet’s or his disciples’) and addressed wider state issues (e.g., international relations). Classical prophets seem connected to priesthood (Jeremiah, Ezekiel), court (Isaiah, Zephaniah), and (perhaps) Levitical circles (Amos, Hosea—see here Cook, Social Roots). In the Persian period, writings such as Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Joel seem thoroughly prophetic and thoroughly cultic.

205 Boccaccini (Roots of Rabbinic Judaism, esp. pp. 88-90, 103) may be right in associating (some sorts of) prophets with the remnants of the Davidic monarchy, and thus seeing the post-Zerubbabel disappearance of the Davidic court-in-exile with the downfall of (some sorts of) prophecy. But the prophetic corpus continued to be copied and extended, not least in connection to the new Jerusalem temple.
groups (farmers or landowning elders, and cult personnel) are the very two groups most likely to support prophecy in Persian Judea. Admittedly, the cult could impose an economic burden on Judean farmers, and some prophetic messages spoke up for these burdened farmers. But it is equally true that unwilling farmers could jeopardize the priests’ livelihood, and prophetic messages also agitate for temple contribution (e.g., Hag 1; Mal 1:6-14; 3:6-12). Rather than emphasizing the obvious conflict of interest between tithe-payers and tithe-collectors, one could just as easily emphasize how a functioning cult requires cooperation between the supporting populous and the ministering priesthood. Persian-era prophetic writings seem interested in keeping this cooperation alive.

Given the historical picture of Persian Judea that I have traced so far, I find problematic the notion of a set of Persian-era Judeans who have money, leisure, and technical skills to preserve and produce the impressive prophetic corpus, but who nevertheless are excluded from “official circles.” Granted, some prophetic strands (by no means all) rather radically question the modus operandi of the Jerusalem cult (e.g., Is 66:1-3), but it is also true that the Pentateuch itself gives more than one perspective on proper sacrifice (contrast Exod 20:24-6 to Deuteronomy; Genesis seems largely unconcerned with this question at all).

Some prophetic passages may be more explicitly revolutionary than anything in the Pentateuch, but other

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206 Plöger, pp. 44-7. Not only are these prophetic groups, so active in canonizing the “prophetic word of Yahweh, including its eschatology” not part of “the official Jewish community,” that official community “had been formed with the express intention of intercepting and neutralizing possible eschatological attempts at restoration.” Plöger does not give a single piece of evidence for this “express intention,” and elsewhere (p. 33) admits the full participation of prophetic eschatology (he cites Haggai and Zechariah) in the construction of the temple—the one event that is most formative of the official Jewish community. In Albertz (History 2, pp. 454-8) prophecy oscillates back and forth between influential, marginalized, and suddenly influential again—all with very little evidence. Petersen (“Eschatology—Old Testament”), perhaps influenced by such authors, simply asserts that “in all likelihood” eschatology was restricted to “those who were not necessarily in charge of either Israel’s political or religious institutions.” Such generalities do not strike me as helpful.

207 Bryan Bibb (“The Prophetic Critique of Ritual in Old Testament Theology,” in PiP: 31-42) evaluates the history of Protestant over-readings of prophets supposedly critiquing cult or ritual.
prophetic passages (e.g., Is 45:1-8) are more pro-Persian than anything in the Pentateuch. In the midst of this complexity, there is no room for an oversimplifying dichotomy of torah-based practical living versus prophet-inspired future hope. Rather, at least some Persian-era Judeans seem to have engaged in practical restoration (with the permission if not aid of Persia), not as a substitute for God’s eschatological visitation but as preparation for it. The cult itself “celebrates” but also “anticipates” Yhwh’s rule, and can invoke the past specifically to point forward to future restoration.

Meanwhile, one must use caution when examining possible anti-prophetic priestly texts, or possible anti-priestly prophetic texts. Although one finds scattered critiques (in priestly writings) of corrupt prophets, or scattered critiques (in prophetic writings) of corrupt priests, both sorts of writing critique corrupt leaders of all kinds. The strongest critiques of erring Aaronic

208 Watts (“The Torah as the Rhetoric,” pp. 330-1) suggests that the priesthood’s seeming tendency to “accommodation” may cohere with “anti-nationalistic” material in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; it is not, in other words, a matter of Pentateuch against prophets. See Trotter, pp. 110-15, for an attempt to read Hosea as purely loyal to Persia.

209 Klaus Koch (The Prophets [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], p. 187) argues that in Ezra the fulfillment of priestly law “was evidently a partial step toward eschatological salvation.” See also Hag 2:6-9, 20-23; Zech 8; and the transition from Neh 9:37 to 10:1 [9:38], implying that cultic renewal is a response to the “great distress” of foreign domination and (perhaps) that proper worship will prompt God’s action (just as the burning bush precedes liberation, the Passover ceremony precedes exodus, and Deuteronomic renewal precedes the entry into the promised land). For penitential prayer as a communal preparation for resistance, see Daniel Smith-Christopher, A Biblical Theology of Exile (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), p. 122.

210 I owe this formulation to Kelly, Retribution and Eschatology, p. 147; see his pp. 169-174 for an analysis of Chronicles’ cult-orientation (following John Kleinig, The Lord’s Song: The Basis, Function, and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993]) in terms of cultic singing that looks forward to a future salvation. He also quotes H. G. M. Williamson (1 and 2 Chronicles [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 129): “In the reality of worship, Israel’s eschatological role in the world is upheld, but in the harsh actuality of life as a minor province in a vast empire, it is recognized that such a role can only be introduced by God’s intervention.” Williamson is speaking of Chronicles, but this seems to me to represent a viewpoint worth testing against other texts as well. See also Stephen Cook, The Apocalyptic Literature (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), p. 101: the Jerusalem temple’s cult symbols, sacrifices, and prayers provoked “expectations of paradise on earth and the ennoblement of humanity”—a state “far from reality in the here and now” which therefore aroused hopes of “God’s eschatological intervention.” Cf. here Jon Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

priests come in Exodus-Leviticus (e.g., Exod 32, Lev 10:1-3), and the strongest critiques of erring prophets fill the prophetic corpus (e.g., Hos 9:7-8; Mic 3:5-7; Jer 28). Priests and prophets are critiqued together in such passages as Hosea 4:4-5 or Zephaniah 3:4. Nothing here suggests two radically opposed corpuses. 212 Ben Sommer concludes, contra Hanson, that “to the extent that the early post-exilic community was polarized, the priestly and the prophetic groups were aligned with, not against, each other”—against Judeans who reject the (possibly minority) tradition of monolatrous, Jerusalem-temple-centered Yahwism. 213

Deuteronomy 34:10-12 is the chief example of the subordination of prophets to Moses; but since this very passage aligns Moses more closely with prophecy than with any other activity, it is hard to avoid the likelihood that other institutions (rulers and priests) are all likewise subordinated to the word of God in Mosaic torah. 214 If, as Nihan notes, Numbers 12:6-8

212 Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006]) examines the evidence in Mal, Hag, Zech 1-8, and Is 56-66, and rejects any sharp dichotomy (as in Plöger or Hanson) of theocracy versus eschatological sects (see, e.g., p. 387). Cf. also Blüm, Studien, p. 359, critiquing Crüsemann’s “anti-prophetic” claim for P. It is another question whether scattered references in the prophetic corpus suggest a “low social status” for the “nābi” (see esp. Blenkinsopp, “Social Roles of Prophets,” pp. 45, citing Is 56:9-12; Is 9:13; and Zech 13:2-6). Without giving each of these examples the attention it deserves, I can only suggest that this evidence is scanty and ambiguous, while passages honoring prophets and their messages are numerous and clear.


214 Discussing this passage in the light of the simultaneous portrayal of Moses as prophet, Chapman (Law and Prophets, p. 123) astutely notes that “no other group (e.g. kings, priests, judges) appears to receive the high privilege of such a ‘subordination’ in this conclusion” See also Konrad Schmid, “The Late Persian Formation of the Torah: Observations on Deuteronomy 34,” JFJC: 237-51, pp. 245-6.
“reasserts Moses’ absolute superiority over the entire prophetic tradition,” Achenbach more astutely realizes that both Numbers 12:6-8 and Deuteronomy 34:10-12 place Moses “above every other prophetic (or Priestly) revelation.” In fact, it is possible that Deuteronomy 34:10-12 was read together with Malachi 3:22-24, as a joint conclusion to a two-part canon. If so, both conclusions may well look forward to a future authoriative prophetic activity. The phrase קָם נוְלֹא נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה, “never again has a prophet risen in Israel like Moses” (Deut 34:10), may suggest that the promise of more Moses-like prophets (Deut 18:15-19) remains unfulfilled—and thus that עוֹד לֹא also means “not yet.” The future may still hold the sort of ideal prophetic activity that Israel’s history has never (since Moses) experienced.

Finally, reading the Pentateuchal and prophetic literature together does not require denying any tensions between them. Even Chapman admits a possible theocratic/ eschatological tension in the “historical situation,” although the biblical tradents have smoothed over such tensions. Perhaps Persian Judeans themselves were not sure whether Pentateuchal “theocracy” and prophetic “eschatology” were fully compatible. Plöger or Crüsemann may be partially right in conjecturing that some Pentateuchal redactors wished to tone down prophetic eschatology—or that certain prophetic authors chafed at the Pentateuch. For that matter, the true non-privileged Judeans—those who could not afford to produce texts and thus left behind little historical

215 Nihan, “Torah Between Samaria and Judah,” p. 189; he has already shown that Num 11:29 indicates the “reception, inside the Torah, of a central belief of postexilic eschatological prophecy,” citing Is 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 39:29; Joel 3:1-2.


217 Chapman, Law and Prophets, p. 146. In Blenkinsopp, Prophecy and Canon, the two conclusions represent two consecutive stages, one priestly and one prophetic, in the canon-redaction process; the question, which I think is unanswerable given the extant evidence, is when these two matched conclusions co-existed.

218 Chapman, Law and Prophets, p. 130.
record—may have felt that their oppression was insufficiently voiced by any Hebrew writings.\textsuperscript{219}

But such possibilities, difficult to prove or disprove, should not overshadow the deep affinities between the Pentateuch and the prophetic corpus.

If some Judean audiences thought the Pentateuch overemphasized the possibility of faithful collaboration (see, e.g., Pharaoh’s favor for Joseph and his family), other audiences might receive Genesis in light of a prophetic/eschatological tradition which had always emphasized God’s forbearance toward oppressive powers—a forbearance which has definite limits.\textsuperscript{220}

Ultimately, the Pentateuch took its place alongside the Prophets/Nebei’im (not as an alternative to it), and encouraged eschatology right alongside it.\textsuperscript{221} Apparently, most Judeans eventually discerned a shared eschatological framework built into both corpuses’ emphasis on Yahweh’s commitment to Israel’s land and freedom. Perhaps the inner diversity within each corpus parallels the diversity between Pentateuch and prophetic literature, and militates against any notion that tension implies a separate readership.

\textsuperscript{219} Berquist, “Postcolonialism”; Albertz, History 2, pp. 553-4. I accept a weak version of sociological determinacy: while people can devote themselves to causes that they value over their own (narrowly defined) interests (see Chapman, Law and Prophets, pp. 94-106, discussing Alitier, Canons and Consequences), they still tend to respond most forcefully to problems that impinge more directly upon themselves. On the other hand, it is worth insisting that those who produced and preserved the prophetic corpus were also privileged literates as well.

\textsuperscript{220} Classic statements include Hab 2:3; Zeph 3:8; Is 46:8-13.

\textsuperscript{221} Here I invoke again the law-prophets canonical grammar traced by Chapman; important is his emphasis on the generative nature of canon (see Law and Prophets, pp. 22-3, citing Carol Newsom, “Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth,” Journal of Religion 76.2 [1996]: 290-306). Hans-Christoph Schmitt (“Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie: Zur Bedeutung der “Glauben”-Thematik innerhalb der Theologie des Pentateuch,” in idem, Theologie in Prophetie und Pentateuch: Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Ulrike Schorn and Matthias Büttner [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001]: 220-37, p. 221) notes the canonical problem when the prophets are read as a corrective to the Pentateuch—especially by Christians, who then read the New Testament as antinomian and non-Jewish. Schmitt cites here H. Geyer, “Zur Frage der Notwendigkeit des Alten Testamentes,” Evangelische Theologie 25 (1965): 207-37. See my section 5.4 for discussion of the interpretive tradition that reads Genesis alongside the Prophets as generative of ongoing hopes that can only be called eschatology; and my ch. 4 for a comparison of Genesis’ eschatology with that of the prophetic corpus.
3.5 Conclusion

I suggest, then, that the Pentateuchal Torah belongs to a sustained project by Persian-era Judeans, carried on in temple circles but not limited to priestly concerns, to preserve a distinctive identity based on preserved and reworked traditions. Those who composed or preserved the Pentateuch grounded Israel’s identity in a rhetorically persuasive appeal, seeking to incorporate (and to compromise with) various groups in an ongoing communal usage that included public readings or performances of narrative and legal material. They embedded their Pentateuchal appeal in a broader complex of traditions, “law” and “prophets,” whose cross-references indicate that the same audiences used both sorts of material.
4. Genesis in the Context of Prophetic Eschatology

4.1 Introduction

Building on the groundwork I have laid so far, in this chapter I attempt a cross-reading of eschatological themes in the prophetic books and future-oriented themes in Genesis. I will begin by outlining the eschatological profile of the prophetic corpus, especially in the Persian period. This eschatological profile can serve as a guide to the sort of eschatological themes that Persian-era users might also have expected to find when (re)writing or (re)hearing Genesis.

Of course, the prophetic corpus is no less complex than the Pentateuch, and space simply does not allow me to address all of the important literary, historical, and compositional questions that this chapter’s claims may raise. Of necessity, I will overview eschatological passages in various prophetic texts without attempting to date each passage. Since the textual evidence is all post-Persian, I am not optimistic about my own (or anyone else’s) ability to specify precisely what forms the prophetic texts took during the Persian period. Several scholars suggest that the Latter Prophets (what I am calling the prophetic corpus) existed as an already-integrated collection by the end of the Persian period; and even if some prophetic-eschatological material (in its current textual form) may be too late to influence Persian-era users of Genesis, the prophetic corpus remains the best evidence of the sorts of eschatology available to Persian-era Judeans who valued Hebrew literature.¹ So, for example, Ben Zvi argues that the prophetic books, despite their varied sources, “most likely resulted from redactional processes that cannot now be fully

¹ See here Lester Grabbe, “Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period,” Did Moses Speak Attic?: Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period, ed. Grabbe (JSOTS 317; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 129-55, esp. p. 155; Ehud Ben Zvi, “Biblical Books and Texts as Self-Contained Sources for the Study of Ancient Israelite History,” Religion Studies and Theology 25.2 (2006): 211-27. Of course, the prophetic scrolls contain multiple editorial additions; but content that is shared by the most ancient manuscript traditions (Greek as well as Hebrew), and which makes no reference to post-Persian events, can only be assigned a post-Persian date if one has already pre-decided which themes (i.e., which sorts of eschatology) are impossible for the Persian period.
recovered’; “in their present form . . . are best dated to the post-monarchic period” (“likely Persian’); and “are an excellent source for understanding this period.” In fact, the collection of these books as “multiple sources shedding light into one another” demonstrates particularly well the “discourses, ideologies, apprehensions and hopes of the communities, or at least the highly literate elites of the communities, within which and for which they were written.”

After laying out some possible lines for understanding the prophetic eschatology that was available to Persian-era Judean (re)writers and (re)readers, I will then bring this eschatology into conversation with Genesis. I will suggest that in a cross-reading of Genesis and the prophetic corpus, eschatological themes are particularly prominent. The traditions of origins which Genesis narrates play a major role in Persian-era prophetic eschatology; conversely, prophetic images of salvation and destruction play a major role in Genesis. In this chapter I lay out some of the most explicit intertextual allusions between the two corpuses, as well as more subtle cross-connections which seem to cluster around a few pervasive motifs. I will suggest that both the prophetic corpus and the book of Genesis assume a shared conversation about the future Israel can hope for—a future which builds upon Israel’s past and which helps shape Israel’s Persian-era identity. In my next chapter, I will more closely examine Genesis’ own contribution to this conversation, drawing out its portrait of the future in light of the prophetic-eschatology connections which this chapter introduces.


3 Ben Zvi, “Biblical Books,” pp. 222-3. See also Ben Zvi’s “Looking at the Primary (His)story and the Prophetic Books as Literary/ Theological Unites within the Frame of the Early Second Temple: Some Considerations,” Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament 12.1 (1998):26-43, where he argues that the whole prophetic corpus has a historical meaning for the Persian-era “(re)readership” that viewed it as a block of material (p. 27)—and that this historical meaning shares certain themes with the historical meaning of the primary historical narrative (Genesis through Kings), also shaped as a block of material in the same general historical period and hence by the same group of Hebrew-writing, text-producing Judeans.
4.2 Prophetic Eschatology in Persian-era Usage

4.2.1 The Grammar of Prophetic Eschatology: Judgment, Salvation, Warning, and Cosmic Change

I begin my account of Persian-era eschatology with a larger profile of prophetic eschatology, including pre-Persian material. After all, Persian-era Judeans shaped their Hebrew literature without sharply distinguishing received prophecy from more recent additions. In the prophetic scrolls, ancient oracles and redactional additions form a literary unity, suggesting that prophetic-eschatological material which Persian-era (re)writers composed builds upon the prophetic-eschatological material which Persian-era (re)readers preserved. In general, the prophetic scrolls juxtapose earlier future-orientations with later eschatological additions as though unfolding what was already implicit in the received traditions. This literary fact has functional implications; old expectations continue to exert influence even as new expectations gain currency.

Some scholars, admittedly, suggest that prophetic eschatology constitutes a radical departure, motivated either by the experience of exile or by even later developments (e.g., the disconfirmation of postexilic prophetic predictions, or the complex Jewish sectarianism attested in the third through first centuries B.C.E.). They contrast the apocalyptic/otherworldly hopes of late Second-Temple writings with the historical/this-worldly focus of earlier Hebrew literature.

4 On this point see my section 1.3.2.

Others, however, trace prophetic eschatology as a gradual development from preexilic roots, through exilic hopes, to Persian-era extension of those hopes (eventually moving in the direction of full apocalyptic). In this narrative, eschatological hopes were always part of official Judean traditions, which in general combine otherworldly (mythic) language with this-worldly (historic) expectations.6

Without settling this ongoing disagreement, I would point out that even where eschatology’s development involves significant discontinuities, Persian-era Judeans could still (re)read and (re)write their prophetic eschatology within a shared conceptual framework. I will call this shared conceptual framework an eschatological grammar,7 and I suggest that its main components are judgment, salvation, warning, and cosmic change. Briefly, the current prophetic corpus suggests 1) that Israel’s fate and the fates of surrounding nations depend on judgments meted out by Israel’s God—judgments generally predicated on human failure to live up to cultic and/or ethical commitments; 2) that a possible salvation may forestall, ameliorate, or reverse

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7 For canonical writings as providing a “grammar” with which discussion is carried out (rather than promoting a single option), see Stephen Chapman (The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000], pp. 94-106), discussing Charles Altieri, Canons and Consequences: The Ethical Force of Imaginative Ideals (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1990). It is worth noting that conceptions of divine judgment and salvation, of warning and of cosmic change, are not unique to Hebrew-language Yahwistic texts; compare, for example, the Tell Deir Alla inscription of Balaam’s dreams of a coming world-destroying punishment, in which Balaam’s warnings seem to avert the disaster (see, e.g., the articles in J. Hoftijzer and Gerrit van der Kooij, eds, The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Reevaluated: Proceedings from the International Symposium Held at Leiden 21-24 August 1989 [Leiden: Brill, 1991]).
Yhwh’s judgment—perhaps by returning conditions to those of an idealized past; 3) that judgment, and the possibility of salvation, together constitute a prophetic *warning*; and 4) that mythically imagined divine actions will bring some sort of future *cosmic change*.

- **Judgment and Salvation:** Some passages attribute judgment to Yhwh’s zealous commitment to the covenant (e.g., Jer 11:6-10, 22:9; Ezek 44:7; Hos 8:1; possibly Am 3:2), and others refer only to general ethical norms. Some predicate salvation on a program of cultic or ethical reform, and some suggest that Yhwh relents with no reform at all—perhaps in response to prophetic intercession. But as Ehud Ben Zvi has shown, the prophetic scrolls have been arranged to bring judgment and salvation into intentional conversation. Ben Zvi judges this form to be Persian-era and to reflect an Israelite identity which includes, at minimum, the expectation that an ideal future will follow a period of exilic punishment.  

In Israel’s Persian-era eschatological grammar, even prophets whose oracles may originally have been unconditional have attracted later additions that hint at a possible salvation. The most obvious example is the book of Amos, where an unrelenting message of doom ends in the (editorial addition) 9:11-15; see further below. Of course, Amos’ rhetoric of an “irreversible decision” (e.g., Am 8:1-2) itself follows an earlier refusal to heed the prophetic warning (e.g., Am 7:10-

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Ancient (re)writers seemed willing to juxtapose the proclamation of all-encompassing destruction with a concern for those who survive.

- **Warning.** It is, of course, the juxtaposition of judgment with possible salvation which suggests a prophetic meta-message of warning. One must, admittedly, guard against over-reading this meta-message into the sources, thematizing prophecy according to post-biblical (individualized, spiritualized) readings of the prophetic call to repentance. References to the prophets’ *warning* (e.g., 2 Kgs 17:7-20; 2 Chron 24:19; 36:15-16; Jer 5:24-7; 7:25-8; 11:7-8; 35:13-17; cf. also the *watchman* or *sentinel* language of Ezek 3:17-21; 32:2-9; Hab 2:1; Jer 6:17; Hos 9:8) function first of all as apologetic justifications of Israel’s exile. But several passages (Zech 1:4-6; 7:7-14; Neh 9:30-38; see also Is 65:1-14, esp. vv. 12-14) indicate that in the Persian era, preserved pre-exilic warnings were already being reread as having an enduring pedagogical relevance. Scrolls such as Jeremiah were being redacted in ways that “stylized” the fall of Jerusalem as the ultimate example of what happens when the prophetic message is rejected (Jer 11:9-10, 19; 12:7; 14:1-15:4; 18:18; 20:1-6). The editors were not just “absolving Yahweh of all blame” but also providing “the chance to derive . . . lessons for

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11 See Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, p. 48; he also finds in these passages an awareness of a “historical” gap between the original situation and the current audience’s application.
the future.”¹² Note here the prophetic stories which exemplify the reprieve that can follow from a proper response to prophecy—as well as the heightened judgment earned by an improper response.¹³ Such narratives present even a bare pronouncement of judgment (e.g., Jon 3:4) as an implicit message of warning (see Jon 3:5-8), able to forestall the promised judgment (see Jon 3:9; 4:2).¹⁴ Persian-era audiences who (re)read or (re)wrote such stories did not receive prophetic texts as the mere record of the historical prophet’s current crisis and proximate future.¹⁵ Rather, they discovered a call, ever applicable, to “turn” (ḇw) from “evil” (ḥ‘r) in order to receive the ancestral promise of the land (Jer 25:5 [cf. also 7:5-7]; note the wordplay between bWv, turn, and bWv, dwell).

• Cosmic Change. When viewed as a larger theological narrative about straying-yet-chosen Israel and its threatening-yet-promising God, the prophetic corpus prompts questions about

¹² Albertz, Israel in Exile, p. 330. Albertz (pp. 336-8) argues that the Deuteronomistic redactors’ “theology of missed opportunity for salvation” (Jer 26:3; 35:14-16; 36:3, 7) “extended . . . explicitly into the exilic present” (see esp. Jer 35:15 and 42:10-12, both of which build on the statements in Jer 7:3, 7; 25:5). The prophetic pedagogy (cf. Jer 29:10-14), evoking the Shema (i.e., “with all your heart”), does not end at the exile, as verses 10-11 make clear. Similarly, Albertz (pp. 234-5) locates an early-Perisan edition of Hosea/Amos/Mica/Zechariah (now combined) which “sought after the catastrophe to develop a future perspective for the exilic generation based on the prophetic documents,” conceiving of judgment as “purifying,” “pedagogical,” and hence “salvific” (see, e.g., Hos 5:1, 9). Here, Albertz suggests (pp. 222-23), a “theological justification for the catastrophe of the exile” has taken on a “salvific aspect”: judgment gives “opportunity for a new beginning.”

¹³ For the first, see 1 Kgs 21:27-29; 22:14-20; for the second, see Amos 7:10-17; Jer 28:1-17, 2 Chron 24:19-24. Admittedly such narratives are not overtly didactic, nor do they portray repentance as an inner change or renewed life of faithfulness. They do, however, distinguish between responses of submission (to Yhwh’s prophetic word) and non-submission, and I find it hard to believe that this distinction is not meant to orient audiences in their own response to prophetic messages (in textual or oral form).

¹⁴ See treatment in George Caird, The Language and Imagery of the Bible (Grand Rapids, Minn: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 56-8. Caird’s point is that only context can distinguish between the linguistic forms prediction (aiming to describe the future accurately) and threat (aiming to produce changed behavior).

where Israel’s story will go from here. Do the disasters of the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.E. represent Yhwh’s last word? Such questions invite an eschatological answer, one that speaks not only of judgment, salvation, and warning, but also of a decisive and final resolution—for good or for ill. Prophetic conceptions of a final resolution are nearly always expressed with mythic imagery. Even when historical developments are at issue, passage after passage evokes a sense of cosmic change. Images of a shaking earth and a lifeless land, of judgments pronounced by a divine council and executed by theophanic visitation, cannot be reduced to mere political reshuffling. Rather, various prophecies describe the end of life as the audience knows it, radically disrupting both social relations and religious constructions. The mythic overtones flow from the fact that Yhwh’s own hand brings this judgment, even when Yhwh uses “this-worldly” instruments. Ultimately, the creator God

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16 See Albertz, Israel in Exile, p. 342-3: the early-Persian Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah “sketches a mighty drama involving Yahweh and his people,” giving “judgment and salvation” for Israel and for the world: a “great change of fortunes” (see, e.g., Jer 29:10-14) as a “still-unrealized . . . salvation” brought about by God alone (see esp. Jer. 32:17-19, 27). Albertz (p. 356) also uses the language of “drama” (“of Yahweh and his people and his city”) in summarizing an edition of Ezekiel dating to approximately the same time.

17 Bill Arnold (“Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalyptic,” in Oxford Handbook of Eschatology, ed. Jerry Walls [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]: 23-39, here p. 28) describes Amos’ “negative proto-eschatology” in which Israel’s story climaxes in cosmic destruction on the day of Yhwh; but later prophets, not to mention later rewriters of Amos, refused to allow this negative resolution to have the last word.


20 Contra Reventlow (“Eschatologizing,” p. 173), who thinks in Am 8:2 refers to “the end of a certain political existence”—an unacceptable euphemism even if the verse denotes “only” the fall of Israel to Assyria. See my section 1.3.3.

21 God’s theophonic judgment is asserted throughout Amos (see, e.g., 5:17); see also Mic 1:3 and Is 26:21, which according to Albertz (History 2, p. 581) portray a “universal epiphany of God in judgment” which influences
determines the cosmic fate not only of Israel, but of surrounding nations and of the natural order itself.\textsuperscript{22} Announcing Yhwh’s judgment/salvation in mythic language leads rather easily to announcing the ultimate transformation of the cosmos as a whole.

In summary, the prophetic future-orientation which serves as the background to Persian-era eschatology takes for granted a grammar of judgment, salvation, warning, and cosmic change. Variations in each of these concepts allow, of course, for distinct permutations, varying emphases, and considerable contradiction. But I suggest that if prophetic scrolls sometimes seem to lurch between hope and despair, this is not \textit{only} because subsequent editorial layers contradict one another. Neither judgment alone nor salvation alone does justice to the Yhwh-and-Israel story that the prophetic scrolls are telling. The similarities (as well as differences) in the ways that the prophetic literature presents this story allow the prophetic corpus to function as a whole, for at least some Persian-era Judean users, to shape a group identity based not just on Israel’s past but also on Israel’s ideal future.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} In general, prophetic announcements of judgment and salvation make little distinction between the rise and fall of nations and the natural cycle of rain or drought, harvest or famine. Yhwh’s judgment brings war, drought, famine, death, and darkness on the human and nonhuman world. Yhwh’s salvation brings peace, fecundity, life, and light on the human and nonhuman world. See here Amos’ hymnic fragments (4:13, 5:8-9, and 9:5-6; see James Crenshaw, \textit{Hymnic Affirmations of Divine Justice: The Doxologies of Amos and Related Texts in the Old Testament} [Missoula, Mont: Scholars, 1975]), which affirm that God turns light to darkness (4:13d, 5:8c), pours water back on the land (5:8b-e, 9:6c-d), and shakes the earth like the Nile, making it melt at his touch (9:5; cf. 8:8). In light of such passages, the step from one sort of eschatology (sometimes called “prophetic”) to another (sometimes called “proto-apocalyptic”) is not as large as it may seem to some post-Enlightenment readers. See my section 1.3.3.

4.2.2 Restoration Eschatology in the Persian Period

4.2.2.1 Eschatologizing Additions to Earlier Prophetic Scrolls

Although I have not traced the compositional history of the prophetic books,\(^{24}\) I take for granted the scholarly consensus that cumulative additions have developed the prophetic message into the matrix which now exists—a matrix that seems to synthesize judgment and salvation, warning and cosmic change. In this section I will consider some proposed additions to the prophetic corpus which reflected (and, of course, encouraged) a growing interest in eschatology among Persian-era users of the prophetic texts. Precisely in the Persian period, old prophetic hopes combine with postexilic “disappointments and deprivations” to inspire eschatological reflection on an “ideal age to come.”\(^{25}\) Here I rely especially on a helpful article by Henning Graf Reventlow, identifying several Persian-era editorial additions which present a distinctive post-exile eschatological profile:\(^{26}\):

- **Amos 9:11-15:** This long-recognized editorial insertion\(^{27}\) describes a permanent return to the land in prosperity, security, and mythic fruitfulness (vv. 13-15) juxtaposed with a

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\(^{24}\) See, e.g., the discussion in Albertz, *History 2 and Israel in Exile.*


\(^{26}\) Reventlow, “Eschatologization.”

reinstatement of the Davidic monarchy (vs. 11) and dispossession of surrounding nations (typified by Edom; vs. 12).²⁸

- **Hosea 1:7, 2:20 [18], and 3:5.** These verses address Persian-era Judeans; 1:7 explicitly names Judah, while 3:5 speaks to an Israel that must “return” or “come” back to its land. These verses expect an abolishment (2:20[18]) or superfluity (1:7) of weapons, a renewed covenant (2:20[18]), and a Davidic restoration (3:5, echoing Am 9:11).²⁹

- **Micah 4 (esp. 4:1-5), 5:1-5, and 5:6-14.** Micah 4 (esp. 4:1-5) belongs to the Zion-tradition eschatology so typical of Isaiah (see below), and Micah 5:1-5 parallels the Davidic eschatology expressed in Hosea 3:5 and Amos 9:11. Meanwhile, Micah 5:6-14 describes Jacob as a remnant among nations (5:6-7[7-8]) whose salvation will include the destruction of weapons (5:9[10]), purification from idols (5:11-13[12-14]), and vengeance on disobedient peoples (v. 14[15]).³⁰

- **Zephaniah 3:9-20.** This ending announces the return of the diaspora (3:20; cf. 3:18-19 and perhaps 3:10) and Yhwh’s secure rule in Zion (3:14-17; cf. also 3:11-12).³¹ I would also highlight the pointed reversal of Israel’s fortunes vis-à-vis the nations, especially in

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²⁸ In postexilic oracles, such as Is 34 and 63, Edom “has a typical function . . . as exemplum and place of judgment on the pagan peoples of the world” (Reventlow, “Eschatologization,” p. 176).


Zephaniah 3:19-20: I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. . . .
Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth.

- **Jeremiah 30-31.** The addressee here shifts from Jeremiah’s Judah to a (postexilic) amalgamation of Israel and Judah together (31:1, “all the families of Israel”; cf. also 30:3, 4; 31:27, 31). 32 “Jacob” (30:7, 10, 18; 31:7, 11) apparently means all Israel, and Samaria (31:5) or Ephraim (31:6, 9, 18, 20) join a community that processes to a rebuilt Jerusalem (31:6, 12; cf. 31:38-40 and probably 30:18). Not only does the diaspora return (30:3, 10; 31:8-10, 16-17, 21) under a restored Davidic monarchy (30:9 and probably 30:21), Israel’s oppressors are punished (30:11, 16, 20)—as are the “wicked” more generally (30:23). Although this expectation suggests a return to past conditions (30:3, 20), the restored relationship with Yhwh is new and improved (30:22; 31:1, 31-4); evocative ideal descriptions of Israel’s restored fortunes (30:18) include health (30:17), peace (30:10), joy (31:7, 12-13), increased population (30:19; 31:27-28), and fruitfulness (31:5, 12, and 14).

- **Ezekiel 20:39-44; 34:23-29; 36:16-38; 37:20-28; and much of the Gog pericope (chs 38-39).** 33 In these passages the diaspora returns (29:40-42; 36:24; 37:21; 38:8, 12; 39:27) with a new permanent Davidic monarch (34:23-24; 37: 24-26) over a united Judah and Israel (37:22). Yhwh makes a new everlasting (37:26-27) covenant emphasizing blessing, security (see also 38:11 34), and especially Edenic fruitfulness (34:25-9; 36: 29-30, 35). A permanently purified relationship between Israel and Yhwh involves inner transformation (36:25-7) and a

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34 Reventlow (”Eschatologization,” p. 183) compares here Zech 2:5; see also the destroyed weapons after the Gog battle (39:9-10).
restored Jerusalem cult (29:40-41, 43-44; 37:23, 26-28). All of this material invokes an ancestral promise (29:42; 37:25-6), and prompts the recognition by surrounding nations of Yhwh’s sovereignty (e.g., 38:16; 39:21-3).

- **Isaiah 2:2-4, 11:1-15.** Isaiah 2:2-4 (like its doublet in Mic 4:1-5) extends the Zion tradition to include torah-centered pilgrimage to Jerusalem and weapon-destroying peace. Similarly, Isaiah 11:1-15 combines Davidic restoration in justice and peace (vs. 1-9) with the return of the diaspora (vs. 11-12, 15-16), accompanied by the gathering/subduing of surrounding peoples (vv. 10, 14).

### 4.2.2.2 Seven Eschatologizing Themes

All of these passages deserve more attention than Reventlow gives them, but I will not here attempt to fill this lack. I contend that Reventlow’s analysis has at least shown a pattern of overlapping, shared conceptions that characterize the eschatological restoration of a “returning” Judean community. This much is true even if one does not accept Reventlow’s redactional scenario. If, however, these passages do indeed belong to a single layer of eschatologizing additions, they give a special window into the expectations of (some) Persian-era Judeans. Even more, such a systematic layer of eschatologizing would demonstrate how these Judeans read their

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36 Note the textual variant; in general, the Hebrew mss have more promise-language than does the LXX *Vorlage*, including *they and their children and their children’s children* (v. 25) and *I will multiply them* (v. 26).

37 Reventlow, “Eschatologization,” p. 185, citing extensive literature.
expectations into the prophetic scrolls which they preserved. The attested expectations, according to Reventlow, fall into seven general categories:\(^{38}\):

- **Reconstitution of Israel:** Clearly, restoration eschatology begins with the return of the diaspora, an event that is given eschatological weight in the additions Reventlow explores and elsewhere.\(^{39}\) The return of exiles then leads to the reconstitution of Israel according to its idealized memories. An especially important part of this ideal memory is the unity of Judah and Israel, north and south. The restoration will be for “all the families of Israel” (Jer 31:1), “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31); Ephraim (Jer 31:60), or Judah and Israel together (Jer 50:4-5), will process to Zion. Ezekiel 37:15-22 makes much the same point through the joining of two sticks; and Ezekiel 47:13-48:29 follows an Edenic description of the restored temple (47:1-12) by narrating a utopian “equal” division of the land among 12 tribes—except that “Joseph shall have two portions” (47:13).

- **Regaining the land:** Reconstitution of Israel often implies the re-gaining of their land (see, e.g., Hos 2:2[1:11]). Note that Obadiah’s eschatological ending (1:18-21), which Reventlow does not discuss, predicts that Israel will re-inhabit its lost lands (Negeb, Ephraim/ Samaria, Gilead) and also gain land that had belonged to neighbors (Edom, the Philistines, Phoenicia). Such predictions, even when not explicit, seem to be part of the language of return.

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\(^{38}\) Reventlow, “Eschatologization,” pp. 186-8; see a comparable description in Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology,” p. 28. A similar set of themes can be found in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 343-4, describing early-Persian Jeremiah’s “promises”: the “return of the golah, population increase, resettlement of lost territories, rebuilding of cities, and a prosperous life” (e.g., Jer 31:27, 23:37-44), but also a “radical renewal of Israel’s relationship with God” (Jer 31:31-32.; 33:34; 32:39-40) in a blessing which ultimately involves all nations (Jer 12:14-17; see 32:17, 19, 27).

\(^{39}\) Donald Gowan (*Eschatology in the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], pp. 24-9) argues that the return from exile is an eschatological theme; he cites passages such as Hos 11:11; Ezek 37; Is 49:10-11; 51:11.
• **Blessing (multiplication and fruitfulness):** The restored life on the regained land will enjoy a paradisal state of blessing, described as fruitfulness, prosperity, and multiplication of the population.\(^40\) Agricultural imagery becomes a metaphor for Israel “sown” upon its land (e.g., Hos 2:2[1:11]; Jer 31:27-8).

• **A new response to Yhwh:** Israel’s return to nationhood and to land also requires a return to God. The prophetic call to *return* (see, e.g., Hos 14:1-3) becomes, in the eschatologizing additions, fulfilled in the restoration: *afterwards the Israelites will return and will seek Yhwh their God* (Hos 3:5).\(^41\) Increasingly this new response is described as *God* changing the people’s sinful orientation to a more faithful one, transforming the heart (Jer 31:33-34; 32:39-40; Ezek 36:26 [cf. 11:19])\(^42\) and removing idols or other sources of unfaithfulness (see, esp., Mic 5:9-13[10-14]). In the same vein, although Reventlow does not highlight this, a major theme in many of these additions is Yhwh’s promise-keeping faithfulness (Jer 30:3; 31:3, 20, 35-37; Ezek 20:42; 36:28; 37:25).

• **Fate of the nations:** Israel’s eschatological restoration also ushers in an eschatological *reversal* vis-à-vis the nations. This reversal may involve destruction of enemies (e.g., Mic 5:14[14]; cf. also Obad 16, 18) or, on the contrary, a new state of peace (e.g., Mic 4:1-5//Is 2:2-4; Is 11:1-15).\(^43\) Note that some such expectations of peace may date from pre-exilic

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\(^{41}\) Reventlow (“Eschatologizing,” pp. 186-7) traces the language of a new heart, a new obedience, and a new trust in Yhwh; Arnold (“Old Testament Eschatology”) speaks of the restored Israel’s new “relationship” with God.

\(^{42}\) Albertz (*Israel in Exile*, p. 344) emphasizes the radically “utopian” vision of Jer 31:34, making the prophetic editors’ “own work of theological instruction superfluous.”

\(^{43}\) Sometimes, rather than being destroyed, the nations are ruled by Israel (cf. Obad 21); Arnold (“Old Testament Eschatology”) calls this “universalized” monotheism in (e.g.) Zec 4:10, Mal 1:1, and “perhaps” Is 66:1-2.
oracles, but (if so) they have been joined to specific hopes of a post-exile restoration (see, e.g., the move from Mic 4:1-5 to 4:6, 10).

- **Zion at the Center:** Donald Gowan, like Reventlow, emphasizes the significance of Zion/Jerusalem in eschatological passages. Arnold specifies that in the exilic era or shortly thereafter, expectations for a restored temple/priesthood and for a restored monarchy converged. So in Ezekiel, where salvation is specifically for Jerusalem (see 16:53-63) and, especially, its temple (chs 40-48), royal hopes have also crept in (e.g., 17:22-4; 34:23-4; 37:22-5). Importantly, eschatological hopes can use monarchic language even where the monarchy itself is not in view; sometimes the Davidic promise has been “democratized and applied to the nation as a whole” (compare Is 55:3-5 to 2 Sam 7). This convergence and transformation of imagery means that references to an ideal temple/priesthood, or a restored

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44 Gowan, *Eschatology*. Cf. Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), especially pp. 111-37. On the other hand, Albertz (*Israel in Exile*, p. 343) finds in Jeremiah’s Deuteronomistic redaction a divinely wrought change which does not involve temple or monarchy. Similarly, on pp. 323-6 he argues for an earlier Jeremiah redaction from Palestine (Mizpah/Bethel), Shaphanide ideology, which is anti-Zion. Certainly Jer 7 (esp. 7:12) challenges the special status of the Jerusalem temple, and Jer 22:24-30 seems to reject any possible Davidic restoration.


46 Contrast the limited power of the eschatological “prince” (45:9, 16-17; 46:1-10, 16-18) with the messianic expectations of 17:22-4; 34:23-4; 37:22-5. See here Daniel Block, “Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel,” in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel*, ed. William Tooman, Michael Lyons and Marvin Sweeney (Eugene, Oreg: Pickwick, 2010): 208-246. Similarly, monarchic language in Hosea 2:2[1:11]; 3:5; Mic 5:1-6a[2-5a] intrudes on scrolls that otherwise seem anti-monarchic (see Trotter, *Reading Hosea*, pp. 110-14). Compare the Messianism of Jer 22:5-6; 30:8-9; and 33:14-26—and note that this last may be marked as a particularly late addition because it is not in the LXX.

47 See George Nickelsburg, “Eschatology: Early Jewish Literature,” *ABD* vol. 2: 579-609. Albertz (*Israel in Exile*, pp. 381; 424; 428-33) argues that Is 55:5, 12-13 substitutes the nations’ pilgrimage to Zion in place of earlier monarchic hopes of political domination; witness replaces dominion.
monarchy, need not imply specific support for a particular priestly or royal program. Yet the centrality of temple and (Davidic) monarchy as ideas, indeed the centrality of Zion as an idea (not simply a place), becomes an inextricable part of Persian-era eschatology.

- **Decisive or final turn**: Reventlow suggests that all of the eschatologizing additions which he has been tracing involve a “decisive turn to a new period of salvation which will now be final.” Important here are the phrases “never again” (דַּעְשׁוֹנָה, Ezek 36:30; Am 9:15; cf. also Joel 2:26-7, 4[3]:17) and in the latter days (הָיוֹם הַמָּצָא, Hos 3:5; Is 2:2; Jer 30:24; Ezek 38:16 [see also יְהוָה הַמָּצָא in Ezek 38:8]). One may also mention attention-drawing temporal phrases “on that day” (יהוה יָמֵי; see, e.g., Am 9:11; Mic 4:6; 5:10; Hos 2:20[18]; Jer 30:8) and “afterwards” (והי, Hos 3:5; cf. also הָיוֹם שֶׁרֶדֶן in Is 1:26; Joel 3:1[2:28]; and Gen 41:31). Such rhetoric at least suggests a climactic ending to Israel’s story, even if further denouement remains possible.

### 4.2.2.3 Restoration Eschatology throughout Persian Period Prophecy

Although Reventlow is primarily interested in eschatologizing redaction added to earlier prophetic material, he finds that the same set of themes also pervades the fifth-century core of

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48 Reventlow, “Eschatologizing,” p. 187. Yair Hoffman (“Eschatology in the Book of Jeremiah,” in Eschatology in the Bible and in the Jewish and Christian Tradition, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997]: 75-97, here, p. 80) asserts that statements about the future followed by “but afterward” cannot be final/ eschatological—but perhaps he overlooks the tendency of eschatological writings to describe a sequence of final events, well attested in such diverse works as Daniel, 1 Enoch, the War Scroll, or Revelation.

Trito-Isaiah (Is 60-62). This section elevates Zion (Is 60:14b-22, as well as chs. 61-2 more generally) and anticipates the return of the diaspora (Is 60:4-22) in idealized security (e.g., Is 60:18, 62:8-9) and prosperity, served by surrounding nations (e.g., Is 60:10-14, 61:5). Reventlow gives little attention to the question of whether other Persian-era compositions demonstrate the same eschatological profile. Briefly, I consider evidence of similar eschatological themes in the following works:

- **Isaiah 40-55** unquestionably emphasizes a future that breaks with the past and present; but Reventlow suggests that this future is not final and (therefore) not eschatological. Such analysis, however, may fail to distinguish the perspective of the hopeful Cyrus poetry from the perspective of Isaiah 40-55 as a whole. Albertz convincingly argues that in its earliest form this composition is already dealing with Judeans’ disappointment at the Cyrus-era reality, re-applying the “servant” language from Cyrus to an ongoing community witness. For Isaiah 40-55, then, the predicted return of a few Judeans under Cyrus is indeed less than final; but this return is only the “vanguard” of a properly eschatological salvation (44:21-22), one which looks to gather all Israel (not just the Judean golah—see, e.g., Is 43:3-7, 49:9-12). The final salvation exalts Zion (see, e.g., 49:14-15, 50:1; 52:7-12; 54:4-6, 11-12, 14,

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52 Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 400-7; cf. also 413-15; 419-20. In 49:2, the teaching function of the community (whether all Israel, or the prophetic group) takes on the martial imagery from the earlier Cyrus-poetry. Albertz (pp. 428-32) argues that all the passages which I cite in this paragraph belong to a very early (pre-520) usage of Deutero-Isaiah. Even if he is wrong, these passages at least belong somehow to the Persian-era history of the Isaiah scroll’s complex composition.

17a) while expecting a “universal extension of the religion of Israel” (see, e.g., 45:18-23; 49:6; 42:1-4). It includes a miraculous increase in population (49:18-21; 54:1-3), predicated in part on the ancestral promises (51:1-2, 7-8), and now fulfilled forever (לארץ—see 51:6, 8, 11; 54:8; 55:3b, 13). Thus it seems fair to say that significant amounts of material in Isaiah 40-55 match the profile of Reventlow’s “eschatologizing additions.”

- **Haggai and Zechariah 1-8**, no less than Deutero-Isaiah, begin with hopes directed at a specific political/historical situation. But anticipations of the end can build upon present politics, and hopes attached to a limited situation can expand to encompass the ultimate fate of Israel and the world (see my section 1.3.3). Haggai 2:5 evokes the Egyptian exodus in order to situate its audience as a new exodus, finally receiving what God promised (נוכט is the technical language for making a covenant); 2:19 announces that the terms of the ancestral promise (God’s blessing, נָתַן) will finally be met. Yet each of these verses is immediately followed by a reference to a future action of God which will shake the heavens, earth, and nations (זָרַע; 2:6-7, 21-2)—as though the author/editor does not consider the true goal of the exodus, the true reception of the covenanted blessings, to be possible without a cosmic upheaval. Similarly, in Zechariah Collins argues that the “Sprout” (שׁוּעַ, 3:8; 6:12) is indeed Zerubbabel, not a future figure; but nevertheless the anticipated restoration of the monarchy


55 Note that Reventlow (“Eschatologizing,” p. 174) suggests that Zech 1-8 looks for a “fundamental change” with a “cosmological aspect” (1:8-15, 6:1-8), but denies that this change is “final.” Similarly, he thinks that Haggai deals with a “concrete situation of a community” rather than the “end.”


is eschatological because “it involves a definitive, lasting, future state.”

This future state includes a final return of the diaspora (2:10-11[6-7]; 6:15; 8:7-8), a reversal vis-à-vis the nations (1:14-15; 2:12-13[8-9]; 8:13-15) which may also include the nations’ conversion (2:15[11]; 8:20-23), and a cleansing from the defilement associated with exile (3:1-7).

Jerusalem/Zion will experience complete security because of Yhwh’s direct presence (2:9[5], 12[8], 16-17[12-13]; 8:2-3), as well as paradisal fruitfulness (8:11-12), population (2:8[4]), and prosperity (1:16-17; 3:10—note here the phrase on that day).

• Joel, unlike Deutero-Isaiah, Haggai, and Zechariah, makes no reference to the initial return and rebuilding that occurred between 539 and 515; but for this very reason its language is all the more striking when it describes Israel’s future salvation under the rubric of a return from exile. So a literal (?) locust plague becomes metaphorically a “northern army” (אֵלֶּה, 2:20) with accompanying military imagery (1:6, 22; 2:7-11, 25). The restoration of the harvest

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I accept Rose’s arguments that it should be translated as Sprout, implying a new creative fruitfulness to restore the monarchy; so also in Jer 23:5 and 33:15, and (probably) Is 4:2. Cf. the restoration “sprouting” (non-monarchic) in Is 42:9; 43:19; 44:4; 45:8; 55:10; 58:8; 61:11; also, perhaps, in Ezek 29:21. Note also that David Petersen (Haggai and Zechariah I-8: A Commentary [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984], pp. 230-2) and Carol Meyers and Eric Meyers (Haggai; Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987], pp. 258-9) think that sons of oil in Zech 4:14 connotes fertility rather than royalty; the two are not, perhaps mutually exclusive.

58 Collins, “Eschatology of Zechariah.” Collins (pp. 75, 82) denies, contra Stephen Cook (Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], pp. 128-9) that this eschatology is “proto-apocalyptic”; he particularly critiques Cook’s overstatement that for Zechariah “historical processes are going nowhere and will accomplish nothing”. Yet Collins does not challenge Cook’s larger point: Zechariah’s mythic, idealized depictions exceed the possibilities of history, as exemplified by (e.g.) the end of evildoers (5:3-4), the presence of God (2:9[5]), and the turning of the nations to Yhwh (2:15[11])—promises “inconceivable without direct . . . divine intervention” (Cook, p. 129). Collins merely points out (pp. 75-6) that “All biblical eschatology [not only proto-apocalyptic] posits divine intervention,” without always specifying whether God will use “historical processes.”

59 וַהֲנֵה evokes the Babylonian exile in Is 14:13; 31; Jer 1:13-15; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 25:26; 46:6, 10, 20, 24; 47:2; Ezek 26:7. More rarely, the north is the source of a foe which will defeat Babylon (Is 41:25; Jer 50:3, 9, 41, 48; 51:48; this may be the idea behind northern “Gog” in Ezek 38:15). Other passages refer to the north as a source for the Israelites’ return from exile; see Is 43:6; 49:12; Jer 3:18; 16:15; 23:8; 25:9; 31:8; Zec 2:10.
will not only return prosperity but, more grandly, reverse the scorn of the nations (2:17-19). Here a remnant (תֵּיָּד) of scattered Israel (יָד, 4:2[3:2]) whose land has been divided (כְּרָמָם, 4:2[3:2]) looks for vindication. The literal situation of agricultural collapse and economic exploitation (see 4:3-6[3:3-6]) seems to be attributed to Israel’s continuing exile. This would explain why the nations must be judged (4[3]:2, 4-8, 11, 19-20) when Yhwh restores Israel’s fortunes. It also explains why the coming salvation will usher in an eternal state of affairs (4[3]:20), and (at least in the extant Hebrew manuscripts) an unprecedented acquittal of Israel’s “blood” (4[3]:21a). Finally, Joel makes it clear that the coming salvation is centered on Zion (2:15; 3:5[2:32]; 4[3]:16-17) and ushers in a paradisal fruitfulness (2:19-24, 4[3]:18) that reverses the book’s earlier un-

interpretations of the locust plague, see, e.g., James Crenshaw, Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1995), and literature cited there.

60 See the יָדוֹ, “reproach,” which Judah fears during Assyria’s attacks (Mic 6:16; 2 Kgs 19:4, 16, 22-3; Is 37:4, 17, 23-24; 2 Chron 32:17) and experiences during Babylon’s destruction (Jer 24:9; 29:18; 31:19; 44:8, 12; 51:51; Lam 3:30, 61; 5:1; Ezek 5:14-15; 22:4). This reproach becomes an eternal state (Jer 23:40), or at least accompanies the lasting results of Babylonian destruction (Neh 1:3; 2:17; see Dan 9:16). But it will end in the eschatological reversal (Is 25:3; 54:4; Ezek 36:15, 30) and rebound upon the enemy (e.g., Zep 2:8-10; see Dan 12:2).

61 This final verse is a crux; reading with the LXX requires two different verbs, the first referring to vengeance/punishment and only the second referring to acquittal, and a vav between the two (hence two parallel uncompleted [vav-relative perfect] actions, I will judge their blood and I will not acquit). But in the extant Hebrew manuscripts, the same verb is used twice, and without an intervening vav; hence the main clause is I will acquit their blood I did not acquit. The second clause is therefore parenthetical and probably subordinate (which I did not acquit). The LXX Vorlage merely proclaims judgment on them (presumably the enemies). As Crenshaw (Joel) notes, the book has not mentioned Israel’s sins (hence its need for acquittal) at all. But this only presses the point that the extant Hebrew seems to reference a wider prophetic story in which “blood” (guilt) remains unacquitted, and will only in the eschaton be fully forgiven.

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creation language (see esp. 2:3, 10, 30-31; 3:4[2:31]; 4[3]:5). Such blessing, however, is contingent on God’s eschatological judgment.63

- **Malachi** lacks many of the marks of restoration eschatology, such as the return of exiles/diaspora and a coming era of paradisal prosperity. The fruitfulness evoked in 3:10-12 does not seem to refer to a future change, but only an ever-present possibility. Still, these verses do refer to blessing (3:10) and to the witness of the nations (3:12), references that are characteristic of restoration eschatology. Other shared rhetoric includes the temporal language of a coming day (3:2, 17, 19[4:1], 23[4:5]), the importance of cleansing (3:2-3) or a change of heart (3:25[4:6]), and the promise of God’s favor as a return to past conditions (3:4, 7, 18). In general, however, Malachi’s eschatology is distinctive, especially in the last few verses (3:19-24[4:1-5]) which many consider (with Zech 9-14) some of the latest prophetic material64—and therefore, perhaps, beyond the scope of Persian-era eschatology.

Admittedly, this bare list of thematically-grouped citations requires more exegetical exploration than I can here provide. But together, the passages I have cited seem to extend Reventlow’s insights about a fifth-century redactional layer. A common core of eschatological themes influenced the (re)reading and (re)writing of most of the prophetic scrolls in the Persian era, including new compositions. This set of Persian-era expectations, which I will call restoration eschatology, has left its indelible mark on the shape of the prophetic corpus as used in the Persian era and beyond.

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63 James Linville (“The Day of Yahweh and the Mourning of the Priests in Joel,” in PiP: 98-114) suggests that the literary pattern of Joel 2:18 – 4:1 portrays the judgment on the nations as an almost ritual “sacrifice” that leads directly to Edenic re-creation. For the eschatological nature of Joel’s judgment see Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, p. 169.

Reventlow attempts (rather briefly) to date all of the “eschatologizing” which he has chronicled to the fifth century, when intensified hope follows the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple.\(^{65}\) Such a construal is plausible, but may be too specific; after all, the fifth-century social situation which Reventlow describes (a partial restoration/return that leaves Israel still scattered, impoverished, and at the mercy of foreigners) persisted throughout the Persian era and beyond.\(^{66}\) Diachronic reconstruction remains uncertain; what is certain is that the prophetic corpus contains a literary layer of eschatologization, in a common characteristic vein, which links the preserved shape of the prophetic scrolls. Whenever they were added, these restoration-eschatology passages now present themselves as the proper conclusion to the prophetic scrolls’ Yhwh-and-Israel narrative.\(^{67}\) The judgment, salvation, warning, and cosmic change that permeate Israel’s prophetic literature have been wedded to a discrete set of hopes for Israel’s life post-exile. Literarily and therefore functionally, the prophetic texts as texts appear to be driving toward a restoration-eschatological vision of the future.

\(^{65}\) Reventlow, “Eschatologization,” p. 188. Elsewhere Reventlow hints that some of the passages he has listed might be later; the Edom-motif from Am 9:12 comes from the “late postexilic period” corresponding to Is 34 and 63 (p. 176), and all the Davidic-restoration passages (Am 9:11; Hos 3:5; Ezek 34:23-4; 34:22-25) echo “a late postexilic expectation of a final restitution of the Davidic monarchy” (p. 178, citing Robinson, *Hosea bis Micha*, p. 16). In neither case does he specify (or defend) what “late postexilic” means; I suggest that at any time in the Persian era, circumstances would have driven discontented Judeans to imagine a reversal vis-a-vis Judea’s neighbor Edom (which had encroached on much of its former territory) and to hope for some sort of self-rule (most naturally by reestablishing the monarchy).

\(^{66}\) See above, ch. 3. Reventlow (“Eschatologization,” p. 188) claims that the “chapters that surround the core of Trito-Isaiah” prove that “this extraordinary mood [of eschatological hope] did not continue”; but he never elaborates. Even if some late Trito-Isaianic material attests some changing expectations among some post-5th-century Judeans, this does not erase the likelihood that many Judeans continued to develop the same set of motifs for decades or centuries.

\(^{67}\) Amos 9:11-15 is an instructive example: its eschatology of restoration comes at the very end, suggesting to Persian-era (re)readers that the whole book’s theophanic judgment (*Yhwh’s day, 5:18-20*) leads toward the coming restoration (*on that day, 9:11*). What is true for Amos seems true for the prophetic corpus as a whole; Frank Crüsemann (*The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* [trans. Allan Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], p. 346) can assert that Persian-era prophecy was “dominated by eschatological and early apocalyptic ideas.” See here Joseph Blenkinsopp’s discussion (“Formation of the Hebrew Bible Canon: Isaiah as a Test Case,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee McDonald and James Sanders [Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002]: 53-67, pp. 61, 65-6; see also idem, *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* [Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977], pp. 120-23) of how the whole prophetic collection focuses on eschatology, as evidenced by the endings of the prophetic books and by the very arrangement of three major and twelve minor prophetic “books.”
Finally, I wish to highlight Cross’s suggestion that an early-Persian eschatologizing of prophecy depended upon a “mythic conception of time,” reusing old traditions and myths to “frame history and lend history transcendent significance.” If Cross is right, then Persian-era restoration eschatology may not be fully separable from a mode of discourse that has sometimes been called proto-apocalyptic. With Collins and Grabbe, I suggest that this term has limited usefulness, especially when referring to mythic themes (i.e., of world-destruction) characteristic both of very late apocalypses and of very ancient oracles. Purported proto-apocalyptic passages have been scrutinized in recent literature to such an extent that space does not even allow an adequate summary of the issues. Cook’s excellent exegetical treatments come to the conclusion, perhaps surprising, that such prophecies are neither particularly late nor particularly marginal within Judean society. In the end, I doubt whether scholars will be able to keep setting aside selected “proto-apocalyptic” passages as self-evidently post-Persian and/or uncharacteristic of prophetic eschatology. Therefore, I tentatively include such passages in my account of restoration eschatology as it may have influenced Persian-era users of Genesis.


69 John Collins (“Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and Eschatology: Reflections on the Proposals of Lester Grabbe,” in KEFB: 44-52, pp. 47-8) thinks that only “judgment of the individual dead” is clearly apocalyptic (cf. Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” CBQ 36.1 [1974]: 21-43); “cosmic” eschatology can occur in pre-exilic material (e.g., Amos’ all-encompassing destruction, or early royal Psalms’ Messianism). Cf also Grabbe, “Introduction and Overview.” Arnold (“Old Testament Eschatology,” p. 29) argues that “cosmic mythological language” (as in Joel 3:3-4[2:30-31]) should not be called apocalyptic, since world destruction occurs in post-Persian 1 Enoch but also in much earlier material. Deutero-Zechariah is a special case, not because of so-called proto-apocalyptic themes, but because references to post-Persian events can at least be argued (Albertz, [History 2, p. 567] makes the case that Zech 9 mentions Alexander’s campaign). Such datable events do not appear in Isaiah 28-29, Ezekiel 38-39, Joel, or Zephaniah 1:3-18. (Contrast also Is 17:18, which seems to make a specific reference to the post-Persian Leontopolis temple in Heliopolis.)


71 Reventlow (“Eschatologization,” p. 179, note 54), for example, asserts without discussion that Zeph 1:3-18; 2:2-3, 11; and 3:8 are apocalyptic or proto-apocalyptic additions, and thus not part of his “eschatologizing” redactional layer. (In the text as it now stands, Zephaniah 3:8’s destruction of the earth in an assembled judgment


4.3 Eschatology between Genesis and the Prophetic Corpus

4.3.1 The Prophetic Corpus and the Pentateuch in Conversation

Scholars have explored many possible allusions between prophetic and Pentateuchal literature, emphasizing either the usage of Pentateuchal material by the prophetic scrolls or the influence that the prophetic scrolls have had on the Pentateuch. However, I am not aware of any systematic exploration of narrative motifs that appear prominent both in prophetic-eschatological passages and in Pentateuchal passages (especially in Genesis)—motifs such as creation, Edenic garden, destructive flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and ancestral promises of blessing.

Admittedly, such shared motifs may draw on a widespread tradition predating the textual emergence of Genesis or of the prophetic scrolls, and therefore need not indicate any direct literary borrowing. Yet if at least some Persian-era (re)writers and (re)readers of Hebrew constitutes a prelude to the restoration eschatology of 3:9-20, discussed above.) Note that on p. 187 Reventlow suggests that Is 24-7, despite its “eschatologizing and universalizing expectation of the imminent rule of God,” should not be called “apocalyptic” nor dated much later than the early fifth century.


73 John Foley (Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], pp. 39-45) makes the important point that intertextual connections play a large part even in the oral production, and aural appreciation, of traditional literature; one should not think (only) of scribes making scholarly use of one another’s manuscripts. See here Willey, Remember, pp. 81-3. Elsewhere I have coined the term “internarrativity” for the sort of allusive reference, especially in oral cultures, that need not involve a source text
literature valued both prophetic and Pentateuchal texts (see my section 3.4.3), those using either corpus might well interpret it in light of the other corpus. The very difficulty of determining the direction of influence (is prophetic literature alluding to Genesis, or Genesis to the prophetic literature?) may indicate an ongoing cross-fertilization between Pentateuchal and prophetic texts, one which occurs as much at the level of reading/ hearing as of editing/ writing. Ben Sommer discusses the literature on *allusion/influence* (direct, one-way) and *intertextuality* (indirect, and focusing on readers’ responses), concluding that allusion/ influence is the better guide to historical (diachronic) processes of composition. 74 I, unlike Sommer, focus on intertextuality—not because my interests are literary rather than historical, but because those who rewrote Genesis and the prophetic texts were themselves simultaneously receiving and composing these texts (see my section 1.2.2). Eventually, rewriters as well as rereaders of the Pentateuch in the Persian period used Genesis’ material in light of similar prophetic material, regardless of which (if either)


originally depended upon the other.\textsuperscript{75} I suggest that the more both sorts of text were reread and reused, the more their intertextual connections impacted the texts’ redactors and audiences.\textsuperscript{76}

Some connections between Pentateuch and prophetic corpus have little to do with Genesis—for example, possible prophetic interest in (or hostility toward) priestly \textit{torah} does not directly impact the usage of Genesis, which contains little priestly regulation. On the other hand, the pervasive prophetic usage of the exodus-from-Egypt tradition does indirectly impact the reading of some Genesis material (e.g., 15 and 48-50). Similarly, although the Pentateuchal portrayal of Moses as a prophet\textsuperscript{77} lies outside the scope of Genesis, it can serve as a reminder that the ancestors of Genesis also function as prophets (explicitly in Gen 20:7).\textsuperscript{78} At the very least, such correspondences can help establish a general affinity between Genesis and the prophetic

\textsuperscript{75} Sommer (\textit{A Prophet Reads Scripture}, pp. 142-4) imagines a single Deutero-Isaiah using priestly material that would later be part of the Pentateuch; this prophet asserts, against the priests, that God made even the primordial darkness (Is 45:7 v. Gen 1:1-13), has no likeness (Is 40:13; 40:25; and 46:5 vs. Gen 1:26; 5:1), and does not rest (Is 40:28 vs. Gen 2:2; Exod 31:17). Cf. here Moshe Weinfeld, “God the Creator in Genesis 1 and in the Prophecy of Second Isaiah,” \textit{Tarbiz} 37.2 (1968): 105-32 [Hebrew]. One could, however, imagine a user of Genesis rereading (or rewriting) its creation story \textit{in light of} Deutero-Isaiah, describing the process of distinction \textit{by which} God creates light and darkness, the process of self-expression \textit{by which} a God without likeness expresses God’s self through all humans, and the process of sacred time \textit{by which} God’s ceaseless activity climaxes in sanctifying rest.

\textsuperscript{76} In general, I join those scholars who doubt that even 6\textsuperscript{th}-century prophetic references to the ancestors seem to be referencing the Pentateuch in its current shape (see Ska, \textit{Introduction}, pp. 193-5); yet 5\textsuperscript{th}-century Judeans could (re)read such references in terms of texts which they had reshaped (or were reshaping).

\textsuperscript{77} See Lothar Perlitt, “Mose Als Prophet,” \textit{Evangelische Theologie} 31 (1971): 588-608; Chapman, \textit{Law and Prophets}, and literature cited there. It is worth noting that on pp. 153-4, Chapman’s discussion of the intertextual connections between Deut 30 and the prophetic literature follows closely the themes which I have identified as \textit{restoration eschatology}: the restoration of fortunes (Deut 30:3 evokes Jer 29:14; 33:26; Ezek 29:26; Am 9:14; Zeph 3:20), the gathering of exiles back to the land (Deut 30:4 evokes Is 43:5-7; Jer 31:30; 32:37; Ezek 36:24; 37:21; cf. Neh 1:8-9), the coming prosperity and increase (Deut 30:5 evokes Jer 23:3; 30:3), and circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6 evokes Jer 31:31-4; 32:37-41; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:26-28; cf. also Ps 51:10).

\textsuperscript{78} For ancestral intercession see Gen 20:7, 17 (Albertz [\textit{Israel in Exile}, pp. 265, 270-71] thinks that these verses evoke Deutero-Isaiah as well as Jer 29:7). The ancestors also receive prophetic-style revelations (although Jer 23:28 disparages revelation by dreams, a common form of revelation in Genesis); they make predictive blessings; and their stubborn ties to a particular burial plot (including Joseph’s instructions to leave his bones unburied) may remind one of Jeremiah’s sign-act with the deed in 32:6-15.
texts; specific examples of intertextuality testify to a deeper redactional congruity between the two corpuses.  

Finally, to my knowledge the most sophisticated exploration of the way the Pentateuch incorporates the prophetic (rather than vice-versa) is the work of Hans-Christoph Schmitt; his careful argumentation, taking full advantage of the seminal compositional discussions of Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Heinrich Schmid, indicates that the Exodus-story has been shaped around a theme of faith, motivated by miracle-signs, testifying to the imminent but still unrealized fulfillment of ancestral promises. From this observation Schmitt turns to other Pentateuchal evidence of a faith-redaction, including Genesis 15:6. Because the object of this faith is always the divine promise, Schmitt’s observations confirm Clines’s thesis that the theme of the Pentateuch is the (unfulfilled) ancestral promise which the exodus, Sinai, wilderness, and Deuteronomic materials all explicitly develop. What Schmitt has done is to relate this promise-theme to the prophetic faith-theme, with fruitful implications for a historical-critical understanding (as well as a theological integration) of the Torah and the Nebi’im.

In the rest of this chapter I will look more closely at specific connections between prophetic scrolls and Genesis, suggesting that the most prominent and sustained of these connections bear significant eschatological weight. In general, I will find that prophetic voices that refer to the ancestors are reading Israel’s past typologically—and so are the shapers of

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79 Sommer (A Prophet Reads Scripture, p. 169) concludes that Deutero-Isaiah is “not opposed to Torah,” emphasizing Sabbath (56:2, 4, 6), right sacrifice (43:22-8; 57; 66:3-4, 17), and torah-obedience (42:18-25; 48:17-19), despite disagreements with some priestly material about cultic qualifications (Is 56:4-7; 61:5-6).

80 Schmitt, “Redaktion.”

81 David Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978).

82 Klaus Balszer (“Schriftauslegung bei Deuterojesaja?—Jes 43,22-28 als Beisp.”, in Die Väter Israels, ed. Manfried Görg [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989]: 11-16), for example, traces verbal echoes between Is 43:22-8 and Gen 30-32 (see also Sommer, A Prophet Reads Scripture, pp. 140-41). Such correspondences, however interesting, are neither as prominent nor as pervasive as the eschatological correspondences which I trace in this section.
Genesis itself. Moreover, these stories’ typological significance orients both toward the (etiological) present and toward the (eschatological) future: “The mythic prototype . . . provides a dual service: it enables the historical imagination to assess the significance of certain past or present events; and, correlative, it projects a configuration upon future events by which they are anticipated and identified.” In fact, connections between Genesis and the prophetic corpus cluster around two overarching, typological patterns of association: judgment/uncreation and promise/creation. Multiple prophecies of judgment allude to primordial imagery (flood, sulfurous fire, and more) in order to evoke cosmic uncreation. Multiple prophecies of hope evoke primordial imagery (Edenic garden, ancestral blessing, and more) in order to ground the expectations of Israel in the stable order of creation itself. A faith that learns from Israel’s foundational stories is also a hope that points to Israel’s expectations for the future.

4.3.2 Judgment and Uncreation between Genesis and the Prophetic Corpus

4.3.2.1 Flood

Daniel Streett provides a helpful overview of the typological usage of flood motifs in prophetic passages. The clearest such allusion, of course, is Isaiah 54:8-11, which emphasizes not the judgment but the post-flood promise. In some senses this passage serves as a hermeneutical key to the eschatological significance of Genesis’ flood story, which tells a story of

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83 So Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 350-5. Fishbane uses the example of ancient Near Eastern cosmology, whose details correspond to later historical events; he cites also Is 11:15-16 and 51:9-11, which suggest that the chaos-battle corresponds both to the exodus from Egypt and to anticipated postexilic restoration.

84 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 356. In this process myth and history become intertwined, and “historical redemption becomes a species of world restoration” (p. 357); descriptions of the mythic past “provide the linguistic and ideological prism for projective forecasts” (p. 361).

horrific earth-threatening destruction but concentrates its rhetorical *application* to the audience precisely in the *post-flood* description of a renewed divine blessing/covenant with all creation (see my section 2.3.4). A similar point is made, without mentioning Noah or flood, in Jeremiah 31:35-7 (see also 33:20-26); Yhwh’s favor for Israel (or, at least, its existence as a people) is as sure as God’s structuring of the natural world—the *ordering* of sun, moon, and stars for giving *light* evokes both Genesis 1 and Genesis 8:22. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that Jeremiah’s hymnic oracle identifies Yhwh *both* in terms of Yhwh’s creation (foundations of the earth, the heavens and their lights) *and* in terms of Yhwh’s ability to stir up the sea with its roaring waves (*זֶרֶב יְהוָה, Jer 31:35*).

Other likely allusions to the flood demonstrate the same mix of destruction and hope. So for example Isaiah 24:5-6 speaks of an “everlasting covenant” with language that may evoke Genesis 9:16, but here the everlasting covenant is broken; Isaiah 24:18 uses the phrase “windows of heaven” (see Gen 7:11 and 8:2) in describing the consequent punishment, even if this punishment seems in context to involve earthquake/fire rather than flood.86 Outside Isaiah, Zephaniah’s language of mythic destruction of human and animal life (1:2-3) may well have connections with the Genesis flood as well as with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.87


87 Zeph 1:2-3 uses the verb פָּלַשׁ (“make an end”) which seems related to the verb פָּשַׁל (“sweep away”) used in Gen 18:23-4; 19:15, 17.
Ezekiel 26:19 and 31:15 use flood imagery in mythic parables about the destruction of Tyre and Egypt (see below for a further discussion of the Edenic imagery which is far more pronounced in these chapters). Habakkuk 3:9-10 seems to describe a flood-like destruction by water, and Jeremiah’s description of uncreation (4:23-5, discussed below) shows a similar pattern in which chaos (though not explicitly in the form of floodwater) engulfs the life-giving land.

Such scattered correspondences between primeval uncreation and future destruction may attest the beginning of a way of reading the flood that has, by the time of 1 Enoch, become “a thoroughgoing typology of primeval time and end time.” Streett claims that within Genesis itself the flood is a “typological” event, because its mythic reversal of creation (the “end of all flesh” and even of the “earth” in 6:13) represents the ongoing threat of chaos, not just a single primordial event. Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues, even more specifically, that Genesis narrates the flood as “grand cosmic paradigm of the Exile”—specifically by predating the flood on the act of polluting (root נֵסַע, 6:11-12) and the pervasiveness of violence (רוּת, Gen 6:11, 13), two major motivations (in the prophetic corpus) for Jerusalem’s destruction. God’s response to widespread pollution and violence is an end (תל, Gen 6:13; see Ezek 7:2-7) but also a “new

88 The “naked” bow (נֵסַע) of 3:9 resonates oddly with the Noahic bow of Gen 9:13-16 and the Noahic nakedness of Gen 9:20-27; see Hab 2:15-17, where a woe oracle against looking on a drunken person’s nakedness (2:15) leads to a condemnation of violence (רוּת; cf. Gen 6:11, 13) which rebounds to “cover” the perpetrator (תל; cf. Gen 7:19-20).

89 Albertz, History 2, p. 579.


order,” introducing a “radical change in the mechanism of sin.” Frymer-Kensky thinks the prophetic post-exile “new order” internalizes law and elevates individual accountability (she cites Jer 31:31-4; Ezek 36:26), while the post-flood new order introduces law (the prohibition against eating [animal] blood and shedding [human] blood in Gen 9:4-6). In her reading, the post-flood “new order” is really Israel’s old order, and Genesis-as-etiology-for-law must logically precede the broken-law-and-exile story presumed by the prophetic literature. But one may ask whether she has over-read the (rather general) regulations of Gen 9:4-6 and under-read the rest of Gen 8:15-9:17. As Moberly has shown, Genesis’ post-flood assumption is that human behavior will remain unchanged (compare Gen 8:21 with 6:5); but after the flood Yhwh nevertheless makes a new divine commitment, refusing to respond to human behavior (including Israel’s lawbreaking?) with absolute destruction. In fact, the “new order” in 8:21 not only renounces a future worldwide flood (and I will not again destroy all life as I have done) but also renounces any further curse on the land (I will not again curse [root לִּשָׁנְו the ground [ פוֹנָה] with respect to humanity). While these lines surely point back to Genesis 3:17, this word for curse is not in Genesis 3. The root may, in fact, evoke the Deuteronomistic account of exile as a covenant curse for disobedience (cf. Deut 11:26-9; 28:15, 45; 29:26[27];

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30:1, 19; Josh 8:34; 2 Kgs 22:19; Jer 24:19; 25:18; 26:6; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22; Zech 8:13). So for example Deuteronomy 29:26-7[27-28] promises that idolatry will activate a curse (root סָדַר) uprooting Israelites from their land (סִדָּר). Genesis 8:21 relativizes, or perhaps completely contradicts, such a perspective on the consequences of human sin.

I suggest, then, that Genesis 8:15-9:17 is less an etiology of the way things were pre-exile (i.e., the origins of the law that Israel would eventually break) than it is a word of comfort for those who hope for a new divine favor. Its audience, no less than the audience of Isaiah 54:8-11, seeks a more certain blessing/creation, predicated on the divine favor rather than on Israel’s own covenant-keeping. As I argued above (sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4), the Genesis flood story is primarily an etiology neither of destruction nor of law, but of divine favor and covenant. And according to the rewriter who inserted the evil-thought clause into Genesis 8:21, this new divine favor is not dependent on a change in human hearts. Thus Genesis 8:21, while differing from prophetic passages about a changed human heart (Jer 31:33; 32:39-40; Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; cf. Joel 2:12-13), recognizes the same problem: ongoing sinful attitudes may warrant a new exile unless something fundamental changes in the relationship between Yhwh and Yhwh’s people.

Ironically, then, the flood serves as an eschatological sign not of the divine threat to undo creation but of the divine commitment not to do so. For those who have been “tossed by storms and not comforted” (Is 54:11), Noah is the reminder of the comfort God offers to the inhabitants of a cursed land (Gen 5:29). Those Israelites who believe that their exile continues will read with interest the touching story of Noah’s family upon the ark (Gen 8:1-16). By God’s grace (Gen 6:8) they have survived, afloat on a sea of uncreation (a scattered people and an occupied land), searching for a sign that God’s spirit/wind is moving (Gen 8:1; cf. 8:6-12). They await a word from God to disembark (8:16), beginning again God’s intentions for creation’s fruitfulness (8:17; 9:1, 7; cf. 1:22, 28). This new order will be characterized, not by an endless series of future
punishments, but by a lasting state in which the floodwaters and all they represent will never curse or destroy again. Such a hope is, in Genesis no less than in Isaiah 54:8-11, properly eschatological.

4.3.2.2 Sodom and Gomorrah

Nine prophetic passages (Am 4:11; Zeph 2:9; Is 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-56; cf. also Lam 4:6) name Sodom and (except Ezek 16:46-56) also Gomorrah. Three more prophetic passages seem to evoke the Sodom and Gomorrah story by using the word “sulfur” (טירף—see Gen 19:24; Is 30:33; 34:9; Ezek 38:22; cf. also Deut 29:22; Job 18:15; Ps 11:6). All of these passages use the ancient story of human guilt/divine destruction to threaten a new destruction, whether of Israel (Am 4:11), of Judah (Is 1:9; Is 3:9; Jer 23:14 [see vs. 15-20]; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46-56), of Moab (Zeph 2:9), of Edom (Is 34:10; Jer 49:18), of Babylon (Is 13:19; Jer 50:40), or of Gog (Ezek 38:22; see also the list of creatures threatened by Gog, in Ezek 38:20, echoing Gen 1).

Many of these passages are not really threats of destruction so much as they are promises of salvation—destruction for Judah’s enemies attending the salvation/restoration of Judah (see, e.g., Jer 50:33-34 [and 51:10]; Is 14:1-4 [and following]; Zep 2:9b-10). Such passages also forecast Yhwh’s mythic victory over all gods, coasts, and islands (see Zep 2:11); or they describe a universal darkness and judgment (Is 13:9-11), a trembling of the earth (Jer 49:21; 50:46), when Edom or Babylon are overthrown. Isaiah 30:33, in typical fashion, comes at the end of a long passage predicting God’s theophanic visitation to restore Israel (30:23-6, predicting Edenic fruitfulness and a sevenfold-bright sun) and to punish her enemies with cosmic judgment (30:30, storming anger, devouring flaming fire, storm, rain, and hailstone). Isaiah 34:9 describes perpetual sulfur and fire (34:9-10) on Edom, which as Israel’s archenemy is only destroyed after a
general judgment on the nations and the heavens (34:1-5). Finally, in Ezekiel 38:22 fire and sulfur fall upon the echatological enemy Gog, bringing joy to those whom Gog had threatened.

Elsewhere Sodom and Gomorrah serve as warnings about Judah’s own guilt and impending destruction; but even here a future restoration is often in view (so Is 1:9b; 3:10; Lam 4:22a; Ezek 16:53-5). Admittedly Amos 4:11, ostensibly addressing the northern kingdom, only holds out the possibility of salvation (contingent on a return to Yhwh); and Jeremiah 23:14 occurs in a context emphasizing unmitigated judgment ending with eternal disgrace and shame (23:40). But the latter passage also includes an intriguing reference to the latter days (משיחא; נְתוֹנָה) when Yhwh’s anger will have turned back (23:20). Finally, assuming that Hosea 11:8 alludes to the same destruction, this verse interrupts an oracle of judgment on guilty Israel to deny that its destruction will be final as was the destruction of the cities of the plains.96

Together, such references suggest that Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed in fire and sulfur, form a stock image of rampant evil ripe for direct divine judgment. Since prophetic writings so often use cosmic imagery when referencing Sodom and Gomorrah, I suggest that the audience probably recognizes these two cities as legendary exemplars of more-than-usual destruction (what we might call destruction of “mythic proportions”). Unsurprisingly, such imagery springs to mind when the writers wish to evoke the eschatological end of all evil, whether represented by a specific enemy (Babylon, Edom) or of enemy nations in general. More surprisingly, the prophetic literature does not shrink from using the same mythic image to describe Judah’s own guilt and deserved destruction. Yet in doing so, they make it clear that Judah’s story goes on after the divine judgment (exile?). In fact, some passages (especially Ezek

96 See discussion in Weston Fields, Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 165; Admah and Zeboiim are neighboring cities and part of the same destruction (see Gen 10:19; 14:2, 8; and, especially, Deut 29:23).
16:53-5, but also, perhaps, Jer 23:14-40) suggest that Judah’s guilt and destruction are so cosmic that only a true eschatological reversal could bring the people to life again—as though, against the logic of the myth, Sodom itself were to be restored.

What does all this mean for a reading of Genesis itself, where the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah forms a significant digression from the mainline story of Abraham and his direct descendants?\(^7\) Ancient users might well read this story alongside primordial threats of uncreation, especially the flood. As in Genesis 6-9, God examines creation (compare 18:20-21 with 6:5-6, 11-12) and brings a cosmic judgment upon it.\(^8\) Abraham, like Noah, receives advance warning of the catastrophe (compare Gen 18:17, 20-21; 19:12-13 with 6:13-14), and both heroes’ favor with God earns salvation for their family (compare 19:29 with 6:8, 18). Even more, each is in some way a channel of salvation beyond his own family, preserving all life upon the earth (Gen 6:19-20) or interceding on behalf of the nations who fall under Yhwh’s judgment (Gen 18:23-32). Perhaps the most significant similarity is the vivid image of these characters after the destruction—Noah looking down at a world drying after the deluge (8:13), and Abraham looking down at a land smoking after the raining fire (Gen 19:28). This is, I suggest, an imagery that presses itself upon the Persian-era readers as a larger story than how the world, or Israel, came to be—it rings with the assurance that after the eschatological judgment Israel will find a place to stand, by God’s grace, to continue life and blessing upon the earth.

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\(^{7}\) Fields (Sodom and Gomorrah, pp. 143-54) suggests that the point of the Sodom-Gomorrah material is an eponymous critique of Ammon and Moab, Israel’s neighbors, paralleling the eponymous stories of the emergence of Ishmaelites and Edomites in Gen 25:12-18 and ch. 36. But the births of Ammon and Moab occupy only a brief episode at the end of the Sodom/Gomorrah story; they are not present for any of the major actions, and even their father Lot is not implicated in the guilt/destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Perhaps the motivation for including this material within the Abraham cycle lies elsewhere—it seeks to associate Abraham with the justice and mercy that underlie eschatological judgment.

\(^{8}\) Interesting here is R. Christopher Heard’s reading of Gen 19:31 (Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah [Atlanta: SBL, 2001], pp. 60-65), in which Lot’s daughters regard themselves as the sole survivors of a worldwide conflagration.
4.3.2.3 Famine, Barrenness, and Snakes

If, as I have suggested, Genesis is concerned with threats of uncreation, sharing imagery with the prophetic literature’s eschatology, the two clearest examples are the worldwide flood and the fire from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. But there are also other, less striking threats to creation’s fruitfulness which also may benefit from a cross-reading between Genesis and the prophetic corpus. Here I will consider a few examples, looking for shared eschatological motifs.

Famine (בָּרִא), seems to be a motif tying together the ancestral stories in Genesis, since the famine of Abraham’s time (12:10) is explicitly referenced when another famine occurs in Isaac’s day (26:1)\(^99\); the word also occurs 21 times in the Joseph story. In prophetic passages, it is directly connected with the exile (Is 5:13; 51:19; Jer 11:22; 14:12-18; 15:2; 16:4; 18:21; 21:7-9; 24:10; 27:8-18; 32:24, 36; 34:17; 38:2; 42:16-22; 44:12-27; 52:6; Ezek 5:12-17; 6:11-12; 7:15; 12:16; 14:13; 21) as well as with mythic darkness (Is 8:21-23[9:1]) and a burning land (Is 9:18-19[19-20]). Finally, famine constitutes a major threat when Yhwh brings his reversal against the nations (e.g., Is 14:30; 29:8; 65:13). This last verse also stipulates that in the eschatological famine, my servants will eat (see also Is 49:10; Ezek 34:29; 36:29-30). Famine, then, is the antithesis of the fruitful land which Israelite traditions associate both with creation and with eschatological re-creation.

Barrenness too is the antithesis of the fruitful procreation associated both with creation and with the eschatological re-creation. Willey suggests that the prophecy of the numerous

*children of the barren woman* (Is 54:1), especially in light of an earlier mention of *Sarah who

bore you (Is 51:2), evokes the traditions of barren ancestors such as Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel. Of course, the closer parallel is the line in Hannah’s song (1 Sam 2:5), which like Isaiah 54:1 pictures a reversal: not only does the barren woman bear children, she also surpasses the woman who would expect to be more fruitful. But Isaiah 54:1 and Hannah’s song itself may also remind readers of the procreative competitiveness of barren Sarah toward Hagar, or barren Rachel toward Leah. Such connections evoke the utopian covenant blessing (Exod 23:26/ Deut 7:14) promising that obedient Israel will have no barren women in its land. Even more, such connections evoke Israel’s own experience as barren, bereaved, or depopulated (e.g., Is 25:6; 49:21; Jer 10:20; 15:7; 31:15; 42:2) —and its hope for a repopulation along the lines of the patriarchal narratives (as referenced in Is 51:2), a repopulation that will also be a reversal vis-à-vis the other nations.

One final anti-creation image worth mentioning is the threat of wild animals to human life and civilization, an image used both for Israel’s exile (e.g., Jer 12:9; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Ezek 5:17; 14:15, 21; 33:27; 34:5, 8; Hos 2:12; Am 5:19) and for eschatological disaster (e.g., Ezek 39:4, 17). Notably, Israel’s eschatological utopia is secure from dangerous animals (Hos 2:18; Ezek 34:25; Is 11:6-7; 35:9), of which the snake is a particularly prominent example (see, e.g., Am 5:19; Is 11:8; Is 65:25). Here one may well ask whether the serpent of Genesis 2-3 (see also 49:17) has mythic, rather than merely folktale-like, proportions. Job Jindo (citing Gunkel) finds in Isaiah 11:6-7 an Urzeit/ Endzeit correlation in which “the whole earth will become a

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101 The snake is a mythic symbol of evil in Isaiah 14:29 (obscure but winged!), 27:1 (the Leviathan), and Amos 9:3 (the sea-serpent); it is a more natural threat (though still a divine punishment) in Jeremiah 8:17 and 46:22. Amos 5:19 has most often been taken as a mere snakebite, though I suggest here (as in 9:3) the serpent may be a mythic threat, especially if the house represents the sanctuary (see Am 7:10, 13) —the cultic source of security has become, in Amos’ biting reversal, the dwelling-place of the destroying serpent.
cosmic mountain,” with Edenic attributes of the restored Jerusalem ultimately encompassing “all living beings.” 102 Surely Isaiah 65:25 (an eschatological peace in which the serpent’s food is dust) and Micah 7:17 (an eschatological reversal in which nations will lick dust like a snake) can bring to mind Genesis 3:14, with its curse/ promise that the serpent will eat dust. 103 Conversely, Genesis 3:14 may well make Genesis’ Persian-era (re)readers and (re)writers think of prophetic visions foretelling an eschatological reversal.

4.3.2.4 Summary of Uncreation Images

In conclusion, Genesis’ uncreation images are, perhaps surprisingly, most often evoked in order to reassure audiences that Yhwh has a creative purpose for the natural world and for Israel. In the prophetic corpus, the “barrenness of matriarchal wombs is recalled to argue that the empty land will be repopulated. The oath to Noah after the flood is recollected to assert the permanence of YHWH’s unconditional promise of peace to Jerusalem.” 104 Isaiah 54:9-10 explicitly references Noah (just as 41:8 and 51:2 look back to Abraham and 51:3 looks back to Eden) in a typical restoration-eschatology reversal, promising that from now on increase of population and honor (54:1-3) will accomplish a restored, lasting relationship with God (54:4-8)—an inviolable change in God’s orientation, renouncing any further divine rejection of creation. 105 Sodom and Gomorrah either serve as the model for the destruction of Israel’s enemies, or else—in a surprising


103 Less clearly connected is Is 49:23, another eschatological reversal in which kings will lick the dust of your feet (no snake is mentioned).

104 Willey, Remember, p. 269; the subtitle of her chapter is, aptly, “Using Memory to Construct a Future.”

reversal—demonstrate that no destruction is so complete that Yhwh cannot bring restoration.

Famine, barrenness, and wild animals threaten the life-sustaining fruitfulness of creation, but both Genesis and the prophetic corpus envision a divine mercy which will protect God’s people from such threats—or do away with them entirely. Genesis, no less than the prophetic corpus, attributes these anti-creation threats to divine judgment; but Genesis, no less than the prophetic corpus, envisions a limited judgment located in the context of an unlimited promise.

4.3.3 Promise as Creation between Genesis and the Prophetic Corpus

4.3.3.1 Creation and Its Blessings

In the previous section, I sought to show that Genesis’ imagery of uncreation seems (both in Genesis and in the prophetic corpus) to point toward the hope of a new creation. The emphasis, in both sorts of literature, lies on Yhwh’s promise as creation—of the world, and of the nation Israel. Here I will discuss more positive creation imagery, with prophetic connections to Genesis 1-3. In my next section I will turn to the (very closely related) ancestral promises.

In Genesis, the creation narratives begin with the very language of chaos (Gen 1:2) which, in Jeremiah (4:23), characterizes the coming exile—חזרה ניאור, waste and void. Genesis 1-2 then continues with a description of much that the prophetic scrolls promise to the post-exilic restoration: a blessing of fruitfulness and multiplication, first realized in a garden. To begin with, such imagery evokes the prophetic picture of what the land was before its ruin. Jeremiah 4:26 notes that exile-uncreation turns the fruitful land (תֵּאָרָה) into a waste.106 Joel 2:3 likewise claims

106 See also Jeremiah 2:7, where יִשְׂרָאֵל refers to a former ideal state of Israel’s land before Israel’s sin defiled it. Isaiah also mentions dried up gardens (יַעֲדוּ) or devastated fruitful land (תְּאָרָה) to threaten (exilic) destruction (Is 1:30; 10:18; 16:10).
that the day of Yhwh will consume a land that was like Eden. This motif of “Eden lost” is particularly prominent in two passages where Ezekiel paints the mythic glory of the rulers of Tyre (Ezek 28; see vv. 13-14) and of Egypt/Assyria (Ezek 31; see vv. 3-9)—only to emphasize their mythic defilement and destruction (28:15-19; 31:10-18). It may also influence Genesis’ comment that before Yhwh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah they were like the garden of Yhwh (Gen 13:10). If the expulsion from Eden is a stock motif, the reader of Genesis 3 will be unsurprised to find humanity cast out from this garden, living in a cursed land (3:17, 4:11-12; 5:29) with the sword blocking their path back (קֶשֶׁף, Gen 3:24; prophetic literature uses this word to describe Judah’s exile more than a hundred times).

Yet Eden is not just a past that is lost forever; it also lies in Israel’s future.⁹⁷ Two eschatological passages predict that the land that was waste has become like the garden of Eden (Ezek 36:35), that Yhwh will make Zion’s wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of Yhwh (Is 51:3). Such formulations (cf. also Jer 4:26) reverse the exile; it is significant that in both passages, the promise follows a reminder that this land had been given to Israel’s ancestors (Ezek 36:28), to Abraham your father and Sarah who bore you (Is 51:2). I will discuss ancestral references at greater length in my next section, but one wonders if the promises they received were viewed in conjunction with the story of Eden. If so, the prophetic writings are at least indirectly supporting the notion that Genesis’ ancestral promises (Gen 12:1-3) point the reader back to a primordial blessing lost in the intervening alienation (e.g., Gen 3-4, 6-7, and 11:1-9). The creator God is once more restoring the blessing, fruitfulness, and multiplication intended for the world, precisely by blessing Israel.

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At the very least, the prophetic corpus attests that the *garden* (ﯽִֽרְ־ָ֖שׁ or הַגָּרְדָּן) is not just something lost in the past but an image of future salvation (Am 9:14; Is 29:17; 32:15-16; 58:11; 61:11; Jer 31:12; Mic 7:14). Especially in Ezekiel, an Edenic temple (41:18-20) will once more be the source of a life-giving stream, watering trees from which fruit can be eaten (47:1-12; cf. also Zech 14:8). Such prophetic passages, I suggest, guide readers of Genesis to understand its rather terse description of Eden (2:8-14), not in terms of some hypothesized state of nonsexuality or nondistinction, but rather as the ideal primordial *fruitfulness* of a garden. If the “Paradise-myth . . . focuses upon the past and anticipates the future,” this myth is largely interested in a return to creation’s fecundity, threatened in the primordial curse upon the land. Below (section 6.3) I will show that Genesis 3:16-19, in its judgment/curse, describes most directly humanity’s ongoing struggle with non-fruitfulness of land and womb. On the other hand, hints of a reversal (in Gen 5:29; in 8:21; and above all in the ancestral promises of fruitfulness/land/procreation) may well evoke restoration-eschatology’s promise of a future Edenic fruitfulness (see, e.g., Ezek 34:26-31; Jer 31:12; and other passages cited above).

Meanwhile, more general re-creation themes are so prevalent in prophetic eschatology, and so ubiquitous in Genesis itself, that I can here only outline some of the most important

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108 Sweeney (“Priesthood,”) discusses how priestly eschatology views cultic worship as symbolic of a cosmic vision of humanity before God which will be perfected through a definitive action of God. If Sweeney is right, the restored temple does not merely replace the cosmic Eden; rather, creation imagery (in Gen 1-3) intentionally evokes the temple while temple imagery (in Ezek 40-48 and elsewhere) intentionally evokes creation.

109 In my section 5.3.1.1 I critique Susan Niditch’s reading (*From Chaos to Cosmos* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1985]) of Genesis 2-3 as a *communitas* that lacks all distinction; even the peace between animals in (e.g.) Is 11:1-9 or Hos 2:18 is not particularly emphasized in Gen 2, although the fact that such animals (lion, wolf, wild dog) are not predatory in the primordial paradise can be found in Sumerian myth (see James Pritchard, *ANET*, p. 38).

connections of creation-blessing language between Genesis and the prophetic corpus. So, for example, the later chapters of Isaiah use the root *בָּרָא* (create) to describe a new work of God in Israel’s restoration; for example, after 45:7 names Yhwh as the one forming light and darkness (compare Gen 1:2-5), verse 8 speaks of God creating as the rain causes the earth to sprout forth (compare Gen 2:5), verses 9-12 insist that Yhwh alone is maker of Israel and the world, and verses 18-19 insist that the Yhwh who created the heavens and formed the earth spoke to the seed of Jacob. Similar, if less densely packed, echoes of Genesis occur in Isaiah 41:20; 42:5-9; 43:1-15; 48:6-7; and 54:11-17 (this last passage follows upon a rehearsal of the post-flood promise to Noah of a new creation that will not be subject any longer to uncreation/flood).

Isaiah’s vision of re-creation climaxes in 65:17-25, promising a new heavens and new earth at the restoration-eschatology re-creation of Jerusalem (65:17-18; see also 66:22). This passage looks forward to a permanent removal of distress (65:19) with uniformly long lifetimes (65:20), like the days of the tree (יָמֵי שְׂמֹאול, 65:22; compare Jer 17:7-8 and Ezek 31:3-9).

This reminds readers not only of the tree of life postponing mortality (Gen 2-3), but of the long lifetimes attributed to the first humans (see, e.g., Gen 5; 11:10-32). Isaiah 65:23 rules out vain labor and disastrous childbirth (אִשָּׁה, לֹא יִלָּא בִּרְאוֹת, 65:23; despite different vocabulary, this juxtaposition surely draws to mind Genesis 3:16-19 and its twofold curse of toilsome husbandry and toilsome childbirth (see my section 6.3). Finally, Isaiah 65:24 proclaims an (Edenic?)

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111 Gowan (Eschatology) lists eschatological passages which predict the transformation of nature (pp. 98-107), play upon chaos-versus-creation dichotomy in which the land becomes a wilderness and the wilderness a fruitful land (pp. 109-113), and explicitly evoke a new creation (pp. 113-18).

112 *בָּרָא* occurs 10 times in Gen 1-6 and 20 times in Is 40-65. See also Am 4:13 (one of the doxologies/hymnic fragments); Mal 2:10 (which invokes both a common creator and a common ancestral covenant in a rhetorical appeal for solidarity among the Persian-era Judean community); and the Eden-parable of Ezek 28:13-15. Of course, the prophetic literature also uses other language for creation, which may also evoke Genesis; see, e.g., Jer 27:5 and (esp) 32:17, using Yhwh’s creative power as evidence that Yhwh is able to dispose nations and (especially) that a return from exile is not too hard for Yhwh (compare Jer 32:27 to 32:37).
vegetarianism for the animals (see Gen 1:30) before mentioning the dust-eating serpent 
(discussed above).

Of course, none of this imagery need be taken literally; Isaiah 66:7-9 seems to interpret 
65:23 in terms of a miraculously easy, fruitful “childbirth” which will suddenly repopulate 
Jerusalem. The point is not that one “world” will be destroyed and a new “world” be created from 
scratch, but that Israel will be fully, finally restored. It seems that Judeans used creation language 
to express divine intervention in history, either to restore/ re-create or to destroy/ uncreate (see, 
e.g., Amos’ doxologies, especially 4:13 but also 5:8 and 9:5-6). Yhwh’s status as creator serves as 
a guarantee that Yhwh will preserve Israel (Jer 31:35-7), working through history to punish but 
also to preserve the covenant (Jer 32:17 [cf. all of 32:17-44]; 33:20-26). Yhwh has power over all 
creation, yet this power is particularly aligned with Yhwh’s people Israel (see Jer 10:12-13, 16, 
which names Yhwh Portion of Jacob as well as Maker of All; Israel is the tribe of his 
inheritance). By analogy, it seems likely that the creation-language in Genesis also serves 
rhetorically to reassure that Yhwh will act to safeguard the divine creative purposes. The creator 
who formed humanity out of the dust of the ground, vivifying it with God’s breath (Gen 2:7), can 
and will also send God’s breath to revivify Israel from the grave of exile (Ezek 37:1-14) and raise 
it from the dust (Is 52:2).

I conclude this section by calling attention to the pervasive agricultural imagery which 
dominates Genesis’ ancestral promises and creation story—agricultural imagery which also 
dominates prophetic visions of the future restoration. This includes everything from seeds to fruit 
to an eschatological sprouting.\(^\text{113}\) So Isaiah 27:6 promises that Jacob will take root, Israel will 
blossom and sprout, and fill the whole world with fruit; Hosea 14:4-7 predicts that when Yhwh’s

\(^{113}\) See above, note 57.
anger turns away, Israel will blossom like the lily, strike root like Lebanon, flourish like a garden [or grow grain?], and blossom like the vine. I suggest that this same agricultural image is behind the reference to a holy or Godly seed in Isaiah 6:13 and Malachi 2:15. (Re)readings of Genesis’ seed and fruit language were also surely influenced by the prophetic eschatological hope that the diminished remnant will sprout forth and bear fruit once again. These prophetic passages help bind together the two major themes of Genesis, Yhwh’s creation of the world and Yhwh’s blessing on the ancestors and their particular descendants. So, for example, Isaiah 8:23-9:2 relates Yhwh multiplying the nation with the imagery of light replacing darkness (see Gen 1); Isaiah 44:2-4 describes Yhwh’s blessing on Jacob’s seed as water poured out to make plants grow. Such passages may remind us that although the ancestors’ seed which is promised fruitfulness means their descendants, the agrarian imagery of literal seeds is never far in the background (compare, e.g., Gen 26:12 with 26:24). The application of such agrarian images to the restoration and re-growth of Israel is a rhetorical strategy shared between Genesis and the prophetic corpus.

4.3.3.2 Ancestral Promises as Blessing

In Genesis, the creation blessing of fruitfulness and multiplication weaves its way into the ancestral promises directed to the descendants of Abraham (compare 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1,7 with 16:10; 17:2, 6, 20; 22:17; 26:4, 22, 24; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; 49:22). The rest of the Pentateuch echoes these promises (e.g., Exod 1:7, 10, 12, 20 [cf. also Ps 105:25]; 23:30; Lev 26:9; Deut 1:10), sometimes explicitly naming the ancestors whose stories are told in Genesis (see, e.g., Exod 32:13). Deuteronomy frequently makes a form of this promise conditional on obedience (6:3; 7:12-13; 8:1 [see also 13]; 11:21; 13:17; 30:16); the exile is an alternative fate in which the Israelites will not be fruitful and multiply because of their disobedience (e.g., 28:63). But
Deuteronomy restates the same hope for repentant Israel returning from exile (e.g., 30:5; see the same reversal in Ps 107:38). This is the narrative of blessing, lost blessing, and hope for a future blessing that is told in the prayer of Nehemiah 9 (see, e.g., verses 25, 37). For a user of Genesis, it is important to note that all of this language of multiplication and fruitfulness upon the land evokes both a specific promise to Israel (in its eponymous ancestors) upon its land and a creation blessing that expresses the creator’s will for all life upon the earth.

The prophetic corpus takes up this dual blessing of creation and Israel with various degrees of explicitness. The language of blessing ( Heb. בָּרָכָה), occurring 6 times in Genesis 1-11 and some 70 times in the ancestral narratives, also appears 20 times in the prophetic scrolls. This blessing contrasts with the cursing which Judea/ Jerusalem becomes in its exile (see, e.g., Jer 26:6), and Israel’s post-exile blessing becomes an example and/or source of blessing for the nations—see here Zechariah 8:13 (the closest parallel to Gen 12:2’s promise that Abraham will be a blessing) and Jeremiah 4:2 (where Israel’s restoration will cause the nations to be blessed/bless themselves). Blessing, in that it is seen and acknowledged by surrounding peoples, also connects to Israel’s fame (see Is 61:9 and 65:23, which also—like the patriarchal promise-language—conceive of Israel as seed).

Other prophetic passages reference a divine grant of the land to Israel’s ancestors, a grant that is sometimes explicitly eternal (Jer 7:7; 25:5; Ezek 37:25). Some such passages, admittedly, refer specifically to the exodus generation rather than the ancestors whose stories are told in Genesis (see, e.g., Jer 11:4-5; 16:14-15; 32:21-22; Ezek 20:5-6). Yet for a reader of the Pentateuch in its current form, the Exodus-era promises merely repeat or extend the promises
which Genesis has already fully explored in its ancestral narratives.\textsuperscript{114} Genesis’ ancestral promises, no less than the promises of the exodus story, seem to be reversed by the exile. So Jeremiah 24:10 tells Israel it will be \textit{destroyed from the land which I gave to them and to their ancestors}; the language evokes Deuteronomy’s message that the ancestral promise is conditional. But, like Deuteronomy, Jeremiah simultaneously predicts a postexilic return to the same land (see Jer 24:4-7 in conjunction with 24:10). This is clearest in 30:3, where a restoration of fortunes (for \textit{Israel and Judah}) brings them \textit{back to the land that I gave their ancestors}; see also verse 20, where \textit{their children will be as before}. Ezekiel is even more consistent in referring to the ancestral land-grant precisely in order to assure the people that they will return (20:42; 36:28). And Ezekiel 47:13-14 redraws the tribal boundaries of the restored land immediately after the Edenic description of the restored temple in 47:1-12.

Occasionally, prophetic restoration eschatology references the ancestral blessings by specifically naming ancestors whose stories are told in Genesis. Jeremiah 33:26 is the only example which mentions Isaac (along with Abraham and Jacob), and it clearly uses the ancient promise to ensure an eschatological restoration (here, of the monarchy) based on an \textit{eternal covenant}.\textsuperscript{115} Meanwhile, references to “Jacob” or “Israel” are too numerous (and, often, too

\textsuperscript{114} Thomas Römer (\textit{Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition} [Freiburg, Schweiz : Universitätsverlag, 1990]) has emphasized that promises to the “ancestors” often denote the exodus generation rather than the stories of Genesis; but by the Persian period, as Albertz argues (\textit{Israel in Exile}, p. 250, esp. note 333), the two sorts of promises were synthesized (see, e.g., Is 41:8-9; 51:9-10). So Ezek 20:42, which may refer to the exodus generation, combines with Ezek 33:24, 28:25, and 37:25, which mention Abraham and Jacob. Genesis’ ancestors are particularly central to the promise of \textit{land}, both in Deut (1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12[13]; 30:20; 34:4) and in the prophetic corpus.

\textsuperscript{115} This language is reminiscent both of the Noahic covenant language in Gen 6:18, 9:9-17 and of the ancestral covenants referenced in Gen 15:18; 17:2-21. The specific promise here is of a Davidic ruler, just as Jer 33:22 speaks of the \textit{seed} of David, and of the Levites, using the metaphor (so prominent in Genesis’ ancestral promises) of stars in the heavens and sand on the seashore. Thus Jer 33:22-6 provides a fitting reminder that at least some of the Abrahamic promises seem intentionally modeled on the Davidic covenant (see here discussion in Ronald Clements, \textit{Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition} [Naperville, Ill: Allenson, 1967]; John Van Seters, \textit{Abraham in History and Tradition} [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975]). But the last clause of Jeremiah
generic) to ensure a connection to the ancestor described in Genesis. But the seven prophetic mentions of Abraham paint a particularly telling picture of Yhwh’s favor, blessing, or promise toward Israel, safeguarded into the future. So for example Micah 7:20 insists that Yhwh will fulfill what Yhwh swore (root ניבש; cf. Gen 22:16; 24:7; 26:3; 50:24) to the ancestors, specifically Abraham and Jacob. This verse sums up the preceding scenario which begins with a desolate land as the fruit of Israel’s evil deeds (7:13), then invokes a new action of God as in days of old (7:14), as in the days of your coming out from the land of Egypt (7:15). This new action will involve eschatological reversal: the nations will be ashamed and astounded (7:16) and even eat dust like the snake (7:17)—an oracle that surely points Genesis’ rereaders back even before the exodus to the garden of Eden. God’s own mercy will also safeguard a renewed relationship which does away with Israel’s guilt (7:18-19).

Isaiah 41:8 specifies that Yhwh chose (root רכב; also in v. 9) Israel, who is Jacob, who is the seed of Abraham. This choosing, equated in verse 9 with taking Israel from the ends of the earth, may evoke Genesis 12:1-9 (where the promise is specifically to Abraham’s seed). Isaiah 51:2 names Abraham as father and Sarah as bearer of the people; here the fact that Yhwh called, blessed, and multiplied Abraham seems to parallel the promised restoration of the people, including the fact that their wilderness will become fruitful like Eden (51:3). This passage also

33:26 moves beyond the monarchy to promise a more general restoration of Israel’s fortunes. Note that Jer 33:14-26 (MT) is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and thus its usage during the Persian-era may be in doubt.

116 Fishbane (Biblical Interpretation, p. 378), however, claims that the connection of Israel with its ancestor Jacob is not mere rhetoric, but “drives deep into the very ‘nature’ of Israel”; he cites Hos 12; Jer 9:30-5. See also the eschatological restoration of land promised to “my servant Jacob” in Ezek 37:25.

117 Sara Japhet (“People and Land in the Restoration Period,” in Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit, ed. Georg Strecker [Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 1983]: 103-25) suggests that Persian-era references to Abraham are especially interested in the claim to the land; see Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, pp. 372-5, and Van Seters, Abraham, more generally.
emphasizes that Abraham began as one (חָיָי) when called, a consoling precedent suggestive of Yhwh’s ability to multiply miraculously a severely depopulated postexilic Israel. Ezekiel 33:24 makes exactly the same point, although this passage denies that the miraculous repopulation will happen specifically for those who remain in Judah.\textsuperscript{118} Even the two references to Abraham (Is 29:22; 63:16) which do not mention any ancestral election or promise may still presume such promises. In Isaiah 29:22 Yhwh is the one who redeemed (יָדָ֑ד) Abraham, and Jacob (probably the ancestor as well as the nation) will cease being shamed precisely when he sees his children, the works of my [Yhwh’s] hand (ֶ֖לֶחֶת יְדֵיִוָּבָ֣א). In the background lie the promises to Abraham and to Jacob of numerous descendants, promises redeemed in their day but still requiring ongoing fulfillment. Similarly, in Isaiah 63:16 the speaker’s confidence that Yhwh stands as Israel’s father (even if the traditional ancestors Abraham and Israel abandon that role) may well rest on an unconditional promise not unlike those found in Genesis.

Overall, the prophetic corpus seems to evoke Abraham precisely in order to address a crisis of confidence about what Yhwh can and will do. An example from the past, simultaneously historical (reminding the audience what Yhwh has already done) and typological (reminding the audience what Yhwh is unconditionally committed to do), serves to expand the audience’s horizon of hope and offer them greater scope for trusting anticipation. The same dynamic is at work, although perhaps more subtly, when no specific ancestor is mentioned but the language of their promises (fruitfulness and multiplication, the latter sometimes compared to the stars in the sky or the sand on the shore) appears in the prophetic scrolls alongside various restoration-

\textsuperscript{118} Note that these people refer to themselves as an (over)confident many, a direct contrast to Abraham. A social context of rivalry between deported and nondeported Judeans is not hard to reconstruct here, although I suggest that the continuing usage of this passage may make a larger point: in restoration eschatology the restoration/multiplication of depopulated Judea will not occur without a return of the scattered diaspora, including (significantly) the descendants of Israel as well as of Judah.
eschatology themes.\footnote{Albertz (Israel in Exile, pp. 249-50) argues that early-Persian prophetic passages (e.g., Jer 29:6; 31:27; Ezek 36:10-11, 37-38; 37:26) here resemble early-Persian ancestral promises (e.g., Gen 13:15-16; 28:14).} So, for example, Jeremiah 3:16 predicts a new multiplication of Israel, then goes on to predict a new relationship with God (e.g., no more need for the sacred ark [3:16]), a new conversion of the nations who come to Jerusalem (3:17), and a new unity of Israel with Judah re-gathered from among the nations (3:18). Unsurprisingly, they will return to a land which God gave to your fathers as an inheritance (3:18). Similarly, Jeremiah 23:3 predicts fruitfulness and multiplication accompanied by a return of scattered Israel to its land (23:3; cf. 23:7-8, comparing this return to the exodus from Egypt), alongside a messianic prediction of a Davidic sprout (23:5-6, also including a special promise of security).

Ezekiel 36:8-11 uses the language of fruitfulness and multiplication to describe the restoration from exile; an ensuing explicit reference to the ancestral land-grant (36:28) accompanies material fleshing out the notion of fruitfulness (36:29b-30a, 34-36; note here also the reference to Eden) and of multiplication (36:37-38). The surrounding material also predicts a new purified heart (36:25-27, 29a) and the removal of reproach in the view of the nations (compare 36:20-21 and 36:30b, 36). In the same vein, Ezekiel 37:26 promises that Israelites will be numerous right after an explicit reference to God’s land-grant to Jacob (37:25a). The context speaks of the reunification of Israel and Judah (37:15-22), a new cleansing/obedience (37:23, 24b), an eternal Davidic rule (37:24a, 25), an eternal sanctuary (37:26-27), and an acknowledgement by the nations (36:28).

More subtly, Jeremiah 30:19-20 speaks of an increase of numbers and children “as in days of old,” as part of the restoration of Israel’s fortunes (see 30:18). And Hosea 1:10 promises Israelites as uncountable as the sand precisely when they are reconstituted as God’s people (1:9-10), re-united in a way that includes Judah and Israel (1:11a), and able to determine their own
rule (1:11b, possibly implying a restored monarchy, whether or not Davidic). Interestingly, innumerable sand can also describe Israel before its exilic winnowing (Is 10:22; 48:19), or even describe the innumerable widows (Jer 15:8) or captives (Hab 1:9) associated with exile. Even here, it is possible that reading the prophetic corpus alongside Genesis’ ancestral promises suggests that exile threatens or reverses a more fundamental expectation of Israel (fruitfulness and multiplication), inviting hope for a future restoration.

4.4 Conclusion: “Everything Lost Will Be Restored”

I have suggested that Persian-era Judeans who heard the stories of ancestral promises would remember the way that their prophetic books associate those promises with God’s guarantee of a post-exile restoration. One may suspect that the very shaping of Genesis 15, modeled on the Davidic promise and looking forward to a return from Egyptian “exile,” is meant to evoke prophetic texts which combined “ancestral and Sinaitic covenants . . . with the Davidic ideal in a new eschatological hope . . . in which everything lost will be restored.”

The prophetic writings make clear that ancestral promises are not, for Persian-era Judeans, merely etiologies for how Israel came to exist in relationship with Yhwh. Rather, they point forward to a new election (Is 14:1; Zech 1:17), a new rebuilding (Jer 33:7), a restoration of fortunes (Am 9:14) as in ancient years (Mal 3:4). Only a wooden literalism would see a contradiction between this hope of renewal based on the idealized past and simultaneous claims that something new and unprecedented is happening (e.g., in Is 48; 42:9; 43:18). After all, the return to Yhwh’s earliest blessings upon Israel’s ancestors and upon creation itself can also

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120 Clements, Abraham and David; cf. discussion in Diana Lipton, Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

121 Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology,” p. 28; he is speaking specifically of Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel.
qualify as a *new thing* unlike any *former* work within the scope of historical memory. In his analysis of postexilic prophetic eschatology, Arnold emphasizes that the expected eschatological restoration will “parallel . . . Israel’s earliest history,” as the postexilic prophets show increased interest in ancestral traditions.¹²²

This increased, typological interest in ancestral traditions is, significantly, found both in the prophetic corpus and in Ezra-Nehemiah. The two are, perhaps, most similar in the way they refer to the exodus¹²³ and to the traditions of a twelve-tribe Israel—both are symbols of Israel’s eschatological hope.¹²⁴ Genesis too shows a typological interest in exodus (Gen 15) and in the 12-tribed Israel as a latter-day reality (Gen 49). Blenkinsopp suggests that the very number of prophetic scrolls (3 major scrolls and a separate scroll with 12 discrete compositions) has been arranged to evoke the “ingathered, reintegrated Israel of the end time to which the prophetic books in their finished form beckon.”¹²⁵ If so, it is hard to see how Genesis’ own stories of the “three” ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and the “twelve” sons of Jacob can be anything other than eschatological symbols of Israel’s future expectations. In my judgment, Genesis—not less than the prophetic corpus (and, perhaps, Ezra-Nehemiah)—is taking an eschatological stand when it refuses to imagine an Israel which is *not* an “exodus” people composed of regathered descendants from all twelve tribes, from both north and south.¹²⁶

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¹²⁶ Genesis’ portrayal of these ancestors as worshiping at shrines near Shechem or Bethel is not, in the Persian period, mere antiquarianism; it suggests a specific interest in an Israelite identity based on the expectation that Judeans will rejoin (or be rejoined by) their northern “brothers.” See here Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 258; he contrasts the perspective of (e.g.) 2 Kgs 17:24-34.
To summarize my findings so far, Genesis’ intertextual connections with the prophetic corpus focus primarily on three major restoration-eschatology themes: reconstitution of Israel, regaining the land, and blessing (multiplication and fruitfulness). The thematic cross-links between Genesis and the prophetic literature point directly toward a sustained Persian-era interest in ancestral and creation traditions precisely as signs of the eschatological restoration of all Israel, upon its land, in a coming state of blessing that specifically fulfills Yhwh’s earliest promises. It is not so much that the Endzeit must resemble the Urzeit, as that the creating and promising God of Israel will not be forever thwarted from bringing to fulfillment the blessings of creation and the closely-related predictions made to Israel’s ancestors.

Moreover, the prophetic intertextual connections with Genesis also help relate Genesis’ usage with the other main themes of restoration eschatology. For example, prophetic passages such as Isaiah 45:18-19 may remind Genesis’ users of the way Genesis interweaves Israel’s fate with the world’s, equating ancestral promises with the blessings of creation more generally and extending a form of these promises to some of Israel’s neighbors (cf. also Zeph 3:9-10, where [Babel’s?] confusion of languages is reversed in a universal pilgrimage to worship Yhwh). Since Edom is such an important symbol of Israel’s eschatological enemies (see, e.g., Is 34; 63; and Am 9:12), Genesis’ account of the struggles and ultimate reconciliation of Jacob and Esau may have eschatological significance. (Isaac’s covenant with Abimelech in Gen 26:28-31, and Jacob’s with Laban in 31:43-54, may also point to eschatological détente with neighboring powers.) Gowan suggests that Genesis, by beginning Israel’s story with the story of all nations and connecting Israel genealogically with other peoples, at least raises questions about “the nations in eschatology.”

nations, displaying the same sort of ambivalence found in the prophetic corpus: sometimes threatening nations are enemies slated for cursing/destruction (Gen 4:11; chs 6-7; or 18-19), and sometimes they are won over to align with Israel—contributing to and sharing in its blessings (Gen 12:3 and parallels; cf. also, e.g., 14:18), or simply witnessing them (Gen 12:2 and parallels; cf. also, e.g., 21:22; 26:28).

In the same way, Genesis’ etiology of Israel as a people is not unconnected to the etiology of Israel’s two great (linked) institutions, monarchy and temple. Jeremiah 33:21-22 reminds Genesis’ users of the close parallels between Genesis’ ancestral covenants and the traditions of Davidic and Levitical covenants. Several other passages, most notably Ezekiel 47:1-13 (cf. also Joel 4[3]:18; Is 33:20-1; and Zech 14:8), seem to combine Zion as divine mountain and Edenic imagery of a life-giving river. Since creation itself may be a symbol of the sanctuary (or vice-versa), Genesis’ creation- and ancestral- promises have a certain resonance with the prophetic expectation of a blessing centered in Zion. Genesis’ promise, however, is firmly aimed at the whole people and (especially) the whole land; even if Genesis hints at Jerusalem in 14:18 (Salem) or 22:2, 14 (Moriah/ the mountain of Yhwh), other sites (especially Bethel) appear just as important. Genesis’ “priestly” passages evoke the temple without particularly privileging any specific cultic leaders, and the book most assuredly does not take the

128 The ancestral narratives certainly focus the creative blessing upon Abraham (as, already in Gen 1-11, that blessing had been focused on Seth rather than Cain, Noah rather than the rest of humanity, and Seth rather Ham)—but not without preserving a strong interest in the ways that Abraham’s blessing relates to Israel’s neighbors and the lands within which they sojourn. But just as the prophetic eschatology cannot decide whether the nations will be converted or destroyed, so Genesis fluctuates between a troubling culling of whole branches of humanity (Cain’s line, as far as we know, has no survivors; Canaan’s line, as far as we can tell, is never blessed; and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are gone for good) and a more cheerful emphasis on the multiplication and fruitfulness of human (including non-Israelite) life. See here Joel Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

129 See here Cross, Canaanite Myth, p. 38.
opportunity to exalt the future priestly establishment through its eponymous ancestor Levi.  
Finally, a few scattered references to kings descended from the ancestors (Gen 17:6, 16; 35:11) and to a rule centered in Judah (49:10) may not have kept some Persian-Judean users from finding in Genesis an ideal picture of Israel’s identity without the need for a king.  

Genesis’ future-orientation also has something to say about the eschatological expectation of a new response to Yhwh. Prophetic passages tend to evoke ancestral stories in order to emphasize Israel’s dependence on its God. As Susan Niditch rightly suggests, Genesis 1-11 as a continuous narrative echoes Judea’s Persian-era preoccupation with exile/scattering and, even more, its Persian-era preoccupation with sin as the underlying cause of this exile/scattering. In this context, the divine promises to Israel’s ancestors parallel the fresh start which Persian-era Judea still expects (or attempts), a start that is contingent first of all upon an unconditional divine favor that has not been lost. Genesis’ story of origins, in other words, does not just portray a relationship to Yhwh in ancient, and now outdated, conditions; on the contrary, telling stories about the ancient past can be a way of proposing a more fundamental and more

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130 Worth mentioning here is Jack Lundbom’s argument (“Abraham and David in the Theology of the Yahwist,” in The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman, ed. Carol Meyers and M. O’Connor [Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1983]: 203-9) that Gen 11:1-9 and 12:1-3 contrast making a name for oneself through temple-building (ziggurat = temple) and a more familial notion that Yhwh makes one’s name great. He compares this dichotomy to 2 Sam 7 where David’s desire to build Yhwh’s temple (house) is subordinated to Yhwh’s promise to build David’s dynasty (house). Lundbom concludes (p. 206) that the Yahwist (i.e., the one who wrote Gen 11:1-9 and 12:1-3) takes an “anti-temple” position not unlike that of Jeremiah (chs. 7; 26) or of Second Isaiah (he cites Hanson, Dawn of Apocalyptic, pp. 161-86).

131 Petersen (“Eschatology—Old Testament”) suggests that the “patriarchal promise traditions” contribute a non-Zion cast to Judean’s “eschatological scenario,” since “Yahweh’s rule will center not on a heavenly throne, nor just in the city of divine residence, but throughout the land which had been promised to Israel’s forbears.

132 Niditch (Chaos to Cosmos) references Zech 1-8 as a typical expression of these “postexilic” concerns. The crushing reality of a scattered, impoverished, powerless Persian-era Judean people—haunted by traumatic memories of destruction and burning, captivity and dislocation—requires explanation. Israel’s literature (especially the Deuteronomistic history generally and other materials which scholars have identified as Deuteronomistic) blames the exile experience on a breakdown in Israel’s relationship with Yhwh. In Genesis 1-11 this exile experience has been universalized and generalized; all humanity is scattered (Gen 11:1-9) and cast out (Gen 3:22-4), threatened by chaos-flood (Gen 6-7) or (more subtly) by the twin curse upon agriculture and procreation (Gen 3:16-19). Here, too, the root problem seems to be a breakdown in humankind’s relationship with the creator God (Gen 3:11; 4:7; 6:5-6; 11:1-8).
permanent praxis than Mosaic Yahwism, which is now construed as “later.”

Genesis’ narratives do in fact model an alternative response to Yhwh, one that Persian-era Judeans may have found particularly appropriate for their eschatological restoration. This response focuses less on legal obedience or national repentance than on Israel’s sheer trust in the divine promises. This vision resonates deeply with the prophetic message of trust in the word of Yhwh.

Finally, one may ask whether Genesis shares with restoration eschatology an interest in a decisive or final turn. For Crüsemann, the answer is clearly no; it is for this reason that he can definitively characterize the Pentateuch as anti-prophetic. When he declares that eschatology is “absent from the Pentateuch,” he clarifies that what the Pentateuch lacks is any expectation of an “earth-shaking action of God” that removes “Israel’s domination by foreign powers.”

Setting aside for the moment Crüsemann’s dubious notion that liberative hope is incompatible with “the contemporary practice of Torah” (see my section 3.3.4), the question remains whether the Pentateuch does indeed look forward to a decisive action of God as the end of Israel’s story. A full answer to this question must await my chapter 6, but one may at least begin by considering whether the language which the prophetic scrolls use to intimate a decisive or final turn also may

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133 So Portier-Young, *Apocalypse*, p. 298 (with reference to Enochic Judaism). R. Walter Moberly (*The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992]) classically addresses the question of why Genesis portrays a rather different relationship with Yhwh than that found in the rest of the Pentateuch (or HB), a “patriarchal religion” distinguishable from “Mosaic Yahwism.” Yet Moberly’s repeated language of “dispensations” and “progression” suggests that the later vision trumps the first (Mosaic law is more normative than unregulated patriarchal worship, just as Jesus’ words are more normative for Christians than the HB itself). As the NT (Mark 10:2-9; Matt 19:3-9) attests, for ancients the will of Yhwh expressed from the beginning can trump later “concessions” of Mosaic legislation! See here proposals that J’s “grace” or “folk religion” responds to and corrects Deuteronomy’s “legalistic” centralization; cf. Ernest Nicholson (*The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1998], pp. 152, 192-5), discussing Rose and Levin.

134 See, e.g., Is 7. Compare also Malachi, which (although interested in cultic and legal obedience) begins in 1:1-5 with an assertion of God’s election. Here faithfulness requires acknowledging the primacy of the creator God (2:10) and God’s will to show favor to Israel (3:6, 10-12). See my section 6.5.

135 Crüsemann (*The Torah*, p. 347). The Pentateuch lacks, not just a literal end-of-the-world scenario, but even any “divinely instituted worldwide shift in power”—anything “that might be interpreted as endangering the power of Persia.” For a rather different account of Genesis’ relationship to Persia, see my section 3.3.
convey the same idea when it occurs in the Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{136} I mention here terms for irrevocable change (\textit{no longer}; see above, note 105), or unending blessing (ךָיָה; see my section 2.1.2); or the eschatologically charged סְפָּקִים שָׂרֶשֶׁר (see above, note 49) used in Genesis 49:1; or the verb דָּקַק, so often referring to eschatological visitation/punishment (see, e.g., Is 24:21-2; 26:21; 27:1, 6; Jer 29:10; 30:20; 49:8; Ezek 38:8), emphasized in Genesis’ conclusion (50:24, 25; cf. 21:1).

Admittedly, such scattered verbal parallels do not in themselves prove that Genesis expects a final or decisive ending to Israel’s story. Most of the passages I have cited may imply mere progression, an ongoing struggle to seek Yhwh’s recurrent blessings or to await recurrent divine intervention. Yet the question is not whether one can assign Genesis an uneschatological meaning, but whether those Judeans who reread and rewrote it during the Persian period were content with such a meaning. One significant piece of evidence is the pervasive intertextual connection between Genesis and the prophetic scrolls; those who shaped (or were shaped by!) the Persian-era prophetic corpus developed an eschatological picture of what Yhwh will still do for Israel, in explicit conversation with the narratives and promises of Genesis. The prophetic books’ intertextual links with Genesis emphasize again and again the promises of Yhwh—often associated with mythic threats of uncreation and hopeful expectations of re-creation. Such intertextual links exert a pressure to (re)read Genesis as the story of what Yhwh will still do for Israel, fully and finally, in light of ongoing threats to Israel’s very existence. In Genesis’ mythic world of absolute beginnings (Gen 1-3), of world-transforming crises (Gen 6-9) and irrevocable promises (Gen 12:1-3 and parallels), this story of what Yhwh will still do for Israel invites the expectation that the creator’s blessings will one day be fully and finally realized.

\textsuperscript{136} Cf. Chapman’s comparison (\textit{Law and Prophets}, p. 154) of Deuteronomy’s usage of \textit{in that day}, אָז יָהָֽה, as a standard prophetic-eschatological idiom.
5 Dynamics of Genesis and Unfolding Eschatology

5.1 Introduction

I suggested in chapter 1 that textual meaning can never be truly text-internal but depends on users’ reading conventions, presuppositions, and (therefore) contexts. I have pursued Genesis’ eschatology by examining its textual strategies of temporal orientation (chapter 2), its historical context in the Persian era (chapter 3), and its interaction with Persian-era prophetic texts (chapter 4). In this chapter I continue my situated account by examining more closely the dynamic nature of Genesis’ meaning. Textual usage occurs in time; texts change, either because of editorial activity or simply because new “contexts of interpretation” (new settings for the exact same text) “inevitably alter the way in which the speech is received.”

Genesis was not only used one time, by one set of users. Genesis’ meaning, and thus its eschatology, emerges from a process of continual and changing usage—a process that traces back to its literary precursors in preexilic times and continues throughout the Second Temple period and beyond. Genesis’ Persian-era usage is only one stage in a continuous process of rewriting and rereading. Any freeze-frame synchronic account of Genesis can only be enriched by a larger awareness of Genesis’ diachronic development—what Childs calls the scriptural texts’ “depth-dimension.”

Of course, developmental accounts of Genesis’ usage remain tentative. Theories of Pentateuchal compositional have been hotly contested, with centuries of scholarship coming to few firm areas of consensus. Moreover, reconstructing Genesis’ unfolding reception requires even more guesswork than reconstructing its unfolding composition; most concrete acts of

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1 So James Trotter, *Reading Hosea in Achaemenid Yehud* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 10-11. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (*Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Blackwell, 1995]) discuss how communication proceeds by implicature (not denotation) and therefore changes to a speech’s contextual relevance are as important as changes to the content of that speech.

reading or hearing Genesis leave few tracks for later historians to trace. Even when late Second
Temple texts interpret Genesis, it is never clear where the interpreter intends to unfold Genesis’
meaning and where the interpreter wishes to insert new ideas. Despite all of these problems,
however, historically informed readers of Genesis cannot avoid the task of wrestling with
Genesis’ diachronic process of usage, beginning with oral traditions and ending with post-biblical
exegesis. The alternative is to imagine (however unwittingly) an unchanging, unreworked,
unreflected Genesis—an account of the text that is, in the end, even more implausible than the
most speculative of diachronic reconstructions.

In section 5.2, then, I begin by considering Genesis’ compositional processes. Enough
has been written about the sources and stages of Genesis’ composition that even reviewing the
various theories would require its own volume. Therefore I confine my discussion to a few well-
established hypotheses about Genesis’ production, involving three large-scale compositional
processes that helped give Genesis its current shape:

• the juxtaposition of ancestral-promise narratives with an originally separate exodus-from-
   Egypt tradition;

• the joining of primeval history to the ancestral narratives;

• the interweaving of literary strands, whether or not these are continuous “documents” as in
  the classic Documentary Hypothesis.

I explore these three hypotheses about Genesis’ prehistory, not in order to debate contested
speculations about that prehistory, but simply to highlight the likelihood that these (or similar)

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methodological discussion.
compositional processes have extended and deepened Genesis’ future orientation. The history of Genesis’ rewriting is in part a history of the growing eschatological effects attested by subsequent rewriters.

Section 5.3 turns from dynamic rewriting to dynamic rereading, offering a few sample suggestions of how a passage’s meaning might develop during subsequent rereadings. While it is impossible to specify what transformations occurred in Genesis’ meaning when the text was re-read and re-used, I find it worthwhile to trace a plausible trajectory from the initial surface impression to a more developed reflection spurred by sustained usage. This section builds on my discussion in chapter 1 of how meaning develops dynamically, how narrative ambiguity can be generative, and how overlapping modes of orientation interact to create new significance. For these reasons, even so-called synchronic (literary) readings occur in time, accruing new meaning with each new encounter with the text. Using a few examples from Genesis, I attempt to shift the interpretive question from What does this text mean? to How does this text mean different things as (re)readers reflect upon it?

Section 5.4 examines interpretations of Genesis attested in various texts from the late Second Temple (post-Persian) period. I find in these sources a trajectory that extends Genesis’ Persian-era eschatological trajectory of meaning. In general, scholars have recognized that these later interpreters viewed Genesis as eschatological, so I consider the evidence only briefly. But I do attempt to show once again how such eschatological interpretations, sometimes viewed as

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4 Fishbane (Biblical Interpretation, p. 7) suggests that from the very earliest (oral) sources to the very latest (postbiblical) readings, the adaptation/ transformation of Genesis traditions “continually . . . build up a sense of national history and destiny.”

radical transformations of Genesis’ patently uneschatological meaning, in fact merely continue a long-standing process of reading Israel’s traditions of origins in order to fuel future expectations. These eschatological interpretations are motivated not only by the needs of new contexts but also by the generative impact of received material.

Finally, it is worth noting that this chapter’s three main sections are not really as distinct as they may first seem. Composition and reception are overlapping processes; every editorial layer is a form of rereading, and every instance of reception or interpretation is a form of rewriting. Although I devote section 5.2 to dynamic rewriting and section 5.3 to dynamic rereading, by necessity issues of reception intrude upon section 5.2 and compositional issues impinge on section 5.3. In the same way, the dynamic interpretations attested in early post-Persian texts (section 5.4) themselves rewrite as well as reread Genesis. Nor is the account of Genesis’ prehistory really a different sort of investigation than the account of its post-history. Both situate the Persian-era eschatology of Genesis within a larger temporal context, showing where this Persian-era usage is coming from and where it is going to. What emerges is a Persian-era meaning of Genesis that is less like a sedentary rock with an unchanging essence, than like an unfolding bud that is always on its way from one state and toward another.

5.2 Dynamic Production: Future-Oriented Compositional Development

5.2.1 Ancestral Stories Joined to the Exodus

In its ending (49-50) but also elsewhere (e.g., ch. 15), Genesis attests the joining of two different traditions about Israel’s origins: the ancestral-promise narratives, and the story of

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Israel’s exodus from Egypt. According to various formulations, this synthesis was achieved by G (Noth), by J (Von Rad), or by P (see A Farewell to the Yahwist, especially the article by De Pury). What all of these scholars recognize is that at an earlier stage the national-origin myth of ancestral promises seems to have stood alone: God brought the patriarchs to Canaan, made promises, and gave them the land. When combined with the exodus tradition, however, this became a story not of promise and subsequent fulfillment, but of promise and subsequent delay. The new version of the ancestral promise-stories focuses on trustful waiting in the absence of fulfillment. The ancestral narratives even seem progressively to heighten the theme of delay, from waiting-in-the-land (Abraham’s story) to leaving-and-returning-to-the-land (Jacob’s story) to leaving-for-future-generations-to-return-to-the-land (Joseph’s story).

This compositional move, which makes the ancestral promise a prelude to exodus, is thematized in two passages: Genesis 15:12-16 and Genesis 50:24-5 (see also the related 46:3-4). As discussed in chapter 2, Genesis 15:12-16 is no less than a prophetic vision of future history.

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7 Martin Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1948); Gerhard von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; New York: McGraw Hill, 1966); Albert de Pury, “The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch”; and other articles in A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid (Atlanta: SBL, 2006): 51-72. David Carr (“What is Required to Identify Pre-Priestly Narrative Connections Between Genesis and Exodus? Some General Reflections and Specific Cases,” Farewell to the Yahwist?: 159-80) and Christoph Levin, (“The Yahwist and the Redactional Link Between Genesis and Exodus,” Farewell to the Yahwist?: 131-42) both argue (with Dozeman, against Schmid and Gertz) that the connection of the Genesis and Exodus stories is not just in P; but they agree (following, e.g., John Van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975]) that the joining of the two traditions is still exilic rather than preexilic.

8 Konrad Schmid (“The So-Called Yahwist and the Literary Gap Between Genesis and Exodus,” A Farewell to the Yahwist?: 29-50) argues that Genesis and Exodus are two separate founding myths, and that prophetic passages tend to use one or the other (not both). See also, at greater length, Schmid’s Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel’s Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible, trans. James Nogalski (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

9 Childs (Introduction, p. 151) puts this well: “the promises, particularly of the land, were originally directed to the patriarchs with the prospect of immediate fulfillment,” but the new canonical ordering of material creates “an eschatological pattern of prophecy and fulfillment which now stretches from Abraham to Joshua.” As a result, “the portrayal of the patriarchs has been refocused about their one role as bearers of Israel’s hope.”
which transparently applies to the hopes of Babylonian exiles. Its chronological schema prefigures the apocalyptic prophecy-ex-eventu and “periodization of world history.”

Importantly, the logic of this passage is demanded by the juxtaposition of Genesis and Exodus, a joining that invites reflection on the immutability of the divine plan but also the extended nature of human waiting. The chronological expanse between promise and fulfillment means that accepting the promise requires living in light of a distant future which Abraham will never see.

Similarly, Genesis ends (50:24-5) with provisions made for Joseph’s bones, an icon for a people awaiting God’s definitive (but indefinitely postponed) visitation. Waiting takes on its own existential reality, a special identity defined by the postponement of the promised time. It is, I suggest, this ending outside the promised land that derails what might otherwise seem a sure and steady progress toward promise-fulfillment. The promise of numerous progeny moves forward through Genesis as barren Abraham and Sarah have a child, as Rebecca and Isaac seek and receive children, and especially as Jacob fathers twelve sons. But the promise of the land of Israel is, if anything, even farther away for Jacob’s family in Egypt than it was for Abraham camping as a sojourner in Palestine. Genesis’ ending, demanded by the need to prepare for the story of exodus, suggests that even the Genesis material indicating fulfillment (e.g., the ancestors receiving children, prospering materially, and purchasing a plot within the land) points to a greater future which is still far distant.

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12 Devora Steinmetz (*From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis* [Louisville, Kent: Westminster/ John Knox, 1991], pp. 151-2) shows that “Joseph’s vision of the future” provides “a model for the ongoing interpretation of experience,” and “Joseph’s bones” symbolize “temporary exile and a guarantee of future redemption.”
As Brevard Childs, James Sanders, and Horst Seebass have all pointed out, both Genesis and the larger Pentateuch end outside the land of fulfillment. One may ask what kind of diachronic development in the tradition produced such open endings to both Genesis and the Pentateuch. Genesis’ future-oriented meaning seems to have become clearer as the ancestral traditions became part of a larger story; ancestral promises now stand as the launching point for an extensive set of traditions about God and Israel. Similarly, the exodus’ developing meaning takes shape when its two-part tradition (leaving Egypt and entering Canaan) is also fitted to a larger story. First, Sinai and wilderness traditions (including, most notably, the law-giving through Moses) seem to have been inserted between the moment of leaving and the moment of arriving, giving the journey itself a new literary weight. Second, Deuteronomy makes the whole Pentateuch a prelude to the Deuteronomistic history, and therefore requires that the Pentateuch end with the entrance into the land still unaccomplished. It is the Pentateuch’s connection with (and simultaneous separation from) the rest of Israel’s Primary History that requires that its whole story become merely preparatory to achieving the land.

I suggest, then, that both Genesis and the Pentateuch commend a stance of ongoing anticipation precisely because any simpler pattern (of promise and then immediate fulfillment, or of exodus and then immediate entry into the land) does not do justice to the rest of Israel’s story.

Both Genesis and the Pentateuch become what they are because Israel tells its story as a

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14 Joshua-Judges-Samuel-Kings, in my judgment, has its own symmetrical presentation of Israel’s history in the land, beginning with glorious entrance and ending in inglorious exile.
continuous sequence, from initial beginnings to the present ambiguous moment. The resulting text drives its audiences to project their own present, and future, as a continuation of Genesis’ story. As Ben Zvi argues, the primary historical narrative as a whole (Genesis through Kings) is “truncated”—its mythic etiology does not come all the way up to the formation of the Persian-era community which created it, but stops short precisely at the seeming “end” of the 586 catastrophe. The Davidic heirs in exile at the end of 2 Kings resemble Moses’ audience on the plains of Moab (at the end of the Pentateuch) and Joseph’s family in Egypt (at the end of Genesis). This structure “strongly communicates that the Israel that has to be according to YHWH’s (long-term) will has not yet materialized.” So Genesis is the first, most mythic national etiology within a larger picture of not-yet-materialized Israel, structured around the delay between the waiting present and the anticipated future. Genesis’ Persian-era users are not literally outside the land, but they are still under foreign rulers who (even if beneficent) may remind them of Genesis’ Pharaoh. Reading their own situation in light of Genesis 50, they too await a divine visitation (Gen 50:24-25) which will end the period of delay and bring Israel fully into being.

5.2.2 National Origins Joined to Cosmogony

Genesis’ second compositional synthesis is the joining of a story of national origins with a cosmogony. Once again, competing hypotheses about when this synthesis occurred (from very early to very late) do not obscure the fact that it gives Genesis a distinctive quality. The ties between Genesis 1-11 and Genesis 12-50 are suggestive. Israel and humanity are both in a

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relationship with God based on commands and promises, covenants and blessings. Both have left one home and still await another. Eve, with one son murdered and the other exiled, receives another seed (Gen 4:25) to fulfill God’s promise, just as Abraham and Sarah receive a seed to fulfill God’s promise (21:12—but here it is the birth of Isaac that causes Ishmael’s exile). The toledot structure architectonically depicts all of Genesis’ stories, cosmic and national, as a genealogy linking Israel, its neighbors, humanity, and the heavens and the earth themselves. The need for a seed, the (threatened) procreative power of women, characterizes the past and clearly marks a trajectory for the future—of Israel and the world.

These and other literary ties binding Genesis as a whole can be noticed on the purely literary level. A diachronic lens, however, asks why Israel bound its story of national origins to a story of cosmic beginnings, when the two might have remained separate. Diachronically, something is being said about the unwillingness of those who read, heard, gathered, preserved, edited, or copied Genesis material—that broad collection of Israelites whom I call Genesis’ users—to separate Israel’s destiny from the world’s. The confession of Israel’s God as the creator God ultimately pressed the users of Genesis to consider Yhwh’s purposes for creation and Yhwh’s purposes for Israel together. Such considerations might have led to various attitudes toward Israel’s neighbors, ranging from adversarial to cooperative—all as part of a progressive thinking-through of Israel’s relationship with the wider world, of Israel’s story within the wider destiny of creation. Genesis both reflects and prompts a process of integrating nationalistic identity with cosmic theology; this process contributes as much to the eschatology of Genesis’ users as any specific statements Genesis makes on the topic.

One entry to the dynamic meaning of this compositional move (tying Gen 1-11 to Gen 12-50) is the long-standing debate about the nifal form וְנִבְרְכוּ in Genesis 12:3b (see also 18:18; 28:14; and—using the hithpael—22:18 and 26:4). While lexical and grammatical analysis has its place, weighty arguments on both sides attest that it is possible to read the verb as passive, all the families of the earth will be blessed through you [Abra(ha)m/ Israel], or as reflexive, all the families of the earth will bless themselves by you [Abra(ha)m/ Israel].

Is Israel, in this verse at least, called for the sake of blessing the larger world? Or on the contrary are the nations the “backdrop in spite of whom Abraham will become a great nation”? Ultimately the context must decide. Yet in that such promises probably occurred in diverse literary and extraliterary contexts during the course of Genesis’ composition, 12:3b’s contextual meaning may have changed through the process of (re)reading and (re)writing Genesis.

To begin, it is possible that some form of this promise predates the joining of the ancestral narratives to the cosmic prehistory. In this context, part of a story narrowly focused on

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17 I.e., they will invoke Abra(ha)m/ Israel as a famous exemplar of blessing; this meaning changes little if one analyzes the verb as middle (they will bless for themselves) or reciprocal (they will bless one another). On this whole question see Keith Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). For the first reading, Grüneberg cites von Rad, Wolff, Mitchell, Sarna, Turner, and Bruegemann; for the second, Moberly, Gunkel, Albrektson, and Blum. Grüneberg follows a mediating position and reads the nifal as passive but the hithpael as reflexive, so that both promises exist in Genesis. See here also Jo Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 185-207.


Israel’s origins, Yhwh’s statement about the future emphasizes above all a nationalistic promise. Genesis’ users might seem insignificant in the eyes of their current neighbors, but God assures them a great name (12:2c), a famous and exemplary state of blessing (12:2d) which all the world’s families will attest whenever they invoke blessings. At this level, the promise that Israel’s blessers will be blessed and its curser cursed is pure encouragement: those aiding Israel will have more effect than those seeking to oppose it. Yet putting the promise this way may eventually prompt Genesis’ audiences to ask themselves how blessed Israel relates to all the families of the earth who witness its blessing, and who also receive blessing (and cursing) insofar as they bless (and curse) Israel.  

This question about the destiny of the nations, which hovers in the background when the promise is read within the context of Israel’s ancestral narratives, becomes far more pressing when these ancestral narratives join the story of the world’s origins. In its current location Genesis 12:1-3 bridges the etiology of the world’s families (Gen 1-11; see esp. 10: 5, 20, 31-32) and the etiology of Israel (Gen 12-50). Perhaps the joining of the two traditions gave a new meaning to a traditional nationalist promise; or, conversely, perhaps the promise’s own incipient involvement of the families of the earth in Israel’s blessing helped motivate the joining of ancestral-promise story with narratives of cosmic origins. Either way, the promise’s dynamic  

21 Such questions, in fact, go to the heart of the promising deity’s nature. According to the logic of the promise, if the promising deity is one among others then that deity must be able to overpower any opposing nations’ deities. Since ancient Near Eastern cosmogonic and national-origins myths pay so much attention to conflict among deities (framing national protection explicitly as protection against hostile deities), Genesis’ silence about divine opponents may be a conspicuous silence. Why does this God not need to take other deities into account, even when pronouncing Israel’s assurance in the face of all the world’s peoples? One answer is that this promising deity is the creator-God, sovereign over all peoples; such a deity must have intentions for other peoples as well as for Israel.  

reception (its potential to be reread with a deepening attention to the nations) and Genesis’ dynamic composition (the joining of two major narrative blocks) mutually reinforce one another. Abra(ha)m’s promise, in Genesis’ current form, now looks like a response to what has come before.\(^\text{23}\) As a result, two possible meanings of Genesis 12:3b—as inward-oriented nationalistic assurance, and as outward-oriented promise for the nations—are not static alternatives between which one must choose. They are, rather, progressive stages in the dynamic composition and dynamic reception (both moving hand in hand) of Genesis. The possibility that this promise shows a real interest in the families of the earth, not only in Abra(ha)m’s worldwide fame, became more pressing as the composition of Genesis progressed.

Carr suggests yet another compositional change in the meaning of וְנִבְרְכוּ. If a form of the ancestral narrative was first joined to the J (or pre-P) prehistory without the P material in Genesis 1-11, then the story of the nations which precedes this promise has been rather dark. For those reading this pre-P synthesis, God has cursed and punished creation (Gen 3, 6-7) but not explicitly blessed it. In this context, the promise to Abra(ha)m comes like a light amid darkness, a sharp contrast to the violence and curse associated with the other nations.\(^\text{24}\) If Yhwh’s promise to make the preservation and use of traditional sources. An outward-focused reading of the ancestral promise is not merely a consequence of compositional moves; it may also be, simultaneously, a cause of such compositional moves.

\(^\text{23}\) Clines \textit{(Theme, p. 30)} says the promise to Abraham is the “affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity”; Brueggemann \textit{(Theology, p. 498,)} suggests that Abraham’s summons is the “antidote” to the problems of Gen 3-11. See also Wolff, “Kerygma.” James Hamilton \textit{ (“The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” Tyndale Bulletin 58.2 [2007]: 253-78, p. 255)} astutely notes that the connection lies in the phrase \textit{be fruitful and multiply}, epitomizing God’s blessing on creation and on Abraham’s seed.

\(^\text{24}\) Carr, \textit{Reading the Fractures, p. 128}: non-P depicts “human striving and divine frustration” as a foil to the “history of promise.” Carr argues (p. 189) that any blessing (in the pre-P layer) which accrues to Israel’s neighbors, like Laban or Potiphar, is only a “pitiful fulfillment” if 12:3b intends universal blessing; he concludes (pp. 215-216) that proto-Genesis’ point is more likely a contrast between Israel and the cursed world (citing Gen 3 and also the Babel story). Christoph Levin \textit{ (“The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch,” JBL 126.2 [2007]: 209-30, pp. 221-2)} agrees that J has set God’s people “over against all the others.” Again, see Moberly, \textit{Theology, p. 149}.\[252\]
your name great (Gen 12:2) seems to contrast with the Babel-builders’ attempt to make for ourselves a name (Gen 11:4), the reflexive reading of נבך may even indicate the nations’ presumption. Blessing oneself may be a futile and self-serving distortion of the divine grant to Abra(ha)m/Israel. On the other hand, primeval material traditionally associated with P emphasizes God’s original blessing toward the cosmos and all humanity (Gen 1:22, 28-30), setting all of Genesis in the context of a creative intent to bless. Thus, whenever P joined the conversation of Genesis’ dynamic composition, 12:3b’s ambiguous blessing became a promise that Yhwh’s blessing of Abra(ha)m serves to preserve/extend Yhwh’s prior act of blessing all creation.

I find Carr’s reading of Genesis’ compositional history suggestive, even if I remain uncertain about the nature of pre-Genesis layers and (especially) the historical-literary contexts in which such readings might have occurred. I emphasize again that in this section I am not seeking to give a straightforward chronology of Genesis’ compositional stages, much less a suggested dating for each stage. Rather, I am giving a plausible trajectory which helps explain some of the dynamic tension which remains within the extant text; both reflexive and passive readings of the nifal resonate with other phrases in Genesis 12:2-3, giving three possible roles to the nations. These nations may, in the text’s extant form, function as witnesses (I will make your name great,

25 See J. P. Fokkelman’s contrast (Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structuralist Analysis [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975], p. 17) between the tower-builders who seek a name for themselves and Abra(ha)m who receives a great name from God.

26 So Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 323. Carr earlier notes that P’s human condition is “divine blessing” and “order,” with summary destruction of all challenges to the divine sovereignty (p. 128); in P, “Israel’s fertility is but a specific and intense instance of God’s blessing on humanity in general,” and “Israel’s possession of the land echoes God’s broader creation intent for humans to fill the earth and subdue it” (p. 131).
you will be a blessing\textsuperscript{27}, challenges to Israel’s blessing (I will curse the one cursing you\textsuperscript{28}), and beneficiaries of Israel’s blessing (I will bless the ones blessing you). All three roles are in fact attested throughout the ancestral narratives, where Israel’s neighbors witness the ancestors’ blessing (e.g., Gen 21:22; 26:28; 30:30; 39:3, 23), threaten the ancestors’ blessing (e.g., 26:15-21; 27:41-5; and possibly 21:9-10), and benefit from the ancestors’ blessing (e.g., 30:27; 41:57). Two of these roles also find supporting evidence in Genesis 1-11, where humanity is both a threat (characterized by disobedience, violence, alienation, and divine judgment) and a beneficiary of God’s continuing creative favor (see especially 8:21).

In the following chart I summarize these three possible meanings of Genesis 12:3b, emphasizing how each successive meaning is additive—building on the earlier meaning. In that the compositional processes being posited here add (rather than delete) Genesis material, the literary context retains pointers to all three meanings. Even when the world’s families are viewed as beneficiaries of Israel’s blessing, they continue to witness Israel’s exemplary blessing—and to provide a hostile foil to it whenever they oppose Israel. Plausible audiences even of the finished Genesis can remain content with narrow, nationalistic readings of the promise—but continued reflection on 12:3b in its current context may also invite them to a progressively broader, more missional understanding of Israel’s unique role.\textsuperscript{29} If Genesis’ narratives do not show many

\begin{footnotes}
\item [27] To be a blessing is to be an exemplary recipient of blessing. See Grünberg, Abraham, pp. 120-1; Moberly, Theology, pp. 152-3, citing Jer 24:8-9 (Israel is a curse, i.e., an exemplary victim of divine curse) and Zech 8:13 (Israel is first curse among the nations and then blessing, i.e., its exemplary fortunes are reversed).

\item [28] Grünberg (Abraham) rightly notes that blessing blessers is more fundamental than cursing (occasional) cursers: The cursed curser is singular (where the blessed blessers are plural), and exists as a sort of parenthesis from the rest of the expressions of God’s purpose (i.e., the vav is on the participle instead of the first-person verb, and the verb is imperfect rather than cohortative). On the other hand, for the very same grammatical reasons, the cursing of the curser stands out prominently from the rest of Abraham’s blessing.

\item [29] Moberly (Theology, pp. 157, 160), after arguing for a reflexive and non-missional reading of 12:3b, notes that in LXX, Christian, and Jewish understandings the nations are blessed in Abraham. He attributes this to a “wider context of Scripture and . . . tradition.” Unlike Carr (Reading the Fractures, p. 320) he does not consider the possibility that this wider context of scripture and tradition is already brought to bear in the process of Genesis’ composition.
\end{footnotes}
examples of Israel blessing the nations, this may indicate (diachronically) that the nation-blessing meaning post-dates the composition of most Genesis narratives;³⁰ but it may also indicate (synchronously) that Genesis’ audience will seek the fulfillment of the nations’ blessing beyond Genesis’ narratives, in the future restoration of Israel. After all, Genesis’ narratives do not show a complete fulfillment of Israel receiving exemplary blessing, either. (As I mention in section 2.5.1, the ancestors’ purchase of a small plot of land is proleptic of the wider promise.) Blessings of Israel or the nations point to a climactic ending for Israel’s story—and the world’s story.

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³⁰ So Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 131.
5.2.3 The Joining of P and pre-P Sources

If Genesis seems to stitch together narrative blocks of tradition, in places it also seems to interweave parallel literary strands. There are as many accounts of this interweaving as there are source critics, but most scholars (not all) still accept some source-compositional scenario, such as the merging of a pre-P document (J/E, or proto-Genesis) with P material. The eschatological implication of these sources and of the processes which brought them together is difficult to determine, precisely because the evidence must be reconstructed. But an overview of some well-known possibilities gives some insight into the increasing future-orientation of Genesis’ likely composition.

So, for example, J’s own compositional contribution is (at least on some hypotheses) the work of bringing the blocks of material together, a process already discussed in my last sections. Carr posits that before this synthesis occurred, the very earliest Genesis material addressed rather narrow concerns of its audience’s immediate present (e.g., legitimating northern cultic sites or the

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31 The question of whether to call pre-P material that dates from the exile “J” is largely semantic (see John Van Seters, “The Report of the Yahwist’s Demise Has Been Greatly Exaggerated!” in A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid [Atlanta: SBL, 2006]: 143-58). A minority (Carr, “What Is Required?” cites Seebass, Friedman, and Nicholson) still distinguish E from J. Perhaps the most important questions are a) the age and continuity of pre-P material, and b) whether P material is itself only redactional (Rendtorff, Van Seters, Cross) or was a source of its own (Carr, Eckart Otto, Thomas Pola)—or, perhaps, something in between (Blum). See discussion in Ernest Nicholson, The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 200; Carr, Reading the Fractures, pp. 43-7, 88. I note here that Hans-Christoph Schmitt (“Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie: Zur Bedeutung der “Glauben”-Thematik innerhalb der Theologie des Pentateuch,” in idem, Theologie in Prophetie und Pentateuch: Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Ulrike Schorn and Matthias Büttner [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001]: 220-37, pp. 220-23) shows that the scholarly assumption of a disjunction between the Pentateuch and the prophets depends in part upon the Documentary Hypothesis, becoming less persuasive in the light of more recent compositional hypotheses.

32 Levin, “The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor.” Nicholson (Pentateuch, esp. pp. 69-71) discusses and defends von Rad’s classic statement, according to which J joined patriarchal stories with settlement (Exodus) traditions and with the primeval history and is thus responsible for Genesis’ delayed-promise and universal-blessing motifs. Van Seters’ J (e.g., “Reports of the Yahwist’s Demise”), while quite unlike von Rad’s in many respects (most notably date), also brings these three types of material together and hence essentially composes much of Genesis. For a somewhat similar characterization of a “proto-Genesis” which (like J) precedes P and joins ancestral materials to a primeval history and a Moses-exodus story, see Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 290. For the theme of unfulfillment and (therefore) of continuing hope in J, see Wolff, “Kerygma of the Yahwist,” p. 154; Walther Zimmerli, Der Mensch und seine Hoffnung im Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), pp. 51-9; Clines, Theme, p. 94.
southern royal dynasty). Later pre-P additions such as Genesis 15, 50:24-5, and 32:10-13 sound more prophetic and involve audiences in the ancestors’ future. Finally, a finished pre-P proto-Genesis revolves around ongoing promise, “intensely oriented toward bolstering an audience’s faith in a non-existent or threatened future of nationhood, blessing, land possession, and protection,” encouraging its audience “to believe in a promise that was not yet executed but would, against all outward appearances, be fulfilled.” So pre-P (or J) shifts attention from life in the land to a promised future, from attempts to “legitimate an existing political structure” to efforts to “support a structure of political hope.” The narrative’s etiological “anticipation of the audience’s present circumstances” has transformed into “a secure prediction of the audience’s future.” Carr’s analysis here bears diachronic testimony to a synchronic fact about Genesis’ literary character: Genesis retains some surface similarities to mythic texts which legitimate existing political structures, but in its current form says more about the ongoing future than the accomplished present.

If pre-P Genesis is already shaped around future-oriented promises, P’s relationship to that shape is somewhat unclear. In Carr, P is a “counterpresentation” which sharply differs from pre-P on several points, but which only intensifies or extends the basic themes of promise. Several authors have noticed P’s interest in the return to the land, and its affinities for Ezekiel and

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33 See, e.g., Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 226, and sources cited there.
34 Carr, Reading the Fractures, pp. 163-9. The same strand includes 18:17-18 and 22b-30, also prophetic.
35 Carr, Reading the Fractures, pp. 226-8. Levin (“The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor,” pp. 218, 220) shows that J chooses stories set outside the land (and portrays Abraham, within the land, as a sojourner), highlighting exile.
36 Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 291.
37 Carr, Reading the Fractures, p. 305.
38 I follow recent authors (such as Carr, Reading the Fractures, and Erhard Blum, Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990]) in not distinguishing separate “E” and “D” sources within Genesis.
39 Carr, Reading the Fractures, pp. 312-14.
Second Isaiah—characteristics which suggest a future-orientation.\(^\text{40}\) Israel’s identity, on this reading, is tied not only to the past but also to a hoped-for future; thus even Crüsemann can speak of a “new eschatological character of salvation” in P.\(^\text{41}\) William Brown is even more sympathetic to a fundamental priestly view of the cosmos which, as in Haggai and Zechariah, connects Israel’s restored cult with hopes of cosmic restoration.\(^\text{42}\)

Otto Plöger, on the other hand, has influentially described P as non-eschatological because it defines Israel in terms of an insular and static (cultic) community.\(^\text{43}\) I have already suggested that Plöger’s sociological dichotomy between eschatology and theocracy no longer bears examination.\(^\text{44}\) Moreover, I believe that Plöger overlooks the way that non-P and P materials form complementary voices in the only form of the tradition that survived the years, i.e., the compositional unity of Genesis as it stands. Importantly, the P which Plöger analyzes (P in isolation from other more nationalistic sources, characterized by what it omits from those)


\(^{43}\) Otto Plöger, Theocracy and Eschatology (London: Basil Blackwell, 1968), esp. pp. 30-36. See also Nicholson, Pentateuch, p. 219, suggesting that even if the cultic practices detailed in P come from early material, the specific “theocratic and hierocratic understanding of Israel as the ‘congregation’ of Yahweh” is the post-exilic message of P as a document.

sources) is a P that no longer exists. If P “corrected” J’s narrative shape by omitting passages (like Gen 12:1-3) that paint Israel “as a bridge . . . from the once universal, now destroyed and scattered, mankind to a new universal mankind,” then the group(s) that preserved P in juxtaposition with J undid that correction.⁴⁵ Not everyone agrees that P was in fact ever used independently of non-P material (see above, note 31). But if it was, Plöger’s work suggests that the process by which P was joined with other sources to produce the current Pentateuch (which does not omit Gen 12:1-3, but features the passage as a programmatic component) fundamentally eschatologized P. A limited, cultic view of Israel’s destiny becomes, in the process of compromise or synthesis which is Genesis, an expansive and universalizing theology about Israel’s cult in relation to the nationalist destiny foreseen by pre-P material.

More recently, de Pury suggests that P actually subsumes early forms of (pre-P) Jacob-nationalism to emphasize “multinational” Abraham (see Gen 17), expanding the extent of the divine promise. De Pury reminds us that P’s cultic agenda can be viewed as missional, challenging Israel to function as “priests of humanity” (de Pury cites Gen 17:18). Brown too notes how P adds international blessings not found in J (see Gen 17:4, 5), and speaks not only of an Israeliite cultic congregation (הָֽהֳַלָּה, the key word of Plöger’s analysis) but also of a congregation of nations (קְהַל גוֹיִם, Gen 35:11; cf. 17:4-6, 8; 48:4; Lev 25:34). He, like de Pury, sees P’s creation-rooted vision as a “hopeful attempt at reforming Israel’s postexilic identity,”

⁴⁵ Plöger, Theocracy and Eschatology, p. 32. See also his telling aside on p. 36: P’s “original authors” would not expect its “link” with “the other narratives of the later Pentateuch.”

⁴⁶ De Pury, “The Jacob Story,” pp. 67-8. He reads Gen 26:5 (and Hosea 12) as a prophetic discomfort with Jacob-nationalism, and aligns P not with temple exclusivism (see Plöger, Theocracy and Eschatology) but with a pre-temple, Cyrus-era southern-Palestine melting pot, seeking a Judean coalition of various groups (including Edom/ Ishmael).

⁴⁷ Brown, Ethos, pp. 61-3.
highlighting *connections* between Israel and surrounding peoples.⁴⁸ Admittedly, de Pury also posits a post-P move that is less inclusive (and thus tries to exclude Ishmael and Edom).⁴⁹ If correct, this theory merely confirms that the dialectic between Israel’s nationalistic hopes and Israel’s universalizing concern for the families of the world never ceases.

### 5.2.4 Eschatological Implications of Compositional Moves

I return, then, to Carr’s conclusion that at each stage Genesis’ composition “leans ever more toward the future and less toward explaining the present.”⁵⁰ Eventually, the re-worked material does not simply meet the needs of its (latest) audience, but points to a more absolute future “beyond the audience’s world”—one that cannot be reduced to the experiences, or even the hopes, of any single moment.⁵¹ Thus a series of discrete hopes (for Judah’s or Israel’s well-being, for a return from exile, for a rebuilt temple) have merged in the Persian era into an ever-extended anticipation of God’s deliverance.⁵² However tentative the conclusions in this section must be, the evidence at least suggests that the future-orientation of earlier sources has been *extended* in the current compositional synthesis that is Genesis. In fact, the impulse toward universalizing, reapplying, and extending earlier hopes can be characterized as a process of *eschatologizing* already well underway when Genesis reaches its present compositional form. The compositional reworking of earlier hopes generalizes or typologizes them, allowing them to be re-applied to new

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⁵⁰ Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, p. 308.


⁵² Cf. Donald Gowan (*Eschatology in the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], pp. 24-9) for return-from-exile as a continuing eschatological theme even for those who had already “returned.”
situations in an ongoing historical dynamic. Ultimately, the future to which these hopes point is not just one more step along the path, but a true end to Israel’s story.

In that Genesis’ composition is wrapped up in the Pentateuch’s, the dynamic eschatological meaning of Genesis connects with the Pentateuch’s larger message. Noth’s classic statement still remains valid: the Pentateuch is a “history of salvation . . . which aims toward a still future blessing of ‘all the clans of the inhabited earth,’ in other words, the whole of mankind, and which employs Israel as the instrument of the saving action.” While the theme of the Pentateuch is beyond the scope of this paper, it is at least worth noting that Clines’ seminal exploration of The Theme of the Pentateuch centers on unfulfilled, future-oriented promise. The more one reads Genesis or the Pentateuch in its entirety, the more one is oriented to future expectations. If indeed an eschatologizing compositional process lies behind the current form of Genesis, this process is replicated in the (re)reading process of reflecting upon and responding to Genesis. I now turn to this process of dynamic rereading.

5.3 Dynamic Rereading: Interpreting the Future in Genesis

5.3.1 Genesis 2-3: Rereading an Unlamented Past as an Idealized Future

5.3.1.1 Story Versus Cycle: Dynamic Composition or Dynamic Rereading?

Susan Niditch, in her book From Chaos to Cosmos, highlights the difference between two fundamentally distinct views of Genesis 1-11. First she reads each story individually, supposing (quite without argument) that the various episodes were once separate and independent pictures of primeval reality. Second, she explains how the myths’ meaning changes when they

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54 Susan Niditch, From Chaos to Cosmos (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985).
come together as a continuous narrative from creation to Abraham. Taken one at a time, each myth describes the “inevitability” of readerly-world reality (“differentiation” and “mortality”), which must eventually follow the initial conditions of undifferentiated *communitas*. Eden from this perspective represents an irrecoverable and largely un lamented past. Joined together in Genesis 1-11, however, the cycle of myths offers a sharply pointed critique of humanity’s progressive “alienation”; conditions deteriorate from Eden into “disobedience and sin, disapproval and separation, paradise lost.”

Niditch surmises that Genesis transforms the stories’ earlier meanings primarily by placing originally “cyclical” myths into a new “linear” progression, adding only a few “key transitions” (e.g., Gen 6:5-8). Although the editing itself is minor, “the very genre of the individual myths is changed when they are blended together into one narrative which leads from Adam to Abraham.”

The joining of the myths completely transforms their meaning.

In this discussion Niditch appears to be offering compositional suggestions about how Genesis’ myths functioned separately before being brought together; but I suggest that she is in fact merely describing two different ways of reading Genesis. Although each Genesis myth may have had its own separate life at some (perhaps oral) stage, to recover such discrete tales one would have to strip away much of the stories’ current literary working—not assume with Niditch that these episodes existed separately, as they are now found in Gen 1-11, before being stapled to each other.

But if Niditch’s piecemeal reading tells us little about Genesis’ literary precursors, it

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56 Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos*, p. 63.

tells us much about a sort of (first) reading which considers one story at a time, before reflecting on how the stories fit together. The “individual myths,” from one perspective, never existed; from another perspective they still exist, any time that an audience responds to one episode within Genesis without thinking about the larger context. Interestingly, when Niditch strips these episodes from their literary context, she also ignores their historical context; her anthropological comparisons range from ancient Rome to modern Australia, nearly ignoring ancient Israel. Her “individual episode” account, in other words, approximates a first reading of Genesis that has not yet integrated each frame either within the larger literary whole or within the users’ concrete situation.\(^{58}\)

By the same token, when Niditch interprets Genesis 1-11 as a whole and begins to connect it with Judea’s contexts (not Rome’s or Australia’s), she is not primarily describing a later stage in the compositional history of Genesis. She is describing what it means to reread

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Finally, note that Gen 1-11 follows in the tradition of the much older Atrahasis which presents primeval myth as a progression of episodes (including both creation and flood); see chart in Carr, Reading the Fractures, pp. 242-3. For a full-length monograph on Gen 2-3, its ancient parallels, and its possible oral composition, see Howard Wallace, The Eden Narrative (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985).

\(^{58}\) By calling this piecemeal reading a “first” reading, and a more integrated reading of Genesis a “rereading,” I am not assuming that subsequent readings move only in one direction (from the particular to the general) rather than another (from the general to the particular). Rereadings can certainly focus attention more closely on a single part of the whole; such focusing, however, does not easily forget the larger context. Each subsequent reading of a work, no matter how focused, can hardly help but increase the audience’s awareness of how the parts fit together to form the whole—and how the whole relates to its historical contexts of usage. Put differently, I suggest that rereadings are additive (see discussion of Gen 12:1-3, above), not replacing but building on earlier readings. For theoretical support of this suggestion, see Matei Călinescu, Rereading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); see my section 1.2.3.
Genesis, to consider it again from a broader perspective—one that views Genesis 1-11 (and
beyond) as a whole, in context, as a word to Israel. Read this way, a new message emerges for a
specific people in a specific context, with specific views on reality, on evil, and on relations to
God. Audiences who reread the Genesis material may, of course, continue to treat its episodes
as mere stories; but they read each story already knowing how that story fits into an overarching
cycle—and already knowing how story and cycle interact with their own traditional theology,
identity, and hope. In other words, the rereading of Genesis allows each story’s message to join a
wider conversation spurred by Genesis as a book, by the Pentateuch as a five-book complex, and
by the developing canon (however they conceived it) as a growing collection.

Niditch’s two ways of reading Genesis 1-11 produce two very different answers to the
question of eschatology in Genesis 2-3. Audiences who read Genesis 3 as inevitable and value-
negative will feel little pressure to return to Eden. Persian-era Judeans (at least those who produced
books like Zechariah) valued differentiation and thus would not have built their eschatology
around a return to creation’s primordial undifferentiated communitas. But equating Eden with
communitas has little to do with Genesis’ final form, and gives no credible reading of Genesis 2-3
within the rest of Israelite literature. When joined with chapter one, Genesis 2-3 continues initial
acts of creation-distinction (dark and light, land and water, weekday and Sabbath) by naming/
distinguishing human and animal, woman and man. When joined with the full downward

60 This ability to receive individual episodes with a full awareness of a larger context applies even
(eespecially?) to aural re-“readers” (hearers); see Foley, Immanent Art; Călinescu, Rereading. The question of whether
ancient Judeans conceived of scrolls as literary units is complicated; see Benjamin Sommer, “The Scroll of Isaiah as
61 Niditch, Chaos to Cosmos, p. 68.
62 Cultic distinctions are not opposed to intimate relations, but exist to foster them (see Carr, Reading the
Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies, Vol. 6, ed. Paul Redditt [Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies,
progression of Genesis 1-11, Genesis 2-3 describes a garden from which humanity is barred—the first in a series of primordial losses. From this perspective, might not reflection on what was lost inspire a sense of longing? Could the downward progression be reversed, the loss be regained?

Niditch claims that “the passing of paradise seems quite irreversible,” that the story “gives no reason to hope that Paradise can be attained again.” Similarly, in a more recent essay Konrad Schmid says that Genesis 2-3 “in its biblical shape is probably one of the most non-eschatological texts of the Bible,” since the guardian cherubim (3:24) ensure that “paradise is lost forever. There is no way back, never, ever.” Yet one must ask for the evidence behind such blanket claims. The iconography of the ancient world, not least of the temple itself, suggests that cherub imagery may represent the cultic restriction from sacred space; ancient religion has various strategies to bridge this divide, whether by moral purity, ritual performance, or visionary experience. In fact, James Hamilton suggest that garden imagery in the tabernacle/temple marks Israel’s cult as an “antidote” to the expulsion from Eden. Niditch admits that for the “continuing tradition” Genesis 2-3 “provides an image of an ideal time for which one can strive, to which one

1986): 151-60) notes the possibility that the cult itself has eschatological, “return to Eden” potential. One may ask whether the opposition of Edenic communitas with cultic distinctions serves finally only to justify Niditch’s concluding Protestant-egalitarian reading of Paul’s eschatology. Users who (re)read Gen 2-3 attuned to cultic resonances will discover that Eden has more common ground with Zechariah than with Victor Turner; both of Genesis’ related stories about creation show God imposing order upon chaos, creating not an undifferentiated world but an order full of temporal, spatial, and social distinctions.

Niditch, From Chaos to Cosmos, pp. 43, 71.


can hope to return.” Yet the tradition of reading Eden as a symbol for Israel’s hopes is already present in the prophetic corpus (see my section 4.3.3.1), and may not postdate the final form of Genesis. Perhaps the rereading of Genesis 2-3 as part of a downward cycle is intimately connected to the eschatological reading of Eden in the prophetic tradition—and beyond.

5.3.1.2 Maturation versus Punishment: A Transformed, Transforming Story

Niditch’s insightful distinction between the primordial myths taken individually and the primordial myths taken together may go some distance toward solving an ongoing controversy about whether Genesis 3 relates a traditional “fall” (the larger cycle of disobedience and punishment) or on the contrary portrays human development (an isolated story about human maturation). Because this question is so important to the theological tone of Genesis as a whole, I will pursue it through the lens of another study which discusses the possibilities of rereading Genesis 2-3: Carr’s “The Politics of Textual Subversion.” Carr’s article stands at the other

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66 Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos*, p. 43. But note that Niditch (p. 79) describes the Enochic Book of the Watchers as “this-worldly” and therefore less than a “complete return to the *communitas* of Eden”—BW’s eschatological profile is “long and full life, righteousness, peace, fecundity, and sinlessness for eternity,” a scenario “rather typical of OT prophecy.” I deny that this description differs substantially from, or is more “this-worldly” than, a return to Eden as described in Gen 2-3; both utopian ideals are situated in relation to created reality (e.g., land, animals, agriculture). I also deny that the return to Eden is atypical of OT prophecy.

extreme from Niditch’s book; Carr interacts with earlier source critics and lays out the subtle evidence of compositional stitching not just between Genesis’ episodes but within them. He concludes that a redactor-author added Genesis 3 to Genesis 2, and also contributed several anticipatory verses to chapter 2 (vv. 6, 9-15 [except for the final two infinitives of v. 15]). Carr’s work is careful and thorough.

Yet lingering doubts remain. The nature of the evidence allows multiple competing compositional accounts. Even more, Carr’s whole argument depends on acknowledging that the writer of Genesis 3 (and of 2:6, 9-15), although sharply subverting the earlier “wisdom story” of Genesis 2, preserved that story and depended upon it for rhetorical effect. If the Genesis 2 story had not already existed, this redactor-author would have needed to invent it in order to subvert it.

That being so, the final redactor is in every meaningful sense the author of the extant whole including chapter two, and one cannot know how much of the “earlier” material this author reshaped or even invented to provide a foil for his own vision. Finally, Carr’s account of the setting of each redactional stratum seems dubious. Genesis 2 is a story aligned with the wisdom tradition, but outside any known wisdom setting; Genesis 3 belongs to a sharp “interinstitutional struggle,” but the struggle is (despite Carr’s citation of Jer 8:8-9) mainly unattested.

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68 Carr, “Politics.”

69 I find Carr, “Politics,” to be quite persuasive; but Ska (“Genesis 2-3,” pp. 4-16) supports an equally persuasive denial that Gen 2-3 involves a new account reworked in a newer one.

70 Cf. Roger Whybray’s insistence (The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study [JSOTS 53; Sheffield: JSOT, 1997] that editors need not be either more or less consistent than authors. Note that Carr’s ur-Genesis-2 remains an enigma precisely because its original literary and extra-literary contexts no longer survive.


Therefore, I will focus not on Carr’s compositional scenario but on the textual effects which he notices in the extant text. In my judgment, Carr has shown that Genesis 2-3 presents two pictures of Eden and its inhabitants, one overlaid upon and challenging the other. For this reason, even a Persian-era reader (who knew no more than we do about the compositional prehistory of the extant text) could notice the tension between the two competing visions. One of the functions of rereading is to uncover the possibility of multiple construals, presenting the audience a choice between these textual potentialities. In discussing Niditch, I noted how rereading tends to sharpen the audience’s global awareness of each context; here, I suggest that rereading can also sharpen users’ ability to notice the detailed particularities of the text, including those particularities which might invite more than one interpretation. Carr’s careful account of inner-textual layering can be read as an account of the options facing a re-reader of Genesis 2-3. 73

The first option, one which Carr associates with ur-Genesis 2, reads the garden as a model for everyday life. It is no perfect utopia, but a workplace. True, it holds an intimate congruency between land and human, and between man and woman (both represented by wordplays, הָאֲדָמָה/הָאָדָם and אִשָּׁה/אִישׁ). But this merely represents a wisdom-style observation of the orderly relationships inherent in the created world as it exists. Yhwh’s pronouncements to humanity/Adam (3:17-19) may be mere reminders that life is not easy; humanity was from the

the way, that Ska (“Genesis 2-3, pp. 21-3) also posits a sharp ideological struggle, but this time it is not within Gen 2-3 but between Gen 2-3 and Gen 1.

73 When rereading occurs in a community, the diverse responses of different readers alert the re-reader to a text’s multiple interpretive options. Hence rereading forces a choice, even if that choice is to adopt an integrative or indeterminate interpretation. See Călinescu, Rereading; Umberto Eco, Interpretation and Overinterpretation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

first created to work (2:5, 15), and nothing in the text says that humans were ever immortal.\textsuperscript{75} A re-reader who chooses this first interpretive option will also find in Genesis 3 several typical wisdom motifs, such as a knowledge-tree with \textit{desirable} (נֶחְמָד, see Prov 13:12, 21:20) fruit, made available to humanity through the instrumentality of a “prudent” (גָּרוּם, see Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 16; 22:3; 27:12) serpent and a strong, providing woman (see Prov 31).\textsuperscript{76} Together, Genesis 2-3 may represent the etiology of an orderly and productive humanity, with close ties between the genders and an appropriate development in humanity’s knowledge won by a bold woman.\textsuperscript{77} This reading may have commended itself to ancients who, despite their recognition that childbirth is painful and agriculture toilsome, seek a neutral etiology describing agrarian reality as it is.\textsuperscript{78} (Needless to say, it also commends itself to [post]modern interpreters who would rather talk about human choice and evolving consciousness than obedience, punishment, and humble acceptance of limitations.\textsuperscript{79})

\textsuperscript{75} Emphasized in Barr, \textit{Garden of Eden} (although he admits that the garden held the potential for immortality, which becomes inaccessible after humanity is expelled). Similarly, Yhwh’s words to the woman may indicate an increased sphere of productive labor (Carol Meyers, \textit{Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context} [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], pp. 95-121). I consider Gen 3:14-19 at greater length below, section 6.3.


\textsuperscript{77} The idea of “maturation” (like the idea of a “fall”) is not explicit in Gen 2-3, but one may note that when Enkidu in \textit{Gilgamesh} is taught (by a goddess) to wear clothes he moves from half-animal to fully human. See John Bailey, “Initiation and the Primal Woman in \textit{Gilgamesh} and Genesis 2-3,” \textit{JBL} 89.2 (1970): 137-50. The move from nakedness to clothing, from not recognizing nakedness to being aware of it, may thus be a real development in human knowledge/ maturity/ civilization.

\textsuperscript{78} See esp. Meyers (\textit{Discovering Eve}, pp. 72-101), locating this reading in the Iron Age.

\textsuperscript{79} See, e.g., John Goldingay, “Postmodernizing Eve and Adam (Can I Have My Apricot as Well as Eating It?)” in \textit{The World of Genesis: Person, Places, Perspectives}, ed. Philip Davies and David Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 50-59. He admits on p. 57 that his reading “would not have been possible until a few decades ago.” I do not doubt that some ancient Judeans could write a story whose main point is that one ought not obey Yhwh, but I do doubt that such a story would have made it into this particular literary collection.
But as Carr notes, another layer in the text invites a very different sort of reading. A second way of understanding the story subverts or polemicizes against any wisdom-tradition notion that humans can determine *good and evil* (טוֹב וָרָע, however understood) on their own. The search for god-like knowledge may be a form of presumptuous disobedience, ignoring the limits imposed by Yhwh. For every clue which points to a positive valuation of snake/fruit/knowledge, another clue points the opposite direction. The snake may be crafty rather than prudent, representing not (just) the pursuit of wisdom but (also) the dangerous bane of humankind. The human evolution from nakedness to clothing includes a very different devolution from unashamed (2:25) to hiding in fear (3:7, 10). The very connectedness of male and female, human and land, so emphasized in Genesis 2 helps set up a sense of loss when the first humans hide from God, the man blames the woman, and both are cast out from this garden land. On this reading, Yhwh’s threefold poetic pronouncement upon serpent, woman, and man contrasts directly with the idyllic picture in Genesis 2. In place of easy food (2:9-16), humans must toil for food (3:17-19, 23). In place of easy mastery over animals (2:19-20), humans must battle and be wounded by the snake’s descendants (3:15). In place of gender mutuality (2:21-4), the man will rule over the woman (whose longing for him is curiously one-sided). In place of the availability of the tree of life (2:9) death is now inevitable (3:19, 24).

Re-readers, then, are confronted with a choice: which set of details will prove determinative of their overall response to this story? Genesis 2-3 remains “ irresolvably

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80 Shame, unlike clothing, is not simply a characteristic of humans that separates them from the animals; it is rather the *sumnum malum* of human life (so frequently in the Psalms; see also Sirach 41:14-42:8). One may here distinguish the first attempt at using leaves as clothing (3:7), which seems inadequate and does not relieve their fear/sense of nakedness (3:10), and the second (divine) action to clothe the humans (3:21).

81 I am relying in part on reversals laid out by Carr, “Politics,” p. 587.

82 See discussion in Trible, “Love Story.”
multivalent,” with real signs of a neutral etiology or a positive upward progress as well as of a negative reversal. Yet any compelling rereading must at least take into account the dynamic which Carr points out, the way that this story confounds wisdom expectations that knowledge will bring life and plenty. Even more, I suggest that Persian-era Judeans (especially those involved in the production/preservation/usage of Genesis and other Hebrew literature) would have come at these re-reading choices rather differently than Iron Age peasants or postmodern academics. Specifically, I have been arguing that many of these Persian-era Judeans thought about their lives not just in terms of universal conditions, but specifically in terms of their own national memory of loss (exile). They would have every reason to notice that any gain in knowledge or maturity suggested by Genesis 2-3 comes at a rather significant cost. By the end of Genesis 3 the tree of life is inaccessible (3:24); humanity’s connection to the earth has been reduced to toil and death (3:16-19); bright hopes for mutuality and relationship (2:13, 23-5) have become muted (3:10, 12, and possibly the last phrases of 3:16). The pattern which will characterize Genesis 4-11 (disobedience/presumption, with escalating consequences) has been set into play. Whatever these stories might have meant (or might still mean) to other peoples in other places, Persian-era Judeans would have seen in these chapters humanity’s radical dislocation from a fruitful land that God gave, because God’s command was not obeyed. This progression—gift, disobedience,

83 Carr, “Politics,” pp. 593-5.
85 The often-repeated observation that Gen 2-3 never mentions sin or punishment may arise from wrongly ending the story of the first humans with chapter 3. As Mieke Bal (Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]) has pointed out, the story continues in Gen 4 with Eve’s bearing of Cain and Abel. Note that the toledot division does not come until 5:1. In Gen 4 sin (4:7) and punishment (4:13) are indeed prominent. To whatever degree chapters 3 and 4 are part of the same story (note parallels between Cain’s punishment and Gen 3:17-24), that story does deal explicitly with sin and punishment.
dislocation—was painfully familiar to those who read (or lived) Israel’s Persian-era accounts of its own tragic history.

Persian Judeans’ painful awareness of dislocation may also have prompted these audiences to attempt a rereading which lays out hope for a return, a chance to reverse the reversal. Genesis 3 flows naturally into 4:1; birth, hence future hope, is still possible. The heightened tragedy of Genesis 4 climaxes in the other seed of 4:25. Flood leads to covenant recreation. For that matter, the prehistory as a whole leads to Abrahamic blessing. It is in the process of rereading, of reflection that draws the widest possible connections (within each story, among the stories, and between the story world and the users’ own reality) that an eschatological understanding of Eden emerges.

5.3.2 Genesis 50:20: Rereading Memory as Hope

Above, in section 2.5, I described Genesis’ temporal orientation as three “modes”—memorial, contemporizing, and expectant—which drive users to read Genesis as their own past, present, and future. Part of what I sought to make clear is that all three modes operate simultaneously—that users of Genesis do not parse its statements out (this statement pertains to the past, that one to the present, and the other one to the future). Rather, they simultaneously experience the same promise as proleptically fulfilled in their remembered past, partially fulfilled in their contemporary present, and finally fulfilled in their expected future. Yet although this multi-pronged reading is in some senses simultaneous, it also takes place within the flow of time. In the dynamic process of reception (rereading and reflection), interlocked modes of temporal orientation may build on one another and progressively accrue meaning. I will explore this
possibility here in an extended reflection on Genesis 50:20, a verse in which Joseph explains to his brothers the significance of his sufferings at their hands:

50:20 Now you intended evil against me. God intended for good, in order to act—as this day—to keep alive a numerous people.

At first, audiences lured into a specific narrative timeframe (Joseph talking to his brothers, after the successful denouement of his story) will read Joseph’s this day as a memorable moment in the history of God’s provision/protection of Israel. This is the immediately obvious reading of the phrase this day when it is in a character’s speech; compare here Genesis 48:15, where Jacob is blessing Joseph and references God’s beneficence shepherding all my life to this day. So in 50:20 the numerous people are the 74 who settled in Goshen (i.e., the seventy of 46:27, plus Joseph and his wife and two sons). To keep alive is their survival in famine (47:27, relieving the suspense of verses like 42:2, 43:8). The whole verse functions for users as memory, confirming that in the past God preserved Israel—and reminding users that without divine preservation they would never have come to exist as Israel at all.

But in the dynamic process of rereading/reflection, audiences make more varied intertextual and extratextual connections. Such reflection may rather easily suggest that 1) Joseph’s this day (כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה) connects to Genesis’ indexical this day passages which reference the time of the ongoing audience, 86 and 2) Joseph’s numerous people (גוּני) connects to Genesis’ various promises to multiply/make numerous (root רבא) the descendants of Abraham (16:10;

86 The only other non-etiological usage of הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה is 48:15, where Jacob affirms that God shepherded me all my life to this day. As it occurs in direct speech, the phrase’s temporal “present” is the time of Jacob speaking—not the audience’s present. Nevertheless, even here the fact that Jacob is Israel, and that God is still Israel’s shepherd (see, e.g., Ps 23), suggests a certain blurring of temporal frames between narrated past and narratorial present.
that these promises have already been fulfilled by the time of Joseph’s speaking the words of 50:20? At one level, the users of Genesis may answer yes, citing 47:27: in Egypt, the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly. At another level, such users must suspect that 47:27 is itself only a partial fulfillment or, perhaps, an anticipatory statement of what will occur in subsequent centuries; the 74 members of Jacob’s family are hardly uncountable as the sands of the sea. The promise of multiplication and fruitfulness, as attested in the prophetic literature, is an ongoing promise for the ongoing descendants of Abraham, who still anticipate being the great nation promised in 12:2 (note that גוֹי גָּדוֹל parallels גָּוִי נַעֲרֵי נַעֲרִים). For this reason, users attuned to the evocative clues in Genesis 50:20 will shift their temporal frames and reread Joseph’s this day as the ongoing this day of the story’s latest readers. The numerous people are not just the 74 but also ongoing Israel, descended from Abraham and from Jacob’s family.

The dynamics of rereading do not leave behind the narrative-world memorial meaning. But they take up (in addition to it) a contemporizing application, a conviction that Genesis 50:20 is speaking of the ongoing ability of God to use evil for good, to keep alive Israel despite and by means of various tragedies, and above all to assure Israel’s survival as the numerous people promised to the ancestors.87 Such readings do not just match the audience’s experience of its present; they create the audience’s experience of its present. They invite, commend, and compel a vision of today in terms of Israel’s ongoing preservation. At the same time, because contemporizing-mode rereadings of Genesis 50:20 build on the prior memorial mode, Genesis’ assured present takes on certain characteristics of the past. The present is stable, as though it were already past; the current divine preservation is not a new moment in which Israel just now

87 Clines (Theme, p. 99) insists that Gen 50:20, no less than 50:25, is about Israel’s exile.
experiences fulfillment, but a continuation of a prolonged history in which Israel can remember God already having fulfilled this promise.

The rereading of Genesis 50:20 need not stop with a contemporizing application; an audience in tiny Persian Judea may ask whether, indeed, God is currently keeping alive a numerous people. Are they actually numerous? If not, they may take comfort in reflecting that neither was Joseph’s family at the time he spoke these words. Joseph’s confident proclamation, on the surface a grateful acknowledgement of what God had already done, is on reflection a confident expression of what God will continue to do. This expectant reading is more tentative, since it is only by extension that an audience will read about this day and ask about tomorrow. Yet it proves fruitful, precisely because Joseph is not just celebrating a single moment of preservation but rather is calling attention to the assured process by which God preserves Israel on its journey forward in time. God acts to keep alive (לְהַחֲיֹת) Joseph’s family, not that it may live complacently in its current conditions in Egyptian Goshen (however appreciated those conditions might be to a family recently threatened with starvation), but precisely that it might move toward the promised future. In a future-oriented rereading, Joseph’s contented appreciation of what God is doing today (50:20) merges with Joseph’s discontented insistence that his bones remain unburied until God does something tomorrow, a coming visitation (50:24-25). 88 Taken together, these verses invite the audience to join Joseph in expecting that God’s present preservation of Israel as a numerous people will lead to greater things—at the very least, to an eventual reconstitution of Israel as a great nation upon her own land, as promised throughout Genesis.

88 Clines (Theme, p. 85) argues, contra Bruce Dahlberg (“On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” Theology Digest 24 [1977]: 360-7), that at the end of Genesis “Nothing is solved.” The same applies, perhaps, to the Pentateuch’s ending, or the Primary History’s; see Zvi, “Looking at the Primary (Hi)story.”
Again, the third mode is built upon the first two; or, to put it differently, the three modes interact dynamically, such that each rereading and reapplication of Genesis 50:20 interweaves all three modes in creative combination. The expected hope is assured by the proleptic past and the partial present. The present is characterized not only by current experiences of being kept alive, but also by current experiences of expecting God to keep acting. The past which Israel remembers is a past which looked forward to today, and beyond today to tomorrow. Time is both condensed into an ongoing mythic present (a sort of timeless *today*) and stretched out into an extended historical sequence of *todays*—each complete with its own remembered past and its own awaited future, each attesting to God’s consistent but diverse acts of preservation. In effect, sufficient rereading of Genesis invites a creative synthesis of meaning, a meta-orientation that merges qualities of past, present, and future. Perhaps *eschatology* is the best name for this meta-orientation.

5.4 Dynamic Retelling: Post-Persian Witnesses to an Eschatological Understanding of Genesis

5.4.1 Introduction to Post-Persian Interpretations

So far, I have tried to show how rereadings of Genesis may operate on multiple levels: the text speaks simultaneously to users’ past, present, and future. As ongoing rereaders are affected by the history of rereading Genesis, the generative process of interpretation may in fact merge all three temporal modes into a new synthesis that is not simply past, present, or future.89

89 Yuri Lotman (*Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* [trans. Ann Shukman; Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1990], p. 18) has explored most fully the cultural implications of language as a
Genesis ultimately comes to orient its users to a future which shares characteristics with the past (eschatological hope has already been fixed and determined in God’s past words and actions) and also with the present (eschatological hope is lived out in present human praxis). In this section, I will try to show that the earliest extant interpretations of Genesis—writings that renarrate, summarize, or in other ways show signs of using Genesis—bear witness to the way that Genesis’ cumulative meaning follows this eschatological interpretive trajectory.

I believe these post-Persian interpretations of Genesis provide indirect evidence about what Genesis meant in the Persian period. Even if this evidence must be used judiciously, it at least give a solid starting point by providing directly attested, ancient examples of Genesis’ reception. Just as one must work backward from the earliest attested manuscript evidence (from the late Second Temple) in order to explore earlier sources, so one must work backward from the earliest attested interpretive usages (from the late Second Temple) in order to explore earlier meanings. Neither methodology assumes that the late Second Temple period has normative status; this period simply provides the earliest accessible evidence of what people read when they read Genesis—and how people reacted to what they read.90

“generator of new meanings”; a re-used text becomes “a metonymy” for the “sum of the contexts in which [it] acquires interpretation,” such that ongoing re-readings are “incorporated in it.” The text becomes “the memory of all its interpretations.” Note that Lotman does not mean that reading contexts hijack the text’s own meaning; on the contrary, he believes that each text contains a “reservoir of dynamism,” and (like “a grain of wheat”) “contains within itself the programme of its future development”—its meaning is both a result of practices of usage and a cause of those very practices, a “stimulus of cultural dynamics.”

90 As I noted in my introduction (section 1.2.1), Laato’s semiotic (Peircean) model requires an I-reading (ideologically aligned to receive the text) before pursuing any tensions that would guide the M-reading (bringing modern historical questions to bear). See not only Laato, History and Ideology, pp. 321-96, but also idem, “About Zion I Will Not Be Silent”: The Book of Isaiah as an Ideological Unity (Coniectanea Biblica OT Series 44; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1998). In the latter volume, Laato finds the entry point to Isaiah’s meaning in attested readings of Isaiah—i.e., the interpretive references to Isaiah in extant Second Temple texts (Ben Sira, Qumran, Josephus, The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, rabbinical exegesis, and Isaiah Targum).
Again, no strict line exists between the re-interpretation of Genesis and the compositional processes discussed in section 5.2 above—or the rereadings discussed in 5.3. Many of the works which I will cite in this section are themselves rewritings of Genesis. They testify to an understanding of Genesis which has stabilized but has not frozen, and continues to be adapted in translations/ expansions. (The addition of Masoretic markings to the consonantal Hebrew is itself another, much later textual adaptation.) Small yet significant variations—witnessing to diverse meanings/ usage—exist not only between “the” MT and “the” LXX, but within the Masoretic or Septuagintal textual traditions, among the Greek texts, and also among the various modern printings, reconstructions, and translations of Genesis. Although most of these changes are subtle, some of them may give significant information about Genesis’ eschatological re-usage.

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91 Sidnie Crawford (Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]), rightly highlights the ambiguous “sliding scale” between harmonistic textual traditions (e.g., pre-Samaritan manuscripts), more expansive reworkings of the Pentateuch (e.g., 4Q364-7), and new written creations like Jubilees and Genesis Apocryphon (or, for legal materials, the Temple Scroll). This last group, however, seems to retain an awareness of the Pentateuch as a separate text that they do not seek to replace; thus Jubilees, for example, can refer back to “the first Law.” Recent treatments of Scriptural texts at Qumran highlight the tolerance for parallel textual traditions even within the same community; see Crawford, Rewriting Scripture; Emmanuel Tov, “Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible 1947-1997,” in Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism: A Symposium in Honour of Adam S van der Woude on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday, ed. Florentino García Martínez and Edward Noort (Leiden: Brill, 1998): 61-81; Eugene Ulrich, “The Community of Israel and the Composition of the Scriptures,” The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A Sanders, ed. Craig Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 327-42; and James VanderKam, “Questions of Canon Viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Bulletin for Biblical Research 11.2 (2001): 269-92.


93 I do not here attempt a full discussion of the changing text of Genesis. I will mention the complex question of possible eschatologizing in the (late Second Temple) Septuagint translation; see Johan Lust, Messianism and the Septuagint: Collected Essays ed. K. Hauspie (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004); Emmanuel Tov, “Theologically Motivated Exegesis Embedded in the Septuagint,” in Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15-16, 1989 (Philadelphia: Annenberg, 1990): 215-33. Brayford (Genesis) suggests that several Greek translation choices might attest an eschatological understanding of its Hebrew Vorlage. She argues that the Greek has added “my servant” (τοῦ παίδος μου) to Gen 18:17-18, “perhaps . . . . as a subtle way of portraying the upcoming conversation . . . . as an early example of how later prophets would negotiate with God” (Brayford, p. 315); and that it has added τ殓ος (end) to 46:4’s prediction of Jacob’s return. She notes that the
Unfortunately, space does not allow a full consideration of Genesis’ fascinating history of transformation/reception/interpretation; I here merely point to some of the earliest post-Persian texts which interpret Genesis, and the trajectory of their interpretations. As I do so, I briefly address some of the re-reading options which these various texts represent, and how this relates to the eschatological understanding of Genesis for which I have been arguing. Admittedly, some of these sources are later than others, and some may be reading against the grain of Genesis (correcting a text which troubles the late Second Temple authors) rather than explicating the received meaning from the Persian period. Still, together they are indicative of the sorts of approaches that ancient readers could take to the text of Genesis, and therefore they give a rough picture of Genesis’ history of effects. Here, then, are some of the interpretive trends which I have observed, and their significance for eschatology.

5.4.2 Six Interpretive Trends

First, the interpretive tradition reads the first chapters of Genesis in terms of God’s creation purposes for humanity—a blueprint for life as it should be and hence life in the eschaton. Admittedly, such readings must significantly adapt Genesis’ rather terse and multivalent descriptions of the original creation. But they are, it seems to me, clearly working with an understanding of Genesis 1-3 that assumes that the world may still return to some perfect state.

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Greek translates 41:16’s שלום (peace) as σωτηρίαν (salvation), and translates בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים in 49:1 as έν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ημέρᾳ (both mean roughly in the end of the days, but Brayford [p. 443] claims that the Greek is more clearly eschatological).

So, for example, the Enochic Book of Watchers (1 En 1-36) describes the center of the cosmos as a forested mountain, containing one special fruit tree which cannot be touched “until the great judgment” (1 En 25:4); at that point its fruit will cause the chosen to “live a long life on earth, as your fathers lived, and in their days sorrow and pain and toil and punishment will not touch them” (1 En 25:6; see also 61:12). Here the tree of life does not confer immortality, but does guarantee a long life (like the lifespan of the early characters in Genesis, “your fathers”); humanity’s expulsion from the tree of life is blamed not for mortality per se, but for the particular problem of short life or untimely death. Moreover, the reference to “sorrow and pain and toil and punishment” evokes a specific understanding of Yhwh’s pronouncement of toil and pain in Genesis 3. Overall, Enoch’s vision here bespeaks an understanding of the Eden story as an etiology of the negative conditions of life, but also an eschatological hint of the ideal conditions that (now lost) will one day be regained by the chosen.

Jubilees confirms that readers did not miss the connection between Eden and the sanctuary; the garden is “holier than all the rest of the earth,” and provides the etiology for laws about entering the sanctuary (Jub 3:12-13). Thus, although it portrays a mythically discrete past (in Jub 28-29 the animals were able to talk before they, like the humans, were expelled from Eden), it also relates to users’ ongoing cultic experience. In this connection, it is significant that Jubilees tells a story in which Enoch is translated into the garden of Eden (Jub 4:23-6), which therefore must still exist beyond the story of Adam and Eve.95 Thus Jubilees tempers the inaccessibility of Eden (it clearly exists on a separate plane, temporally and spatially) with the notion that those who enter sacred space or who have visionary experiences may somehow

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approach Eden. Those who hope for a future access to the sacred or hidden realm may also expect this to take the form of a return to Eden.

Finally, even more neutral etiological usage of the first chapters of Genesis may carry a hint of regaining a lost ideal state. So, for example, Sirach 15:14-17 describes Genesis 3 as simply a prototypical moral choice, not unlike those that all humans make; yet it is also true that for Sirach such moral choices ultimately control one’s eschatological fate. When Tobit 8:6 quotes Genesis 2:18, 24 as a straightforward celebration of marriage, it may be significant that this celebration occurs precisely when a demon has been vanquished (8:1-3), a seemingly inevitable death has been averted (see 8:9-14), and utopian blessing will be invoked upon the newlyweds (8:7, 15-17). At the least, these passages show the way that the Eden story’s elements (marriage, or choices between good and evil) act as templates for the audience’s ongoing life; at the most, these passages are using Eden precisely as a guide to how one may pursue (regain?) the ideal human state.

Second, several sources find in Genesis the cosmic origins of evil. As discussed above, 1 Enoch 25:6 associates suffering (including “punishment”) with the inaccessibility of the tree of life and hence with the judgment/ expulsion narrated in Genesis 3. Jubilees tells the story of Genesis 3, but adds little to Genesis’ account; Sirach for the most part accepts mortality as the “decree from of old” that forms a natural part of life (14:7-8), assuming that God grants limited lifespans—along with power, dominion over animals, and wisdom/ knowledge of good and evil—as an act of “favor” (17:1-8, alluding to Gen 1-3). The same acceptance of death as “the Lord’s decree for all flesh” occurs in Sirach 41:4. Yet that does not mean that Sirach is unaware of a negative side to human existence, read through the garden story; 41:4 occurs in the midst of reflection upon troubles (41:1-13), and 40:1-11 describes the “heavy yoke laid on the children of
Adam” (v. 1; cf. Gen 3:17-19) before describing death as a return to the earth (v. 11; see Gen 3:19).96

Later, Wisdom of Solomon 2:23-4 stipulates that humanity’s creation in God’s image (Gen 1:26-7) involves some sort of immortality, and that “by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it” (cf. also Philo, Questions on Genesis 1:16; 2 Enoch 31:3-6). Thus Genesis 3 somehow effects the origin of death, even if “death” here means the permanent spiritual death of the wicked (those in the devil’s possession). Similarly, Sirach 25:23, in a brief (and sexist) interpretation of Genesis 3, blames sin and death on “a woman” (Eve). These sources may not, as Schmid argues, imply that humanity was immortal before eating the forbidden fruit.97 They do, however, associate life (even if metaphorical) with Genesis 2, and associate death (however understood) with the disobedience of Genesis 3. Reading long life (or spiritual immortality) into the story of Eden, and short life (or spiritual destruction) into the loss of Eden, surely has eschatological implications not too unlike the disobedience-death versus righteousness-life polarity in prophetic eschatology.98


97 Schmid, “Loss of Immortality?”: Since the general message of Sirach is that God created humans mortal, 25:24 is either a redactional addition or means only “early death” (contrasted with the long life which comes from having a good wife; see 26:1-2). Schmid argues that mortality is humanity’s created state in Wisd Sol (7:1), 1 En (15:3-7), 2 Bar (17:2-3; 21:10; 40:3; 54:15; 85:5), 4 Ez (3:9f, 7:118f), Josephus (Ant I, 46), and Philo (De opificio mundi 134f.). Even if Schmid is right and none of these sources think humans were ever immortal, I think he seriously underplays the utopian character of later references to Eden—and hence, perhaps, of Gen 2 itself.

Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 is careful to blame the origins of death on the devil (the snake?) rather than on Adam; 10:1-2 insists that “the first-formed father” was protected or delivered “from his transgression,” “raised up,” and given “power to rule all things.” After all, the death sentence of Gen 2:17 does not literally come to pass, and presumably the gift of authority in Gen 1:26-28 continues outside of Eden (cf. Gen 9:1-3; Ps 8). Wisdom of Solomon continues by contrasting Adam with the prototypical sinner, fratricidal Cain, on whom the flood is blamed (Wisd Sol 10:3-4). This begins a long dualistic summary of the wicked versus the (saved) righteous: Noah versus the flooded world (10:4), Abraham versus the tower-building nations . . . put to confusion (10:5), Lot versus Sodom and Gomorrah (10:6-8), Jacob versus his oppressors/enemies (10:9-12), and Joseph versus his accusers (10:13-14). Wisdom of Solomon also reads Genesis’ account of the Canaanites’ origins in terms of the same basic dualism between the righteous and the unrighteous; their “inborn” wickedness is “from the beginning” (Wisd Sol 12:10-11; cf. Gen 9:25-7). Sirach 33:10-15 demonstrates the same polarity, reading Genesis 2’s creation story (God forming humanity “from the earth”) as the origin of an innate distinction between “the sinners” (whom God “curses and brings low and expels from their place”) and “the righteous” (whom God “blesses and makes great”; compare Gen 12:2-3). Grounding this dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked in Israel’s myths of origins may lend the distinction a timeless weight which feeds the expectation of eschatological judgment.

A rather different take on the origins and nature of evil occurs in the tradition reading a rebellion of semi-divine “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4 (Enoch; Wis 14:6; Jub 5:1, 5; 7:21-5; 20:5; 29:9-11; Sir 16:7; Bar 3:26-8; 3 Macc 2:4). This complex Watcher-myth dominates Enoch, where it seems to explain both the origins of evil before the flood (1 En 6-11) and the continuation of evil after the flood (1 En 12-16, especially 15:9; 16:1; see Jub 7:27)—an explanation set within the context of the eschatological judgment in which evil will be decisively
dealt with (1 En 1-5, 10:13-11:2). In fact, the later Enochic Animal Apocalypse (1 En 85-90) omits the events of Genesis 3 (serpent, fruit, and expulsion from Eden) entirely, even though it retells the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen 2) and Cain’s murder of Abel (Gen 4)—and narrates at length the “fall” of the angelic beings. Again, the context is the hope of an eschatological solution which will at last reverse the effects of this cosmic disorder.

Third, interpretations tend to read predictive prophecies into the mouths of Genesis’ characters. Enoch is the prime example, a prophet of the quasi-eschatology of the flood (especially in the Epistle of Enoch [1 En 106-7] and related material in the Genesis Apocryphon [col. 1-2]) and indeed a foreteller of all future history (especially in the Animal Apocalypse [1 En 85-90]). It is telling that an ancestor from the beginning of Israel’s story is the most logical figure to receive a revelation about the ending of Israel’s story. The key to the present and future is the ancient past, and these Enochic ex eventu prophecies review history in order to order current life.

99 James VanderKam (“The Interpretation of Genesis in 1 Enoch,” in The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation, ed. Peter Flint [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2001]: 129–48, esp. pp. 138-40) argues persuasively that BW not only expands on Gen 6:1–4 but actually responds to a (perceived) problem in Genesis, namely Genesis’ lack of sufficient explanation for the evil which leads to the flood (see Gen 6: 5–7) and which continues after it (see Gen 8:21). Contrast the suggestion of J. Milik (The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4 [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976], p. 31) that Gen 6:1–4 depends on 1 En 6–19. See George Nickelsburg, “Eschatology: Early Jewish Literature,” ABD 2: 579-609, p. 583; Philip Alexander, “The Enochic Literature and the Bible: Intertextuality and Its Implications,” in The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Jutæan Desert Discoveries, ed. Edward Herbert and Emmanuel Tov (London: The British Library, 2002): 57-68. Moshe Bernstein (“Contours of Genesis Interpretation at Qumran: Contents, Context, and Nomenclature,” in Studies in Ancient Midrash, ed. James Kugel [Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001]: 57-85, pp 60-61) suggests that Enoch is largely interested in using Genesis material as a springboard for telling its own stories; yet even such expansive reading (see also Jubilees) may belong to the history of Genesis’ effects, indicating some of the interpretive moves possible to users already in the Persian period—for example, the possibility of expanding upon Genesis’ terse narrative style, of speculating about its suggestive mythic references (see Gen 6:1-4 and 28:10-17), and of contrasting the intended cosmic order with the disordered world in which Genesis’ users may find themselves.

and point to the end. A similar interpretive tradition can be discerned in the way that Jubilees repeatedly has pre-Sinaitic ancestors (including Enoch, Noah, and Abraham) narrate some form of the coming Mosaic law—and then give eschatological speeches which schematize history and carry it forward to the end of Israel’s story (Jub 1:7-18; 7:34-8; 15:31-4). So also Genesis Apocryphon (col 13-15) narrates the visions of Noah, with a seemingly apocalyptic eschatology (col 15, lines 9-13). Such interpretations raise the possibility that Genesis’ predictive visions (e.g., 15:12-21) or prophetic blessings (e.g., 49:1-28) are being read as a review, set at the beginning of Israel’s story, of what Israel’s future still holds—up to and including the eschaton.

Fourth, Noah’s worldwide flood is in several sources a transparent symbol for a coming eschatological destruction. The flood has loomed large in my last two paragraphs (on the origins of evil and the ex eventu prophecies of Enoch). But I believe the flood-eschaton typology is a particularly powerful interpretation of Genesis’ end of all flesh (Gen 6:13) and post-judgment new beginning (see, e.g., Gen 9:1). As Street has mentioned, Noah’s flood uses typological language even in Genesis itself. The summary in Sirach 44:17-18 further highlights the flood’s prototypical function as a “time of wrath” in which “a remnant” survives. This summary also attests a way of reading the flood story less as a story about destruction and more as a story about survival (most of v. 17) and promise (all of v. 18). Noah’s flood seems to

101 See Crawford, Rewriting Scripture.

102 Daniel Streett, “As It Was in the Days of Noah: The Prophets’ Typological Interpretation of Noah’s Flood,” Criswell Theological Review 5.1 (2007): 33-51, pp. 38-9. He also mentions 8:22 (as long as the earth endures, a possible hint at an eschatological end to the earth) and concludes, “At the very least, the Pentateuch contains an openness that allows, even invites, eschatological interpretation of its narratives.” See Louis Feldman, “Questions About the Great Flood, as Viewed by Philo, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, and the Rabbis,” ZAW 115 (2003): 401-22.

103 See Nickelsburg, “Eschatology: Early Jewish Literature,” p. 582. Nickelsburg also notes that the “Isaiah apocalypse” tradition, which compares the coming judgment to the primeval flood (Is 24:17-23, discussed in my section 4.3.2.1), may also be post-Persian (some date it as late as the third century B.C.E.).
represent the *new creation* that will follow eschatological judgment, not just destruction alone.\(^{104}\) Thus in Wisdom of Solomon 14:6-7 Noah is the “hope of the world” who “left to the world the seed of a new generation.” In Jubilees 5:12, God makes after the flood a “new and righteous nature, so [his works] would not sin in their whole nature forever”; in context this may speak of an eschatological righteousness, since Jubilees 5:13-18 is a lengthy digression *from* the flood story to talk about the coming judgment. The same eschatological hope is attested in 1 Enoch 10:1-11:2, where universal righteousness follows the flood and endures “for all the days of eternity.”\(^{105}\) In fact, this passage’s agricultural imagery (a “righteous plant” or “seed” that will escape the flood and be established “forever,” 1 En 10:3, 16-17) is taken up by later Enochic eschatology (cf. the Book of Dreams, 1 En 84:5-6).\(^{106}\) Finally, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah joins the flood as an example of future judgment (see Jub 16:5-6; 20:5-6; 22:22; Wisd Sol 10:6-8; 3 Macc 2:4-5), including eschatological judgment. So Jubilees 36:10 compares this past destruction to the future fate of evildoers, “eternal execration . . . in wrath and in torment and in indignation and in plagues and in disease forever.”\(^{107}\)

Fifth, late Second Temple texts tend to read the ancestral narratives in terms of the promise, and to read that promise as constitutive of ongoing Israelites and their hopes of


deliverance. Baruch 2:34-5 mentions the land grant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the context of a typical prophetic prediction of the sort I have been calling restoration eschatology. Tobit lists Noah as well as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as “ancestors of old” who “were blessed in their children, and their posterity will inherit the land” (4:12). This promise is properly eschatological, as becomes clear in 14:5-7: the true return of “the Israelites who are to be saved” to “the land of Abraham, which will be given over to them” and where they “will dwell in security forever” (14:7) delays “until the period when the times of fulfillment will come” (14:5).

Sirach 44:19-23, which tells the story of the ancestors, for the most part passes over their unique characteristics and conflates them into a single history of “covenant” or “oath” or “blessing.” Several points are worth emphasizing here: first, that the blessing of the nations through Abraham’s seed is clear and emphatic; second, that the various promises (great nation, land, and individual tribal inheritances) have been brought together; and third, that the terms of the promise are significantly expanded in two minor changes. In 44:21 Abraham’s offspring are not multiplied as the stars in the sky (so Gen 22:16; 26:4; this is surely implied by the command to count the stars in 15:5; cf. also Exod 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22; 28:62; 1 Chr 27:23; Neh 9:23)

The books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, which may come from the Hellenistic era, contain summaries of Genesis material as the beginning of Israel’s larger history from exodus to exile. In general, these summaries locate Israel within a tradition of promise and partial fulfillment (see Neh 9:6-8) despite current distress/disgrace (see Neh 9:32, 36-7; Ezra 9:7-8). For a similar summary see Jud 5:6-10. In some passages, the reference to the ancestral stories seems particularly geared toward an ongoing expectation of salvation (see here 1 Chron 16 [compare Psalm 105]; 2 Chron 20:7). This association of Abraham with salvation becomes even more pronounced in Greek Esther (13:15, 14:5, 18) as well as in 3 Macc 6:2-3.

All of this is in the context of a full restoration eschatology, mentioning the fulfillment of the prophetic word (14:5), the conversion of “all the nations of the world” (14:6; see 13:11), the rebuilding of Jerusalem “with splendor” (14:5; see 13:16-18), and a moral reformation (they will “truly be mindful of God” and “sincerely love God,” 14:7; see 13:6). There may also be hints of Gen 12:1-3 in Tob 13:12, where those who “speak a harsh word against you” are “accursed” but those who “build you up” are “blessed.” Nickelsburg, “Eschatology,” says that since this restoration is explicitly permanent it must count as eschatology.

The Greek passive (ἐνεκλογηθοῦσαν, they will be blessed), unlike the Hebrew nifal or hithpael (נִבְרְכֻת / הָבְרָכְחוֹת), cannot be reflexive. Note that Sir 44:19-23 makes the promise to the nations the first promise to Abraham (44:21b, “that the nations would be blessed through his offspring”) and to Jacob (44:22b, “The blessing of all people”).

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but are instead *exalted* like the stars (cf. Dan 12:3). In the last phrase of the same verse the promised land is expanded, “from Sea to Sea and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth.”\(^{111}\) Together, these two minor changes intimate that the promise of numerous people and extensive property has become something more, a star-like (angelic?) status and a *worldwide* inheritance (compare Dan 12:3; Ps 2:8).

**Sixth** and finally, many late Second Temple texts begin to portray the ancestors as ethical exemplars. So Sirach 44:19-20 speaks of Abraham’s unparalleled “glory” (perhaps associated with the *great name* of Gen 12:2) and of his law-keeping (see Gen 26:5), circumcision (“covenant in his flesh,” see Gen 17), and faithfulness when tested (see Gen 22). Sirach 49:14-16 ends the litany of famous ancestors by re-emphasizing the unparalleled greatness of Genesis characters like Enoch, Joseph, Shem, Seth, Enosh, and Adam.\(^{112}\) Other texts tell stories of Abraham’s stand against idolatry (see Jub 11:16; 12:1-14; Ps Philo, *Bib Antiq* 6:2-18; Targ Ps Jon on Gen 11:28; Apoc of Ab 8:1-6; Gen Rab 38:13).\(^{113}\) Some of Genesis’ interpretations, but by no means all, latch onto and heighten its somewhat mixed endorsement of endogamy (see, e.g., Tob 4:12; Jub 4:33; 34:21). So Jubilees 30:4-10 (cf. Judith 9:2-4) valorizes Simeon and Levi for their violent

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\(^{111}\) See here Zech 9:10. Genesis rarely mentions the borders of the promised land, usually promising only *this land* (12:7; 15:7; 24:7; 48:4); *all these lands* (26:4); the land which Abraham *sees* (13:15) or upon which he *walks* (13:17), which Jacob is *lying on* (28:13); and, of course, the land *which I gave to Abraham and Isaac* (35:12) or *swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob* (50:24). Slightly more precise is 17:8, where the land Abraham is given, *the land of your travels*, is called *the land of Canaan*. The former phrase is in 28:4 (and implied in 26:3), and the equation with Canaan is in 37:1. But the geographic extent of Canaan is quite uncertain, and only 15:18 stipulates actual boundaries to the land Abraham’s seed is given: from the Nile (river of Egypt) to the Euphrates.

\(^{112}\) It is, perhaps, significant that in the Hebrew and Syriac of Sir 49:15 Joseph is praised solely for his final act of hope (having his bones preserved for the return to the promised land); the Greek also mentions Joseph’s leadership of his brothers and support of his people, a probable expansion (if the fuller description of Joseph were original, I see no reason for the Heb and Syr to omit it).

rejection of intermarriage with the Shechemites in Genesis 34, but 4 Maccabees 2:19-20 praises Jacob for rebuking Simeon and Levi in Genesis 49:7. Several texts, most notably Jubilees, not only portray the ancestors as ethical exemplars but emphasize their obedience to the (Mosaic) Torah, a trend which continues in early rabbinic writings and is already implied in Genesis 26:5.

Sometimes this ethical-exemplar function seems to serve an eschatological function. So for example the Akedah (Gen 22) is a favorite story in the retellings of Genesis, and seems to be conflated with the similar test of Job, in that a demonic figure provokes God’s decision to command Isaac’s sacrifice (see, e.g., Jub 17:16; 18:9, 12). For 4 Maccabees (7:14, 15:28) the Akedah is an example of willingly accepted martyrdom, for oneself or one’s children. The point is also made in 18:11, where Isaac joins Abel and Joseph as an example of an innocent victim. Even more, in 16:20-21 Abraham’s act, and Isaac’s refusal to cower, join Daniel (in the pit of lions) and Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael (in the fiery furnace) as examples of a “faith in God” that will “not be grieved.” Accepting martyrdom makes people “true descendants of father Abraham” (17:6). Of course, 4 Maccabees also considers the ancestors prominent examples of the life that follows death (7:19; 13:17; 16:25; 18:23).

114 Crawford (Rewriting Scripture) notes that Jubilees, following the earlier Aramaic Levi Document, also gives Levi a special blessing from Isaac (Jub 31), a heavenly vision (Jub 32), and a tithe from Jacob (Jub 32; cf. Gen 14:17-20). These straightforward additions, it seems to me, point indirectly to a possible understanding of Genesis as insufficiently interested in the priesthood/Levi (and hence such details had to be added).

5.4.3 Summary of Late Second Temple Interpretations

All of these themes come from material that (probably) dates to the late Second Temple period. In general, the interpretive trends in these earliest witnesses resemble the prophetic language which parallels Genesis (see above, chapter 4), and may be grouped into two different sorts of expectation: ancient cosmic disasters (especially the flood and the rain of fire and sulfur) still stand for a coming judgment, and the ancient blessing (at creation as well as to the ancestors) still stand for Yhwh’s ongoing commitment to salvation and re-creation. The two are, of course, connected; God’s ability to pre-ordain human destiny (including both blessing and cursing) rests on God’s creative actions (Sir 33:9-13); “creation, serving you who made it, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous” (Wisd Sol 16:24). These two strands of Genesis interpretation represent an early and persistent tradition of understanding what this story means, not just within its own story-world, but within the world of its community of users. Both of these two interpretive trajectories have implications for the present (judgment and/or salvation currently being experienced), but both also apply to Israel’s expectation of a future eschaton of cosmic judgment and promise-keeping salvation.

116 Space does not allow me to consider the eschatological interpretations of Genesis in works that postdate the destruction of the temple, from 4 Ezra (2 Esdras 3-14) to 2 Baruch (see, e.g., 56:5-6; 72-4) to the New Testament, rabbinic sources, Aramaic targumim, and the like.
6. Rereading Genesis’ Promise-Eschatology

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I give my final account of Genesis’ eschatology as users wrote and rewrote it, read and reread it, in Persian-era Judea. Already I have attempted to survey the whole book in terms of temporal orientation (chapter 2), to describe its historical contexts of usage among Persian-era Judeans (chapter 3), to trace its major intertextual connections with the Persian-era eschatology attested in the prophetic corpus (chapter 4), and to discuss specific passages that seem particularly important in the dynamic re-usage of Genesis both before and after the Persian period (chapter 5). In this chapter I apply all of this information to one more rereading of eschatology in Genesis, seeking to bring together literary and contextual clues.

I begin by discussing (6.2) the literary shape of Genesis, suggesting once again that promise is the key to the book’s narrative strategy. Note that my primary goal is not to uncover a hitherto-unknown literary clue planted by a brilliantly arcane ancient editor, but rather to account for the ways that whole communities of users rewrote and reread Genesis over time. As a result, my comments on Genesis’ literary structure mainly serve to review some of the more obvious effects of Genesis when users receive it as a whole. Where various structurally-oriented analyses of Genesis argue for various ways of diagramming its material, Genesis’ users throughout the centuries have not read according to any single plan but rather have followed the branching webs of connections binding this book into a more fluid unity. This fluid unity manifests itself through various matched themes (drought and plenty, blessing and cursing, sibling rivalry and family unity, exile and homeland) which together suggest a narrative movement from blessing through various threats toward a promise of restoration.
In sections 6.3 and 6.4, I exegetically explore two specific passages as two windows into the eschatological impact of Genesis’ narrative strategy. I choose two poetic comments on the narrative because I think they are prominently placed to reflect on the narrative action from the perspective of the beginning of Genesis’ story (1-3) and its ending (49-50).\(^1\) I will show that Genesis 3:14-19 explores the inciting incident which launches Genesis’ narrative struggles, and that Genesis 49:1-28 summarizes how those struggles produce an eschatological oriented people known as Israel. In other words, these poems comment upon the way Genesis’ narrative opens and upon the way it is resolved (or fails to be resolved). Each poem has a well-known quasi-messianic verse embedded within it (3:15 and 49:10), but also holds a broader eschatological message within the context of the rest of Genesis. I will attempt to show how each poem resonates with language that is particularly potent in Genesis (especially language of blessing/cursing and of seed/fruit/multiplication), and speaks to Persian-era Judeans who bear a traumatic memory of exile/subjugation and maintain a hopeful expectation for the future.\(^2\) In a sense, each of these poems presents in miniature the Persian-era eschatology of Genesis as a whole.

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\(^1\) For a discussion of the prominence of beginnings and endings in literature, see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For a discussion of the prominence of poetic “hymns” inset into Hebrew narrative, see James Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). Watts considers here only praise-songs (“psalms”) and hence does not discuss the long poems inset into Genesis’ narrative; but note Watts’ historical-rhetorical suggestion (pp. 186-9) that songs set within narrative were *sung* as “show-stoppers” in the midst of the reading/hearing of the story, a function only magnified when those songs occurred in “final or near-final positions.” On pp. 190-91, he cites Henning Graf Reventlow (*Gebet im Alten Testament* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986], p. 284) and Peter Ackroyd (“An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38-39,” *SJT* 27 [1974], p. 345) to suggest that songs inset within narratives “aid in the appropriation of the narratives . . . as authoritative guides for the readers’ beliefs and lives.” Thus, analysis of Gen 3:14-19 and 49:1-28 may help elucidate how Genesis’ whole narrative orients its ancient users within their lived contexts.

\(^2\) In keeping with what I have written in chapter four, I am not here interested in how all inhabitants of Persian-era Judea may have thought/acted/worshipped/hoped. Rather, I am trying to paint a portrait of those who used Hebrew-language texts in order to construe a self-identity as Yahwist members of Israel. Given the limited literate population of Judea at this time, I am supposing that this group of “scripture”-users would have a shared interest in all the surviving Hebrew literature from the period.
Finally, in section 6.5 I discuss the eschatological ethics of Genesis as it might have functioned for Persian-era Judeans. I begin with the clue of a late Pentateuchal redaction-layer, probably from the Persian period, which tries to present the meaning of Genesis (and of the rest of the Pentateuch) in terms of the faith enjoined by the prophetic literature. I then show that this issue of faith (or trust) is a primary issue not just for Genesis’ characters, but also for its users. While my discussion will certainly not give the final word on the significance of faith in Genesis, I do hope to show that an ethic of trust both rests upon and supports an eschatological understanding of how God will fulfill God’s promises. Genesis’ eschatological ethic of trust is, I maintain, a vital part of its function within the Persian period alongside other Hebrew literature. Those who use Genesis for ongoing ethical reflection (and praxis) should take into account its call for eschatological trust in the promises of Yhwh.

6.2 Genesis’ Shape and the Narrative Prominence of Promise

Genesis’ literary shape is dominated by two major strategies. The first is a deep literary coherence within each of its component parts, especially in four major sections: the primeval history (1-11:26), the Abraham cycle (11:27-25:11), the Jacob cycle (25:19-35:29), and the Joseph novella (37:2-50:26). The second is the intertwining among these component sections,
repeating and varying shared motifs in a way that mutually illuminates the message of each individual cycle. Both of these literary strategies, I suggest, are not merely architectural (signaling the way composers/redactors linked narrative material) but also rhetorical (affecting the reception by readers and audiences). In other words, I consider these to be effective literary strategies, marked by explicit narratorial comments as well as by patterns of repetition and plot development.

The correspondences between initial creation and post-flood re-creation, the repeated outward movement of humankind and the genealogies linking one story-world generation with the next, all present the first eleven chapters as the story of humanity’s creation and dispersal across the land. Yhwh’s driving pronouncement to go . . . to the land and become a great nation (Gen 12:1-3), given to an ancestor whose wife has already been proclaimed barren (11:30), marks the Abraham cycle as a single story driven by concerns for an heir and a homeland. The Jacob

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Analyses of Genesis’ unity include Robert Cohn, “Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis,” Jcot 25 (1983): 3-16; Bruce Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” Theology Digest 24 (1975): 360-67; and Gary Rendsburg, The Redaction of Genesis (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1986). See below for more consideration of ways Genesis’ four main blocks have been drawn together; for now, I note that the dividing lines between these blocks have been blurred. As David Clines (The Theme of the Pentateuch [Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978], p. 84) and Keith Gröneberg (Abraham, Blessing, and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003], pp. 126-8) discuss, scholars cannot agree where the primordial history ends; does the ancestral cycle begin at 11:10, 11:27, 12:1, or perhaps earlier, with the end of the flood (e.g., 8:21, or 9:1-7)? The transition from Abraham’s cycle (toledot of Terah) and Jacob’s (toledot of Isaac) is complicated by Isaac’s story, which overlaps both with the ending of Abraham’s story (Gen 24) and with the beginning of Jacob’s story (Gen 26). Finally, even Joseph’s tightly-knit novella continues a story of Jacob’s children begun long before 37:2, and therefore Gen 49’s poem (see my section 6.4) draws on Gen 34 and Gen 35:22 as well as material within the Joseph story.
cycle begins as a story of sibling rivalry over the birthright/blessing, with language that evokes and extends the great nation promise (and related promises to Abram); meanwhile, its concentric structure, shaped by two great movements out of (Gen 28) and into (Gen 31-33) the promised land, indicates a continued interest in Israel’s homeland. The Joseph novella is even more clearly a unified story, this one even more firmly focused on brotherly relations in an unfolding drama of conflict and reconciliation—yet with plenty of narrative guidance to read this story as the story of Israel’s tribes (not just brothers—see, e.g., 49:28) and their relationship with an ongoing promise (not just the need to survive—see, e.g., 46:3-4; 50:24-5).

In general, I accept Ernst Wendland’s arguments that analysis of chiasm and other literary structures can serve to establish points of rhetorical prominence, that is, to highlight a literary work’s effects on readers. Interrogating these cycles for structural arrangement may, for example, draw attention to possible chiastic centers, such as the heart of the Jacob cycle in which his flocks and children multiply in exile (29:31-30:43). But most of Genesis’ material is, I think, structured not as a chiasm but as a series of suspense-raising conflicts that lead toward a long-anticipated resolution. In the Abraham story, this anticipated climax is surely the birth of Isaac and perhaps (to a lesser extent) the firm establishment of Isaac, having survived his great test and procured a suitable wife, within the promised land. In other words, Abraham’s story drives in linear fashion toward the promise-fulfillment, and the various stories that resonate with one


6 See Rendsburg, Redaction, pp. 53-69; 79-97. As Rendsburg notes, his chiastic arrangement of the Jacob cycle (by far the most convincing part of his book, in my judgment) is largely a reworking of Fishbane’s excellent “Composition and Structure”; cf. idem, Text and Texture, pp. 40-62. Elsewhere, Rendsburg’s structural arrangements have rough edges; he must re-arrange “misplaced” parallels in Gen 1-11 (switching 11:1-9 with 11:10-26—see pp. 19-22), leave material out of Abraham’s and Jacob’s narrative cycles (23:1-25:11; 35:23-36:5—see pp. 50-51, 71-7), and posit that a death notice of Rebecca has been omitted in order to highlight Sarah’s punishment (pp. 72-3).
another do not come in tightly matched pairs. In the same way, the Joseph story narrates a variety of struggles before the final (satisfying) denouement, and it seems useless to call such a mass of material as 44:1-46:28 (“Joseph reunites with his brothers”) a chiastic center. The story’s emphasis falls on Joseph’s reconciliation with his whole family, in several narrative peaks that stretch to the very end of the story (45:1-15; 46:29-30; 50:15-21).

While I applaud the attempts of Rendsburg and other structural analysts to make sense of the material as it now exists, outlines of obscure parallels may not be the best way to approach Genesis’ rhetorical coherence (i.e., how it strikes its audiences as a single story). A better guide to this rhetorical impact might be the explicit cross-references in which Genesis interprets one part of the ongoing story in terms of an earlier episode. These cues guide the users’ attempts to integrate the story as a whole, just as user-world cues guide the users’ attempts to integrate the story world with ongoing experience (see my chapter 2). So, for example, Isaac’s story in Genesis 26 does not just parallel Abraham’s story, but actually refers to that story (26:1, 3-5, 15, 18, 24). The narrator here connects the famine in Isaac’s time with a similar famine in the days of Abraham (Gen 26:1), and Isaac’s well-digging with his father’s (26:15-18). Similarly, in Jacob’s story the narrator reminds the audience that the land in which Jacob is an alien is the same land where Abraham and Isaac had been aliens (35:27; 37:1), and that the three are buried in the same

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7 Rendsburg (Redaction, pp. 41-5) unpersuasively argues that the chiastic center is the diverse material in Genesis 15-18—and that Isaac’s birth, coming after so many promises and delays, is of “secondary importance.”

8 Rendsburg (Redaction, pp. 79-97) bases this “center” on forced parallels, matching the “reversal” in Gen 39 (innocent Joseph is deemed guilty) with the “reversal” of Gen 47:28-48:22 (secondborn Ephraim is deemed firstborn), or Joseph’s consignment to a pit (37:1-36) with the death of Jacob (49:29-50:26) on the grounds that in both “Jacob and Joseph part.” Closer matches, such as the similarities between Joseph’s unjust consignment to a pit and his unjust consignment to an Egyptian dungeon, go unnoticed in this structural arrangement. See general critique of Rendsburg’s analysis in Marc Brettler’s review, JQR 78 (1987): 113-19.

field (49:29-31; 50:13). Even more importantly, throughout Genesis explicit cues drive home the point that Isaac maintains a relationship with Abraham’s God (26:24), and that in the next generation Jacob invokes the God before whom Abraham and Isaac walked (48:15-16).¹⁰

The promise to Abraham is not only repeated (with variations) throughout Genesis, it is explicitly looked back upon both within Abraham’s lifetime (e.g., 21:1; 24:7) and after it (26:3-5; 28:4; 35:12; 50:24). Genesis also repeatedly re-references a promise already made to Jacob (32:9-12; 35:1, 3, 7; 48:3-4). Such promise-repetition cues occur at key moments in the plot of each cycle: at the climactic birth of Isaac (21:1), at the concluding episode of Abraham’s life (24:7), at Jacob’s departure from the promised land (28:4) and return to it (32:9-12), at the end of Jacob’s cycle (35:12; cf. 35:3, 47), at the descent of Jacob/Israel into Egypt (46:1-4), in Jacob’s blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:3-4), and in the last verses of the entire book (50:24). All these references back to one or more earlier ancestral promises may hold special power for audiences who know that similar back-references to these promises will carry the action into the rest of the Pentateuch.¹¹ Genesis’ users, thus guided to read the whole story in terms of promise, will also find multiple echoes among the repeated promises throughout the ancestral stories.

Together, explicit cross-references and implicit echoes (shared language and parallel motifs) alert Genesis’ audience that each episode occurs within a larger narrative framework stretching across the entire book. For if the promises themselves begin in Genesis 12:1-3, the

¹⁰ Note here that God is identified (in divine and human speech, in Genesis and elsewhere) as the God of one or more previously narrated ancestors (28:13; 31:42, 53; 32:9; see Exod 3:6; 15-16; 4:5). See Rendtorff, Problem of the Process, pp. 88-9.

¹¹ References back to the ancestral promise which explicitly name Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bear several interrelated functions in Exodus through Deuteronomy: they motivate the rescue of Israel from Egypt (Exod 2:24; 6:8) and from a predicted future exile (Lev 26:42), signal divine mercy when Israel is threatened with punishment/destruction (Exod 32:13; Num 32:11; Deut 9:27), and guarantee the gift of land (Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4) and of relationship with God (Deut 29:13; 30:20). These functions are all closely connected to a Persian-era restoration eschatology in which God brings Israel out of Egypt-like exile, saves them from punishment/destruction, gives them the land, and renews their relationship with God.
terms of those promises (land, blessing, fruitful multiplication, peoplehood, greatness, relations to the rest of the world’s peoples) and the threats to those promises (cursing, exile from the land, strife between brothers, and the difficulties of agricultural and especially of human fruitfulness) closely resemble the themes already introduced in Genesis 1-11. Thus Genesis projects a clear narrative coherence. How precisely one articulates this coherence will, of course, depend upon one’s context of usage. Audiences with specific concerns in their own ongoing life might appropriate this unified story from several related angles. Here I give four Persian-era examples:

First, audiences struggling to eke out a living from the land might focus on the creation blessing or gift of plenty. Genesis 1-3, from this perspective, is a story about food and land. When God singles out from scattered humanity Israel’s traditional ancestors to receive (but also mediate?) a new variation on the same blessing, Genesis clearly emphasizes these ancestors’ fluctuation between the promised plenty (e.g., 13:1; 20:15; 24:1; 26:12-14) and the threat of famine (e.g., 26:1, 41:57)—a threat very familiar to any central-Palestinian audience. These famines are not, in other words, just individual inciting incidents in separate traditional stories; they represent a larger working-out of the single problem of agricultural productivity, a problem that challenges Genesis’ whole conception of Israel as a blessed nation. It is no accident that Genesis ends with the most extensive famine yet, one which threatens all life (41:57) in a way


that is strikingly similar to earlier cosmic threats of flood (Gen 6-7) or of divine fire (Gen 19). It is also no accident that the Joseph story is also a story about plenty, recalling earlier stories of plenty. The ups and downs of the ancestors’ attempts to eke out a living would surely spark the interest of audiences still seeking the concrete assurance of provision in a land prone to agricultural failure.\footnote{See, e.g., David Hopkins, “Agriculture,” in Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader, ed. Suzanne Richard (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003: 124-30).} Genesis encourages such audiences to view the ups and downs of the land’s productivity, thematized so starkly by Deuteronomy (obedience-plenty, disobedience-famine), within a more fundamental paradigm of the creation blessing and ancestral promise.

**Second**, audiences whose cultic or family life involves the passing on of divine blessings may read Genesis from the perspective of its web of blessing-pronouncements. Such audiences will find in Genesis’ repeated use of the root ברך a rather obvious clue to the book’s overarching meaning. At the same time, Genesis’ audiences may also experience actual pronouncements of cursing, either in the cult or in family life (i.e., an angry family member may speak as Noah did to Ham/ Canaan in Gen 9:25). Genesis, for such audiences, is quite clearly a story about the power of God’s blessing and cursing, replicated in parental blessing and cursing of children.\footnote{See here especially Devora Steinmetz, From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1991).} By narrating blessing-pronouncement from parents to children, Genesis also raises the painful relationship between blessing/ cursing and the loss (or lack) of children. Abraham’s plaintive complaint in 15:2 (“O Yhwh God, what will you give me, for I continue without a child?”) and Jacob’s inconsolability at the loss of Joseph (37:35; 42:38; 44:34) resonate with Judeans facing the rather common experience of childlessness (whether from barrenness or early death).\footnote{Jon Levenson (The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993], pp. 55-169) discusses at length how many}
Genesis’ surprising reversals overcome such challenges, especially when Jacob/Israel pronounces a series of final blessings (48:8-49:28) after he has regained the child he thought lost forever (see 48:11: *Israel said to Joseph, “I did not expect to see your face, and see, God has let me see your children too!”*). Meanwhile, Genesis’ family blessings also raise the issue of favored sons and (thus) of Judeans’ sense of election compared to their “deselect” neighbors/siblings. As the beloved child, Israel itself has also been threatened with death (the Babylonian destruction), and is invited to consider how divine providence has acted “to keep alive” (*לְהַחֲיוֹת*, Gen 45:7/50:20) until it can be restored to its proper place.

This brings me to my third example: Genesis’ Judean audiences might focus on its stories of sibling rivalry. As I have shown in chapter three, Persian-era Judeans worked out their own identity while relating with their Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, or Philistine neighbors—and with the descendants of the northern tribes, who exerted influence from a significantly wealthier Samaria. Meanwhile, the extended “family” of Judeans had to negotiate divergent experiences of exile or return, of isolation or intermarriage. Genesis presents this conflicted audience with a series of sibling conflicts over God’s favor and/or a parent’s blessing. Genesis’ story moves from

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Genesis fathers lose or almost lose their “beloved son.” So for example Abel is killed, and Cain driven off; Ishmael driven off to almost die of want in the wilderness; Isaac nearly sacrificed in God’s test; Jacob chased away by a murderous brother; and Joseph sold away in a faked death.


fratricide in the first human family (4:1-16) to near-fratricide among the sons/tribes of Israel (37:2-36). Beginning and ending this way conveys a sense of development, from the most tragic brotherly clash to the most thorough family reconciliation.\(^{21}\) Between these two bookends, Shem is opposed to Ham/Canaan (9:22-7), Lot’s herders clash with Abram’s (13:7), Hagar and Sarah spar on behalf of the status of the half-brothers Isaac and Ishamel (21:9-10; cf. 16:4-6), and sisters Rachel and Leah contest with one another over Jacob’s love and their own procreative prowess (29:31-30:24). Genesis ends with not one but two pairs of brothers from the next generation—Perez and Zerah, Manasseh and Ephraim—whose relative status as firstborn/favored involves reversal or ambiguity (38:27-30; 48:8-20). The audience can only wonder whether the pattern of sometimes-murderous rivalry will continue. Even more, the audience can only wonder whether the final reconciliation within Israel’s family (narrated in Joseph’s story) has implications for a broader reconciliation within the whole family of nations.

**Fourth** and finally, Genesis’ users who had recently returned from literal exile (or who still lived in a state which they conceptualized as ongoing exile) might find that the stories of Genesis are bound together by the repeated motif of exile and return.\(^{22}\) This motif is, perhaps, most explicit in the cycle of Jacob, the eponymous ancestor who represents Israel itself; he encounters angels and pronounces literally summative prayers on his way out of and his way back into the promised land (Gen 28:10-22; 32:2[1], 10-13[9-12]). In fact, the sons (tribes) are for the most part born in exile (29:31-30:24; 41:50-52), where Israel’s identity is forged. (Compare the message of Exod 1:1-7, 20 where Israel becomes a numerous people precisely in Egyptian bondage.) Similarly, the Joseph story closes Genesis with the move of Israel’s family into Egypt

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\(^{21}\) Dahlberg, “On Recognizing.”

and with two repeated assurances, that they will be preserved there (45:5, 7; 50:20) and that they will return from there (46:1-4; 50:24-25). The exile-dominated Jacob and Joseph stories may lead to further reflection on more subtle moments of “exile” in Abraham’s story—his call to leave his home for the promised land (12:1), the repeated notice that he was a stranger/sojourner (גֵּר, 12:10; 17:8; 20:1; 21:23, 34; 23:4; see also 26:3; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1; 47:4, 9), and his short but highly stylized trip to Egypt and back (12:10-20). Admittedly, Isaac does not leave the promised land—a point which receives special emphasis (24:5-8; 26:1-3), perhaps because Isaac represents the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. Yet Isaac’s story is particularly brief, and the longest component of it is when a servant-surrogate leaves Canaan on Isaac’s behalf and returns with a spouse for him to marry (chapter 24). Thus, an audience may reasonably conclude that the journey motif is the key to Genesis’ literary structure, and this motif often implies a sort of exile or return (Gen 12:1-3 may combine the two—exile away from home and family, return from the east into the promised land). Moreover, such an audience may read Genesis 1-11 as humanity’s own alienation from its land, resonating with experiences of exile. Indeed, Genesis ends with Israel in Egypt as a sort of faux Eden (compare Gen 45:18 to 13:10) but waiting for God to bring them back home.

These four examples merely demonstrate how verbal repetitions, narrative similarities, and narratorial signposts may point Genesis’ (re)users from one passage to another, tracing a pattern of correspondences that make of its multiple stories a single overarching narrative. Within this web of connections, most plausible usages of the book of Genesis orient the audience’s

23 The wording of this trip, e.g., the evocative term plagues, clearly foreshadow’s Israel’s later Egypt experience; see Steinmetz, From Father to Son, pp. 136-7.

experience around twin poles of blessing (seed, fruitfulness, multiplication, promise, land, or reconciliation) versus cursing (destruction, threat, death, disappointment, exile, or strife). In fact, the motifs which I have outlined interact with one another within a clear trajectory. Sibling strife and forgiveness correlate with exile and return; famine and plenty correlate with curse and blessing. Genesis’ interweaving motifs strike the reader as a single story, the story of Israel, the story of the world. Genesis’ eschatology emerges from the conflicted shape and its primary focus on promise.

The shape of the story is the conflict between prosperity and famine, blessing and cursing, sibling rivalry and peaceful relations, or exile and land. Genesis’ narratives gain their impetus neither from the simple pursuit of positive blessings, nor from the simple harm of negative curses, but rather from narrative movement between the two. Blessing comes under the shadow of threat; misfortunes and curses retain a penumbra of hope. Genesis proceeds from blessed creation through cursed exile toward an expected homeland; from flourishing garden through threatened seed toward expected fruitfulness; from origins of life through the introduction of death toward the preservation of life; from creation’s obedience through disobedience which earns uncreation toward an obedience which preserves creation; from primordial companionship through strife and division toward hopes of unity and peace; from receiving God’s gifts through bearing God’s punishment toward trusting God’s word. As Devora Steinmetz has shown, Genesis portrays Israel’s ancestors and indeed all of humanity as a single family, engaged in a multigenerational “quest . . . for redemption, for the fulfillment of the promise of creation.”

25 Steinmetz, Father to Son, p. 148.
The focus of the story is promise. Promise encapsulates the conflict between Yhwh’s good intentions (creation blessing, plenty and peace) and the audience’s current need (threat of uncreation, famine and strife). Laurence Turner shows how each of the major parts of Genesis begins with a different “announcement” of promise, which the resulting narrative fulfills (or disappoints). Genesis’ promise is, in Turner’s thesis, never a straightforward experience of blessing; challenges complicate each announcement, and in fact frustrate the expectations which the story has aroused. Perhaps the promise comes into particularly sharp focus precisely through Israel’s experience of exilic disappointment; thus Genesis repeatedly emphasizes that the ancestors are strangers or aliens in the land (see, e.g., Gen 17:8; 26:3; 28:4; 32:4-5), and most of the tribes are born outside of the land of promise (see Gen 29:31-30:24).

As I will continue to show in my next two sections, the beginning of Genesis establishes the need for a divine promise, and the ending of Genesis shows how a divine promise will work out in the ongoing life of Israel. For now, I will merely cite Bill Arnold’s suggestion that the

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27 Laurence Turner, Announcements of Plot in Genesis (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). These announcements occur in Gen 1:28 (for Gen 1-11), 12:1-3 (for Gen 11:26-25:11), Gen 25:23 and 27:27-29, 39-40 (for 25:12-36:43), and 37:5-11 (for Gen 37-50). In my view, Turner underestimates how much these announcements resemble each other and in fact how each cycle has a whole string of thematic promises which may be just as important as the initial promise (Gen 15:4 no less than 12:1-3 drives the Abraham story, and 50:20 no less than 37:5-11 explicates the Joseph story). But this observation in no way invalidates the pattern which Turner carefully traces.
“conceptual foundations for Israel’s eschatology” lie in the ancestral promises that drive the Genesis narrative and provide two alternative paths for Israel’s story to take: a path of blessing and a path of cursing (cf. Deut 27:16-46; 28:1-14). The way that Genesis relates these two possibilities (blessing versus cursing) locates the cosmic fate of Israel and the world in the fulfillment of Yhwh’s promises.

6.3 Cursing, Toil—and a Seed (3:14-19)

6.3.1 The Interpretive Framework: Genesis 2-3 and Israel’s Story

The first two chapters of Genesis describe the emergence of life (including human life) in a setting where Yhwh blesses (1:22, 28) and gives (1:29-30; 2:16). In narrative terms, these chapters provide both a stable platform (which later story-world conflicts will threaten) and a program (a preview of procreation and filling the earth, which later story-world developments will follow or deviate from). As Ska notes, Genesis 2 exists only to set the stage; when 2:18 describes the human’s solitude as not good, the “dramatic tension” is only “minimal.”

The elements necessary to life and creation having been established in chapters 1 and 2, the tension of darkness/formlessness (1:2) and of non-cultivation/aloneness (2:5, 2:18) having been fully resolved, the reader is now ready to learn what sort of story is being told on the cosmic scene that has been set. In this regard Ska is right to claim that the serpent of Genesis 3 is “the first truly

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29 Jean-Louis Ska, “Genesis 2-3: Some Fundamental Questions,” in Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2-3) and Its Reception History, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 1-27, p. 6. Admittedly, when read together with Gen 1’s litany of creation’s goodness and fruitfulness, the uncultivated land in 2:5 (not yet) and the human’s solitude in 2:18 (not good) do provide real tension. Yet neither tension is sustained for very long; by the end of Gen 2 humans are not alone, and are engaged in their created purpose of care for the earth.
disturbing element” in the story, and precipitates a more significant “crisis in the peaceful world created by God in Genesis 2:4b-24.”

As I explored above (section 5.3.1.2) the nature of the “crisis” of Genesis 3 is irresolvably multivocal. When read as a story of maturation, the story’s suggestion that the first humans did not know they were naked (3:7, 11) implies a childlike sexual innocence; only the “disturbing element” of the serpent, and the eating of the forbidden tree’s fruit, provides humanity the opportunity to pursue the narrative program of procreation. From this perspective, it may be significant that only outside of Eden does Genesis explicitly state that the first human “knew” his wife and that she bore children (4:1). Perhaps the command to fill the earth (or even to work it) could not take place in Eden, and the story’s program requires that the first humans grow up and leave the garden. But upon sustained rereading, Genesis’ users test this plausible interpretation and note how it fits (or does not fit) with the rest of the story-world and indeed with the rest of the world in which they live. Such users may reasonably question whether the serpent was right to challenge Yhwh’s words, whether the humans’ disobedience constitutes “passing the test,” and whether human reproduction and agricultural production require an expulsion from Eden (they are already implied in Gen 1:27-8; 2:15, 23-4). Does the textual language of curse, toil, and

33 As Dan Burns (“Dream Form in Genesis 2:4b-3:24: Asleep in the Garden,” JSOT 37 [1987]: 3-14, p. 13) contends. But the Pentateuch’s emphasis on obedience to Yhwh is fully present in Genesis, where Noah’s obedience is programmatic (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16), and where Abraham’s obedience seems tied to the reception of promise—not just in 26:5 but also in 12:4a (Abraham goes in obedience to the imperative associated with the first promise); 15:10 (Abraham sacrifies as God tells him as part of a covenant-ratification ceremony); 17:23-7 (Abraham obediently circumcises himself and his household as a sign of the covenant); and ch. 22 (Abraham obeys God in sacrificing Isaac, and vv. 15-18 make this a motivation for the promised blessing).
death really inaugurate blessing, peace, and life? Does Eden, seemingly a stock image in the ancient world for fruitfulness and blessing, here represent a sub-optimal environment from which humans must escape?\(^3^4\)

Where each individual interpretive choice may be disputed, one must ask what general interpretive framework most powerfully invites a given community of users to reflect on their traditional stories in one way rather than another. As I have already argued, a group of Persian-era Judeans (re)read and (re)wrote all of Genesis as part of a larger project of telling Israel’s story in relationship with Israel’s God, Israel’s land, and Israel’s neighbors (the nations or families of the world). For these users, Israel’s story—not only the economy of the Iron Age, not only universal reflections on human coming-of-age—explains the language of divine curse found in Genesis 3:14 and 17. In fact, each element in the Eden narrative activates resonances in the rest of Israel’s story.\(^3^5\) So, for example, the gift and loss of Eden parallels the gift and loss of Israel’s promised land, and the ambiguous doubled tree(s) in the center of the garden evoke the description of Mosaic Torah as the path to life and death, good and evil, blessing and cursing (see, e.g., Deut 30:15, 19).\(^3^6\) As with Genesis 2-3, so with the rest of the primeval history; the “dispersion” of Genesis 11 is “Israel’s own diaspora,” Noah’s “flood is the uncreation of Israel’s life at the time


\(^3^6\) Emmrich, “Temptation Narrative,” pp. 10-17.
of the destruction of Jerusalem,” and the “various judgments of God upon primaeval disobedience, murder, lust and hybris” all represent reflections upon Israel’s sins.

I suggest, then, not an Augustinian fall, but a mythic reflection on the disorder inherent in the world as the users knew it. The serpent’s role as instigator does not (primarily) launch humanity into a full and mature life, but into the familiar world of sin (חַטָּאת; see 4:7), violence (see 4:8, 23; 6:11-13), evil (see 6:5; 8:21), cursing (see 4:11; 9:25)—and, perhaps, of human presumption and divine punishment (see 6:1-4; 11:1-9). This is the world of Israel’s ancestors (see, e.g., the ancestors’ fears [12:12; 20:11; 26:7], the sinfulness and violence of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the threats within Abraham’s own family, detailed above). In that chapter 3 is Genesis’ first reflection on cursing (אָרוּר) in a world that has previously been blessed, Judean users of Hebrew literature would read the serpent not (just) as a symbol of wisdom but as a

37 Clines, Theme, p. 104; see discussion in Grüneberg, Abraham, p. 125.

38 Terence Fretheim (“Is Genesis 2-3 a Fall Story?” Word and World 14.2 [1994]: 144-53) suggests that rather than a single “fall down” one should speak of a general “falling out,” an accumulation of disrupted relationships between human and human, human and God, and human and nature; viewing the world as pervasively sinful is not a later development, but has parallels in the Hebrew Bible (Fretheim cites 1 Kgs 8:46; Jer 13:23; Ps 51) and in various Sumerian and Egyptian texts (Fretheim cites examples from Walter Beyerlin, ed, Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978]). While Carol Meyers (“Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered,” in The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday, ed. Carol Meyers and M. O’Connor [Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003]:337-54, p. 343) emphasizes that Adam and Eve are not mentioned again in Hebrew Bible prophecy in contexts of “sin, judgment, punishment, and banishment,” I press this question further, considering language that is shared between the prophetic scrolls and Genesis, not least the language of cursing. (This story may postdate and reflect upon prophetic material; if so, the prophets could scarcely be expected to name Adam or Eve—though see the disputed reading of Hos 6:7.)

39 Contra Clines (Theme, pp. 64-73) I reject Gerhard von Rad’s suggestion that chapters 1-11 show a heightening of sin (Genesis: A Commentary, trans. J. H. Marks, revised [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], pp. 152-3). The comparable sin, if sin even be the right word (the text does not use it), of such figures as the sons of God in 6:1-4 or the tower-builders in 11:1-9 is almost impossible to assess. But in general the premiere statements of human evil (6:5-6), of divine judgment (6:13, 7:23), and of the divine will to mercy (8:21-22; 9:8-17), all occur with reference to the flood; in vain does Clines (Theme, p. 70) try to argue that the scattering of languages in Gen 11 is more severe than the divine decision to destroy all flesh by water. On the other hand, one does not need to discern an increase in sin and judgment in order to read Gen 1-11 as a multi-faceted exploration of the various kinds of disorder in creation; see Grüneberg (Abraham, pp. 130-1) citing Claus Westermann (Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, trans. John Scullion [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], pp. 233-4). Thus while the pre-flood verdict (6:5-6) is the strongest and most climactic statement of human evil, the post-flood verdict (8:21) explicitly counsels readers not to think that conditions have improved. This, Genesis seems to say, is simply the way it is.
dangerous pest of the wilderness (Num 21:6-9; Deut 8:15; Am 5:19; Prov 23:32; Eccl 10:8; Is 30:6; Jer 8:17; Ps 91:13) or even a mythic force threatening life (Is 27:1; Job 26:13; Am 9:3). This talking snake bears intriguing similarities with the Hebrew Bible’s only other talking animal, Balaam’s donkey, in a pattern of correspondences and reversals that promote sustained reflections about the dangers of straying from Yhwh’s instructions.

6.3.2 Barriers to the Blessing: Agricultural and Procreative Unfruitfulness

Within the interpretive framework discussed above, it is scarcely surprising that the snake is the first thing in Genesis that receives a curse. The twin possibility of blessing and cursing continues throughout the prehistory, the rest of Genesis, and the larger Pentateuch. While it may

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40 As has often been noted, the shrewdness (גָּרוּם, 3:1) of the serpent can be positive (Prov 1:4; 8:5; 15:5) or negative (Job 5:12; Exod 21:14). See Beverly Stratton, Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2-3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 45. Emmrich (“Temptation Narrative,” p. 12) notes the possibility that כְּפָרֵד in 3:14 phonetically recalls כְּפָרֵד in 3:1, and certainly both words are set within the same phrase; the rereader who encounters 3:1 already knows that this snake is not just more clever but will also be more cursed than the rest of the animals. The serpent in ancient folklore could similarly have positive as well as negative roles; the positive roles tend to make of the serpent a representative of wisdom, which according to Carr (“Politics”) is the subject of a deliberate critique in Gen 3. In negative roles, one interesting pattern has a trickster (גָּרוּם?) serpent who foils the hero’s efforts—including, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, stealing the opportunity for immortality. For discussion, see R. Hendel, “Serpent,” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, 2nd ed, ed. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 746; Karen Joines, “The Serpent in Gen 3”, ZAW 87 (1975): 1-11; idem, Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield House, 1974). Burns (“Dream Form”) makes the serpent the hero of the story; he cites John Crossan, “Response to White: Felix Culpa and Foenix Culprit” Semeia 18 (1980): 107-13. In my view, Moberly (“Did the Serpent” and “Did the Interpreters”) has persuasively shown that the serpent’s role in this story activates the more negative symbolic meanings of snakes, a conclusion shared by Joines (“Serpent” and “Serpent”).

41 George Savran (“Beastly Speech: Intertextuality, Balaam’s Ass and the Garden of Eden,” JSOT 64 [1994]: 33-55) lays out these correspondences, most notably the angel with the sword guarding a path; the snake reverses the donkey’s function in counseling disobedience rather than obedience, and (arguably) condemns where the donkey saves. Emmrich (“Temptation,” pp. 15-17) asks whether, in light of these contrasting parallels, the snake as a mantic-prophetic symbol (the word נָחָשׁ in Num 23:23 and 24:1 refers to divination, as in Gen 30:27; 44:5, 15) stands for the false prophecy that leads Israel away from following Yhwh, evoking the prophetic misleading referenced in Deut 13:1-3. Deut 13:3 commands Israel not to listen to such prophets, and Adam is punished because he listened to Eve (3:17). Right after the Balaam story Midian leads Israel astray through women (25:1-18), a theme rather prominent in Israel’s primary history (see, e.g., Exod 34:15-16; Deut 7:3-4; Jud 3:6; 1 Kings 11:4); so Emmrich (pp. 18-19) proposes that Eve represents any woman who causes a man to forsake traditional authority (Gen 2:24). Emmrich’s reading may stretch the (positive) tone of Gen 2:24 too far, and ignore the equal responsibility implied by Gen 3 (see arguments in Jean Higgins, “Myth of Eve: The Temptress,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 44.4 [1976]: 639-47; Meyers, Discovering Eve). Yet however unpalatable I find it, I must admit that such a misogynist interpretation could have commended itself to some Persian-era Judeans.
be an exaggeration to refer to Genesis 3:14-19 as a single collective *curse*, the appearance of this charged word at the beginning of the poem (and its repetition in 3:17) does set the poetic/performative tone of the pronouncement.

More precisely, two of the three parts of the poem (the pronouncements to the serpent and to Adam/humanity) are structured as a statement of consequences: *because you did X, Y will follow*. In my view one may call this structure “punishment,” in that the action (X) involves disobedience to the divine will and the consequence (Y) pronounces a change of life for the worse. 42 Thus the serpent’s punishment takes stereotypical language for defeat or humiliation: eating dust and having one’s head crushed. Humanity/Adam receives a punishment that plays on the serpent’s, as it too mentions “eating” (from a cursed land) and *dust* (as a reminder of mortality). Although it is the land (not Adam) which is cursed, it is cursed not in itself but only *with respect to you* (humanity). Having one’s sphere of activity and source of food cursed is, of course, a blow to the human; so is being doomed to *toil*, a note of distress which simply has not appeared before in Genesis. Meanwhile the notice that humanity will die and return to the ground/dust need not mean that humans were ever immortal; 43 but it certainly evokes a whole range of distressing realities (the inevitability of eventual death and the possibility of untimely death).

At the very least, this poem reframes and reverses the earlier narrative: the ground was once a reminder of the gift of life and of fruitful land to work (2:7-8, 15-16), but is now a reminder of a cursed ground, uncertain toil, and the destiny of death. The human was already

42 Terence Fretheim (*God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2005], pp. 75-6), citing various scholars, claims that the pronouncements are “descriptive” rather than “prescriptive”; but he concludes that the language of “punishment” is still appropriate for negative “consequences” attributed by God to disobedience. Following Phyllis Trible (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978]), Fretheim is careful to emphasize that these are not unchangeable expressions of the divine will, and thus should be seen as observations by Yhwh rather than true performatives. But I suggest that Genesis’ picture of the divine will is uncomfortably two-sided; the creator God is most clearly the source of blessing, but may actively threaten the blessing (most notably in flooding the earth, but also in expelling Adam and Eve from Eden or cursing the land).

made to work (2:5, 15), but in 3:17-18 work becomes toil; the human was already (perhaps) mortal, but in 3:19 death is held over the head of humans. In the larger context of Persian-era Judean literature, this poem is not just an etiology of why weeds grow faster than wheat or bodies decompose; it coheres with the hundreds of passages which connect agricultural failure with divine disfavor and with the very real threat of starvation.

Meanwhile, if the woman’s pronouncement (3:16) lacks the language of punishment (because you did X) as well as the language of cursing, it too speaks of largely negative consequences. Admittedly, Carol Meyers proposes a less negative translation than that of the versions which she reviews, rendering Genesis 3:16a as “I will greatly increase your [agricultural] toil and your pregnancies; along with [agricultural] travail shall you beget children.” Yet Meyers still stipulates that the toil/travail cannot be positive; this verse emphasizes the difficulties of women’s lives.44 Certainly the repetition of the root עצב suggests distress, not just work, and ties the woman’s consequences to those of humanity/Adam.45 In the end, I find it implausible that audiences who associated fertility with blessing46 would have read this pronouncement as

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44 Meyers, Discovering Eve, pp. 104-9. Note that the translation “increase,” while certainly appropriate, may disguise the intertextual link to the creation blessing (1:28) to multiply—along with all of the multiplication language in Genesis and elsewhere (both Pentateuch and prophetic corpus). See Viands, The Progeny Blessing.

45 עצב appears only 3 times, and refers to toil/pain (see 3:16, 17, 5:29); the verbal root often denotes psychological pain (14 out of 15 times, according to Carol Meyers, Discovering Eve, p. 104—e.g., God’s grief in Gen 6:6, David’s grief over his son’s death in 2 Sam 19:3, and the grief of a forsaken wife in Is 54:6). The noun עצב 7 out of 8 times is either physical toil, or emotional grievance, or both (Meyers, Discovering Eve, pp. 106, 112-13). In Eccl 10:9 it signals general hurt or even injury, and in 1 Chron 4:9 a specifically notable example of toilsome/painful birth (the child’s name would not, I think, proceed from the mere fact of birth-pain, but from a particularly traumatic or threatening birth experience—the point is not “it hurt to have my baby” but “thanks that my baby was born despite a risky ordeal.”) These usages do not support the idea that עצב here must mean agricultural toil (although males and females both participate in the consequences of agricultural unproductivity); rather, the poetic parallelism sets side by side two human difficulties, agriculture (3:17-18) and procreation (3:16a). See here especially Maggie Low, “Eve’s Problem (Gen 3:16): Pain, Productivity, or Paucity of Birth?,” unpublished paper, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta: 2010).

initiating or increasing female childbearing *per se*; the world of Genesis, and of its users’ ongoing experience, is not marked by a surfeit of successful pregnancies. Even if one does not take גִּצְּבוֹנֵ uni( as a hendiadys for painful procreation,⁴⁷ the two parallel poetic lines suggest a threat to human procreation, twisting the original creation blessing.⁴⁸ Perhaps this is even meant to be ironic: *I will greatly multiply your pregnancies—but also your hardships; (only) with troubles will you bear children.*⁴⁹

Just as 3:17 threatens humans not just with hard work but with the possibility that their hard work will *not* yield food (the ground may prove unproductive, yielding only thorns and thistles), so 3:16a most likely threatens humans not just with toilsome pregnancies (or even toil along with pregnancies) but rather with the possibility that their procreative toil will not yield children.⁵⁰ I find this reading persuasive specifically for those audiences who reread Genesis 3 in light of the rest of Genesis; the book as a whole is probably less interested in reminding people that farming isn’t easy or that childbirth hurts, than it is in explaining how humanity/Israel laboriously navigates the twin threats of barrenness (reproductive failure) on the one hand and famine (agricultural failure) on the other. Genesis’ matriarchs need Yhwh’s help in producing children (Gen 18:1-15; 25:21; 29:31; 30:22; this may be the meaning of 4:1), while the patriarchs

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⁴⁸ Low, “Eve’s Problem”; Turner (Announcements, p. 23) shows that “the three main concepts of 1:23 [dominion over animals, subduing the earth by agriculture, and fruitful multiplication] are modified in 3:14-19 to show that their fulfillment will be far more troublesome than originally expected.”

⁴⁹ So Turner, Announcements, pp. 23-4. For a similar ironic use of the root בְּבַר see Gen 6:1-5, where the people begin to *multiply* (6:1) but so does wickedness (6:5).

⁵⁰ Low, “Eve’s Problem,” argues that the first half of 3:16 refers neither to healthy childbirth pains nor to healthy pregnancies, but rather to the grievous toil would-be mothers experience in a world rife with barrenness, miscarriage, and infant mortality. This meaning resonates beyond Genesis, within its ancient extratextual setting; Low cites the Cambridge Encyclopedia (vol. 50, http://encyclopedia.stateuniversity.com/pages/14937/Mesopotamia.html) which places ancient Mesopotamian infant mortality at 75 to 95%, and references Atrahasis, where gods threaten/limit human reproduction by introducing miscarriage. Low thinks that in such a context תֵלְדִי בָנִים refers to the whole process of having descendants, not the birth experience narrowly.
need Yhwh’s help in producing food (implied in Gen 24:1; 26:12; 30:27; and esp. 31:42). The point is not that women are valueless if they do not have babies, nor that men are valueless if they do not engage in agriculture; but these two human tasks represent two primary ways of participating in the creation blessing of fruitful productivity. Both activities are essential to humanity’s (and Israel’s) survival as well as blessing; both activities are fraught, difficult, and shadowed by the possibility of curse instead of blessing.\footnote{I do not address here the second half of 3:16, which may comment on the souring of the male-female relationship (Phyllis Trible, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” in idem, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978]: 72-142; but contrast Meyers, Discovering Eve, pp. 109-21). Note that Leah and Rachel compete for (“desire”) Jacob’s attentions (Jacob is passive), with considerable anxiety, for the sake of reproduction. The notice that “he will rule over you” is far too little to infer wholesale patriarchy; Genesis’ women are at least as assertive as its men, especially with respect to procreation (Sarah commands Abraham to produce and to send away Ishmael, Rebecca receives her own oracle about the fates of her twins and compels Isaac to follow its dictates, and Leah and Rachel treat Jacob as little more than a hired hand in their business of bearing children). Genesis’ reflections on who rules over whom (e.g., Shem/ Canaan; Jacob/ Esau; Joseph/ brothers) are not about gender at all. Note that while the fruitful primordial couple must be male and female, most of the story deals not with ish (male) or ishah (female) but with adam (human). Burns (“Dream Form”, pp. 3-5) thinks that Adam and Eve are not clearly distinguished in Gen 2-3; Eve cites a command given to Adam, and Adam is implicated in a choice made by Eve. Problems with procreativity and agriculture belong not just to women or to men, but to humanity; the serpent’s seed will battle male and female descendants; and both genders return to dust at death. Admittedly, ancient Hebrew literature is androcentric, and thus the primary representatives of humanity in Gen 1-11 and of Israel in Gen 12-50 are male. But in both parts of the story female characters, where mentioned, are presumed to be a fully complementary (if under-narrated) part of the story of Yhwh and humanity/ Israel.}

So humanity, in its eponymous first ancestors, is not quite cursed; but its blessing has been threatened. This threat to the blessing most clearly affects two areas of human life: the ground’s relationship to humans (i.e., agriculture), and procreativity. Agriculture and procreation, in turn, provide obvious ties between the creation blessing of Genesis 1 and the ancestral blessings of Genesis 12-50. Thus Genesis’ rereaders can scarcely ignore the bright line from creation blessing (multiplication and fruitfulness, 1:22, 28a; 9:1, 7) to the ironic multiplication of distress in human fruitfulness (3:16) to the promise to multiply or make fruitful the seed of Hagar/ Ishmael (16:10; 17:20), of Abraham (17:2, 6; 22:17), of Isaac (26:4, 22, 24), and of Jacob (28:3;
They can scarcely ignore the parallel line from the creation blessing of food provision (Gen 1:29-30; 2:16) to the cursing of the land’s productivity (3:17b-19a) to the ancestral promises of a plentiful land.\textsuperscript{53} In tracing these two lines forward, these rereaders will notice that the ancestral promises are \textit{not} fulfilled in Genesis, and therefore that the promised multiplication/fruitfulness and land/prosperity continues to lie under the same threat as did the original creation blessing. In other words, the poetry of Genesis 3:14-19 continues to shadow the ancestors in their struggles with barrenness (11:30; 25:21; 29:31) and with famine (12:10; 26:1; 41:27-47:20).

Judean users of Genesis in the Persian era would likely have little trouble locating themselves in this ambiguous position, affirming a blessing that is both general (to all creation) and particular (to their own identity as Israel), while experiencing a multiplication of distress and a cursed agriculture.\textsuperscript{54} Their population had dwindled, they were deeply impoverished, and they certainly lacked any special prominence vis-à-vis their neighbors. Genesis 3:14-19 offers them a mythic-poetic commentary on their struggles, suggesting that these current troubles are not just temporary but are deeply rooted in the mythic structure of human life. In its narrative context, this poetic commentary also suggests that these perennial human struggles are \textit{not} the original creative intent, but result from disobedience and (just as importantly) accompany an exile from

\textsuperscript{52} See Viands, \textit{The Progeny Blessing}.  
\textsuperscript{53} The promises of plenty are not as explicit, but I am making two modest assumptions: that the often-repeated ancestral gift of land envisions the land as fruitful soil (not, e.g., mere geography), and that the promise to \textit{bless} must include agriculturally-based fertility. See here Grüneberg, \textit{Abraham}, pp. 100-7; Mitchell, \textit{Meaning}.  
\textsuperscript{54} See Grüneberg, \textit{Blessing}, pp. 132-5: the “punishment” of 3:14-29 is “precisely aetiological for the human condition as experienced in ancient Israel (as indeed today).” On p. 135 he notes that these \textit{Lebensminderungen} may not be permanent (he cites Is 11:6-9; 65:17ff.), but that if the \textit{Urzeit} is like the \textit{Endzeit} Genesis does not say so. In my mind, he misses the significance of an ancestral blessing which so directly addresses the “problems” of these \textit{Lebensminderungen}; on this point see Kaminski, \textit{Primaeval Blessing}.  

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the land in which God originally placed humanity (2:8; 3:23-4). For this reason, the fulfillment of the promise to the ancestors—a fulfillment which, as I have shown, remains clearly future not just for the characters of Genesis but also for its users—may be conceived of as a reversal of the conditions laid down in 3:14-19. The full experience of the blessing and the land will mean that agriculture is no longer cursed. The full experience of fruitful multiplication will mean that procreation is no longer characterized by multiplied procreative distress. These twin notions—a numerous population (i.e., an end to barrenness and child mortality) and plentiful food (i.e., an end to agricultural failure)—correspond exactly with the prophetic description of Israel’s conditions when it receives the ancestral promise and is restored to the land God gave.

6.3.3 Dominion, Enmity, and the Victory of the Woman’s Seed

Finally, given this interweaving of Genesis 3:14-19 with the full Pentateuchal drama that stretches from Israel’s beginnings to the (re)entrance to the promised land, one may suggest that the prediction of enmity (אֵיבָה) in Genesis 3:15 also speaks to one more promise given at creation:

Genesis 1:28’s blessing to subdue (כּבש) the earth and exercise dominion (רדה) among the animals. Ellen Davis notes that while the second verb can refer to general rule, the first is a pointed term for conquering, especially conquering the promised land (Num 32:22, 29; Josh

55 The similarity of humanity’s punishment in Gen 3:14-19 with Cain’s punishment in 4:11-16 clarifies the intricate ties between a cursed ground and the experience of exile; humanity (3:24) and Cain (4:14) are driven out, root גרש. The same root is used for Hagar’s expulsion (Gen 21:10), Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Exod 6:1; 11:1; 12:39), the Canaanites’ expulsion before Israel (Exod 23:31; 33:2; 34:11; Judg 2:3; 6:9; 1 Chron 17:21; Ps 78:55; 80:9[8]), and Israel’s own exile (Hos 9:15; Am 8:8; Mic 2:9).

56 Turner (Announcements, pp. 33-47) separates these two, connecting שׂבָא to agriculture (but also, p. 38, to cultural development of various kinds) and שלד to rule over animals. In that governing and making subservient are closely related concepts (see Westermann, Genesis I-11, p. 161), I conflate the subservient earth and the governed animals.
These traditions of the conquest of Canaan function, for relatively powerless Persian-era Judeans, as one way of expressing what is required for Israel to *exercise dominion* in a particular *land*; such dominion requires a prior victory over enemies. Users of Genesis 1-11 who associate the creation blessing of 1:28 with the ancestral promises will naturally associate *subduing/dominion* with the promised ancestral preeminence (see, e.g., Gen 12:2; 17:20; 18:18; 21:18; 46:3) and victory over enemies (see, e.g., 22:17; 49:8; cf. 14:20). In that 1:28 has already evoked Israel’s conquest tradition, such users will expect the challenges to the blessing in 3:14-19 to include some mention of enmity.

Admittedly, this poem does not (and, given the characters available in the surrounding narrative, cannot) speak directly of enemy armies or nations. Yet there is no reason that the serpent cannot stand in for such enemies, for ancient Judean poetry commonly presents human enemies in the guise of animal imagery—including serpent imagery (see, e.g., Ps 58:4; 140:3; Mic 7:17; Jer 46:22). The serpent, as an animal, should be under humanity’s creation-ordained dominion, but from now on will occupy a place of ongoing enmity with humanity (3:15). Grüneberg astutely notes that if Genesis 2-3 is trying to summarize the human condition (or, I suggest, Israel’s own story), it would scarcely bother with a simple “aetiology of why humans dislike snakes.” Thus the audience is primed to seek a further significance, and it is hardly a stretch to suggest that the snake’s *seed* (*זֶרָע*) represents all who are destined for ongoing enmity. Enemies of Israel, while literally Eve’s descendants, take on the status of enemies of humanity.

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57 Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, pp. 53-63. She cites Norbert Lohfink (*Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], pp. 10, 126-28) for the insight that כּבש (with earth/land) occurs in Israel’s conquest tradition, and Walter Brueggemann (“Kerygma of the Priestly Writers,” *ZAW* 84 [1972: 397-414]) for the insight that this phrase imports into Genesis 1 the promise of restoration from exile (or, Davis suggests, the ironic possibility of further “exile”).


Thus 3:15 introduces a threat to the creation promise of subduing/dominion, just as 3:16-19 introduces a threat to the creation promise of agricultural and procreative fruitfulness.

In this light, the ancestral blessings’ restoration of Genesis 1:28 does not just promise a renewed (procreative and agricultural) fruitfulness, but also a renewed human dominion. This dominion will subdue dangerous animals, of whom the serpent is a fitting representative—and dangerous enemies, of whom the serpent is also a fitting representative. (For both sorts of promises in the prophetic corpus, often using language that parallels Gen 3:15, see my section 4.3.2.3.) Those who read Genesis 3:15 in terms of Genesis’ larger rubric of promise may even view the last two lines addressed to the serpent (he shall strike your head, and you shall strike his heel) not as an ongoing equally-matched struggle, but as one or more future victories in which the woman’s seed defeats the serpent.60

I am convinced that Genesis 3:15 encourages precisely this sort of reflection. The most important clue is the way that this age-old and ongoing conflict is framed as an enmity between two kinds of seed.61 At least some Persian-era Judeans self-identified as the holy seed (Ezra 9:2; Is 6:13; see also Godly seed in Mal 2:15).62 Such users of Genesis would scarcely have missed

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60 A great many commentators (see citations in Turner, Announcements, p. 45) have insisted that these lines imply no advantage on either side; serpents can only reach the heel (but their bite there is deadly), and humans would naturally strike serpents’ heads. Perhaps. But these scholars’ arguments (many of which treat this as an isolated saying) do not remove the possibility that Genesis’ users will read this puzzling wording in terms of attacks upon the head in such verses as Hab 3:13; Judg 5:26; 1 Sam 17:49; Ps 68:21; Jer 30:23; Ezek 17:19. The trampling of the serpent (along with the lion) in Ps 91:13 may remind the reader that when a heel meets a head it is usually in victory. Moreover, the first half of 3:15 surely implies subjugation associated with licking or eating dust (Ps 72:9; Is 49:23; and, mentioning the snake specifically, Is 65:25 and Mic 7:17). See also Is 27:1, where God announces an eschatological victory over the serpent.

61 Levin (“Yahwist: The Earliest Editor,” pp. 221-2) insists that in J the “line of blessing” and “line of curse” run on parallel tracks from beginning to end. T. Desmond Alexander (“Genealogies, Seed, and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” Tyndale Bulletin 44.2 [1993]: 255-70) reads 3:15 in light of the important seed language elsewhere in Genesis, beginning with the birth of Seth in 4:25. While I find his Christian-messianic exegesis unconvincing, I do think he has traced important signals that the text is emphasizing this word.

62 In that Ezra 9-10 enjoins endogamy, the phrase implies a certain degree of exclusivism. But this community chose a phrase that positions them as “a remnant in the face of widespread destruction,” marked by “smallness and vulnerability”—but also “a potential for growth” (Tamara Eskenazi, “The Missions of Ezra and
God’s climactic gift to Eve of another seed (Seth), which ends the story of the first humans (the toledot of heavens and earth, 2:4-4:26) by introducing a new line to carry the Adamic/divine image (see 5:1-3) in contradistinction to the line of cursed Cain (see my section 2.3.2). Such users, attuned to the notion of an ancient and ongoing enmity between two types of seed, might look to the curse on the serpent for a message of hope. After all, if each of the three pronouncements (to snake, to woman, and to Adam) describes a negative consequence for the addressee, any statement benefiting humans must occur in the curse of the snake.\(^{63}\)

Indeed, while the creator God does not directly curse humanity, no such delicacy is shown the snake—it is the first cursed entity, and thus (like cursed Cain in 4:11 and cursed Ham/Canaan in 9:25) may already align with the general category of those who will be cursed because they oppose/despise Abraham (12:3).\(^{64}\) All such figurative descendants of the serpent will, this poem suggests, act out an ongoing enmity toward Israel/humanity, but in doing so will fall under divine curse. They will eat dust (an image of defeat), while the blessed seed will crush their head (an image of victory). In Genesis, God wipes out the violent in a flood, yet saves Noah and his family—in part to keep seed alive (לְחַיּוֹת זֶרַע, 7:3). God wipes out oppressive Sodom and

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63 Westermann (Genesis 1-11, p. 260) opines that a pronouncement of punishment cannot include a prophecy of promise; but Genesis’ users may be clever enough to realize that my enemy’s punishment may be my promise. Does not the proclamation of hope to beleaguered Israel often begin with a pronouncement of punishment on Israel’s enemies?

64 In that the election of Abel’s gift (and not Cain’s), of Seth’s line (and not Cain’s), of Shem’s family (and not Ham’s) prefigures the election of Abraham and his family, one may say that the diselection of primeval enemies may foreshadow the curse on those who oppose Abraham’s family. If so, the fate of the serpent prefigures or mythically represents the fate of all those enemies of the chosen line (seed) whom Kaminsky (Yet I Loved Jacob) calls “deselect.”
Gomorrah with a rain of fire, yet again saves Abraham’s relatives, who respond to the disaster with a concern to keep seed alive (19:32, 34). And in Genesis 14 Abraham himself, with only his small household, wins an impressive victory over several kings. The rest of Genesis, in other words, paints an image of God cursing the ones who show enmity to the special seed, and destining them for ultimate defeat.

Primordial, mythic threats to the promise of multiplication and blessing (agricultural and procreative fruitfulness) will not have the final word; life and land and blessing and victory still remain the ending toward which this story strains. Thus, it is not too much to say with Hans-Joachim Kraus that the activity of God in Israel’s view of creation and the activity of God in Israel’s eschatology are two sides of the same coin, and that the creation accounts exist in no small part to portray what God’s future intrusion will look like.  

6.4 Blessing Israel for the End of Days

6.4.1 From Beginning (Gen 1:1) to Ending (Gen 49:1)

If Genesis’ inciting incident is the primordial disobedience/exile which threatens human blessing, one may ask whether and how the conflict gets resolved. Various passages, beginning in 4:1-2 and sprinkled throughout the primordial history, suggest at least a partial human success in agriculture and procreativity. Yet in general the threats are only exacerbated; Genesis 4:1-2 leads into a story about fratricide and a second (more direct) curse on agriculture, just as Noah’s possible relief from the curse (5:29) leads into a story about wholesale destruction. After the flood

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66 See Turner, Announcements, p. 25.
God reiterates the creation blessing (9:1, 7), but between these two verses chapter 9 makes it clear that ongoing violence will continue (9:5-6), just as 8:21 has acknowledged that the evil inclination will continue. The covenant of 9:8-17 is above all a mechanism for controlling the ongoing threat to creation so that all flesh will not perish—not an intimation that the blessing is no longer threatened. Meanwhile, the blessing/cursing poem of 9:25-27 exemplifies the ongoing conflict entailed in humanity’s pursuit of blessing; and as Carol Kaminski has shown, neither the Table of Nations (Gen 10) nor the Babel story (11:1-9) fulfills the “primaeval” blessing.

In the final form of Genesis this original creation blessing is funneled into the promises to the ancestors. In his much-cited article on the unity of Genesis, Bruce Dahlberg explains how the ancestral promises “reverse the theme of expulsion, alienation, and scattering abroad” of Genesis 1-11. But Dahlberg goes too far in hinting that these promises are actually fulfilled (and the threats to the blessing reversed) by the end of the story. Joseph’s partial, and temporary,

68 Kaminski (Primaeval Blessing, esp. pp. 142-5) persuasively shows that the patriarchs are “bearers of the creation theme” or “God’s creation purpose”; “God’s intention” is realized not in Gen 1-11 but in Israel. For this unity of Gen 1-11 and the promise to Israel’s ancestors, see Gerhard von Rad, “Das theologische Problem des alttestamentlichen Schöpfungsglaubens,” Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1936): 138-47; Ludwig Köhler, Theologie des Alten Testaments (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), p. 71; Franz Delitzsch, Commentar über die Genesis (Leipzig: Dörfling & Franke, 1860), p. 91. Despite Frank Crüsemann’s classic statement of the conceptual distinction between primeval and ancestral blocks of narrative (“Die Eigenständigkeit der Urgeschichte: Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um den ‘Yahwisten,’” in Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Jörg Jeremias and Lothar Perlitt [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981]: 9-29), Genesis’ users surely found ample ways to relate these two contiguous sections of the same scroll/book. Note here, for example, Gen 14:19b, where blessing is invoked on Abram precisely from the Maker of heaven and earth.

70 Dahlberg, “On Recognizing,” pp. 362-6. Dahlberg’s attempt to present Joseph as an anti-Adam is, in my view, not fully persuasive. I see little connection between the transgression mentioned in 50:17 and the so-called “sin” in Genesis 3, or between Joseph’s affirmation that God has preserved life (50:20) and the serpent’s insistence that the earliest humans will “not die” (3:4-5). Plenty of intervening verses have spoken of sins, life, and death. More credible (although still tenuous) is Dahlberg’s suggestion that the question Am I in the place of God? (50:19) reverses the earliest humans’ attempt to be like God (3:4-5). Finally, while the worldwide famine of 41:57 parallels the worldwide flood of chapters 6-8, this makes Joseph a second Noah—not an anti-Adam. Timothy Stone (“Joseph in the Likeness of Adam: Narrative Echoes of the Fall” unpublished paper, Genesis and Christian Theology Conference [St. Andrews, 2009]) gives an excellent cross-reading of the garden story and Joseph’s encounter with Potiphar’s wife. But along the way Stone shows similar correspondences throughout Genesis (e.g., Noah’s nakedness in 9:21-2), not a simple
authority under Pharaoh is hardly the same as a great name for a great nation of Israel; the blessing of Potiphar’s house is only a tiny piece of the greater sense that all families of the earth will be blessed through you. As elsewhere in Genesis, intriguing yet ultimately unsatisfactory successes have been strung along, not to show that the promise is fulfilled, but rather to keep the plot moving toward a future fulfillment. As Clines rightly protests against Dahlberg, “Nothing is solved.”

Perhaps the best way to put this is that the end of Genesis teases its audience with the possibility of resolution; Israel is now no longer simply an idea passed from parent to child, but rather a community of 70 settling down in the best part of the land of Egypt (which was already compared to the garden of Yhwh in Gen 13:10).

This possibility hits its peak in chapter 49, where Jacob pronounces Genesis’ final and longest blessing, addressed to the twelve tribes of Israel (49:28), bringing Genesis’ story full circle from in the beginning (בראשית, Gen 1:1) to at the end of (the) days (בְאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, 49:1). Yet precisely in chapters 49 and 50, Genesis takes special care to point the ending of the story beyond the ending of Genesis, refusing to resolve the narrative conflict (threatened blessing) in Joseph’s lifetime and heightening the tension of unrelieved expectation. Jacob in Genesis 49, inclusive; and his attempt to paint Adam as guilty and Joseph as innocent understates the narrative ambiguity of both these characters.

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71 Clines, Theme, p. 85. Kaminski (Primaeval Blessing) also demonstrates that this promise remains unfulfilled in the partial realizations sprinkled throughout Genesis’ ancestral stories; see my section 2.5.1. On the other hand, Kaminski significantly overstates the promise fulfillment in Exod 1:7; here the “land” which the Israelites “fill” is, ironically, the land of Egyptian slavery, and they are still on the way to their own promised land.

72 John Sailhamer (“Creation, Genesis 1-11, and the Canon,” Bulletin for Biblical Research 10.1 [2000]: 89-106, pp. 92-6) convincingly argues that the beginning in Gen 1:1 is itself incipiently eschatological, portraying creation as the initiation of a single history “that compels one to ask when its completion and fulfillment will come” (he cites here Köhler, Theologie, p. 72). The word ראשית already implies its “antonym” or “antithesis” in the word אַחֲרִית (Sailhamer cites here Delitzsch, Kommentar, p. 91; Otto Proksch, Die Genesis übersetzt und erklärt [Leipzig: Deichersche, 1913], pp. 265 and 425). According to Sailhamer, “Israel’s own history” is thereby construed as a “time between.”
like Baalam in Numbers 24:14 and Moses in Deuteronomy 31:29, looks up from Israel’s narrative setting (in Egypt, in Moab, and overlooking the Jordan) in order to speak of what will happen in the last days (בְאַחֲרִית הַיָמִים). These parallel poems only confirm the notion that the Pentateuch is presenting the scope of history from the very beginning to the very end.

Genesis 49:1-28 serves as a poetic commentary on Genesis’ ending, just as Genesis 3:14-19 was the poetic commentary on Genesis’ beginning. This lengthy poem explicates the action of the ancestral narratives and binds them tightly with the primeval struggles to realize the creation blessing. In the process, this poem clarifies the eschatological cast of Genesis’ promises. The first thing to notice about this poem is that its introduction and conclusion, more clearly than any other part of Genesis (with the possible exception of 15:13-16), steps out of the narrative moment and addresses the ongoing audience. This poem, which refers explicitly to various parts of the narratives that have already been recounted, as much as admits that the whole Genesis story has

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73 Sailhamer (“Creation,” pp. 92-4) argues persuasively that these three poems (or, rather, their final editorial additions) are clearly related. Not only are they introduced by the precise same phrase, not found elsewhere in the Pentateuch, but they bear other similarities as well. So, for example, compare Gen 49:9b with the nearly identical Num 24:9a. The poetry of Num 24, in fact, seems to include various Genesis formulae (see also 24:9b, repeating Gen 12:3; 27:29). All three poems point toward a distant future; see, e.g., Num 24:17, not now and not near. See especially Hans-Christoph Schmitt, “Der heidnische Mantiker als eschatologischer Jahweprophet: zum Verständnis Bileams in der Endgestalt von Num 22-24,” in idem, Theologie in Prophetie und Pentateuch: Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Ulrike Schorn and Matthias Büttner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001): 238-54.

74 Savran (“Beastly Speech”) and Grünberg (Abraham, pp. 22-33) explore allusions in Numbers 23-4 to Genesis’ ancestral promises and to the Eden story—reversing the “curse” in 3:14-19. So, for example, in Num 23:10 dust, which was life-giving in Gen 2:6 but became a symbol of the serpent’s humiliation (3:14) and humanity’s death (3:19), has (as in Gen 13:16; 28:14) been restored to a symbol of Israel’s fruitful multiplication. The prediction that the coming king will crush the forehead of Moab (unless פֵאָה here means borders) evokes the striking of the serpent’s head in Gen 3:15; and the odd mention of Seth in Num 24:17 and Cain in Num 24:22 also ties to the primordial history. Finally, as Sailhamer (“Creation,” pp. 102-3) makes clear, the poetry in Deut 32:1-43 also seems to evoke creation: in 32:10-14 God takes Israel from the תוהו to the אָרֶץ with language that evokes Gen 1:2 (esp. the rare verb הָרָא). This poem ends (Deut 32:43) with a cleansing of the land in a restoration-eschatological victory over enemies.
really been about what will happen to you in the last days (קְרָא אֶתְכֶםיִ נאֲשֶׁר בְאַחֲרִית הַיָמִים 49:1), a respective blessing (בְרָכָה) of each of the twelve tribes of Israel (שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר 49:28).  

In my next section I explore the two longest (and most eschatological) sections of Genesis 49, the blessings of Judah (49:8-12) and of Joseph (49:22-6). Here I consider briefly Jacob’s poetic words to the other 10 brothers. It is hard to make much of these 10 so-called blessings (see 49:28), terse poetic notes which play with the tribal names and/ or their tribal history. Note especially that the tribal history alluded to here may come from the eighth century B.C.E. (before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria) or even earlier. If so, this history is centuries removed from Genesis’ Persian-era Judean audiences, and may mean little to them (no record remains of Persian-era groups who claimed descent from most of these specific tribes). Most likely, such audiences valued this poem’s broad vision of Israel as a twelve-tribe unity dominated by the blessings so fully promised to Judah (representing Judea) and Joseph (representing the bulk of Samaria). The other brothers either echo this primary double blessing or else, in an even more interesting dynamic, provide a foil for it.

Four of these brothers are promised, in brief and uncertain hints, a measure of blessing. Asher has—or does he only provide?—rich and kingly, even Edenic, food (מֵאָשֵׁר שְׁמֵנָה לַחְמוֹ 49:20). Naphtali’s imagery is beautiful but obscure; Naphtali’s imagery is beautiful but obscure; אַמְרִי-שֶפֶר in 49:21 may


76 I simply cannot address all or even most of the textual and translational issues; for a thorough study which devotes 631 pages to this one chapter, see Raymond de Hoop, Genesis 49 and its Literary and Historical Context (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
refer to lovely (but not particularly numerous or powerful) progeny. And Benjamin’s wolf-like ability to overcome prey and receive spoils (דָּבָר שֶׁל דֵּבָרָה 49:27) may be a much more modest echo of the powerful lion with his prey (רֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶנֶn שלֶהֶה בְּרַכָּתָה 49:9). This tribe’s ravenous . . . devouring (רָצַּר רָצַּר . . . כִּי יֵאֹכַל 121) may remind the audience, humorously, of the only real participation of Benjamin in the preceding narrative—in 43:34 he is given a particularly large meal! Finally, the matter-of-fact placement of Zebulun near the sea bordering Sidon (49:13) fulfills in a modest way the land promise in the ancestral blessing so clearly attested in the surrounding narrative (49:29-33 revisits the Machpelah burial site which symbolizes the ancestors’ roots in Canaan, and such verses as 46:4 and 50:24-5 predict the exodus-settlement motif).

Much more ambiguous are the blessings of Issachar, Dan, and Gad. Issachar (49:14-15) is strong (גוֹר) and will have a good resting place/ pleasant land (מְנֻחָה כִּי טוֹב 49:14-15), evoking the land which is good in Gen 1-2). But this comes at the expense of accepting ongoing subjugation. As a northern tribe, Issachar may represent the perception by Genesis’ Judean users that some Persian-era northerners (Samarians) had better land and greater prosperity, but had capitulated to the conditions of oppression. At the moment, they embody more of the creation/ancestral blessing than do the Judeans, but they will not take the lead in the full restoration. Dan will judge his people (but not anybody else’s), demonstrating independence as one of the tribes rather than a special place of leadership among them (רָצַּר כְּאַחַד שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 49:16). In 49:17 he effectively attacks someone, but it is unclear whom; the horse and its rider (סְוֵס וְרֹכְבָיו) may evoke enemies, but may merely describe hapless passers-by. At the best, this is a modest military victory like that of Benjamin (v. 27; contrast the more expansive vv. 8b, 9-10). At worst, Dan is
compared to a dangerous pest (snake/ horned viper, נחש/שפיף) which strikes the horse’s heels (עקב סוס) without warning. Gad’s notice in 49:19 is similar, sharing the imagery of an attack at the heels (עקב) yet lacking any explicit serpent imagery; the reciprocal raiding of those who raid Gad (root גד) sounds more like an ongoing state of simmering conflict than decisive military action. All of this conflict reminds one of the dubious blessing of Ishmael in 16:12 (his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him). The expectation of ongoing enmity and (of course) the imagery of the snake biting at heels also evoke Genesis 3:15, a connection which I explore further below.

In the poem’s beginning, Jacob’s first three sons/ tribes are (49:28 not withstanding) more cursed than blessed; not coincidentally, these are the three oldest brothers, disqualified here in order to make way for the primacy of Judah (but also, perhaps, of Joseph; see below). Unlike the rest of the sons/ tribes, these three receive an explicit commentary on their actions earlier in Genesis’ narrative. So Reuben is, after an initial assumption of his preeminence as firstborn (49:2), robbed of that status (49:3a) precisely because of his earlier action of sleeping with Bilhah (35:22)—a sign not just of disrespect but of intentional rebellion in 2 Samuel 16:21-22. Simeon and Levi, treated together, receive this poem’s only explicit cursing (49:7) for their violent response to proposed intermarriage in 34:25-31. Obviously the language of cursing is significant in Genesis; in addition, the fact that they will be scattered (פוץ) ties them to Genesis’ non-Israelite nations (the Canaanites in 10:18, the tower-builders in 11:8-9) and the prophetic

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This is a strong critique—especially for Levi, which is not merely a northern “tribe” but is the eponymous ancestor claimed by Jerusalem’s cultic leaders of all kinds (including, but not limited to, Aaronids and Zadokites). It can hardly be a coincidence that some of these priests were known for their violent rejection of intermarriage. In fact, Jacob’s prediction that they will be *apportioned* (חלק, like spoil in Gen 49:27 and, e.g., in Exod 15:9 and Is 53:12) may also evoke the Pentateuch’s discussion of Levites’/priests’ *portion* (חלק) in view of their lack of a regular inheritance. Jacob does not merely criticize Levi’s (and Simeon’s) deceptive ploy leading to mass slaughter (34:25-31) as *fierce or cruel* (49:7a), he rather pointedly rejects any participation in such a strategy (49:6a). When Judeans hear (or sing) these words (*Let me not come into their council; may I not be joined to their assembly*) they take a stance against the violent exclusivism of (some) Levitical/priestly leaders. Unlike Jubilees (Jub 30:4-10; cf. also Judith 9:2-4), which quite approves of Simeon’s and Levi’s actions, Genesis centers Israelite (eschatological) identity *not* on Levi’s drive for purity but rather on the leadership of Judah and the fruitfulness of Joseph. I will now turn to these two central, eschatological blessings.

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78 For the postexilic assumption that Aaronids, Zadokites, and other priestly groups are genealogically Levites see, e.g., Gary Knoppers, “The Relationship of the Priestly Genealogies to the History of the High Priesthood in Jerusalem,” JINBP: 109-134, esp. p. 129.

79 See Ezra 9:1-10 and (especially) the etiological tracing of Levites’ special position to the zealous violence of Phinehas when the Israelites are intermarrying with foreign women (Num 25:6-13).

6.4.2 Judah’s Future Victory (Gen 49:8-12) and Joseph’s Fruitfulness (Gen 49:22-6)

In small but interesting ways, the blessings of Judah and Joseph relate to the stories already narrated about these two brothers. Joseph’s predicted fruitfulness (Gen 49:25 and perhaps 49:22) reminds one of his comment about fruitfulness in exile (41:52); his beleaguered state (49:23) could invoke his repeated narrative mistreatment (chs 37 and 39-40). Meanwhile, his preeminence among his brothers, predicted at the very beginning of this cycle (37:5-11) and repeated at the end (50:18a), connects not only to his blessing (49:27b) but to Judah’s (49:9a, c). On the other hand, Judah’s blessing (49:8-12) gives no explicit allusions to the limited narrative material about him in the preceding chapters. Audiences may, of course, read Genesis 49:8-12 while remembering this brother’s gradual lead in caring for his brothers (e.g., 37:26-7; 43:3-5, 8-10; perhaps 46:28; and especially 44:18-34); kingly preeminence comes precisely to the character who places the family’s good before his own. For that matter, such audiences may also read chapter 38 as royal etiology of the kingly (Davidic) line—and/or as an odd description of Israel’s ideal ruler. Judah in this chapter, like David in 2 Sam 11, is caught up in a sex scandal, tricked into passing hypocritical judgment before recognizing his own guilt (38:26) and thus, by implication, the need to behave responsibly rather than exercise self-serving authority.82

81 For the importance of this theme to the Joseph story see Turner, Announcements, pp. 143-69.

82 For this whole paragraph see Bryan Smith, “The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37-50,” Bibliotheca Sacra 162 (2005): 158-74. Smith goes too far, in my judgment, in suggesting that Judah has been a major character all along. Yet he does make the strong point that readings of this so-called “Joseph cycle” often simply omit Gen 38 and/or 49 (so Redford, Study; Lowenthall, Joseph Narratives; Coats, From Canaan to Egypt; and Longacre, Joseph). At the very least, one may notice that in 38:29-30 Judah’s line receives naming-formulae that continue past the eponymous tribal ancestor, and is unique in this regard (Joseph’s sons also receive naming-formulae, but Ephraim and Manasseh are themselves tribes). Thus Gen 38:29-30 points attention beyond the question “How did Israel’s tribes come to be?” to an entirely separate question—“How does ancestry continue within Judah?” It is hard not to connect the answer to the line of David (see Ruth 4:18-22).
Meanwhile Tamar is in Genesis’ ethics more righteous (Gen 38:26) because her scandalous deception has continued a line that had been cut off, ensuring Judah’s future.⁸³

Any such narrative-world reflections must also be read in light of Judah’s eschatological kingship in his poetic blessing. Genesis 49:10 has long been understood as an eschatological or even messianic text, beginning with Qumran’s 4Q252.⁸⁴ One does not have to resolve the obscure phrase about “Shiloh”⁸⁵ (which may not have been clear even to ancient audiences) in order to affirm that Judah’s preeminence over his brothers (49:8) and even the nations (49:10) is, in Persia-era Judea, an eschatological expectation. Even Müller, who associates this passage with a historical situation (the reign of David), argues that any “present salvation” (under David) functions as a “pledge for the final completion,” and that these verses’ actual description (victory over enemies, paradisal fruitfulness) leave “no heights to rise further.” As a result, they clearly intend a final and unsurpassable state, an expectation of cosmic (not merely political) transformation.⁸⁶ The expression here parallels closely the prophetic restoration eschatology, especially the twin themes of political/military power and transformation of the natural world (see, e.g., Am 9:12-13; Joel 4:18-21). This expectation is portrayed as a totally new day, one in which the creation blessing of dominion and the related ancestral promises (great nation, great

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⁸³ Note this story’s similarity to Gen 19:30-38, where the Ammonites and Moabites are populated by a similar act of incest. Jenkins (“A Great Name,” p. 49) emphasizes that the naming formulae for Judah’s children place this act of birth into explicit continuity with the series of promised-line births up to this point, providing a crucial link toward later material (e.g., Ruth 4:18-22) about the origins of the Davidic monarchy.


⁸⁵ The variation in ancient manuscripts/versions may demonstrate ancient readers’ confusion. See discussion in Hans-Peter Müller (“Zur Frage nach dem Ursprung der biblischen Eschatologie,” VT 14 [1964]: 276-93), favoring various messianic (Davidic) emendations; and Schmitt (“Eschatologische Stammesgeschichte” pp. 196-7), recommending the MT and translating “until he (i.e., Judah) comes to Shiloh” (bis daβ er (sc. Juda) nach Silo kommt).

name, victory over enemies) will be realized to a much greater extent than anything experienced by the characters of Genesis—or its Persian-era users.

Admittedly, some have argued that this poem in its original setting must refer to Davidic conquests or (alternatively) the Josianic expansion. Even if this is so, Persian-era Judeans read it in a context without a monarchy, one in which Davidic expectations (where present at all) were themselves closely tied to idealistic eschatology of a miraculous restoration. In fact, the tendency of Genesis to apply Davidic promises to the people as a whole means that even the references to the ruler’s scepter/staff (שֵׁבֶט, 49:10) may here have to do less with a restored royalty than with general Judean hopes for ascendance. Hans-Christoph Schmitt has argued that the poem is postexilic, its expectation having less to do with Davidic or Josianic expansion than with the relationships of Persian-era Judeans with their northern neighbors. Just as the Israelites have been asked to come to Jerusalem to worship, so in the final consummation Judah too will come (יָבֹא) to the premiere northern shrine, undoing Yhwh’s implicit rejection of northern Israel and its worship sites.


88 However, users from the Persian period or shortly after could certainly connect the Judah-expectation with a specific messianic/Davidic restoration. Schmitt (“Eschatologische Stammesgeschichte,” pp. 199-200) thinks that Gen 49:8-12 is about the tribe of Judah’s “collective greatness” (kollektive Größe), yet admits that in Zech 9:9-10 (which shares some of the same language, joining Ephraim/Joseph with Judah while predicting a coming reign of peace) this has become a single (messianic) figure. Note also that the geographic expression of the universal rule in Zech 9:10, from the River to the ends of the earth, is the same phrase which Sir 44:21 associates with the ancestral promise to Abraham. I do not think that Persian-era Judeans would have agreed among themselves as to whether Judah in Gen 49 represents only the ongoing community of Judeans (the audience), or also a restored Davidic monarch (Messiah?) from their midst. As noted above (section 4.2), disagreement/ambiguity on this point fills the Persian-era prophetic corpus.

89 On the basis of his redactional (compositional) discussion Schmitt (“Eschatologische Stammesgeschichte,” pp. 196-7) stipulates that this verse must refer to postexilic associations with Shiloh; a late layer in the book of Josh (18:1, 8-10; 19:51; 22:9 12), for example, understands Shiloh as a preeminent north-Israelite shrine (see also Ps 78:56-68, where Yhwh rejects Shiloh/Joseph and chooses Judah/Zion).
Even if Schmitt over-reads the enigmatic Shiloh phrase, he rightly emphasizes the concern of Genesis 49 (in its narrative context) to balance Judah’s supremacy with Joseph’s. Judah’s brothers bow to him in the poem (49:8), just as Joseph’s repeatedly bow to him in the story (37:7; 42:6; 43:26, 28; cf. 37:7). In the poem’s ordering Judah becomes the preeminent son (after Reuben, Simeon, and Levi have been disqualified), but in the story Jacob consistently treats Joseph as firstborn. Genesis 49:22-26, which I discuss further below, continues to treat Joseph as the chosen son set apart from his brothers (נְזִיר אֶחָיו, 49:26b), the exemplary recipient of the ancestral blessing expressed in Edenic language (49:22, 25-6).

Yet these Edenic images also occur in Judah’s section, which predicts for this tribe the “Fülle von Milch und Wein” which Hermann Gunkel calls “ein Charakteristikum der Endzeit.” Such language points not just back to Eden, but forward to the Davidic promises and their multifold expression in narrative and Psalm. Edenic images of fruitfulness complement the verses about Judah’s kingly rule, just as Numbers 24 combines Edenic restoration (24:5-7a) with the rise of a future king (24:7b-9). If Judah’s poem is primarily about preeminence but also about paradisal wine and milk, if Joseph’s poem is primarily about the Edenic blessing but also

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92 See Sailhamer, “Creation,” p. 97. Of course, the Abrahamic promises are, it has often been noted, modeled on Davidic promises; see, e.g., Ronald Clements, Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition (Naperville, Ill: Allenson, 1967); John Van Seters, Abraham in History and Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

93 Incidentally, the tendency of so many early texts and versions (LXX, Samaritan Pentateuch, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotian) to render the victory over Agag (Num 24:7b) as a victory over Gog attests the fact that the eschatological significance of אֵלֶּה אֲגָּן (אֵלֶּה אֲגָּן) in Numbers 24:14 has not been missed—the same phrase occurs in Ezekiel’s eschatological Gog prophecy, Ezek 38:16. According to Sailhamer (“Creation,” p. 97), such a reading of Num 24:7b helps explain Ezek 38:17’s claim that prophets had already spoken of Gog in former days.
about preeminence among his brothers, it may be difficult to place one of these sections ahead of the other. Could it be that Genesis intends to elevate the two together—an understanding attested from at least as early as 1 Chronicles 5:1-2?

Schmitt notes that Genesis here foreshadows an eschatological reconciliation (endzeitliche Wiedervereinigung) of Judah and Joseph, as a precondition for Israel’s eschatological supremacy over the nations (49:10b) and Edenic prosperity (49:11-12). This is, of course, the conception of various expressions of restoration eschatology in the prophetic literature (e.g., Ezek 37:15-24 and Hos 2:1-3). Israel’s eschatological reunification of north and south is implied throughout Genesis, whose ancestral promises are addressed to the whole 12-tribed Israel and delivered in sites sacred both to Judeans and to Israelites/ Samarians. In Judah’s blessing, then, expectation focuses on the tribe most closely associated with Genesis’ Judean audience; but even when expecting its own superiority (49:8b) this audience attempts, in story and song, to tie its own special fate together with an exalted state for its northern “brothers” as well. Perhaps the promise of fruitful multiplication is simply not envisioned as capable of fulfillment without the incorporation of Judeans’ more populous northern neighbors, not to mention the return of all Israel’s descendants wherever they might be scattered.

This brings me to the Joseph poem, which resembles Judah’s blessing yet also differs from it significantly. This section, too, promises paradisal blessing; in fact, only here does the poem itself use the word blessing (root ברך, vv. 25-6), a concept applied to the whole poem in 49:28. Obviously, Joseph receives here a preeminence which rivals Judah’s own; he receives the

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95 In light of Genesis’ narratives, an audience identifying with Judah narrates itself as imperfect but humble (ch. 38), guilty of gross sin (50:15, 17) but willing to be enslaved on behalf of its family (44:18-34).
blessings of his father, as Jacob did in Genesis 27, and he is set apart from his brothers (נזיר אחים, 49:26b). Nor does his blessing lack the language of military strength; verse 24 parallels, at least in part, verse 8b and 9. Yet set apart is not quite the same thing as receiving praise and bowing, and Joseph’s taut bow and agile arms (בأستין כפשתו נ弱点 וירח, 49:24a-b) imply only strength in battle, not absolute victory. By contrast, Judah’s military power makes fighting itself unnecessary; your hand on the neck of your enemies (בדעה י伸びו עליך, 49:8b) is not a position of battle but of corralling a defeated prisoner, and the lion in verse 9 is not battling but stretched in a repose that none dare rouse.

But if Judah’s poem gives the premiere statements of kingly rule (especially in verse 10), Joseph’s poem most lavishly expresses Edenic bounty. Here is not simply wine and milk, but blessings associated with creation itself—heavens above and deeps below (ברכות שמיים ומצל ברכות, 49:25). The same verse includes the procreative blessing from Gen 1:28, concretized (as it has been throughout Genesis) as the fertility of women, breasts and womb (ברכות שעדות ורמח). In this light, I even suggest that audiences seeking to make sense of the difficult verse 22 (e.g., is פורה fruit or bull?) may receive it in light of the story of Eden; the spring (גיא) is the source of the earth’s waters, the wall (שורי) is the garden’s boundary (unmentioned in Gen 2-3, but common enough in users’ experience of gardens). Similarly, however one treats the textual, lexical, and grammatical difficulties of 49:26, this blessing is obviously associated with something timeless—eternal (עולם) in v. 26 may mean either “infinitely ancient” (i.e., primordial) or “infinitely longlasting” (i.e., enduring to the very end). Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in Genesis 12-50, the creation story has been
associated with Israel’s future blessing; the *beginning* (Gen 1:1) comes full circle here at the *ending* (Gen 49:1).

### 6.4.3 Summary: Genesis 49 and Israel’s Trust

Finally, I wish to call attention to the one verse in Genesis 49 which seems to interrupt the poem, addressing not a single tribe but the whole of Jacob’s (Israel’s) response to this vision of the future. That verse, of course, is 49:18: *I wait for your salvation, Yhwh!* (גּ קִוֵיתִי יהוה). In Sailhamer’s words, this interjection “reveals an eschatological hope expressed in terms identical to those of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 25:9; 33:2; 40:31; 59:11).”

It may not be coincidental that this exclamation of hope or trust occurs immediately after Jacob describes Dan as a serpent that bites at the heel—and right before he predicts that Gad too will raid *their heels*. I cannot help but wonder whether the audience of Genesis, centuries removed from any real knowledge of Dan’s or Gad’s tribal history, will read this description precisely as a mythic-poetic evocation of the Genesis 3 serpent. The *modus operandi* of the serpent becomes the primary activity associated with Dan and with Gad. Enmity—the challenge to blessing, the opposition to the promises—is here embodied in one or more of Israel’s own tribes. Perhaps Genesis’ Judean users, who want to incorporate the northern “tribes” (i.e., the neighboring sub-province whose capital was Samaria) and to symbolize them in the person of fruitful Joseph, also know that some of their their northern brothers can be a source of hostility as well. If so, this ongoing possibility of hostility throws a shadow on the poem’s eschatological fruitfulness and peace (49:8-11, 22-26). In this shadow, the hearer (or singer) of this poem must simply *wait* for Yhwh’s *salvation*.

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96 Sailhamer, “Creation,” p. 94.
In other words, the ending of Genesis has not left behind the need for a divine intervention. Robert Cohn traces a movement in Genesis from direct/explicit divine action to more subtle divine involvement in a world which (like that of the users’ present) is dominated by human choices and activity. This movement replicates the way that Genesis’ first chapters begin in mythic/utopian conditions and only then move toward realistic conditions of normal life (e.g., realistic human lifespans). Genesis’ movement from a world of direct divine involvement and utopian conditions, toward a mundane world of human ups and downs, may seem quite uneschatological. On Cohn’s reading, the world was once-upon-a-time charged with the possibility of ideal life and salvific intervention, but now the world simply is the way that it is. Yet I suggest that the Joseph story conveys the opposite effect, guiding its audience through an in-between time when the present (veiled) activity of God must be viewed precisely through the twin lenses of God’s past promises and God’s future fulfillment. Israel can shape its life around the present affirmation of God’s veiled activity (50:20) and the future expectation of God’s unveiled activity (50:24-5).

What kind of future expectation is envisioned? Certainly, in the context of the narrative situation in which this whole poem occurs, framed by twin predictions about the need to return to the promised land (46:2-4; 50:24-5), this poem expects God to act in bringing Israel out of Egypt. Almost as certainly, Judeans living in the Persian era would read such an expectation (and, indeed, all of the biblical accounts of the exodus event) as directly applicable to the return-from-exile experience. Yet this experience also functions as a pointer toward something else; even those Judeans who had never left their land (the majority of Judeans) could call themselves exiles.

97 Cohn, “Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective.” Note that Joseph and his brothers receive no divine speeches of instruction or blessing like those received by earlier characters such as Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca and Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, Joseph must interpret cryptic dreams and the events of his experience to discern God’s intentions.
a deep communal identification with the grand dislocation of the Babylonian conquest. And as Nehemiah 9:36 makes clear, even those deported Judeans who did return to the Persian province of Judea (probably the minority of deportees) could speak of return-from-exile as something more than their geographic move; they still struggled to rebuild the Jerusalem temple but also the social structures and theological hopes which they associated with an idealized past (now lost) and an idealized future (still unrealized). Thus Persian-era Judeans developed a profile of restoration eschatology, not least in their prophetic corpus, which closely resembles the expectation laid out in Genesis 49: victory over enemies, unity between Judah and northern Israel (Joseph), and paradisal prosperity and fruitfulness.

In fact, the future act of God envisioned in Genesis 49 (and, perhaps, in the prophetic corpus) cannot be reduced to simple national prosperity or military greatness. Rather, the poem takes great pains to tie this condition back to the fruitfulness of God’s original creation. Perhaps, then, the dominion expected in Genesis 49:8b and 9-10 should also tie back to the prediction in Genesis 3:15—a verse clearly evoked by the language of 49:17. Rereaders who stumble upon this correspondence may, amid whatever thoughts they might have had about Dan (as a person or a tribe), have connected all Genesis’ language about victory with a fundamental creation-victory over the ancient enmity which has threatened the blessing. Thus Genesis 49 evokes, both in obvious and in subtle ways, all which the prophetic eschatology envisions.

By passing down human blessings which replicate the divine ancestral blessing, Israel can continue to affirm and lean into its future destiny in the absence of explicit signs. The

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99 Grüneberg (Abraham, p. 136) rightly notes that while a specifically messianic reading of Gen 3:15 is a later development, it is certainly “not unjustifiable” to read this verse as an implicit “future triumph of humanity over some power of evil.” My contention is that this implicit meaning becomes activated precisely by the evocation of Gen 3:15 in a context of more explicit predictions of future triumph (49:8-10).
“withdrawal” of God’s hand from current events, which could spur a disinterest in eschatological speculation, is itself a training ground for the sorts of trust-against-the-evidence that constitutes Israel’s eschatological ethic. For now, it is enough that Israel is kept alive (לְהַחֲיוֹת, 45:7; 50:20; cf. also 6:19-20, where the same infinitive is used to describe the preservation of animals on Noah’s ark). But eventually a future dominion (49:8-10), a paradisal blessing (49:11-12, 22, 25-26), and above all the possession of the land must all await a future moment when God will visit his people (root פָּקַד, 50:24-5). Thus Genesis 49:18, along with the very final verses of Genesis (50:24-6), expresses fully the prophetic notion that “one waits for the decisive salvation solely from the intervention of Yhwh.”¹⁰⁰ This orientation toward waiting constitutes the eschatological trust-ethic of Genesis, to which I now turn.

### 6.5 Conclusion: Trusting the God of Promise

#### 6.5.1 Trust in Persian Judea, and in the Pentateuch’s Overall Composition

From a purely literary standpoint, Genesis invites an eschatological understanding without ever going so far as to require one. Grüneberg suggests that for some audiences, the ancestral promise might seem realizable without “any particular change in Israel or decisive action on God’s part to accomplish it.” Yet he immediately adds that such a reading would be most likely “when Israel was prosperous, and the promises of [Gen 12:2] seemed to be having their effect (e.g. during Solomon’s reign as traditionally depicted).”¹⁰¹ One may note the

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¹⁰¹ So Grüneberg, Abraham, p. 189.
conceptual fuzziness of proposing a reading of Genesis 12:2 within “depicted” rather than plausible history; Grüneberg does not propose any other potential settings when Israelites might have thought themselves near to experiencing promises like these.\textsuperscript{102} It is worth exploring what this sequence of promises, this web of blessings and cursings, would have meant for real users in historically plausible (not merely depicted) settings.

Specifically, Babylonian destruction and deportation, along with severe decreases in population and prosperity for those who remained in (or returned to) Judea, had raised a particularly pressing question of Israel’s trust in Yhwh. A massive amount of literature (e.g., Israel’s Deuteronomistic history and much of its prophetic corpus, as well as several Psalms and the book of Lamentations) narrates this exile as a deserved punishment by Yhwh, presumably in order to defend Yhwh’s power and justice in the midst of national suffering. Yet like Shakespeare’s lady who protests too much (Hamlet Act III, Scene II), Persian Judeans who (re)write and (re)read such literature also attest their own sharp temptation to doubt that history truly belongs to Yhwh and his so-called chosen people. Judeans in this period no longer faced anything as drastic as a conquered capital and a burned temple, but they continued to be an occupied, impoverished, sparsely populated community clinging to dreams of a special blessing while surrounded by more prosperous neighbors. Literature from this era attests an ongoing crisis of faith—a question of whether they are indeed loved (Mal 1:2), of whether there is indeed any point in rebuilding the shattered remnants of Jerusalem’s temple and community (Hag 1:2). The

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{102} Grüneberg, \textit{Abraham}, treats Genesis in its final form, but does not discuss its dating. As Carr (\textit{Reading the Fractures}, pp. 220-32) argues persuasively, past attempts to date Genesis’ promises to the golden age under David and Solomon are historically backward: the depictions of Israel’s golden age are themselves later idealizations, constructed in part to give visible expression to exilic and postexilic hopes.
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Pentateuch came together in large part to deal with the question of Israel’s identity as a people whose faith remained in Yhwh.\textsuperscript{103}

In Genesis, this question of whether or not one will trust God’s promises comes to the surface in Genesis 15. Lipton notes that “God’s dealings with Abraham established a pattern of promise and fulfillment punctuated by delay,” giving Genesis the “capacity to quell the uncertainty of the exiles”—“delay need not entail doubt.”\textsuperscript{104} Yet delay may entail doubt, and this (it seems) is the very point of Genesis 15:6. Studies by Schmitt, John Ha, and Herbert Mölle have shown that Genesis 15 is not just one among many patriarchal accounts; it has, in its present form, been deliberately constructed to tie the ancestral promises to the full sweep of Pentateuchal history.\textsuperscript{105} These studies may arrange the passage’s layers differently, but all three agree that at least some of chapter 15 addresses a Pentateuch-wide question of faith, related to the prophetic faith-challenge in (e.g.) Is 7:9b. So for example Schmitt connects Genesis 15:6 to a general pattern dominating Exodus 1-14, in which the crisis of the people’s faith/belief is accompanied by signs (4:1-9, 31), climaxing in a God-granted deliverance (14:13-14) and a final faith-acknowledgement (14:31).\textsuperscript{106} Schmitt meticulously demonstrates a) that this faith-theme belongs to a late post-priestly layer, b) that a similar expression connects various parts of the Pentateuch, each time playing a central role in its respective tradition-block (e.g., Gen 15:6; Exod 19:9a; Num 19:11b; 20:12); and c) that the same perspective occurs in prophetic and Deuteronomistic works


\textsuperscript{104} Lipton, \textit{Revisions of the Night}, pp. 216-17.


Schmitt concludes that a very late, Persian-era reworking of Pentateuchal sources reads this material as a salvation-historical reflection on the crisis of exile, carried on in conversation with the writing prophets.\textsuperscript{108}

As Sailhamer notes, at least two Psalms (78 and 106) view the Pentateuch in terms of the ancestors’ faith (106:12) and lack of faith (106:24; 78:22, 32, 37) in Yhwh’s words and actions. This may confirm that Schmitt’s faith-principle is not merely operative in the composition of the Pentateuch—it also impacts the Pentateuch’s reception by ancient audiences. One may also mention here Nehemiah 9:8 (you found [Abraham’s] heart faithful) and, considerably later, the New Testament’s extensive reflection on the Pentateuch in Hebrews 11’s litany of faith.

Admittedly, Sailhamer’s attempt to \textit{contrast} Abraham (“man of faith”) and Moses (“man of law”), at the expense of Moses, is indefensible.\textsuperscript{109} The corrective for this sort of Protestant antinomianism is simple enough: in the Pentateuch Abraham and Moses function together, imperfectly expressing both faith and obedience. Thus Moberly persuasively argues, against Gerhard von Rad, that Abraham’s faith in Genesis 15:6 is not an individualized, interiorized, anti-cultic act of belief.\textsuperscript{110} Rather, Abraham in 15:6 \textit{continues} to believe, a faith which “cannot be


\textsuperscript{108} Schmitt, “Redaktion,” pp. 236-7; see also idem, “‘Priesterliches,’” pp. 213-19. Note that on p. 217 Schmitt actually accepts a postexilic opposition between theocratic-priestly and prophetic-eschatological groups (with the obligatory reference to Otto Plöger, \textit{Theocracy and Eschatology} [London: Basil Blackwell, 1968] and no other support). He therefore must assume (p. 218) an unexplained process of “consensus building” (\textit{Konsensus-bildung}) in the Pentateuch between prophetic and priestly circles. His actual exegesis does not really trace two separate visions, but rather demonstrates the currently-existing “joint presentation” (\textit{Zusammenschau}), in which there is no noneschatological theocracy.

\textsuperscript{109} John Sailhamer, \textit{The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 66-76. Sailhamer unaccountably compares premier statements praising Abraham (15:6; 26:5) with one of the few passages critiquing Moses (Deut 32:51)—ignoring Abraham’s less exemplary moments (e.g., 12:10-20 and 20:1-18, esp. 20:9c) and praises of Moses (e.g., Num 12:8; Deut 34:10).

understood apart from his whole life of obedient response.”

Just as in Psalm 106:31 the priesthood owes its special status to Yhwh’s acceptance of Phinehas’ exemplary actions, so in Genesis 15:6 Israel owes its special status to Yhwh’s acceptance of Abraham’s exemplary faith.

It is for this reason that Genesis’ earliest attested users tied Genesis 15:6 to Genesis 22:15-18, where Yhwh also makes Abraham’s exemplary response a motivation for Israel’s ongoing life. These verses, it seem to me, lend a prima facie plausibility to von Rad’s suggestion that the Akedah (like Gen 15:6) has something to do with faith—not, admittedly, the interiorized existential experience described by Kierkegaard, but faith nonetheless. After all, Abraham does straightforwardly claim both that Isaac will return and that God will provide. If the word עָבֹד in 22:2 evokes family affection, then perhaps this story is about Abraham’s poignant test of “love” versus “obedience.”


\[114\] Levenson (Death and Resurrection, pp. 126-31) takes Soren Kierkegaard (Fear and Trembling [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954 (1843)]) as an unfortunate straw man before concluding (p. 131) that only “Pauline-Lutheran well-springs” motivate the interpretation of the Akedah as “based upon faith.” Levenson actually begins (pp. 125-6) by citing Gerhard von Rad (Das Opfer des Abraham [Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971]; Genesis [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972]) before switching to Kierkegaard, who then becomes the representative for this faith-interpretation. Thus Levenson mainly passes over the exegetical arguments offered by the biblical scholar, attacking instead the overstatements of the philosopher.

\[115\] Levenson (Death and Resurrection, pp. 131-2) rightly notes that there are other ways of taking these words, but I find quite problematic his argument that narrative ambiguity means we should seek a “more pragmatic” explanation than the hypothesis that Abraham means what he says.

\[116\] So Levenson, Death and Resurrection, p. 137. Levenson focuses on Abraham’s tugged heart-strings. But Abraham himself is silent (contrast, e.g., 18:22-33 and 21:11), as Terence Fretheim emphasizes (“God, Abraham, and
favored child or heir (see, e.g., Mal 1:2-5), one may with von Rad suggest that the test is less about affection than it is about one last threat to the divine promise—Isaac embodies all which God has already promised Abraham.117

As I discuss above (chapter 2), I think that Genesis 22 is an example of those Pentateuchal stories which guide the audience’s appropriation through an etiological conclusion—in this case a double-ending (22:14 and 22:15-18). If the second of these is the Akedah’s “earliest commentary,” the first more clearly takes up the story’s own repeated language of seeing or seeing to (i.e., providing; ראה).118 I take seriously this etiological notice which could not say any clearer that this story is about Yhwh’s provision. In fact, Genesis 22:14 does not merely characterize Yhwh as a faithful, providing God, it also invites a user-world (to this day) disposition which trustingly recites that God will provide. Those who use this ongoing saying are thereby joining Abraham in his response to Yhwh’s test (22:8). If Genesis 22 validates both the divine promise and the ongoing sacrificial cult because you have heeded my voice (v. 18b),119 this obedience takes a form in which God’s provision completely overshadows the actual human act of sacrificing (the ram). Cultic sacrifice or legal obedience are grounded upon, but to a

the Abuse of Isaac,” Word and World 15.1 [1995]: 49-57, p. 51). As Phyllis Trible argues (“Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah,” in “Not in Heaven”: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative, ed. Jason Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]: 170-91), Abraham has shown no signs of over-attachment to Isaac, and has already shown himself willing to cast off family members. In contrast, on a subject of which Abraham does speak (his confidence that God will provide), Levenson warns against drawing any conclusions about his “thoughts and feelings” (Levenson, p. 131). This is, it seems to me, exactly backward.

117 Von Rad, Das Opfer. For a recent defense of von Rad’s interpretation, see Schmid, “Abraham’s Sacrifice.”

118 Moberly, “Earliest Commentary.”

119 Moberly (“Earliest Commentary” and “Abraham’s Righteousness”) notes that 22:14 (Mountain of Yhwh) and 22:2 (Moriah; see 2 Chr 3:1) may imply an etiology of Jerusalem temple-worship, just as 22:15-18 clearly provides an etiology (or motivation) of God’s promise/blessing.
certain degree relativized by, the test-passing faithful response which fear[s] God (22:12) and obey[s] his voice (22:18b). One may connect this perspective with Genesis 15:6 under the rubric of tested (and obedient) trust.

Schmitt concludes that the Pentateuch fully combines a (priestly?) “legal piety to be striven for” and a (prophetic?) “expectation of a new act of God.” In other words, the obedience to Mosaic law enjoined on the Pentateuch’s audience in its priestly material is, in the Pentateuch’s final redaction, combined with “an existential attitude, which in trust in the divine promise passively expects from God the decisive salvation-action.” In light of my preceding discussion I take issue with the word “existential” (unless Schmitt here means only “experience-based”), and I certainly do not think that Genesis’ trust is “passive” (passiv). In Genesis, trust motivates the ancestors to radical obedience (e.g., Gen 22:15-18), radical generosity (e.g., 14:21-5), and radical forgiveness (e.g., 45:4-15). Yet as Schmitt emphasizes, trust also motivates a radical hope in the future visitation of Yhwh (50:24-5). This brings me back to the exclamation of hopeful waiting in Genesis 49:18 (I wait for your salvation, Yhwh!), which echoes not just prophetic eschatology (Is 8:17) but also the eschatological liturgy of the Jerusalem temple (see, e.g., Ps 130:5). These words, coming as they do at the end of the book, use the characters’ relationship with God in order to orient readers to their own trustful waiting. They direct a rereader of Genesis to look back on the book in order to understand, not just the promised salvation for which they wait, but the attitude of hope in which they wait. In other words, the

122 Schmitt, “‘Priesterliches’ und ‘prophetisches,’” p. 216 (einer Existenzhaltung . . . die im Vertrauen auf die göttliche Verheißung das entscheidende Heilshandeln passiv von Got erwarten). On the same page Schmitt stipulates that this trust is a response to the “untransparency of history” (Undurchschaubarkeit der Geschichte), perhaps a veiled reference to the lack of obvious blessing in Persian Judean life.
waiting or trust commended by 49:18 and 15:6 emerges from, and also guides, an overall (re)reading of Genesis. I now turn to survey the possibility of using tested (and obedient) trust as a reading strategy for the whole book of Genesis.

6.5.2 Trust as a Reading Strategy for the Book of Genesis

In Genesis’ stories, because divine promises are a common thread, trust in those divine promises is also a common thread. Abraham’s story begins with his leaving his homeland for a place that I will show you (אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ, 12:1), and climaxes in the Akedah where he sets out to sacrifice in the place that I will say to you (גּuni(אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶי/ךּכ, 22:2). Jacob’s vow at his journey’s outset (38:20-22) eventually transforms into a confession of God’s blessing throughout his struggles (32:9-10). Genesis’ ending relates the trust of the nascent Israelites, linked both with providential exilic survival (50:20) and with expectation of a radically new divine visitation (50:24-25). In each of these situations the characters’ trust is tenuous and conflicted, predicated on a promise/blessing whose reality only emerges through severe testing. Perhaps this is clearest in the linked stories of Genesis 16, 21, and 22, in each of which an angelic voice produces a new awareness of the God who sees the oppressed and fugitive slave, who hears the voice of the child dying of thirst and opens the eyes of the mother to a nearby well, and who sees to (provides) a sacrifice to spare Abraham’s heir.

Above, I showed how Genesis’ logic of etiological naming-formulae (of a well in 16:14, and a mountain in 22:14) attempts to draw the audience into the characters’ recognition of a God whose “seeing” or “provision” assures the future. Yet the audience may, in view of the rather cavalier divine commands which initiate the crisis, refuse to accept this invitation. Audiences may understandably ask what sort of God sends Hagar back to her oppression under Sarah, what...
kind of God persuades Abraham to consign Hagar to near-death in the wilderness, and what kind of God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Especially in this last story, the father who lets Ishmael go only after wringing a promise from God (21:11-14; compare 18:22-33) now obeys without protest when Isaac’s life at stake—perhaps because Isaac is the very embodiment of the promise, and thus the command to sacrifice Isaac calls into question the very practice of intercession. Additional words of protest or assurance are neither needed nor helpful, since a God cruel enough to decree Isaac’s death would scarcely heed Abraham’s protests—and a God faithful enough to keep God’s own word would scarcely decree Isaac’s death. Only playing the test out to its bitter end will determine whether the promising God is worthy of Abraham’s trust.

In the process, the audience is brought into the same stark test of whether to regard Yhwh as trustworthy. Some readers, ancient and modern, have decided that such stories testify to a deity who regards oppressed women and helpless children as merely instrumental, a deity who concocts a cruel test simply to underline that obedience to God’s own self must trump all basic human compassion. In going along with such a farce, does Abraham fail the test and (in the process) scar Isaac for life? Or does the audience, reciting “God will provide” with renewed confidence, read in Isaac their own conviction that God will always snatch back life from the very shadow of death for the child of the promise? I argue that the story heightens (rather than

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123 I am thinking of God’s command to Jeremiah not to pray for the people (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11), perhaps because in God’s decision to exile Israel the whole covenant basis for intercession is thrown into question.

124 Fretheim, “God, Abraham, and the Abuse of Isaac,” pp. 55-6. In discussing an earlier Genesis story (Gen 15), Lipton (Revisions of the Night, p. 216) astutely notes that “in creating a text that demands interpretation and which is, in fact, incoherent without it, the redactor has forced the exilic readers posited here to participate in a text of which they, as well as Abraham, are the subjects.”

125 So, explicitly, Malcolm Schrader, “The Akedah Test: What Passes and What Fails,” JBQ 32.4 (2004): 251-8; David Zucker, “Isaac Betrayed and Triumphant,” JBQ 38.3 (2010): 166-74. See the balanced discussion in Fretheim, “God, Abraham, and the Abuse of Isaac.” As an aside, one may note that this character hardly comes across as neurotic and fearful: he receives an ideal wife with no effort of his own (contrast Jacob’s struggles!), plays out the wife-sister charade modeled by his father but departs from the script long enough to fondle his wife in public, finds water so easily that he shows little reluctance in abandoning wells to grasping neighbors, and makes parenting decisions based on his fondness for wild game.
obscuring) this tension, emphasizing the characters’ pathos (Hagar’s emotions in 21:15-16, and Isaac’s innocence in 22:7) in a way that threatens to deconstruct the concluding reflections on God’s trustworthiness but need not do so.

In semiotic terms, one could perhaps say that Genesis 21-22 replicates in the reader the testing that is asserted of Abraham. The evocative description of Hagar’s and Ishmael’s plight (21:15-16) tempts the reader to distrust God, as does the evocative description of the horrendous sacrifice that God (initially) commands Abraham (22:2). The readers’ real anxiety about Hagar’s, Ishmael’s, and Isaac’s fate—an anxiety which the story intentionally arouses—allows for the possibility of a blanket refusal to trust God. Thus it should surprise nobody that many modern readers, and no doubt many ancient readers, “fail” the test and conclude that this God is not worth trusting. Or, to put the matter more fairly, many readers take one fork in the road, a fork which reveals and embodies such readers’ basic orientation: to them, such a story could never reveal anything other than an uncaring monster-God. Other readers take the other fork, choosing to find (or discovering about themselves that they can find) something trustworthy about God despite real challenges which the story in no way conceals.

The story itself (contra Sternberg’s notion of an “omnipotent” narrator who all but forces readers to read one way and not another) cannot demand either trust or distrust. It does, however, commend the choice of trust; only those who take this interpretive fork will leave the Akedah telling proverbs about the Lord’s provision. Only by passing the test will they constitute

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126 See James Crenshaw, “Journey into Oblivion: A Structural Analysis of Genesis 22,” Soundings 58.2 (1975): 243-56. Note that plenty of ancient Hebrew literature, from Lamentations to Job to the complaints of Jeremiah, demonstrates that this perspective on God as enemy was perfectly possible for ancient Judeans reflecting on the experience of exile.

127 See here the eloquent language of Crenshaw, “Journey into Oblivion.”

themselves as Genesis’ addressees, those who to this day name places in terms of God’s provision (not in terms of fear, resentment, dread, or angst). By means of user-world cues, the narrator invites the audience to participate in a trust-community that uses Genesis 16 as a story about God’s gracious “seeing” of Hagar, and Genesis 22 as a story about God’s gracious “provision” toward Abraham/Isaac. But such trust-readings are won in the face of narrative beginnings (God’s troubling decree), even as distrust-readings cannot fully concur in the narratorial endings (a trustful naming of the world).

The audience faces this test again and again in Genesis. Moberly makes this point in his discussion of the Cain and Abel story, where God’s initial rejection of Cain’s sacrifice is completely unexplained. Audiences, no less than Cain, are drawn into a distrustful resentment which the divine voice names as “sin.” Even after the fratricide, readers can join Cain in seeing God’s continued involvement in Cain’s story as further (unfairly harsh) interference—or, alternatively, as a continuing thread of gracious protection. The door is never closed for Cain (and the reader) to conceive of Cain’s life as the recipient of unexplained grace rather than (merely) unexplained judgment. Meanwhile, Genesis’ larger structural inclusio pairs the Cain and Abel story with Joseph and his brothers. At the end of Genesis, unlike the beginning, the initial unfavored-sibling-kills-favored-sibling conflict results in a reconciliation where both God’s unaccountable favoritism, and the resentful violence that resulted from it, are repeatedly proclaimed to be intended by God for good and for life (Gen 45:7; 50:20). Yet once again the

129 Regina Schwartz (The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997]) makes the most extensive case that in these stories it is Yhwh who is at fault. See discussion in R. Walter Moberly, The Theology of the Book of Genesis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Moberly reads Cain’s story next to Esau’s—Esau too is disfavored for little apparent reason, a fact which the narrative records with pathos (note the bitter weeping of Gen 27:34, 38). But Esau overcomes his murderous resentment (27:41) and achieves a generous and gracious acceptance of his own fate (ch. 33).
distrust-reader is given plenty of fuel to deconstruct Joseph’s interpretation of these events as merely self-serving pious rhetoric.\textsuperscript{130}

In stories like these, characters and readers of Genesis alike face a basic choice between suspicious resentment of God’s unaccountable rejections and grateful acceptance of God’s unaccountable blessings. Perhaps this is, indeed, the original human choice presented in Eden, where the serpent presents the divine ordering of the garden as an arbitrary and ill-intentioned restriction of Eve’s and Adam’s good. Again, the story does nothing to prevent a reading in which the serpent gets it right. Fretheim shows that the snake is pointing out partial truths, just as God’s own truths are partial, and thus the story presses on the audience as well as on the characters the “fundamental problem of trust.”\textsuperscript{131} Readers who question God’s unexplained restriction of the knowledge-bearing tree, who decide that disobeying Yhwh is the path to maturity and human growth, are not just misreading the story.\textsuperscript{132} Rather, they have been tempted by the text to replicate the distrust that the serpent commends. They should not be surprised that they, like Eve and Adam, are subsequently excluded from the garden—that is, they will be put off from God’s presence in the rest of the Genesis story, having abandoned the basic orientation of trust.

One may ask whether it is even possible to choose otherwise, to hold onto a trust in God when experiencing alienating exile. I suggest that two elements are needed. The first is the bare assurance of survival—that despite Yhwh’s seeming willingness to reject and destroy, some small

\textsuperscript{130} Both Mark Brett (\textit{Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity} [New York: Routledge, 2000]) and Pirson (\textit{Lord of the Dreams}, p. 138) are suspicious of Joseph’s attempt to speak for God here.

\textsuperscript{131} Fretheim, “Is Genesis 2-3 a Fall Story?”

\textsuperscript{132} James Kennedy (“Peasants in Revolt: Political Allegory in Genesis 2-3,” \textit{JSOT} 47 [1990]: 3-14), building on Thorkild Jacobsen’s demonstration that ancient myth serves to underline political and social structure, argues that Gen 2-3 depicts Adam and Eve in a peasant role, working ground that they do not own and required to submit to the landowner’s arbitrary commands. The “peasant revolt” can only result in expulsion by thinly veiled violence (the sword). This perfectly plausible reading makes Yhwh the oppressor.
seed will remain. Something must endure that can blossom and bear fruit, vitiating the initial divine prediction (You will surely die) and giving the primordial couple (and cursed Cain) a chance for descendants. In the midst of Yhwh’s terrifying and world-destructive flood, a single beam of favor (6:8) and a single moment of remembering (8:1) preserve the seeds of human and animal life. From the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah a few angel-led survivors escape and give birth to two new nations. The tenuous link from one generation of Israel’s ancestors to the next, no matter how often threatened, can never be cut. The Yhwh who brings about incalculable mental and physical suffering stands by the terms of the promise just enough that hope may remain for the future.

This brings me to the second necessary element, if one is to accept Genesis’ bracing and dangerous invitation to trust Yhwh. This element is the willingness to wait, to place the burden of theodicy (not in the philosophical sense, but in the bare sense of trusting God in the midst of exile or oppression) firmly upon the shoulders of the future. A character’s trust is vindicated only at the end of an episode or cycle, when the painful testing is over and life continues—for Noah’s arkful of survivors, for Abraham’s promised son, for Moab and Ammon and Ishmael and Edom in their own lands, for Jacob’s family reunited in Egypt. Yet in Genesis’ wider story (and Israel’s) that end has not yet been reached; Genesis (and the Pentateuch, and the Primary History) leave off with divine promises decidedly unresolved. Even after the “return” of exiles under Cyrus, the eschatological vision remains unfulfilled—not because history has not ended, but because oppression and suffering continue to be acute. The audience of the whole book, then, is still in

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133 I find myself influenced here by Gandolph’s words in J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Return of the King (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002): “I shall not wholly fail of my task . . . if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come.”

134 I suggest a partial analogy to first-century Christian eschatology; the coming of the Messiah leads some Christians to claim a victory already won, but conditions of the 1st century (or the 21st!) fall painfully short of the
the ark surrounded by stormwaters, still facing cruel threats to the promised child, still seeking to survive a devastating famine. The angel has not yet appeared; the deliverance has not yet come. God is already acting to keep alive but the preserved community is only a seed, only a bare possibility of blessing. Any real vindication of the audience’s trust still remains in the future.

Genesis’ users, shaped by a complex and ongoing challenge which they called exile (deportation for some, upheaval for others, subjugation under foreign rule for all), have developed an eschatological double-vision. The present is a time of waiting, of survival, of affirming Yhwh’s provision simply in the fact that some seed still remains. Yet if the beginning of Israel (and of the world!) is to reach a suitable ending, if Yhwh is to prove faithful to those who have been trusting Yhwh’s promises, the story requires more than limited acts of providence which barely keep the possibility of fulfillment lurching forward. Genesis’ reception invites an eschatological trust—not simply the trust that a future blessing has been promised, but that the future blessing will transform curse and death into blessing and life, even when the cursing and death proceed from Yhwh. Eschatological confidence has been complicated and deepened: the promise cannot be cut off, even when God is doing the cutting. Again, Genesis’ users are left carting around the unburied bones of Joseph, waiting for their God to act; they are left singing with Jacob, I wait for your salvation, O Yhwh.

expectations of the messianic age. Similarly, in the Persian period the return of (some) exiled Judeans and the rebuilding of the temple constitute a real restoration, but many of the conditions which made exile so painful remain unrelieved. For more on this comparison see Walter Harrelson, “Christian Misreadings of Basic Themes in the Hebrew Scriptures” (Quarterly Review 2.2 [1982]: 58-66), arguing that eschatology in the Hebrew Bible, no less than eschatology in the New Testament, combines a forward-pointing “not yet” with a proleptic “already.”

135 That the promises can be threatened by Yhwh’s own decree is most obvious in the Akedah, but also implicit in the creator’s decision to confront the initial humans with a forbidden tree, to pronounce a curse upon a land, to evict humans from the garden, and to respond to sin with judgments of flood or fire. Ultimately, Yhwh’s complicity in blessing and in cursing, in plenty and in famine, is a pervasive question raised by Israel’s theology of election and exile.
7. Epilogue

The evidence is, in my view, conclusive: Genesis is indeed eschatological. It contains the same set of restoration-eschatology themes, not always fully compatible, found in the other great Hebrew compositions of Persian-era Judeans. It expects a coming era that will restore Israel’s past and surpass it, transforming the very cosmos not in order to end the world but in order to bring about divine purposes imbued in the world at creation: fruitfulness and blessing.

Meanwhile this eschatological vision, while framed in terms of creation and humanity, is sharply focused on the Judean audience’s own identity as Israel. This does not mean that Judeans developed an eschatology only about their own narrow interests; one may note, above all, the balance between promising eschatological rule to Judah and portraying Judah in cooperative (and, indeed, humble) unity with Jacob’s other children. Genesis expects the tribes to return to full unity and coexist in family relationship with surrounding nations; it attests a special mode of blessing for the whole world, one which Israel may itself help to serve. Yet there is no question in Genesis that the great nation comes through Abraham—whose seed is reckoned through Isaac—whose full blessing falls on Jacob—who is Israel.

Persian-era Judea’s testimony to its own future blessing is not triumphalistic; Judeans’ hopes have been tempered by the harsh experiences of exile and by their present life as a small, poor province. In writing or reading Genesis, Judeans fully thematize their own self-perception as sojourning exiles, subject to dislocations and other threats. Profoundly, they extend this vision of themselves to all of humanity, now viewed as exiled and blocked from the full expression of its creative blessing. Even more profoundly, Judeans express their experiences of cursing (or, at the very least, threatened blessing) in terms of conflicted relationships with God and with one
another. The long journey back to blessing, therefore, requires both a will to reconcile with one another and a trusting response to the initiatives of the creator God.

One may ask the significance of these conclusions for the ongoing usage of Genesis. I set aside here any purely scholarly usage of Genesis as evidence about other users from another time and place—what Wendland calls the “etic” (outsider) perspective, and Laato the “M-reader” (who does not enter into the text’s own address). What makes Genesis a living artifact is the fact that some communities, including many who would self-identify as “Jews” and “Christians,” read this text as though it addresses their identity, as though it orients their being/knowing/acting within their experience. Admittedly, such users approach Genesis within contexts quite different from the contexts of Persian-era Judeans; the extratextual social world is hardly the same, and even the intertextual world has been significantly modified by placing Genesis within larger Christian canons (including the New Testament) and Jewish canons (including rabbinic writings). Yet many—not all—Jews and Christians nevertheless construe their usage of Genesis as essentially continuous, a step along the same journey of being/becoming Israel that was charted out by the users of Hebrew literature in Persian-era Judea.

It is possible, of course, either to defend and commend such an undertaking, or to challenge its plausibility for 21st-century life. I merely observe that the undertaking does exist, and does form a significant part of Genesis’ ongoing usage. Many communities do still continue, or at least still wish to continue, the project of scriptural usage which they have indirecatly inherited from Persian-era Judeans. Thus they too (re)read and (re)write Genesis believing that we are addressed by this text, invited by it to construct our identity as Israel. The ongoing

1 See my section 1.2, above.

2 This point is made, in slightly different forms, by Moberly, ??; by Levenson, ??; and by Neusner, ??.
significance of Genesis’ eschatology, for such communities, does not lie in overhearing and reappropriating someone else’s hopes and expectations; it lies precisely in preserving and extending Israel’s story with Israel’s God, which means (in part) preserving and extending Israel’s expectations for Israel’s future.

In fact, one pressing issue in Jewish-Christian relations is the very question of how Jews and Christians can respect one another’s attempts to constitute their disparate identities in terms of these shared texts, to identify themselves as the Israel addressed by Genesis. My modest suggestion is that fully recognizing the eschatological nature of Israel’s identity may help clarify such attempts. If Genesis does not exist to justify and valorize a 12-tribed great nation which is already established, but rather seeks to point to a 12-tribed great nation which has never been fully realized, then ongoing attempts to be Israel may be construed as progressive steps toward a scriptural identity rather than static claims to possess that identity already. Genesis’ users cannot elide the particularities of Genesis’ witness, returning to Eve or Adam and bypassing Abraham; but they can notice the inherently open-ended, future-oriented character of Genesis’ particularity. The Israel addressed by Genesis is an Israel which is not yet itself, and which lives in hope of becoming what it knows it ought to be.

In my judgment, Genesis’ portrait of life itself as an exile or sojourn has rich potential for Genesis’ Christian users today. Genesis’ balance between cursing and blessing may have much to say to various contemporary communities (including Christians) who think of their world as in some sense fallen. Protology as well as eschatology (and Genesis is both!) can help us express the way we think the world should be but is not. Genesis’ dissatisfaction with the present order deepens and enriches Genesis’ simultaneous witness that this world (not another) embodies the land God created and blessed, and therefore is the locus in which the promised restoration will occur. John Sailhamer rightly notes that any divorce between eschatology and creation may result
either in ignoring hope entirely, or in hoping for unhelpful abstractions. So on the one hand Christians who emphasize eschatology without creation risk overlooking their gratitude for what God has made—and their responsibility to be a channel of material (as well as spiritual) blessing for others. Yet on the other hand Christians who emphasize creation without eschatology risk imagining that “normal life” is a state of blessing and that only in special crises does one need to invoke the “emergency measures” of divine deliverance. Israel’s literature reminds such Christians that normal life is (unless we are affluent and complacent) precisely a life of sojourning or exile. Genesis’ ongoing users may gratefully acknowledge God’s good creation and its blessings, while insisting that such blessings are threatened and incomplete—proleptic pointers toward a future deliverance.

My final suggestion is that recovering Genesis’ eschatology also means struggling once again with Genesis’ call to ground (creation) ethics in a future-oriented trust. Many of Genesis’ ideals may be difficult to reconcile with present concerns; just as one example, I am struck by the tension (in today’s world of overpopulation and environmental degradation) between rejoicing in human fruitfulness and caring for a fruitful land. Yet the eschatological cast of this book, its insistence throughout on promises that remain in the future, may ultimately relativize such questions. The world’s story does not depend on humans perfectly balancing the demands of the moment. Rather, any Israel constituted by Genesis will be able to trust in God to preserve the

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5 For this mis-statement see John Goldingay, Old Testament Theology vol. 1, Israel’s Gospel (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 471: “Israel’s story (the world’s story) is not ultimately about deliverance but about blessing. When things have gone wrong (e.g., the people are slaves in Egypt), then God needs to take some emergency measures to put them right by delivering them. But normal life is then about blessing.” In context, Goldingay’s intention seems to be to combat a radically dualistic eschatology which finds no blessing in “normal life.”
seeds of life, and to one day bring these seeds to their full (perhaps surprising) consummation. If human experience is always both blessing in the land and cursing in exile, there may be real ethical value in faithful (obedient) action in the prospect of a yet-unrealized promise. There may be real ethical value in being able to call out with Genesis’ ideal Israel, “I wait for your salvation, O Lord!”


---. “Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: The Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis.” Pages 48-74 in *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts:*


---. “What is Required to Identify Pre-Priestly Narrative Connections Between Genesis and Exodus? Some General Reflections and Specific Cases.” Pages 159-80 in *A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*. Edited by Thomas Dozeman and Konrad Schmid. Atlanta: SBL, 2006.


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Biography


Jonathan had the extraordinary privilege of teaching as Adjunct Professor of Bible at Milligan College, from 1999-2001, and as Interim Professor of Bible and English at Nebraska Christian College, from 2001-2002. He served as the preaching minister at Steele’s Chapel Christian Church in Corbin, Kentucky from 2002 until 2006, when he began studying at Duke University’s Graduate Program of Religion. And he is currently under contract to begin this fall as Associate Professor at Abilene Christian University’s Graduate Theological Seminary.