The Book of Genesis

Part I

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The Book of Genesis

Scope:

This course of 24 lectures focuses on the first book of the Bible (in both the Jewish and Christian canons), the book of Genesis. This particular book is an extremely rich text that can be approached from a variety of perspectives, including literary, historical, theological, and archaeological. Most of the stories in Genesis (creation, flood, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and so on) are well known, but many crucial issues in the study of the book are less familiar to general audiences. We will present these issues in a detailed fashion; the 24 lectures afford us plenty of time to work through the 50 chapters of the book of Genesis.

The course will speak to the different perspectives listed above. First and foremost, we will approach the text as a piece of literature, highlighting the many literary devices and techniques employed by the ancient author(s) of the book. In so doing, we will demonstrate that what on the surface may look like rather simple tales are, in fact, the products of great literary sophistication. This finding bespeaks not only a remarkably gifted author but also an ancient Israelite audience that could appreciate and understand literature of such high quality and brilliance. We are led to conclude that literature played a central role in the life of ancient Israel, thus establishing at a very early time the notion that the Jews are the people of the book.

We will talk about the history that lies behind the book of Genesis. We will address such questions as when Abraham lived, where his birthplace of Ur was located, under which pharaoh did Joseph serve, and so on. We will also raise even more fundamental questions, such as did Abraham and Jacob and Joseph and so on exist at all, or were they simply literary creations of ancient Israelite literati? To answer these questions, we will need to look at other ancient Near Eastern sources from the three main regions: Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. Thus, this course also will provide an introduction to these neighboring cultures, especially as they affect our understanding of the Bible.

We will delve into theological issues. What can we learn about the religion of ancient Israel from reading these stories? Did the ancient Israelites believe in one God? Or did they only worship one God without denying the existence of other deities? And what was the nature of the God of Israel? Was he similar to the other deities of the ancient Near East? Or was he uniquely different? Was he, in fact, even a he? Religion is more than the conception of the deity, however; it also includes the relationship between God and man, and this, too, embodied in the covenant concept of the Bible, will be a topic of exploration in this course.

As intimated above in the paragraph about history, this course will use a vast array of archaeological evidence to illuminate issues in the book of Genesis. The evidence, both textual and artifactual, will come from across the ancient Near Eastern landscape, from Mesopotamia in the northeast, from Canaan most proximate to Israel, and from Egypt in the southwest. We are required to retain such broad horizons because the book of Genesis itself does so. Abraham is born in Mesopotamia; he migrates to the land of Canaan; his grandson Jacob returns to Mesopotamia, where he lives for 20 years; and at the end of the book, Joseph and his brothers are resident in Egypt.

Most importantly, we will deal with questions of authorship. Is the book of Genesis the result of a haphazard compilation of disparate sources? Or does it present itself as a unified literary whole, suggesting a single author? And in either case, when might the book have been written and/or achieved its final written form?

Finally, we will explore various other issues that emanate from our reading of Genesis. Often, these topics will be of interest to biblical studies in a wider scope. For example, we will explore the question of women in the Bible: Why does the Bible include so many female characters, especially in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern literature, and why are these women often portrayed in unexpectedly heroic fashion, often at the expense of the male characters? We will discuss different translations of the Bible: Why are there so many different versions? How are they different? How are they similar? And we will take time to consider the way later generations of Jews and Christians understood the Bible, especially given that these later readings are often quite different from the original authorial intent.

In sum, the multifaceted book of Genesis allows for numerous avenues of inquiry: We will do our utmost in this course to tackle all of them.

Lecture One
On Reading the Book of Genesis

Scope: We begin with a basic overview of the course, touching on a number of crucial issues at the outset, creating almost a set of ground rules, as it were, for reading the book of Genesis. We will approach the text as literature, as history, and as theological treatise—all at once! Most importantly, we will attempt to understand the text in its original setting, reading it with the knowledge and worldview that an ancient Israelite would have brought to his or her reading of Genesis. Finally, in contrast to those scholars who carve up the text into separate sources, we will take a holistic approach to the text of Genesis.

Outline

I. This course is, first and foremost, a course on the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible in both the Jewish and Christian canons. We will perforce need to look at other biblical material at times, but we will keep our focus on Genesis throughout. Because both the Bible in general and Genesis in particular are so wide-ranging, I will need to use a variety of approaches while presenting the material.

- **A.** Most importantly, we must recall that we are reading ancient literature; thus, we will most frequently use literary analysis—that is to say, the course will look and sound like a literature course.
- **B.** Second, much of the material in the book of Genesis, especially from chapter 12 onward, to the end of the book in chapter 50, needs to be situated in a historical context. Thus, we will bring historical analysis to the material, as we seek to uncover the history of ancient Israel and the surrounding cultures in the ancient Near East—that is to say, at times, the course will look and sound like a history course.
- **C.** Third, we must recall that the text that we are reading presents some of the most basic concepts of ancient Israelite religion, such as the worship of a single deity; thus, we will need to discuss aspects of ancient religion, cult, and theology—in such instances, the course will look and sound like a religion course.

II. There are three questions that one may ask while reading the Bible:

- **A.** What was the author's original intent, and how did his or her original audience understand the text? This will be our main emphasis throughout the course. To successfully answer this question, we must immerse ourselves in the world of ancient Israel by attempting to live and think, as well as we can, like an ancient Israelite in, say, c. 1000 B.C.E.
- **B.** How has the text been interpreted by the two faith communities who hold the Bible to be sacred, namely, Judaism and Christianity, throughout the ages? This subject requires a different approach, as we will illustrate with a few examples. Before moving to these illustrations, however, note that the formative periods of Jewish and Christian interpretation largely coincided: Jewish midrashic writings from the rabbis and early patristic writing from the church fathers both date to the late Roman or Byzantine period (4th through 6th centuries B.C.E.).
  - **1.** Later Jews and Christians developed a belief in creation *ex nihilo*, that is, "out of nothing," and therefore, read this belief into their reading of Genesis 1. As we shall see, however, Genesis 1 states exactly the opposite.
  - **2.** The wording of Genesis 1:26, "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness," may suggest a belief in the Trinity, but this is a later Christian theological development not to be found in the Jewish Bible.
- **C.** What does the text mean to me today? For this question, one turns to one's personal clergy for religious guidance, but this is not a matter into which we will enter during this course.

III. The book of Genesis is a book about origins. It presents ancient Israel's understanding of two beginnings.

- **A.** The first 11 chapters of Genesis discuss the origins of the world, since those stories are of a universal nature.
- **B.** Chapters 12–50 in Genesis present the origins of the people of Israel. Actually, Israel is not quite a people yet but, rather, a family, namely, Abraham and his descendants.

C. These two origins reflect Israel's theology, their belief in a God who is at once the God of the world in general and the God of the people of Israel in particular.

IV. Many scholars have proposed reading Genesis as a composite of three separate sources that were put together more or less haphazardly by a redactor or compiler. We will explore this theory further in Lecture Six, but for now, we note simply that we will take a different tack. We will approach the story as a unified literary whole. We will not sweep minor contradictions and divergences under the rug, but we are much more impressed with a unified reading than one that places the text under a microscope and divides it into tiny component parts. Again, as noted, we will return to this issue in much more detail in Lecture Six.

V. Next, there is the question of what translation to use. We will devote all of Lecture Sixteen to the issue of Bible translations, but for now, let me simply recommend a few of the standards.

A. The most widely used Bible in college classrooms is the Revised Standard Version, which comes in a variety of editions, such as the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. This translation adheres closely to the Hebrew original, word for word.

B. The Jewish Publication Society Version (technically the New Jewish Publication Society Version, because an older one was produced in 1916) is the standard among Jewish readers of the Bible. Note that it is a more idiomatic rendering and frequently departs from the Hebrew text literally. A fine recent edition, which includes this translation, is *The Jewish Study Bible*.

C. Robert Alter, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, produced a translation of the book of Genesis alone in 1996, replete with superb notes of a literary nature; he then completed the task for the entire Torah, published in 2004.

D. The most literal translation of the Torah, which of course, includes the book of Genesis, is that of Everett Fox, professor at Clark University in Worcester, MA. For those readers who wish to get as close to the Hebrew text as possible, with the result that the English is often a bit odd-sounding, this is the text for you.

VI. Finally, let me say a word about the overall structure of the lectures that follow. Generally, I go back and forth between and among different kinds of presentations: close readings of selected texts, broader readings of larger swaths of material in Genesis, and contextual material providing background information not only for Genesis but for the Bible in general.

A. We cannot read all of Genesis in the same detail; thus, I have chosen a representative sampling of stories to examine closely, including, for example, the two creation accounts and selected episodes from the lives of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Judah.

B. I admit that my rationale for selecting these particular texts is sometimes subjective: I simply enjoy the episode in Genesis 29, for example, better than the story that precedes it or the one that follows it.

1. One point that attracts me to this story is the very human quality of this episode—the interplay between the human characters is front and center at all times, and God is not mentioned in the text at all.

2. Yet, as we shall see in Lecture Eighteen, when Jacob is deceived by Laban, the reader has no doubt that the hand of God is present and that this is Jacob's punishment for having deceived his father, Isaac, two chapters earlier.

C. Furthermore, the individual stories that I have chosen to examine in fine detail provide us with a sampling of the literary devices utilized by the ancient Israelite literati. To take Genesis 29 again as our example, when we reach that story in Lecture Eighteen, we will see such devices as the typescene, wordplay, alliteration, and change in perspective—all present in a single chapter of the book of Genesis.

D. Here, in a more detailed fashion, is how the course will proceed.

1. We will look at the first two stories of Genesis—the two stories of Creation.

2. We will do an overview of the history of ancient Israel from the very beginning through the end of the biblical period, a period of about a thousand years.

3. Then, we will talk about the ancient Near East (Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia) and regions beyond the Near East that will have some play in our course, including Greece and Persia.

4. We will devote a lecture to the theory that holds that the book of Genesis derived from three sources.

5. We will look at the Flood story and the Mesopotamian literary tradition, especially the Gilgamesh epic.
6. We will talk about the two covenants—the one with Noah, which is representative of all of humanity, in Genesis 9, and the one with Abraham, which is representative of God's relationship with the people of Israel and described in Genesis 15 and 17.
7. We will then look at the Abraham story, with a special emphasis on the story of the binding of Isaac, known as the *Aqedah*.
8. We will look at women in the Bible.
    a. We will look at Sarah and Hagar, and we'll talk about why the Bible, especially in contrast with other ancient Near Eastern material, spends so much time talking about female characters.
    b. We will talk about Isaac getting a bride—Rebekah.
    c. We will consider "the barren woman" motif (Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel all have trouble conceiving) and "the younger son" motif (think of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph).
9. We will compare the Abraham and Jacob cycles.
10. We will devote a lecture to different Bible translations.
11. We will do close readings of the story of Jacob and Esau, and the story of Jacob and Rachel.
12. We will investigate the date of the book of Genesis.
13. Next, we will turn to the story of Joseph, which commences in Genesis 37.
    a. All of a sudden in Genesis 38, Joseph is actually not in the story, which instead is about his brother Judah and Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar.
    b. We will also read closely the next chapter where Joseph returns, engaged in work for Potiphar, whose wife tries to seduce Joseph.
    c. Joseph is living in Egypt, so we will also talk about the Egyptian background of the story of Joseph.
14. We will sum it all up as we will complete our journey through the remarkable book of Genesis.

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. xi–xlvii.

Supplementary Reading:

Elliot Rabin, *Understanding the Hebrew Bible: A Reader's Guide*, pp. 1–47.

Questions to Consider:

1. How are the three questions that one may legitimately ask when reading the Bible different from each other? Why do we choose to focus on the first of the three during our course?
2. Why are there so many different translations of the Bible available?

Lecture Two
Genesis 1, The First Creation Story

Scope: We begin at the beginning, by reading the first creation story (Genesis 1:1–2:4a). We delay the usual introductory material until Lectures Four through Six, opting instead to plunge right into the biblical text, with the goal of learning how to read the literature of ancient Israel, which is greatly removed from our world in both time and place. We will discuss both the literary aspects of the text and the theology that lies behind it. We will pay close attention to the description of the world as preexistent, with matter symbolic of evil (noting that the belief in creation *ex nihilo* is a later theological development), and we further will note how God's actions bring goodness into the world. Finally, we will demonstrate how the literary form of the story parallels its content, with order out of chaos as the prevailing theme.

Outline

I. The first thing we notice about Genesis 1 is that, contrary to what most people might assume or believe, the world is not created *ex nihilo*, that is, "out of nothing." Instead, the earth begins as a mass of preexistent matter, with four of the five key words listed in verse 2 (*unformed*, *void*, *darkness*, *deep*) symbolic of chaos and evil (only the wind is not of that ilk).

- **A.** God's role is to bring order and goodness into this chaotic and evil world.
- **B.** He does so by creating light, which he sees as good, in verses 3–4 (henceforth, everything that God creates will be good, as the refrain repeats throughout chapter 1), and by separating the light from the darkness, that is, the good from the evil, in verse 4 (the first of several separations that occur in the creation story).
- **C.** As such, the beginning of the story seeks to explain the question of evil in the world. This is a theological issue that all religions must answer.
  - **1.** For the polytheisms of the ancient world, there was a simple answer because there were plenty of gods to go around, and some of these were evil gods capable of inflicting great harm on humans.
  - **2.** For Israel, by contrast, this was a major problem, because only one God is worshipped, and that god, by definition, is a good God. Thus, this story gets God "off the hook," as it were, for the existence of evil in the world. He cannot be blamed, because evil is preexistent. God brought only goodness into the world.
  - **3.** We hasten to add that this is the answer to the problem of evil forthcoming from the pen of the author of Genesis 1. Other biblical authors, such as the prophet Second Isaiah, will have different answers.

II. Days 2 and 3 continue the story of creation, with the sky created on day 2, and the dry land and the vegetation created on day 3, in two separate stages.

III. An important point to be noticed is the presence of demythologizing, that is, the conscious avoidance of words that can be associated with pagan deities.

- **A.** This is seen especially on day 4, where the words *sun* (*shemesh*) and *moon* (*yareah*) are consciously avoided.
- **B.** Even the singular form *sea* (*yam*), which was also the word for the sea god of the ancient Canaanites, is studiously avoided in favor of the plural *seas* (*yamim*).
- **C.** The author does not want the reader to think for a moment that God is responsible for the existence of pagan deities.

IV. The living creatures are created on days 5 and 6. Fish and fowl are created on day 5, and the land animals and the first human couple are created on day 6, again via two stages of creation.

V. A major problem in the story is the threefold use of first-person plural pronouns in Genesis 1:26: "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness."

- **A.** This could be an echo of an earlier polytheism lurking behind or beneath our text, but that seems most unlikely for a text that goes out of its way to demythologize at every turn.

B. We may see here a reference to the angels, but the belief in angels developed in the later biblical period, and there is no hint of angels anywhere else in this chapter.

C. The most likely explanation appears to be the royal *we*, as well known from English style, except to note that nowhere is this usage attested in all of ancient Near Eastern literature.

VI. The six days of creation are aligned according to a pattern, with the first three days paralleled by the second three days.

A. Light in day 1 is paralleled by the lights in day 4.

B. The waters and the sky in day 2 are paralleled by the fish and the birds in day 5.

C. There are two stages of creation in day 3—first, the dry land, then, the vegetation—corresponding to two stages of creation in day 6—first, the land animals, then mankind, both of whom inhabit the dry land and eat the vegetation.

D. This pattern acts as a blueprint and establishes the overall theme of Genesis 1, namely, creation of the world according to an order, representative of goodness, continuing the theme of order out of a chaos, or good out of evil, expressed above. As such, our text is an example of "form follows content."

VII. Literary refrains appear throughout the text, bolstering the orderly pattern just noted:

A. "And God said, 'Let [such and such happen].'"

B. "And God saw that it was good."

C. "And it was evening and it was morning."

D. We note, however, that the second of these is lacking in day 2. The reason for this is that the second day deals with the separation of the waters into the waters above and the waters below. Because the watery mass is symbolic of evil, as noted above, the refrain must be omitted. That is to say, the author sacrificed literary perfection here in order to make the theological point.

Essential Reading:

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 1–23.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 3–6 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 17–19.

Supplementary Reading:

Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*, pp. 3–16.

Pamela T. Reis, *Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 15–26.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does the author use the first-person plural pronouns in the passage "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness" in Genesis 1:26?
2. How would you explain the creation of light on day 1 before the creation of the sun and the moon on day 4? Similarly, how would you explain the reference to "and there was evening and there was morning" on days 1, 2, and 3 before the creation of the sun and the moon on day 4?

Lecture Three
Genesis 2–3, The Second Creation Story

Scope: The second creation story begins properly in the middle of a verse, at 2:4b, and continues through the end of chapter 3. It comprises both a different account of how the world came to be and the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This lecture will highlight the four major differences between the two creation accounts, and it will discuss the main reason why the book of Genesis, and hence, the Bible as a whole, begins with two divergent narratives. We will note that the first story is cosmocentric in its focus, including the sky, sun, moon, stars, and so on, while the second story is anthropocentric in its focus, with an emphasis on man and his activities. Both foci are required in Israel's approach to religion: God and man in their separate realms yet inextricably interlinked.

Outline

I. We begin by completing our reading of the first creation story, which continues into Genesis 2.

- **A.** We first present a quick note on the history of the chapter and verse divisions—a new chapter does not always mean a new story begins at that point. The chapter and verse divisions in use today were accomplished by Stephen Langton (c. 1150–1228), the Archbishop of Canterbury in England.
- **B.** The Sabbath serves as the culmination of the first creation story, prompting comparison with the Babylonian creation story, *Enuma Elish* (which means "when on high").
  - **1.** The Babylonian story begins with a conflict among the gods—in particular, the deity Tiamat, who is the goddess of salt water and is symbolic of evil, and the god Marduk, who is the heaven god or storm god and symbolizes good.
  - **2.** Marduk kills Tiamat, and he creates the world out of her body, using the upper part of her body to create the vault of heaven and the lower part of her body to create the earth. The story continues with the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars, and it finishes with the creation of man.
  - **3.** The Babylonian story ends with the construction of the temple to Marduk in Babylon—holiness in physical space—as is typical of the polytheistic world.
- **C.** The biblical story ends with the establishment of the Sabbath—holiness in time—a unique contribution of ancient Israel to world religion.

II. We now turn to our reading of Genesis 2:4b–25, the second creation story. We note the segue between the two stories in verse 4, whose first half has the wording "heaven and earth" and whose second half has the wording "earth and heaven." There are four major differences between the two stories.

- **A.** Different names for the deity are used: Elohim ("God") in the first story and Yahweh ("LORD") in the second story, though actually in a combined form, Yahweh Elohim ("LORD God").
- **B.** The method of creation is different: creation by fiat (the spoken word) in the first story versus creation by physical means in the second story (for example, God plants a garden).
- **C.** The order of creation is different: The first story progresses from vegetation to animals to humans, while the second story begins with humankind (only male, though), then comes the vegetation (in the form of the Garden of Eden), and finally, comes the animal kingdom.
- **D.** In the first story, male and female are created at once (1:26), while in the second story, male alone is created first, with female following later.

III. The two stories of creation are to be read in tandem, with the cosmocentric approach provided by Genesis 1 and the anthropocentric approach presented in Genesis 2. This is the essence of ancient Israelite religion: the two working in sync together, the melding of the world of God and the world of man, in unique relationship with each other.

- **A.** Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, deities were associated with nature, and thus, there was a distance between the gods and humankind.
- **B.** In Israel, by contrast, God was seen in close relationship with humankind, as illustrated in the mind of the Israelites by the covenant concept, to which we shall return in Lecture Eight.

IV. We add a few brief comments on Genesis 3, the Garden of Eden account, which is an extension of the second creation account. (Note that the divine name "LORD God" continues to be used in this chapter, as does the theme of the prohibition of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.)

A. "Good and evil" may be a merism, a literary device, in which one takes two opposites, such as good and evil, and combines them to express the totality of something, in this case the totality of all knowledge.

B. The main point of the story is how man gained knowledge, or the ability to obtain knowledge, and that is a trait which distinguishes man from the animal kingdom. Far from being the fall of man, one could argue that we are dealing here with the rise of man.

C. However, man still violated God's command.

1. This may be the author's attempt to present an alternative answer to the problem of evil, which Genesis 1, as we saw in our previous lecture, explained as a preexistent feature of the world.

2. By so doing, the author of Genesis 2–3 introduces us to the concept of free will, a dominant motif in the Bible and in Judaism in general.

3. Note one further instance of later interpretation that is not present in a surface reading of the chapter. I refer to the (mainly) Christian interpretation that understands the snake in Genesis 3 ("the shrewdest of all the wild beasts") to be Satan. There is no hint of this in the biblical text, and in any case, the belief in the Satan figure is a very late development in Jewish theology, from which it passed into Christian belief.

D. The biblical narrative begins with a journey—Adam and Eve expelled from the Garden of Eden—paralleling both Israel's journey in a physical sense (beginning with Abraham) and the metaphorical journey of all humankind ("the game of life" we may call it).

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 7–15 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 20–28.

Supplementary Reading:

Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 16–23.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the presence of two creation accounts in Genesis 1–2 relate to the theology of ancient Israel?

2. What other interpretations for the Garden of Eden story might be forthcoming?

Lecture Four
An Overview of Ancient Israelite History

Scope: With this lecture, we turn to a presentation of the basic introductory material necessary for any study of the Bible. This lecture traces the history of ancient Israel from Abraham c. 1400 B.C.E. to the conquest of Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.E. Our study of Genesis will focus on the earlier period only, but an overview of the entire 1,000-year period is necessary for other questions that we will address in this course. We also will discuss the development of the biblical canon, that is, how and when the books of the Bible came to be considered sacred.

Outline

I. We present here a basic outline of Israelite history.
- **A.** The first major period is the pre-monarchic period (1400–1020 B.C.E.).
  - **1.** The biblical tradition begins with the three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
  - **2.** We then read of the experience in Egypt, with the highlights being Joseph, the Slavery, Moses, and the Exodus.
  - **3.** This, in turn, is followed by what we call the emergence of Israel as a nation. Three shorter periods fit here: the wandering through Sinai, the settlement in Canaan, and the period of the Judges.
- **B.** The next major epoch is the monarchic period.
  - **1.** Israel moves to a monarchy c. 1020 B.C.E., with Saul as the first king (1020–1000 B.C.E.).
  - **2.** The united monarchy, marked by the reigns of David and Solomon (1000–930 B.C.E.), is Israel's glory period.
  - **3.** On the death of Solomon, Israel splits into two kingdoms, what we call the period of the divided monarchy, with the kingdom of Israel in the north comprised of nine tribes (930–721 B.C.E.) and the kingdom in Judah in the south comprised of three tribes (930–586 B.C.E.).
  - **4.** In the year 721 B.C.E., Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, including its capital city of Samaria, and exiled the population to Mesopotamia to work in Assyria and surrounding regions.
- **C.** Finally, there is the late period, closing out the era of biblical history.
  - **1.** The Babylonian Exile (586–538 B.C.E.) resulted from the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people to Mesopotamia.
  - **2.** The Persian period (538–333 B.C.E.) commenced with the Persian conquest of the Babylonians and the decree by their king, Cyrus the Great, to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, which was dedicated in the city of Jerusalem in the year 516 B.C.E.
  - **3.** During the Babylonian Exile and the decades right after the Exile, Israel transitioned from a monolatry to a pure monotheism.
  - **4.** The conquest of Alexander the Great (333 B.C.E.) brought an end to the era of biblical history. The period that follows is called either late antiquity or the post-biblical period.

II. The implication of this outline is that the Bible is essentially historically accurate, but the picture is more complicated than that. In recent decades, two competing schools of scholarship have developed.
- **A.** The maximalists believe that, because so much of the Bible has been demonstrated to be historically accurate, even when there is no confirming evidence from elsewhere in the ancient world, we should accept the Bible as essentially reflecting history.
  - **1.** Maximalists do not believe that every single statement in the Bible is true—for example, one would have a problem accepting that Abraham fathered a child at 100 and lived to 175, or that there were 600,000 adult Israelite males leaving Egypt during the Exodus—but that the basic story line is historically accurate.
  - **2.** One excludes from this view, however, the first 11 chapters of Genesis, because everyone, with the exception of some fundamentalist Jews and Christians, recognizes that the pre-Abraham material is in the world of myth and legend.
- **B.** The minimalists believe that only where there is confirming evidence from elsewhere in the ancient world can we assume that the Bible is historically accurate. Thus, because there is no confirmation for any of the characters from Abraham through the early kings, including David and Solomon, the large narrative of the

Torah, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and much of Kings must be seen as a pious fiction, created by later Jewish authors to give a glory to ancient Israel that never existed.

C. I personally place myself in the maximalist camp, and thus, I will speak of the events in the Bible as essentially historical. At the same, though, I recognize that the stories in Genesis about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are literary creations, with more literary quality to them than historical reality per se. We will return to this issue in Lecture Nineteen.

III. We now turn to surveying the development of the biblical canon from the time of authorship to the final canonization of the books.

A. The writing of the biblical books took place over the course of 1,000 years.

1. A small amount of the Bible is archaic poetry (1150–1000 B.C.E.), representing the earliest preserved literature from ancient Israel. Examples include Exodus 15, some snippets in Numbers 21, and Judges 5.

2. The flowering of ancient Hebrew literature occurred during the 600-year period commencing with the United Kingdom in 1000–B.C.E. and continuing into and beyond the Babylonian Exile.

a. The most important representative of this literary productivity, especially for our course, is the great narrative from Genesis through Kings.

b. A second category in this period is that of the classical prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so on).

c. A number of other important biblical books date to this period, too, including Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ezra-Nehemiah.

3. Finally, a few biblical books were written at a later stage (400–150 B.C.E.), including such works as Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), Esther, Chronicles, and Daniel (authored in 164 B.C.E.).

B. The canonization of the biblical books is another matter. The books did not become holy or sacred or canonized overnight. Much time passed between the authorship of these books and the establishment of a *canon*, or collection of sacred writings.

1. The Jewish canon is a tripartite one: Torah, Prophets, Writings. The first letters of the three Hebrew words for these texts (Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim) form the Hebrew word *Tanakh*, meaning "the Bible."

2. The Christian canon, by contrast, is a four-part one: Pentateuch, Histories, Wisdom, Prophets. Christians call this the Old Testament, to which were added additional books, known as the Apocrypha (though these are not canonical in the Protestant tradition), and of course, the New Testament books.

Essential Reading:
Hershel Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed.

Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 109–314.

Supplementary Reading:
Marc Z. Brettler, "The Canonization of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 2072–2077.

Questions to Consider:
1. In the debate between the maximalists and the minimalists, with which group would you side?
2. Of all the peoples of the ancient Near East, why did only Israel create a canon of its sacred writings?

Lecture Five
The Ancient Near East

Scope: We continue our presentation of the basic introductory material by surveying the broader context of ancient Israel. Scholars call this world the ancient Near East, which in turn, is divided into three major geographical regions: Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. All three are important for understanding the Bible in general and Genesis in particular. Abraham is born in Mesopotamia, migrates to Canaan, and visits Egypt. Jacob is born in Canaan, lives for 20 years in Mesopotamia, returns to Canaan, and dies in Egypt. Joseph is born in Mesopotamia, moves to Canaan with his family at a young age, and spends his entire adult life in Egypt. In short, the book of Genesis provides a veritable tour of the entire ancient Near East. Knowledge of these regions greatly enhances our understanding of the biblical stories.

Outline

I. The Ancient Near East is divided into three major geographical regions: Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. [See appendix map: **The Ancient Near East c. 1400 B.C.E.**] All of these are important for understanding the Bible in general and the book of Genesis in particular.

- **A.** Abraham is born in Mesopotamia, migrates to the land of Canaan, and visits Egypt during his lifetime.
- **B.** His grandson, Jacob, is born in Canaan, lives for 20 years in Mesopotamia, returns to Canaan, and then spends the end of his life in Egypt, where he eventually dies.
- **C.** Joseph, in turn, is born in Mesopotamia, moves to Canaan with his family at a young age, and then spends his entire adult life in Egypt.

II. "Near East" is the term scholars use to refer to the area where Asia, Africa, and to some extent Europe all come together.

- **A.** *Ancient* refers to the period from c. 3000 B.C.E., when our written records first begin, though 333 B.C.E., at which point we move to the Greco-Roman period, also called late antiquity.
- **B.** From the archaeological perspective, we divide the period into large epochs, Bronze Age and Iron Age, with the former further subdivided into three periods:
  1. Bronze Age (3000–1200 B.C.E.)
     - **a.** Early Bronze Age (3000–2200 B.C.E.)
     - **b.** Middle Bronze Age (2200–1550 B.C.E.)
     - **c.** Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.)
  2. Iron Age (1200 B.C.E. onward)

II. The three main geographical regions of the ancient Near East are as follows:

- **A.** Egypt, that is, the Nile valley, home of the Egyptians, contained mainly a homogeneous population.
- **B.** Mesopotamia, that is, the Tigris and Euphrates valley, contained, in contrast to Egypt, a very heterogeneous population: it was the home of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hurrians, and others.
- **C.** Canaan, the land in between the two great powers listed above, in which lived the Canaanites and the Israelites, might be called "the third world" of ancient times.
  1. Canaan has rather amorphous boundaries; basically, we define it as the area bounded by the shore of the Mediterranean to the west and the Syrian Desert to the east.
  2. There was no unified political entity in Canaan (in contrast to Egypt especially, but Mesopotamia as well); instead, dozens of independent city-states dotted the landscape.
  3. In contrast to Egypt and Mesopotamia, there is no major river in Canaan. Instead, the people of Canaan were totally dependent on rainfall for growing crops.
- **D.** There are three regions beyond the main Near East that have a role to play in biblical history: Persia (modern Iran), Greece, and Arabia.

III. It is important to note that all of these cultures were literate societies during the biblical period (with the possible exception of Arabia). Moreover, their literary remains often share striking similarities with the Bible, as we have seen already and as we will continue to demonstrate as the course unfolds. Examples include:

A. The Babylonian creation story, known as the *Enuma Elish*, discussed in Lecture Three.

B. The Gilgamesh Epic, which includes the Babylonian flood story, to be discussed in Lecture Seven.

C. The Canaanite epics of Aqhat and Kret, heroic figures in quest of a son, as is also the case with Abraham, as we will see in Lecture Nine.

D. The Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers and the *Iliad* of Homer both include a story that closely parallels an episode in Joseph's life; see Lecture Twenty-Two.

E. In addition, although literary texts are the most exciting discoveries in archaeological excavations, note that the most common written records found, by far, are economic and legal texts, detailing the everyday life of the ancient Near East. These, too, play a role in our study of the Bible, the best example of which are the Nuzi documents from northern Mesopotamia, which we will survey in Lecture Ten.

F. These numerous parallels lead us to the conclusion that Israel did not exist in a vacuum but, instead, participated to a large extent in the greater cultural world of the ancient Near East. At times, it is not just texts from the ancient world that illuminate the Bible but other matters as well. For example:

1. The Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1–9 reflects the Mesopotamian ziggurat tradition, tall pyramid-like temple structures that were envisioned to connect heaven and earth.

2. We get a second reference to this Mesopotamian tradition in the story of Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10–22 Note that this dream occurs at the beginning of his journey to Aram, that is, northern Mesopotamia (modern-day northeastern Syria and southern Turkey). The Hebrew term there, *sullam*, is traditionally rendered "ladder," but we now know that it means "stairway" or even "ziggurat," if you will.

G. Our reading of ancient Near Eastern literature allows us to see important distinctions between the way the polytheistic world saw matters and the way ancient Israel understood the world. A discussion of Genesis 3 illustrates this. Note that the Tree of Knowledge is the central issue in this chapter, not the Tree of Life, though this second tree is also present in the garden.

1. Most ancient Near Eastern people saw eternal life as the ultimate quest for mankind

2. The Gilgamesh Epic has this as its main theme, and the story ends with Gilgamesh crying to himself in resignation of the fact that he will not achieve immortality and even the next best thing, rejuvenation, has slipped through his fingers.

3. Egyptians were the only people in antiquity who believed one could live forever after one's death in a pleasurable, positive afterlife.

4. Not so Israel, however, which places the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden as a token nod in that direction, but there is no danger that Adam and Eve will eat from that tree because we all know that immortality is unattainable.

5. The main issue, instead, is the Tree of Knowledge, which demonstrates that for the ancient Israelites, the main quest was knowledge, and not eternal life.

Essential Reading:
Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 32–108.
Michael Roaf, *The Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*.

Supplementary Reading:
Bill T. Arnold and Bryan Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*.
Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*.

Questions to Consider:
1. One of the main points we made in this lecture is that no culture exists in a vacuum. Illustrate this point for ancient Israel.
2. Can you think of parallels to this issue in our contemporary culture, whether it be minority cultures in the American melting pot or America within the greater world today, or other cultures elsewhere in relationship to America?

Lecture Six
The JEDP Theory and Alternative Approaches

Scope: In Lecture Three, we presented a unified approach to the two creation accounts, understanding the two stories as an integrated whole. Most scholars, however, would disagree, opting instead to assign the two narratives to two distinct authors, with no connection to each other. A survey of Genesis and the other books of the Torah, in fact, reveals a host of contradictions, for example, the names of Esau's wives and who transported Joseph to Egypt. The result of scholarly investigations is a theory about the authorship of the Pentateuch called the *JEDP theory*, which posits four separate sources, all independent of each other, brought together in more or less haphazard fashion by a later redactor. We will present this hypothesis and discuss both its good points and its problems.

Outline

I. Scholars have noted a number of contradictions in the book of Genesis, including the following:

A. As noted earlier, we saw major differences between the two creation stories in Genesis 1–2.

B. The number of animals that Noah took on board the ark differs: 6:19–20 states that one pair of each species shall be brought on the ark, while 7:2 makes a distinction between pure species (seven pairs) and impure species (one pair).

C. There is divergent material concerning the identification of Esau's three wives; compare 26:34, 28:9 with 36:2–3.

Wives of Esau

Gen 26:34 and Gen 28:9	Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael
Gen 36:2–3	Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite Oholibamah, daughter of Anah (daughter of Zibeon the Hivite) Basemath, daughter of Ishmael

D. Then there is the question of who took Joseph down to Egypt: Was it the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:28, 39:1) or the Medanites (Genesis 37:36)? And note also the Midianites mentioned in Genesis 37:28.

II. Scholars developed the *documentary hypothesis*, or the *JEDP theory*, as a reasonable explanation for the composition of the Torah or Pentateuch.

A. The Enlightenment led scholars to begin looking at the Bible with fresh eyes, as they turned away from the traditional view that the five books of the Torah or Pentateuch are divine in origin.

B. Jean Astruc (1684–1766) took the first steps in this direction, while Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) is the person credited with developing the JEDP theory in its classical formulation.

C. Four separate sources are posited, written at different times in ancient Israel:

1. J = Yahwist, 10th century B.C.E. ("Jahweh" is German for Yahweh)

2. E = Elohist, 9th century B.C.E.

3. D = Deuteronomist, 7th century B.C.E.

4. P = Priestly, 5th century B.C.E.

D. The four sources were then brought together by the redactor, called R, to create the Torah or Pentateuch in its final form in the 5th century B.C.E.

III. The social and cultural background of 19th-century Germany influenced Wellhausen's reconstruction of the development of the sources of the Torah or Pentateuch. He was a Protestant (Lutheran, specifically), and his anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic biases led him to date D and P after the time of the classical Prophets.

A. Wellhausen dated J and E early, because they are essentially the basic narratives of ancient Israel, devoid of any overriding theology.

B. Wellhausen saw the Prophets, dated to the 8th century B.C.E. (the time of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah), as the earliest expression of ancient Israel's religious thought. The Prophets emphasized ethics and morality, the aspects of religion most heavily emphasized by Protestants.

C. Because D is mostly legal in nature and Jews continue to uphold the laws of the Torah, Wellhausen dated D to after the Prophets and viewed the legal tradition as a downward turn away from the religious ideals of the Prophets.

D. Similarly, because P is mostly cultic material and Catholics continue to re-create this worship system, with priests offering incense on an altar, Wellhausen also dated P to the late period, regarding cultic concerns as a downward turn away from the Prophetic ideal.

E. Nevertheless, even with the anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic bias at the heart of the documentary hypothesis, the theory took hold and continues to dominate biblical studies into the 21st century.

IV. As with all theories, the JEDP theory has pros and cons.

A. The theory neatly explains the contradictions noted above, as well as others; for example, according to Leviticus (P), there is a hierarchy between priests and Levites, while according to Deuteronomy (D), there is no hierarchy; that is, all Levites are priests.

B. However, what we may perceive as contradictions in an ancient text, as a result of our notions of rational logic, may not have been perceived as such by the ancient authors and readers. That is to say, the literary style in antiquity had its own narrative logic, which does not necessarily mesh with ours.

1. For example, in Genesis 15, first God tells Abraham to look at the sky and count the stars, for as innumerable as they are, so will be his offspring (in verse 5)—then the sun sets in verse 12! By our standards, this is totally illogical, but based on the norms of ancient narrative logic, no problem is present.

2. As another illustration, twice in Genesis 42, Joseph's brothers discover the silver in their bags and react with equal fear and trembling, first in verses 27–28 at an encampment on the way back from Egypt to Canaan, then again in verse 35 when they are telling Jacob all that transpired on their mission. Clearly, the brothers could not have been surprised by this discovery the second time! Yet once more, we must assume that such storytelling is in line with the norms and expectations of ancient narrative logic.

C. In the same vein, the literary study of biblical prose has demonstrated much greater unity to the narratives than the JEDP theory perceives.

D. The dates of the JEDP theory are all wrong, especially for the last two sources, D and P. Linguistic analysis demonstrates that the entirety of the Torah, and certainly Genesis, is composed in classical Biblical Hebrew, not Late Biblical Hebrew—the dividing point for these two strata is c. 550 B.C.E., in the middle of the Babylonian exile.

1. All languages undergo change during their history, often gradual, but typically, there is radical change during and after times of political and social upheaval. (Note, for example, that Old English becomes Middle English upon the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066.) And thus it is with Hebrew, but the linguistic developments that one finds in the texts dated to the Exile and beyond are *not* to be found in Genesis.

2. The easiest demonstration of this is the following: During the Persian period, loanwords from Persian enter the Hebrew language by the dozens, as can be seen by looking at the relatively short books of Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others from that period. By contrast, not a single Persian loanword occurs in the very extensive five books of the Torah.

V. My approach is as follows:

A. I accept the obvious differences between P and D and recognize that the laws and cultic material in the Torah emanate from these two distinct sources. I am unwilling, however, to posit one source as earlier than the other.

B. Instead, I prefer to see P (essentially the book of Leviticus, along with portions of Exodus and Numbers) and D (essentially the book of Deuteronomy) as contemporary and competing systems of law and worship in ancient Israel.

C. Most importantly for our study of Genesis, I see the narratives as literary wholes, not to be subdivided into J, E, and P material.

1. A crucial example that illustrates this point—and resounds through the book of Genesis—is the deceiver deceived.

2. We will see the importance of literary wholes more fully in Lecture Fifteen.

Essential Reading:

Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 131–154.

Supplementary Reading:

Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, esp. pp. 1–31.

William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What other contradictions can you identify in the book of Genesis that could serve as additional fodder for the JEDP theory?

2. We noted the social, political, and religious agenda that underlay the development of the documentary hypothesis. Can you think of other theories in the humanities or the social sciences that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries with similar agendas at their heart?

Lecture Seven
Genesis 6–8, The Flood Story

Scope: We return to our reading of the book of Genesis by looking in detail at chapters 6–8, the story of Noah and the flood. This story provides us with an excellent opportunity to apply information learned in the previous lectures. First, we will compare the biblical account to the flood story incorporated into the Gilgamesh Epic, the great literary classic of ancient Mesopotamia. We will note the many points of similarity, and we will emphasize several crucial differences. Second, we will read chapters 6–8 in two different fashions: in the light of the JEDP theory, which sees two sources intertwined in the text, and as a unified whole, in opposition to the above approach, thereby illustrating the contrasting methods.

Outline

I. The Gilgamesh Epic was the literary classic of the ancient Near East, read far and wide, either in the original Akkadian (Babylonian) by people educated in that language (even if it was not their native tongue) or in translations into other languages (Hittite, Hurrian, and so on).

- **A.** This lengthy (by ancient Near Eastern standards) composition is an epic poem about the search for immortality of the legendary king Gilgamesh (from the southern Mesopotamian city of Uruk).
- **B.** Among the scenes narrated toward the end of the epic is Gilgamesh's visit to Utnapishtim, the flood hero, who relates to Gilgamesh the story of the flood (occurring in Tablet XI of the 12-tablet composition).

II. The Babylonian flood story shares numerous similarities with the biblical flood story in Genesis 6–8, including the building materials for the ark, the dimensions, and the number of decks; the population of the ark and the detailed description of the flood; the mountaintop landing and the sending forth of a series of birds to determine that the land was dry; and finally, the fact that the hero sets everyone free and offers sacrifices to the deity. (**See Table 7a**.)

- **A.** Note that all translations agree on two of the building materials for the ark: wood and pitch. The third item is the subject of some discussion, however. The consonants in the biblical text, namely, QNYM, can be read as either *qinnim*, "rooms, compartments" (thus the traditional rendering), or *qanim*, "reeds" (thus some recent translations). We favor the latter understanding, especially because reeds constitute the third building material in the Gilgamesh Epic flood narrative.
- **B.** Not only do all the aforementioned elements appear in both the biblical account and the Babylonian version, but these elements parallel each other in the same order as well. Even where there is room for some variation, the order in the two stories remains constant.
  1. At the beginning of both stories, the first three elements appear in the order: materials, dimensions, number of decks.
  2. In both stories, the mountaintop landing appears before the sending forth of the birds, even though the alternative order is possible.
  3. At the end of both accounts, all are set free and the flood hero offers sacrifices, even though, once again, the alternative order is easily conceivable.

III. There are also two crucial differences between the two stories.

- **A.** In the Gilgamesh Epic, it is not clear exactly why the gods decided to destroy the world, and it is also not clear why Utnapishtim was chosen to survive the flood. The biblical account includes a morality factor—the world was destroyed because of its immoral state; and Noah was chosen to survive the flood because he was righteous.
- **B.** The biblical account introduces the covenant factor—God makes a covenant with Noah.

IV. The most likely explanation for the striking similarities between the two versions is this: The biblical account is borrowed from the Mesopotamian flood tradition, for the following reasons:

- **A.** In general, greater societies influence lesser ones, and Babylonia was a major power in the ancient world, whereas Israel was a relatively minor player.

B. Flooding is typical of Mesopotamia but not of Canaan. The former gets more plentiful rainfall, and it has two major rivers running through the region, the Tigris and the Euphrates, both of which flood the Mesopotamian plain with relative frequency. The flood tradition obviously grew to legendary proportions, but presumably, one such real flooding formed the basis for the flood story. By contrast, flooding is impossible in the land of Canaan, with its lesser amount of rainfall and no major rivers.

C. The only geographical location mentioned in the biblical account is the mountains of Ararat, which are located in far northern Mesopotamia (around Lake Van, in modern-day eastern Turkey), near the headwaters of both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

D. As noted above, the Gilgamesh Epic was the literary classic of the ancient world; thus, people in other cultures would have been familiar with it. Indeed, a fragment of the epic dated to c. 1400 B.C.E. (relating a scene known from Tablet VII of the 12-tablet version) was found in Megiddo, a city in northern Israel, not far from modern-day Haifa.

1. We have to assume that the local Canaanites at Megiddo were able to read this text in the original.

2. From the city of Ugarit, located in far northern Canaan, on the Mediterranean coast in northern Syria, we have another cuneiform tablet, describing another episode from the life of Gilgamesh (though not one known from the 12-tablet version).

3. How did somebody in, let's say, the 10th or 9th or 8th century in Israel know about the Gilgamesh Epic? It might have been translated orally, perhaps, into Hebrew or Canaanite (recall that Hebrew and Canaanite are dialects of the same language).

E. In addition, the biblical tradition has Abraham originating from Mesopotamia, before he moves to the land of Canaan. Thus, it is possible that the earliest Hebrews would have brought the flood story with them.

F. The additions in the biblical account suggest that the Hebrew version is an expansion of the Babylonian version. This is far more likely than assuming that the Babylonians excised material from an Israelite version.

G. The end of Genesis 8 also contains a particular item that is very non-Israelite.

1. When Noah sacrifices to God, Genesis 8 tells us that God smelled the sweet savor of the sacrifices.

2. Of all the many times in the Bible where we have reference to the Israelites offering sacrifices, this is the only place in the Bible where we have a reference to God smelling the sacrifices.

3. God appears here almost in human fashion, which is something we would expect to find in the polytheistic world. Indeed, in Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet XI, line 161, we read, "the gods smelled the sweet savor" emanating from Utnapisthim's sacrifice.

V. Most scholars, especially those who adhere to the JEDP theory, believe that the biblical flood story is redacted from two separate sources. But was it?

A. Certain apparent inconsistencies in the biblical account, such as the number of animals that Noah brought onto the ark, have led scholars to propose that the biblical story has two layers, the Yahwist and the Priestly, which then were redacted into a single narrative.

B. There is an alternative approach, though, which we prefer, and that is to read the biblical account as a unified whole. By doing so, and only in this manner, does the biblical account match with the Gilgamesh version of the flood.

C. Just as Julius Wellhausen was presenting the JEDP Theory in its classical formulation in 1878, these Babylonian texts written in the Akkadian language, discovered during the British excavations of Nineveh in the 1840s and 1850s, were being read and analyzed by scholars in the 1870s and 1880s.

D. Most famously, a remarkable man named George Smith, working at the British Museum in London, discovered Gilgamesh Tablet XI containing a flood story closely paralleling the biblical account.

E. Only later, so great was Wellhausen's influence, did it occur to anybody that we should not think of the Flood story as a compilation of two texts. It cannot be the case, so goes the argument, that a redactor took this material from two hypothesized, smaller component parts and put them together in the very order that we actually find in the Gilgamesh Epic.

Essential Reading:

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 37–59.

Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*.

Supplementary Reading:

Benjamin R. Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the fact that the Gilgamesh Epic influenced the biblical flood story affect our understanding of the Bible as "sacred scripture"?
2. Imagine yourself as George Smith reading cuneiform texts in the British Museum during the 1870s. What kind of intellectual tools and abilities would you require to do this kind of work?

Table 7a: Flood Stories Compared:

The Biblical Story (Genesis 6–8) and the Gilgamesh Epic (Tablet XI)

			Story Elements According to JEDP Source Theory	
Order in story	*Genesis story element*	*Present in Gilgamesh Epic?*	*Yahwist (J) "Yahweh" (Lord)*	*Priestly (P) "Elohim" (God)*
1.	morality/immorality factor	no	6:5–8	6:9–13
2.	materials (wood, pitch, reeds)	yes		6:14
3.	dimensions	yes		6:15
4.	decks	yes		6:16
5.	covenant, population	no		6:17–22
6.	population	yes	7:1–5	
7.	flood	yes	7:7–10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22–23	7:6, 11, 13–16a, 17a, 18–21
8.	mountaintop landing	yes		7:24–8:5
9.	birds sent forth	yes	8:6–12	
10.	dry land	yes, but much less than in Genesis		8:13–14
11.	all set free	yes		8:15–19
12.	sacrifices	yes	8:20–22	

Lecture Eight
Genesis 9, Covenant

Scope: The covenant mentioned briefly in Genesis 6:18 is treated in greater detail in Genesis 9. This lecture focuses on this crucial concept in biblical studies and on how the notion of covenant distinguished ancient Israel from other cultures and religions of the ancient Near East. We also will look ahead to chapters 15 and 17, in which God establishes a covenant with Abraham. In 9:3–4, God permits man to eat meat (though not blood); this passage leads us back to the creation accounts, where we note that man was allowed to eat only vegetation. We will use this passage as a springboard to discuss the vegetarian ideal that permeates the Bible.

Outline

I. There are two major distinctions between the gods of the polytheistic religions and the single God worshipped in Israel, the quantitative and the qualitative.

A. The quantitative is well known. The religions of other cultures in the ancient world were polytheisms, characterized by the belief in many gods. By contrast, in Israel, only one God was worshipped. But the picture is more complicated, for there is no radical step from polytheism to monotheism. Instead, the process occurred in stages.

1. The religion of ancient Israel throughout most of the biblical period was a monolatry, that is, the worship of one God.

2. Only later, during the Babylonian Exile, did the religion of ancient Israel develop into a monotheism, that is, the belief in one God.

B. The background for the distinction between Israel and the other religions of the ancient world may be found in the societal difference.

1. Egypt, Babylonia, and the other great powers were complex societies, governed by kings and vast bureaucracies, while Israel was a simple society, based on a tribal structure with one individual leader at the head.

2. Given that the gods are a projection of human society onto the divine realm, one can understand how Egypt, Babylonia, and the other great powers developed the notion of a pantheon of deities, while Israel, by contrast, fostered the worship of one god (which, as noted above, eventually developed into pure monotheism).

3. Unfortunately, we do not have written remains for other semi-nomadic, tribal, pastoral peoples who lived in the desert and in the desert-fringe, and so we do not know what their religious outlook would have been like.

C. We also note that the worship of the deity in antiquity was a local affair. Gods could be worshipped only in their own locale or realm.

1. Such was true in ancient Egypt, for example, where Khnum was the god of Elephantine (near modern-day Aswan) but could not be worshipped in the region of the Nile Delta in the far north.

2. Several biblical passages indicate that Israel had the same understanding about the worship of Yahweh.

a. Moses asks Pharaoh for permission for the Israelites to leave Egypt to worship God in the Sinai for three days (Exodus 7:16, 8:23).

b. David states that moving to Philistia would require him to worship other gods (1 Samuel 27:19).

3. During the Babylonian Exile, however, the theology of Israel underwent a change. Israel now believed that it could worship Yahweh outside the land of Israel. The background for this transformation is the fact that Assyria and Babylonia were international empires, which had an effect on religious ideas, not just geopolitics.

4. Moreover, Jews living in exile and worshipping their God in Babylon, concluded that He must be the God of the entire world and that the Babylonian gods are not gods at all, only figments in the imagination of the people who worship them.

D. This quantitative distinction, however, is only half the equation. The other part of the equation is the qualitative distinction.

1. Gods in the polytheistic world were, by and large, seen as nature deities, associated with the earth, sky, sun, moon, desert, sea, and so on.
2. Yahweh, by contrast, was perceived by the Israelites as a god of history, exalted above all of nature, manifesting himself in human history.
3. One can point to the Aten cult developed by Akhenaten, an Egyptian pharaoh c. 1350 B.C.E., as an example of another monolatry.
   a. However, the god Aten was still a nature deity, the god of light.
   b. Akhenaten ruled for about a decade and when he died, the old priesthoods came back and reestablished the worship of the other Egyptian gods in their temples.
4. A key passage to understand the distinction is 1 Kings 19:11–12, in which Elijah makes a trip to Mount Sinai to visit God.
   a. There was a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire—all elements of nature—but nowhere was God to be found in those powerful displays of the natural world.
   b. God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice— communicating directly with human beings through the divine word.

II. The concept of covenant (*berit*)—a bond between God and man—was possible because of Israel's unique view of the deity.

A. The first covenant in the Bible is between God and Noah, representative of all mankind (see Genesis 9).

B. The second covenant in the Bible is between God and Abraham, representative of the people of Israel (see Genesis 15 and Genesis 17).

III. The concept of covenant speaks to the closeness between God and man in Israel's understanding of the world. By contrast, the other peoples of the ancient world saw a distance between man and the gods.

A. Notwithstanding the chasm between man and the gods in the polytheistic world, ancient peoples believed that that gap could be bridged in certain instances.
1. The first method was by the gods coming down to earth and having sexual intercourse with females. We find this in a variety of ancient mythologies, including that of ancient Greece. Note, moreover, that this is what occurs in Genesis 6:1–4 to epitomize the depravity of mankind.
2. At other times, certain humans could achieve divine status. Such, for example, was the belief among the Egyptians, who considered every pharaoh to be divine. In addition, Imhotep, the builder of the first pyramid, was deified after his death.

B. By contrast, notwithstanding the closeness between God and man, as concretized through the covenant, for ancient Israel, the gap could never be bridged. Again, if a bridging of the gap appears in Genesis 6:1–4, it is simply an ancient Near Eastern mythological fragment that is used for the specific purpose of a prelude to the flood story.

IV. Another interesting topic pertaining to how ancient Israel understood the divine is the gender of God. On the one hand, one could argue that the God of Israel was devoid of gender (unlike the polytheistic deities) or gender-neutral, if you will, but these ideas are rather modern and fall outside the worldview of ancient Israel. More likely, the average ancient Israelite would have understood the God of Israel as a male deity.

A. The Hebrew language has grammatical gender, and God is always referred to with masculine nouns, verbs, and pronouns.

B. The metaphors usually attached to God suggest that he was seen as a male deity. For example, the prophets of Israel saw the covenant between God and Israel in terms of a marriage, with God as the male partner and Israel as the female partner.

C. At the same time, one must readily admit that the ancient Hebrew writers sometimes used female imagery, such as presenting God as a mother caring for her children.

V. God apparently had some ideals in store for humanity the first go-round, which mankind could not live up to. Accordingly, God permits greater flexibility in Genesis 9, by allowing humankind to eat meat now; but this does not detract from the vegetarian ideal that permeates the Bible.

A. In Genesis 1, God commands a vegetarian diet for both humankind and the animal kingdom.

B. Genesis 9 adds something new: Because man cannot live up to this ideal, humankind is given permission to eat meat, with the proviso that no blood can be consumed.

C. Leviticus 11 presents the dietary laws specific to Israel, with a general prohibition against eating carnivores.

D. Isaiah 11 presents the prophet's eschatological view of world history, in which vegetarianism will define the end of days.

Essential Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, "An Essay on Israelite Religion," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, pp. 1–17.

Supplementary Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Vegetarian Ideal in the Bible," in L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and G. Shapiro, eds., *Food and Judaism*, pp. 319–334.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that other cultures in the ancient Near East might also have developed a monolatry or a monotheism? Explain your answer.

2. What other commands from God are present in Genesis 9:1–7 that relate to our discussion in this lecture?

Lecture Nine
Genesis 12–22, The Abraham Story

Scope: Abraham is introduced at the end of chapter 11, and there is additional material about his life in chapters 23–25, but the main core of the Abraham story is chapters 12–22, bounded by the first and last times that God speaks to Abraham (12:1–3 and 22:16–18). This lecture presents an overview of the narrative, focusing on the interrelated themes of God's granting the land of Canaan to Abraham and Abraham's quest for an heir. We will see how Lot, Eliezer, Ishmael, and Isaac are all candidates for this role, but how the story eliminates the first three, one after another, thereby leaving only Isaac as the true heir.

Outline

I. Israel's understanding of God as a deity who reveals himself in history has far-reaching implications for ancient Israel.

- **A.** Statements in Deuteronomy 32:7 and Psalms 78:5–6 command the people to recall their history. It is no surprise, then, that the biblical books developed as they did, especially the great narrative that commences with Genesis and continues through Kings, presenting the entire history of Israel from Abraham through the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.
- **B.** As indicated, that history begins with the personality of Abraham, and it is to his story, which commences at the end of Genesis 11 and the beginning of Genesis 12, to which we now turn.

II. We note several literary devices in the story.

- **A.** The story begins with a conflict between the statement that Sarah was barren (11:30) and the promise by God that Abraham would be a great nation (12:2). All literature is driven by conflict, which creates the drama. In this case, the reader wishes to read on to see how the conflict between the promise from on high (12:2) and the facts on the ground (11:30) will be resolved.
- **B.** Note the verbs predicated of Abraham in verses 4–5, "went forth" and "took." We would expect these two verses to appear in reverse order. But the storywriter narrates the tale in dischronological fashion in order to emphasize the point that Abraham immediately followed God's command. God told Abraham to "go forth" in verse 1, and Abraham immediately obeyed in verse 4, as indicated by the verb "went forth."

III. The Abraham story brings a host of potential heirs into the picture.

- **A.** First, we are directed to focus our attention on Lot, but he is a nephew. Thus, we ask ourselves: Can he count as offspring? Perhaps, but then Lot departs in Genesis 13.
- **B.** We next are introduced to Eliezer, an adopted son (to be discussed further in the next lecture). Is he the one? The answer is no, because as soon as Eliezer is introduced in Genesis 15, we are informed that he will not be Abraham's heir.
- **C.** At last, finally, after much travail, Abraham gains a natural-born son, Ishmael, son of Hagar, a servant woman presented to Abraham by Sarah (again, more on this in the next lecture).
- **D.** But wait, in Genesis 21, another son is born to Abraham, Isaac, son of Sarah, confirming the more specific promise made to Abraham in Genesis 17 that Sarah would bear him a son—especially noteworthy in light of the introductory statement in Genesis 11:30 that Sarah was barren.

IV. God makes two interconnected promises to Abraham.

- **A.** God promises to Abraham the land of Canaan.
- **B.** God also promises that Abraham shall have offspring.

V. The stage is too crowded, with Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac all present; thus, there is a literary need to remove several characters from the stage.

- **A.** Hagar and Ishmael depart in Genesis 21.
- **B.** Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac remain toward the story's end, though this scene will be challenged with God's command to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22, for which see Lecture Eleven in detail.

VI. Note the manner in which all comes full circle, with the language in 22:16–18 echoing that of 12:1–3; we will note this again in Lecture Eleven and return to this issue in greater detail in Lecture Fifteen.

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 50–107 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 62–112.

Supplementary Reading:

Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 53–95.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did Israel's unique understanding of God affect the production of literature in ancient Israel?
2. In what way is the conflict in the story increased before it is resolved? Why would the author have constructed the narrative in this fashion?
3. The most unique episode in the Abraham story, which we did not discuss in this lecture, is the account in Genesis 14. What makes this story so different from the other stories in Genesis 12–22?
4. Another story that we did not discuss is the Sodom and Gomorrah episode in Genesis 18–19. What do you think is the main point of this narrative?

Lecture Ten
When and Where Did Abraham Live?

Scope: This lecture addresses the two questions announced in the title. There is considerable scholarly debate concerning both issues. The dates proposed for Abraham range from c. 2000 B.C.E. to c. 1400 B.C.E. As indicated in Lecture Four, I adhere to the latest possible date. Scholars also debate the location of Ur, the birthplace of Abraham: Is it to be identified with the great Sumerian city in southern Mesopotamia, or is to be located in another city with the same name in northern Mesopotamia? In this case, I adhere to the latter opinion. This lecture surveys the different arguments for the various opinions and presents the reasons in favor of a late date (1400 B.C.E.) and a northern Ur (to be identified with Urfa in modern-day southern Turkey). The lecture also discusses the ancient city of Nuzi (in modern-day northern Iraq), whose archives have provided social and economic parallels to the book of Genesis, as well as the site of Ugarit (in modern-day northwestern Syria), whose epic compositions provide an important thematic parallel to the patriarchal narratives.

Outline

I. One question that continues to vex scholars is: When did Abraham live? By asking this question at all, one clearly is approaching the subject from the maximalist standpoint (see Lecture Four). The minimalists, of course, would not even bother to ask the question.

- **A.** A standard view places Abraham as early as 2000 B.C.E. This dating typically is based on a literal acceptance of the number of years presented in the Bible, such as the statement in Exodus 12:40 that the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years. There are problems with this approach, however.
  - **1.** The numbers that appear in the earlier biblical books, including Genesis, are part of the epic style; they should not be taken literally. Note especially the repeated use of the number 40.
  - **2.** Only from the time of Solomon onward do we get an accurate chronology reflected in the text. This is attributable to the establishment of the monarchy, with royal scribes now keeping accurate records in the palace.
- **B.** A second option dates Abraham to c. 1400 B.C.E., which is the year that I presented in Lecture Four. This dating is based on the judicious use of the genealogies presented in the Bible, in accordance with the Near Eastern custom of preserving family lineages accurately.
  - **1.** Note that the individuals who appear in the Exodus account (most famously Moses but also such individuals as Nahshon and Zelophehad) are three to five generations removed from the sons of Jacob. This suggests a period of about 100 years for the Israelites in Egypt.
  - **2.** To this day, people in the Near East frequently are unable to tell you how old they are (witness the story related to me by my teacher Cyrus Gordon), but they are able to recite their genealogies with great accuracy.

II. A second question scholars ask is: Where is Abraham's Ur? To which city does Ur of the Chaldeans refer?

- **A.** One view proposes the great Sumerian city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia. [See appendix map: **The Ancient Near East c. 1400 B.C.E.**]
  - **1.** This great urban center was not known to scholars until excavations in the early part of the 20th century by the British archeologist Sir Leonard Woolley, who around 1920 announced to the world that he had found the birthplace of Abraham.
  - **2.** However, in truth, there is little evidence to support this position.
- **B.** A second view locates the Ur from which Abraham came in northern Mesopotamia, specifically, at the venerable city of Urfa in southern Turkey. A number of reasons for this view are presented.
  - **1.** Joshua 24 states that Abraham came from beyond the Euphrates, which works for the location of Urfa, which is in the north, beyond the Euphrates, but not for Ur in southern Mesopotamia, which is on the western shore of the Euphrates River.
  - **2.** If one were to journey from southern Ur to Canaan, as per the details provided in Genesis 11, the route would not take one via Harran. This would be the case, however, if Urfa is the birthplace of Abraham.

3. As Genesis 24 and 29 show, when people from Abraham's inner circle (his servant and his grandson Jacob, respectively) return to the family homeland, they journey to the region of Aram Nahariam, that is, northern Mesopotamia.
4. The local tradition among the Jews, Muslims, and Christians of Urfa, in southern Turkey, is that their city is the birthplace of Abraham.
5. The designation in Genesis 11:28 and 11:31, "Ur of the Chaldeans" (*Ur Kasdim*) suggests that the Ur from which Abraham came is the less famous Ur. The great metropolitan center of Ur in southern Mesopotamia would not require an additional descriptive phrase, such as "of the Chaldeans."
6. In line with the above comment, note that the Greek historian Xenophon places the Chaldeans as neighbors of the Armenians, that is, once again in northern Mesopotamia.

III. Once we realize that Abraham came from northern Mesopotamia, we can explain why several customs attested among the Hurrians are reflected in Genesis.

A. The peoples of Mesopotamia, working from south to north were the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Hurrians. Hurrians were in the far north in the northern parts of the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley.

B. The main source of this evidence is the city of Nuzi, in northern Mesopotamia (near the modern city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq; see appendix map: **The Ancient Near East c. 1400 B.C.E.**), which yielded several thousand important cuneiform tablets, dated to c. 1350 B.C.E., providing details about the legal and socioeconomic practices in the town.

1. Childless men would adopt their servants to be their heirs, which explains the relationship between Abraham and Eliezer (see Genesis 15).
2. These adoption contracts furthermore state that if a natural-born son is born, the natural-born son will supersede the adopted son.
3. Marriage contracts from Nuzi state that if a woman is unable to conceive, it is her legal duty to present to her husband a slavewoman as a second wife. This parallels Sarah's presentation of Hagar to Abraham in Genesis 16—and note that Sarah takes the initiative here, because it is her legal responsibility to act.

IV. There are literary parallels from ancient Ugarit (a city in northern Canaan on the Mediterranean coast; see appendix map: **The Ancient Near East c. 1400 B.C.E.**), concerning the childless hero, that are relevant to our story.

A. The Epic of Aqhat concerns the hero Dan'el, a legendary king of Canaan, and his quest for a son, which culminates in the birth of the heroic lad Aqhat.

B. The Epic of Kret, a legendary king devoid of family, has a similar theme.

C. Note that Ugarit also flourished during the 14th century B.C.E.

D. The combined evidence of Ugarit and Nuzi suggests that the 14th century, during which both cities flourished, is the most likely time period when Abraham lived

Essential Reading:

Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, pp. 109–130.

Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Patriarchal Narratives," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 13 (1954), pp. 56–59.

Supplementary Reading:

P. Kyle McCarter (with Ronald S. Hendel), "The Patriarchal Age," in H. Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed., pp. 1–31.

Questions to Consider:

1. In the long run, does it really matter when and where Abraham lived? Or is this just a case of scholarly curiosity?
2. If the stories in Genesis 15–16 reflect actual ancient social and legal customs (adoption, marriage), why does the biblical text not make this point more clearly?

Lecture Eleven
Genesis 21–22, Abraham Put to the Test

Scope: Lecture Nine presented the "big picture" of the story of Abraham; in this lecture, we will look at the last two chapters of that narrative in great detail. Our approach will be a close reading of the text; that is, we will focus on the different literary techniques used by the author. One such device, for example, is the naming technique; we will note how Ishmael is never referred to by name in chapter 21, even though he is a major presence in the story. The attentive reader realizes that this is a sign that Ishmael is to be written out of the story at this point, which indeed, is the case. Another device is the accumulation of the words *father* and *son* in 22:7–8—in contrast to the usual economical style of writing encountered in biblical prose—as a harsh reminder to the reader of what is occurring here: A father is about to sacrifice his son.

Outline

I. The style of literature in ancient Israel (and in the ancient Near East as a whole) was an oral-aural one. A single reciter held the text and read it aloud, while the gathered group listened. This style of reading demands reader input and involvement.

II. We introduce here several additional literary devices not previously discussed in the course. Prime among them is alliteration, which occurs frequently in the Bible, in prose texts as much as in poetry.

- **A.** An excellent example occurs in Genesis 21, with the use of the rare verb *millel*, "utter," in verse 7 (used here instead of the common verb "say").
- **B.** This verb is selected by the author to create the alliterative effect with nearby verbs, namely, *mûl*, "circumcise," in verse 4 and *gamal*, "wean," in verse 8.

III. A second literary device that we may consider is the naming technique. Note that Ishmael is never referred to by name in Genesis 21; instead, a series of other terms is used, including *son*, *lad*, and *child*.

- **A.** The author employs this literary technique as a sign to the reader that Ishmael is to be written out of the story at this point.
  - **1.** Note, however, that there are no villains in the story, because Ishmael, too, is noble and he, too, will become a great nation (see verse 18 and, earlier, see already 17:20).
  - **2.** Muslim tradition, in fact, which also traces its origins back to Abraham, does so through Ishmael, as opposed to the Jewish tradition, which reaches back to Abraham via Isaac.
- **B.** This clears the way for Isaac to be the only son of Abraham, as stated in Genesis 22:2.
  - **1.** In reality, Isaac is not the only son of Abraham, because Ishmael remains a son. This is a case of literary expressionism, exaggerating reality to stress the point.
  - **2.** As proof of Ishmael remaining a son of Abraham, we take a quick glance ahead at Genesis 25:7–9, where both sons are present to bury their father upon his death.

IV. We use the term *aqedah* (Hebrew for "binding") to refer to the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22.

- **A.** How could God command Abraham to sacrifice his son? What is going on here?
  - **1.** First, we note the larger literary pattern. Just when the story seems to be winding down, with the removal of Ishmael and Hagar from the stage, leaving only Isaac and Sarah at Abraham's side (see Lecture Nine)—at this very point—the author throws us a curveball. A new crisis arises: God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This pattern is well known from the modern novel.
  - **2.** Next we note that this is only a test, as indicated in Genesis 22:1. This information is conveyed to the reader to ensure that we focus our attention on Abraham without having to worry about Isaac.
- **B.** The statement in Genesis 22:1 leads to the identification of another literary technique in the story: The reader knows something that the character does not know.
  - **1.** We know that God is only testing Abraham, that the sacrifice of Isaac will not really occur, but Abraham does not know this; thus, we focus our full attention on Abraham to see whether or not he will pass the test.
  - **2.** If we had not been told this information in verse 1, all of our emotions and sympathies would be on Isaac—what will happen to this boy?—but because we have been informed that this is "only a test"

(compare the interruption of a television or radio show: "This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System"), our eyes are solely on Abraham. We need not worry about Isaac, because we know that he will be fine.

3. The author wants our eyes solely on Abraham to such an extent that no mention whatsoever is made of Sarah. Where was she when all this took place? Did Abraham not consult with her? Did she wonder where her husband and son were for three days? Again, storytellers craft their stories to keep the focus where they want it. The introduction of Sarah into this episode would obfuscate the picture—we need to focus solely on Abraham. (Compare, in the movie *Monkey Business*, how we are asked to suspend disbelief when we see Harpo Marx go into a marionette box during a children's show, yet we do not see the puppeteer who is operating the marionettes.)
4. And the author never lets us forget what is happening here, with the repeated use of the words *father* and *son* in verses 7–8.

C. A simple comment: The story illustrates the move from child sacrifice (practiced by Canaanites and others in the ancient Near East) to animal sacrifice (practiced widely—and the only kind of sacrifice in ancient Israel, where child sacrifice was prohibited).

1. We have evidence of child sacrifice from the site of Carthage, a Canaanite or Phoenician outpost in the western Mediterranean (in modern-day Tunisia).
2. Archeologists there found hundreds of infant skeletons burnt, showing that they were indeed sacrificed to one of the gods.

D. A more complex analysis: The story is the culmination of Abraham's spiritual odyssey. [We noted this briefly in Lecture Nine, and we will return to this issue in greater detail in Lecture Fifteen.] The words of God's first speech to Abraham in Genesis 12, about how he will be blessed, echo here in chapter 22, the last time that God speaks to Abraham.

Essential Reading:

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 154–163.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 97–107 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 102–112.

Supplementary Reading:

Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (consult the pages listed for Genesis 21–22 in the index on p. 289).

Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, pp. 115–120.

Questions to Consider:

1. Readers (critics?) of the Bible often ask, "What kind of God would command Abraham to offer his son?" How do you react to this question?
2. At the end of the story, in Genesis 22:19, we read, "Abraham then returned to his servants." What do you find odd about this statement? How do you explain the wording?

Lecture Twelve
Women in the Bible—Sarah and Hagar

Scope: One of the new avenues of biblical scholarship during the last few decades has been an increased awareness of the many important female characters in the story. This lecture illustrates the point by paying attention to the roles of Sarah and Hagar in the Abraham narrative. The presence of these women in the story stands in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern literature, in which female characters typically do not play major roles. We will explore the reasons for the use of important female characters by Israelite literati in crafting their narratives. Our main conclusion will be that these women represented the people of Israel, a lowly nation, not among the major powers of the ancient world, for whom women, traditionally viewed as the weaker sex, served to exemplify Israel's self-definition.

Outline

I. Before getting to the heart of this lecture, we begin with a literary reading of another theme that appears in the Abraham cycle.

- **A.** Genesis 12:10–13:4: Abraham attempts to pass Sarah off as his sister, and thus, she is taken into the palace of the pharaoh in Egypt.
- **B.** Genesis 20: Again, Abraham attempts to pass Sarah off as his sister, and this time, she is taken into the palace of Abimelech, king of the city-state of Gerar (in southern Canaan).
  - **1.** In verse 2, Abraham says *to* Sarah, "She is my sister," as if to say, "I am going to pass you off once more as my sister."
  - **2.** God comes to Abimelech in a dream and warns him that he will die for having taken a married woman.
  - **3.** Abimelech summons Abraham, and the literary device of "X said…X said…" appears in verses 9–10, indicating to the reader that a momentary silence, a pregnant pause, occurs between the two speeches by Abimelech, with Abraham unable to respond to the charges.
- **C.** A close reading of Genesis 20:12 in conjunction with Genesis 11:29 reveals the very real possibility that Abraham is telling the truth, that indeed, he and Sarah are half-siblings.
  - **1.** In ancient Hebrew the same word (*'ahot*) was used for sister or half-sister or step-sister.
  - **2.** Given that incest is prohibited in Leviticus 18 and 20, we may assume that the Genesis narrative is older than the law in Leviticus. That is to say, no later Israelite writer would have crafted a story in which Abraham and Sarah appear in such blatant violation of a prohibition in the Torah.
- **D.** Although all English translations for verse 13 use the singular *God* to render "*Elohim,*" in this case the noun is actually in the plural (we know that because the verb, which is predicated, is in the plural). Thus the passage should be translated, "when the gods made me wander from my father's house."
  - **1.** How could Abraham be speaking such language?
  - **2.** Abraham uses the word *gods* in verse 13, because he is speaking to a (presumed) polytheist, Abimelech. This is an instance of style-switching, that is, adopting the speech of one's interlocutor.
- **E.** The word *hesed* in verse 13 means "kindness" generally, and that is its surface meaning here, as Abraham describes how he asked Sarah to do a favor for him.
  - **1.** But the word also means "shameful act" occasionally, and it is used in this fashion in Leviticus 20:17, specifically with reference to brother-sister marriage.
  - **2.** As such, I believe that these texts are speaking to one another. Scholars call this "intertextuality."
- **F.** The literary device used here is as follows: The characters know something that the reader does not know; there is a gap in the reader's knowledge, and that gap is filled at a later point in the story, when the reader learns what the characters knew all along.

II. In the above two stories, our sympathy lies with Sarah. Abraham, the male, is the dominator; Sarah, the female, is the passive one. Abraham speaks; Sarah never does—in both stories. She is objectified. Our hearts go out to her.

III. Note further that in the Ugaritic parallels to the childless hero motif (see Lecture Nine), the focus was on the male hero's quest for an heir, with little or no mention of the hero's wife. By contrast, in the Abraham cycle

(and elsewhere, as we shall see in Lecture Fourteen), the focus is on the female. Recall the passage in Genesis 11:30 that Sarah was barren and childless (again, see Lecture Nine).

IV. When Hagar is introduced into the picture, however, Sarah becomes the dominator, and Hagar becomes the mistreated one. See Genesis 16 and Genesis 21. Now our sympathies lie with Hagar.

- **A.** Note that God speaks twice to Hagar in each of these stories, in loving and comforting fashion.
- **B.** Note that God never speaks to Sarah, except in Genesis 18:15, and then only in very curt language to chastise her.

V. These women represent Israel—the lowly, the marginal, the one in need of God's special protection. These women, whether Sarah vis-à-vis Abraham or Hagar vis-à-vis Sarah, are the lowly, and this is how Israel saw itself. We call this Israel's *self-definition*, and the ancient Hebrew writers used these women to great effect in creating the literature of ancient Israel, including the book of Genesis.

- **A.** Tamar in Genesis 38—we will read that story in detail in Lecture 21—has the moral upper hand as opposed to her father-in-law, Judah.
- **B.** In Exodus 2, a woman, Jochebed, hides Moses in the bulrushes, while the father of Moses is mentioned only in passing and is not seen as an active participant.
- **C.** In Joshua 2, a prostitute named Rahab becomes the heroic figure who helps Israel conquer the city of Jericho.
- **D.** In Judges 4 and 5, the great Israelite general Barak does not get the glory when the Israelites defeat the Canaanite army. Instead, the glory goes to Deborah, and even more importantly, to Jael (Hebrew: Ya'el), who kills the Canaanite general Sisera by hammering a tent peg into his temple after having deceived him.
- **E.** Note that both times God speaks to Hagar, he finds her in the wilderness. This represents the larger picture of God finding Israel in the wilderness, the major storyline of the Torah.
- **F.** As a later parallel to this idea, note the statement of the prophet in Jeremiah in 31:2, in a later context: "The people escaped from the sword, found favor in the wilderness."

Essential Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, "Unlikely Heroes: Women in the Bible," *Bible Review* 19:1 (February 2003), pp. 16–23, 52–53; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/ bswb_BR/bswbbr1901feat1.html.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, esp. pp. 93–98, 225–237.

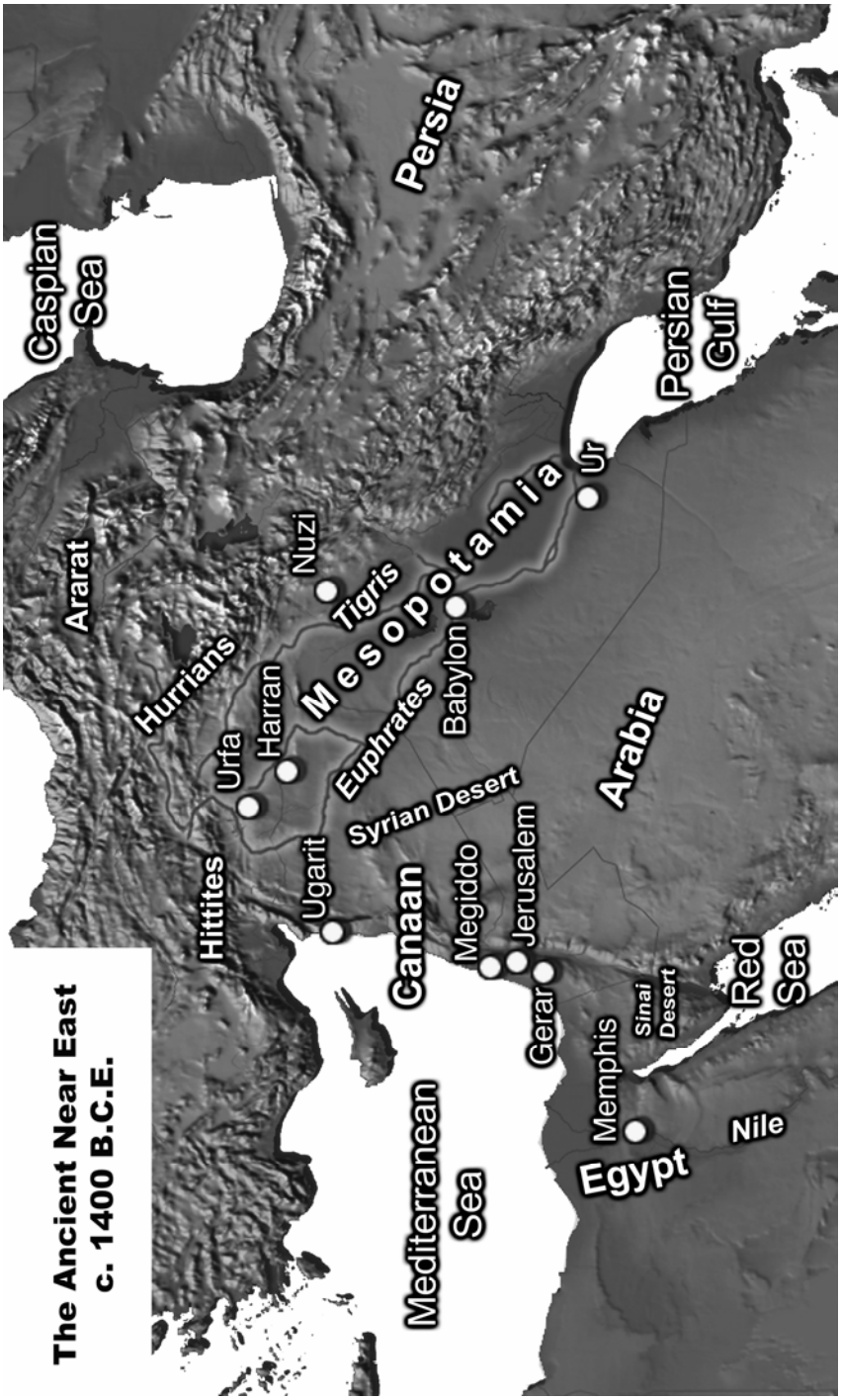
Supplementary Reading:

Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*.

Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*.

Questions to Consider:

1. In Judges 9, the hero of Israel (even if aspects of his career are less than noble and stellar) is Abimelech, the son of a concubine (see Judges 8:31), while in 2 Kings 7, the heroes of Israel are four lepers. How do these stories relate to the main theme of this lecture?
2. Although one might "blame" Eve for eating the fruit in Genesis 3, she nevertheless appears in that story as more active than Adam. Identify specific elements in the text that underscore this point.



Timeline of Israelite History

c. 1400–1300 B.C.E.	Patriarchs
c. 1300–1275	Joseph as viceroy in Egypt
c. 1275–1175	Slavery
c. 1175	Exodus
c. 1175–1150	Wandering
c. 1150–1140	Joshua
c. 1140–1020	Judges
c. 1020–1000	Reign of King Saul
c. 1000–965	Reign of King David
c. 965–930	Reign of King Solomon
930–721	Kingdom of Israel
930–586	Kingdom of Judah
586–538	Babylonian Exile
538–333 B.C.E.*	Persian Rule

***Note**: Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in 333 B.C.E. and his rule over the entire Near East, including Israel, from 333–323 B.C.E. brings an end to the biblical period. The succeeding centuries are known as the post-biblical period, the Hellenistic period, the Greco-Roman period, or late antiquity.

Formation of the Canon

c. 450 B.C.E.	Books of the Torah become Jewish canon.
c. 250 B.C.E.	Books of the Prophets enter Jewish canon.
c. 100-150 C.E.	Books of the Writings (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs) enter Jewish canon.
c. 200-700 C.E.	Christian canon formed, by different churches in the Near East and the Mediterranean, by accepting the books of the Jewish Bible, the books of the Apocrypha, and the New Testament as Scripture.

Biblical Names—People and Places

Note: All names in Hebrew mean something, and frequently, the biblical authors played upon these names and their meanings. In such cases, especially where they are relevant to our course, I have included the meaning of the Hebrew name in parentheses.

Aaron: Older brother of Moses; first high priest of Israel.

Abel: Second-born son of Adam and Eve; brother of Cain (see Genesis 4).

Abimelech: King of Gerar, visited by both Abraham (Genesis 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26).

Abimelech: Judge in ancient Israel, son of Gideon and his concubine (Judges 8–9).

Abraham ("great father"): First of the patriarchs; the originator of the Israelite tradition centered on the worship of one god.

Abram ("great father"): Original name of Abraham until it was changed in Genesis 17. The two names are dialectal variants of each other.

Absalom: Son of David; he led a popular rebellion against his father, which was squelched by David's general Joab, who then killed Absalom (see 2 Samuel 15–19).

Adam ("man"): First male human being according to the biblical tradition.

Adonijah: Son of David and apparently the leading contender to succeed his father, at least until David nominated Solomon as his successor (see 1 Kings 1–2).

Amnon: Firstborn son of David, presumably the one who would have succeeded his father under normal circumstances; killed by his brother Absalom (see 2 Samuel 13–14).

Arabia: Major region to the southeast of Canaan.

Aram: Country to the northeast of Canaan, more or less modern-day Syria.

Aram Naharaim: Literally "Aram of the two rivers," referring to that part of Aram along and beyond the Euphrates River.

Ararat: Mountainous region to the far north of Mesopotamia, in modern-day northeastern Turkey and Armenia.

Asenath: Joseph's Egyptian wife; daughter of Potiphera; our knowledge of ancient Egyptian allows us to explain the name as "the deity is Isis."

Babylon: Major city of ancient Mesopotamia, on the Euphrates River, in modern-day south-central Iraq.

Benjamin: Youngest son of Jacob.

Bethuel: Father of Rebekah, son of Nahor, and thus, a nephew of Abraham.

Bilhah: Handmaiden to Rachel; given to Jacob as a secondary wife.

Cain: Firstborn son of Adam and Eve; brother of Abel (see Genesis 4).

Canaan: Region between Egypt and Mesopotamia, with rather amorphous boundaries, but essentially the land bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Syrian Desert to the east; it was in this land that the people of Israel were resident.

Cyrus the Great: First great ruler of ancient Persia; conquered Babylonia in 538 B.C.E., then permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

David: Second king of Israel, c. 1000–965 B.C.E.; son-in-law of Saul.

Dinah: Daughter of Jacob and Leah.

Dothan: City in northern Israel, north of Shechem, mentioned in Genesis 37:17.

Edom: Land bordering Israel to the south in the mountain region of Seir (straddling both sides of the modern-day Israeli-Jordanian border).

Egypt: Great culture of the Nile valley.

Eliezer: Servant of Abraham.

Ephraim: Second-born son of Joseph, who supersedes his older brother Manasseh when Jacob places him first in the blessing ceremony.

Esau: Twin brother of Jacob; son of Isaac.

Euphrates: One of the two great rivers of Mesopotamia, west of the Tigris.

Eve ("living"): First female human being according to the biblical tradition.

Garden of Eden: Legendary location that served as home to Adam and Eve before their expulsion.

Gerar: City-state in southern Canaan (see **Abimelech**).

Greece: Major culture of the Aegean Sea region.

Hagar: Handmaiden of Sarah who became Abraham's second wife; mother of Ishmael.

Hannah: Mother of Samuel.

Isaac ("he laughs"): Second of the patriarchs; son of Abraham.

Ishmael ("God hears"): First son of Abraham, born to Hagar.

Ishmaelites: Desert people living to the south and southwest of Israel; biblical tradition held them to be the descendants of Ishmael.

Israel: The people and culture, resident in the land of Canaan, that produced the Bible.

Israelites: People of ancient Canaan, unique in their religious position, characterized by the worship of one deity; the people responsible for the Bible.

Jacob ("heal-grabber," "deceiver"): Third of the patriarchs; son of Isaac.

Jerusalem: Capital city and religious center of ancient Israel, established by David c. 1000 B.C.E.; location of the Temple, built by Solomon c. 965 B.C.E., destroyed 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonians; location of the Second Temple, built by Jews who returned from exile and dedicated in 516 B.C.E., destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

Joab: David's general (also his nephew), who quashed the rebellion by Absalom, then slew him.

Joseph ("add"): Eleventh and favorite son of Jacob; he rose to high station in the government of Egypt.

Joshua: Leader of the Israelites after Moses, c. 1150 B.C.E.

Judah: Fourth son of Jacob, who is very prominent in Genesis 37–50; the name of the leading tribe of ancient Israel, from which came such individuals as David and Solomon; the name of the southern kingdom from 930 B.C.E. onward, until its destruction in 586 B.C.E.

Laban: Brother of Rebekah, son of Bethuel, uncle and father-in-law of Jacob.

Leah (possibly "cow"): First wife of Jacob, daughter of Laban.

Levi: Third son of Jacob; progenitor of the priestly group of ancient Israel (see next entry).

Levites: Group of men who assisted the priests in the sacrificial cult in the Jerusalem Temple.

Lot: Nephew of Abraham.

Manasseh: Firstborn son of Joseph, who is superseded by his younger brother Ephraim.

Medanites: A semi-nomadic people who traversed the Sinai-Negev region south of Israel; mentioned in Genesis 25:2, 37:36 (though in the latter passage, most translations incorrectly read "Midianites").

Megiddo: Major city in northern Israel.

Midian: Land in the general region of Sinai.

Midianites: Desert people living to the south and southwest of Israel, in the general region of Sinai.

Moses: Leader of the Israelites during the Slavery period in Egypt, the Exodus, and the Wandering that followed, c. 1200–1150 B.C.E.

Mount Halaq (spelled "Halak" in most English Bibles): Mentioned in Joshua 11:17, 12:7 as the southernmost extreme of Israel before one crosses the border into the land of Edom.

Nahor: Brother of Abraham.

Noah: Flood hero according to Genesis 6–9.

Perez ("breach"): Son of Judah, younger twin brother of Zerah, who emerges first from the womb of his mother, Tamar.

Persia: Major empire of the ancient world, centered in ancient Iran, created by Cyrus the Great c. 550 B.C.E., who then conquered Babylon in 538 B.C.E.; eventually defeated by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.E.

Pharaoh: Title of the king of Egypt.

Potiphar: Courtier of Pharaoh and master of Joseph (see Genesis 39).

Potiphar's wife: Wife of Potiphar who attempted to seduce Joseph, then falsely accused him of rape (see Genesis 39).

Potiphera: Egyptian priest; father-in-law of Joseph; our knowledge of ancient Egyptian allows us to explain the name as "he who is given by Ra," with reference to the sun-god; the name of Potiphar (see above) may be a variant form.

Rachel ("ewe"): Second and favorite wife of Jacob, daughter of Laban.

Rebekah: Wife of Isaac.

Reuben: Firstborn son of Jacob; he slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, then later tried to save Joseph from the scheming of his brothers.

Samson: One of the Israelite judges, c. 1050 B.C.E.

Samuel: Leader of the Israelites during the transition from the period of the Judges to the period of the early monarchy, c. 1040–1010 B.C.E.

Sarah ("princess"): Wife of Abraham; originally called Sarai.

Sarai ("princess"): Original name of Sarah, until it was changed in Genesis 17. The two names are dialectal variants of each other.

Saul: First king of Israel, reigned c. 1020–1000 B.C.E.

Seir: Mountainous region south of Israel; homeland of Edom.

Simeon: Second son of Jacob.

Sinai: Tract of land separating Egypt and Canaan; the mountain in that region in which God revealed himself to Moses.

Solomon: Third king of Israel, c. 965–930 B.C.E.; son of David.

Tamar: Daughter-in-law of Judah (see Genesis 38); mother of Zerah and Perez.

Tigris: One of the two great rivers of Mesopotamia, east of the Euphrates.

Ur of the Chaldeans: Biblical term for the birthplace of Abraham; many scholars identify it with the major city by that name in southern Mesopotamia (modern-day southern Iraq); to my mind, however, it should be identified with Urfa in southern Turkey.

Zaphenath-paneah: Joseph's Egyptian name, given to him by Pharaoh, which translates as "the god has spoken, he has life."

Zerah ("shiny, brilliant"): Son of Judah, older twin brother of Perez, though the latter emerges first from the womb of their mother, Tamar.

Zilpah: Handmaiden to Leah; given to Jacob as a secondary wife.

Zipporah: Wife of Moses, originally from Midian.

Glossary

'abrek: Hebrew word appearing in Genesis 41:43, derived from Egyptian *ib-rek*, literally "heart to you," or more idiomatically, "hail."

Akhenaten (also **Akhenaton)**: Pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, who ruled Egypt for 18 years during the mid-14th century B.C.E. (suggested dates are 1353-1336 according to one chronological schema). He is most famous for having introduced the worship of only Aten (Aton), the god of light, into ancient Egypt, thereby establishing a short-lived monolatry; his name means "spirit of Aten."

Akkadian: Language of ancient Mesopotamia, known more popularly by the term *Babylonian*.

Alexander the Great: King of Macedon who ruled over Greece, then all of the ancient Near East and more; his victory over Persia in 333 B.C.E. marks the end of the biblical period and begins the period known as late antiquity.

alliteration: The repetition of the same sounds or similar sounds in words in close proximity to each other. In English usage, this usually implies that the *first* letter or sound of each word is the same. In Hebrew, however, the same sounds or like-sounding sounds can appear anywhere in the alliterative words, that is, in scrambled order, for example.

ancient Israelite literati: Collective term used for the writers of ancient Israel who produced the book of Genesis and the other books of the Bible.

ancient Near East: General term for the cultures of the Near East in antiquity, stretching from Egypt in the southwest to Mesopotamia in the east, from c. 3000 B.C.E. onward.

angel: In the earlier parts of the Bible, including Genesis, the term refers to a manifestation of God; later, especially in post-biblical times, the term refers to celestial beings who act as intermediaries between heaven and earth.

annunciation: The technical term for a scene in which a deity reveals to a woman the fact that she is pregnant and will bear a child.

Anteia: Wife of Proetus, king of Tiryns, who attempted to seduce Bellerophontes in the *Iliad*.

anthropocentric: Focused on man, as in the second creation account in Genesis 2.

Apocrypha: Group of eight works (five whole books and three additions to earlier biblical books) that are canonical in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches but are not included in the Protestant Bible; all of these works were written by Jews in the last few centuries B.C.E. but did not become part of the Jewish canon.

Aqedah: Literally "binding," referring to the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22.

Aqhat: Young hero of the Canaanite epic poem found at Ugarit.

Aramaic: Semitic language closely related to Hebrew.

archaeology: The study of the past, especially human culture, by the recovery and examination of remaining material evidence, such as pottery, tools, buildings, tombs, and so on.

Assyrians: Major people of northern Mesopotamia, centered on the Tigris River; they defeated the kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C.E.

B.C.E.: Before the Common Era; used in the study of religion to replace *B.C.*, "Before Christ," which reflects a Christian view of the world.

Babylonian Exile: The period from 586 to 538 B.C.E., during which the people of Judah were conquered by Babylonia and taken into exile, that is, resettled in Mesopotamia; the period came to an end when Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylonia and permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

Babylonians: Major people of southern Mesopotamia who replaced the Sumerians as the dominant culture in the area; they exiled the people of Judah in 586 B.C.E. (see also **Babylon** in Biblical Names—People and Places).

Bellerophontes: Valiant and heroic young man in the *Iliad* who was falsely accused of rape by Anteia after she unsuccessfully tried to seduce him.

Bible: Canonical scriptures of Judaism, later adopted as canonical by Christianity (to which were added additional books, most importantly, the New Testament).

Biblical Hebrew: Language in which the Bible is written.

Bronze Age: Term used by archaeologists for the years 3000–1200 B.C.E., during which time bronze (an alloy of copper and tin) was the common metal in use for the production of tools and implements.

C.E.: The Common Era; used in the study of religion to replace *A.D.*, "Anno Domini" (= the year of our Lord), which reflects a Christian view of the world.

Canaanites: People of the land of Canaan, with whom the Israelites shared the region; they never achieved any sort of political unity but, rather, were organized into dozens of city-states, each with its own king.

canon: Books of the Bible officially accepted as Scripture; more generally, the works of a writer that have been accepted as authentic, for example, the Shakespearean canon.

canonization: Process by which the biblical books came to be considered sacred Scripture; this process occurred in stages and took several centuries.

Carthage: Major city in North Africa (near modern-day Tunis), founded by the Phoenicians c. 814 B.C.E. and destroyed by the Romans at the conclusion of the Third Punic War in 146 B.C.E. (though later, the city was rebuilt as a Roman urban center).

chiasm: A literary or rhetorical device in which the words in a sentence or verse, or the units in a larger chunk of text, are presented in one order in the first parallel half, then in inverted order in the second parallel half.

chiastic structure: See **chiasm**.

Christianity: Offshoot of Judaism that developed in the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E., eventually to become the most populous religion in the world.

Church of England: The official church of England since the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, corresponding to the Episcopalian Church in the United States.

cosmocentric: Focused on the cosmos as a whole, as in the first creation account in Genesis 1.

countertext: A hypothesized alternative reading that the author could have utilized, instead of the actual wording of the text.

covenant: Term used by biblical scholars to refer to the bond between God and humanity in general (represented by Noah) and the bond between God and the people of Israel in particular (represented by Abraham).

creation *ex nihilo*: Belief that the world was created "from nothing."

cult: Formal means of religious worship, including ceremonies and rituals.

cycle: Term used by scholars to refer to a series of distinct (and, at times, unrelated) episodes in the life of an individual character that, together, create a narrative unit, such as the Abraham cycle or the Jacob cycle.

Dan'el: Legendary Canaanite king, father of Aqhat.

demythologizing: Conscious removal of mythological elements from a text or story that might have been present in the mind of the ancient reader. For example, Genesis demythologizes when it avoids the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, which meant both "Saturn," a non-Hebrew deity, and "Saturday" ("Saturn's Day").

Deuteronomist: Author of the third source of the Torah according to the JEDP theory, dated to the 7th century, abbreviated as D.

Diaspora: The dispersion of the Jews into lands outside the land of Israel.

documentary hypothesis: See **JEDP theory**.

Ea: Babylonian god who warns Utnapishtim of the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic.

Early Bronze Age: First subdivision of the Bronze Age, 3000–2200 B.C.E.

Elohim: One of the two common names of God in ancient Hebrew, the generic word for "god, deity."

Elohist: Author of the second oldest source of the Torah according to the JEDP theory, dated to the 9th century, abbreviated as E.

Enuma Elish: The Babylonian creation myth, meaning literally "when on high," the opening words of the text.

epic: A story about a human hero or human heroes, in which gods (or God, in the case of ancient Israel) may appear, but with the focus on the human character(s); examples mentioned in our course include the *Iliad* and the Gilgamesh Epic.

eschatology: Belief or doctrine in the end of days, the ultimate or final destiny of humankind and the world, the Messianic Age.

etiological story: A story that seeks to explain the origin of a peculiarity, such as why snakes have no legs but instead move on their stomach (see Genesis 3).

Exodus: Second book of the Bible, following Genesis; also the term used for the Israelites' collective leaving of Egypt according to the biblical tradition.

expressionism: Literary style characterized by exaggerating the reality to stress the point or to emphasize the emotions.

fiat: Literally "let it be done" (in Latin) referring to the method of creation by the spoken word in the first creation account in Genesis 1.

focal point: The centerpiece of a chiastic structure, on which the entire chiasm turns.

form follows content: Literary device in which the style and language of the narrative reflects the action and content of the narrative; for example, fast action may be narrated in snappish style, with the conjunction *and* omitted.

free will: Doctrine by which man's freedom to choose good and evil, and other such choices, governs one's destiny (in contrast, for example, to predetermination or predestination).

Gilgamesh Epic: Great literary classic of ancient Mesopotamia whose main theme is the legendary King Gilgamesh's quest for immortality; its most famous scene is Gilgamesh's visit to Utnapishtim, the survivor of the flood in Mesopotamian tradition.

Greco-Roman period: Period immediately following the biblical period, when first, the Greeks, and then, the Romans held political and cultural sway over Israel and much of the Near East (see also **late antiquity**).

Hebrew: Semitic language used in ancient Israel; actually a dialect of Canaanite. For additional information, see **Essay: Hebrew Language**, which follows Lecture Twenty-Four.

Hebrews: Term used by the Bible to refer to the Israelites; the term is used especially in international contexts, either when the Israelites identify themselves to non-Israelites or when non-Israelites (Egyptians and others) refer to the Israelites.

Histories: Second part of the biblical canon according to the Christian tradition; it includes such books as Samuel and Kings.

Hittite: Indo-European language of ancient Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

Hittites: Major people of Anatolia in antiquity.

holistic: Emphasizing or concerned with the whole, rather than with the component parts; in our course I take a holistic approach to the book of Genesis, emphasizing its literary unity, instead of concerning myself with hypothesized earlier sources.

Homer: Ancient Greek poet, author of the epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; his exact date is unknown, but most likely, he lived in the period of the 10th–8th centuries B.C.E.

Hurrian: Non-Semitic language of far northern Mesopotamia.

Hurrians: Major people of far northern Mesopotamia who flourished in the 2nd millennium B.C.E. (see also **Nuzi**).

Iliad: Epic poem of ancient Greece, written by Homer, detailing the war between the Achaeans and the Trojans.

intertextuality: The process by which one text needs to be read in the light of its allusions to another related text.

Iron Age: Term used by archaeologists for the period beginning c. 1200 B.C.E., when iron tools and implements became more and more common.

JEDP theory: Theory that posits four separate sources for the Torah or Pentateuch, which were later redacted into a single work; also known as the *documentary hypothesis*.

Jerome: Church father of the late 4th and early 5th centuries C.E.; translated the Bible into Latin (see **Vulgate**).

Judaism: Religion that sprung from ancient Israel.

Judges: Term used to refer to the leaders of Israel in the period between their arrival in the land of Canaan c. 1150 B.C.E. and the establishment of the monarchy c. 1020 B.C.E.; the term is a misnomer, because essentially, these individuals were military (not judicial) leaders.

Ketuvim: Literally "writings," that is, miscellaneous writings, referring to the third part of the biblical canon in the Jewish tradition.

King James I: King of England during the years 1603–1625 (also reigned as King James VI of Scotland from 1567 onward); commissioned an authorized English translation of the Bible, which was published in 1611.

King James Version (1611): First authorized translation of the Bible into English (see **King James I**).

Kingdom of Israel: Northern kingdom comprised of nine northern tribes, established upon the death of Solomon; existed during 930–721 B.C.E.

Kingdom of Judah: Southern kingdom comprised of three southern tribes, continuing the kingdom established by David and Solomon and ruled by their descendants, though now over a much smaller territory; existed during 930–586 B.C.E.

Kret (also Keret): Legendary king and hero of the Canaanite epic poem found at Ugarit.

late antiquity: Period of history commencing with the conquest of Alexander the Great over Persia in 333 B.C.E.; the setting for the development of post-biblical Judaism and early Christianity (see also **Greco-Roman period**).

Late Biblical Hebrew: Latest stage of the Hebrew language during the biblical period, in use from c. 550 B.C.E. onward.

Late Bronze Age: Third subdivision of the Bronze Age, 1550–1200 B.C.E.

Leitwort: Literally "leading word," a common feature in biblical prose, whereby the same word is used over and over again to unite the various scenes of an extended story or narrative.

levirate marriage: Marriage custom of the ancient Near East (attested to in Israel and elsewhere), whereby the brother of a man who dies childless must impregnate his brother's wife in order to produce offspring for his deceased brother, so that the deceased's lineage will not die out; from Latin *levir* "brother-in-law."

literary foreshadowing: Literary device in which an author drops subtle hints about plot developments to appear later in the story.

Marduk: Storm god of the Babylonians, head of the pantheon, and creator-deity in the *Enuma Elish*.

maximalists: Scholars who believe that the biblical account is essentially historical, even when evidence is lacking from the ancient Near East to confirm a particular point.

merism: Literary device by which two opposites are placed together to indicate the totality; thus, for example, *good and bad* means "all," so that *the tree of knowledge of good and evil* means "the tree of all knowledge."

Mesopotamia: Region of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, essentially, all of modern Iraq and parts of northern Syria and southern Turkey.

Middle Bronze Age: Second subdivision of the Bronze Age, 2200–1550 B.C.E.

minimalists: Scholars who believe that the biblical account is essentially fictional unless specific evidence is available from the ancient Near East to confirm a particular datum.

monolatry: Worship of one God, without necessarily denying the existence of other gods.

monotheism: Belief in one God, with a denial of the existence of other gods.

mummification: Ancient Egyptian funerary ritual, characterized by embalming the deceased before the body is placed in a tomb. For additional information, see **Essay: Mummification**, which follows Lecture Twenty-Three.

myth: A story about the gods, in which no human characters appear; such stories were told by all of the ancient peoples, with the exception of ancient Israel, due to their unique understanding of the deity; an example mentioned in our course is the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation account.

naming technique: Term used to describe the manner in which characters are referred to in the narrative, whether by their names, by various terms, or by pronouns.

Nevi'im: Literally "prophets," referring to the second part of the biblical canon in the Jewish tradition.

Nuzi: Hurrian city in Mesopotamia (near modern-day Kirkuk in northern Iraq); the archives found there date to c. 1350 B.C.E. and provide social and economic parallels to practices mentioned in the book of Genesis.

Old Testament: Term used by Christians to refer to those books of the Bible canonized by Judaism, to which were added the New Testament books to create the Christian Bible.

pagan: Polytheistic.

patriarchs: Common term used for the three individuals Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom biblical tradition consistently saw as the originators of the people and religion of Israel.

Pentateuch: Greek for "five books" (more literally, "five scrolls"), equivalent to Torah.

Peshitta: Syriac translation of the Bible, accomplished by Christian scholars in the 4th-5th centuries C.E. This text is still used today by various Christian communities in the Middle East.

polytheism: Belief in many gods.

Priestly: Author of the fourth and latest source of the Torah according to the JEDP theory, dated to the 5th century, abbreviated as P.

priests: Group of men who officiated in the Jerusalem Temple (or any ancient temple), with their main responsibility being the offering of animals and other food items in the sacrificial cult.

Primeval History: Term used to describe Genesis 1–11, that is, the stories from creation through Abraham.

primogeniture: Inheritance by the firstborn.

prooftext: A clearer passage in the Bible that allows us to prove the meaning of a more obscure passage in the Bible.

prophet: Spokesperson for God, endowed with the dual gift of receiving the divine word and transmitting it to the people of Israel; prominent ones in the biblical tradition include Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others.

Prophets: Fourth and final part of the biblical canon according to the Christian tradition.

Ptolemy II: King of Egypt; reigned 281–246 B.C.E. in Alexandria; he commissioned the translation of the Bible into Greek known as the Septuagint.

redactional structuring: Literary device by which the individual units in an extended narrative are structured into a unified whole; see also **chiasm**.

redactor: Term used by biblical scholars to refer to the individual who compiled the Torah into its final form; adherents of the JEDP theory date this person to the 5th century B.C.E.

refrain: Phrase or verse repeated at intervals throughout a literary composition, especially at the end of each stanza or section.

royal *we*: The use of first-person plural forms even when the speaker is an individual; used especially by monarchs and similar figures.

Sabbath: Seventh day of the week in Judaism, marked as a holy day.

Satan: Evil adversary of God and humanity, also known as the Devil, the belief in which developed in the very late biblical and post-biblical periods.

self-definition: Term used by scholars for the manner in which a people or culture defines and understands itself.

Septuagint: Greek translation of the Bible, accomplished in the 3rd century B.C.E. by the Jews of Alexandria.

style-switching: The literary device by which an author of a text adjusts his or her language to reflect the specific conditions of a scene. In the Bible, for example, the author incorporates Aramaic words, phrases, and grammatical forms in Genesis 24 and Genesis 30–31, because these chapters are set in the land of Aram.

Sumerians: Major people of southern Mesopotamia who flourished in the 3rd millennium B.C.E. and developed the oldest known writing system; by the time ancient Israel appeared on the scene of history, the Sumerians had long disappeared from the historical record.

Syriac: Dialect of Aramaic used by Christians in the general region of Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Syrian Desert: Large tract of empty land to the east of the land of Canaan; the northern extension of the Arabian Desert.

Tale of Two Brothers: Egyptian story from the 13th century B.C.E., with a striking parallel to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife.

Tanakh: Hebrew for "Bible"; the term is an acronym created by the first letters of the words *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*, that is, the three parts of the canon.

Targum: An Aramaic translation of a biblical book or set of books (plural: Targumim), accomplished by Jewish scholars in the 2nd–7th centuries C.E.; there are three Targumim of the Torah, one for the Prophets, and single Targumim for each of the Writings (except for Esther, for which there are two Targumim; and for Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, for which we possess no Aramaic renderings).

Targumim: See **Targum**.

temple: Center of worship in the ancient world, usually through the means of animal sacrifice; the Temple in Jerusalem was built by Solomon c. 965 B.C.E.; the Second Temple was dedicated in 516 B.C.E. early in the Persian period (see also **Jerusalem** in Biblical Names—People and Places).

theology: System or school of opinions concerning God and religious questions.

tithe: A tenth of one's income or wealth given to a religious authority or institution; see Genesis 14:20.

Torah: Literally "teaching," referring to the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch and traditionally referred to as the Five Books of Moses; the first part of the biblical canon.

Tree of Knowledge: One of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, whose fruit God prohibited Adam and Eve to eat.

Tree of Life: One of the two trees in the Garden of Eden; its fruit was not explicitly prohibited.

Trinity: Christian doctrine that developed in the first two centuries C.E. concerning the three aspects of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit).

typescene: Literary device in which the same theme or story is narrated over and over again, only with different characters or under different circumstances.

Ugarit: Major city in far northern Canaan, on the Mediterranean coast, in modern-day northwestern Syria.

ultimogeniture: Inheritance by the lastborn.

United Kingdom: See **United Monarchy**.

United Monarchy: The relatively short period of Israel's history when all 12 tribes were united under a single king, c. 1020–930 B.C.E.

Urfa: City in modern-day southern Turkey; traditional birthplace of Abraham according to the local Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions.

Uruk: City in southern Mesopotamia (modern-day southern Iraq), home of the legendary King Gilgamesh; it is mentioned in the Bible as Erech.

Utnapishtim: Flood hero in the Mesopotamian epic tradition.

Vulgate: Latin translation of the Bible, accomplished by Jerome c. 400 C.E.

we-hinne: Hebrew word for "and behold," used to change the perspective from looking at the scene from the outside to experiencing the scene through the eyes of one of the characters.

Wisdom: Third part of the biblical canon according to the Christian tradition; it includes such books as Psalms, Proverbs, and Job.

wordplay: Umbrella term used for a variety of literary devices in which the multiple meanings of words are played upon, for example, through double entendre.

Xenophon: Ancient Greek historian, c. 427–355 B.C.E.

Yahweh: One of the two commonest names of God in ancient Hebrew, the specific name of the God of Israel; in origin meaning, most likely, "the one who is" or "the one who causes things to be" but traditionally rendered as LORD (in all caps) in English.

Yahwist: Author of the earliest source of the Torah according to the JEDP theory (see **JEDP theory**), dated to the 10^{th} century, abbreviated as J.

ziggurat: Tower-like temple complex of ancient Mesopotamia, having the form of a terraced pyramid with successively receding stories.

Biblical Scholars

Alter, Robert (b. 1935): Professor of comparative literature at the University of California at Berkeley and a major figure in the literary approach to the Bible. His translation of Genesis was published in 1996, and his translation of the entire Torah appeared in 2004.

Astruc, Jean (1684–1766): French professor of medicine who also worked in the field of biblical studies. In 1753, he proposed that the book of Genesis was composed of two separate sources used by Moses to compile the book, thus laying the groundwork for the documentary hypothesis.

Buber, Martin (1878–1965): Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar, active in Germany through 1938, then in Israel until his death. He developed a unique style of translating the Bible (together with his colleague Franz Rosenzweig) based on the sounds, rhythms, and syntax of the Hebrew original, which he attempted to capture into German.

Cassuto, Umberto (1883–1951): Jewish biblical scholar, active in Italy through 1938, then in Israel until his death. He was one of the first scholars to integrate the study of the Ugaritic literary texts and the study of the Bible. His major publications include commentaries on Genesis and Exodus.

Fishbane, Michael (b. 1943): Professor of biblical studies at the University of Chicago (and previously for many years at Brandeis University). He has written major studies on the literary style of biblical narratives, on intertextuality within the Bible, and on post-biblical Jewish interpretation of the Bible.

Fox, Everett (b.1947): Professor of biblical studies at Clark University, Worcester, MA; translator of the Torah and Samuel (other books are in progress), using a unique translation method borrowed from his spiritual mentors, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

Gordon, Cyrus (1908–2001): One of the leading scholars of the Bible and the ancient Near East in the 20th century. He was active in the field for about seven decades, teaching at Dropsie College, Brandeis University, and New York University (where I studied with him during the years 1975–1980). His autobiography, *A Scholar's Odyssey* (2000), is a delightful read.

Langton, Stephen (c. 1150–1228): Archbishop of Canterbury (head of the Catholic Church in England) who created the system of chapter and verse divisions in the Bible. He also is famous for his role in siding with the English barons in their successful attempt to get King John to sign the Magna Carta.

Rosenzweig, Frank (1886–1929): Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar in Germany. He collaborated with Martin Buber on a unique translation of the Bible into German based on the sounds, syntax, and rhythms of the Hebrew original.

Sasson, Jack (b. 1941): Contemporary biblical scholar, who has made major contributions to the study of the literature of the Bible and the society of the ancient Near East. He taught for many years at the University of North Carolina and now teaches at Vanderbilt University.

Smith, George (1840–1876): British amateur Assyriologist (that is, one expert in the study of ancient Mesopotamia), who first discovered the Babylonian flood account on a tablet in the British Museum in 1872.

Tyndale, William (1484–1536): Early translator of the Bible into English. He was condemned as a heretic, both by the Catholic Church and by the newly established Church of England. Tyndale fled England for the Continent; eventually, he was burned at the stake in Belgium.

Wellhausen, Julius (1844–1918): German biblical scholar who created the classical and most widely accepted version of the JEDP theory in 1878.

Woolley, Leonard (1880–1960): Excavator of major ancient Near Eastern sites, most famously, the great Sumerian city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.

Wycliffe, John (1320–1384): Early translator of the Bible into English. The Church condemned him for this action and ordered that his books be burned.

Bibliography

Translations:

Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. A superb translation of the Torah by a master reader of ancient Hebrew prose, replete with notes explicating the literary devices used by the ancient Israelite literati.

———. *Genesis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. The first book of the Bible translated by Alter, which later was incorporated into *The Five Books of Moses*, described above.

Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken, 1995. A unique translation of the Bible that attempts to replicate as closely as possible the sounds, syntax, and cadence of the Hebrew original. Often, this results in an odd-sounding English, but for readers who want to know exactly how the biblical text is worded, this is the best guide available.

The Jewish Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. A recent volume, gaining popularity in college classrooms today. The translation used is the New Jewish Publication Society Version, produced in the 1960s and 1970s, which takes an idiomatic (and, therefore, less literal) approach to the biblical text. The volume includes detailed notes and fine essays, two of which are included below (one under Essential Reading and one under Supplementary Reading).

King James Version. The first authorized translation of the Bible into English, accomplished by a committee of scholars sponsored by King James I of England and completed in 1611. The work is available in a variety of editions, and free access is available on a number of Web sites, including, for example, http://etext.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html, http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/kjv/ and http://www.bartleby.com/108/.

The Catholic Study Bible, second edition: New American Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. The standard translation of the Bible in use by North American Catholics. NAB first appeared in 1970, and it has appeared in a variety of editions since then, including the first edition of CSB in 1990. The text is available online at http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.htm.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. An edition of the Bible commonly used in college classrooms today, incorporating the New Revised Standard Version, the translation used by most Protestant mainline churches in the United States, along with useful notes, maps, and other material.

Oxford Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. An edition of the Bible commonly used in college classrooms today, incorporating the Revised English Version, a translation produced by scholars from the British Isles representing different denominations, along with useful notes, maps, and other material.

Zondervan NIV Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. This volume includes the New International Version, a translation sponsored by the International Bible Society and widely used by Evangelical Christians. The text of the NIV is available online at http://www.ibs.org/niv/.

Essential Reading:

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981. A masterful guide to the Bible as literature, with a particular emphasis on the prose material. This volume includes treatments of several stories in the book of Genesis.

Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994. A readable guide to the workings of biblical prose, describing the many techniques present in the text, including, for example, the naming technique and the use of the term *we-hinne*, "and behold."

Friedman, Richard E. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: Summit, 1987. The best introduction to the JEDP theory, or documentary hypothesis, available. The author presents the theory in its classic formulation, along with a few of his own original insights and contributions. A very readable work.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *Reading the Women of the Bible*. New York: Schocken, 2002. The definitive work on biblical stories centered on female characters. Because so many of the stories in Genesis focus on women, Frymer-Kensky's book makes for essential reading. As a bonus, the author offers her own translations of the biblical texts scrutinized.

Goldin, Judah. "The Youngest Son, or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 96 (1977), pp. 27–44. A seminal article in a scholarly journal on one of the dominant motifs in the book of Genesis: the vaulting of the younger brother over the firstborn.

Gordon, Cyrus H. "The Patriarchal Narratives." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 13 (1954), pp. 56–59. A short, scholarly article situating the patriarchs in time and place, with the dual conclusion that the main characters in Genesis date to the Late Bronze Age and that Ur of the Chaldeans, the birthplace of Abraham, is to be identified with Urfa in northern Mesopotamia.

Gordon, Cyrus H., and Gary A. Rendsburg. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. A basic introduction to the Bible set against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern history, society, law, and religion.

Greenspahn, Frederick. *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. A detailed investigation into one of the dominant motifs in the book of Genesis and the Bible as a whole, that of the younger son, as discussed in our course.

Greenspoon, Leonard. "Jewish Translations of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 2005–2020. A fine survey of the many translations of the Bible produced under Jewish auspices, spanning more than 2,000 years, from the Septuagint in the 3rd century B.C.E. to the most recent effort of Everett Fox. The volume as a whole, incidentally, is an outstanding reference work, with introductions to each of the biblical books, a running commentary, and excellent essays at the back of the volume (including this one, for example).

Heidel, Alexander. *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963. This work is dated, but it nevertheless remains as a serviceable introduction to a comparison between the Babylonian and biblical flood traditions.

Hoffmeier, James K. *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. A fine treatment of all the Egyptological data relevant to the biblical traditions recorded in the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. Although the emphasis in this book is on the latter material (that is, the Slavery, the Plagues, and the Exodus), the work includes a fine chapter on the Joseph story as well.

Rendsburg, Gary A. "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 2 (1998–1999), available on the Web at http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/. A scholarly article in an online journal treating the literary device of confused language to reflect the confusion or bewilderment of the moment. Two examples from Genesis 37 are included in this article.

———. "An Essay on Israelite Religion," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, New Series, vol. 8. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, pp. 1–17. A basic introduction to the official religion of ancient Israel, that is, the worship of God as espoused by the authors of the biblical books (with occasional side comments about popular trends in ancient Israel).

———. "The Genesis of the Bible," in *The Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair in Jewish History*, Separatum published by the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers, 2005, pp. 11–30; available at: http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/genesis.pdf. The inaugural lecture delivered by the professor of this course upon assuming his position at Rutgers University in 2004. The article presents in detail the arguments for dating the book of Genesis to the 10th century B.C.E., along with the author's theory for assuming that an earlier poetic account underlies the large prose narrative that extends from Exodus through Samuel. (See also the next entry.)

———. "Reading David in Genesis: How We Know the Torah Was Written in the Tenth Century B.C.E." *Bible Review* 17:1 (February 2001), pp. 20–33, 46; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BR/brf01reading_david.html. A more popular version of the author's theory that the book of Genesis dates to the 10th century B.C.E. This article also includes a basic critique of the JEDP theory.

———. *The Redaction of Genesis*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986. A detailed presentation of the literary structure of the entire book of Genesis. This monograph demonstrates the patterns inherent in the four major cycles (Primeval, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph), along with the linking material, then discusses how the redactional structuring militates against the division of Genesis into the postulated sources J, E, and P.

———. "Unlikely Heroes: Women in the Bible." *Bible Review* 19:1 (February 2003), pp. 16–23, 52–53; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BR/ bswbbr1901feat1.html. A basic article on the use of women in the Bible as reflections of Israel's self-definition, that is, women (and Israel) as the lowly and marginal.

Roaf, Michael. *The Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*. New York: Facts on File, 1990. An excellent survey of the culture and history of the various peoples of Mesopotamia and environs, including the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hurrians, and Hittites.

Sarna, Nahum. *Understanding Genesis*. New York: Schocken, 1970. A first-rate survey of the book of Genesis, with full control of all the scholarly material yet presented in a very readable fashion.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999. An excellent survey of the history of ancient Israel, extending from Israel's origins through the Roman period. The first chapter in the book, by P. Kyle McCarter (with Ronald S. Hendel), surveys the patriarchal narratives.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985. The gold standard of scholarly books on the Bible as literature, in particular the prose material of Genesis through Kings. This volume does not make for easy reading, but it pays major dividends to all who are willing to mine its nuggets.

Supplementary Reading:

Arnold, Bill T., and Bryan Beyer. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. A fine collection of ancient Near Eastern documents relevant to the study of the Bible, including translations of many of the texts discussed in our course (such as the *Enuma Elish*, the flood story incorporated into the Gilgamesh Epic, the Ugaritic epics of Aqhat and Kret, and the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers. For a second such work, see the source by Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, below.

Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989. The most detailed book available on the panoply of literary devices utilized by the biblical authors. Examples abound on every page, and a comprehensive index allows the reader to look up individual passages, such as the texts that we read from the book of Genesis.

Bird, Phyllis A. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. An excellent volume on women in the Bible, with special attention to the various roles they play, including, for example, prostitute (or in the case of Tamar in Genesis 38, a woman disguised as a prostitute).

Brettler, Marc Z. "The Canonization of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 2072–2077. An introductory survey of the process that led to the canonization of the biblical books. The volume as a whole, incidentally, is an outstanding reference work, with introductions to each of the biblical books, a running commentary, and excellent essays at the back of the volume (including this one, for example).

Callaway, Mary. *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. A study of the barren woman motif, which we examined in Lecture Fourteen. This book focuses more on post-biblical interpretations, however, than on the biblical material itself.

Day, Peggy L., ed. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. A fine collection of original essays treating various female characters in the Bible.

Fishbane, Michael. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*. New York: Schocken, 1979. A collection of close readings of selected biblical texts (as per the subtitle of the book), including, for example, Genesis 1–11 (the Primeval cycle) and Genesis 25–35 (the Jacob cycle).

Fokkelman, J. P. *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999. Another of the many excellent guides aiming to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. This volume is very user-friendly, as its subtitle indicates, directing the reader with questions for consideration and self-study at every turn.

Foster, Benjamin R. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. One of the two recent translations of the Gilgamesh Epic, including plenty of background material about the world's first great narrative epic poem. (See the source by Andrew George below for the second volume.)

Fox, Everett, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 60 (1993), pp. 45–68. A scholarly article (though quite accessible) devoted to one of the main literary motifs of the book of Genesis and the Bible in general, that of the younger brother superseding his older brother(s).

Friedman, Richard E. *The Bible with Sources Revealed*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003. A polychrome poly-font edition of the Torah, allowing the reader to see with ease the postulated sources of the Pentateuch (J, E, D, and P—along with, at times, their various presumed subdivisions).

George, Andrew. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Penguin, 2000. One of the two recent translations of the Gilgamesh Epic, including plenty of background material about the world's first great narrative epic poem. (See the source by Benjamin R. Foster above for the second volume.)

Licht, Jacob. *Storytelling in the Bible*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978. Another of the many excellent guides aiming to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. The author deals with certain techniques not treated in other works, such as ways of indicating the passage of time.

Matthews, Victor H., and Don C. Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*. New York: Paulist, 1997. A fine collection of ancient Near Eastern documents relevant to the study of the Bible, including translations of many of the texts discussed in our course (such as the *Enuma Elish*, the flood story incorporated into the Gilgamesh Epic, the Ugaritic epics of Aqhat and Kret, and the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers). For a second such work, see the source by Bill T. Arnold and Bryan Beyer above.

McCarter, P. Kyle (with Ronald S. Hendel). "The Patriarchal Age," in H. Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999, pp. 1–31. This article was referred to above under the source by Hershel Shanks in the Essential Reading section.

McGrath, Alister. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 2001. One of two recent books describing the making of the King James Version of the Bible. This book is must reading for anyone interested in the early history of the Bible in English. The world of early-modern Britain comes alive in McGrath's lively prose. Ditto for Adam Nicolson's book (see next entry).

Nicolson, Adam. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. One of two recent books describing the making of the King James Version of the Bible. This book is must reading for anyone interested in the early history of the Bible in English. The world of early-modern Britain comes alive in Nicolson's lively prose. Ditto for Alister McGrath's book above.

Rabin, Elliot. *Understanding the Hebrew Bible: A Reader's Guide*. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2005. A readable guide to the Bible as a whole, with individual chapters devoted to each of the Bible's main genres (narrative prose, law, poetry, prophecy, and so on).

Redford, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970. A study of Genesis 37-50 in the light of the Egyptian evidence that sheds light on the narrative. Note, however, that the author seeks to demonstrate that the Joseph story dates to the Persian period, which runs contrary to the approach taken in our course.

Reis, Pamela T. *Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. A series of original readings of selected biblical texts by an independent scholar. Among the best essays in this volume is the first one on the two creation stories, arguing for an integrated reading of the two accounts.

Rendsburg, Gary A. "The Vegetarian Ideal in the Bible," in L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and G. Shapiro, eds., *Food and Judaism*, *Studies in Jewish Civilization*, vol. 15. Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005, pp. 319–334. An article dealing with the vegetarian ideal in the Bible, incorporating an array of texts, such as Genesis 1, Genesis 9, Leviticus 11 (≈ Deuteronomy 14), and Isaiah 11.

Schniedewind, William M. *How the Bible Became a Book*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. A scholarly yet accessible book about writing in ancient Israel, the production of literature, the social dimensions of reading and writing, and eventually, the creation and canonization of the biblical books.

Sperling, S. David. *The Original Torah*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. An original scholarly investigation into the political background of selected biblical stories, including, for example, the 10th-century-B.C.E. background of the Abraham material.

Walsh, Jerome T. *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001. Yet another of the many works intended to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. This book pays special attention to the patterns inherent in individual stories and to the structures observable in larger chunks of material.

Additional Internet Resources [also see the Translations section above]:

http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/index.shtml
This is the personal website of Professor Gary Rendsburg. One can find here a variety of articles written by Professor Rendsburg, which are available on the web; along with a complete list of his publications. Note further that one can access from here his non-credit online mini-course "The Bible and History," offered by Rutgers University.

http://www.bib-arch.org/
This is the website of the Biblical Archaeology Society, headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Society's main goal is to bring the scholarship of expert archaeologists and biblical scholars to educated lay people. It does so most importantly through its semi-monthly magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review*, but also through weekend and week-long seminars and through study tours of Israel, Egypt, and other lands.

http://www.bibleinterp.com/
The website of Bible and Interpretation, which, in its own words, is "dedicated to delivering the latest news, features, editorials, commentary, archaeological interpretation and excavations relevant to the study of the Bible for the public and biblical scholars." One can find a host of interesting essays at this website.

http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/RTOT.HTM
This website contains the online version of Barry Bandstra's (Hope College) excellent textbook, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Chapters 1 and 2, entitled "Genesis 1-11: The Primeval Story" and "Genesis 12-50: The Ancestral Story," are the most relevant for our course on the Book of Genesis.

The Book of Genesis

Part II

Professor Gary A. Rendsburg

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Gary A. Rendsburg, Ph.D.

Professor of Jewish Studies, Rutgers University

Gary Rendsburg holds the Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair in Jewish History at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. He serves as chair of the Department of Jewish Studies and holds an appointment in the History Department.

Dr. Rendsburg majored in English and journalism as an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina and graduated in 1975. He then pursued graduate work in Hebrew Studies at New York University and received his Ph.D. in 1980.

He previously taught at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY (1980–1986), and at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY (1986–2004).

Professor Rendsburg's areas of special interest include literary approaches to the Bible, the history of the Hebrew language, the history of ancient Israel, and the literature and culture of ancient Egypt.

Dr. Rendsburg has held a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship and has taught as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania, at Colgate University, and at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Professor Rendsburg is a frequent guest of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where twice he has served as visiting research professor and twice he has held the position of visiting fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies.

Dr. Rendsburg is the author of five books and more than 100 scholarly articles. His most popular book is a general survey of the biblical world entitled *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, co-authored with the late Cyrus H. Gordon (1997).

He has visited all the major archaeological sites in Israel, Egypt, and Jordan and has participated in excavations at Tel Dor and Caesarea. In addition, he has lectured around the world, including Europe, Japan, and Australia.

For more information, go to: http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/.

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The Book of Genesis

Scope:

This course of 24 lectures focuses on the first book of the Bible (in both the Jewish and Christian canons), the book of Genesis. This particular book is an extremely rich text that can be approached from a variety of perspectives, including literary, historical, theological, and archaeological. Most of the stories in Genesis (creation, flood, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and so on) are well known, but many crucial issues in the study of the book are less familiar to general audiences. We will present these issues in a detailed fashion; the 24 lectures afford us plenty of time to work through the 50 chapters of the book of Genesis.

The course will speak to the different perspectives listed above. First and foremost, we will approach the text as a piece of literature, highlighting the many literary devices and techniques employed by the ancient author(s) of the book. In so doing, we will demonstrate that what on the surface may look like rather simple tales are, in fact, the products of great literary sophistication. This finding bespeaks not only a remarkably gifted author but also an ancient Israelite audience that could appreciate and understand literature of such high quality and brilliance. We are led to conclude that literature played a central role in the life of ancient Israel, thus establishing at a very early time the notion that the Jews are the people of the book.

We will talk about the history that lies behind the book of Genesis. We will address such questions as when Abraham lived, where his birthplace of Ur was located, under which pharaoh did Joseph serve, and so on. We will also raise even more fundamental questions, such as did Abraham and Jacob and Joseph and so on exist at all, or were they simply literary creations of ancient Israelite literati? To answer these questions, we will need to look at other ancient Near Eastern sources from the three main regions: Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia. Thus, this course also will provide an introduction to these neighboring cultures, especially as they affect our understanding of the Bible.

We will delve into theological issues. What can we learn about the religion of ancient Israel from reading these stories? Did the ancient Israelites believe in one God? Or did they only worship one God without denying the existence of other deities? And what was the nature of the God of Israel? Was he similar to the other deities of the ancient Near East? Or was he uniquely different? Was he, in fact, even a he? Religion is more than the conception of the deity, however; it also includes the relationship between God and man, and this, too, embodied in the covenant concept of the Bible, will be a topic of exploration in this course.

As intimated above in the paragraph about history, this course will use a vast array of archaeological evidence to illuminate issues in the book of Genesis. The evidence, both textual and artifactual, will come from across the ancient Near Eastern landscape, from Mesopotamia in the northeast, from Canaan most proximate to Israel, and from Egypt in the southwest. We are required to retain such broad horizons because the book of Genesis itself does so. Abraham is born in Mesopotamia; he migrates to the land of Canaan; his grandson Jacob returns to Mesopotamia, where he lives for 20 years; and at the end of the book, Joseph and his brothers are resident in Egypt.

Most importantly, we will deal with questions of authorship. Is the book of Genesis the result of a haphazard compilation of disparate sources? Or does it present itself as a unified literary whole, suggesting a single author? And in either case, when might the book have been written and/or achieved its final written form?

Finally, we will explore various other issues that emanate from our reading of Genesis. Often, these topics will be of interest to biblical studies in a wider scope. For example, we will explore the question of women in the Bible: Why does the Bible include so many female characters, especially in comparison to other ancient Near Eastern literature, and why are these women often portrayed in unexpectedly heroic fashion, often at the expense of the male characters? We will discuss different translations of the Bible: Why are there so many different versions? How are they different? How are they similar? And we will take time to consider the way later generations of Jews and Christians understood the Bible, especially given that these later readings are often quite different from the original authorial intent.

In sum, the multifaceted book of Genesis allows for numerous avenues of inquiry: We will do our utmost in this course to tackle all of them.

Lecture Thirteen
Genesis 24, A Bride for Isaac

Scope: Genesis 24 is the longest prose narrative in the Torah. The length of the story results from the way it is constructed. First, Abraham commands his servant to journey to Aram, the family homeland in Mesopotamia, in order to procure a bride for Isaac. Next, the servant arrives in Aram and meets Rebekah at the well, a scene described in great detail. Finally, the servant is invited into the house of Rebekah's family, where he retells both what his master had commanded him and what transpired at the well. The result is a telling and a retelling, each time with slightly different wording, yielding the lengthy narrative. In addition, we note that this long episode focuses on a minor character, the servant of Abraham, and we further note that he remains anonymous throughout the story. The lecture also explores the reasons why this is so.

Outline

I. Abraham sends his servant to Aram to obtain a bride for Isaac.

- **A.** Why cannot Isaac go himself? The answer is that the promise of offspring and the promise of the land of Canaan were inextricably linked, so that Isaac cannot leave the land—not even to procure his own bride—and, thus, a surrogate must go to Aram to find Rebekah.
- **B.** Note as well, as an aside, that while Abram's name is changed to Abraham and Jacob's name will be changed to Israel, Isaac's name remains Isaac throughout. The reason is that he was named by God! See Genesis 17:19.
- **C.** Note further that the author does not disclose either of these points to his readers explicitly. That is not the style of writing in the Bible. The reader must determine these two points on his or her own—wondering why it is that Isaac cannot find a bride for himself and, if the question even should enter the mind of the reader, figuring out why Isaac alone among the three patriarchs does not undergo a name change. The main point is that the narrative demands reader input. The author does not provide everything for the reader. Consistent with this narrative style is the very economical writing style in the Bible.

II. In contrast, Genesis 24 represents a departure from the norm just described, because it is such a long story. The account takes 67 verses, with much repetition, making it the longest narrative chapter in the Torah (only Numbers 7 has more verses, but that chapter is not a narrative in the true sense).

- **A.** The main reason for the great length of this chapter is the repetition that occurs throughout. This itself is a literary device, as the reader is invited to compare the different tellings of the story:
  1. First, we read Abraham's instructions to the servant (verses 1–10).
  2. Then, we read the story itself as it unfolds (verses 11–34).
  3. Finally, we hear the servant relate the events to the household of Bethuel, father of Rebekah (verses 35–50).
- **B.** By paying attention to the minor differences in these different tellings—which we may call, respectively, (1) command, (2) fulfillment, and (3) retelling—we are treated to great literature. Repetition is typical of biblical style, but the repetition is never verbatim.
- **C.** Before turning to specific examples of the repetition with its variation, along with other literary devices present in the story, we note a comparison between the life-cycle events concerning Ishmael and the same events concerning Isaac.
  1. We already have read of the annunciation to Hagar and the birth of Ishmael (both in chapter 16) and the near-death experience of Ishmael and his marriage (both in chapter 21).
  2. Of these four events, three already have occurred in the stories about Isaac: the annunciation to Sarah (chapter 17), the birth of Isaac (chapter 21), and the near-death experience of Isaac (chapter 22—the Aqedah). The fourth has not been related yet; thus, we are primed for a marriage narrative for Isaac.
  3. Note that in each instance, not unexpectedly, more is narrated about Isaac (or Sarah) than about Ishmael (or Hagar).

D. An ancient custom is reflected in our story. Abraham instructs his servant to place his hand "under his thigh" in verse 2, and the servant does so in verse 9. The expression is a euphemism for *testicles*; touching or grabbing hold of the testicles was a way of swearing or taking an oath. The same custom presumably existed in ancient Rome, which thus explains why our English words *testicles*, *testify*, and *testimony* all derive from the same Latin root.

E. We mention and analyze here several literary devices that are present in the narrative.

1. Note the use of *we-hinne*, "and behold," which changes the camera angle and allows the reader to experience the scene as the character in the story experiences the action.

a. One example appears in verse 15, in which the servant espies Rebekah, and we, the readers, view the scene as the servant sees it.

b. Examples from earlier in Genesis include 8:11, when Noah sees the dove returning with an olive leaf in its mouth; 18:2, when Abraham sees the three angels; and 22:13, when Abraham saw "and behold, the ram caught in the thicket." In Lecture Eighteen, we will see this device operating in a story about Jacob in Genesis 29.

2. Alliteration is present in verses 20–21, between the words *mishta'e*, "he gazed," and *wa-tish'ab*, "she drew" (water). The former occurs only here in the Bible; the biblical author reached deep into the Hebrew lexicon to pluck this word for special usage in this passage.

3. Another example of *we-hinne*, "and behold," occurs in verse 30, in which Laban notices the servant standing with the camels, and we see the scene as Laban perceives it.

F. There are innumerable instances of variation within the repetition. Here we may compare the following verses: 14 and 17–19; 3 and 37; 4 and 38; 6–7 and 40; 8 and 41; 15 and 45; 24 and 47; and 27 and 48.

1. An excellent example is found in verses 6 and 40. Abraham had instructed the servant, "On no account must you take my son back there!" (verse 6). When the servant quotes Abraham, he omits these words altogether (verse 40), because they would have been insulting to his hosts in Aram.

2. Another fine example is seen by comparing verses 27 and 48. In the former, the Israelite readers actually hear the words of the servant's blessing of Yahweh. In the latter, the servant, now speaking to Rebekah's household, states simply, "I blessed the LORD," because the actual words would be meaningless or, at least, have very little meaning for a household in which (presumably) another deity is worshipped.

3. As always, the reader must have all the former wordings in his or her mind when encountering the latter wordings; there is no "going back" to reread the material, because a reciter read the story aloud.

G. The great detail in this story is the author's way of indicating how God interacts in human affairs, not only in direct fashion at times (such as in the story of the Aqedah) but also in minor, indirect ways, ensuring, in this case, for example, that Isaac and Rebekah become husband and wife. This also explains the anonymous nature of the servant; his lack of a name indicates, in the end, his relative unimportance, in contrast to the omnipresence of God, even when acting behind the scene.

Essential Reading:

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 131–152.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 113–123 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 117–126.

Supplementary Reading:

Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, pp. 135– 138.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 6–15.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why does the biblical author not provide a name for the lead character in the story, Abraham's servant?

2. Why was this episode developed by the author into the longest narrative text in the Torah?

Lecture Fourteen
The Barren Woman and the Younger Son

Scope: We continue with our reading of Genesis by summarizing a large amount of material, including the next several generations: Isaac and Rebekah and their children, Esau and Jacob, and Jacob and his 4 wives, 12 sons, and 1 daughter. We note that two themes repeat in the Genesis narratives: the barren woman (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel) and the younger son's superseding his older brother(s) (Isaac, Jacob, Judah/Joseph, Perez, Ephraim). There are two main reasons for the presence of these themes. The first is literary: They are the extraordinary in life, and it is the atypical in life—not the quotidian—that drives literature. The second is theological: In line with what was stated in Lecture Twelve, the barren woman and the younger son represent the lowly and, thus, serve once more as Israel's self-definition. Only through divine intervention does Israel prosper, as God takes the barren woman and makes her fruitful and elevates the younger son to prominence over his older brother(s).

Outline

I. We begin with a presentation of the family tree during the next several generations, summarizing material from the second half of the book of Genesis.

- **A.** As we saw in the previous lecture, Isaac marries Rebekah (chapter 24). They then have two sons, the twins Esau and Jacob (chapter 25).
- **B.** Jacob marries Leah and Rachel (chapter 29), plus he has 2 handmaiden wives, Bilhah and Zilpah (chapter 30). Through these 4 wives, he has 12 sons, as well as 1 daughter, Dinah.
- **C.** These 12 sons are portrayed in Genesis and Exodus as the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel, though historically we know that the nation of Israel developed differently, because nations do not spring from the offspring of one individual.

II. We have commented already on the motif of the barren woman, as exemplified by Sarah. This motif appears in two other places in the book of Genesis.

- **A.** In the case of Sarah, this theme dominated the Abraham story throughout (introduced in 11:30, then discussed more fully in chapters 16–21).
- **B.** In the case of Rebekah, the theme repeats, but it is a relatively simple statement—see 25:21.
- **C.** In the case of Rachel, we have more information again—see 30:1–2, 30:22–24.
- **D.** Also, to complete the picture, note that this theme occurs in two other places in the Bible: in Judges 13, with the unnamed mother of Samson, and in 1 Samuel 1, with Hannah, the mother of Samuel.
- **E.** The episodes with Bilhah (handmaiden of Rachel) and Zilpah (handmaiden of Leah) reflect the custom attested in the Nuzi tablets, as discussed earlier in Lecture Ten.
- **F.** In each of the three barren woman episodes in Genesis, there is a different active partner: God in the first account (re: Sarah), Isaac the husband in the second account (re: Rebekah), and Rachel in the third account. This reflects Israel's religious understanding.

III. A second motif repeats throughout the book of Genesis, one which we have not noted until this point—the motif of the younger brother.

- **A.** Isaac supersedes Ishmael as the chief heir of Abraham, as stated explicitly by God in chapter 17, then carried out in the action narrated in chapter 21.
- **B.** In the next generation, Jacob supersedes Esau (because even with twins, there still must be a firstborn, which was Esau—see 25:25) This is described in two stories: the sale of the birthright in 25:27–34, and the deception of Isaac in chapter 27, by which Jacob, and not Esau, gains the blessing.
- **C.** In the succeeding generation, although Joseph is not the absolute youngest of Jacob's sons (he ranks number 11 in birth order, with Benjamin the actual youngest), it is he, Joseph, who rises to the top, superseding his 10 older brothers as his father's favorite (chapter 37). Moreover, we get an extended story about Joseph (chapters 37–50), with no other son getting nearly that much attention in the narrative.

D. It is also worth noting that the other son of Jacob who rises to the top is Judah. Note that he was the youngest of the four sons that Leah bore at the outset (see 29:32–35). Although we cannot call Judah a "youngest son" per se, he is the youngest to some extent.

E. Finally, the sons of these tribal fathers, Joseph and Judah, provide additional instances in Genesis where the younger son supersedes his older brother.

1. Ephraim supersedes Manasseh in chapter 48.

2. Perez supersedes Zerah (at birth!) at the end of chapter 38.

F. Note further that this motif occurs once elsewhere in the book of Genesis, indeed, with the first two sons on record—for we read in Genesis 4 how God favors Abel (the younger) over Cain (the older). In addition, we will read of one more instance of this theme in the book of Exodus: Moses is the younger brother of Aaron, yet the former outranks the latter.

IV. The reasons for these two motifs that dominate the book of Genesis are twofold.

A. The first is literary—these motifs represent the abnormal in life.

1. In the ordinary course of life, women have children and oldest sons inherit from their father (the technical term for this is *primogeniture*).

2. But such quotidian material does not make for great literature. Storytelling is based on the abnormal or extraordinary in life.

3. Thus, these two motifs of barren woman and younger son carry the story forward, generation after generation.

4. In fact, given that these motifs occur in Ugaritic literature from the 14^{th} century B.C.E. as well (we have noted the childless hero motif several times already, and we have one instance of the youngest child—a daughter, in fact!—superseding her older siblings), we can conclude that this was a popular literary theme, not just in Israel but in Canaan in general.

B. The second reason is theological.

1. As we saw in Lecture Twelve, women in the Bible are used to represent Israel, based on the portrayal of the lowly. The barren woman is part of that general picture.

2. The same is true of the younger son, who is another literary figure of the lowly and, thus, once more represents Israel.

3. Only through God's interventions in these individuals' lives, sometimes through direct means, though more typically through subtle and indirect means, do these lowly prosper; that is to say, barren women conceive and give birth, and younger sons rise to the top. Thus it is with Israel—that only through God's presence in Israel's collective destiny does the nation prosper.

V. Note the lack of an Isaac cycle in the book of Genesis, even if no definitive explanation is forthcoming.

A. In chapter 22 (the Aqedah), Isaac appears as a secondary character, as the son of Abraham.

B. In chapter 24 (as we saw in Lecture Thirteen), the servant plays the active role, and Isaac is barely seen in the long narrative.

C. In chapters 25 and 27, Isaac appears as the father of Jacob and Esau, who hold center stage (along with Rebekah in the latter). In the latter, in fact, Isaac is portrayed as old, blind, and inactive.

D. There are stories about Isaac in chapter 26, but these are merely parallels to episodes in the Abraham cycle. For example, Isaac attempts to pass Rebekah off as his wife in a visit to Abimelech, king of Gerar.

E. The result is that we see no stories about Isaac in Genesis of the type we possess concerning Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.

VI. The ages of the three patriarchs in the book of Genesis constitute a number game.

A. Note the following:

1. Abraham: $175 = 7 \times 5^2$

2. Isaac: $180 = 5 \times 6^2$

3. Jacob: $147 = 3 \times 7^2$

B. Another number game is present with 318 in Genesis 14:14 (Abraham takes 318 men with him when he goes out to fight a particular battle); the number 318 is the sum of the 12 prime numbers between 7 and 7^2 (or 49). The number 318 also occurs in an ancient Egyptian text, where a princess of the Hurrians comes to

Egypt to marry an Egyptian prince accompanied by her 318 handmaidens, and as the number of dead at the end of the *Iliad*.

C. This numerological material, especially the ages of the Patriarchs, is another indication of the hand of God in Israel's national history.

Essential Reading:

Frederick Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*.

Judah Goldin, "The Youngest Son, or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 96 (1977), pp. 27–44.

Supplementary Reading:

Mary Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*.

Everett Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 60 (1993), pp. 45–68.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why are earlier women in the book of Genesis, such as Eve and the wife of Noah, not barren? Why does this motif begin with Sarah only?

2. In Judges 6:15 Gideon informs us that his clan is the smallest in the tribe of Manasseh (and also that he is the youngest son), and yet he has been chosen by God to save the people of Israel from Midianite oppression. In 1 Samuel 9:21, we learn that Saul is from the smallest clan within the smallest tribe, and yet he has been selected to be the first king of Israel. How do these two stories relate to the discussion in this lecture?

Lecture Fifteen
The Literary Structure of Genesis

Scope: *Redactional structuring* refers to the manner in which the individual stories are assembled to create a literary whole. We had a first glimpse of this in Lecture Nine, where we noticed that the beginning and the end of the Abraham story mirror each other. We now expand that point to note that the Abraham cycle divides nicely into two halves, with individual episodes matching each other (for example, two covenant stories, twice Lot is rescued, and so on), and with the focal point at 17:1–3, where God changes Abram's name to Abraham. The Jacob cycle (25:19–35:22) works in similar fashion, with matching episodes in the two halves (for example, Jacob's dream about the angels in chapter 28 and his encounter with an angel in chapter 32), and with the focal point in 30:22–25, where Joseph is born and Jacob decides to return to Canaan. This lecture looks at the literary and theological reasons for the use of redactional structuring.

Outline

I. *Redactional structuring* refers to the manner in which the large sections of the book of Genesis, often composed of disparate units, are organized. We can see this literary technique at work in the three main sections of the patriarchal narratives: the Abraham cycle, the Jacob cycle, and the Joseph story.

- **A.** We use the term *cycle* to refer to the Abraham material (Genesis 12-22) and the Jacob material (Genesis 25-35), because those narratives tend to be more a series of individual episodes in these characters' lives, with a connection between and among them not always readily visible.
- **B.** We use the term *story* for the Joseph material (Genesis 37–50), because these chapters hold together as one long extended narrative, so much so that some scholars refer to the last section of Genesis as a novella.
- **C.** All three redactional structures work the same way.
  - **1.** The cycle (or story) builds from its onset with a series of episodes in the life of the individual hero (the patriarch).
  - **2.** The cycle (or story) reaches a climax, or focal point, halfway through the narrative, on which everything turns.
  - **3.** The cycle (or story) concludes with another series of episodes, each of which matches, in reverse order, the episodes in the first half of the narrative.
  - **4.** We call this pattern with inverse order of matching units *chiasm* or *chiastic structure*. This term originates from the Greek letter *chi* (χ), which looks like an "x" and suggests that the patterning of this material is to be seen or visualized as an "x."
  - **5.** As mentioned in the previous lecture, note that there is no cycle of stories about Isaac. He appears only as a son to Abraham or as a father to Jacob, but there is no developed narrative about him as an individual.

II. The Abraham cycle builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 17:1–3, after which the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, creating the chiastic structure.

- **A.** In Genesis 17:1-8, the name Elohim is introduced into the narrative for the first time; Abram's name is changed to Abraham; and the covenant is established.
- **B.** There are five episodes (A, B, C, D, E), followed by five parallel episodes (E′, D′, C′, B′, A′).
- **C.** The result is a neatly constructed palistrophe in what is already a well-unified story.
- **D.** Though not indicated in the chart below, each of the matching episodes is linked by a series of key words (for example, *lekh lekha*, "go forth," in 12:1 and 22:2; the place names *Moreh* in 12:6 and *Moriah* in 22:2).

The Abraham Cycle

A Genealogy of Terah (11:27–32)

B Start of Abram's spiritual odyssey (12:1–9)

C Sarai in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abram and Lot part (12:10–13:18)

D Abram comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (14:1–24)

E Covenant with Abram; annunciation of Ishmael (15:1–16:16)

Focal point: **a)** Abram's name changed to Abraham

b) Elohim appears for the first time in the story

E′ Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac (17:1–18:15)

D′ Abraham comes to the rescue of Sodom and Lot (18:16–19:38)

C′ Sarah in foreign palace; ordeal ends in peace and success; Abraham and Ishmael part (20:1–21:34)

B′ Climax of Abraham's spiritual odyssey (22:1–19)

A′ Genealogy of Nahor (22:20–24)

III. The Jacob cycle builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 30:22–26, after which the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, creating the chiastic structure.

A. In Genesis 30:22–26, Rachel gives birth to Joseph, and Jacob decides it is time to return to Canaan.

B. There are six episodes (A, B, C, D, E, F), followed by six parallel episodes (F′, E′, D′, C′, B′, A′).

C. The result is a neatly constructed palistrophe in what is already a well-unified story.

D. Though not indicated in the chart, each of the matching episodes is linked by a series of key words (for example, *paga'*, "encounter," in 28:11 and 32:2).

The Jacob Cycle

A Oracle sought, struggle in childbirth, Jacob born (25:19–34)

B Interlude: Rebekah in foreign palace, pact with foreigners (26:1–34)

C Jacob fears Esau and flees (27:1–28:9)

D Messengers (28:10–22)

E Arrival at Harran (29:1–30)

F Jacob's wives are fertile (29:31–30:24)

Focal point: **a)** Rachel gives birth to Joseph

b) Jacob decides to return to Canaan

F′ Jacob's flocks are fertile (30:25–43)

E′ Flight from Harran (31:1–34)

D′ Messengers (32:1–32)

C′ Jacob returns and fears Esau (33:1–20)

B′ Interlude: Dinah in foreign palace, pact with foreigners (34:1–31)

A′ Oracle fulfilled, struggle in childbirth, Jacob becomes Israel (35:1–22)

IV. The Joseph story builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 45:1–3, after which the themes and stories are repeated in reverse order, creating the chiastic structure.

A. In Genesis 45:1–3, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

B. There are six episodes (A, B, C, D, E, F), followed by six parallel episodes (F′, E′, D′, C′, B′, A′).

C. The result is a neatly constructed palistrophe in what is already a well-unified story.

D. Though not indicated in the chart, each of the matching episodes is linked by a series of key words (for example, *hesed*, "favor," in 39:21 and 47:29).

The Joseph Story

A Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (37:1–36)
  B Interlude: Joseph not present (38:1–30)
    C Reversal: Joseph guilty, Potiphar's wife innocent (39:1–23)
      D Joseph hero of Egypt (40:1–41:57)
        E Two trips to Egypt (42:1–43:34)
          F Final test (44:1–34)
            Focal point: Joseph reveals himself to his brothers
          F′ Conclusion of test (45:1–28)
        E′ Two tellings of migration to Egypt (46:1–47:12)
      D′ Joseph hero of Egypt (47:13–27)
    C′ Reversal: Ephraim firstborn, Manasseh second born (47:28–48:22)
  B′ Interlude: Joseph nominally present (49:1–28)
A′ Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Joseph part (49:29–50:26)

V. Preceding the three patriarchal cycles, there is also a redactional structure to the Primeval History in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, though the structure here is different.

A. The two series of individual units parallel each other in the same order; that is, they are not in inverse order or aligned in a chiastic structure.

B. The Primeval History builds to a focal point, or pivot point, at Genesis 6:8–9, focusing on Noah, after which the themes and stories are repeated in parallel order.

C. There are five episodes (A, B, C, D, E), followed by five parallel episodes (A′, B′, C′, E′, D′), though the order of the last two by necessity is reversed.

D. The order of the last two units is reversed, so that the genealogy of the 10 generations from Noah to Terah leads the reader directly to Abraham, son of Terah.

E. Though not indicated in the chart, each of the matching episodes is linked by a series of key words (for example, *tehom*, "abyss," in 1:2 and 7:11, 8:2; *'arur*, "cursed," in 4:11 and 9:25).

The Primeval History

A Creation, God's words to Adam (1:1–3:24)

B Adam's sons (4:1–16)

C Technological development of mankind (4:17–26)

D Ten generations from Adam to Noah (5:1–32)

E Downfall: The Nephilim (6:1–8)

Focal point: God decides to destroy the earth; Noah is to be saved

A′ Flood, God's words to Noah (6:9–9:17)

B′ Noah's sons (9:18–29)

C′ Ethnic development of mankind (10:1–32)

E′ Downfall: Tower of Babel (11:1–9)

D′ Ten generations from Noah to Terah (11:10–26)

VI. Finally, there are two sections of *linking material* collecting less important information between the three patriarchal cycles. This is material that closes out Abraham's life in 23:1–25:18 and material that bridges the Jacob cycle and the Joseph story in 35:23–36:43.

VII. The picture of redactional structuring in the book of Genesis presented here is the result of several decades of scholarship by different researchers.

A. In the 1950s, the pattern in the Abraham cycle was adumbrated by Umberto Cassuto (Hebrew University), though he died before he could fully explicate his discovery.

B. The pattern in the Jacob cycle was discovered by Michael Fishbane (then of Brandeis University, now of the University of Chicago) in his book *Text and Texture* (1979), which in turn, was based on his earlier 1975 article on the subject.

C. The term *redactional structuring* was coined by Jack Sasson (then of the University of North Carolina, now of Vanderbilt University), who also discovered the pattern present in the Primeval cycle.

D. I completed Cassuto's work on Abraham and found that the pattern in the Joseph story was the same as in the Abraham and Jacob cycles, at which point I brought all of this evidence together in my book *The Redaction of Genesis* (1986).

VIII. The result of this analysis is the conclusion that there is much greater literary unity to the book of Genesis than most scholars have realized. To be sure, the division of the Genesis narratives into J, E, and P material does not stand, as adumbrated in Lecture Six.

IX. The reader is supposed to see the hand of God in this literary unity. A theological message shines through: There is a divine presence in Israel's history, with the redactional structuring serving as the blueprint thereof.

Essential Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, pp. 1–106.

Supplementary Reading:

Jerome T. Walsh, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, pp. 89–92, 111–113.

J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide*, pp. 156–168.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that the readers of Genesis in ancient Israel would have recognized the overarching structure of the book, or is it something that only we as modern readers have "imposed" on the text?

2. Why would the author of Genesis have structured the book in this manner?

Lecture Sixteen
Different Bible Translations

Scope: We take timeout from our reading of Genesis to discuss the very important issue of different Bible translations. We begin with the history of Bible translations in antiquity; and then we move to the history of Bible translations into English, focusing on the King James Version of 1611 and culminating with the plethora of renditions available today. Why are there so many? How do they differ? How are they the same? We will discuss the different kinds of translations, differentiating those that are more literal, those that are more idiomatic, and those that are hyperliteral, that is, they attempt to capture the Hebrew as closely as possible, even if this results in an unnatural English at times. We will illustrate these differences with several key passages from the book of Genesis.

Outline

I. First, let's look at some historical background, given that Bible translations go back to antiquity. Four major translations were produced in ancient times, all directly from the Hebrew original, two by Jewish scholars and two by Christian scholars.

- **A.** The Jewish texts are the Septuagint and the Targum.
  - **1.** The Septuagint ("LXX") refers to the translation into Greek produced by Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century B.C.E. at the behest of King Ptolemy II. Legend says that 72 translators produced this text, and that number is rounded to 70.
  - **2.** Targum (plural: Targumim) refers to a series of translations into Aramaic, produced in the first few centuries C.E. We actually possess three different Aramaic renderings of the Torah, along with Aramaic translations of the Prophets, the Psalms, and almost every other biblical book.
- **B.** The Christian texts are the Peshitta and the Vulgate.
  - **1.** The Peshitta refers to the translation into Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) produced in the 4th–5th centuries C.E.
  - **2.** The Vulgate refers to the translation into Latin, completed single-handedly by Saint Jerome, in 405 C.E.

II. English translations began in the Middle Ages, and there were two early efforts, though both met with unacceptance, to put it mildly, because the Church insisted on using only the Vulgate, not translations in the vernacular.

- **A.** John Wycliffe (1320–1384) translated the Bible into English, but the Church condemned him for this action and ordered that his books be burned.
- **B.** William Tyndale (1484–1536) also translated the Bible into English. He, too, was condemned as a heretic, both by the Catholic Church and by the newly established Church of England. Tyndale was forced to leave England for Germany, but eventually, the authorities caught up with him on the Continent, and Tyndale was burned at the stake in Belgium.

III. With the Church of England firmly in control in the early 17th century, and with a greater liberalism now in the air, King James I commissioned scholars in London, Oxford, and Cambridge to create an authorized translation of the Bible. The result is the King James Version (KJV, 1611), which remains one of the hallmarks of not only biblical scholarship throughout the ages but English literary productivity, as well.

IV. Although the KJV remained popular into the 20th century, because its language was seen as archaic and often difficult to understand by modern readers, the need for new translations was keenly felt. By the late 20th century, there was a host of English translations, especially in the United States.

- **A.** Some of these translations are more literal, for example, rendering each conjunction by *and* (as did the KJV), because Hebrew has essentially only one conjunction.
- **B.** Other translations were more idiomatic, allowing for context and idiom to influence the rendering. Thus, for example, instead of the ubiquitous *and* throughout, one finds the use of *but*, *since*, *while*, and so on.
- **C.** A rather unique translation is the one produced by Everett Fox, which attempts (rather successfully, in my opinion) to capture the sounds, rhythms, and syntax of the Hebrew original. Fox utilizes an approach

initiated by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in their German translation of the Bible, which often sacrifices the target language (English or German, in this case) in order to more accurately capture the source language (Hebrew, in this instance).

V. We illustrate here several examples from the Fox translation.

A. The Seventh Commandment in Exodus 20:13 (= Deuteronomy 5:17) is rendered "you shall not adulter" to parallel the similar structure of the Sixth and Eighth Commandments, "you shall not murder" and "you shall not steal," respectively.

B. Alliteration is captured in Genesis 15:4 with the expression "Son Domestic" echoing the sounds of "Damascus Eliezer" (Hebrew: *ben mesheq* and *dammeseq*, respectively).

C. *Leitwort*, or "leading word," is a common feature in biblical prose, whereby the same word is used over and over again to unite the various scenes of an extended story or narrative (in contrast to English usage, where elegant prose calls for varying one's vocabulary). An example appears in Genesis 24, where the word *yad*, "hand," occurs seven times (verses 2, 9, 10, 18, 22, 30, 47).

VI. Rare words often require special attention. An example is the word *botnim*, which occurs in Genesis 43:11 and nowhere else in the entire biblical corpus. Based on the ancient translations, the word appears to mean "turpentine, resin," though modern translations typically render *botnim* as "pistachios."

VII. Some renderings in the KJV are obsolete, either because the English is now archaic or because our increased knowledge of ancient Hebrew permits a more accurate translation.

A. The KJV translation of Psalm 23:1, "I shall not want," reflects an archaic usage of the word *want*, meaning "lack." Several modern translations render the phrase "I lack nothing."

B. The KJV rendering in Psalm 23:4, "the valley of the shadow of death," is now known to be inaccurate. A more accurate translation is "dark valley" or "darkest valley."

Essential Reading:

Leonard Greenspoon, "Jewish Translations of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp. 2005–2020.

Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. ix–xxx.

Supplementary Reading:

Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*.

Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the advantages of the different styles of Bible translation (the more literal rendering versus the more idiomatic rendering)?
2. Some churches and synagogues have elected to use one kind of translation for prayer services (for example, one that retains such wordings as "I shall not want" and "the valley of the shadow of death") and another kind for Bible study (for example, one that uses "I lack nothing" and "darkest valley"). Why might these churches and synagogues have done this? What do you think of this practice?

Lecture Seventeen
Genesis 27, Jacob and Esau

Scope: Lectures Fourteen and Fifteen provided an overview of the Jacob cycle; this lecture and the next will provide close readings of two individual episodes in the narrative. The well-known story of Jacob and Esau permits us once again to see repetition at work, the device that we encountered in Genesis 24 (Lecture Thirteen). In this case, we hear Isaac tell Esau to bring him game meat, at which point Isaac will bless his firstborn son; we then hear Rebekah tell Jacob what she overheard, giving her son similar instructions. Once more, not unexpectedly, the repetition is not verbatim. We also will discuss Rebekah's role as instigator of the deception of Isaac and the punishment she receives for her actions.

Outline

I. We return to another close reading of another biblical story, the familiar account of Jacob and Esau, in particular, the episode in Genesis 27, in which Rebekah orchestrates the deception of Isaac, resulting in Jacob's receiving the blessing instead of his brother Esau.

II. As was the case with Genesis 24, in this story, too, there is repetition of action and speeches, which requires our close attention. For example, Isaac instructs Esau what to do in verses 3–4, and Rebekah then informs Jacob of what she heard in verses 6–7. A comparison of these wordings reveals a few interesting points.

- **A.** Isaac uses technical words, such as *gear*, *quiver*, and *bow* in verse 3. Rebekah omits these terms altogether in verse 7; for her, they are probably like football terminology for some of today's women, terms not in her vocabulary, part of "guy talk."
- **B.** Isaac said in verse 4, "in order that my soul will bless you before I die." Rebekah quotes this as follows in verse 7: "so that I may bless you before the LORD before my death." Note how Rebekah introduces God into the equation: Is this an example of women's greater spirituality? Remarkably, though, when Jacob appears before Isaac in verse 19, he refers to the words that Isaac actually spoke to Esau in verse 4, *not* to the words that Rebekah spoke to him in verse 7.

III. We should note other literary devices in this story, most importantly, wordplay and alliteration.

- **A.** In verse 11, Jacob says, "Behold Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man." The word *smooth* here, *halaq* in Hebrew, bears triple meaning.
  1. Its first meaning is the basic meaning "smooth," because Esau was hairy and Jacob was smooth-skinned.
  2. The second meaning is "smooth-talking," as occurs in Proverbs 26:28 and other biblical passages. This fits Jacob's character very well, because he will use his quick wit on more than one occasion in his personal dealings. We might want to compare Odysseus, another ancient hero, who bears this trait.
  3. Finally, the word refers to Mount Halaq (spelled "Halak" in most English Bibles) in Joshua 11:17, 12:7, which was the southernmost extreme of Israel, before one crosses the border into Edom, known as the land of Seir, home of the descendants of Esau. Note further that the name of "Esau's mountain" echoes the word *sa'ir*, "hairy."
- **B.** Two alliterations appear in the story.
  1. The word *mat'amim*, "tasty dish," occurs six times in the chapter, including in verse 9, where Rebekah tells Jacob that she will make a tasty dish for Isaac as part of the deception plot. When Jacob replies in verse 12, he states that his father will consider him as a *meta'tea'*, "trickster, mocker, scorner." Both of these are rare words in Hebrew.
  2. The second example occurs in verse 36, where Esau states, "And he has swindled me now twice, my birthright he took, and behold now he has taken my blessing." The two key nouns sound alike in Hebrew: "birthright" is *bekhora*, and "blessing" is *berakha*. The reference to the birthright takes us back to 25:27–34, where the older Esau sold his birthright to the younger Jacob.

IV. Once Isaac speaks the blessing in verses 27–29, Jacob is blessed and must remain blessed.

A. Even when Isaac and Esau realize what has occurred, in verses 33–36, there is no taking the blessing back. Words spoken have a power unto their own, according to the biblical mode of thinking. All that Esau can hope for is a second blessing, which he receives in verses 39–40.

B. Note, however, that God is referred to in the former blessing but not in the latter blessing.

V. Such deeds, according to the mores of the Bible, should not go unpunished.

A. In the next lecture, we will discuss how Jacob is punished for deceiving his father and tricking his brother.

B. Here, we take note of the punishment of Rebekah, who after all, was the one who hatched the plot to deceive Isaac. Her punishment is that she never gets to see her beloved son Jacob again. When Jacob returns to the land of Canaan in chapters 33–35, he is reunited with Esau and his father, Isaac, but we hear nothing of Rebekah.

1. We are led to conclude that Rebekah died in the intervening 20 years that Jacob was away from home.

2. But she brought this upon herself with her words "may your curse be upon me, my son" in 27:13. Words like this glibly spoken come to fruition in the Bible; thus, Rebekah brought upon herself the curse of never seeing her son again. Indeed, more than that, she is written out of the story, and not even her death is recorded (unlike all the other major figures—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, and Rachel—whose deaths are recorded).

3. All this is accomplished in the most subtle fashion in the narrative. Nowhere does the reader hear a statement, in Aesop-like fashion: "And the moral of the story is: Don't deceive your blind father/husband." The reader must figure this out without any guidance from the author. As we have seen before, the reader is invited to participate in the act of storytelling by being an attentive listener.

4. Another example of this occurs in the Bible in the extended narrative of King David in 2 Samuel 11–1 Kings 2. In response to the death of Uriah and other innocents, David glibly said, "the sword eats this one and that one" (2 Samuel 11:25). As a result of this line, three of David's sons (Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah) die by the sword in subsequent chapters (2 Samuel 13 through 24, and in the first two chapters of the Book of 1 Kings).

VI. The number seven operates in this chapter in subtle ways.

A. There are seven scenes (Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob, Jacob and Isaac, Isaac and Esau, Rebekah and Jacob, Rebekah and Isaac, Isaac and Jacob). Jacob and Esau, however, never appear on the stage together.

B. The key word *berakha*, "blessing," occurs seven times.

Essential Reading:

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 181–188.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 137–145 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 139–146.

Supplementary Reading:

J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, pp. 82–84, 97–99.

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 17–23.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do women bring greater spirituality to religion?

2. The number seven operates not only in this chapter but in many other biblical (and ancient Near Eastern) stories as well. Why do you think that this number developed as the "special" number in the Bible (and in the ancient Near East in general)?

Lecture Eighteen
Genesis 29, Jacob and Rachel

Scope: The story of Jacob and Rachel meeting at the well allows us to see the typescene at work, that is, a specific plot treatment that occurs in a variety of places in the Bible. We already have seen one version of this typescene in the story of Abraham's servant's meeting Rebekah at the well in chapter 24 (Lecture Thirteen). The Bible provides one more example in Exodus, where Moses meets his destined bride at the well, in addition to which there are two variations on the theme, as we shall see, one concerning Saul and one concerning Ruth. We also will take note of other literary devices in the arsenal of ancient Israelite writers, including wordplay, allusion, and point of view.

Outline

I. We will utilize my own translation of Genesis 29 in this lecture, which is included in the course booklet. Note that my translation takes a literal approach, though it is not as hyperliteral as Everett Fox's, for example.

II. The story of Jacob (Ya'aqov) and Rachel (Rahel) meeting at the well is a typescene. The ingredients are as follows: A bachelor in a foreign land meets his destined bride at the well. The ancient reader would not have to read much beyond the first few verses to realize that Jacob and Rachel would get married, because all the elements of the typescene are present.

- **A.** The story about Jacob and Rachel here and the story about Moses and Zipporah in Midian in Exodus 2 are the standard versions of the story.
- **B.** The story that we read earlier, in Genesis 24 (see Lecture Thirteen), has an important variation. Not Isaac but, rather, his agent (the unnamed servant of Abraham) makes the journey to the foreign land to meet Rebekah.
- **C.** An aborted version of this story occurs in 1 Samuel 9. One expects that Saul will marry one of the young women that he meets at the well, but in fact, he does not. The aborted version is symbolic of Saul's aborted, or short-lived, kingship.
- **D.** An inverted version occurs in the book of Ruth. Here we read of a foreign woman in the land of Israel who meets her destined husband at the well (the well itself is not mentioned specifically, but there is reference to the drawing of water; see Ruth 2:9).

III. Once more, the author employs various literary devices.

- **A.** The use of the Hebrew word *we-hinne* "and behold," which changes the perspective from looking at the scene from the outside to experiencing the scene through the eyes of one of the characters, in this case, Jacob, occurs in verse 2 and in verse 25.
- **B.** The technique is used whereby the reader knows something ahead of the character, and the character learns the information only slightly later. Thus:
  1. The readers learn in verses 2–3 why the shepherds wait until everyone is gathered at the well before removing the stone, whereas Jacob does not learn this information until verse 8.
  2. The reader learns ahead of Jacob that Leah (Le'a) has been substituted for Rachel on the wedding night; see verses 23 and 25.
- **C.** Another delightful wordplay occurs in verses 6 and 9, in the expressions "and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the flock" and "Rachel came with the flock," respectively. The Hebrew word for "coming" and "came" is *ba'a*, which reproduces the sound that sheep make. When one realizes further that Rachel means "ewe," the wordplay is enhanced. How playful the ancient Israelite authors could be!
- **D.** Why identify, and reiterate, that Laban (Lavan) is the brother of Jacob's mother? Anthropologists have noted that a father with multiple wives cannot give attention equally to all of his sons; the maternal uncle is often the close male relative and the protector.
- **E.** Alliteration appears again in verses 10–11, where the words *wayyašq*, "he watered," and *wayyiššaq*, "he kissed," sound alike (the symbol *š* is used to represent the sound "sh").

F. Literary foreshadowing occurs in verse 11, when Jacob kisses Rachel. This is the only place in the Bible where a single man kisses a single woman. The scene looks ahead to verse 18, where we read, "And Jacob loved Rachel," especially given that the love between husband and wife is not typically expressed in the Bible either.

G. The technique of form following content is used in verse 20: "And Jacob worked for Rachel seven years; and they were in his eyes as a few days, such was his love for her." Note that the seven years are narrated in a single verse, because that is how Jacob experienced them.

H. The use of pronouns in verse 23—"and he brought her to him; and he came unto her"—reflects the secrecy and anonymity of the moment. Jacob is unaware that Leah—not Rachel—is his bride that evening; therefore, only pronouns are used.

IV. More important than these literary devices, all of which enhance the narrative, however, is the overall theme in this chapter.

A. Note that when Jacob awakes the morning after his marriage and realizes that he married Leah and not Rachel, with whom he was in love and for whom he had labored for seven years, he complains to Laban, "What is this that you have done to me?…Why did you deceive me?" (verse 25).

B. Laban's response is: "It is not done thus in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn" (verse 26). With this statement, we realize that Jacob has been punished for having done exactly this in chapter 27, that is, having placed himself (the younger) before Esau (the firstborn).

C. Thus, Jacob is punished, tit-for-tat, but we note that the punishment is not a direct punishment from the hand of God; rather, it is retribution exacted through God's human agent, in this case, Laban, in playful, yet appropriate, manner.

D. Again, as noted in Lecture Seventeen concerning the punishment of Rebekah, the reader must figure this out for himself or herself. There is no direct statement informing us that Jacob thus was punished for what he did to Esau.

E. Furthermore, this will not be Jacob's only punishment; he will be deceived by his sons in turn when they trick him into believing that Joseph is dead (chapter 37). We will discuss this incident further in Lecture Twenty-One.

V. We should note one more literary device. A comparison of verses 23–25 and verses 29–30 reveals that the latter describes the action in chronological order, while the former describes the action out of chronological order. The gift of Zilpah to Leah is interposed between the consummation of the marriage on the wedding night and the morning scene when Jacob awakes to find Leah next to him in bed, in order to prolong the suspense.

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 47–62.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 151–157 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 152–157.

Supplementary Reading:

Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 132–138.

Questions to Consider:

1. In what way is it more effective to have Laban serve as the agent of Jacob's punishment than to have God carry out the deserved punishment?

2. Do you think that the typescene discussed in this lecture is a total fiction invented by the biblical authors, or do you think that meeting at the well is reflective of something in ancient Near Eastern society?

Genesis 29
Translation by Gary A. Rendsburg

1. And Ya‘aqov lifted-up his feet, and he went to the land of the Bene Qedem.

2. And he saw, and behold, a well in the field, and behold, there were three flock-herds lazing at it, for from that well they would water the herds; and the stone was large on the mouth of the well.

3. And all the herds would be gathered there, and they would roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well, and they would water the flock; and they would return the stone upon the mouth of the well to its place.

4. And Ya‘aqov said to them, “My brothers, from where are you?” And they said, “From Haran are we.”

5. And he said to them, “Do you know Lavan son of Nahor?” And they said, “We know.”

6. And he said to them, “Is it well with him?” And they said, “Well, and here is Rahel his daughter coming[a] with the flock.”

7. And he said, “Here the day is still great, it is not time to gather the livestock; water the flock, and go and shepherd.”

8. And they said, “We are not able until all the herds are gathered, and they roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well, so that we may water the flock.”

9. He was still speaking with them, and Rahel came with the flock that was her father’s, for she was a shepherdess.

10. And it was, when Ya‘aqov saw Rahel the daughter of Lavan the brother of his mother, and the flock of Lavan the brother of his mother; and Ya‘aqov approached, and he rolled the stone from upon the mouth of the well, and he watered the flock of Lavan the brother of his mother.

11. And Ya‘aqov kissed[b] Rahel; and he lifted up his voice and he cried.

12. And Ya‘aqov told Rahel that he was a brother[c] of her father, and that he was the son of Rivqe; and she ran and she told her father.

13. And when Lavan heard the hearing-news about Ya‘aqov the son of his sister, he ran to greet him, and he hugged him, and he kissed him, and he brought him to his house; and he told Lavan all these things.

14. And Lavan said to him, “Indeed my bone and my flesh are you”; and he sat with him a month of days.

15. And Lavan said to Ya‘aqov, “Just because you are my brother, should you work for me for free? Tell me, what (should be) your wage?”

16. And Lavan had two daughters, the name of the greater-one was Le’a, and the name of the smaller-one was Rahel.

17. And the eyes of Le’a were soft[d]; and Rahel was beautiful of form and a beautiful sight.

18. And Ya‘aqov loved Rahel; and he said, “I will work for you seven years, for Rahel your smaller daughter.”

19. And Lavan said, “Better that I give her to you than I give her to another man, sit with me.”

20. And Ya‘aqov worked for Rahel seven years; and they were in his eyes as a few days, such was his love for her.

21. And Ya‘aqov said to Lavan, “Bring my wife, because my days are fulfilled, so that I may come unto her.”

22. And Lavan gathered all the men of the place, and he made a drinking-feast.

23. And it was in the evening, and he took Le’a his daughter, and he brought her to him; and he came unto her.

24. And Lavan gave to her Zilpa his handmaid, for Le’a his daughter (as) a handmaid.

25. And it was in the morning, and behold, she is Le'a; and he said to Lavan, "What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Rahel? And why did you deceive me?"

26. And Lavan said, "It is not done thus in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn.

27. Fulfill the week of this-one; and also this-one will be given to you, for the work that you will work with me, another seven years more.

28. And Ya'aqov did thus, and he fulfilled the week of this-one; and he gave him Rahel his daughter to him as a wife.

29. And Lavan gave to Rahel his daughter Bilha his handmaid, for her as a handmaid.

30. And he came also unto Rahel, and also he loved Rahel more than Le'a; and he worked with him another seven years more.

Notes to the Translation:

[a] A delightful wordplay appears here. The feminine forms of the verb "come," both here in verse 6 and again in verse 9, both predicated of Rahel, are both *ba'a* (the present-tense form in verse 6 is accented on the second syllable; the past-tense form in verse 9 is accented on the first syllable). This verb evokes the sound that sheep make, and the effect is superb when one realizes that Rahel means "ewe"!

[b] Another delightful wordplay occurs here. The words for "watered" in verse 10 and "kissed" in verse 11 are spelled exactly the same: *waw-yod-shin-qof*. (Both single and doubled consonants were written with only one grapheme.) The first is pronounced *wayyašq*, while the second is pronounced *wayyiššaq*. (The symbol *š* is used to represent the sound "sh"; an English speaker might approximate these as "wa-yashk" and "wa-yee-shak"). The effect is even more playful when one recalls that the name Rahel means 'ewe'!

[c] Used loosely here as "male relative"; in actuality, he was a nephew of Lavan.

[d] Hebrew *rakkot*, literally "soft," but the exact nuance here is not clear.

Lecture Nineteen
The Date of the Book of Genesis

Scope: We have reached the point in our course when at last we can discuss the date of the book of Genesis. We have mentioned in passing the date of its composition as the 10th century; this lecture now offers details to defend that conclusion. Our starting point is that all authors reveal the present when describing the past; this is true of Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, and many others, and it is equally true of the author of Genesis. The book of Genesis includes a number of references in support of the Davidic-Solomonic monarchy, a new institution in the 10th century. Prime examples, consciously embedded in the text by the author, are 17:6 and 17:16, in which God promises that kings will stem from Abraham and Sarah; 15:18, which presents the boundaries of the Davidic-Solomonic empire; and 49:10, which locates kingship specifically in the tribe of Judah.

Outline

I. We move now to a consideration of the date of the authorship of the book of Genesis. First, as noted in Lecture Six, I reject the standard theory, adhered to by many scholars, that Genesis is to be divided into three separate sources (J, E, and P). I prefer to view the book as a literary whole.

II. We repeat here the history of the 10th century, which we presented earlier in Lecture Four.

- **A.** Before the year 1020, Israel was organized as a loose confederation of 12 tribes, with no central authority.
- **B.** In the late 11th century, because of increased pressure from the Philistines in particular, Israel felt the need to move to a monarchy, which represented a more centralized form of government.
  - **1.** The move to a monarchy was a compromise on Israelite theology, because in the Israelite view—unique in the ancient world—only God could be king; thus, Israel until this point was not ruled by a human king.
  - **2.** Two political parties, as it were, arose: a pro-monarchic one, which felt the need to institute the change, and an anti-monarchic one, which continued to hold the old belief that only God could be king. In the end, the former view won the day, and Saul was appointed as the first king of Israel in 1020 B.C.E.
- **C.** After the transitionary kingship of Saul, monarchy flourished in Israel under King David (1000–965) and King Solomon (965–930).
  - **1.** David conquered the Philistines and the remaining part of the land of Canaan, including the city of Jerusalem.
  - **2.** David established Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel.
  - **3.** David established an international empire stretching from the Euphrates River in the northeast to the Sinai Desert in the southwest.
  - **4.** Solomon inherited the kingdom and built the Temple in Jerusalem, further enhancing the centrality and importance of Israel's new capital city.

III. I date the book of Genesis to the 10th century B.C.E., during the time of the United Kingdom of David and Solomon, when these two kings ruled over all 12 tribes. There are numerous clues in Genesis that match the historical background of David and Solomon.

- **A.** In Genesis 17, God promises that kings will stem from Abraham and Sarah. This would be an issue in the 10th century only, when Israel first established kingship. The traditional view is that only God could be king, and thus, there was no human king. The author of Genesis is pro-monarchic; for this reason, he embeds into the record the divine promise of human kings.
- **B.** According to Genesis 49:10, kingship is to reside in the tribe of Judah, the tribe from which David and Solomon came.
- **C.** The boundaries of the land of Canaan, which God promises to Abraham at the end of chapter 15, from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt, match the extent of the Davidic-Solomonic empire. (Note that "the river of Egypt" here most likely does not refer to the Nile, but rather to one of the large wadis [i.e., a dried-up riverbed, which flows with water at times during the winter months] in the Sinai desert.)

D. Allusions to Jerusalem in Genesis 2:13 (the river Gihon in the Garden of Eden shares the same name as the large spring in Jerusalem), 14:18 (the king of "Salem" blesses Abraham), and 22:14 ("Moriah" is another name for Jerusalem) are the author's way of showing how this new capital city of David and Solomon has a tradition stretching back to Israel's origins.

E. The motif of the younger son, which dominates the book of Genesis, is a reflection of the fact that David was the youngest of his brothers and that Solomon was either the youngest or among the youngest of the sons of David.

F. Another theme in Genesis, which we have not discussed to any great extent, is fraternal strife. Note especially Cain's killing of Abel, as well as the discord between Joseph and his brothers. This parallels two sets of brothers in David's family: Absalom kills Amnon, and Solomon (actually his henchman) kills Adonijah.

IV. The negative side of David is also portrayed at times. Most significantly, the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is a veiled (or perhaps not-so-veiled) reference to the sin of David and Bathsheba recorded in 2 Samuel 11–12.

V. All these parallel themes and motifs, often with strikingly similar wording, suggest that the author of Genesis lived in the 10th century B.C.E. The author tells the story about the past, but the present is reflected throughout. Analogies occur in world literature in familiar texts:

A. The most famous instance in American literature is Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which tells about the Salem witch trials of the 1690s but is really about McCarthyism in the 1950s.

B. Shakespeare's histories are about earlier English kings, but in reality, they describe the monarch of his day, namely, Elizabeth I. When a Scottish king came to the throne in London, that is, James I (formerly James VI of Scotland), the great bard turned his attention to an old Scottish king and wrote *Macbeth*.

C. The movie *M*A*S*H* (1970) is set in Korea, but it really is about another land war in Asia, namely, Vietnam, which was raging when the movie was written by Ring Lardner Jr. and directed by Robert Altman.

VI. The narratives in Genesis and elsewhere in the Bible are written in prose. Most likely, however, there were earlier poetic accounts of Israel's ancient heroes and early history.

A. Most cultures in the ancient Near East wrote their narratives in poetry, for example, Babylonia (*Enuma Elish* and the Gilgamesh Epic), Canaan (epics of Kret and of Aqhat), and Greece (the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*).

B. We have snippets of narrative poetry in the Bible included in the large prose narrative that stretches from Genesis to Samuel. These excerpts are characterized by very archaic language, which speaks to their antiquity.

1. Prime examples are Exodus 15 and Judges 5.

2. In two instances, we even know the names of the earlier poetic compositions, because their titles are cited in the Bible.

a. The *Book of Jashar* is cited in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

b. The *Book of the Wars of the LORD* is cited in Numbers 21:14.

C. Israel consciously rejected the poetic tradition, because it was identified with the polytheistic literature of the ancient Near East (witness the *Enuma Elish*, the Baal myth, and so on).

D. Israel adopted the prose model of writing from ancient Egypt, which was the one culture that told stories in prose. These Egyptian narratives are largely devoid of any theological overtones; instead, they constitute literature for the sake of enjoyment and, thus, could serve as the prototype for Israelite literati to create their own narratives.

Essential Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, "Reading David in Genesis: How We Know the Torah Was Written in the Tenth Century B.C.E.," *Bible Review* 17:1 (February 2001), pp. 20–33, 46; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BR/brf01reading_ david.html.

Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Genesis of the Bible," in *The Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair in Jewish History*, pp. 11–30; available at: http://jewishstudies. rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/genesis.pdf.

Supplementary Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis*, pp. 107–120.

S. David Sperling, *The Original Torah*, pp. 75–90.

Questions to Consider:

1. Can you think of other examples from world literature (or even modern film) that set a story in the past but reflect the present?
2. In addition to the main point discussed at the end of this lecture, what other advantages does prose storytelling provide?

Lecture Twenty
Genesis 37, Joseph and His Brothers

Scope: This lecture begins with some final observations of a literary nature concerning stories covered earlier, namely Genesis 24 and several episodes in the Jacob cycle. The lecture then moves to the last main section of the book of Genesis, the Joseph narrative. We begin with a look at several details in chapter 37, where the story commences. Most important is the question of who transported Joseph to Egypt; three different groups, the Ishmaelites, the Midianites, and the Medanites, are mentioned in Genesis 37. In line with the approach used throughout this course, we offer a literary answer: Joseph is at the bottom of a well, able to hear only muffled sounds from above; the action occurs swiftly; and Joseph himself is probably unsure about what is happening. The mention of different ethnic groups does not allow the reader to decide the issue, which in turn, reflects Joseph's take on the course of events. We will also discuss the purpose of the anonymous man mentioned in 37:15–17 who directs Joseph toward his brothers—what might his role be?

Outline

I. We begin with three observations concerning stories covered during previous lectures.

A. The stories in Genesis 24 and 30–31 transport the readers to Aram, to which Abraham's servant travels in order to obtain a bride for Isaac and to which Jacob travels in order to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. The language of these episodes is colored with Aramaic words, phrases, and grammatical forms, e.g., the Aramaic words for "almond" (*luz*) and for "provide" or "supply" (*zabad*). We call this technique *style-switching*, in which the language of the text reflects the geographical setting of the narrative.

B. Twice in the patriarchal narratives, the word *'elohim* is to be understood as "gods" in the plural, not as "God" in the singular. This can be determined by the use of a plural verb serving as the predicate of the subject *'elohim*.

1. In Genesis 20:13, Abraham is addressing Abimelech, and presumably, he utilized the plural form "gods" because he was speaking to a polytheist.

2. In Genesis 35:7, we have a polemic against the city of Bethel, which later would serve as one of the sanctuary sites of the northern kingdom of Israel, that is, after the split in the kingdom c. 930 B.C.E.

C. The death notice concerning Deborah, Rebekah's nursemaid, in Genesis 35:8, is quite peculiar; the passage occurs without any connection to the overall storyline. It is present in the narrative, however, to allow the reader to hear Rebekah's name. One expects to read of Jacob's reunion with Rebekah at this point (only his reunions with Esau and with Isaac are described), but of course, as we noted in Lecture Seventeen, the reader is to conclude that Rebekah died during the 20 years of Jacob's residing in Aram.

II. The final part of the book of Genesis is the story of Joseph, chapters 37–50. We begin by addressing various thematic issues.

A. Jacob plays favorites, since Joseph is seen as his favorite son. Are we to read this in light of Jacob's own youth, during which Isaac favored one son and Rebekah favored the other?

B. The dreams in the Joseph story appear in duplicates in Genesis chapter 37 (Joseph's two dreams), chapter 40 (the baker's and cupbearer's parallel dreams), and chapter 41 (Pharaoh's two dreams). The text provides a reason for the duplication in Genesis 41:32 in words spoken by Joseph: "And the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh two times, this means that the thing has been determined by God, and God is hastening to do it."

III. A crucial issue in our text is: Who brought Joseph down to Egypt?

A. According to 37:28 (or at least one reading thereof), Midianites pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites. It was presumably these latter people who took Joseph to Egypt.

B. According to the 37:36, however, the Medanites sold Joseph to Potiphar (a courtier of Pharaoh) in Egypt, so they must be the people who transported him there. Note that Medanites and Midianites are two separate peoples (see 25:2). Most translations mask this by using the word Midianites in 37:36, but the Hebrew text reads "Medanites."

C. When we resume the story of Joseph in Egypt in 39:1, we read that the Ishmaelites brought Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar.

D. The result is a very confused narrative. For most scholars, this is fodder for the JEDP theory—they explain the problem by assuming separate sources with conflicting information. I prefer a literary explanation, however. The confusion reflects the confusion in Joseph's mind. The reader experiences the events as Joseph experienced them. Stuck at the bottom of a pit, Joseph is able to hear only muffled sounds and dialogue from above. He is pulled out and transported to Egypt, but because he himself is unsure about the chain of events, the narration presents the tale in confused terms.

E. Later in the narrative, the confusion is reflected by two different statements from Joseph: Genesis 40:15, "I was stolen [kidnapped] from the land of the Hebrews," and Genesis 45:4, "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt."

IV. Confused language also appears in Genesis 37:30, where Reuben, upon discovering that the pit is empty, with Joseph not in sight, states: "And I, where am I to come?" This confused language reflects the confusion in Reuben's mind, which is unable to produce clear syntax. This represents yet another literary device in the arsenal of the ancient Israelite writers.

V. We take note of the anonymous man mentioned in 37:15–17. What is the purpose of this character?

A. I would argue that this man is the most important character in the Bible! If Joseph had not encountered him while seeking his brothers, he would have returned home to Jacob and reported that he simply could not find them.

B. Instead, this man directs Joseph to Dothan, where he finds his brothers, who then sell him as a slave to Egypt. This event puts Joseph in prime position, as he rises through the ranks of Egyptian society, to save his family when they come to Egypt during the famine in Canaan.

C. If this man had not encountered Joseph in chapter 37, there would be no story! The reader is supposed to see the divine hand in history here in the most subtle of ways.

Essential Reading:

Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 113–121.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 208–216 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 206–213.

Supplementary Reading:

Gary A. Rendsburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 2 (1998–1999); available at: http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/.

J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide*, pp. 79–82, 99–101.

Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, pp. 48–50.

Questions to Consider:

1. We continue to identify literary devices used by the biblical authors. Do you think that the average Israelite reader would have grasped these techniques?
2. To some extent, I am being playful when I refer to the unnamed man in Genesis 37:15–17 as the most important character in the Bible. Or am I? What do you think?

Lecture Twenty-One
Genesis 38, The Story of Judah and Tamar

Scope: Chapter 37 ends with Joseph taken to Egypt, but the very next episode in Genesis makes no mention of him. Instead, Genesis 38 relates the story of one of Joseph's brothers, Judah, and his daughter-in-law, Tamar. Although on the surface there appears to be no connection between the two episodes, we note how the author has integrated chapter 38 into the larger Joseph narrative by means of lexical and thematic links. We also return to our discussion of women in the Bible (see Lecture Twelve); here, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute, representative of the lowly and marginal in society, yet it is she, and not powerful Judah, who gains the upper hand, in this case, the ethical high ground, as she teaches both Judah and the ancient Israelite readers the moral lesson.

Outline

I. The Joseph story is interrupted—it begins in chapter 37 and is resumed in chapter 39—by the story of Judah and Tamar interposed here. The legal background of the story is levirate marriage (*levir* is the Latin word for "brother-in-law"): If a man died childless, it was his brother's duty to impregnate the widow in order to produce offspring, which would be counted as the offspring of the deceased brother. (See Deuteronomy 25:5–10.)

II. Judah's first son, Er, dies for displeasing the Lord in unspecified ways. Judah's second son, Onan, dies for refusing to impregnate Tamar, Er's widow. Wanting to protect his third son, Shelah, from this woman, Judah tells her to return to her father's house and remain there, even though she is still legally bound to the household of Judah.

III. Tamar decides to take matters into her own hands and disguises herself as a prostitute.

- **A.** The author puns on the expression *petah 'enayim* in verse 14. The term means both "the entrance of [the city of] Enaim" and "the opening of the eyes," with the latter referring to the slit in Tamar's veil.
- **B.** In another instance of form following content, Tamar is referred to in verses 15–19 by pronouns only. This represents Judah's viewpoint, because he does not recognize her; for Judah, the woman is simply an unnamed prostitute.

IV. At first glance, it appears that this story has nothing to do with the greater Joseph story in which it appears, yet upon closer inspection, we realize a number of important links.

- **A.** Note how Joseph's brothers ask their father to recognize the evidence (of the bloodied tunic) in 37:32, and how Tamar asks Judah to recognize the evidence (of his three personal items) in 38:26, using the same wording.
- **B.** In light of these links, the reader is invited to contrast the action of Judah, who sleeps with Tamar, disguised as a prostitute, in chapter 38, and that of Joseph, who valiantly rejects the offer for an adulterous affair proposed by Potiphar's wife in chapter 39.

V. This story is the third and final example of a deception in the book of Genesis, each of them accomplished through the use of the same props: a goat and clothing.

- **A.** In this manner, Jacob was able to trick Isaac, by using goatskins on his arms and neck to make himself appear hairy, like his brother Esau, and by wearing Esau's clothes, to make himself smell like his brother (chapter 27).
- **B.** Jacob, in turn, was tricked by his sons in chapter 37, when they took Joseph's tunic and dipped it in the blood of a slain goat, thereby to induce Jacob into believing that his beloved son Joseph had been killed by a lion. This is another way in which Jacob was punished, in addition to the playful retribution exacted by Laban (see Lecture Eighteen).
- **C.** The ringleader among Jacob's sons in the deception of their father was Judah (see 37:26–27). Thus, it is fitting that he, in turn, is deceived by Tamar in chapter 38—and, once more, the props are the goat (which he promised to deliver to her as payment) and clothing (the veil used by Tamar in place of the widow's garb that she should have been wearing).

D. The series of deceptions ends here, however, given that Judah admits, "She is right, and I am not" (verse 26). This is yet one more indication of Tamar's moral superiority, which should serve as a model to all Israelites.

VI. Once more it is the low-ranking woman in the story who serves as heroine. Note that Tamar is a non-Israelite who plays the role of the prostitute, that is, a woman on the margins of society, one of the truly lowly. Yet she is the one who takes the moral high ground, because she has been wronged by Judah. She represents Israel, which lacks the might of other nations but can gain and prosper by using both its wit (in a good sense) and morality (which it should possess in large supply).

VII. In addition, once more, we see the younger brother motif present. We noted the case of Zerah and Perez in Lecture Fourteen, and we now read the passage about them in Genesis 38:27–30.

VIII. The naming of the twins Perez and Zerah affords us the opportunity to discuss the meaning of names in the Bible. Frequently, the personal names of individual characters are integrated into the storyline.

A. Isaac means "laughter, he laughs," while Jacob means "heal-grabber."

B. Perez means "breach," and Zerah means "brightness."

IX. We end this lecture with a look ahead to Genesis 39. Here, we read of Joseph in Potiphar's house.

A. The success and bounty in the household are reflected by the departure from the biblical narrative norm. Instead of terse language, we note the rather repetitive and verbose language in Genesis 39:2–6.

B. Finally, as noted above (in item IV.B), the reader is to contrast Judah's action with Tamar with Joseph's valor when enticed by Potiphar's wife.

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 3–12.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 217–223 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 214–220.

Supplementary Reading:

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 264–277.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did the author of the Joseph story interpose the story of Judah and Tamar at specifically this juncture? Can you think of another place where it might have been inserted? Would it have been more effective or less effective in a different location?
2. The author uses one Hebrew word for "whore, harlot, prostitute" in verse 15 (with the corresponding verb and abstract noun in verse 24) and a different Hebrew word for "whore, harlot, prostitute" in verses 21 and 22. Why do you think the author varied the vocabulary here? What literary device may be at work?

Lecture Twenty-Two
Genesis 39, The Story of Potiphar's Wife

Scope: Stories of a sexual nature abound in the Bible, as illustrated by both the story of Judah and Tamar, discussed in the previous lecture, and the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, discussed in this lecture. The latter episode is part of a widespread literary motif, for both ancient Greek and Egyptian texts include the same theme. The Egyptian text is called The Tale of Two Brothers, while the Greek parallel occurs in Homer's *Iliad* with the story of Bellerophontes. In all three cases, a handsome young man is enticed by his master's wife, but in each instance, the lad remains valiant and virtuous—though not without receiving punishment after being falsely accused by the woman of attempted rape or adultery. We will discuss these similarities, though we also will note how the biblical account differs from its Greek and Egyptian parallels.

Outline

I. In the previous lecture, we noted the contrast between Judah's action in chapter 38 and Joseph's action in chapter 39. We now investigate the latter story in greater detail. The main storyline concerns the wife of Potiphar (Joseph's Egyptian master) and how she attempts to seduce Joseph. He remains valiant and virtuous and declines her offer to have sexual intercourse. She turns the tables on him, however, and falsely accuses him of rape.

- **A.** Note the contrast between her words in verse 7, "Lie with me," only two words in Hebrew, and his long response in verses 8–9, 35 words in the Hebrew original.
- **B.** Note the double entendre in verse 6, where "the food that he ate" refers literally to Potiphar's food and also means "the wife/woman with whom he had sexual intercourse."
  1. In Proverbs 30:20, we have a "prooftext," another passage, which demonstrates that *eat* can mean "to have sexual intercourse."
  2. Later on, in post-biblical Hebrew, the basic Hebrew word for "food" or "bread" (*lehem*) is used euphemistically to mean woman or wife.
  3. The reader who did not notice the double meaning in verse 6 presumably would comprehend both senses upon reading verse 9.

II. For one final time in this course, we are able to highlight the literary device of repeated language, though with variation (as opposed to verbatim repetition). There are, in fact, *five* tellings of the story in this chapter.

- **A.** The narrator presents the story objectively in Genesis 39:11–12.
- **B.** We read how Potiphar's wife processed what occurred in verse 13.
- **C.** Next, Potiphar's wife tells her tale twice, first to the servants of the house in verses 14–15, then to her husband when he returns home in verses 17–18.
  1. In the first instance, she states, "He brought us a Hebrew man to play with us" (verse 14), while in the second instance, she says, "The Hebrew slave came into me, whom you brought us, to play with me" (verse 17).
  2. Note how she refers to Joseph as a "Hebrew man" when speaking to the servants of the house; if she called him a slave, they might side with him out of solidarity.
  3. When speaking to her husband, though, she uses the expression "Hebrew slave" as a reminder to him that he is the master and Joseph is the slave and that he should, therefore, take appropriate action.
  4. Similarly, when she speaks to the servants, Potiphar's wife says, "to play with us," thereby showing her solidarity with the servants, as if it were "that Hebrew" versus "we Egyptians."
  5. When speaking to her husband, though, she says "to play with me," because now the issue is her alone, as his sole wife.
- **D.** Finally, we read how Potiphar processed the information conveyed to him by his wife in verse 19: "Thus and so your slave did to me."
- **E.** Joseph is sent to prison by his master (end of chapter 39).

1. Because adultery (or attempted adultery) would carry the death penalty, imprisonment may suggest that Potiphar did not believe his wife fully.
2. This, in turn, raises the possibility that Potiphar was a eunuch, which is the base meaning of the Hebrew noun *saris* in Genesis 39:1. If so, that may explain the behavior of Potiphar's wife.

III. The larger issue to be noted with this story is the following: We have two parallels to this story from other ancient texts.

A. The same motif occurs in the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers (c. 1200 B.C.E.). Here, the wife of the older brother attempts to seduce the younger brother. When he remains virtuous, however, she falsely accuses him of rape.

B. The motif occurs again in Homer's *Iliad* (c. 850, though the date of Homer is hotly debated) in the story of Bellerophontes, who is enticed by Anteia, remains valiant, and is falsely accused of rape.

C. We conclude that this was a popular motif among the various peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean—Egyptians, Greeks, and Israelites.

D. Thus far, we have seen the similarities between the stories. We now focus on the major difference. Although all three heroes are equally valiant and virtuous and each states that the action, if carried through, would be a great sin, the Younger Brother of the Egyptian tale and Bellerophontes of the Greek epic stop with that expression and go no further. Joseph, by contrast, tells Potiphar's wife that the action would be a sin before God. This marks a major feature of Israelite life and society—the manner in which religion and morality were interconnected.

IV. The two chapters that follow the episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife can be summarized as follows:

A. Joseph is sent to prison by his master (end of chapter 39).

1. Notice that Joseph continues to descend, a word that is used several times in this narrative.
2. First, his brothers put him into a pit in Genesis 37. Then, he is taken down to Egypt, a southerly direction but also topographically downhill from the highlands of Central Canaan where the Israelites lived to the Nile Valley. Once in the household of Potiphar, Joseph descends from a high-ranking servant to prison.

B. In prison, Joseph gains a reputation as a dream interpreter; he successfully interprets the dreams of two fellow inmates—the cupbearer, who is restored to his position, and the baker, who is hanged (see chapter 40).

C. Two years later, Joseph is brought before Pharaoh, where he impresses the king of Egypt by interpreting his two dreams (see chapter 41). This leads to Pharaoh installing Joseph as second-in-command in the land of Egypt (see Genesis 41:39–43 in particular).

Essential Reading:

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 423–427.

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 224–228 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 221–225.

Supplementary Reading:

Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, pp. 74–77.

Questions to Consider:

1. Consider the similarity between the Greek and Egyptian parallels discussed in this lecture and the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. How likely do you think it is that the three stories are intimately related, as opposed to the alternative position that the similarities are due simply to chance?
2. Read closely the various tellings of Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis 41 and produce your own literary analysis of this story. Pay special attention to the changes in language between the narrator's voice (verses 1–7) and Pharaoh's relating the dreams to Joseph (verses 17–24).

Lecture Twenty-Three
The Egyptian Background of the Joseph Story

Scope: The parallel between The Tale of Two Brothers and chapter 39 noted in the previous lecture is but one of many points of contact between the Joseph story and ancient Egypt. This lecture surveys a host of such items, including the presence of several Egyptian words in the story; the use of authentic Egyptian personal names (such as Potiphar); the presence of Egyptian customs, such as mummification (noted in 50:2 and 50:26); and the mention of Joseph's death at the age of 110 (see 50:26), matching the ideal lifespan of an ancient Egyptian. The totality of the evidence demonstrates that the ancient Israelite author had an intimate knowledge of Egyptian culture and that, most likely, he expected his Israelite audience to absorb many of these details.

Outline

I. Given that the last part of the book of Genesis takes places in Egypt, the author brings the readers along on the journey, as it were, by incorporating into the narrative a host of elements that reflect the culture of ancient Egypt.

A. There are several Egyptian words in the story, most significantly *'abrek* (41:43), literally, "heart to you," or more idiomatically, "hail," an appropriate expression as Joseph is paraded through the city.

B. The names in the story are also authentically Egyptian, including Potiphar (whom we encountered in the previous lecture), Potiphera (a variant form of the same name, the father-in-law of Joseph), Asenath (Joseph's Egyptian wife), and Zaphenath-paneah (Joseph's Egyptian name, meaning something like "the god has spoken and he has life").

C. Names in antiquity typically have the name of the deity whom one worships embedded into them.

1. Potiphar, Joseph's master, and Potiphera, Joseph's new father-in-law, are variants of the same name, meaning "given by Ra."

2. Earlier in our course, we talked about Akhenaten, and you will remember that the god Aten appears in his name.

3. In Hebrew, those names that end in "yah" reflect the fact that these individuals worshiped *Yahweh*—"yah" is a shortened form of Yahweh—as you see at the end of names such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. If you have "el" in a biblical name, this is a shortened form of the word *Elohim*, as you get in at the end of Samuel, and Daniel, or at the beginning of Elijah and Elisha.

C. Joseph's father-in-law is a priest in the city of On, an authentic place in ancient Egypt, the center of worship of the sun-god Ra, and, thus, later called, most appropriately, Heliopolis by the Greeks (located in the northern suburbs of modern Cairo).

D. Joseph shaves in 41:14. This reflects Egyptian lifestyle, since Egyptians were clean-shaven, whereas Semites wore beards.

E. Joseph interprets dreams, first those of the baker and cupbearer (chapter 40), then those of Pharaoh (chapter 41). Dream interpretation was very much a part of Egyptian society.

F. An Egyptian papyrus from the late 13th century B.C.E. describes a group of Semites from the land of Edom arriving in the eastern Delta of Egypt, along with their flocks, in order to escape drought and famine in their homeland. This historical reference offers a striking parallel to the description of the Israelites settling in Egypt under similar circumstances. In both cases, moreover, the Egyptians grant permission for the Semites to settle in their land.

G. Both Jacob and Joseph were embalmed when they died (chapter 50), reflecting the quintessential Egyptian custom of mummification. [See the **Essay: Mummification** at the conclusion of this lecture for additional information.]

H. Joseph lived to the age of 110 (see 50:26), which represents the ideal lifetime of an ancient Egyptian.

II. Although we cannot judge how historical this story may be—we have no evidence for Joseph in Egypt, and the story does not disclose the name of the pharaoh but, rather, refers to him always as either "Pharaoh" or "king of

Egypt"—what we can say is that the above elements suggest that the average Israelite readers, or at least a significant percentage of them, could appreciate the Egyptian coloring of the story.

III. Notwithstanding the statement above, we nevertheless can say a few words about the general historical background of the Joseph story, including an attempt at answering the question: Who was the pharaoh under whom Joseph served? [See **Table 23a: Egyptian Chronology**.]

A. The dominant position among biblical scholars is that Joseph served during the Hyksos Dynasty, or the 15th Dynasty (1675–1575). Given that the Hyksos came from Western Asia and, thus, included a large Semitic population, it makes sense that Joseph could have reached a high level of government during this period.

B. The chronology does not work, though, as noted earlier in Lecture Ten, when we discussed the question of when Abraham lived. My approach, accordingly, places Joseph at a later period, either during the end of the 18th Dynasty (1575–1309) or the beginning of the 19th Dynasty (1309–1194), with the latter the more likely.

1. The area in which the Israelites settled is called "the land of Rameses" in Genesis 47:11, using the name of two 19th-Dynasty pharaohs (along with nine other pharaohs from the succeeding 20th Dynasty). Although this usage could be anachronistic, one also must allow for the use of the name Rameses at the time of Joseph.

2. The implication from throughout this story is that the Israelites resided near the capital city, which suggests the 19th Dynasty, given that its pharaohs ruled from the eastern Delta (in contrast to the 18th Dynasty, which was rooted in Thebes in far southern Egypt).

3. Just about everyone agrees that the pharaoh who instituted the slavery in Exodus 1 was Rameses II (1291–1224), which suggests that Seti I (1308–1291) was the pharaoh under whom Joseph served.

Table 23a: Egyptian Chronology

	SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
1675–1575 B.C.E.	**15th Dynasty—Hyksos** (Delta)
	16th Dynasty (ruling concurrently, minor and unimportant)
	17th Dynasty (ruling concurrently, minor and unimportant)
	NEW KINGDOM
1575–1309	**18th Dynasty** (Thebes)
1309–1194	**19th Dynasty** (Delta)
1309–1308	…Rameses I
1308–1291	…Seti I
1291–1224	…Rameses II
1224–1214	…Merneptah
1214–1208	…Seti II
1208–1194	…Minor kings
1194–1087	**20th Dynasty** (Delta)
1194–1182	…Minor kings
1182–1151	…Rameses III
1151–1087 B.C.E.	…Rameses IV–XI

IV. We return to the plotline of the Joseph story.

- **A.** Famine strikes the land of Canaan, and the Israelites turn to Egypt for sustenance.
  - **1.** First, the brothers make two trips to Egypt to obtain grain, though Joseph toys with them throughout.
    - **a.** During the brothers' first trip to Egypt, Joseph imprisons Simeon.
    - **b.** During the brothers' second trip, Joseph threatens to imprison Benjamin.
  - **2.** Judah produces one of the longest and most impassioned speeches in the Bible, in Genesis 44:18–34, thereby moving Joseph to tears and to reveal himself to his brothers.
- **B.** The true message appears in the words spoken by Joseph. In both Genesis 45:5–8 and Genesis 50:20, he tells his brothers that they intended harm but that God turned it into good. The hand of God is to be seen throughout.

Essential Reading:

Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 211–227.

James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, 77–98.

Supplementary Reading:

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 285–308.

Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible*, pp. 80–86, 138–143.

Questions to Consider:

1. What percentage of the population of ancient Israel do you think would have recognized the Egyptian customs reflected in the narrative, understood what the word *'abrek* meant, and so on?
2. When Joseph retains one of the brothers in Egypt, why do you think he chooses Simeon (see Genesis 42:24) as opposed to any of the others (such as Reuben, Levi, or Judah)?

Essay: Mummification

In Lecture Twenty-Three, I noted that the reference in Genesis 50:3 to a 70-day period of mummification for Jacob accords well with the Egyptian evidence. In truth, however, the picture is more complicated.

Evidence from the Bible: First, let us look at the biblical passage, which actually reads as follows: "And they fulfilled for him forty days, for such they fulfill the days of embalming; and the Egyptians bewailed him seventy days."

The verse implies that the actual mummification process took 40 days, while the entire funerary procedure took 70 days. Most likely, this means 40 days plus an additional 30 days for a total of 70 days (as opposed to the alternative, 40 days and 70 days more, which would imply a total of 110 days).

Accordingly, one would concur with the assessment of Donald B. Redford, one of North America's leading Egyptologists, who wrote: "The period of seventy days is probably to be construed as the entire period between death and interment" (*A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* [1970], p. 240).

Thus, the biblical evidence seems to point to 70 days, though note—for the sake of presenting the total picture—that when Joseph is embalmed in Genesis 50:26, the number of days is not given.

Evidence from Egypt: When we look at the Egyptian sources, we note a wide range of days in the documentary evidence, from as few as 30 days to one extreme case of 272 days. Clearly, however, the lower end is the norm.

Most strikingly, we possess a number of references in Egyptian tomb inscriptions to specifically 70 days for the mummification process. Note the following in particular, which date from more or less the time of Jacob (according to our dating schema) and/or the time of the composition of the book of Genesis (again, according to my view):

- Two examples from the 18th Dynasty (1575–1309)
- One example from the 19th Dynasty (1309–1194)
- One example from the 20th Dynasty (1194–1087)
- Three examples from the 21st Dynasty (1087–945)

And then come more frequent references to 70 days during the Saite (26th) Dynasty and the Persian and Ptolemaic periods (for the specific citations, see Redford, op. cit., pp. 240–241).

Evidence from Greek Authors: Additional confirmation is forthcoming from two classical sources. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt in the 5th century B.C.E. and described the customs and rituals of the country in great detail in Book Two of his *Histories*. Herodotus mentions three options: the most expensive method, the middle price, and the least expensive method. For the first of these, he writes as follows (Book Two, chapter 86):

> [3] If they do this [i.e., mummification] in the most perfect way, they first draw out part of the brain through the nostrils with an iron hook, and inject certain drugs into the rest.
> [4] Then, making a cut near the flank with a sharp knife of Ethiopian stone, they take out all the intestines, and clean the belly, rinsing it with palm wine and bruised spices;
> [5] they sew it up again after filling the belly with pure ground myrrh and cassia and any other spices, except frankincense. After doing this, they conceal the body for seventy days, embalmed in saltpeter; no longer time is allowed for the embalming;
> [6] and when the seventy days have passed, they wash the body and wrap the whole of it in bandages of fine linen cloth, anointed with gum, which the Egyptians mostly use instead of glue;
> [7] then they give the dead man back to his friends.

For the least expensive option, Herodotus states the following (Book Two, chapter 88):

> [1] The third manner of embalming, the preparation of the poorer dead, is this: they cleanse the belly with a purge, embalm the body for the seventy days and then give it back to be taken away.

Herodotus does not, by the way, include a length of time for the middle price, though by implication this, too, would have lasted 70 days.

From the above passages, it is clear that 70 days is a typical span of time for the process, though one must admit that the descriptions here suggest that the embalming alone took 70 days, whereas the Bible mentions 40 days for the mummification itself and 70 days for the period of mourning. Nevertheless, it is striking that the number 70 occurs both in Genesis and in Herodotus.

Our second classical source is Diodorus of Sicily (1st century B.C.E.), who also visited Egypt and described the country in great detail. He mentions the Egyptian custom of mourning 72 days for the pharaoh. His description (*Bibliotheca historia*, Book One, chapter 72) reads as follows:

> For when any king died all the inhabitants of Egypt united in mourning for him, rending their garments, closing the temples, stopping the sacrifices, and celebrating no festivals for seventy-two days…. Every Egyptian grieved and mourned during those seventy-two days as if it were his own beloved child that had died.

This, too, is in line, generally speaking, with the biblical passage. In fact, if one reads further in Genesis 50, one notes that a great entourage of Egyptians accompanied Joseph to Canaan to bury his father, Jacob, in Hebron, then returned to Egypt (see verses 7–14). By all accounts, it appears that Jacob was accorded a state funeral befitting a monarch. As such, the 70-day figure comes into even greater focus, especially in light of Diodorus's account. Of course, the biblical passage states 70 days, while this classical author states 72 days, but the two are close enough, and the difference should not cause major concern.
(Note, by way of comparison, that legend holds that 72 translators [6 from each tribe] rendered the Torah into Greek, but that the text quickly came to be known as the Septuagint, "seventy," which modern scholars continue to abbreviate as LXX. This translation was discussed in greater detail in Lecture Sixteen.)

The Stability of Egyptian Religious Rituals: The reader rightly may ask how appropriate it is to use a source from the 1st century B.C.E. to help elucidate a biblical text that dates from nine centuries earlier and that relates an event that purportedly occurred about 1250 years earlier. The answer is that Egyptian culture was so tenaciously conservative—especially in respect to religious rituals—that most scholars feel comfortable using evidence from throughout the 3,000 years of Egyptian history in order to shed light on issues arising from reading the biblical text. This is especially the case, as in the present instance, when Diodorus's description dovetails with sources from the earlier period (again, more or less so, recognizing the slight difference between 70 and 72).

In sum, then, although the picture is not as perfectly clear as we might wish, one is struck by the repeated use of the number 70 in the Bible, by classical authors, and in Egyptian texts with reference to the ritual of mummification.

The Purpose of Mummification: Finally, let us consider briefly why the Egyptians of all people in the ancient world developed the custom of mummification. The answer to this question is tied to their unique view of the afterlife. All other cultures in the ancient world believed that upon death, the deceased descended to the netherworld, a dark, dreary place beneath the earth, to lead a dismal semi-consciousness for eternity—a kind of perpetual 3:00 a.m., if you like. The Hebrews called this place She'ol; the Greeks called it Hades (which could be personified as a deity as well); and the Canaanites, Hittites, and Babylonians similarly held to this belief.

The Hebrew term She'ol is used, in fact, in Genesis 37:35, in the mouth of Jacob, when he states, believing Joseph to be dead, "I will go down to my son, mourning to She'ol." (Some older English translations, such as the King James Version, render this word as "grave.") Note that *all* people—good, bad, and indifferent—were believed to descend to the netherworld upon death, including Jacob in this instance. The belief in a heavenly reward did not exist in biblical times; this would be a development of post-biblical Judaism, borrowed from the world of classical Greek philosophy, in particular Plato, who emphasized the existence of the soul as a distinct entity from the body.

Not so the Egyptians, however. They believed, unlike everyone else in the ancient world, that the dead continued onward in a pleasurable, physical afterlife. It is for this reason that the Egyptians built elaborate tombs for the deceased, into which they placed all necessities for the next world, including furniture and reading material, and developed the custom of mummification, to prevent the body from deteriorating and, thereby, to preserve it for eternity.

Lecture Twenty-Four
One Last Text—and the Text as a Whole

Scope: In this final lecture, we look at one last chapter in the Joseph story in detail, namely, Genesis 49, Jacob's deathbed blessings to his children. We then survey the biblical narrative as it continues beyond the book of Genesis, from the succeeding book of Exodus through the book of Joshua, with the extended account relating Israel's history from the enslavement in Egypt through the arrival in the land of Canaan. In light of this long narrative, we take a second look at Genesis 12:10–13:4, which thus constitutes a microcosm of Israel's history. Finally, we present a major conclusion of our course: The Bible is the record of God's relationship with man, in particular, the people of Israel—yet within that record, we note how the focus remains tenaciously on man.

Outline

I. Genesis 49 is Jacob's deathbed blessing to his 12 sons. Much of what we have been discussing in the latter part of our course comes to the fore here.

- **A.** Reuben, the firstborn, is cursed in verses 3–4, and the reason given is an echo of Genesis 35:22, where Reuben slept with Bilhah. Compare the story of Phoenix, the tutor of Achilles, in *Iliad*, Book 9, where we learn that he attempted to sleep with his father's concubine, after which his father cursed him. This is another instance of a shared literary motif in the ancient world, harking back to our earlier lecture on the need to have broad horizons, using material not only from Israel's near neighbors, such as Egypt and Babylonia, but from farther places as well, including Greece.
- **B.** The next two sons, Simeon and Levi, also are cursed, in verses 5–7. This relates to a story that we did not read in our course, Genesis 34, where these sons sacked the city of Shechem and killed all the men of the city as revenge for the prince of that city, who has the same name, Shechem, violating their sister Dinah.
- **C.** This leaves the door open for the next son, Judah, to be blessed, and indeed, as we have mentioned, he receives the longest blessing in this chapter, five verses, 8–12 (along with Joseph's, also five verses, 22–26).
  1. Verse 8: "your brothers shall praise you"—"your father's sons shall bow down to you."
  2. Verse 9: Judah is compared to a lion, the most kingly of beasts (compare others: Issachar, donkey; Naphtali, deer; Benjamin, wolf).
  3. Verse 10: "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs; so that tribute shall come to him, and the homage of peoples shall be his"—royal language.
- **D.** Yet these same words about Judah can be read in another tone altogether, with the opposite meaning present—a chastisement of Judah, the author's reprimand for what he did in Genesis 37–38—one final scolding.
  1. In verse 9, the words "on prey, my son, you have gone up" also can be read as "on the prey of my son you have gone up"—using the same lexical root for "prey" as occurred in Genesis 37, when Jacob said that his son must have been "torn" by a wild beast. In Genesis 37:33, the verb is *tarof toraf*, and here, in Genesis 49:9, the noun is *teref*, meaning "prey."
  2. In verse 10, we read, "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs," but this is exactly what occurred in Genesis 38, where Judah gave up his staff to Tamar! Note further that the expression "between his legs" always carries a sexual innuendo.
  3. The words in verse 10 "so that tribute shall come to him" also can be read as "until Shelah comes," with reference to Genesis 38 once more.
  4. Thus, Judah is both glorified, as with his great speech in Genesis 44 that brings Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers, and chastised.

II. We conclude, accordingly, that the ancient Israelite writers had an extraordinary freedom to craft their narratives as they saw fit: lauding the heroes with effusive praise when needed and desired and rebuking those same individuals when censure and condemnation were required.

- **A.** None of the major figures in the book of Genesis comes off as a perfect person; witness Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, and so on.

1. Sarah abuses Hagar. Abraham places his wife in danger—not once, but twice—and lies to (or at least misleads) Abimelech. Isaac plays favorites with his two sons. Rebekah deceives her blind husband. Jacob deceives his father.
2. Rachel steals her father's *terafim*—Laban's household idols—and then deceives him (Genesis 31).
3. Joseph is haughty and brings bad reports about his brothers. Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine. The other brothers sell Joseph as a slave. Judah refuses to uphold the law of levirate marriage.

B. Furthermore, if these stories are a reflection of the events and personalities of the 10th century, as we have argued in this course, then presumably, many of these matters reflect on King David, the beloved great king of Israel.
1. This parallels closely the presentation of David in the book of Samuel. David is praised to the hilt in that book, and in later biblical and post-biblical tradition, his status is elevated even more among both Jews and Christians.
2. Yet the same book of Samuel highlights his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and not in a single verse but in a superbly crafted narrative that comprises two entire chapters, 2 Samuel 11–12, which serves as the turning point in David's life story.

C. The biblical authors portrayed their characters as human beings, nothing more, nothing less—with all their positive traits and with all their imperfections as well. This, I submit, is what makes the Bible so engaging.

III. The book of Genesis closes (Genesis 50:26) with the final words "in Egypt," *be-mizrayim* in Hebrew, a conscious ending that looks forward to the book of Exodus. We briefly summarize the story of the book of Exodus and the remainder of the Torah.

A. A new pharaoh comes to the throne in Egypt, and this new king—most likely Pharaoh Rameses II of the 19th Dynasty in the 13th century B.C.E.—enslaves the Israelites (Exodus 1).

B. Moses arises as the leader of the Israelites (Exodus 3–4).

C. After a series of plagues, Pharaoh allows the Israelites to leave—the event that is known as the Exodus (Exodus 12).

D. The Israelites worship God at Mt. Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

E. The Israelites wander through the Sinai, the Negev, and Transjordan for 40 years, reaching the doorstep of the land of Canaan (see especially the book of Numbers).

F. Moses dies (Deuteronomy 34), as leadership is transferred to Joshua, who will lead the Israelites into the Promised Land (described in the book of Joshua).

IV. In light of this outline of the larger narrative, we take another look at Genesis 12:10–13:4 (discussed earlier in Lecture Twelve). All the elements of the Exodus story are present in this short narrative.

A. Note how Sarah represents Israel here (in line with Lecture Twelve), because she is the one taken into Pharaoh's palace, a metaphor for the enslavement of the Israelites.

B. In the first four verses of Genesis 13, we are told that Abraham and Sarah and Lot and the entourage left Egypt, journeyed through the Negev, and came to the cities of Ai and Bethel, the very cities that are mentioned, after Jericho, in the book of Joshua (see Joshua 7-8).

C. This story is a microcosm of the much larger narrative of the people of Israel, from the book of Exodus through the book of Joshua.

D. In short, no Israelite reading this short story in Genesis 12:10–13:4 could fail to see the national destiny of Israel reflected in this short snippet of literature.

V. We come to the summary of our course, extending from the two creation stories in Genesis 1–2 through the story of Joseph in Genesis 37–50.

A. The first 11 chapters of Genesis are of a universal nature, describing the relationship between God and humanity in general.

B. From chapter 12 through the end, the text focuses on God's relationship with a special subset of mankind, that is, the people of Israel.

C. The distinction between these two parts (of unequal size) can be seen in the redactional structuring, with chapters 1–11 laid out in parallel series and with the three cycles that comprise chapters 12–50 laid out in chiastic fashion (see Lecture Fifteen).

D. One point not noted until now is this: The presence of God recedes as one progresses through the book of Genesis.

1. God is very much present in the first 11 chapters, especially in such stories as the creation and the flood.

2. God is still greatly present in the Abraham cycle, especially in the chapters that relate the establishment of the covenant (15 and 17). And, of course, Abraham represents the man of supreme faith in God.

3. God is less present in the Jacob cycle—as the stories focus more and more on human interplay (witness Laban, not God, as the one who punished Jacob for his deception of Isaac). In addition, Jacob is a man of less faith than Abraham; note his vow in 28:20–22: Only if God does all these things for Jacob (providing for him, bringing him back to Canaan, and so on), only then, will Jacob worship God.

4. Finally, in the Joseph story, God is least present. He never speaks to Joseph in the entire lengthy narrative. The only time that God speaks in these chapters is to Jacob in 46:2–4.

E. Yet the diminution of God's direct presence in the narrative does not mean that we are supposed to see his removal from the scene.

1. Quite the contrary, for whether God is directly present or "out of sight" temporarily, the author never allows the reader to gain the impression that things happen on this planet without God's involvement.

2. God's involvement may be very direct, as when Onan is immediately punished by death for spilling his seed on the ground; or it may be indirect, as when Laban playfully exacts punishment against Jacob or when Tamar gains the moral upper hand against Judah.

3. God may direct events directly, as when he commands Abraham to go forth from his homeland, or he may do so indirectly, as when he places an unnamed man in Joseph's path as he journeys to locate his brothers to see how they are faring.

VI. This, perhaps, is the greatest lesson that we should learn from our course. The Bible is the record of God's relationship with man, especially the people of Israel, as understood by one subset of mankind, namely, again, the nation of Israel.

A. Yet within that record, the focus remains tenaciously on man. We get very few glimpses of God in the Bible, and none, I would submit, in the book of Genesis, not even in the creation stories.

B. God is the subject time and again—and the nearness of God and his concern for the earth is felt throughout—but actual pictures and visions of God are not provided.

1. Only occasionally in the Bible does the camera take us to heaven, as it were, to see God—as it does in Job 1–2 and in several passages in the book of Ezekiel. Both of those, incidentally, are later books, from the 6th century, during the Exilic Period.

2. The Ezekiel passages, in fact, are so extraordinary, that they border on the mystical—such is the danger of visits to heaven.

3. Other peoples of the ancient Near East could describe their gods through their mythologies, but Israel recoiled from such literature.

C. Thus, the biblical narrative follows mankind, which in the case of the book of Genesis means the early heroes of Israel, in their attempt to find meaning in life; and we as readers of the Bible gain from that experience, extracting the lessons of their lives and, it is hoped, finding meaning in our own lives.

Essential Reading:

Robert Alter, *Genesis*, pp. 292–301 = Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, pp. 282–291.

Supplementary Reading:

Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 445–481.

Questions to Consider:

1. What points distinguish Jacob's blessing to Joseph (Genesis 49:22–26) from that of all the other brothers in this chapter, including even Judah's?
2. What was there about ancient Israel's theology that prevented the development of a mythology, stories about God in heaven, and so on?

Essay: The Hebrew Language

Hebrew is actually a dialect of the Canaanite language, along with the other neighboring dialects of Phoenician, Ammonite, Moabite, and Edomite, all attested during the 1st millennium B.C.E. This means that the Israelites could converse with their neighbors with relative ease, as is implied throughout the Bible. Canaanite, in turn, belongs to the Semitic family of languages, along with Arabic, Aramaic, Akkadian, and Ethiopian.

We also should mention here Ugaritic, because we have referred to the literature of Ugarit at several junctures during our course. Scholars debate how to classify Ugaritic: Some believe it to be a separate Semitic language unto itself, while others, myself included, believe it to be another Canaanite dialect, albeit one attested at a slightly earlier time, c. 1400–1200 B.C.E.

Hebrew, in turn, can be subdivided into two regional dialects: Judahite Hebrew, used in the south (the area of the kingdom of Judah), and Israelian Hebrew, used in the north (the area of the kingdom of Israel). Given that most of the Bible emanates from Judah in general and/or Jerusalem in particular, the standard dialect used in the biblical books is Judahite Hebrew. Significant portions of the Bible, however, especially material in Judges concerning the tribal leaders who were active in the north and material in Kings detailing the history of the northern kingdom of Israel, are composed in the Israelian dialect. Because the book of Genesis, as we discussed in Lecture Nineteen, is the product of scribes in Jerusalem, it is not surprising to find the standard Judahite Hebrew used throughout the book.

Hebrew is a relatively simple language. That is to say, for example, there are no case endings for nouns (nominative, genitive, accusative, and so on), as exist in such languages as Latin, German, and Arabic; and verb formation is rather standard and predictable, without the large number of anomalous forms and exceptions that occur in a language such as English.

There is grammatical gender, however, so that nouns are either masculine or feminine, and the corresponding verbs, adjectives, pronouns, and so on must agree. A sample Hebrew sentence, taken from the beginning of Genesis 1:21, reads as follows (in transliteration and with grammatical forms identified):

wayyibra'	*'elohim*	*'et*	*hattanninim*	*haggedolim*
and-created (masc. sing.)	God (masc. sing.)	DIR-OBJ	the-(sea)-serpents (masc. pl.)	the-great (masc. pl.)

"And God created the great sea-serpents"

we'et	*kol*	*nepesh*	*hahayya*	*haromeset*
and-DIR-OBJ	every	being (fem. sg.)	that-lives (fem. sg.)	that-crawls (fem. sg.)

"and every living being that crawls [about]."

From this short sample of Biblical Hebrew prose, we may note the following points:

- The standard word order in prose is verb-subject-object, or VSO, in linguistic shorthand.
- Because the subject *'elohim*, "God," is masculine singular, the verb *wayyibra'* must appear in the masculine singular form as well.
- The word order of an adjectival clause is noun + adjective.
- Because the noun *tanninim*, "(sea-)serpents," is masculine plural, the corresponding adjective *gedolim*, "great," must occur in the masculine plural form as well.
- The definite article *ha-*, "the," is prefixed to both the noun and the adjective, with the initial consonant of the word doubled, thus *hattanninim* and *haggedolim*.
- Because the noun *nepesh*, "being," is feminine singular, the corresponding modifiers *hahayya*, "that lives," and *haromeset*, "that crawls," must occur in the feminine singular form as well.

- The conjunction *and* is expressed by the consonant *w* with vowel following and is prefixed to the next word, as in *wayyibra'*, "and-created," and *we'et*, "and-DIR-OBJ."
- Hebrew has a special form, *'et*, that serves to mark the direct object, but this is not translated when rendered into English (indicated here by DIR-OBJ).

As in all languages, basic prose, as in the above and in almost all of the book of Genesis, is simpler than poetry. The latter, which occurs, for example, in Genesis 49 in Jacob's deathbed blessings to his sons, is typically more archaic, both in grammar and lexicon. We may illustrate the point with the use of the word *sut*, "garment," the last word in Genesis 49:11. This lexeme occurs only here in the entire Bible; presumably it was a very rare word, most likely an archaism retained in poetry only.

By and large, however, to emphasize what is intimated above, the prose of the book of Genesis is written in a very basic Hebrew. Almost all of the words used, both nouns and verbs, come from the core vocabulary of ancient Hebrew. Moreover, the same words repeat throughout the book: *man*, *woman*, *father*, *mother*, *son*, *daughter*, *brother*, *sister*, *God*, *covenant*, *earth*, *sky*, *garment*, *goat*, *donkey*, *city*, *mountain*, *rock*, *altar*, *create*, *say*, *go*, *come*, *eat*, *build*, *sacrifice*, and so on. For this reason, and because the stories in Genesis are so well known, most students of Biblical Hebrew begin their study of the language with material from this book.

The Hebrew language was written in a 22-letter alphabet, invented by the Phoenicians and borrowed almost immediately by all the peoples of Canaan. Note that all 22 letters are consonants (see below for a discussion of the vowels). The direction of writing was from right to left.

Note further that the forms of the letters have changed over time. The inscriptions from ancient Israel use the original letter forms, while the Dead Sea Scrolls and all Hebrew literature to the present day use letter forms that developed sometime in the 5th or 4th century B.C.E.

(The difference between the two alphabets is somewhat analogous to the difference between the Gothic script [also called Blackletter or Fraktur], used in Germany until the 1940s, and the Roman or Latin script, which became the norm in Germany since the 1940s and, of course, is used to write English, Romance languages, and hundreds of others.)

The following chart provides the forms of the Hebrew letters, both the original ones and the later ones; the names of the Hebrew letters; and their consonantal values. Note that some of the consonantal sounds of Hebrew do not correspond to specific sounds in English.

Original and Later Hebrew Letters, Their Names, and Consonantal Values

Original letter form	*Later letter form (incl. present-day)*	*Name*	*Value*
	א	aleph	(glottal stop)
	ב	bet	/b/
	ג	gimel	/g/
	ד	dalet	/d/
	ה	he	/h/
	ו	waw	/w/
	ז	zayin	/z/
	ח	het	/ch/ as in German ich, Bach, etc.
	ט	tet	/t/
	י	yod	/y/
	כ	kaf	/k/
	ל	lamed	/l/
	מ	mem	/m/
	נ	nun	/n/
	ס	samekh	/s/
	ע	ayin	(a rough ejection of air from deep in the throat)
	פ	pe	/p/
	צ	tsade	/ts/ as in tse-tse or cats, boats, etc.
	ק	qof	/q/
	ר	resh	/r/
	ש	shin/sin	/sh/ or /s/
	ת	taw	/t/

- Most Jews today pronounce the *waw* as a /v/ sound, not a /w/.
- The letters *tet* and *taw* had distinct pronunciations in antiquity, though almost everyone today pronounces both as simple /t/.
- The letters *kaf* and *qof* had distinct pronunciations in antiquity, though almost everyone today pronounces both as simple /k/. However, because the Latin alphabet includes both <k> and <q>, we avail ourselves of both letters and transliterate *kaf* as *k* and *qof* as *q*.
- The letter ש (next-to-last one in the alphabet) carried two pronunciations, either /sh/ (the more common) or /s/ (the less common). The latter, however, which we call *sin*, was pronounced differently than *samekh* /s/.

As implied above, vowels were not indicated in the writing system. Thus, for example, a string of consonants, such as *samekh – pe – resh*, <spr>, could be pronounced in a variety of ways, including the following:

sapar, "he counted" (past tense)
sepor, "count!" (imperative)
sapor, "to count" (infinitive)
sipper, "he told, he recounted" (past tense)
sapper, "tell! recount!" (imperative)
sapper, "to tell, to recount" (infinitive)
suppar, "was told, was recounted" (past tense passive)
seper, "letter, scroll, written document" (noun)
soper, "scribe" (noun)
separ, "census" (noun)

separ, “Sephar” (toponym; cf. Genesis 10:30)
sappir, “sapphire” (noun)

Readers of texts knew how to pronounce individual words either because they were heirs to an oral reading tradition, passed down from generation to generation, or because the context demanded only one particular possible meaning. For example, in a sentence such as “and David wrote a <spr> to Joab” (2 Samuel 11:14), the word <spr> can only be *seper*, meaning “letter, scroll, written document.”

With the passage of time, certain letters came to indicate vowels (though the practice was not carried out consistently), in particular, *waw*, <w>, for /o/ and /u/, especially when long; *yod*, <y>, for /i/, especially when long; and *he*, <h>, at the end of a word to indicate final /a/. Thus, for example, the spelling of the last word listed above was extended from <spr> to <spyr> because the /i/ vowel therein was pronounced long.

In the early Middle Ages, Jewish scribes invented a series of diacritical marks to be placed (mainly) below and (in one case) above the letters to indicate the vowel sounds consistently. At the same time, they created a complex system of additional marks to indicate the accented syllable on each word and the punctuation of a sentence into syntactic units and subunits (serving like our comma, semicolon, and other marks). Yet another symbol—a simple dot in the middle of a letter—was used to indicate the doubled pronunciation of the consonant, as is necessary in the forms *sipper*, *sapper*, and *suppar* cited above.

Finally, it is important to note the following: This system of markings (comprised of dots, dashes, and so on, in various alignments and arrangements) to indicate vowels, accents, and punctuation was simply a physical way of notating in writing a reading tradition that had been passed down orally by professionally (as it were) trained *tradents* (that is, transmitters of the oral reading tradition) for hundreds of years, stretching back to biblical times.

These tradents and scribes are called the Masoretes, from the Hebrew word *masora*, meaning “tradition,” and the text they created is called the Masoretic Text, or the traditional text as transmitted within Jewish tradition for centuries. Our earliest exemplars of the text are the Aleppo Codex, written c. 900 C.E., housed for many years in the synagogue in Aleppo, Syria, and now on display in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; and the Leningrad Codex, written 1009 C.E., housed in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg (though still called the Leningrad Codex, because it was first studied by scholars and published in the 1920s, when the city was known by that name).

A website devoted to the former, with pictures of each page available for viewing, is: http://aleppocodex.org/flashopen.html.

For information on the latter, including several photos, go to: http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/biblical_manuscripts/LeningradCodex.shtml.

Timeline of Israelite History

c. 1400–1300 B.C.E.	Patriarchs
c. 1300–1275	Joseph as viceroy in Egypt
c. 1275–1175	Slavery
c. 1175	Exodus
c. 1175–1150	Wandering
c. 1150–1140	Joshua
c. 1140–1020	Judges
c. 1020–1000	Reign of King Saul
c. 1000–965	Reign of King David
c. 965–930	Reign of King Solomon
930–721	Kingdom of Israel
930–586	Kingdom of Judah
586–538	Babylonian Exile
538–333 B.C.E.*	Persian Rule

***Note**: Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia in 333 B.C.E. and his rule over the entire Near East, including Israel, from 333–323 B.C.E. brings an end to the biblical period. The succeeding centuries are known as the post-biblical period, the Hellenistic period, the Greco-Roman period, or late antiquity.

Formation of the Canon

c. 450 B.C.E.	Books of the Torah become Jewish canon.
c. 250 B.C.E.	Books of the Prophets enter Jewish canon.
c. 100-150 C.E.	Books of the Writings (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs) enter Jewish canon.
c. 200-700 C.E.	Christian canon formed by accepting the books of the Jewish Bible, the books of the Apocrypha, and the New Testament.

Biblical Names—People and Places

Note: All names in Hebrew mean something, and frequently, the biblical authors played upon these names and their meanings. In such cases, especially where they are relevant to our course, I have included the meaning of the Hebrew name in parentheses.

Aaron: Older brother of Moses; first high priest of Israel.

Abel: Second-born son of Adam and Eve; brother of Cain (see Genesis 4).

Abimelech: King of Gerar, visited by both Abraham (Genesis 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26).

Abimelech: Judge in ancient Israel, son of Gideon and his concubine (Judges 8–9).

Abraham ("great father"): First of the patriarchs; the originator of the Israelite tradition centered on the worship of one god.

Abram ("great father"): Original name of Abraham until it was changed in Genesis 17. The names Abram and Abraham are dialectal variants of each other.

Absalom: Son of David; he led a popular rebellion against his father, which was squelched by David's general Joab, who then killed Absalom (see 2 Samuel 15–19).

Adam ("man"): First male human being according to the biblical tradition.

Adonijah: Son of David and apparently the leading contender to succeed his father, at least until David nominated Solomon as his successor (see 1 Kings 1–2).

Amnon: Firstborn son of David, presumably the one who would have succeeded his father under normal circumstances; killed by his brother Absalom (see 2 Samuel 13–14).

Arabia: Major region to the southeast of Canaan.

Aram: Country to the northeast of Canaan, more or less modern-day Syria.

Aram Naharaim: Literally "Aram of the two rivers," referring to that part of Aram along and beyond the Euphrates River.

Ararat: Mountainous region to the far north of Mesopotamia, in modern-day northeastern Turkey and Armenia.

Asenath: Joseph's Egyptian wife; daughter of Potiphera; our knowledge of ancient Egyptian allows us to explain the name as "the deity is Isis."

Babylon: Major city of ancient Mesopotamia, on the Euphrates River, in modern-day south-central Iraq.

Benjamin: Youngest son of Jacob.

Bethuel: Father of Rebekah, son of Nahor, and thus, a nephew of Abraham.

Bilhah: Handmaiden to Rachel; given to Jacob as a secondary wife.

Cain: Firstborn son of Adam and Eve; brother of Abel (see Genesis 4).

Canaan: Region between Egypt and Mesopotamia, with rather amorphous boundaries, but essentially the land bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Syrian Desert to the east; it was in this land that the people of Israel were resident.

Cyrus the Great: First great ruler of ancient Persia; conquered Babylonia in 538 B.C.E., then permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.

David: Second king of Israel, c. 1000–965 B.C.E.; son-in-law of Saul.

Dinah: Daughter of Jacob and Leah.

Dothan: City in northern Israel, north of Shechem, mentioned in Genesis 37:17.

Edom: Land bordering Israel to the south in the mountain region of Seir (straddling both sides of the modern-day Israeli-Jordanian border).

Egypt: Great culture of the Nile valley.

Eliezer: Servant of Abraham.

Ephraim: Second-born son of Joseph, who supersedes his older brother Manasseh when Jacob places him first in the blessing ceremony.

Esau: Twin brother of Jacob; son of Isaac.

Euphrates: One of the two great rivers of Mesopotamia, west of the Tigris.

Eve ("living"): First female human being according to the biblical tradition.

Garden of Eden: Legendary location that served as home to Adam and Eve before their expulsion.

Gerar: City-state in southern Canaan (see **Abimelech**).

Greece: Major culture of the Aegean Sea region.

Hagar: Handmaiden of Sarah who became Abraham's second wife; mother of Ishmael.

Hannah: Mother of Samuel.

Isaac ("he laughs"): Second of the patriarchs; son of Abraham.

Ishmael ("God hears"): First son of Abraham, born to Hagar.

Ishmaelites: Desert people living to the south and southwest of Israel; biblical tradition held them to be the descendants of Ishmael.

Israel: The people and culture, resident in the land of Canaan, that produced the Bible.

Israelites: People of ancient Canaan, unique in their religious position, characterized by the worship of one deity; the people responsible for the Bible.

Jacob ("heal-grabber," "deceiver"): Third of the patriarchs; son of Isaac.

Jerusalem: Capital city and religious center of ancient Israel, established by David c. 1000 B.C.E.; location of the Temple, built by Solomon c. 965 B.C.E., destroyed 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonians; location of the Second Temple, built by Jews who returned from exile and dedicated in 516 B.C.E., destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

Joab: David's general (also his nephew), who quashed the rebellion by Absalom, then slew him.

Joseph ("add"): Eleventh and favorite son of Jacob; he rose to high station in the government of Egypt.

Joshua: Leader of the Israelites after Moses, c. 1150 B.C.E.

Judah: Fourth son of Jacob, who is very prominent in Genesis 37–50; the name of the leading tribe of ancient Israel, from which came such individuals as David and Solomon; the name of the southern kingdom from 930 B.C.E. onward, until its destruction in 586 B.C.E.

Laban: Brother of Rebekah, son of Bethuel, uncle and father-in-law of Jacob.

Leah (possibly "cow"): First wife of Jacob, daughter of Laban.

Levi: Third son of Jacob; progenitor of the priestly group of ancient Israel (see next entry).

Levites: Group of men who assisted the priests in the sacrificial cult in the Jerusalem Temple.

Lot: Nephew of Abraham.

Manasseh: Firstborn son of Joseph, who is superseded by his younger brother Ephraim.

Medanites: A semi-nomadic people who traversed the Sinai-Negev region south of Israel; mentioned in Genesis 25:2, 37:36 (though in the latter passage, most translations incorrectly read "Midianites").

Megiddo: Major city in northern Israel.

Midian: Land in the general region of Sinai.

Midianites: Desert people living to the south and southwest of Israel, in the general region of Sinai.

Moses: Leader of the Israelites during the Slavery period in Egypt, the Exodus, and the Wandering that followed, c. 1200–1150 B.C.E.

Mount Halaq (spelled "Halak" in most English Bibles): Mentioned in Joshua 11:17, 12:7 as the southernmost extreme of Israel before one crosses the border into the land of Edom.

Nahor: Brother of Abraham.

Noah: Flood hero according to Genesis 6–9.

Perez ("breach"): Son of Judah, younger twin brother of Zerah, who emerges first from the womb of his mother, Tamar.

Persia: Major empire of the ancient world, centered in ancient Iran, created by Cyrus the Great c. 550 B.C.E., who then conquered Babylon in 538 B.C.E.; eventually defeated by Alexander the Great in 333 B.C.E.

Pharaoh: Title of the king of Egypt.

Potiphar: Courtier of Pharaoh and master of Joseph (see Genesis 39).

Potiphar's wife: Wife of Potiphar who attempted to seduce Joseph, then falsely accused him of rape (see Genesis 39).

Potiphera: Egyptian priest; father-in-law of Joseph; our knowledge of ancient Egyptian allows us to explain the name as "he who is given by Ra," with reference to the sun-god; the name of Potiphar (see above) may be a variant form.

Rachel ("ewe"): Second and favorite wife of Jacob, daughter of Laban.

Rebekah: Wife of Isaac.

Reuben: Firstborn son of Jacob; he slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah, then later tried to save Joseph from the scheming of his brothers.

Samson: One of the Israelite judges, c. 1050 B.C.E.

Samuel: Leader of the Israelites during the transition from the period of the Judges to the period of the early monarchy, c. 1040–1010 B.C.E.

Sarah ("princess"): Wife of Abraham; originally called Sarai.

Sarai ("princess"): Original name of Sarah, until it was changed in Genesis 17. The names Sarai and Sarah are dialectal variants of each other.

Saul: First king of Israel, reigned c. 1020–1000 B.C.E.

Seir: Mountainous region south of Israel; homeland of Edom.

Simeon: Second son of Jacob.

Sinai: Tract of land separating Egypt and Canaan; the mountain in that region in which God revealed himself to Moses.

Solomon: Third king of Israel, c. 965–930 B.C.E.; son of David.

Tamar: Daughter-in-law of Judah (see Genesis 38); mother of Zerah and Perez.

Tigris: One of the two great rivers of Mesopotamia, east of the Euphrates..

Ur of the Chaldeans: Biblical term for the birthplace of Abraham; many scholars identify it with the major city by that name in southern Mesopotamia (modern-day southern Iraq); to my mind, however, it should be identified with Urfa in southern Turkey.

Zaphenath-paneah: Joseph's Egyptian name, given to him by Pharaoh, which translates as "the god has spoken, he has life."

Zerah ("shiny, brilliant"): Son of Judah, older twin brother of Perez, though the latter emerges first from the womb of their mother, Tamar.

Zilpah: Handmaiden to Leah; given to Jacob as a secondary wife.

Zipporah: Wife of Moses, originally from Midian.

Biblical Scholars

Alter, Robert (b. 1935): Professor of comparative literature at the University of California at Berkeley and a major figure in the literary approach to the Bible. His translation of Genesis was published in 1996, and his translation of the entire Torah appeared in 2004.

Astruc, Jean (1684–1766): French professor of medicine who also worked in the field of biblical studies. In 1753, he proposed that the book of Genesis was composed of two separate sources used by Moses to compile the book, thus laying the groundwork for the documentary hypothesis.

Buber, Martin (1878–1965): Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar, active in Germany through 1938, then in Israel until his death. He developed a unique style of translating the Bible (together with his colleague Franz Rosenzweig) based on the sounds, rhythms, and syntax of the Hebrew original, which he attempted to capture into German.

Cassuto, Umberto (1883–1951): Jewish biblical scholar, active in Italy through 1938, then in Israel until his death. He was one of the first scholars to integrate the study of the Ugaritic literary texts and the study of the Bible. His major publications include commentaries on Genesis and Exodus.

Fishbane, Michael (b. 1943): Professor of biblical studies at the University of Chicago (and previously for many years at Brandeis University). He has written major studies on the literary style of biblical narratives, on intertextuality within the Bible, and on post-biblical Jewish interpretation of the Bible.

Fox, Everett (b. 1947): Professor of biblical studies at Clark University, Worcester, MA; translator of the Torah and Samuel (other books are in progress), using a unique translation method borrowed from his spiritual mentors, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.

Gordon, Cyrus (1908–2001): One of the leading scholars of the Bible and the ancient Near East in the 20th century. He was active in the field for about seven decades, teaching at Dropsie College, Brandeis University, and New York University (where I studied with him during the years 1975–1980). His autobiography, *A Scholar's Odyssey* (2000), is a delightful read.

Langton, Stephen (c. 1150–1228): Archbishop of Canterbury (head of the Catholic Church in England) who created the system of chapter and verse divisions in the Bible. He also is famous for his role in siding with the English barons in their successful attempt to get King John to sign the Magna Carta.

Rosenzweig, Frank (1886–1929): Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar in Germany. He collaborated with Martin Buber on a unique translation of the Bible into German based on the sounds, syntax, and rhythms of the Hebrew original.

Sasson, Jack (b. 1941): Contemporary biblical scholar, who has made major contributions to the study of the literature of the Bible and the society of the ancient Near East. He taught for many years at the University of North Carolina and now teaches at Vanderbilt University.

Smith, George (1840–1876): British amateur Assyriologist (that is, one expert in the study of ancient Mesopotamia), who first discovered the Babylonian flood account on a tablet in the British Museum in 1872.

Tyndale, William (1484–1536): Early translator of the Bible into English. He was condemned as a heretic, both by the Catholic Church and by the newly established Church of England. Tyndale fled England for the Continent; eventually, he was burned at the stake in Belgium.

Wellhausen, Julius (1844–1918): German biblical scholar who created the classical and most widely accepted version of the JEDP theory in 1878.

Woolley, Leonard (1880–1960): Excavator of major ancient Near Eastern sites, most famously, the great Sumerian city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia.

Wycliffe, John (1320–1384): Early translator of the Bible into English. The Church condemned him for this action and ordered that his books be burned.

Bibliography

Translations:

Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. A superb translation of the Torah by a master reader of ancient Hebrew prose, replete with notes explicating the literary devices used by the ancient Israelite literati.

———. *Genesis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996. The first book of the Bible translated by Alter, which later was incorporated into *The Five Books of Moses*, described above.

Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken, 1995. A unique translation of the Bible that attempts to replicate as closely as possible the sounds, syntax, and cadence of the Hebrew original. Often, this results in an odd-sounding English, but for readers who want to know exactly how the biblical text is worded, this is the best guide available.

The Jewish Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. A recent volume, gaining popularity in college classrooms today. The translation used is the New Jewish Publication Society Version, produced in the 1960s and 1970s, which takes an idiomatic (and, therefore, less literal) approach to the biblical text. The volume includes detailed notes and fine essays, two of which are included below (one under Essential Reading and one under Supplementary Reading).

King James Version. The first authorized translation of the Bible into English, accomplished by a committee of scholars sponsored by King James I of England and completed in 1611. The work is available in a variety of editions, and free access is available on a number of Web sites, including, for example, http://etext.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html, http://www.hti.umich.edu/k/kjv/ and http://www.bartleby.com/108/.

The Catholic Study Bible, second edition: New American Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. The standard translation of the Bible in use by North American Catholics. NAB first appeared in 1970, and it has appeared in a variety of editions since then, including the first edition of CSB in 1990. The text is available online at http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.htm.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. An edition of the Bible commonly used in college classrooms today, incorporating the New Revised Standard Version, the translation used by most Protestant mainline churches in the United States, along with useful notes, maps, and other material.

Oxford Study Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. An edition of the Bible commonly used in college classrooms today, incorporating the Revised English Version, a translation produced by scholars from the British Isles representing different denominations, along with useful notes, maps, and other material.

Zondervan NIV Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. This volume includes the New International Version, a translation sponsored by the International Bible Society and widely used by Evangelical Christians. The text of the NIV is available online at http://www.ibs.org/niv/.

Essential Reading:

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981. A masterful guide to the Bible as literature, with a particular emphasis on the prose material. This volume includes treatments of several stories in the book of Genesis.

Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994. A readable guide to the workings of biblical prose, describing the many techniques present in the text, including, for example, the naming technique and the use of the term *we-hinne*, "and behold."

Friedman, Richard E. *Who Wrote the Bible?* New York: Summit, 1987. The best introduction to the JEDP theory, or documentary hypothesis, available. The author presents the theory in its classic formulation, along with a few of his own original insights and contributions. A very readable work.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *Reading the Women of the Bible*. New York: Schocken, 2002. The definitive work on biblical stories centered on female characters. Because so many of the stories in Genesis focus on women, Frymer-Kensky's book makes for essential reading. As a bonus, the author offers her own translations of the biblical texts scrutinized.

Goldin, Judah. "The Youngest Son, or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 96 (1977), pp. 27–44. A seminal article in a scholarly journal on one of the dominant motifs in the book of Genesis: the vaulting of the younger brother over the firstborn.

Gordon, Cyrus H. "The Patriarchal Narratives." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 13 (1954), pp. 56–59. A short, scholarly article situating the patriarchs in time and place, with the dual conclusion that the main characters in Genesis date to the Late Bronze Age and that Ur of the Chaldeans, the birthplace of Abraham, is to be identified with Urfa in northern Mesopotamia.

Gordon, Cyrus H., and Gary A. Rendsburg. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. A basic introduction to the Bible set against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern history, society, law, and religion.

Greenspahn, Frederick. *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. A detailed investigation into one of the dominant motifs in the book of Genesis and the Bible as a whole, that of the younger son, as discussed in our course.

Greenspoon, Leonard. "Jewish Translations of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 2005–2020. A fine survey of the many translations of the Bible produced under Jewish auspices, spanning more than 2,000 years, from the Septuagint in the 3rd century B.C.E. to the most recent effort of Everett Fox. The volume as a whole, incidentally, is an outstanding reference work, with introductions to each of the biblical books, a running commentary, and excellent essays at the back of the volume (including this one, for example).

Heidel, Alexander. *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963. This work is dated, but it nevertheless remains as a serviceable introduction to a comparison between the Babylonian and biblical flood traditions.

Hoffmeier, James K. *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. A fine treatment of all the Egyptological data relevant to the biblical traditions recorded in the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. Although the emphasis in this book is on the latter material (that is, the Slavery, the Plagues, and the Exodus), the work includes a fine chapter on the Joseph story as well.

Rendsburg, Gary A. "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 2 (1998–1999), available on the Web at http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/. A scholarly article in an online journal treating the literary device of confused language to reflect the confusion or bewilderment of the moment. Two examples from Genesis 37 are included in this article.

———. "An Essay on Israelite Religion," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, New Series, vol. 8. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, pp. 1–17. A basic introduction to the official religion of ancient Israel, that is, the worship of God as espoused by the authors of the biblical books (with occasional side comments about popular trends in ancient Israel).

———. "The Genesis of the Bible," in *The Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair in Jewish History*, Separatum published by the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers, 2005, pp. 11–30; available at: http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/genesis.pdf. The inaugural lecture delivered by the professor of this course upon assuming his position at Rutgers University in 2004. The article presents in detail the arguments for dating the book of Genesis to the 10th century B.C.E., along with the author's theory for assuming that an earlier poetic account underlies the large prose narrative that extends from Exodus through Samuel. (See also the next entry.)

———. "Reading David in Genesis: How We Know the Torah Was Written in the Tenth Century B.C.E." *Bible Review* 17:1 (February 2001), pp. 20–33, 46; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BR/brf01reading_david.html. A more popular version of the author's theory that the book of Genesis dates to the 10th century B.C.E. This article also includes a basic critique of the JEDP theory.

———. *The Redaction of Genesis*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986. A detailed presentation of the literary structure of the entire book of Genesis. This monograph demonstrates the patterns inherent in the four major cycles (Primeval, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph), along with the linking material, then discusses how the redactional structuring militates against the division of Genesis into the postulated sources J, E, and P.

———. "Unlikely Heroes: Women in the Bible." *Bible Review* 19:1 (February 2003), pp. 16–23, 52–53; available at: http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BR/ bswbbr1901feat1.html. A basic article on the use of women in the Bible as reflections of Israel's self-definition, that is, women (and Israel) as the lowly and marginal.

Roaf, Michael. *The Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*. New York: Facts on File, 1990. An excellent survey of the culture and history of the various peoples of Mesopotamia and environs, including the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hurrians, and Hittites.

Sarna, Nahum. *Understanding Genesis*. New York: Schocken, 1970. A first-rate survey of the book of Genesis, with full control of all the scholarly material yet presented in a very readable fashion.

Shanks, Hershel, ed. *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999. An excellent survey of the history of ancient Israel, extending from Israel's origins through the Roman period. The first chapter in the book, by P. Kyle McCarter (with Ronald S. Hendel), surveys the patriarchal narratives.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985. The gold standard of scholarly books on the Bible as literature, in particular the prose material of Genesis through Kings. This volume does not make for easy reading, but it pays major dividends to all who are willing to mine its nuggets.

Supplementary Reading:

Arnold, Bill T., and Bryan Beyer. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. A fine collection of ancient Near Eastern documents relevant to the study of the Bible, including translations of many of the texts discussed in our course (such as the *Enuma Elish*, the flood story incorporated into the Gilgamesh Epic, the Ugaritic epics of Aqhat and Kret, and the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers. For a second such work, see the source by Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, below.

Bar-Efrat, Shimon. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989. The most detailed book available on the panoply of literary devices utilized by the biblical authors. Examples abound on every page, and a comprehensive index allows the reader to look up individual passages, such as the texts that we read from the book of Genesis.

Bird, Phyllis A. *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. An excellent volume on women in the Bible, with special attention to the various roles they play, including, for example, prostitute (or in the case of Tamar in Genesis 38, a woman disguised as a prostitute).

Brettler, Marc Z. "The Canonization of the Bible," in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 2072–2077. An introductory survey of the process that led to the canonization of the biblical books. The volume as a whole, incidentally, is an outstanding reference work, with introductions to each of the biblical books, a running commentary, and excellent essays at the back of the volume (including this one, for example).

Callaway, Mary. *Sing, O Barren One: A Study in Comparative Midrash*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986. A study of the barren woman motif, which we examined in Lecture Fourteen. This book focuses more on post-biblical interpretations, however, than on the biblical material itself.

Day, Peggy L., ed. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. A fine collection of original essays treating various female characters in the Bible.

Fishbane, Michael. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*. New York: Schocken, 1979. A collection of close readings of selected biblical texts (as per the subtitle of the book), including, for example, Genesis 1–11 (the Primeval cycle) and Genesis 25–35 (the Jacob cycle).

Fokkelman, J. P. *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999. Another of the many excellent guides aiming to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. This volume is very user-friendly, as its subtitle indicates, directing the reader with questions for consideration and self-study at every turn.

Foster, Benjamin R. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. One of the two recent translations of the Gilgamesh Epic, including plenty of background material about the world's first great narrative epic poem. (See the source by Andrew George below for the second volume.)

Fox, Everett, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 60 (1993), pp. 45–68. A scholarly article (though quite accessible) devoted to one of the main literary motifs of the book of Genesis and the Bible in general, that of the younger brother superseding his older brother(s).

Friedman, Richard E. *The Bible with Sources Revealed*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003. A polychrome poly-font edition of the Torah, allowing the reader to see with ease the postulated sources of the Pentateuch (J, E, D, and P—along with, at times, their various presumed subdivisions).

George, Andrew. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Penguin, 2000. One of the two recent translations of the Gilgamesh Epic, including plenty of background material about the world's first great narrative epic poem. (See the source by Benjamin R. Foster above for the second volume.)

Licht, Jacob. *Storytelling in the Bible*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978. Another of the many excellent guides aiming to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. The author deals with certain techniques not treated in other works, such as ways of indicating the passage of time.

Matthews, Victor H., and Don C. Benjamin. *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*. New York: Paulist, 1997. A fine collection of ancient Near Eastern documents relevant to the study of the Bible, including translations of many of the texts discussed in our course (such as the *Enuma Elish*, the flood story incorporated into the Gilgamesh Epic, the Ugaritic epics of Aqhat and Kret, and the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers). For a second such work, see the source by Bill T. Arnold and Bryan Beyer above.

McCarter, P. Kyle (with Ronald S. Hendel). "The Patriarchal Age," in H. Shanks, ed., *Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999, pp. 1–31. This article was referred to above under the source by Hershel Shanks in the Essential Reading section.

McGrath, Alister. *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 2001. One of two recent books describing the making of the King James Version of the Bible. This book is must reading for anyone interested in the early history of the Bible in English. The world of early-modern Britain comes alive in McGrath's lively prose. Ditto for Adam Nicolson's book (see next entry).

Nicolson, Adam. *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. One of two recent books describing the making of the King James Version of the Bible. This book is must reading for anyone interested in the early history of the Bible in English. The world of early-modern Britain comes alive in Nicolson's lively prose. Ditto for Alister McGrath's book above.

Rabin, Elliot. *Understanding the Hebrew Bible: A Reader's Guide*. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2005. A readable guide to the Bible as a whole, with individual chapters devoted to each of the Bible's main genres (narrative prose, law, poetry, prophecy, and so on).

Redford, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970. A study of Genesis 37-50 in the light of the Egyptian evidence that sheds light on the narrative. Note, however, that the author seeks to demonstrate that the Joseph story dates to the Persian period, which runs contrary to the approach taken in our course.

Reis, Pamela T. *Reading the Lines: A Fresh Look at the Hebrew Bible*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. A series of original readings of selected biblical texts by an independent scholar. Among the best essays in this volume is the first one on the two creation stories, arguing for an integrated reading of the two accounts.

Rendsburg, Gary A. "The Vegetarian Ideal in the Bible," in L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and G. Shapiro, eds., *Food and Judaism*, *Studies in Jewish Civilization*, vol. 15. Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005, pp. 319–334. An article dealing with the vegetarian ideal in the Bible, incorporating an array of texts, such as Genesis 1, Genesis 9, Leviticus 11 (≈ Deuteronomy 14), and Isaiah 11.

Schniedewind, William M. *How the Bible Became a Book*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. A scholarly yet accessible book about writing in ancient Israel, the production of literature, the social dimensions of reading and writing, and eventually, the creation and canonization of the biblical books.

Sperling, S. David. *The Original Torah*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. An original scholarly investigation into the political background of selected biblical stories, including, for example, the 10th-century-B.C.E. background of the Abraham material.

Walsh, Jerome T. *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001. Yet another of the many works intended to introduce the reader to the workings of biblical narrative prose. This book pays special attention to the patterns inherent in individual stories and to the structures observable in larger chunks of material.

Additional Internet Resources [also see the Translations section above]:

http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/faculty/grendsburg/index.shtml
This is the personal website of Professor Gary Rendsburg. One can find here a variety of articles written by Professor Rendsburg, which are available on the web; along with a complete list of his publications. Note further

that one can access from here his non-credit online mini-course "The Bible and History," offered by Rutgers University.

http://www.bib-arch.org/
This is the website of the Biblical Archaeology Society, headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Society's main goal is to bring the scholarship of expert archaeologists and biblical scholars to educated lay people. It does so most importantly through its semi-monthly magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review*, but also through weekend and week-long seminars and through study tours of Israel, Egypt, and other lands.

http://www.bibleinterp.com/
The website of Bible and Interpretation, which, in its own words, is "dedicated to delivering the latest news, features, editorials, commentary, archaeological interpretation and excavations relevant to the study of the Bible for the public and biblical scholars." One can find a host of interesting essays at this website.

http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/RTOT.HTM
This website contains the online version of Barry Bandstra's (Hope College) excellent textbook, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*. Chapters 1 and 2, entitled "Genesis 1-11: The Primeval Story" and "Genesis 12-50: The Ancestral Story," are the most relevant for our course on the Book of Genesis.