

International Exegetical Commentary
on the Old Testament

David M. Carr

GENESIS 1–11



Kohlhammer

Kohlhammer

International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT)

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Cover:

Top: Panel from a four-part relief on the “Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III” (859–824 BCE) depicting the Israelite king Jehu (845–817 BCE; 2 Kings 9f) paying obeisance to the Assyrian “King of Kings.” The vassal has thrown himself to the ground in front of his overlord. Royal servants are standing behind the Assyrian king whereas Assyrian officers are standing behind Jehu. The remaining picture panels portray thirteen Israelite tribute bearers carrying heavy and precious gifts.

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Bottom left: One of ten reliefs on the bronze doors that constitute the eastern portal (the so-called “Gates of Paradise”) of the Baptistry of St. John of Florence, created 1424–1452 by Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1378–1455). Detail from the picture “Adam and Eve”; in the center is the creation of Eve: “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” (Gen 2:22)

Photograph by George Reader

Bottom right: Detail of the Menorah in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem, created by Benno Elkan (1877–1960): Ezra reads the Law of Moses to the assembled nation (Neh 8). The bronze Menorah was created in London in 1956 and in the same year was given by the British as a gift to the State of Israel. A total of 29 reliefs portray scenes from the Hebrew bible and the history of the Jewish people.

David M. Carr

Genesis 1–11

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Contents

Editors' Foreword	9
Preface and Acknowledgements	11
Introduction to the Commentary	15
Initial Overview of the Contents and Literary Patterns in Gen 1–11	15
Major Themes in the History of Interpretation of Gen 1:1–6:4	18
Major Contours of the Diachronic Background to Gen 1–11	22
Ancient Non-Biblical Precursors	22
The Character of Mesopotamian Primeval Texts and Traditions	24
The Limited Usefulness of the 'Creation' Category for Reading Gen 1–11 . . .	27
Literary Stages in the Formation of Gen 1–11	27
P, Non-P, and Models for their Relationship	27
Layers and Dating of the Pre-P Primeval History	29
Layers and Dating in the Priestly Levels of the Primeval History	33
Early Textual Transmission of Gen 1–11: The Three Major Traditions	36
Moving to Commentary	37
 Genesis 1:1–2:3: The Seven Day Creation Account	 40
Notes on Text and Translation	41
Diachronic Prologue	48
Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Priestly and Its Relations to Gen 2:4b–3:24	48
Separate Precursors to Gen 1:1–2:3: The Enuma Elish Epic and Psalm 104	49
The Question of Stratification within Gen 1:1–2:3 Itself	51
Synchronic Analysis	52
Overview of Gen 1:3–31	54
Commentary	57
Conclusion: Divergent Patterns Spanning Gen 1:1–2:3	76
Synthesis	78
 Genesis 2:4–3:24: The Origins of Adult Human Life in the Garden of Eden	 85
Notes on Text and Translation	87
Diachronic Prologue	92
Genesis 2:4a as a Conflational Superscription	92
Genesis 2:4b–3:24 (Gen 2–3) as a Pre-Priestly Creation Narrative	94
Non-Biblical (Mesopotamian) Precursors to Gen 2–3	96
Other Precursors to Gen 2–3	97
Synchronic Analysis	99
Overview	99
Commentary	101
Synthesis	143

Genesis 4:1–26: First Descendants of the Initial Human Couple	148
Notes on Text and Translation	149
Diachronic Prologue	154
Synchronic Analysis	155
Overview	155
Commentary	156
Conclusion to the Synchronic Analysis	178
Diachronic Analysis	180
Synthesis	182
 Genesis 5:1–32: The Genealogical Line from Adam to Noah and his Sons	 185
Notes on Text and Translation	186
Diachronic Prologue	190
Part One: P and Non-P in Gen 5 (and Relations to non-P in Gen 4)	190
Part Two: A Priestly Toledot Book Standing Behind (most of) Gen 5	192
Part Three: Links of the Toledot Book to (a Late Iteration of) the Sumerian King List Tradition	192
Part Four: Scribal Adaptations of the Chronological System	193
Conclusion to the Diachronic Prologue	194
Synchronic Analysis	195
Overview	195
Commentary	196
Synthesis	202
 Genesis 6:1–4: The Marriages of Sons of God with Human Daughters and Their Effects	 204
Notes on Text and Translation	204
Diachronic Prologue	206
Genesis 6:1–4 as a Part of the Pre-P Primeval History	206
Traditional Precursors to Gen 6:1–4	208
Conclusion to the Diachronic Prologue	209
Synchronic Analysis	210
Overview	210
Commentary	210
Conclusion to the Synchronic Analysis	217
Synthesis	220
 Genesis 6:5–9:17; 9:28–29: Noah and the Flood	 222
Notes on Text and Translation	225
Diachronic Prologue	231
Preliminary Source Analysis of Gen 6:5–9:17	233
Non-Biblical Precursors to the Noah and Flood Story	238
Synchronic Analysis	239
Commentary on the Non-Priestly Story of the Flood and Noah	239
Commentary on the Priestly Story of Noah and the Flood	252
Comments on the Present Combined P/non-P Noah-Flood Story	273

Synthesis	275
Genesis 9:18–29: The Conclusion of the Noah Account—Noah and His Sons	278
Notes on Text and Translation	278
Diachronic Prologue	279
Genesis 9:18–27 as Pre-Priestly	279
Ancient Near Eastern Precursors	280
Literary Stratification: The Addition of Ham (Gen 9:18, 22) and the Spread of Noah’s Family (Gen 9:19)	281
Synchronic Analysis	282
Commentary	282
Concluding Overview of the Non-P Narrative of Noah and his Sons	287
Synthesis	288
Genesis 10:1–32: Post-Flood Peoples Descending from Noah’s Sons	290
Notes on Text and Translation	291
Introduction and Diachronic Prologue	293
Synchronic Analysis	297
Commentary on Pre-P Elements Embedded in Gen 10	297
Commentary on the P/Verbless Framework of Gen 10	305
Comments on the Present (Conflated P/non-P) Overview of Noah’s Post-Flood Descendants	309
Synthesis	312
Genesis 11:1–9: Divine Prevention of Human Collective Power through Linguistic Confusion and the Scattering of Humans	314
Notes on Text and Translation	314
Introduction and Diachronic Prologue	315
Synchronic Analysis	316
Overview	316
Commentary	318
Conclusion to the Synchronic Reading of the Present Text	325
Diachronic Analysis	327
Proposed Literary Strata Inside Gen 11:1–9	327
Non-Biblical Precursors to Gen 11:1–9	328
Genesis 11:1–9 as part of the Pre-Priestly Primeval History	330
Synthesis	331
Genesis 11:10–26: The Genealogical Line from Shem to Abraham	334
Notes on Text and Translation	334
Diachronic Prologue	335
Synchronic Analysis	336
Synthesis	341
Selective Bibliography	342

Indexes 351

Index of Hebrew Words 351

Index of Key Words 352

Index of Biblical Citations 353

Index of Other Ancient Literature 355

Plan of volumes 357

Editors' Foreword

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was “international, ecumenical and contemporary.” The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the Deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to “contemporary,” one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as “synchronic” and “diachronic” and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand “synchronic” to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. “Synchronic” studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand “diachronic” to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time*.

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a “depth dimension” of a given text – how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives – e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical – appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

Fall 2012 The Editors

Preface and Acknowledgements

The following commentary is a guided tour of some of the most interesting and discussed chapters of the Bible. Much like a tour guide informs his group about particular features of an often-visited city, this guide to Gen 1–11 discusses aspects of the biblical text that I know the most about and find particularly fascinating. In this case, many other such commentary/tours of Gen 1–11 have been and will be done, and this tour makes no pretense to cover the text comprehensively.¹ Instead, in agreement with the focus of the overall series, I focus on ways that the Bible might be illuminated through a combination of close reading and attention to the original literary contexts of the texts under discussion. In addition, I have tried to bring together diverse worlds and forms of biblical criticism together in this commentary. I attend in the historical exegesis portions to a mix of international perspectives on the philology and formation of the texts discussed, and I include at least some pointers (in the Synthesis) to how such discussions might interact with non-historical approaches to the biblical text.

Having brought this commentary to a close, I have ever more respect for my predecessors who have done the same. I keep learning interesting things about these texts, and so there is never a point of obvious closure. Moreover, as one works on a commentary of this sort over years, the successive stages of learning necessarily end up reflected in diverse diachronic levels of the commentary itself. I and my editors have done our best (perhaps like the editors of Gen 1–11 itself) to bring the whole into a coherent unity. Nevertheless, I hope remaining imperfections can stand as an important reminder that this guide offers an imperfect and partial, but hopefully suggestive mix of ways one might understand the texts in Gen 1–11.² It does not, contrary to some concepts of biblical commentary, purport to have mastered the text.

This work would be more imperfect if I had not had the aide of numerous people. I have presented and gained invaluable feedback on my work as I presented it to two seminars on Gen 1–11 at Union Theological Seminary (Fall 2015 and Fall 2019) and two seminars at NYU (Spring 2017; Spring 2019 host Liane Feldman), two meetings of the Columbia University Hebrew Bible seminar (September 2015, May 2019), two Colloquiums on Old Testament at Heidelberg and Tübingen (January 2016; hosts Jan Gertz and Erhard Blum), a conference on scribalism and orality at the College de France (May 2016; host Thomas Römer), a workshop on scribal-

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- 1 In accordance with the focus of this book on commenting on Gen 1–11, the concluding index is selective, aimed primarily at offering guidance to a few topics, Hebrew expressions, specific citation of non-biblical texts, and (for the index of biblical texts) discussions of pericopes in Gen 1–11 that occur outside of the main commentary sections focused on those pericopes.
 - 2 In particular, I must stress that, though I have found comparison of Gen 1–11 with cuneiform texts particularly productive, I have depended throughout on others with specialist knowledge of those texts. I hope this commentary provides a useful entry into such comparison, but I have cited editions and other publications by such specialists and hope that readers use these to verify, correct, and further explore the theses advanced here.

ism and Genesis in Koblenz (February 2016; host Michaela Bauks), a faculty and doctoral student gathering in Zurich (July 2018; host Konrad Schmid), and multiple presentations at both the International SBL (2017) and Annual SBL meeting (2016, 2018, 2019). Along the way, I gained specific help from more people than I can gather and name here. Nevertheless, the following is an alphabetical list of some of the individuals who provided extra comments on my work and/or private copies of theirs: Fynn Adomeit, Joel Baden, Walter Bühner, Simeon Chavel, Colleen Conway, John Day, Paul Delnero, Albert DePury, Liane Feldman, Dan Fleming, Aron Freidenreich, Jan Gertz, Esther Hamori, Robin ten Hoopen, Ki-Eun Jang, Ed Greenstein, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, Konrad Schmid, Stephan Schorch, Mark Smith, and (for discussion of theological matters) my Union Seminary colleagues John Thatamanil and Andrea White.

Above all I thank Erhard Blum for his extraordinary help. Initially he read and discussed my work across a series of visits to Tübingen in Winter 2016 (funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung) and Summer 2017 as we planned then to write this commentary together. Even when he had to withdraw as co-author, he continued to provide generous help up to the final days of the commentary's completion. Along the way I have become ever more convinced that Erhard Blum is one of the premier Hebrew philologists and exegetes of our age. This commentary, especially the translation, is immensely better as a result of his input, even as I must stress that he did not read the final whole and would not agree with some of the positions adopted in it.

One thing that both Erhard Blum and my wife, Colleen Conway, encouraged me to do was to publish my work on Gen 1–11 in two books. My initial work on this commentary ended up being too long to be included in a single volume, and my diachronic discussions of precursors to Gen 1–11 had become too technical. Therefore, I made the decision to include those more technical, diachronic discussions in a separate monograph, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11*, which was published this year (2020) by Oxford University Press (New York). I still treat diachronic issues in this commentary, but the separate publication allowed me to treat them in a more summary way.³ I apologize in advance to some readers who then must consult a different book to find more detailed coverage of issues that interest

3 Because I treat diachronic issues in both books and advance similar positions, some overlap between them is inevitable. I have avoided exact duplication wherever possible, but there are some instances where I deemed certain formulations to be useful to both works and mere shift in wording for the sake of variation seemed superfluous. In addition, I note here several existing and forthcoming article-length publications where I pursue topics relevant to this commentary: “Looking at Historical Background, Redaction, and Possible Bad Writing in Gen 6,1–4: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis,” *Biblische Notizen* 181 (2019):7–24; “Standing at the Edge of Reconstructable Transmission History: Signs of a Secondary Sabbath-Oriented Stratum in Gen 1:1–2:3,” *Vetus Testamentum* 70 (2020):17–41; “Scribal Dynamics at the Beginning of the Bible: The Case of Genesis 1–4,” in *Oral et écrit dans l'Antiquité orientale: les processus de rédaction et d'édition. Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 26 et 27 mai 2016*, ed. Thomas Römer, Hervé Gonzalez and Lionel Marti, OBO (Leuven—Paris—Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2020), 31–50; and “On the Meaning and Uses of the Category of ‘Diachrony’ in Exegesis” [in honor of Erhard Blum], in *Exegetik des Alten Testaments*, ed. Joachim Krause and Kristin Weingart, FAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

them. At the same time I hope that this move thus makes this particular volume more accessible to those who do not need as much technical background.

I must stress that most of this commentary is a synthesis of others' work. Of course, I have attempted through footnotes to indicate particular places where I have gotten ideas. Nevertheless, as a result of reading and composing this commentary over a number of years, there are places where I have absorbed something from somewhere and forgotten my source. In particular, I found myself coming back again and again to certain interpreters of Genesis that I found to be unusually good readers, even when I also disagreed with aspects of their positions. They are cited in the relevant parts of the commentary, but I list here some that I found to be particularly useful and interesting resources to be in dialogue with: studies of all of Gen 1–11 by Umberto Cassuto, John Day, Jan Gertz, Benno Jacob (the original German edition of his commentary), Andreas Schüle, Horst Seebass, Gordon Wenham, and Markus Witte; and studies on specific parts of Gen 1–11 by Samuel Abramsky (Gen 10), Norbert Clemens Baumgart (on Gen 4, 6–9), Walter Bühner (especially Gen 1–3; 6:1–4 and 11:1–9), Frank Crüsemann (Gen 2–3, 4 and 10), Karel Deurloo (Gen 4), Ron Hendel (text-criticism of Gen 1–11), Henning Heyde (Gen 4), Annette Schellenberg (Gen 1–3), and Odil Hannes Steck (on Gen 1 and 2–3). If nothing else, I hope the reader discovers in my footnotes some more guides like these to enrich their reading of Gen 1–11. It should be emphasized that I give full information on many materials that I cite at the locus where those materials are discussed, but (as per the style of the commentary) the reader must consult the selective bibliography at the end of this commentary for bibliographic information on items that are cited by author and short title across disparate pages.

The Kohlhammer staff, particularly Florian Specker and Jonathan Robker, have provided fantastic support as I have worked to complete this project. In addition, I must thank my fellow IECOT/IKAT authors. Some paved the way for this commentary by writing earlier volumes in the series, while others provided especially helpful feedback on draft sections of this commentary at IECOT author-editor workshops in November 2017, August 2019 and November 2019. In particular, I benefited from the careful, frank feedback of Christl Maier at those workshops, and feedback from Carolyn Sharp prompted me to engage postmodern and (consciously) ideological readings of Gen 1–11 more than I otherwise would have.

I conclude with three mechanical notes and one dedicatory one. As per the style of the series, I use abbreviations from John Kutsko et al., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Therefore, I do not provide a separate list of abbreviations here aside from noting here my frequent use of Gesenius¹⁸ to refer to the eighteenth edition of the *Gesenius Handwörterbuch*.⁴ In addition, even though the Hebrew names in Gen 1–11 often diverge from their common equivalents, I have used standard English forms of biblical names as they generally appear in the Bible (following the NRSV), and I default to the most common form of characters whose names change across the biblical narrative, e.g., Abraham rather than Abram. Along the way, I frequently use the convention of using an asterisk (*) to indicate a citation of a verse range that is substan-

4 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament begonnen von D. Rudolf Meyer bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Herbert Donner*, 18th edition (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

tially, though not completely, made up of the texts that I mean to point to. For example, I sometimes refer to priestly elements embedded in Gen 10—Gen 10:1a, 2–7, 20, 22–23, 31–32—with the shorthand Genesis 10* after I have specified those elements at least once in the prior discussion.

Finally, I dedicate this book to a person who will not be aware of its existence for quite some time: my new (and first) granddaughter, Kaia Comorau, who was born on Oct. 17, 2019 in the later stages of finishing this work. While the outset of the present decade (2020) seems quite fraught and the outlook for earth's life unclear, Kaia's birth and that of others in her generation stand as symbols of human commitment to the future. Genesis 1–11 is a story of first births, and it articulates both that potential and certain challenges for human life on this earth. I dedicate this critical analysis of Gen 1–11 to Kaia and other little ones in a prayer for them finding ways to flourish together. To quote a poem by Buddhist teacher and author, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel "For All Beings":⁵

May all beings be cared for and loved,
 Be listened to, understood and acknowledged despite different views,
 Be accepted for who they are in this moment,
 Be afforded patience,
 Be allowed to live without fear of having their lives taken away or their
 bodies violated.
 May all beings,
 Be well in its broadest sense,
 Be fed,
 Be clothed,
 Be treated as if their life is precious,
 Be held in the eyes of each other as family.
 May all beings,
 Be appreciated,
 Feel welcomed anywhere on the planet,
 Be freed from acts of hatred and desperation including war, poverty, slavery,
 and street crimes,
 Live on the planet, housed and protected from harm,
 Be given what is needed to live fully, without scarcity,
 Enjoy life, living without fear of one another,
 Be able to speak freely in a voice and mind of undeniable love.
 May all beings,
 Receive and share the gifts of life,
 Be given time to rest, be still, and experience silence.
 May all beings,
 Be awake.

Let us turn now to look at stories of earth, family, and awakening in Gen 1–11.

5 The poem "For All Beings" comes from Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, *Tell Me Something About Buddhism: Questions and Answers for the Curious Beginner* (Newburyport, MA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2011), 116–117. I thank Zenju Earthlyn Manuel (www.zenju.org) for permission to quote this poem.

Introduction to the Commentary

Initial Overview of the Contents and Literary Patterns in Gen 1–11

The first eleven chapters of Genesis offer a picture of the origins of their audience's present world—e.g., their agricultural way of life, family relationships, distinction from and relation to animals, and the backgrounds of social groups (e.g., Kenites, Canaanites) and famous foreign loci (e.g., Babylon, Nineveh). The general lack of focus in these chapters on specifically Israelite figures and explicitly Israelite places distinguishes these chapters from the rest of the book of Genesis, indeed from Exodus and other historical books that follow.¹ At the most, the figure of Shem among Noah's sons is identified here as Abraham's direct ancestor (Gen 11:10–26), and he is particularly connected in Gen 10:21 with a group—"all the sons of Eber"—that seems specially related to, though not identical to the "Hebrews" with which Israel is later identified.

This primeval history is split by the great divide of the flood narrative. Indeed, the Jewish liturgical calendar separates Gen 1–11 into two liturgical portions that are read in the first two weeks of the annual Torah-reading cycle: an initial pre-flood portion labeled "in the beginning" from Gen 1:1–6:8 and then a subsequent liturgical reading labeled "Noah" that covers Gen 6:9–11:32.

The text of Gen 1–11 itself contains explicit structuring elements: a series of labels, starting in Gen 2:4a, that designate the following text as concerning the "descendants" (תולד[ו]ת)—or, by extension, "generations" for Gen 2:4a—of figures featured in the preceding text. Here again the flood features prominently, with both post-flood labels (Gen 10:1; 11:10) stressing the post-flood character of the descendants that they focalize. As indicated in the following overview, most of these labeled subsections feature an element toward their conclusion that anticipates the focus of the following one:²

In the beginning (Gen 1:1–6:8)

[God's seven-day creation of heaven, earth and living beings in them (Gen 1:1–2:3)]

"These are the generations of heaven and earth" (Gen 2:4a): first humans along with animals (2:4b–4:26)

Anticipation of the first parts of the following Adam-to-Noah genealogy (Gen 4:25–26)

"This is the book of the descendants of Adam" (Gen 5:1a): Adam-to-Noah genealogy (5:1–32), demigods (6:1–4)

Anticipation of flood destruction/Noah rescue (6:5–8)

1 In this respect, Gen 1:1–11:9 resembles the book of Job.

2 The latter point is made in Richelle, "Structure littéraire de l'Histoire Primitive," 4.

Noah (Gen 6:8–11:32)

“These are the descendants of Noah” (Gen 6:9a): Story of Noah/flood (6:9–9:17), Noah and his sons (Gen 9:20–27)

Anticipation of post-flood humanity from Noah’s sons (Gen 9:18–19)

“These are the descendants of Noah’s sons ... after the flood” (10:1a): The expansion and spreading of post-flood humanity (Gen 10:1–11:9)

“These are the descendants of Shem” (Gen 11:10a): From Shem to Israel’s ancestor, Abraham (11:10–26)

Anticipation of the Abraham story (Gen 11:26)

Though the beginning of the “descendants of Terah” section in Gen 11:27–32 is included in the “Noah” liturgical reading, these verses are not actually part of the primeval history. Instead, they begin the story about Abraham and his family that extends into the following chapters. Therefore this commentary will not cover this section, reserving its treatment for the IECOT volume on the Gen 12–50 ancestral materials.

The orientation of the primeval history around creation and flood means that the story of primeval origins clearly distinguishes the present, experienced world of the audience from the world as God initially created and intended it. Thus, Gen 1–11 does not just present contemporary realities as an immutable, divinely-created order. Instead, these chapters depict present reality as the result of a complex process leading from 1) God’s creation of an initial “very good” order (Gen 1:1–2:3, also 2:4–25) that was then compromised by human actions (Gen 3:1–4:24) to 2) a flood destruction and partial revision of the initial creation order (Gen 6:5–9:17). This depiction starts with an account of God’s ideal creation in Gen 1:1–2:3 and the initial story of YHWH’s creation of an initial human, the first animals, and the first woman as the human’s true counterpart and helper (Gen 2:4–24). These two texts, complexly related and distinguished in numerous respects, both explain some aspects of present reality (e.g., distinct components of the present cosmos [Gen 1], the strong bond of a young man to his wife [Gen 2:24]) and also present ideal “counterworlds” (German *Gegenwelten*) to the audience’s present, where, e.g., humans peacefully dominate animals (Gen 1:26, 28–30; 2:18–20) and survive on plant life (1:29–30; 2:8–9, 15–16).

Starting in Gen 3, however, human disobedience and violence disrupts this ideal picture, and subsequent narratives show other ways that humans act and God must react. In this way, the primeval narratives of Genesis explain non-ideal elements of human life—such as animosity with animals (Gen 3:14–15), hard labor for food (Gen 3:17–19, 23), and violence (Gen 4:8)—as the result of primeval events involving the first humans. Nevertheless, the stories of Adam and Eve in Eden and Cain and Abel are much more complex than the simple “crime and punishment” model that is often applied to them.³ These pre-flood stories depict the gradual emergence of the first humans from a state of childlike [and animal-like] lack of shame (Gen 2:25), gullibility, and naivete (Gen 3:1–6) into the hard work and hard choices of life

3 Cf., for example, the influential commentary of Westermann, “all narrative passages of Gen 1–11 are concerned in some way with crime and punishment” (“in den erzählenden Bestandteilen von Gen 1–11 geht es in allen hier aufgenommen Erzählungen in irgendeinem Sinn um Schuld und Strafe”; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 66 [abbreviated translation taken from the ET 47]).

outside the garden. This certainly involves human mistakes and misdeeds, partly instigated by other non-human powers—disobedience prompted in part by the snake Gen 3:1–6 and fratricide associated with sin lurking as a demon in Gen 4:7–8. Nevertheless, humans also gain important adult capabilities along the way, such as godlike “knowledge of good and evil” (3:7, 22), and God does not only respond to their actions with anger, but also with compassion (Gen 3:8–24; 4:9–15). We see this mix of divine responses also in the divine response to marriages between the sons of god and human daughters in Gen 6:1–2. There YHWH imposes a 120-year lifespan limit to humanity (6:3), one that both a) allows the potentially immortal children produced by such marriages to live unusually long lives and yet b) reinforces the mortality of such divine-human offspring. Amidst all this, there is little to indicate that God will impose a world-destroying flood on all life. At most, there are subtle anticipations of the coming of diluvian destruction in the names for the last five primeval ancestors in Gen 5 and their age notices.

The following flood narrative echoes and reverses aspects of the Gen 1 and 2 creation stories. To start, Gen 6:5–6 echoes Gen 2 in describing God’s regret at having made (עשה) humans whose formation (יצר) is thoroughly evil (cf. יצר in 2:7) and then Gen 6:11–12 echoes and contrasts with Gen 1 in describing the corruption of the “very good” earth that was created at the outset (cf. Gen 1:31–6:13). God then goes on to destroy all of humanity except Noah (7:6–8:19) before promising not to bring another flood (8:20–9:17). The status of the flood as an uncreation of God’s initial creation is highlighted by parallels between God’s creation of the heavenly plate in Gen 1:6–8, God’s opening of its windows to create the flood in 7:11, and God’s closing of them in 8:2.

The text in Gen 9:18–11:9 then continues the meditation on human possibilities and limits seen in Gen 3:1–6:4. For example, much as the Eden story in Gen 2–3 presented a fundamentally ambivalent picture of human acquisition of wisdom (3:7, 22) and concomitant condemnation to hard labor (Gen 3:17–19, 23–24), the story of Noah combines a picture of him discovering comfort from that hard labor through farming grapes from the ground (Gen 5:29; 9:20–21a) and his accidental descent into a drunken nakedness reminiscent of nakedness in Eden (Gen 9:21b; cf. 2:25; 3:7) and subsequent imposition of a curse (ארר) on his grandson (Gen 9:21–25; cf. Gen 3:17–19). And, as partially indicated in the table below, various other aspects of the post-flood stories in Gen 9:20–11:9 resume themes of human division (e.g., Gen 4:1–26 // Gen 9:25–10:32) and threat to the divine-human boundary (e.g., Gen 3:22; 6:1–2 // 11:1–4) that were seen in the stories leading up to the flood:⁴

4 The correspondences between these parts of the primeval history are discussed in Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 236–38. See the following commentary for more nuance on the themes of these texts.

General (un)creation, three pairings of the nuclear family, divine-human boundary, peoples

Initial Divine Creation of Humans and the Biome that They Rule (Gen 1:1–2:3)

First Human Couple: End of Nakedness, Start of Farming, Reproduction (Gen 2–3)

Establishment of firm divine-human boundary (of mortality)

First Sibling Pair: Echoes of Eden (Gen 4:1–16)

Kenite Peoples (tents, pastoralists, metalurgists) (Gen 4:20–22)

Sethite Substitute for Abel—Calling on YHWH's Name (4:25–26)

Reinforcement of Divine-Human Boundary (Gen 6:1–4)

Divine Uncreation and Recreation of the Cosmos (6:5–9:17)

Parent-Children Pairing: Echoes of Eden—Farming, Nakedness, and Curse (Gen 9:20–27)

Population of Earth from Noah's Sons (Gen 10)

Spatial Reinforcement of the Divine-Human Boundary (Gen 11:1–9)

(11:1–9 provides background to spread of earth's population in Gen 10)

The flood and post-flood stories (Gen 6:5–11:9) thus unfold themes from the pre-flood section (Gen 1:1–6:4) in two main ways. First, they echo specific elements of Gen 2:1–6:4, describing the continuing development of human farming, unfolding of ethnic divisions, and featuring themes of nakedness, curse, and God's concerns about preserving the divine-human boundary. Second, the flood narrative represents a temporary interruption in the emergence of the current world order, echoing elements of Gen 1–2 in the process of describing God's undoing and revision of God's initial creation work.

Major Themes in the History of Interpretation of Gen 1:1–6:4

The above-surveyed texts in Gen 1–11 have played such an important role in Jewish and Christian interpretation that adequate treatment of that history requires a book (or books) in itself. Therefore, this commentary does not provide a sustained treatment of this area. Nevertheless, I note below a few central foci in the history of interpretation of the texts in Gen 1–11 as a preface to this commentary's diachronic exploration of their formation over time and synchronic reading of the distinct diachronic levels embedded in them.

I start by noting a marked contrast between the Hebrew Bible's general lack of specific reference to stories in Gen 1–11 and the broad and deep reflection on these chapters from the Second Temple period onward. Aside from more general references to creation in a number of biblical texts, the main potential reflections of Gen 1–11 in other Hebrew Bible texts occur in a brief mention of “the garden of YHWH” in Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3, reference to Noah in Ezek 14:14, 20 and Isa 54:9, use of genealogical information from Gen 1–5 in 1 Chr 1:1–4, and a likely reflection on the Gen 1:26–28 picture of God's creation of humans to rule in Ps 8:5–9 (ET

8:4–8; cf. also Ps 136:8–9).⁵ In addition, as will be discussed more later, there may be some ways that the garden of Eden story of Gen 2:4–3:24 is responded to or otherwise appropriated in Psalm 82:7 and texts in Ezekiel on the expulsion of a proud figure from the garden of God/“Eden” because of his pretensions to divinity (28:11–19) and of a great world tree in the garden of God/“Eden” (31:3–9).

This general lack of reflection on texts in Gen 1–11 in the rest of the Bible (excepting Ezekiel) stands in marked contrast to the relatively frequent interpretations of Gen 1–11 in Second Temple Jewish literature and even more intense reflection on these chapters in the Christian theological tradition. For example, several early Jewish texts clarify the background of God’s judgment and the world-destroying flood of Gen 6:5–7:23 by seeing the stories of Gen 2:4–6:4 against the background of Hellenistic and Roman-period traditions about demonic powers and fallen angels.⁶ In addition, early and later Jewish readers added new semi-divine characters to the mythical world of Gen 1–11—taking the snake in Gen 3 to be Satan (e.g., 4 Macc. 18:7–8; Rev 12:9; Apoc. Mos. 16:4; 17:4; possibly Wis 2:24), the “sons of God” in Gen 6:2, 4 as rebel angels producing evil and violent giants who then caused the flood (e.g., 1 En. 6:2–7:5; Jub. 5:1–5), and the figure of Nimrod in Gen 10:8–12 as a giant, evil rebel warrior who led the project to build the tower in Babylon (11:1–9).⁷ Meanwhile, the character of Enoch, who only briefly appears in Gen 5:22–24 as a proto-Noah character who “walked with God” (cf. Gen 6:9), became a much more important figure in several early Jewish texts—moral example, mediator between heaven and earth, sage, and revealer of heavenly secrets (Sir 44:14–16; Ps.-Philo, LAB 1:16; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.85; cf. Heb 11:5).⁸ In a similar vein, interpreters endeavored to elaborate on the Bible’s brief positive comments about Noah, Gen 6:8, 9; 7:1), developing stories of his righteous attempts to warn his contemporaries of the oncoming flood (Sib. Or. 1:127–131, 149–151; Jos. *Ant.* 1.74) and starting to see him as inaugurating a set of “Noachide laws” about murder and other topics that apply to humanity as a whole (cf. Gen 9:2–6).⁹

Later rabbinic and mystical Jewish interpretation of these chapters have varied widely, depending on the theme under discussion. Overall, interpreters often have tended to reinterpret various parts of the Gen primeval history through the lens of the flood narrative’s report of the pervasive, irremovable evil of humanity

5 In addition, it should be noted that some have found more subtle reflections of the Genesis primeval history in other Hebrew Bible texts thought to post-date it. See, for example, the overview and judicious evaluation of proposals for links of Ecclesiastes and Gen 1–11 in Katharine Dell, “Exploring Intertextual Links Between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 3–14.

6 Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20–120.

7 For an overview of early Jewish and Christian interpretations of Nimrod (including a minority of positive depictions) see Van der Toorn and Van der Horst, “Nimrod,” 16–29. Note also later Jewish and Christian readings of Cain as the offspring of Satan in 1 John 3:10–12; Gos. Phil. 61:5–10; Tertullian, *Patience* 5:15; and Tg. Ps.-J. 4:1. For overview of these and other interpretive traditions, see Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, esp. 98–100, 147, 180–81. See below for more on the giants tradition in the book of the Watchers.

8 VanderKam, *Enoch and the Apocalyptic Tradition*; idem, *Enoch, A Man for All Generations*.

9 For a broader, more differentiated survey, see Lewis, *Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*.

(Gen 6:5–7; also 8:21). For example, an initial stratum in the Enochic Book of the Watchers (1 En. 6:2–7:5) is the earliest tradition to link the evil of the flood (Gen 6:5) with the preceding story of marriages of sons of God and daughters of humanity (Gen 6:1–4) by telling how those marriages produced violent giants whose violence caused the flood.¹⁰ The above-noted tradition about evil Nimrod built on that picture, seeing the “warrior” (גבור) Nimrod of Gen 10:8–9 as a continuation of the line of evil, giant “warriors” noted in Gen 6:4. This interpretation then was complemented by a broad tendency to attribute grave sexual sins to Noah’s son, Ham (Gen 9:22–23), and see the building of Babylon (often seen as Nimrod’s work) as an illustration of the persistence of human evil in the post-flood period (Gen 11:1–9; cf. Gen 8:21).¹¹ As will be discussed later in this commentary, these negative strands of interpretation of Gen 1–11, particularly those focused on semi-outsider figures in the story world (e.g., Cain, Nimrod), have been used by some to justify exclusion, colonization, or enslavement of perceived others, especially people of African descent, who are often identified with those figures.

Another broader trend to note is the way that the flood narrative’s depiction of the evil of humanity in Gen 6:5–7 appears to have influenced early Jewish and, particularly, Christian readings of the Garden of Eden story (Gen 2–3). We may already see this in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the Paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus (4Q422 1:11–12), which seems to link the “evil inclination” (יצר ... רע) of humanity mentioned in Gen 6:5 to rebellion of the first human in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3).¹² This idea of original human evil, undergirded by a reading of Gen 2–3 in light of Gen 6:5–7, then appears even more explicitly in Paul’s reading of the Garden of Eden story as an account of the “fall” of all of humanity into sin and death (Rom 5:12–21; also 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45–49).¹³ The Eden story served for Paul as a crucial background for his broader theology about Jesus’s salvation of the entire world, both gentile and Jewish. Though there were other stories in Scripture, such as the golden calf incident (Exod 32:1–14), that depicted sins by Israel, Paul focused on the Gen 3 story of disobedience in Eden because of its potential to illustrate a *universal* human deficiency—something suffered by both gentiles and Jews—to which Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection could stand as a universal

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- 10 This commentary on Gen 6:1–4 below joins earlier studies (e.g., Uehlinger, *Weltreich und ‘eine Rede’*, 566–68; Kenneth Pomykala, “A Scripture Profile of the Book of Watchers,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 263–84; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36, 81–108* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 166–68) in concluding that the giants tradition in the book of the Watchers (1 En. 6:2–7:5; cf. 4Q201 [4QEnoch^a ar]) represents an interpretive adaptation of the Gen 6:1–4 rather than reflecting an earlier non-Biblical tradition.
 - 11 For summary of relevant literature and analysis of the frequently racist and colonialist interpretations of the story of Noah and Ham, see Knust, “Canaan’s Curse.” For survey of early Jewish interpretation of the Babel story, see Phillip Michael Sherman, *Babel’s Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*, BibInt 117 (Boston: Brill, 2013).
 - 12 See Torleif Elgvin, “The Genesis Section of 4Q422 (4QParaGenExod),” *DSD* 1 (1994): 180–96 [here 187] for discussion of questions surrounding this locus.
 - 13 For discussion of issues and scholarship surrounding interpretation of Genesis in 4Q422 and a linking of this retrospective reading to early Christian texts like Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22, Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 24–27, 110–12 (notes).

solution.¹⁴ In the wake of Paul's interpretation, most Christians have read Gen 2–3 as a story of the original sin of the first humans that was then inherited by all of subsequent humanity.¹⁵

The more interpreters focused on Gen 3 as the story of a fall into sin, the more they also sought figures to blame, and the most obvious suspects often ended up being Eve and the snake, rather than the man in the story. To be sure, Paul himself juxtaposed Adam's bringing of sin with Christ's bringing of salvation (e.g., Rom 5:12–21), and only a few early Jewish interpretations stressed Eve's role in bringing death into the world (e.g., Sir 25:24; Philo *Creation* 151–152). Nevertheless, following the scriptural precedent of 1 Tim 2:14–15, many Christian interpreters particularly blamed Eve for the garden sin, projecting onto her an anxiety about women, bodies, and desire that was characteristic of their context.¹⁶ In addition, building on the above-described early-Jewish tendency to see angelic and other demonic powers at work in the primeval period, Christians saw the snake of Gen 3 as Satan in disguise, tricking the woman into her temptress role.

More recently, especially in the seventeenth and subsequent centuries, these first chapters of Genesis have been a central locus for European Christian development of concepts of race, as Europeans colonized and enslaved people of color. On the one hand, the primeval history posed a challenge for concepts of race because it posited a unitary origin for all humans, with the diverse peoples of the world sharing a common set of parents and being siblings to each other. On the other hand, the depiction of post-flood peoples in Genesis 10 came to be a crucial template for European constructs of “Semitic,” “Hamitic,” and “Japhetite” (the latter often associated with Europeans) races and development of religiously-based ideologies supporting racial domination. In particular, the stories of Cain and Ham were reinterpreted to provide an account of African peoples as subhuman products of a separate line of Adam's descendants, bearing the dark “mark” of Cain's infamy (Gen 4:15) and the curse of Ham's descendants to slavery (Gen 9:25).¹⁷

In the contemporary context, the first chapters of Genesis also have been a focus of discussions around gender, ecology and broader questions surrounding the relations of humans to other living beings. For example, some feminist interpreters such as Phyllis Trible have critiqued traditional Christian readings of the Garden of Eden story as a story of a fall caused by Eve's weakness. So also, Trible and others have found salutary the Gen 1 description of God's creation of male and female “humanity” (הָאָדָם) in (or as) God's image.¹⁸ Meanwhile, an increasing sensitivity to the problem of

14 Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 209–10.

15 For discussion of Jewish correlates to this belief, see Alan Cooper, “A Medieval Jewish Version of Original Sin: Ephraim of Luntshits on Leviticus 12,” *HTR* 94 (2004): 445–59.

16 Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang: Eva und die Folgen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 1–86.

17 For a global discussion of the role of Genesis in these constructs, see Kidd, *The Forging of Race*. I will return to these themes in the following commentary with a few more resources.

18 See, e.g., Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. The following commentary will argue for a translation of Gen 1:26 as “as God's image,” but many such interpretations presuppose a rendering of “in God's image.”

human destruction of the environment has raised questions about the anthropocentric character of Gen 1–3, particularly God’s intent in Gen 1:26–28 for humans to “rule” and even “subdue” creation. An oft-cited 1967 article on “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” by Lynn White attributes part of this crisis to the anthropocentric perspective of the Genesis creation stories.¹⁹ In response, some religious interpreters of the Bible have offered more ecofriendly readings of Genesis, seeing Gen 1:26–28 as envisioning human royal *care* for creation or the stories of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel as chronicling the corruption of the earth that follows on human misdeeds.²⁰ Still more recent readings of Gen 1–9 have followed the lead of Jacques Derrida in raising questions surrounding the basic distinction between humans and all other living beings that is presupposed in many such readings, a distinction that is a particular focus of the creation stories in Gen 1–3.²¹

Major Contours of the Diachronic Background to Gen 1–11

This commentary aims to enrich the above-surveyed centuries-long conversation about Genesis with a mix of diachronic and synchronic analysis, each pursued in turn and in relation to each other. As stated in the preface to the series, “diachronic analysis” is understood here to pertain to the “depth dimension” of a given text—that is its various sorts of identifiable precursors: earlier source or compositional-redactional strata, oral traditions, and/or separate biblical or non-biblical texts with which the text specifically interacts. The following section of this introduction prepares for the diachronic portion of the commentary by surveying the main precursors of Gen 1–11 to be discussed across the course of the commentary, starting with pre-biblical Near Eastern literary traditions.

Ancient Non-Biblical Precursors

Much of Gen 1–11 appears to interact with primeval traditions attested in a variety of non-Israelite contexts. Genesis 1, in particular, manifests some potential links to motifs seen in Egyptian contexts. Genesis 6:1–4 features some elements known from Greek, Hittite (originally Hurrian), and Ugaritic texts. In general, however, the texts in Gen 1–11 show the most identifiable connections to texts in the Mesopotamian Sumero-Akkadian literary tradition.

There are several factors that may contribute to the predominance of parallels between Gen 1–11 and Mesopotamian literary texts. To start, we have better access to Mesopotamian literary texts because they were recorded on imperishable clay tab-

19 White, “Ecologic Crisis,” 1205

20 See, e.g., Janowski, “Herrschaft über die Tiere” and Kahl, “Fratricide and Ecocide.”

21 These questions are already raised vis-à-vis Gen 1–4 by Derrida himself in chapter one of his classic *L’animal* (originating in lectures at a 1997 conference). See Hannah M. Strømme, *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2018) for a recent example of a biblical scholar rereading Gen 1–9 from this perspective.

lets and sometimes collected in large archives, such as the library of Ashurbanipal. Yet, even beyond such accidents of preservation and collection, the Mesopotamian literary tradition appears to have included an unusually large number of stories about primeval times that are analogous to parts of Gen 1–11. Egyptian scribes seem to have developed relatively few such traditions about primeval times.²² Moreover, most traditions specifically connected to the Levant (e.g., Ugarit) and broader Mediterranean (e.g., Greece) focus on royal-legendary heroic figures rather than the creation of the cosmos and human civilization.²³ In connection with Gen 6:1–4, I will mention Hittite-Hurrian myths around Kumarbi and some Greek traditions (especially in Hesiod and Homer) that apparently develop older Near Eastern, Hittite, and Levantine themes about ancient interactions of the gods and humans. Nevertheless, the level of focus on such primeval times is far less in Egypt and Mediterranean scribal spheres than that seen in the Mesopotamian literary tradition, and there is not good evidence for a text in Gen 1–11 specifically responding to a specific text in the Egyptian, Greek, Hittite/Hurrian, or Phoenecian sphere.

Finally, it is important to recognize the multiple occasions in which the Judean scribes might have been exposed to Mesopotamian literary traditions or themes from such traditions. We know that cuneiform texts—specifically including the Adapa and Gilgamesh epics—circulated in the Levant during the Bronze Age, and it is possible that early Judean scribes encountered echoes of those texts in some form, whether preserved versions of some Mesopotamian texts themselves or Canaanite reflections of them.²⁴ When Judah was under Assyrian domination, some elite Judean youths may have been sent to Assyria for education in Assyrian literature, much as happened in other parts of the Assyrian empire.²⁵ Finally, it is

22 John Baines, “Egyptian Myth and Discourse: Myth, Gods, and the Early Written and Iconographic Record,” *JNES* 50 (1991): 81–105. As Baines notes, there are indirect indications of various kinds of Egyptian oral narratives about mythic events, and we see the emergence of some narrative primeval myths in New Kingdom Egypt. In this respect the “Memphite Theology” is the exception rather than the rule. For a survey of recent study of this text, see Amr El Hawary, *Wortschöpfung: Die memphitische Theologie und die Siegesstele des Pije: Zwei Zeugen kultureller Repräsentation in der 25. Dynastie*, OBO 243 (Fribourg and Göttingen: Academic Press and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

23 For a survey of semi-cosmogonic Levantine materials (outside the Bible), mostly consisting of stories of conflicts among deities, see Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, CBQMS 26 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 117–33. The cosmogonic elements (purportedly drawn from Sanchuniathon) in Philo of Byblos appear to date well into the Hellenistic period (see Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary*, EPRO 89 [Leiden: Brill, 1981], especially 42–51, 125–30, 178).

24 Note here the recent work William Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: The Beginnings of Scribal Education and How It Shaped the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) that finds inscriptional and biblical evidence that early Levantine education in alphabetic indigenous languages (e.g., Hebrew) followed templates for elementary education derived from Mesopotamian models.

25 Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 305–6; Amitai Baruchi-Unna, “‘Your Servant and Son I am’: Aspects of the Assyrian Imperial Experience of Judah,” in *The Southern Levant under Assyrian Domination*, ed. Shawn Zelig Aster and Avi Faust (University Park, Penn: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 119–38 (here 128–29).

possible that the Judean exiles in Babylon encountered and engaged elements of Babylonian literature during their stay there.²⁶

In the end, the argument for textual influence of Mesopotamian or other traditions must be made on a case by case basis. Nevertheless, numerous discussions in the following commentary will provide support to the idea that the character and broader shape of Gen 1–11 were particularly influenced by primeval compositions and cosmogonic traditions seen in Sumerian-Akkadian cuneiform literature.

The Character of Mesopotamian Primeval Texts and Traditions

Given the close connections of Gen 1–11 to Mesopotamian literary traditions, our examination of these chapters can be informed by a brief overview of primeval themes seen in this corpus. To start, this literature contains an impressive range of texts devoted all or in part to narrating the gods' creation of civilized humanity. These include both Sumerian (e.g., Enki and Ninmah, the Eridu Genesis) and Akkadian (portions of the Atrahasis and Enuma Elish Epics) texts, along with a couple of bilinguals (the Ashur bilingual [KAR 4], Marduk bilingual).²⁷ I will term such texts "primeval creation accounts." In addition, we see a number of important traditions about primeval origins embedded in texts of other genres. They are particularly frequent in hymns (Enki and the World Order, Ninurta's Exploits, Hymn to the Engura, Song of the Hoe, How Grain Came to Sumer). But we also see such primeval themes occur briefly in some incantations,²⁸ the outset of the Rulers of Lagash list, a part of the Eridu Genesis text, and part of a Sumerian school debate (Debate between Grain and Sheep). This mix of genres shows the overall prominence of themes of primeval origins in the Mesopotamian literary tradition and suggests the possibility of mutual influence of primeval creation narratives on the one hand and the treatment of creation themes in other genre texts (e.g., hymns) on the other.

Notably, the bulk of Mesopotamian primeval creation narratives and cosmological traditions in other genres do not focus generally on the creation of the world per se, but rather on describing the emergence of different aspects of the

26 For a sophisticated and up-to-date survey, see the discussion in Jonathan Ben-Dov, *Head of All Years: Astronomy and Calendars at Qumran in Their Ancient Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 270–75, though also note cautions in Mladen Popović, "The Emergence of Aramaic and Hebrew Scholarly Texts: Transmission and Translation of Alien Wisdom," in *Dead Sea Scrolls: Transmission of Traditions and Production of Texts*, ed. Sarianna Metso, Hindy Najman, and Eileen Schuller, STDJ 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 110–14.

27 Here and in the following commentary I generally use designations of Sumerian texts from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>), while depending on Foster, *Before the Muses*, for designations of Akkadian texts.

28 Sumerian and Akkadian *mīs pī* rituals for cult statues, prologue to astrological omens, fragment in ritual (on the latter, see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 494).

Mesopotamian canal-based, temple-city social system.²⁹ In doing so, this etiological dimension of numerous Mesopotamian literary texts integrally connect their audience's world to the story world of the creation narratives, depicting key aspects of contemporary reality, including social reality, as resulting from events at the outset of time. Far from being an added or superficial element of the stories, this overall etiological dimension of creation narratives constituted a key aspect of their claim upon their readers, turning key elements of the contemporary world—e.g., canals, farming, cities, kingship—into testimony of the truth of the creation myths that purported to explain them.

Certainly the creation of humans by the gods (usually Enki/Ea) is often included as a part of this. Nevertheless, even here Mesopotamian compositions include an anticipation of irrigation-based agriculture on which Mesopotamian civilization depended. A particularly frequent theme in Mesopotamian texts is the idea that humans were created to do labor to support the gods. In particular, we see multiple attestations in Sumerian texts of the idea that, prior to the creation of humanity, the lower gods were sorely burdened by labor, bearing the hoe and the bucket³⁰ or more specifically maintaining the canals.³¹ Yet more Sumerian and Akkadian texts then go on to describe how higher gods then create humanity to alleviate the lower gods' labor, often after a specific consultation among the gods. These themes appear already in the ancient Sumerian Enki and Ninmah myth, and they reappear in Sumerian compositions (Song of the Hoe, Debate between Grain and Sheep) and the Akkadian Atrahasis Epic, the Akkadian Enuma Elish Epic and several later Akkadian compositions (Ashur bilingual, Marduk bilingual) as well as being briefly mentioned in some incantations.³²

These stories of the origins of humans typically occur as parts of broader compositions about the origins of Mesopotamian city-temple culture. Alongside the creation of human beings, we see a particular focus in these Mesopotamian origins texts on themes such as: 1) the origins of the great cities like Eridu (in Sumerian compositions) and Babylon (in bilingual and Akkadian compositions); 2) the creation of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; and 3) the founding of field agriculture along with the canal-irrigation system that made such agriculture possible in Mesopotamia. In the hymn to Enki and the world order, along with the Eridu Genesis, the creator, Enki, is praised as the founder of the first city, Eridu, along with other important Sumerian cities. Later bilingual and Akkadian texts (Enuma Elish Epic, the Marduk bilingual) then shift this achievement to Marduk,

29 Pettinato, *Altorientalische Menschenbild und Schöpfungsmythen*, 21–38; Annette Zgoll, “Welt, Götter und Menschen in den Schöpfungsentwürfen des antiken Mesopotamien,” in *Schöpfung*, ed. Konrad Schmid (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 17–70, esp. 25–26 and 64–65; and Claus Wilcke, “Vom altorientalischen Blick zurück auf die Anfänge,” in *Anfang und Ursprung: Die Frage nach dem Ersten in Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. Emil Angehrn (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 3–59.

30 See the Exploits of Ninurta 334–46 and Hymn to Nippur and the Ekur (given in Pettinato, *Altorientalische Menschenbild und Schöpfungsmythen*, 23).

31 Enki and Ninmah 1–11.

32 Note, e.g., the cosmological fragment added to a ritual text and translated in Foster, *Before the Muses*, 494, along with two texts presented in Pettinato, *Altorientalische Menschenbild und Schöpfungsmythen*, 26.

who is praised for founding Babylon and its great Esagila temple. So also, Enki (in the hymn to the world order), Ninurta (in the exploits of Ninurta), Marduk (in the Marduk bilingual and *Enuma Elish*), or the gods in general (in the Ashur bilingual) create the Tigris and Euphrates rivers on which the Mesopotamian irrigation system depended. Finally, the creation of that irrigation system is presupposed in the *Atrahasis Epic* (where humans take over canal maintenance from lower gods) and explicitly described in the *Eridu Genesis*, Ashur bilingual, and the *Hymn to Enki and the world order*.

Notably, this overall etiological emphasis seen in Mesopotamian primeval creation accounts (and creation traditions) seems to have militated against a regular combination of such creation narratives with stories of a world-destroying flood. To be sure, creation and flood are integrated in the *Atrahasis Epic*, focused as it is on various ways that contemporary life structures resulted from the gods' attempts to end human multiplication and its accompanying noise. Nevertheless, the flood does not appear at all in most Mesopotamian primeval creation accounts, and the flood is only incompletely integrated with creation-etiological elements in the *Eridu Genesis*. The documented secondary insertion of a flood account into tablet eleven of the Standard Babylonian version of the *Gilgamesh epic* (hereafter "SB *Gilgamesh*" as opposed to the Old Babylonian [OB] versions) shows that some scribes could bring flood traditions into relation with other textual traditions. Nevertheless, the broader picture of Mesopotamian primeval narratives and traditions shows that narrative integration of creation and flood episodes—seen particularly in the *Atrahasis Epic*—was the exception rather than the rule.

Finally, I must emphasize that the Mesopotamian literary tradition regarding primeval times is varied, constituted as it is by works of various genres in two languages (Sumerian and Akkadian) that were composed over many centuries. There are important differences across this corpus. For example, the Akkadian texts, which generally lie closer than the Sumerian texts to the time of the composition of Gen 1–11, are distinguished from those Sumerian texts by their more resolutely negative view of the heavy labor put on humans by the gods and their more exclusive picture of humans as created through a process of formation, generally a god or goddess crafting humans out of clay (where several Sumerian texts depict humans as sprouting from the earth).³³ In addition, it appears that certain texts enjoyed more prominence in different periods of the Mesopotamian scribal context. In particular, it seems that the *Enuma Elish Epic*, composed in the later second millennium and synthesizing earlier traditions of varied kinds (e.g., the *Anzu* and *Atrahasis Epics*), became increasingly prominent across the first millennium BCE and particularly influenced later representations of primeval times.³⁴ For example, Berossus's *Babylonian History*, composed in the early third century, particularly reflects the version of creation seen in tablet VI of the *Enuma Elish Epic*.³⁵

33 For these and other distinctions, see, e.g., Pettinato, *Altorientalische Menschenbild und Schöpfungsmythen*, 18–46.

34 For an overview of the influence of *Enuma Elish* on other Mesopotamian literature, see Foster, *Before the Muses*, 25–26, 437; Frahm, "Politically Motivated Responses."

35 Pettinato, *Altorientalische Menschenbild und Schöpfungsmythen*, 21.

The Limited Usefulness of the 'Creation' Category for Reading Gen 1–11

The following commentary will explore more similarities and distinctions between texts in Gen 1–11 and their Mesopotamian (and other) counterparts. The point for now is to emphasize how the broader focus of the Gen 1–11 materials corresponds to the focus of many Mesopotamian primeval narratives on the overall origins of human city culture and specific temple cults as well. Both sets of material undermine a common contemporary conceptual division between cosmos-oriented “creation stories” on the one hand and other primeval stories on the other. Such an understanding assumes a semi-scientific division of the order of the natural world from social, ethnic, and other constructed orders (e.g., canals, cities), a division that was foreign to the world of the Bible.³⁶ Where modern readers might separate off the seven-day account of Gen 1 or the Eden story of Gen 2–3 as being stories of “creation,” ancient authors and readers probably would have seen the entire primeval history of Gen 1–11, including its account of post-flood peoples and cities in Gen 10:1–11:9, as an overall account of the primeval origins of the audience’s natural-ethnic-social world.³⁷

Literary Stages in the Formation of Gen 1–11

P, Non-P, and Models for their Relationship

Two and a half centuries of scholarship have established a basic distinction in Gen 1–11 between a Priestly strand (often designated “P” in the following) starting in the seven-day creation account of Gen 1:1–2:3 and a non-Priestly strand (non-P; often termed “J”) starting with the garden of Eden story in Gen 2:4–3:24. The following commentary will argue for and develop this picture. The basic distinctions between these Priestly and non-Priestly materials have been established for over a century and will only be fine-tuned in minor respects across this commentary.

In most cases, the conflator who combined them seems to have preserved major blocks of each. From the P source, the conflator preserved the P creation account in Gen 1:1–2:3, Adam-to-Noah genealogy in most of Gen 5*,³⁸ and the

Basic Shape of
P and non-P

36 See here Francesca Rochberg, “The History of Science and ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 1 (2014):37–60.

37 In this respect, I also disagree with proposals like that of Baumgart (“Das Ende der biblischen Urgeschichte in Gen 9,29,” *BN* 82 [1996]: 27–58) that a primeval history per se excludes material of a specific ethnic-national character (e.g., Gen 10:1–11:9). On this see also the critical remarks in Gertz, “Formation,” 110–11.

38 As noted in the preface, here and elsewhere in the commentary an * is used in citations meant to designate a portion of the verses enclosed in the citation, but not all. In this case, the naming report in Gen 5:29 is widely recognized as non-P.

Shem-to-Abraham genealogy of Gen 11:10–26. From the non-P primeval history, the conflator preserved stories about first humans found in Gen 2:4b–4:26; the brief account of sons of God and daughters of humanity in Gen 6:1–4; the stories of Noah and his sons in 9:20–27; and building of Babylon in 11:1–9. Nevertheless, the conflator appears to have more finely interwoven P and non-P sources in two cases where P and non-P contained parallel materials: the story of the flood (Gen 6:5–9:17) and the overview of offspring of Noah’s sons (Gen 10). In general, across the primeval history the conflator appears to have preserved the P narrative as the primary structuring element, while non-P materials have been more selectively preserved and reorganized to supplement this Priestly substructure. That said, substantial portions of both P and non-P strata have been preserved, forming relatively readable parallel strands.³⁹ Though the conflator occasionally eliminated portions of the non-P narrative in the process of producing a readable text, the combined P/non-P result still preserves enough of each source to produce relatively secure hypotheses about their original contents.

Non-P = Post-
P in Gen
1–11?

Thus this commentary does not join with a number of recent studies that have argued for the post-Priestly, supplementary character of all or most of the non-P material in Gen 1–11. Starting in the late eighties, studies by Wenham (1987), Blenkinsopp (1992, 1995), Ska (1994), and Krüger (1997) argued that major portions of the non-P primeval history were post-Priestly expansions of the Priestly primeval history,⁴⁰ and this approach was then developed extensively in several early twenty-first century monographs along with numerous essays.⁴¹ Overall, these studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of texts in Gen 1–11. Where many (including the present author) were once tempted to place the non-P (a.k.a. “Jahwistic”) primeval history in the early monarchal period, these more recent studies of the non-P primeval history materials have highlighted elements in it that point to a relatively later date, at least for portions of that history. Moreover, many of these studies have illuminated the character of the present (conflated) Gen 1–11 text by showing elegant ways in which the non-P parts of Gen 1–11 are selected and arranged in relation to the P materials that surround them.

P and non-P
conceived
separately, not
supplementarily

That said, there still are strong indicators that the P and non-P strands in Gen 1–11 were originally composed separately before they were combined: the extensive doubling of P and non-P elements (not typical when redactional strata are

39 The term “relative” should be highlighted here because any such conflation involves the subtraction of major elements from the source compositions. Some such elements, such as duplicate birth or death reports, are omitted for obvious reasons, while the omission of other elements simply seems to have to do with a given author-conflator’s individual preferences and compositional goals.

40 Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible*, AB Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 78–98; Jean-Louis Ska, “El relato del Diluvio: un relato sacerdotal y algunos fragmento redaccionales posteriores,” *EstBib* 52 (1994): 37–62 (ET “The Story of the Flood: a Priestly Writer and Some Later Editorial Fragments” in idem., *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009], 1–22); Krüger, “Menschliche Herz,” 74–81.

41 E.g., Bosshard-Nepustil, *Vor uns die Sintflut*; Schüle, *Der Prolog der hebräischen Bibel*; Ar-neth, *Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt*.

added), the relative readability of both strands as originally independent sources, the existence of competing conceptual systems in P and non-P, and identifiable secondary attempts to harmonize those systems. These features will be discussed at more length in the following commentary.⁴²

Furthermore, there are subtle indicators that P was partially modelled on corresponding parts of the non-P primeval history. To be sure, the narratives do not verbally parallel each other, and there is no locus where P cites non-P. In this sense, P is not a paraphrase of non-P nor is it a transformation of non-P in the manner of Chronicles vis-à-vis parts of Samuel-Kings. At the same time, the two strands are distinguished from other Near Eastern chronologies by a shared contrast in both narratives between the deity's creation of an ideal initial creation order (P in Gen 1:1–2:3; non-P in Gen 2:4b–25) and then the disruption of that order by evil (non-P in Gen 3:1–4:24; P in Gen 6:11–13). Moreover, P's depiction of the corruption of the earth by pre-flood violence (Gen 6:11–13; cf. 9:5–6) seems to adapt elements of the non-P depiction of events surrounding Cain's pollution of the earth through the murder of his brother, Abel (Gen 4:8–14).⁴³ Across the following commentary I will discuss yet other elements in P that appear to have had their original home in the corresponding non-P narratives. These and other indicators suggest that the author(s) of P, though uninterested in providing an exact mirror of every element in non-P, had the non-P primeval history among its literary precursors.

P's Relation to
Non-P

Layers and Dating of the Pre-P Primeval History

This commentary will develop the case for one main, additional theory about the formation of the non-P strand: the idea that the non-P material in Gen 1–11 originally did not originally include a flood story. This idea was developed long ago in 1872 by Julius Wellhausen, largely on the basis of the fact that the etiology of various professions linked to Lamech's sons in Gen 4:20–22 did not seem to presuppose that these sons and their descendants would be destroyed by a global flood.⁴⁴ Ten years later Karl Budde offered a source version of Wellhausen's approach, hypothesizing that the non-P material of Gen 1–11 originated in two J sources, one with a flood and one without.⁴⁵ This two-source approach to the non-P ("J") primeval history then enjoyed much popularity amidst a broader focus

The supplementary character of the non-P flood

42 In addition, yet more detailed argumentation is provided in the relevant chapters of Carr, *Formation of Genesis 1–11* and (for the flood narrative) idem. "Meaning and Uses of the Category Diachrony."

43 See the commentary on Gen 9:1–7 below for more details and relevant citations regarding this relationship.

44 Wellhausen, *Composition des Hexateuchs*, 10–14, later followed by Abraham Kuenen, *Historisch-critisch onderzoek naar het ontstaan en de verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds*. Amsterdam: S. L. van Looy, 1887–93), 140, 227–28, 245–46 (ET: 142–43, 233–34, 252); Stade, "Das Kainszeichen," 274–81.

45 Budde, *Biblische Urgeschichte*, esp. 309–11, 314, 321–22, 325–26.