

GENESIS

(All comments by Walter Bruggemann unless otherwise noted.)

- 1) 1:1 – The Hebrew text actually states, “When God (Elohim here and in 2600 other places) began to create...,” followed by two vss that describe what already existed: earth, darkness, water, wind. So God did not create ex nihilo. However, in 2 Maccabees 7:28 we read, “God did not make all these things out of things that existed.”
- 2) 1:1-2:4a – First story of creation,
 - Day 1 -- 1:3-5 Light and darkness – the Jewish day begins at sundown
 - 2 -- 6-8 Earth, earth waters and heavenly waters
 - 3 -- 9-13 Separation of the waters, naming Earth and Seas; in Hebrew, “earth” is feminine, so the feminine earth brings forth the first life: vegetation
 - 4 --14-19 Lights in the firmament to separate day from night and to be for signs, seasons, days, years
 - 5 -- 20-23 Water-living creatures, birds
 - 6 -- 24-31 Land-living creatures, man and woman
 - 7 -- 2:1-4a Sabbath
- 3) 1:26 – The editorial or royal "us" -- or in consultation with Jesus, the angels, the heavenly hosts?
- 4) 1:29 – The basis for religious vegetarians' practices. But see Gen 9:3.
- 5) 2:3 – Later named the "sabbath," from a Hebrew word meaning to cease, to abstain, to terminate.
- 6) 2:4-25 – Josh McDowell in *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* says, “If in Gen 2-19 you translate the first verb “had formed” rather than “formed,” there **aren’t** two stories of creation. That is, God had formed the animals before creating Adam, and now brings them to him for naming. “We do not have here an example of incompatible repetition. We have an example of a skeletal common Hebrew literary device.” /// James Orr: “They are not ‘contradictory,’ they are in fact bound together in the closest manner as complementary. It is a misnomer to speak of Chap 2 as an account of creation at all. It contains no account of either earth or heaven...its interest centers in the making of man and woman.” /// 2:7 – An etiological pun: Ádam: Man, Ádamah: earth.
- 7) 2:10-14. In the July/Aug 1996 issue of BAR, James Sauer states that the geography of the rivers may be backwards. A dry river bed, the Kuwait River, has been found which once entered the Persian Gulf near where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers now enter. It could be the Pishon. The Gihon may be the still-flowing Karun River of Iran, which also flows into the Persian Gulf near the others. So rather than all originating at the same point and dividing, they may all flow into the same point. (In David’s time, the Gihon Spring furnished most of the water for Jerusalem. Gihon means “gusher.” Clearly not the same waters, but perhaps named for the Edenic River?) /// Cush may have been the Sudan, but probably was the land of the Kassites, east of Mesopotamia. Asshur was the capital of Assyria.
- 8) 3:1-2 – God told Adam not to eat fruit of the tree of **Knowledge of Good and Bad**, did not forbid eating from the tree in the center of the garden, the **Tree of Life**. So why does Eve misquote here? Because she didn’t eat from the forbidden tree, she ate from the Tree of Life. Therefore neither she nor Adam die! They broke no divine injunction! Note that

Eve didn't *tempt* Adam. She gave it to Adam and he ate!

So what was the evil of Adam and Eve? Regardless of how you answer the question, the primary point remains unchanged: People, freely, chose to break faith with God. Thus they are directly responsible for the entry of evil into their lives.

- 9) 3:19 – Note that Adam and Eve will “return to dust,” and the serpent is doomed to “eat dust.” Its brood will feed on the remains of humans who killed its ancestors.
- 10) 3:21 – The wearing of animal skins was God’s way of reminding Adam and Eve how close they were to the animal world, not a solicitous act. When King Sargon defeated a ruler, he dressed him in skins. When Gilgamesh lost contact with civilization he wore skins.
- 11) 3:24 – Cherubim had the head of a man, body of a lion with wings.
- 12) 4:2 – “Abel” is the same word used in Ecclesiastes and translated as “vanity” or “emptiness.” Foretells Abel’s fate.
- 13) 4:6-7 – An argument **against** Adam and Eve having committed the "original sin" which made everyone damned from birth: here Cain is told he has a choice to do good or evil. See also Ezek 18:1:4 where he says that the sins of the father should **not** be visited on the sons. See also Jer 31:29-30
- 14) 4:17-24 – Cain’s lineage. From the J source: 4:25-26, 5:9-31. But see #13. From the P source: 5:1-28,30-32; 5:3-6. Cain’s marriage implies a “broader population,” indicating that the stories about him were once not connected with creation.
- 15) 4:25-5:32 – The lineage of Seth. Lamech killed Cain; he and Adah and Zilla were drowned in the flood. So all mankind is descended from Seth. But see 4:17-24 for an argument against this statement. An unresolvable tension.
- 16) 5:25-32 – Methusaleh died in the Flood: He was 187 when Lamech was born (not the same Lamech as in 4:24). Lamech was 182 when Noah was born. Noah was 600 when the Flood came. (Gen 7:6) 187+182+600=969. Methusaleh was 969 when he died.
- 17) 6:1-4 – There seems to be no connection between 6:1-4 and either chap 5 or 6 and its meaning is disputed, and not really understood by anyone. The *Nephilim* were a mythical race of giants, a belief found in other ancient literature. Multiple references in the OT. (Numbers 13:32-33 -- Caleb's men report seeing the descendants of the Nephilim, which they call Anakim. Deut 1:28 -- Moses' speech in which he accepts the reports of the spies. Amos 2:9 -- where the Lord tells how he subdued the giants' descendants, the Amorites.) They were semi-divine, but the placement of this passage immediately before the Flood indicates that the writer felt that these marriages demanded punishment. For which, see Jude vs 6. But then vs 4 seems to deny that the Nephilim were wiped out by the flood. Note that the Nephilim existed before and after the sons of God came to earth and were “the heroes of old,” not the sons of God.
- 18) 6:9 – The Dead Sea Scrolls state that Noah was born perfect, at night, and weighed 350 shekels (7#,3oz).
- 19) 8:1 – God **remembered** -- the turning point in the entire story! (JB: Had he forgotten them?)
- 20) 9:3 – God countermands his own order to Adam -- Gen 1:29-30
- 21) 9:13 – Vss 8-13. The Hebrew word "bow" is always used of a weapon: lightning is the Lord's arrow, shot from his bow, and laid aside when his wrath is sated. The rainbow as a weapon is found in many ancient mythologies.
- 22) 9:20-27. This story is probably told to explain the success of the Israelites in subduing the Canaanites, whose eponymous ancestor, Canaan, had been cursed for sodomizing his grandfather (although the passage does not **say** he did). The passage is probably not a

- negative comment on drinking, nor a theological comment on homosexuality (or whatever it was that Caanan did). More likely it is a priestly attempt to root in pre-history the enmity between Canaan's descendants (the people who lived in the Promised Land when Moses arrived) and Shem's descendants (Israel). Similar to the later relations between Isaac and Ishmael (Moabites, later Arabs), and Jacob and Esau (Edomites). (JB: but why curse Canaan for his father Ham's misdeed, if indeed there was one?)
- 23) 10:8 – Nnimrod was probably an Assyrian king, perhaps a composite of several, including Sargon, Hammurabi, and Gilgamesh.
- 24) 11:8 – Thus the final fulfillment of Gen 1:28: "Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it."
- 25) 11:9 – Not until Acts 2 does the world again hear the same language. V. 14 Eber –the ponymous ancestor of the Hebrews.
- 26) 12:1ff. Abram was probably the personification of the desert nomads who moved into a Canaan already settled by other Israelites. The latter's center of worship was Hebron. Abram brought Yahwism to that community, already a monotheistic society. To outward appearances it was just another of the many migrations which occurred in the ancient world. But the settlement in Palestine resulted in "an extraordinary deepening and enrichment of Yahwism," brought from the desert. The writer of Genesis reasoned that the migration must have been divinely willed. (See *The Same God?* [by JB] for the Koran's take on Abraham, pp.111-119.)

Much more is written about Abraham than we find in our Bible: pseudo-epigraphic texts, Josephus, Philo, Pseudo-Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Essenes considered **Jubilees** to be authoritative scripture. In it, Abraham from early childhood understands there is one true God, whereas Terah doesn't. By the time Abraham is 28, he convinces Terah in this belief; the **Apocalypse of Abraham** records many details of this gradual conversion. But Terah is afraid of reprisal from neighbors if he ceases to worship idols. (Terah means moon, implying that he was a "member" of the Moon Cult). At age 60, Abraham sets fire to his family's shrine. Haran, father of Lot, dies trying to save the idols. Terah's family move to Haran. Alone one night under the stars, Abraham pleads with God to "establish my seed forever." (Then Jubilees quotes Genesis 12:1-3)

Philo of Alexandria (c AD 13-45) writes that Abraham studied Chaldean astrology, rejected it, having received a perception of One True God.

Josephus wrote that Abraham was very intelligent, persuasive, and determined to change the current concept of God. "He was the first to declare that God, the creator of the universe, is one..." He claims that the hostility of the Chaldeans drove Abraham and family out of Ur.

Pseudo-Philo (cBC 25-AD 25) paraphrased Genesis through I Samuel. He wrote that Abraham was one of 12 men who refused to help build the Tower of Babel. They were imprisoned for a week. Joktan, captain of the guard, recognized the power of their God and released all but Abraham, who refused to go free. The citizens forced Joktan to throw Abraham into the brickyard furnace. When he did, an earthquake occurred, flames gushed out, and killed 83,500 people (sic) but left Abraham untouched. God banished the surviving citizens (where to?) and sent Abraham and family out of Babylon. (Joktan was one of the two sons of Eber, so was a gr-gr-gr-grandson of Noah.)

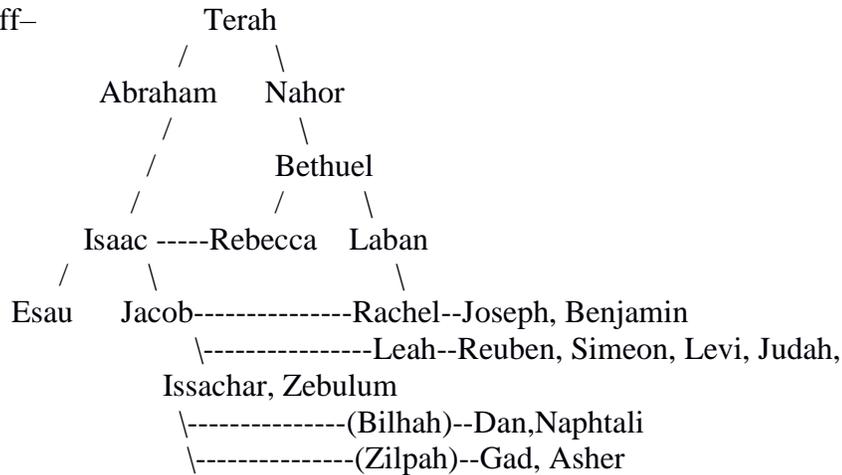
- 27)12:10 – First of three similar stories, see Ch 20 and 26.

- 28) 14:1-14 – The eastern kings subdued the Canaanite kings in fulfillment of Noah’s curse on Ham’s son Canaan. The revolt of the Canaanites is crushed and Lot and family are taken. /// Neither the battle nor the kings can be identified in non-biblical sources. /// Based on numerology, the Alexandrian Jews take this verse to be a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus: the Greek symbol for 300 is **tau**, which is in the shape of the cross; the Greek symbol for 18 is **iota-eta**, the first two letters in Jesus's name. Shinar: Babylon. Ellasar: Northern Mesopotamia. Elam: Eastern Mesopotamia. Sodom, Gomorrah, Adnah, Zeoim, Zoar: all in a ring around the Dead Sea.
- 29) 14:18 – Melchizedek is Hebrew for "righteous king," the Caananite, the Akkadian equivalent of Sargon. Salem, his kingdom, may have been Jerusalem, though in Abram's time it was home of the Jebusites and called Jebus (p. 6a). However, Egyptian chronicles pre-dating the Israelite conquest call the area Urusalim. Abram may therefore have paid tithes at the future site of Solomon's temple. See also Hebrews 5:5-6, 10, 11; 6:20; 7:1-28.
- 30) 15:6 – The Lord reckoned Abram's faith as righteousness in anticipation of Paul's "justification by faith" doctrine. (Romans 4:13-22)
- 31) 16:1-16. See Gal 4:21-31 for Paul's allegory re: Hagar and Sarah. /// Fretheim (NIB) says that the story is a dead end, has only a negative purpose. Israel's God plays an important part in the lives of the "unchosen" ones. E.g. God appears to Hagar, talks with her, makes promises not unlike those given Abram. God acts in both word and deed outside the community of faith. In this story, God enters the picture precisely where Hagar has been excluded from the "chosen" family. The Ishmaelites (Arabs, later Muslims) are who they are because God has kept his promise. The Ishmaelites do not receive negative treatment in the rest of the OT: 25:9, Isaac and Ishmael bury Abraham; 1 Chron 2:17, David's sister marries an Ishmaelite; 1 Chron 27:30-31, one of David's administrators is an Ishmaelite. God blesses Ishmael in Gen 17:20ff.
- 32) 16:12 – But see Job 39:5-12 for God's description of the wild ass.
- 33) 16:13-14 – El-roi – “God who sees.” Beer-lahai-roi – “Well of the Living One who sees me.” (Hagar is the **only** person in the OT to name God.) See Genesis 24:25, where Isaac returns from Beer-lahai-roi to the Negeb and meets Rebekah being escorted from Aram by Abraham’s servant.
- 34) 17:8 – See Psalm 105:44-45, where it is explained why it necessary to have land to keep God's laws. (See 12:1 and Note #26 for explanation of name change.)
- 35) 19:1 – This story is the most frequently cited text in the rest of the Bible. Note close parallel to the outrage at Gibeah, Judges 19:22ff. /// Professor J. Harold Ellens: “Lot is so aware of the homosexual interest of the particular crowd that mobbed his door that he saw them to be of no threat to his daughters...(this) incites a general burst of sarcastic laughter among (those) inside the house, including merriment on the part of his daughters.”
- 36) 19:26--Probably engulfed in a fallout of fire and chemicals -- there are still human-shaped pillars of salt in the area.
- 37) 21:14-34 – v. 14 – Ishmael was 14 or 15. Beer-sheba – “Well of the Seven” –an anachronism because the well had not been dug yet, see Gen 21:31. V. 21 – Paran was in the central part of the Sinai Peninsula. V. 34 -- The Philistines probably came from Greece as part of the “Sea Peoples” confederacy in the 12th century BCE. Settled cities of Gath, Ekron, Gaza, Ashdod, and Askelon along the coastal strip in the southwest part of Canaan. This was Egyptian land but the Egyptians never succeeded in driving them

out. They had a monopoly on iron smithing.

38) 22:2 – In 2 Chron 3:1, Solomon builds his temple in the "land of Moriah." Actually **on** Mt. Moriah -- the threshing floor of Ornan.

39) 22:20ff–



40) 23:9 – Machpelah, in or near Hebron, still a Holy Place for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In addition to Sarah, also buried there are Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

41) 24:2-4 – Abraham came from Ur, but that is not where Nahor and Laban now live, that is in Aram (Syria). “Put your hand under my thigh” is a euphemism for "grasp my circumcised member," circumcision being a sign of God's covenant with the Jews and totally solemnized the oath.

42) 24:62 – “The well of the Living One who sees me.” See Genesis 16:14

43) 25:26-34 – Grasping the “heel” is probably a euphemism for “genitals. The caricature of Esau as a dimwit is intended to explain Israel’s domination of Edom during the time of David and Solomon (2 Samuel 8:9-14, 1 Kings 11:14-22, 1 Kings 3:9-12, 8:20-22).

44) 27:32 – Play on words: my birthright (berkoati), and blessing (birkati).

45) 29:23 – Made possible by the customary veils and heavy drinking. Rachel means “ewe,” Leah “wild cow.”

46) **Chapters 31-33 – (Almost hidden in these chapters is the name change of Jacob to Israel.) See map opposite: 1) 31:17ff – Jacob flees from Laban in Haran, Padan-Aram, and arrives in Gilead. 400 miles away. 2) 32:1ff – After his confrontation with Laban, Jacob camps in Mahanaim (“God’s camp”). 3) 32:24-32 -- While waiting for Esau to come from Edom, Jacob journeys to the Jabbok river, where in the night he wrestles with the Lord. He is renamed “Israel,” and calls the camp “Penuel,” the “face of God.” 4) 33:16-18 – Esau returns to Edom and Jacob goes on first to Succoth, then Shechem. /// 32:4 – There is an extra-Biblical reference to Edom in a 13th century BC Egyptian papyrus which tells of Edomites stopping at a fort of Pharaoh Merneptah.**

47) 34:2 – "By force" --the same verb in Hebrew is used here as is used in Egypt's treatment of the Jews, and Sarah's treatment of Hagar.

48) 36:20 – The eponymous ancestor of the people already living in Edom. They were not driven out but probably intermarried and blended with Esau's descendants.

49) 37:25 – The balm of Gilead, a medicine made from the mastic tree, located in "Transjordan."

- 50) – **Chapter 38: Tamar's story**” Vv 1-11 – Judah married an unnamed Canaanite. He took Tamar as wife for his first-born son Er. Er died, put to death by the Lord. Judah orders his second son Onan to perform Er’s duties, but he performs coitus interruptus instead, so the Lord kills him, too. Tamar returns to her father’s home. /// Vv 12-30: Judah’s wife dies and Tamar tricks Judah into making her pregnant. /// In Matthew 1:3, Tamar and Perez are listed in the genealogy of Jesus, along with Judah. Tamar rebelled against authority and custom. Most religious people would condemn her act. But the Hebrew word for her act in vs 26 means "righteous." It cannot be universalized as righteous wherever it is committed, but may be if it becomes the way of doing justice to a relationship. "It may be necessary to go beyond the law in order to fulfill the law. The OT narrative gives especially high value to the future of the community, in view of which individual acts which might be normally condemned are viewed positively. Relationships are more important than rules; faithfulness may mean going beyond the law."
- 51) 38:9 – Origin of the archaic word “onanism,” now called masturbation.
- 52) 41:14 – Why did Joseph shave? By shaving his beard, Joseph immediately transformed himself from a foreigner into an Egyptian. This passage also foreshadows Joseph’s appearance in court, as well as the fact that later Joseph’s brothers will fail to recognize him, taking him for an Egyptian.
- 53) 41:39 – This may have been a Hyksos king from the upper Nile, when "foreign" pharaohs ruled for 200 years. A true Egyptian pharaoh would have been unlikely to take Joseph as one his strong men. Interpretation of pharaoh’s dream of seven cows, etc., interpreted by Joseph as seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine: a papyrus from 1300 BCE records a letter from King Zoser to a governor of Elephantine describing a famine caused by seven years of failure of the Nile to flood.
- 54) 41:45 – Asenath means "she who belongs to the goddess Neith." Heliopolis (On) was the center of Ra worship. In the apocryphal book, “Joseph and Aseneth, Aseneth’s father is Pentephres. And, Aseneth converts to Judaism so she can marry Joseph.
- 55) 47:18b – The Hebrew word translated as “cattle,” refers to cows, sheep, goats and camels.
- 56) 48:5 – So Joseph becomes the father of two tribes. Originally, neither Joseph or Levi received land. So now, Ephraim and Manasseh make up the 12 tribes.
- 57) 49:1-27 – This "speech" reflects the situation as it was at the time of David, about 600 years later, so it was probably put in written form at that time.

The blessing by Jacob of his ten sons, and their actual future:

- Ruben: in effect, deposed of first-born status; his tribal area absorbed by the Moabites.
- Simeon: his tribal area absorbed by Judah.
- Levi: his descendants become a non-territorial priestly group.
- Judah: his area grows over the years and achieves prominence at the time of Saul and David. "Judah" becomes a royal figure and rules until the Messiah comes.
- Zebulun: no prediction except location with access to the sea near Sidon.
- Issachar: will live in the fertile plains of Esdraelon and his descendants will become servants (slaves?) to others, e.g. the Canaanites or Solomon's forced levy -- 1 Kings 9:21.
- Dan: the image of a snake suggests a small tribe struggling for existence, and in fact the tribe has trouble settling in its original area and migrates north, above Galilee.
- Gad: settled east of the Jordan and responded bravely to raider bands.

- Asher: settled in fertile land that can grow rich food.
- Naphtali: will enjoy its freedom and vitality, and will increase in numbers in the mountains.
- Joseph (Ephaim and Manasseh): God will continue to bless them.
- Benjamin: the image does not correspond to anything in the OT unless it be that he is successful in maintaining his territory between Judah and Ephraim.

Note that Manasseh and Ephraim are not blessed except through their father Joseph.

58) 50:16 – Clear indication that Jacob knew what the brothers did to Joseph