

The Blanche and Irving Laurie
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Inaugural Holder

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The Genesis of the Bible

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The year is 1593—C.E., that is, not B.C.E. We will get to the B.C.E. period soon enough, but for now let us stay with 1593 C.E. The scene is a tavern in London. The following seven men are seated around a table: the playwrights William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Johnson; the poets John Donne and Edmund Spenser; and the essayists Francis Bacon and Walter Raleigh. If the movie “Shakespeare in Love” helps you imagine the scene, great. There, on the spot, these seven men create modern English literature.

What led to this moment in time in 1593, when in my little fantasy world these seven individuals launched the great enterprise known as modern English literature? Let us review the events of the previous century. In 1476 William Caxton brought the first printing press to England, introduced from the continent, representing a new technology, allowing for the easier production of books and thereby stimulating a greater desire to read by the public at large. In the 1500s the Renaissance reached England, and with it the rediscovery of the classics of Greek and Roman literature, especially the former material. New literary forms were introduced from the

continent, in particular the sonnet borrowed from Italy, which Shakespeare and Dunne mastered, and the essay borrowed from France, which Bacon and Raleigh mastered.

In 1588 the English defeated the Spanish Armada, and with that event England became the dominant political and military force in Europe. It was an age of glory for England, characterized by patriotism, exploration, and foreign colonization. Fifteen years before our seven men are sitting in the London tavern, Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe, claiming lands on distant shores for England, including present-day northern California and Oregon. All of this created a new class of wealthy Englishmen, a rich merchant class, a new nobility even, an urban elite, not necessarily people of the landed gentry type. With increased leisure time, these people desired entertainment, especially in the form of literature to read and plays to see.

Ruling over England at this time was Elizabeth I, whose long and successful reign fostered the arts. The queen herself, in fact, could read or speak six languages, including classical Greek and Latin. The connection between political power and the flowering of the arts is a well-established one in world history. One need only consider Classical Greece, Imperial Rome, Medieval Spain, 17th century Holland, Napoleonic France, England's second go-round under Queen Victoria, and 20th century America: the height of these countries' political and military power corresponded to the height of their artistic creative endeavors.

A new religion was a swirl in England. Elizabeth's father Henry VIII had broken with the Church in Rome and had established the new Church of England. The Roman-Anglican wars continued to be fought after his death, but the new Church became firmly established under his daughter Elizabeth, whose anti-Catholic stance characterized her reign. Within a year of ascending the throne, she oversaw the Act of Uniformity requiring the use of the Protestant Book of Common Prayer; she removed all the Catholics from her Privy Council; and she established herself as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

Against the backdrop of all this political, military, and religious activity stands an important event in 1576: James Burbage built England's first theatre,

as plays moved from the house and the street to the theatre. In this new setting plays no longer were silly little things of no value, but henceforth would be major productions of lasting import.

And thus was invented modern English literature during the reign of Elizabeth I—or in my imaginary world, by the seven men (note the good biblical number!) seated in a London tavern in 1593 during the heyday of her majesty's rule.

John Dryden writing only a century later would refer to these writers as “that great race of men who lived before the flood,” employing, quite felicitously, a well-known biblical topos. Indeed, not a single English play written after 1633 would be produced on the London stage with any regularity for the next 250 years, so canonical had Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Johnson become (along with their slightly younger contemporaries, including John Webster, John Ford, and Thomas Middleton)—the monopoly would be not be broken until Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw arrived on the scene in the late 19th century.

Now, what does all of this have to do with the Bible? The comparisons with Jerusalem in the 10th century B.C.E. are striking. There was a new polity in Israel, a monarchy, which traditionally had not been a feature of the society—in fact, quite the contrary, since according to normative Israelite theology only God could be king, and any human king was a compromise of that tenet. For the first time, power was concentrated in a single place, namely Jerusalem—in contrast to traditional Israelite society, formed by a loose confederation of twelve tribes, sharing many beliefs and customs, especially the worship of one God, but otherwise retaining autonomy from each other. The establishment of a monarchy in Jerusalem, in fact, brought about a greatly diminished emphasis on the entire tribal system. Israel was in a new stage of social development altogether, shifting from a tribal, pastoral, and village basis to a new urbanism.

These major changes did not occur without opposition. The Bible records a resistance to the new monarchic system, first in the book of Judges (see, for example, Gideon's famous declaration in Judg 8:23) and then most forcefully in 1 Samuel 8 with the prophet Samuel's denunciation of human kingship. But

the liberals of the day, if we can call them that, won out, and Israel moved to a monarchy, first in the person of Saul, a transitional figure, then in complete fashion under David and Solomon, by which point human kingship was a *fait accompli*. When David died, there was a question as to who specifically would succeed him, but no one doubted that it would be one of his sons, so quickly had kingship taken hold in Israel. Similarly, when Solomon died, the northern tribes expressed their discontent with the Davidic dynasty, but there was no turning back at this point to an earlier system of governance. Thus, when the northern tribes refused to follow Rehoboam, son of Solomon, grandson of David, their only choice was to set up a rival kingship, with a parallel royal dynasty established by Jeroboam from the tribe of Ephraim.

There was also a major new religious development during the 10th century B.C.E. Until this point, the Ark of the Covenant, the centerpiece of the Israelite cult, had been housed in the Tabernacle, a tent structure, in the village of Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim. David brought the Ark to Jerusalem amidst great ceremony, and a generation later Solomon built the Temple to house the Ark. The Temple, a structure of stone, was something totally alien to Israelite religious life. Temples of stone were features of urban life, indeed of the Canaanites! The Israelites were traditionalists, with a tent-like Tabernacle, portable during their wandering period, then housed in a smallish village, but by no means to be replaced by the urban wonder. In fact, the Temple was so foreign to Israelite lifestyle that Solomon needed to import Phoenician architects and builders to undertake the project.

The very notion of Jerusalem as the religious and administrative capital of the nation was altogether new and striking. After all, Jerusalem had not been an Israelite city until this point. The traditional capital was Shechem; it was the city where representatives of the twelve tribes would gather when necessary (Josh 24:1, 24:25, 1 Kgs 12:1; see also the references to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in Deut 11:29, 27:12, Josh 8:33). Jerusalem, by contrast, had been an independent city-state of the Jebusites (either a local autochthonous people or a subgroup of the Canaanites), but that was exactly the point. Since it had not belonged to any of the twelve tribes, and since David sought to diminish the influence of the tribes, the choice of Jerusalem was intentional:

it would serve him well as the capital of the new political entity. (Americans will compare the selection of Washington, D.C., belonging to no state; while Australians will compare Canberra and the surrounding Australian Capital Territory, which belongs to none of the six states.)

David built an international empire, first by quashing the Philistine threat and gaining control of remaining Canaanite pockets within the ideal boundaries of Israel; then by conquering Moab and Ammon to the east, Edom to the southeast, and Aram to the northeast; and all the while securing good relations with the Phoenicians to the northwest via treaty alliance. The result was an empire stretching from the Sinai desert in the southwest to the Euphrates River in the far northeast.¹

To return to religious issues, something even more shocking occurred during David's reign: the new king in Jerusalem allowed the former Canaanite (or Jebusite) high priest of the city to remain in that position, even though the deity now worshipped there was Yahweh. Which is to say, the priest who administered unto Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple had earlier served a Canaanite deity before David's conquest. What is the evidence for this reconstruction of history? There are two priests mentioned in the book of Samuel in connection with David's reign: Abiathar and Zadok. The former appears very early in the narratives, as early as 1 Samuel 22, long before David comes to the throne. The latter, on the other hand, appears out of nowhere, quite suddenly, in 2 Sam 15:24-29.² In fact, this passage is quite telling. In the first of these verses, Abiathar is the subject of the main verbal clause, with Zadok and the accompanying Levites as the subject of a subordinate clause (v. 24). Next, David addresses Zadok twice (vv. 25-26, 27-28), with instructions on how to proceed. And finally we read, "And Zadok and Abiathar returned the Ark of God to Jerusalem, and they dwelt there," with Zadok in first position (v. 29).

So, who was this Zadok? Time does not permit me to present the totality of the data, but suffice to state that I accept the conclusion of those scholars who posit that Zadok is the former king and high priest of Jebusite Jerusalem. In the Canaanite city-state system, these two roles were filled by one individual: one person served as both royal ruler of the city and as high priest in the temple of the city. Zadok, therefore, should be identified with Araunah (see 2

Samuel 24), which in fact is not a proper name at all, but rather an old Hurrian word meaning “the lord.” Note especially 2 Sam 24:23, where Araunah is called quite plainly “the king!”³ Accordingly, we can reconstruct the matter thus: David conquered Jerusalem, he stripped Zadok/Araunah of his civil authority as king of the city, but he permitted him to retain his sacerdotal authority as high priest over the cult of the city.

How to get the people to go along with all these major changes of the 10th century? Monarchy—an international empire—the centrality of Jerusalem—Zadok as priest. The answer is: write a national epic incorporating all of the earlier traditions back to Abraham, and embed into that narrative anticipations of the present. That is to say, there is a social, religious, and indeed political message in the book of Genesis (less so in the other four books of the Torah, though even there occasional points shine through). Or in other words: tell the story about the past, but reflect upon the present. This was the major accomplishment of the anonymous authors in Jerusalem who created the book of Genesis, to be dated, in my opinion, to the 10th century B.C.E.

Let us turn now to specific examples in defense of my hypothesis, beginning with three prominent illustrations. The first is God’s promise to Abraham that kings shall stem from him and Sarah (Gen 17:6, 17:16). The issue of monarchy, as indicated above, was an issue during the late 11th century and the first half of the 10th century (or perhaps a bit longer, if there was any lingering resistance), but at no other time. In the earlier period there still was a strong opposition to kingship; while after the time of David and Solomon, monarchy was a *fait accompli*.

Second, the boundaries of the land of Canaan promised to Abraham in Gen 15:18, from the river of Egypt (most likely this refers to the Wadi el-Arish) to the Euphrates River, match the extent of the Davidic-Solomonic empire. At an earlier time an Israelite could only have laughed at such an idea—for Israel was a very minor player in the geopolitics of the 12th and 11th centuries B.C.E.—and after the death of Solomon the empire collapsed, never again to be realized.

The third item is the emphasis placed on Judah in the book of Genesis, especially Jacob’s deathbed words to his fourth son in Gen 49:10. The dying

patriarch describes Judah in royal terms: his brothers shall bow down to him and tribute shall come to him.⁴ In addition, Judah is the most noble of the brothers in the Joseph story: it is his long speech in Gen 44:18-34 that brings Joseph to tears as he reveals himself to his brothers. Moreover, Judah is the only brother—other than Joseph—to receive an independent tale, notwithstanding the fact that said tale portrays him in less than favorable light—more on this below.

These three items converge to demonstrate that the book of Genesis, or at least its greatest part, derives from the 10th century B.C.E. The anonymous author responsible for this masterpiece of literature told the story of Israel's patriarchs, but that story is at all times refracted through the prism of the present. God approves kingship, which is to reside with the tribe of Judah, and the boundaries of the realm were preordained in hoary antiquity. Or to put this in other terms, the story of the patriarchs is narrated, but the shadow of David and Solomon is evident throughout.

This technique is well known in world literature. The best example from American literature is Arthur Miller's "The Crucible," which narrates the past, specifically the Salem witch trials of late 17th century Massachusetts, but echoes the present, with specific reference to the McCarthyism of the 1950s, of which Miller himself was a victim. Or to take an example from film, the movie "M*A*S*H", written by Ring Lardner, Jr., and directed by Robert Altman in 1969, tells the story of American troops during the Korean War, but as all who see that film know, in essence it is about another land war in Asia, the one still raging in 1969, the one in Vietnam. The anti-war pro-peace stance of the lead character Benjamin Franklin "Hawkeye" Pierce reflects the present, which is the late 1960s, but is anachronistic for the early 1950s. These themes would continue, of course, in the television series "M*A*S*H" which dominated the small screen in the 1970s. Finally, let us recall that Shakespeare's histories tell the lives of earlier kings, but at the same time are informed by the English monarchy of his day—we will return to this point at the end of my talk.

Having established the main point about Genesis and its connection to the Jerusalem court of kings David and Solomon, let us now look at additional

details in the text that support our hypothesis. As noted above, David established his rule over the small kingdoms to the east and southeast, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. The author of Genesis reflects this by relating the ancestors of these nations to the family of Abraham: the first two are descended from Abraham's nephew Lot, while the third is descended from Abraham's grandson Esau. Furthermore, the twinning of Jacob and Esau, representing Israel and Edom, as opposed to the more distant relationship seen with Ammon and Moab as descended from Lot, reflects a difference in the manner in which the Transjordanian kingdoms were ruled by David. In the case of Ammon and Moab, it appears that David allowed their kings to remain on the throne, as vassals to Israel's suzerainty. In the case of Edom, however, the king of that realm was deposed, and David served as king over Edom. This also will explain why the author incorporated into his narrative the list of Edomite rulers in Genesis 36, for David and Solomon were seen as the royal successors to all those individuals mentioned there (see especially Gen 36:31). Finally, note that Isaac's blessing to Esau in Gen 27:40 foretells a time when Esau (read: Edom) will throw off the yoke of his brother (read: Israel), exactly as 1 Kgs 11:14-22 records in detail how Edom rebelled against Solomon towards the end of his reign.⁵

Jerusalem appears in the book of Genesis in several places. The most explicit reference is in Gen 14:18, where Melchizedek, king of Salem, occurs (all agree that "Salem" is a shortened form of "Jerusalem"). Note, moreover, that this individual is referred to not only as the king of Salem but as a priest to El Elyon "God Most High," reflecting the reality of the heads of Canaanite city-states, who served as both king and priest. Furthermore, the story includes the important detail that Abram tithes to this individual. The message for someone in 10th century B.C.E. Israel is clear: do not object to tithing to the new Canaanite king-priest who supervises the cult in Jerusalem, namely Zadok, for it is something that father Abraham did in the distant past already. And note that the names of these two Jerusalemite figures include the same root רָצַק "righteous," thereby further solidifying the connection.

A more subtle reference to Jerusalem occurs in Genesis 22, in the famous story of the Aqedah, the binding of Isaac. Here we encounter the earliest ref-

erence in the Bible to the expression *har YHWH* “the mount of the LORD,” which in every other attestation refers unambiguously to Mount Zion (the other instances are in Isaiah, Micah, and Psalm 24). Presumably this phrase already was in use in 10th-century Jerusalem, or we may even wish to suggest that the author of Genesis 22 coined the term right here before our eyes.⁶ In addition, even more subtle is the use of two key words in v. 14 that begin with the letter combination *yod - resh*, viz., *yir’e* and *yera’e*, thereby evoking the sounds found at the beginning of the word *yerušalayim* “Jerusalem.” Accordingly, the listener to this story (and recall that these texts were read aloud, even performed aloud by a single reader), would hear the very sounds of *ye rušalayim* at a very crucial moment in the text. Later Jewish tradition, beginning with 2 Chr 3:1, would make this point explicit, that Mount Moriah is the spot on which the Temple was built; the author of Genesis 22 makes the same point, but much more subtly. Moreover, while Abraham builds altars in a variety of locations (see Gen 12:7, 12:8, 13:18), only here does he sacrifice. The point could not be clearer: the ram caught in the thicket would be but the first of countless rams sacrificed on that spot.

The third reference to Jerusalem in Genesis is the mention of Gihon in Gen 2:13, as one of the four rivers of Eden. This is the name of the large spring in Jerusalem, the city’s largest water source by far, whose presence makes life in the locale possible. We must, of course, disregard the geographical impossibility of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the Gihon (regardless of how one identifies the Pishon, the fourth river mentioned), but that is beside the point. We are dealing here with the transfiguration of a myth, or of a mythic feature, which has the great life-giving water sources of the world flowing together, including the main water source of Jerusalem. The author of Genesis, faced with a people unaccustomed to ascribing any special quality to Jerusalem, embedded into his narrative these three key passages—the Melchizedek episode, the reference to *har YHWH* in the Aqedah, and the mention of the Gihon as one of the waters of Eden—in order to demonstrate the centrality of Jerusalem to the tradition, indeed to the divine order.

A dominant theme in Genesis, perceived by everyone who reads the book, is the motif of the younger son, present in all four generations of the

patriardal narratives. Generation one: Isaac supersedes Ishmael. Generation two: Jacob supersedes Esau. Generation three: Judah (the youngest of the original four sons of Leah) supersedes Reuben, Simeon, and Levi; and Joseph (the youngest of the twelve save one) supersedes his older brothers. Generation four: Perez supersedes Zerah; and Ephraim supersedes Manasseh. In addition, if we look at the first brothers in the history of mankind, God favors the younger Abel over the older Cain; and if we look at the book immediately following Genesis, we note that Moses is three years younger than Aaron (Exod 7:7). What lies behind this repeated motif?

Three reasons may be put forward: literary, theological, and political. On the literary level, this motif represents the extraordinary in life, and the extraordinary is what drives literature. The ordinary does not make for good storytelling: it is the departure from the quotidian norm that generates drama and makes for interesting reading, and such is the case throughout the ages, no less in antiquity than in modern times. Primogeniture, which was the norm in the ancient world, would hardly require mention in belletristic writing. Ultimogeniture, on the other hand, was apparently a *topos* for which ancient readers had an insatiable appetite. I say this because the theme appears not only in the numerous instances in the Bible listed above, but in Ugaritic epic as well.⁷

But our biblical author did not have in mind only a literary purpose for including this theme. Rather, the *topos* served him well on the theological level too. In the mind of the writer, Israel as a nation was likened to a younger son, one without the natural gifts that descend on the firstborn nations of the world, well-established entities like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, with great political, economic, and military power, much larger populations, and an unending supply of fresh water provided by the major rivers that flow through these lands (Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates, respectively). Israel had none of this. It was a fledgling nation, a people only recently (or relatively so) settled in the land of Canaan, living in a land without the bounty of water found in these other countries, and thus at a natural disadvantage, and only presently coming into its own as a nation among the nations. In light of this dichotomy between Israel and the nations—and even when measured against

neighbors closer to home, Israel (at least until David's time) paled in comparison with city-states such as Tyre and Hazor—the biblical author expanded the younger son motif into another plane altogether. God had chosen none of the firstborn nations of the world to be his people, but rather he selected Israel, a lowly nation, a lastborn nation, if you will, to be his covenant partner, elevating it to firstborn status, as the book of Exodus states explicitly: “Israel is my firstborn son” (Exod 4:22).⁸

But there is more still. Could anyone in the 10th century B.C.E. read these stories in Genesis and not see the lives of kings David and Solomon before their eyes? Recall that David was the youngest son of Jesse (the seventh according to 1 Sam 16:10-11, the eighth according to 1 Chr 2:13-15), a point emphasized in the story of Samuel's mission to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king of Israel (1 Samuel 16). Even more relevant is the extended narrative of who would replace David on the throne in 1 Kings 1-2, for here the point is expressed overtly. Adonijah was the oldest of David's remaining sons and under normal circumstances the throne would have been his. But as events unfolded, it was not Adonijah, but rather Solomon, one of David's youngest sons—if not the youngest—who succeeded his father on the throne.⁹ Kingship was still new in Israel, but the average Israelite could expect that the firstborn son of the king would succeed him on the throne. Such did not occur, however, in the succession from David to Solomon. Lest someone criticize the king for his decision, the author reminds his readers that God has always favored the younger or youngest son: thus Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Perez, Ephraim—thus Solomon.

Yet another theme that dominates the book of Genesis is the theme of fraternal strife. The conflict is mild in the case of Isaac and Ishmael, where truly it is more a case of their mothers, Sarah and Hagar, at odds (Gen 16:4-9, 21:9-10). It increases in the next generation, in the persons of the twins Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:22-23, 27:40-41). Finally, the theme of fraternal strife blossoms fullfold in the case of Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37-50). Once more we can point to the present conditions of the 10th century B.C.E. as the background for a repeated motif in the book of Genesis. In David's family there are two major conflicts: that between Amnon and Absalom (2 Samuel 13) and

the aforementioned one between Adonijah and Solomon (1 Kings 1-2). In each of these cases, in fact, the conflict ends violently: Absalom kills Amnon (2 Sam 13:28-29), and Solomon kills Adonijah (through his agent Benaiah; see 1 Kgs 2:25). In light of these actions, our attention should be drawn to yet another instance of fraternal strife in Genesis, indeed, the one present in the world's first set of brothers. The familiar tale of Cain and Abel now comes into even greater focus for the reader. To echo a rhetorical question asked above in reference to another theme, would anyone in the 10th century B.C.E. have missed the connection between Cain's killing of Abel *baššade* "in the field" (Gen 4:8), exactly as occurs in the mouth of the wise woman of Tekoa in her allusive account of Absalom's slaying of Amnon (2 Sam 14:6).

Certain stories in the book of Samuel portray David in less than favorable light, most famously the account of his adultery with Bathsheba. The author of Genesis, whose main goal was to valorize David (as we saw above in those verses which promote the monarchy in general and kingship resident in the tribe of Judah in particular), could not pass over the less positive aspects of David's career, especially if they were widely known in Jerusalem and beyond. Accordingly, he included one extended story about Judah, the most obvious reflex of David in Genesis, in which the former is similarly portrayed in negative light. I refer, of course, to the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Note the connections between the two characters of Judah in Genesis and David in Samuel. Both are shepherds; both separate from their kinsmen by moving to Adullam (Gen 38:1; 1 Sam 22:1); the one has a friend named Hirah (Gen 38:1), the other a friend named Hiram (2 Sam 5:11, 1 Kgs 5:15). Judah's wife, whose actual name is not given, is described as *bat . . . šua'* "the daughter of . . . Shua" (Gen 38:2), a close match to the name of David's wife *batšeba'* "Bathsheba." There is an even closer nexus when one reads the book of Chronicles, for in this later version the wife of Judah is now called by the proper name *batšua'* "Bathshua" (1 Chr 2:3), and the wife of David is similarly called *batšua'* "Bathshua" (1 Chr 3:5). Judah and David both have a Tamar in their lives: in the former case a daughter-in-law; in the latter, a daughter. And the

ultimate connection between the two stories: in both cases the protagonist commits a major sin involving sexual intercourse with a woman, and in both cases he is forced to admit his guilt (Gen 38:26; 2 Sam 12:13). To paraphrase the question we have been asking throughout this talk: could anyone in 10th century Jerusalem have read the account of Judah and Tamar without seeing the present-day David and Bathsheba in the text? We actually have two interpretative options here: either the author of Genesis 38 sought to lampoon David through the story of Judah and Tamar; or he was writing an apologia, as if to state, do not worry too much about the king's sexual peccadilloes, for such comes with the territory or at least is part of the family legacy.¹⁰

Another story that repeats in Genesis is the threefold attempt by one of the patriarchs to pass his wife off as his sister. Abraham does this twice (Genesis 12, Genesis 20), and then Isaac does the same (Genesis 26). Much has been written about the wife-sister motif, but to my mind the most important issue has been missed by most scholars. While I cannot go into all the details here, the books of Samuel and Chronicles provide evidence that David and Abigail were not only husband and wife, but were also brother and sister.¹¹ Furthermore, implicit in the book of Samuel is the fact that Amnon and Tamar, half-brother and half-sister, could have married each other (2 Sam 13:13), the law in Lev 18:11 notwithstanding. Abraham, you will recall, when pressed by Abimelech to explain why he passed Sarah off as his sister, states that in fact he and Sarah are half-brother and half-sister, with the same father though with different mothers. Many scholars read this passage as simply a white lie from Abraham's mouth, but we should accept the basic fact that these individuals were indeed half-siblings. Thus Abraham and Sarah, thus David and Abigail, thus Amnon and Tamar.

There are still other items that link the Genesis stories with events of the 10th century, but time allows for only several brief references. Jacob's antagonist Laban and David's antagonist Nabal have much in common, not the least of which are their names, which are anagrams of each other. Rachel steals her father Laban's *teraphim*, deceives him, and sides with her husband Jacob in the clash between the two men; in similar fashion Michal uses the *teraphim* to fool her father Saul in order to protect her husband David. Places significant to the

career of David reverberate in Genesis: I already mentioned the case of Adullam, to which we may add more famous places such as Hebron, David's first capital, and Bethlehem, David's birthplace. Another less well-known case is Mahanaim, the place in Transjordan to which David fled during Absalom's revolt, and where earlier Jacob had encamped during his return to the land of Canaan after twenty years away in Aram. Of the hundreds if not thousands of toponyms in the land of Israel, I find it striking that relatively minor places such as Adullam and Mahanaim appear both in Genesis and in Samuel.

We must note that the matches between the characters in Genesis and those in Samuel are not always perfect. A prime example was noted above: Tamar in Genesis is the daughter-in-law of Judah, while Tamar in Samuel is the daughter of David. But we have to recognize the fact that the author of Genesis had to work within his tradition—a tradition, which we must assume was known to his readers. I do not want to open the large question of how historical the patriarchal narratives may or may not be, but the fact is this: these stories work better if the characters are real people known to later Israelites, and not fictional literary creations. In like manner, Miller's play works better because the Salem witch trials were a real event in American history; if the playwright had invented this story out of whole cloth, the dramatic effect would have been greatly reduced. And the same holds, of course, for the Korean War in "M*A*S*H" and "Richard II" by Shakespeare.

I have focused this talk on the book of Genesis, the name of which is played upon in the title of my presentation, but in passing I should note that other books of the Torah evoke material from the early monarchy. In Numb 24:7, for example, Balaam declares, "[Israel's] king shall rise above Agag, and his kingdom shall be established," with reference to the king of Amalek defeated by Saul in 1 Samuel 15. Or to take another example, the law of the king in Deut 17:16-17 limits the monarch in three ways: he is not to multiply wives, he is not to hoard large amounts of silver and gold, and he is not to engage in a horse trade with Egypt. All three of these acts were committed by Solomon, and indeed led, either directly or indirectly, to the split of the kingdom into the two separate entities, Judah and Israel, upon his death. To my mind, the law in Deuteronomy 17 limiting the king's powers must date to the

late 10th century B.C.E., as a reaction to the excesses of Solomon. In like manner, the 22nd Amendment to the United States Constitution, limiting the president to two terms, was passed in the years immediately following the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, whose four terms were seen as excessive. It hardly seems likely that Deuteronomy 17 would date from centuries after Solomon, as most scholars opine.

Let us return now to our imaginary London tavern scene, but let us transpose that scene to 10th century Jerusalem. In like fashion, I conjure a scene in which seven ancient Israelite literati are sitting in a wine hall (with reference to the favorite drink of ancient Israel), and there on the spot they invent ancient Hebrew literature.¹² We have situated their work in the 10th century, and we need not belabor that chronological setting further, but in what way, we may ask, did they create ancient Hebrew literature?

To answer this question, we must emphasize the point that most of ancient literature is poetry, as opposed to prose. From Babylonia we may point to the classical epics of Creation, called *Enuma Elish* (“When on High”) in the original, and *Gilgamesh*, both of which are written in poetry. In Canaan, both the myths of the gods, such as the *Baal Myth*, and the epics about human heroes, such as *Kret* and *Aqhat*, were written in poetry. If we go further afield, we also may note that the earliest Greek literature is poetic: the epics of Homer and the mythological material of Hesiod (only at a later stage do we encounter the prose material, whether historical [Herodotus, Thucydides, etc.] or philosophical [Socrates, Plato, Aristotle]).

Israel forged a new religious path, and that new path required a new medium to express its new religious ideas. The poetic tradition of the ancient Near East and the eastern Mediterranean was too heavily laden with the polytheistic mythologies of Israel’s neighbors—as the cases of *Enuma Elish*, the *Baal Myth*, and Hesiod’s *Works and Days* indicate clearly—and Israel’s writers simply could not countenance utilizing that medium for expressing their revolutionary ideas about the divine. We segue, therefore, from the social-political issues that we have discussed above to the religious-theological issues that dominate the biblical text. Most obviously we can point to the worship of only one God in ancient Israel, a radical departure from the

multiplicity of deities present in the surrounding cultures. But this quantitative difference is only half the equation, for the qualitative difference is equally crucial. In Israel, Yahweh, the one God worshipped, was not a nature deity (associated with the sun, moon, rain, earth, sea, desert, river, etc.), but rather a deity who manifested himself in history, the history of mankind in general and the history of the people of Israel in particular. In the words of 1 Kgs 19:11-12, Yahweh is not to be found in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but rather as a *qol demama daqqa* “a still small voice” who speaks to mankind. One need only consider the manner in which the literature of Ugarit, our number one source for Canaanite mythology, describes Baal, Anat, Mot, Yamm, and the other gods, all associated with nature, all narrated in poetry. Given this difference, Israel’s writers rejected the poetic tradition and created an entirely new literary mode: narrative prose. The chart below presents the dichotomy for the two great bodies of literature emanating from the land of Canaan at our disposal:

<i>Place:</i>	Ugarit	Israel
<i>Deity:</i>	Baal et al.	Yahweh
<i>Manifestation:</i>	nature	history
<i>Mode of writing:</i>	poetry	prose

The evidence from the Bible suggests strongly that at one point Israel too narrated its stories in poetry, as part of its legacy as an ancient Near Eastern people. Snippets remain in the Bible: Exodus 15 (the Song of the Sea), Judges 5 (the Song of Deborah), two quotations from the Book of Yashar (Josh 10:12-13, 2 Sam 1:18-27), and a single passage from the Book of the Wars of YHWH (Numb 21:14-15). But this is all that remains—just a few pages total, nothing more.¹³ Otherwise, Israel’s story is told in prose, and what eventually developed was the glorious narrative that stretches from Genesis 1 through 1 Kings 2, the core of which, if not the bulk of which, dates from the 10th century B.C.E., emanating from people close to the court of kings David and Solomon.

You will recall that I mentioned the introduction of new literary forms from continental Europe into Elizabethan England, most notably, the sonnet from Italy and the essay from France. As such, the question arises: from where did Israel borrow the narrative prose style? The answer is from the one country that we have not mentioned to this point: Egypt. Unlike the other peoples of the ancient Near East, the Egyptians told their stories not in poetry, but in prose. One rightly may ask: but were not the ancient Egyptians as polytheistic as the other neighboring peoples? Why should their prose storytelling style be more acceptable to Israel than the poetry of the Canaanites or the Babylonians? The answer lies in the nature of the Egyptian prose stories: they typically are adventure tales, devoid of overriding theological messages. The best examples of such tales are *Sinuhe*, *Wenamun*, and the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, about which we will say more below.¹⁴ The deity rarely is mentioned in these accounts, and when the divine is referred to, rarely do we read the name of a specific god such as Ra or Horus or Isis; instead we usually encounter the generic term *ntr*, the Egyptian term for simply “god, deity.” These tales, I would argue, served as the model for the Hebrew prose literary tradition. Moreover, one finds signs of Egyptian cultural influence at the Jerusalem court during the reigns of kings David and Solomon, especially in the area of government administration (officialdom, bureaucracy, etc.).¹⁵ Such influence reached Israel either directly (for example, through the marriage of Solomon to the daughter of Pharaoh [1 Kgs 3:1]) and/or indirectly (for example, via the intermediation of Tyre). Within this picture we can situate the adaptation of Egyptian narrative prose by Israelite literati in 10th century Jerusalem.

Finally, we may reflect on a major literary motif that appears not only in the Bible and in these Egyptian tales, but in other ancient epics as well, most notably *The Odyssey* and *Gilgamesh*. I refer to the homecoming motif, or the *nostos* theme. No less than the five major stories referred to above focus on the episodic journey of a hero, who must leave his native land, travel from locale to locale, and then return home successfully. The title characters in *Gilgamesh*, *Sinuhe*, *Wenamun*, and the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, along with *Odysseus* in Homer’s epic, all fit into this pattern.¹⁶ The Bible utilizes this motif as well, and includes one such hero who also must leave home and then returns after

years away. I refer to Jacob, and one even may wonder whether his twenty years in Aram (Gen 31:38) is not coincidentally the same number of years that Odysseus was away from Ithaca.

But the Bible goes beyond all these narratives, with the focus on a single hero figure, by adapting the homecoming motif to the major story that dominates the Torah and the following book of Joshua. The story is the same—the *nostos* theme still dominates—but in this case the focus has been shifted from the travails of a particular individual to that of an entire nation: *'am yisra'el* “the people of Israel.” This is the genius of the Israelite writers, combining a major epic motif of antiquity with the collective history of the people of Israel.¹⁷ The individual recedes in importance, and even though Moses may dominate the narrative, the journey is that of the Israelites—in fact, this will serve as an additional explanation as to why Moses cannot enter the Promised Land, for the journey is Israel’s, and not Moses’s. History plus epic, with an overlay of theology, all combined in a unique way, expressed in prose, unparalleled in ancient literature—and that is the creation of the brilliant Israelite literati of the 10th century B.C.E.

And so let us return to our English friends, but most importantly to Shakespeare. His histories deal with real people—Richard II, Richard III, Henry V, and so on—but he takes liberties with the history in order to accomplish two things: a) to create an aesthetically pleasing play, and b) to reflect the present, the monarchy of his day. Shakespeare had a bit of a problem, however, for his monarch was a woman, Elizabeth I, but nothing could stand in the way of the great bard—and indeed Her Majesty understood well the message of the plays she saw in the Globe Theatre. Elizabeth is reported to have said to the Keeper of the Tower, “I am Richard II, know ye not that?”

And thus I imagine David turning to Benaiah, the captain of his personal bodyguard—after a reading of Genesis 38 in whatever version you may imagine it—and saying אֲנִכִי יְהוּדָה הֲלֵא תִדַע “I am Judah, know ye not that?”

Thank you.¹⁸

NOTES

- 1 I need to mention here that many scholars today doubt the historicity of the material in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings concerning David and Solomon, the building projects in Jerusalem, the extent of the empire, and so on. This is not the forum to enter into an extended discussion on this matter, so I will need to beg your forbearance and ask you to join me in accepting the biblical record as more or less historical. For a recent treatment on one aspect of the debate, see Jane Cahill, "Jerusalem in David and Solomon's Time: It Really Was a Major City in the 10th Century B.C.E.," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 30:6 (November-December 2004), pp. 20-31, 62-63.
- 2 Zadok appears already in 2 Sam 8:17, in a list of David's officials. But this text must originate from relatively late in David's reign, since the second priest listed there is Ahimelech son of Abiathar. Naturally, there is no way to dovetail this passage with the apparent fact that Abiathar served as priest until after David died (see 1 Kgs 2:27, 2:35). One solution is to assume a scribal error in 2 Sam 8:17 and posit a reading "Abiathar son of Ahimelech" (see 1 Sam 22:20). Regardless of how this issue is resolved, note the important fact that Zadok appears first among the two priests listed in 2 Sam 8:17.
- 3 Most scholars, unable to accept the fact that Araunah was the king of Jerusalem, emend this verse or explain the usage in some other fashion.
- 4 Understanding שיליה as שיליה "tribute to him," with many scholars.
- 5 It is unclear from 1 Kgs 11:14-22 whether or not the Edomites were successful in their rebellion against Solomon, but at some point they clearly must have become independent, either during Solomon's reign or soon after his death. The same would be true of Ammon and Moab (the latter is confirmed by the statement in the Mesha Stele that Omri had conquered Moab, which means that the small kingdom must have been independent in the 50 or so years between Solomon and Omri), but note that only with Edom is there explicit mention of rebellion against Israelite rule: thus Edom in 1 Kgs 11:14-22, thus Esau in Gen 27:40.
- 6 In a different vein, note that both Avraham ibn Ezra in the 12th century and his supercommentator Yosef ben Eliezer Tov Elem (Bonfils) in the 14th century recognized that the expression "the mount of the LORD" would be anachronistic in the time of Moses, and thus they suggested that the phrase must have arisen at a later date.
- 7 Specifically in the Epic of Kret, in which the eighth and youngest daughter of the title character (called Thitmanit, a name based on the numeral "eight"; cf. English "Octavia") rises to prominence over her seven older sisters. For the text and an English translation, see E. L. Greenstein, "Kirta," in S. B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (n.p.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), pp. 9-48. References to Thitmanit appear in CTU 1.15:III:12 (on p. 26) and CTU 1.16:I:29 (on p. 32). The key passage is CTU 1.15:III:16: "the youngest of them I name firstborn."
- 8 A second motif present in Genesis, that of the barren wife, also fits here. Other nations are blessed with natural fecundity. Israel, on the other hand, is likened to a barren woman; and only through God's direct intervention does she prosper.

- 9 According to the narrative in 2 Samuel, it would appear that Solomon is indeed the youngest of David's sons. The genealogy in 1 Chr 3:5-8 may suggest otherwise, since there are sons listed after Solomon; but we cannot be sure if they are younger than Solomon or simply are listed after Solomon since they were born to other wives, and not Bathsheba.
- 10 For a more detailed look at this material, see G. A. Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986), pp. 438-446.
- 11 See J. D. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980), pp. 507-518.
- 12 For another imagined scenario, which takes a similar approach to the present article, see the entertaining fictional account by Loren Fisher, *The Jerusalem Academy* (Willits, CA: Fisher Publications, 2002).
- 13 I hasten to add that I refer here to poetry as the vehicle for storytelling. The poetic tradition remained very much alive in ancient Israel for other genres, most importantly hymns (Psalms), wisdom writing (Proverbs), love poetry (Song of Songs), and the like. It also would achieve new heights in the writings of the Prophets, a distinctly Israelite development, with no parallels known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.
- 14 For translations of these texts, see M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-1980) (Sinuhe and Shipwrecked Sailor are in the first volume, while Wenamun is in the second volume); and R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) (Wenamun does not appear in this collection, since it postdates 1640 B.C.E.). Note that, as per the title of his book, Parkinson considers the Egyptian tales to be poetry, but this is highly debatable. For bibliography on the issue, see G. A. Rendsburg, "Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000), pp. 13-23, in particular p. 14, n. 4.
- 15 For a recent treatment, see J. D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), pp. 159-171.
- 16 The end of Wenamun is missing, but no one doubts that the hero successfully returned home, for the tale is narrated in first person by the title character.
- 17 See C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), p. 192.
- 18 Some of the ideas expressed in this essay appeared earlier in G. A. Rendsburg, "Biblical Literature as Politics: The Case of Genesis," in A. Berlin, ed., *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 1996), pp. 47-70; and G. A. Rendsburg, "Reading David in Genesis: How We Know the Torah Was Written in the Tenth Century B.C.E.," *Bible Review* 17:1 (February 2001), pp. 20-33, 46. Finally, I take this opportunity to thank Karen Small, associate director of the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers University, and my former student Gregg Serene of Richland, WA, for their critical reading of an earlier version of this essay.