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From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis

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I

One of the most significant developments in biblical studies in the past twenty years has been the recognition of the need for a synthetic, as opposed to analytic, approach towards the biblical text. By concentrating on the genetic development of the biblical material mainstream biblical scholarship has viewed the interpretive task as both 'analytic and diachronic': 'analytic in the sense that one dissects the received text into its component parts, and diachronic in the sense that one seeks to understand the genesis of the text from its earliest origin to its final formulation.'¹ This has created an unfortunate situation in which the present literary form of the biblical text has been neglected in favour of hypothetical reconstructions. As R. Polzin comments,

Traditional biblical scholarship has spent most of its efforts in disassembling the works of a complicated watch before our amazed eyes without apparently realizing that similar efforts by and large have not succeeded in putting the parts back together again in a significant or meaningful way.²

The oddity of this situation is also noted by D. J. A. Clines:

When, as in Old Testament studies, the sources and pre-history of our present texts are for the most part entirely hypothetical, and when, in

¹ B. W. Anderson, 'From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1:11', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, 1978, 23.

² R. Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger" in *Danger*, *Semeia* 3, 1975, 82-83.

any case, a work of art, such as a good deal of Old Testament literature undoubtedly is, yields its significance to the observer as a whole and through the articulation of its parts in its present form, one would have imagined that a genetic approach would not be strongly favoured.³

Fortunately, on account of such observations, greater attention is now being paid to the final form of the biblical texts.

The purpose of this study is to consider the final form of the book of Genesis, as preserved in the Masoretic text. This is not to deny that different sources may underlie the present text. Such is undoubtedly the case. However, even if the book is composed of older material, it is important to appreciate its final format. Moreover, given the hypothetical nature of source analysis, any discussion of the text's prior history is purely conjectural. To move back beyond the present form of the text is not as easy as is often supposed. There always exists the possibility that the final author/editor may have modified his source material in order to make it conform better to his overall intention. Furthermore, even if we understand correctly the prior history of the text, this does not automatically clarify its present meaning. We must consider the constituent parts of Genesis within the context of the whole book. The same words in different settings do not necessarily denote the same thing. Context is a very important factor for determining meaning. Unfortunately, as regards the book of Genesis biblical scholars have tended to neglect its final form, favouring rather the approaches of source and form criticism.⁴

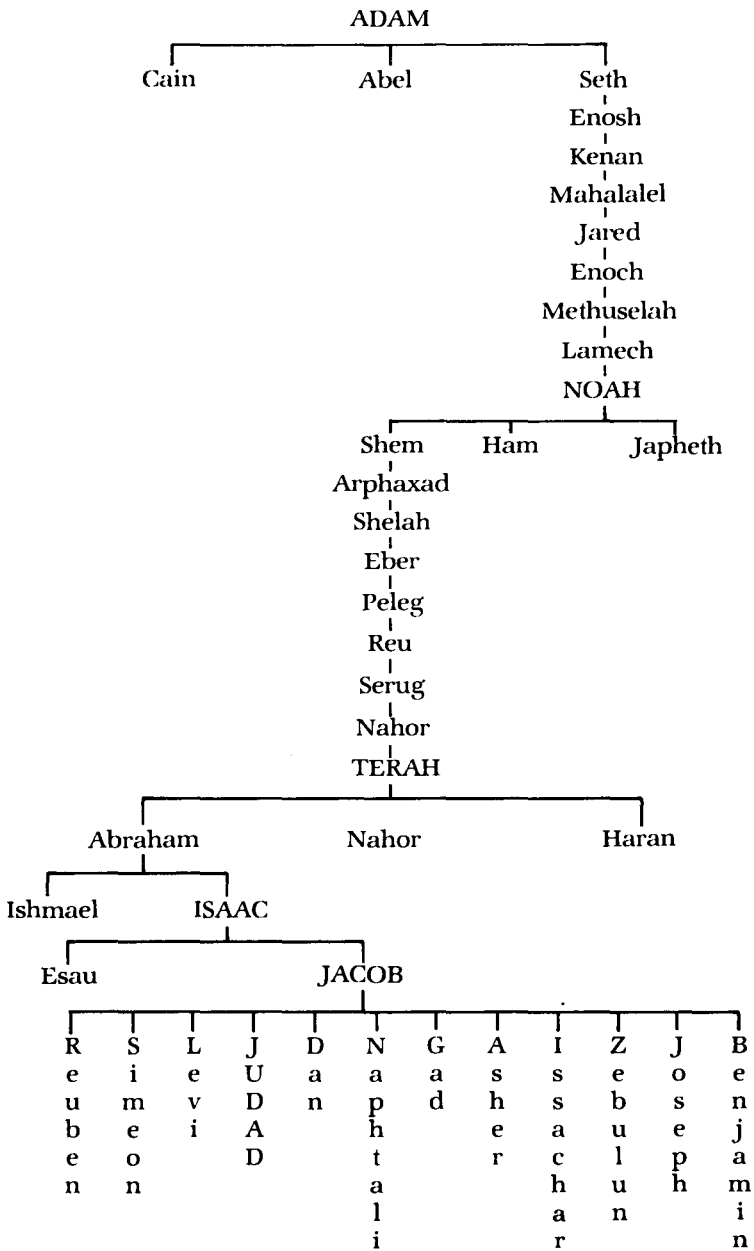
II

As it stands Genesis is a very selective record of events which start with the creation of the world and end with the death of Joseph in Egypt. Although it begins with a broad picture of mankind's early history, the focus of attention is gradually and constantly narrowed as we pursue the fortunes of one particular family. Structurally this is achieved through the use of (a) *tôlêdôt* formulae ('these are the generations of. . .') which focus in upon a particular individual and his descendants (e.g., 6:9; 11:27; 25:19; 37:2), and (b) genealogical lists which pass over

³ D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT Supplement 10) (Sheffield, 1978), 9.

⁴ This is most apparent in the massive commentary of C. Westermann, *Genesis* (Biblicher Kommentar I) (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1982); ET *Genesis* 3 vols, (SPCK, 1987). This approach is rejected, however, by G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, 1987).

Diagram A



quickly a number of generations (e.g., 5:1–32, from Adam to Noah; 11:10–26, from Shem to Terah). When Genesis does from time to time follow other branches of the family tree, this is always done briefly, and usually by means of a genealogical table (e.g., 4:17–24; 10:1–32; 22:20–24; 25:12–18; 36:1–43). In this way Genesis provides a very distinctive family lineage (see Diagram A). Moreover, it is evident that, apart from the genealogies contained in Genesis, almost all the narrative material relates in one way or another to the family tree which underlies the entire book. A survey of the book's contents highlights this fact.

Following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden we are informed of the births of Cain and Abel (4:1–2). Unfortunately Cain grows jealous of his younger brother and eventually murders him. As punishment he is exiled to the land of Nod, east of Eden (4:16). The narrative then contains some information about the immediate descendants of Cain (4:17–24). Significantly, however, the chapter, concludes by noting that Eve gives birth to another son, Seth, a replacement for Abel (4:25).

Chapter 5 consists of a genealogy which traces the line of descendants from Adam to Noah. Interestingly, although it is always stated that there were 'other sons and daughters', only one member of each generation is named throughout the list.⁵ Beginning with Adam, a line of descent is traced through Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, to Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Significantly, these descendants of Adam are traced through Seth, Adam's third-born son, and not Cain the first-born. The reason for this is obvious. In chapter 4 Cain is responsible for the death of his brother Abel, and consequently is punished by God (4:10–16). Moreover, Cain's murderous actions are exceeded by his descendant Lamech (4:23–24). However, Adam has another son, whom Eve views as filling the place of Abel: 'God has granted me another child (*zera* "seed") in place of Abel, since Cain killed him' (4:25).⁶ We are then informed that Seth has a son, whom he

⁵ R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (Yale Near Eastern Researches 7) (New Haven, 1977), 9, refers to such genealogies as 'linear'. In contrast, genealogies which follow more than one line of descent are labelled 'segmented'. The purpose of Old Testament genealogies is considered by M.D. Johnson, *The purpose of the Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 8) (Cambridge, 1969). For a brief survey of modern research on biblical genealogies, see R.R. Wilson, 'The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, 1975, 169–89.

⁶ In her comment regarding the birth of Seth, Eve uses the Hebrew noun *zera* 'seed', a key-word in the book of Genesis. Approximately one-quarter of all its

names Enosh (4:26). This is immediately followed by the statement, 'At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD' (4:26). Clearly, the births of Seth and Enosh are viewed in a positive light; Seth and Enosh, unlike Cain and his descendants, show a true desire to worship God.

The genealogy of chapter 5 is followed by a short description of the marriage of the sons of God to the daughters of men (6:1-4). This is linked to the decision that God intends to wipe out mankind because of their wickedness (6:5-7). Noah alone is excluded from this condemnation (6:8).

Events associated with Noah, his three sons and their descendants comprise 6:9 through to 11:9. The beginning of this material is marked by the *tôlêdôt* formula, 'These are the generations (*tôlêdôt* of Noah. . .)' (6:9). Within this section of Genesis we have the lengthy account of the flood (6:9-9:19), the cursing of Canaan (9:20-29), the table of nations (10:1-32) and the episode about the tower of Babel (11:1-9). This material is then followed by another genealogy (11:10-26), similar, but not identical, to that found in chapter 5. This traces the descendants of Shem down to Terah. As in chapter 5 only one individual in each generation is named. No attempt is made to provide even a limited list of the names of other descendants.⁷

In 11:27 we come to the *tôlêdôt* of Terah. The material that follows concentrates mainly on Abraham, one of the sons of Terah, although some details are provided about his brothers Nahor (22:20-24; ch. 24) and Haran (11:28).⁸ Significantly, one of the main themes running through the narratives involving Abraham concerns the fact that he lacks a son. In 11:30 we are informed that Sarah, Abraham's wife, is barren. Nevertheless Abraham is promised by God that he will become a great nation (12:2). Clearly, this assumes that children will be born to him. Furthermore, when Abraham arrives in the land of Canaan, God promises that his seed (*zera'*) will inherit the land (12:7). This promise is repeated in 13:15-16.

In chapter 15 Abraham, still childless, seeks an assurance from God that he will indeed have descendants (15:2). Again the term

occurrences in the Hebrew Bible are in Genesis. It occurs 56 times in Genesis and 165 times in the rest of the Old Testament (164 in Hebrew and once in Aramic [Dan 2:43]). Given the special interest in 'seed' in the book of Genesis, it is noteworthy that in chapter 1 attention is drawn to the fact that seed bearing plants produce plants of the same kind (1:11-12).

⁷ Gen. 10:22-29 provides a much fuller record of Shem's descendants. This takes the form of a segmented genealogy (see note 5).

⁸ Although few details are given about Haran, his son Lot figures prominently in a number of passages (11:31; 12:5; 13:1-12; 14:12-16; 19:1-38).

zera' is used. Although Abraham has an heir, Eliezer of Damascus, he is merely a servant in his household and not part of Abraham's seed (15:3). In response God promises that Abraham's seed will be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (15:5).

Frustrated at not being able to bear Abraham a son, Sarah proposes to her husband that he should begat a child by her maidservant Hagar (16:1-4). As a consequence of this action Ishmael is born, and, being of his seed (cf. 21:13), Abraham apparently assumes that he is the promised son (16:15; cf. 17:18). However, God appears to Abraham some years later and tells him that Sarah will yet bear him a son, to be named Isaac (17:15-16,19). Moreover, it is through Isaac and his descendants, and not Ishmael, that God's covenant with Abraham will be established (17:19,21). After the birth of Isaac, God reiterates that Abraham's seed will be reckoned through Isaac and not Ishmael (21:12). Consequently, Hagar and Ishmael are expelled from Abraham's household (21:14).

Following the testing of Abraham in chapter 22, God swears to Abraham that his seed will be numerous, they will take possession of the gates of their enemies, and that through them all the nations of the earth will be blessed (22:16-18). Later, when a famine forces Isaac to move to the region of Gerar, God confirms these promises. Isaac's seed will possess the land of Canaan and will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens (26:3-4). When Isaac moves to Beersheba the promise of numerous descendants (*zera'*) is repeated (26:24).

In chapter 24 Abraham makes much of the fact that Isaac's wife must come from his father's household.⁹ So he sends his chief servant to Aram Naharaim in search of a suitable wife for Isaac. When Rebekah leaves to return with Abraham's servant to Canaan, she receives a blessing from her mother and brother:

Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your seed (*zera'*) possess the gates of their enemies (24:60).

Unfortunately, it later transpires that Rebekah, like Sarah, is barren (25:21). Isaac prays for her and she subsequently gives birth to twins, Esau and Jacob (25:24-26). It is predicted, however, that there will be antagonism between the two children, with the younger gaining the advantage (25:23).

Between the accounts of the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah and the birth of Esau and Jacob, we are informed that Abraham had another wife, Keturah, who bore him six sons (25:1-4). This

⁹ E.g., 24:2-5,7. Abraham's own wife, Sarah, also came from his father's household (20:12).

section of Genesis ends with the record of Abraham's death and burial (25:8–11). There then follows a short genealogy listing the sons of Ishmael (25:12–18). The next main section of Genesis is introduced by the formula, 'These are the generations (*tôlêdôt*) of Isaac, Abraham's son. . . ' 25:19).

The struggle between Esau and Jacob is an important theme in chapters 25, 27, 28, 32 and 33. The fact that Esau marries two Hittite women is a matter of regret to both his parents (26:34–35). Jacob, in contrast, is encouraged to go to Paddan Aram and find a wife who is related to his mother (28:2). In an attempt to make amends for his actions Esau marries a daughter of Ishmael (28:8–9).

As he flees to Paddan Aram Jacob experiences a dramatic encounter with God in which the divine promises made to Abraham are renewed (28:13–15). Jacob's seed (*zera'*) will be numerous and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him and his seed. On arriving in Paddan Aram he soon discovers his relatives, meeting first his cousin Rachel (29:9–11). He eventually marries her, although not without the unforeseen complication of having to marry her sister Leah (29:14–30). Although Jacob's love is directed primarily towards Rachel, she is barren and cannot bear children (29–30). Leah on the other hand gives birth to four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah (29:32–35). Rachel becomes jealous and gives to Jacob her maidservant Bilhah. To Bilhah are born Dan and Naphtali (30:4–8). Then Leah gives her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob and two more sons are born, Gad and Asher (30:9–13). After this Leah bears Jacob another two sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah (30:17–21). Finally, Rachel gives birth to a son, Joseph (30:22–24). Jacob's family now numbers eleven sons.

God blesses Jacob and he grows wealthy in Paddan Aram (30:27–43). His relatives, however, become jealous of his prosperity (31:1–2). With divine encouragement, he decides to return to the land of Canaan (31:3,17–18). Several obstacles stand in his way. First, Jacob must overcome the reluctance of his father-in-law to let him leave. Secondly, he must face again his brother Esau who previously had threatened to kill him (27:41). The removal of the first of these hurdles is recorded in 31:19–55. Then, while preparing to meet Esau, Jacob has another remarkable encounter with God during which his name is changed to Israel (32:22–32). Afterwards, the reunion of the two brothers is marked by a willingness on both sides to forgive past grievances (33:1–11). Thus Jacob returns with his family to the land of Canaan.

Chapter 34 records how Dinah the daughter of Jacob is raped by Shechem the Hivite (34:2). As a consequence of this, her brothers Simeon and Levi take revenge by killing all the men of the city of Shechem (34:25–26). Following this, Jacob moves to Bethel where he receives yet another affirmation of the divine promise made to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac:

I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants (*zera'*) after you (35:11–12).

Soon afterwards Rachel gives birth to another son Benjamin, but unfortunately she dies as a result of the birth (35:16–18). The notice of the death of Rachel (35:16–20) is followed by a brief comment about Reuben sleeping with his father's concubine Bilhah (35:22). We then learn of the death of Isaac (35:28–29).

The description of the death of Isaac is followed by a genealogy outlining the descendants of Esau (36:1–30). Next comes a *tôlêdôt* formula, 'These are the generations (*tôlêdôt*) of Jacob. . .', heading the final section of the book of Genesis (37;2). The arrangement of this material parallels the conclusion of the Abraham cycle (25:7–19), where the death of the patriarch is followed by the genealogy of his oldest son, and then a *tôlêdôt* formula introducing a long narrative section dealing with the children of the younger son.

Much of the material in the final chapters of Genesis deals with Joseph, the first son borne by Rachel, Jacob's favourite wife. Especially loved by his father, Joseph is despised by his brothers and soon they conspire together to dispose of him. As a result he is sold as a slave to traders who transport him to Egypt (37:12–36).

The account of what becomes of Joseph is interrupted by an unusual incident involving Jacob's son Judah, who marries a Canaanite woman. She bears him three sons, Er, Onan and Shelah (38:3–50). In due course the eldest son Er marries a woman called Tamar. However, because he is evil, God puts him to death. Judah then commands his next son Onan to produce descendants (*zera'*) for Er by having intercourse with Tamar (38:8). Onan, however, evades this responsibility and, consequently, he too is put to death by God. Judah then tells Tamar to return to her own family, thus avoiding the possibility that Shelah, his youngest son, might suffer the same fate (38:11). Tamar, however, is determined to have a child and so she poses

as a shrine-prostitute in order to sleep with Judah (38:15–18). She succeeds in becoming pregnant and gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerah (38:2–30). Chapter 38 thus introduces us to the seed of Judah.

In chapter 39 we take up again the plight of Joseph. Through a series of events we follow Joseph's chequered career, from slave to prisoner (39:1–40:23), to governor of Egypt (41:1–40). Under Joseph's direction the Egyptians prepare for the seven years of famine predicted in Pharaoh's dream (41:41–57). At this stage in the story Joseph's brothers reappear, sent by their father to buy grain in Egypt (42:1–5). After various complications Joseph reveals himself to them (45:1–15). This results in Pharaoh commanding that all of Joseph's family living in Canaan should come and dwell in Egypt (45:17–18). On learning that Joseph is still alive, Jacob agrees to go and see him (45:28). Thus all the descendants (*zera*^c) of Jacob go down to Egypt (46:6–7). A list of those involved is recorded in 46:8–27.

Although Joseph is by far the most important character in the final chapters of Genesis, the part played by Judah should not be overlooked. Chapter 38 narrates the unseemly incident with Tamar, portraying Judah in a very negative light. However, he is pictured in a more positive manner as the Joseph story progresses. When Joseph demands that Benjamin be brought down to Egypt, Judah is prepared to take full responsibility before his father for what happens to Benjamin (43:8–9). Moreover, later Judah acknowledges the guilt of the brothers (44:16), and volunteers to be a slave in Egypt in order that Benjamin may return home to his father in Canaan (44:18–34). Finally, Judah is the one entrusted by his father to get directions from Joseph for the journey to Goshen (46:28).

The settlement of Jacob and his family in Goshen is described in 46:28–47:12. Next is recorded Joseph's handling of the famine in Egypt (47:13–26). The chapter concludes with Jacob's request that he should be buried in Canaan (47:28–31). Chapter 48 records how Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Interestingly, Ephraim the younger son receives the greater blessing (48:14–20). This is then followed by a description of how Jacob sees the futures of his sons (49:1–27). In particular he highlights in detail what will become of Judah (49:8–12) and Joseph (49:22–26). Jacob's death and burial are narrated in 49:29–50:14. Finally, prior to dying, Joseph requests that when the descendants of Jacob eventually return to the land of Canaan they will carry his bones with them (50:24–25).

III

From this survey of Genesis it is very apparent that a major literary feature of the book is the lineage which begins with Adam and concludes with the sons of Jacob. Narratives and genealogies are carefully combined so as to highlight this line of descent. Almost all of the material in the book relates in one way or another to this feature. Before considering why Genesis traces this particular ancestry, let us observe some of the more significant traits of the family tree.

Throughout Genesis great care is taken to establish accurately the line of descent. Ancestry is reckoned through the father, and descendants are always clearly named.¹⁰ Moreover, it is apparent that each descendant must be of his father's seed. Thus, for example, it is not sufficient that Abraham should adopt a slave to be his heir (15:2-3). He must have an heir from his own body (15:4). For this reason barrenness presents a major barrier to the continuation of the family lineage. Remarkably, the wives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all described as being barren (11:30; 25:21; 29:31). When Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel eventually bear children, this is clearly attributed to divine intervention (21:1; 25:21; 30:22). Thus God is actively responsible for the continuation of the family line.

Another aspect of the ancestry found in Genesis is the desire to maintain the purity of the seed. In the patriarchal narratives marriages with Canaanites are discouraged.¹¹ Abraham seeks a wife for Isaac, not from the local population in Canaan, but rather from his relatives in Aram Naharaim (24:3-4). Later Isaac expresses the same desire as regards Jacob (28:1-5). The fact that Esau marries two Hittite women distresses his parents greatly (26:34-35). The one obvious anomaly to this rule is the peculiar relationship of Judah with Tamar (38:1-30). This concern for the purity of the seed may also underlie the enigmatic account of the sons of God marrying the daughters of men (6:1-4).¹²

¹⁰ It is possible, however, that in these genealogies, not every generation is included. R.R. Wilson notes that even in written genealogies there is a tendency to limit the maximum length of the lineage to ten generations. Thus it is not uncommon to find Near Eastern genealogies being modified by the addition and omission of names. Examples of this process of 'telescoping' are also to be found in the biblical texts (e.g., compare 1 Chron. 6:3-14 and Ezra 7:1-5; cf. W. H. Green, 'Primeval Chronology' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 47, 1890, 285-303).

¹¹ This is linked to the cursing on Canaan (9:20-27).

¹² The emphasis which occurs in Genesis upon maintaining the purity of the seed is interesting, especially in the light of those regulations in the Pentateuch which forbid the mixing of seeds and the crossbreeding of animals (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9).

Yet another noteworthy feature of the family tree is the way in which the younger son often displaces the older as regards the birthright and paternal blessing. This is most apparent in the story of Jacob and Esau where it forms a major part of the plot (25:29–34; 27:1–40). It also occurs with regard to Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael (17:18–21; 21:1–21). Similarly, Judah is privileged by his father over his older brothers, Reuben, Simeon and Levi (49:8–12). Jacob also has a special love for his younger son Joseph (37:3; 49:22–26). This feature is also present at the very beginning of the family tree, where the lineage is traced through Seth, the younger brother of Cain (5:3). In all these cases Genesis provides some reason for the rejection of the older brother, or brothers, in favour of the younger. Cain kills Abel (4:68). Esau, apparently against his father's wish, marries two local Hittite women (26:34–35; cf. 28:1–2). Reuben, Simeon, and Levi all act in ways which are disapproved of by their father Jacob (35:22; 34:25–30).¹³

IV

Having noted some of the more significant features of the family tree in Genesis, let us now consider why the book of Genesis is so intent on tracing this lineage. Why do we have this specific family tree? What is its significance?

As we have noted above the family lineage begins with Adam and is traced through Seth his third-born son. In naming Seth, Eve remarks, 'God has granted me another child (*zera'*) in place of Abel, since Cain killed him' (4:25). The use of the term *zera'* is noteworthy, especially in the light of God's earlier comment to the serpent:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed (*zar'^akā*) and her seed (*zar'^aāh*);
he will bruise your head,
and you will bruise his heel (3:15).

Eve's use of the word *zera'* in 4:25 associates the birth of Seth with the earlier divine pronouncement of judgement upon the serpent. Unfortunately, because most commentators do not

¹³ The fact that Judah receives a special blessing from his father (49:8–12) is quite remarkable, given that he marries a Canaanite (38:2) and is involved in an unseemly sexual relationship (38:12–30). However, chapter 38 commends the behaviour of Tamar in her desire to produce offspring (lit. 'seed') for her first husband (cf. 38:8), and the incident appears to have had a profound effect upon Judah (cf. 38:26).

consider 3:15 in the light of the whole book of Genesis, but tend to interpret it within the context of chapter 3 alone, this link with the birth of Seth is often missed. Yet, given the frequent use of *zera'* throughout Genesis and the book's overall concern to trace a particular line of descendants, the connection between 3:15 and 4:25 is surely significant. It is through the seed of Seth, and not Abel, that the divine pronouncement against the serpent will be fulfilled.

One of the difficulties with Genesis 3:15 concerns whether or not the noun *zera'* should be understood collectively or singularly. Either interpretation is possible, and the verse itself does not favour strongly one option against the other. It is not inconceivable that *zera'* is deliberately used, because it can denote both singular and plural. Eve's use of the term in 4:25, suggests that it is to be understood in the singular. On other occasions in Genesis it clearly has a collective meaning (e.g., 15:5). However, the fact that one specific line of descent is carefully traced throughout the entire book of Genesis suggests that the seed of 3:15 does not refer to all mankind, but rather to a specific individual or group. For this reason the divine pronouncement in 3:15 should not be interpreted as merely a general statement about the hostility which exists between men and snakes.

The precise meaning of Gen. 3:15 has been the subject of much debate, and space does not permit us to review here the wide variety of opinions which have been expressed. Rather we shall focus on one observation which is especially appropriate to our present discussion. This is the suggestion of W. Wifall that behind this verse one can discern a Davidic or royal background.¹⁴

In particular Wifall notes various expressions found in 'royal' Psalms which bear a close resemblance to 3:15. He writes,

David is addressed as God's 'anointed' or 'messiah' (Ps 89:21,39; 2 Sam 22:51) whose 'seed' will endure forever under God's favor (Ps 89:5,30,37). As Yahweh has crushed the ancient serpent 'Rahab' (Ps 89:11), so now David and his sons will crush their enemies in the dust beneath their feet (Ps 89:24; 2 Sam 22:37-43). . . In Ps 72:9, the foes of the Davidic king are described as 'bowing down before him' and 'licking the dust'. In the familiar 'messianic' Psalms, God is described as having placed 'all things under his feet' (Ps 8:6) and will make 'your enemies your footstool' (Ps 110:1).¹⁵

¹⁴ W. Wifall, 'Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36, 1974, 361-5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 363.

This connection between the seed of Eve and the Davidic dynasty may at first appear somewhat tenuous. However, when we consider the conclusion of the family tree in Genesis it is noteworthy that special attention is given to Judah, the ancestor of David.

We have noted above the importance of both Joseph and Judah in chapter 49. Here their father Jacob spends a disproportionately long time in pronouncing his blessing upon them. In marked contrast, what he has to say about his other ten sons is quite brief. Significantly, although Joseph occupies the more prominent position in the final chapters of Genesis, it is Judah who receives the superior blessing. According to his father, Judah's brothers will now bow down to him (49:8) and he will hold the sceptre and ruler's staff (49:10). While this does not necessarily imply kingship,¹⁶ it is noteworthy that the Davidic dynasty later arises from the tribe of Judah. Although Joseph also receives a lengthy blessing, there is no mention of, or allusion to, kingship. Joseph's descendants, however, form the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which later play a central role in the history of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Having noted this interest in kingship at the beginning and end of the family lineage, it is significant that the subject of royalty surfaces elsewhere in Genesis. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is God's promise to Abraham that, 'kings will come from you' (17:6). However, in a number of passages Abraham himself is portrayed as attaining to the status of a king, even if he does not have a royal title. In chapter 14 he is presented as superior to the kings of Ellasar, Elam, Goiim, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zebaiim and Bela. Later Abimelech, the king of Gerar, enters into a treaty with Abraham out of a sense of fear (21:22-34). (A similar treaty is later made between Abimelech and Isaac (26:26-33).) In 23:6 the Hittite inhabitants of Hebron speak of him as a 'mighty prince' (literally, 'a prince of God'). The subject of kingship also appears in the story of Joseph. At the very outset Joseph's dreams are interpreted by his brothers as indicating royalty: 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' (Gen. 37:8). Subsequently, he rises from the obscurity of an Egyptian prison to the position of governor, second only to

¹⁶ Westerman, *Genesis 37-50* (London, 1987) 230, argues, mainly on the basis of Judg. 5:14, that the terms *šēbet* 'sceptre' and *m'hoqēq* 'staff' refer to a 'commander's staff' and are not to be associated with the office of a king. However, the word *šēbet* does on occasions clearly denote a king's sceptre (e.g., Ps. 45:7). In Num. 2:3 and 10:14 the tribe of Judah comes first in lists involving all the tribes (cf. Jos. 15:1).

Pharaoh himself (41:40). Apart from these references, there are a few other passages which focus on royalty: the list of the kings of Edom (36:31–39) and the reference to Nimrod's kingdom (10:10). It is perhaps also worth noting that in the account of creation mankind is expected by God to exercise authority over the rest of creation (1:26,28; cf. 9:2).

In the light of the preceding observations we are now in a position to suggest that the book of Genesis provides a very remarkable and distinctive record of the early ancestry of the royal lines of David.¹⁷ This explains best the facts (a) that Genesis follows carefully the line of descent of one particular family, concluding in a special way with Judah, and (b) that close links exist between the traditions associated with these early ancestors and those associated with David himself. Thus, for example, one can observe similarities between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.¹⁸ There are also interesting parallels between Gen. 38 and the book of Ruth.¹⁹ Further, given that David is the youngest member of his family, it is interesting to observe that in Genesis the privilege of primogeniture is often overturned. These, however, represent only some of the links which exist between the book of Genesis and the biblical material concerning king David.²⁰

V

In the preceding discussion we have adopted a synthetic approach towards the text of Genesis. By viewing the book as a unity we have observed the importance of its genealogical framework and the book's special interest in tracing a specific line of descent. It is significant that the book of Genesis traces one line of seed, beginning with Eve and ending with Judah. Clearly,

¹⁷ R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, 132, observes that in the 'politico-jural sphere' Near Eastern genealogies "are used to legitimate royal and professional officeholders". Is it possible that the book of Genesis was viewed as supporting the claim of David to the royal throne?

¹⁸ E.g., R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David* (London, 1967).

¹⁹ Although Tamar and Ruth are non-Israelites they are both included in the genealogy of king David. Moreover, the Davidic genealogy in Ruth 4:18–22 starts with Perez the son of Tamar. It is perhaps also worth noting that king David named one of his daughters Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1).

²⁰ Cf. B. Mazar, 'The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 28, 1969, 73–83; G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, 1986), 107–120.

this ancestry, and the traditions associated with it, had a special significance for the Davidic monarchy.²¹

Given that the book of Genesis focuses in a special way on the ancestry of king David, we may now appreciate better various New Testament references and allusions to Genesis. For example, in his discussion of the seed of Abraham in Galatians 3:16 Paul adopts a messianic interpretation of the seed. The seed is Christ. Moreover, he is emphatic that the text of Genesis has in view one individual, rather than all the descendants of Abraham. In the light of our study, Paul's exegesis is not as strained as it may initially appear. Since Genesis focuses on the seed of David, Paul can hardly be faulted for viewing the 'seed' as referring to Jesus who was descended from the seed of David (Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8).

As regards Genesis 3:15 we are now in a better position to appreciate (a). why some Jewish sources offer a messianic interpretation of this verse,²² (b). why certain New Testament allusions to Gen 3:15 see it as relating to the Messiah,²³ and (c). why this passage was viewed by at least some of the early church fathers as the first announcement of the Gospel or Protevangelium.²⁴ Since the book of Genesis highlights in a special way the early ancestry of David, it is hardly surprising that passages which may have originally been interpreted as relating to the Davidic king should later be understood as referring to the Messiah.

²¹ According to the conventional source analysis of Genesis the Yahwistic material (J) is dated to the 10/9th century BC, whereas the Priestly material (P), which includes most of the genealogical information, comes from the 6/5th century. If, however, the genealogical framework of the book of Genesis relates to king David, a 6/5th century date for P appears unlikely. Our study supports a much earlier date for the main redaction of the book of Genesis.

²² Such an interpretation is found in the Septuagint (cf., R. A. Martin, 'The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Gen 3:15', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, 1965, 425-7), and in the targums Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti and Fragmentary.

²³ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-25; Rev. 12:1-13:1

²⁴ Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* (Library of Christian Classics) (Philadelphia, 1953), 390-1.