

CHRISTOPH LEVIN

Re-Reading the Scriptures

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
87*

Mohr Siebeck

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Christoph Levin

Re-Reading the Scriptures

Essays on the Literary History
of the Old Testament

Mohr Siebeck

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Gratefully dedicated to

Otto Kaiser

Preface

“Is there an English equivalent for the German word *Fortschreibung*?” At one of the receptions during the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2011 in San Francisco, I witnessed a discussion on the point between British and American colleagues. Suggestions went backwards and forwards, and in the end there was general agreement that no equivalent had up to now been found, and that perhaps none existed. So the term which Walther Zimmerli¹ introduced in 1969 would seem to be subject to the same fate as *Sitz im Leben* and *Vorlage*: it has become a loanword in English-language exegesis.

That does not mean that the thing itself cannot be described. Because the first collection of my exegetical studies in German appeared under the title *Fortschreibungen*,² I looked for an equivalent heading in English. However, there are reasons why I did not decide in favor of “Re-Writing” but instead chose “Re-Reading” and, in addition, have headed the collection not “Re-Writing the Bible” but “Re-Reading *the Scriptures*.” The literary growth which we can discover everywhere in the Bible was not seen by the writers to mean that they had augmented the Word of God on their own authority or even written it themselves. When they interpreted the texts for their own particular present, and allowed them to answer their own questions, they saw themselves as guarantors of the tradition. There was no distinct line dividing tradition from interpretation. The circle of canonical texts was therefore for a long time not firmly closed.

The essays which have been collected in the present volume are all determined by the basic insight that the biblical literature as we have it is the outcome of a gradual literary historical process. What must said here fundamentally and methodically can best be deduced from the essay on “Source Criticism: The Miracle at the Sea” (95–114). The first six essays have to do

¹ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (BKAT XIII; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 106*; English translation: *Ezekiel*, vol. 1 (trans. R. E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1979), 69. Clements uses different English terms: “development,” “updating of traditions,” also “successive elaboration.”

² Christoph Levin, *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 316; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). The title of the second volume is *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament II* (BZAW 431; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013).

with the Pentateuch, and especially with its oldest source: the Yahwist's History. My attention was drawn to its editorial textual level by pure chance in the spring of 1978, and since then I have investigated it in detail. On the basis of earlier narrative cycles which the editor has absorbed into his work, and in view of his language, it emerged that the earliest continuous source of the Pentateuch was addressed to the Jewish diaspora (1–23, 83–93). Through this finding, the tradition-history co-ordinates have shifted fundamentally over against previous research, even though at the same time many insights acquired by earlier research into the literary development of the Pentateuch proved to be correct. In order that the reader may follow the literary analysis, I have appended a complete English translation of the Yahwist's History, in which the sources are distinguished from the editor's text, and where the development of the pre-editorial sources is also made clear (25–44). Compared with the earlier German version of this reconstruction³ there are a not inconsiderable number of changes in detail.

Drawing on the foundation acquired in this way, I have since also investigated the later strata of the books of Genesis and Exodus especially, and have tried to gain a picture of the literary history of the Pentateuch as a whole. Here, as everywhere in the narrative tradition of the Bible, the theme of God's righteousness takes on an ever greater role in the course of the literary development. The scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife is a good example, among many others (65–82).

For the redaction history of the historical books the fundamental discovery is probably that the "synchronistic excerpt" which provides the scaffolding for the books of Kings represents a pre-deuteronomistic source (195–220). This eliminates the reason for the widespread notion that there was already a first form of the Deuteronomistic History in the era of the monarchy. In the essay "On the Cohesion and Separation of Books" (115–41) I have tried to show that this does not necessarily mean disputing the existence of the Deuteronomistic History.

The changed outline of the literary history has considerable consequences for our understanding of the religious history of Israel and Judah, and for the theology of the Old Testament. The whole concept of God's people "Israel" is up for debate. This is brought out in a number of the essays. Thus the traditional antagonism between "Israel and Canaan" turns out to be a late construction with which Second Temple Judaism described its relationship to its non-Jewish environment (143–63). The reasons are religious rather than ethnic and cultural, and a projection rather than a historical reality. At a first reading of the Bible, the reader gains the impression that biblical covenant theology was fundamental from the very beginning; but this has proved to be

³ Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 51–79.

the attempt to find a new foundation for the relationship to God after the political (and religious) catastrophe (245–59). It therefore belongs to the beginning of the Second Temple period. Religious conditions during the period of the monarchy deviate from it considerably. These are the subject of the brief outline “Old Testament Religion: Conflict and Peace” (165–81). However, the contrast which begins to emerge here does not mean a complete denial of the continuity between the era of the monarchy and the epoch of the Second Temple. The relevant sources show that concept of the “exile,” which is supposed to have divided the two periods, is largely fictitious (195–220).

The prophetic tradition could also be understood as a link binding the epochs together. But it acquired its literary form, largely speaking, not from the prophets in the period of the monarchy, but only through subsequent reflection. With a degree of exaggeration, we might say that the prophetic books in the Old Testament are not prophetic; they are the work of editors and interpreters. The book of Jeremiah is an important example; and here I have been able to reconstruct its early stages of development. It emerges that the theological concept of the “Word of God” which later became so important came into being in the wake of reflection about the relationship between prophecy and history (221–43). The book of Zephaniah is an example of a comprehensive process of *Fortschreibung*. Based on the cultic language passed down from the first Temple, the book grew in the course of time into one of the most important testimonies for late Old Testament eschatology (261–80). The groups supporting this late eschatology were the devout poor, who clung to the Torah but were not without reservation towards the cult (281–300). Against the contemporary historical background which thereby emerges, the Old Testament’s prophetic social ethic takes on a different light.

Most of the essays printed here have been held as lectures which I was invited to give between 2000 and 2010 in Estonia, Finland, Japan, Korea, Namibia, Scotland, South Africa, Switzerland, and in the United States. Since 2002 almost every year I have participated in sessions on various different subjects at the meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature.

Since 2004 co-operation with the colleagues in Finland has expanded particularly. From 2007 to 2012 I was involved in the project “Birth and Transmission of a Holy Tradition” funded by the European Science Foundation. Under the chairmanship of Juha Pakkala (Helsinki) who in 2006 won the European Young Investigator Award, this brought together colleagues from the universities of Helsinki, Tartu and Munich. Joint colloquiums are held almost annually.

Ever since 2005, in the framework of the partnership between the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität of Munich and the University of Alberta in Canada, there has been close co-operation with the Department of History and Classics in Edmonton, under the chairmanship of Ehud Ben Zvi. In 2008, 2009, 2011

and 2012 one-week workshops were held in Edmonton or Munich. Two of these have meanwhile been documented in print⁴ and a third volume, with the lectures given in 2012, is in preparation.⁵ All this has meant that although English has not become the language in which I myself work, it has acquired increasing importance for the purpose of communication.

In most cases the lecture versions of the essays were translated by Margaret Kohl, M.A., M.Litt., and I have increasingly come to value our excellent and longstanding co-operation, in the course of which I have not only learnt a great deal about English forms of expression, but have also been able to improve my exegetical argumentation. This has not been without influence on my use of German. One writes differently, and instinctively more precisely, when what one writes is going to be translated. For help with the English style for the printed versions I also have to thank Bernard M. Levinson and Lester L. Grabbe.

Unless specifically otherwise stated, the translation of the Biblical text has been taken from the Revised Standard Version, although this has often been altered to meet the exigencies of the exegesis. Alterations made for text-critical reasons are indicated by <pointed brackets>. Biblical references with asterisc * refer to emended text or to passages quoted only in part.

As is customary, the essays have been printed unaltered, except that they have been typographically and bibliographically unified and supplemented, and have been furnished with an index. Obvious errors have been corrected.

Christian Höllerer has provided valuable help with the layout. Anna Ammon and Hayim Malkhasy have read the proofs and prepared the indexes.

For the inclusion of these essays in the series “Forschungen zum Alten Testament” I have to thank the editors, and am also grateful to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki and the staff of Mohr Siebeck for their careful overseeing of the publication.

Munich, June 2013

Christoph Levin

⁴ *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; BZAW 404; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010); *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; FAT 85; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁵ *Thinking of Water in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Judah* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; BZAW; Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming).

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List of Abbreviations

AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
ÄgAbh	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
<i>AEL</i>	<i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i> . M. Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley, 1971–1980
<i>AHI</i>	G. I. Davies, <i>Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions – Corpus and Concordance</i> . Cambridge, 1991
AnBib	Analecta biblica
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament. Edited by M. Noth and H. W. Wolff
BM	British Museum
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ.NF</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift. Neue Folge</i>
BZAR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAP	Cowley, A. E. <i>Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.</i> Oxford, 1923
CB.OT	Coniectanea biblica. Old Testament series
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2002
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1995
DZGW	Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>EstB</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford, 1910
GTA	Göttinger theologische Arbeiten
HAE	J. Renz and W. Röllig, <i>Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik</i> . 3 vols. Darmstadt, 1995–2003
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HSAT	<i>Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments</i> . Edited by E. Kautzsch and A. Bertholet. 4th ed. Tübingen, 1922–1923
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JDT	<i>Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JPTH	<i>Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2d ed. Wiesbaden, 1966–1969
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KEH	Kurzgefaßtes exegetisches Handbuch
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KK	Kurzgefaßter Kommentar zu den heiligen Schriften Alten und Neuen Testaments
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976.
MThSt	Marburger Theologische Studien
Mus	<i>Muséon: Revue d'études orientales</i>
NBL	<i>Neues Bibel-Lexikon</i> . Edited by M. Görg and B. Lang. 3 vols. Zurich, 1991–2001
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische studien
RGG	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . 2d ed. 5 vols. Tübingen, 1927–1931; 3d ed. 6 vols. Tübingen, 1957–1962
RLA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by E. Ebeling et al. Berlin, 1928–
RPP	<i>Religion Past & Present</i> . Edited by H. D. Betz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, and E. Jüngel. 13 vols. Leiden and Boston, 2007–2013
SAT	Die Schriften des Alten Testaments in Auswahl
SBAB	Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series

SBOT	Sacred books of the Old Testament
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SHAW.PH	Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
StudBib	Studia Biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
<i>Syr.</i>	<i>Syria</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997–2006
ThSt	Theologische Studien
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TUAT</i>	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i> . Edited by Otto Kaiser. Gütersloh, 1982–2001
<i>TUAT.E</i>	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments. Ergänzungslieferung</i> . Edited by Otto Kaiser. Gütersloh, 2001
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZABR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZKT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch

I

Recent Pentateuch research has again come to center on the long-familiar fact that the Pentateuch narrative rests on a sequence of individual narrative compositions. In the non-Priestly text, six separate narrative groups can be distinguished: (1) the primeval history (Gen 2–11), which has to do with the origin of the world and humankind; (2) the history of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 12–36); (3) the story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37–50); (4) the narrative about Moses (Exod 2–4); (5) the history of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their wanderings through the desert (Exod 12–Num 20), to which the death of Moses may also have belonged (Deut 34*); and (6) the story about the seer Balaam (Num 22–24).

The diversity of the material indicates that it was only at a later stage that these groups were linked to form the continuous narrative we have today. At present the view is gaining ground that the compositions were joined together not in a single literary step but in several stages, and that this fusion took place at a late period. One reason is that, according to ancient Israelite tradition, the history of God's people began with the exodus from Egypt. Consequently it is assumed that the great Old Testament history also originally began with the book of Exodus. According to this view, the stories of the patriarchs and the primeval history were put in front of the account of the exodus only later.¹ The Documentary Hypothesis, which assumes that there are sources that run

¹ Considerations along these lines can be found already in Gerhard von Rad, "The Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch, and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966; German original 1938), 1–78, here 50–67; also in Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. B. W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972; German original 1948), 46–62. See recently Markus Witte, *Die biblische Urgeschichte: Redaktions- und theologiegeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Genesis 1,1–11,26* (BZAW 265; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998); Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; Siphut 3; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010; German original 1999); Jan Christian Gertz, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung* (FRLANT 186; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; London: T&T Clark, 2005; German original 2000), 279–82.

right through the Pentateuch, is incompatible with a solution of this kind. Not a few of today's scholars consider that this hypothesis is now superseded.² Instead, Deuteronomistic³ or late wisdom writers⁴ are made responsible for fusing the different blocks of tradition. This view can claim support inasmuch as explicit cross-references in the Pentateuch have clearly been introduced subsequently, and at a late date;⁵ one example is the explicit references to the tradition of the patriarchs in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy.⁶

Another solution sees the Priestly source as providing the historiographical scaffolding into which the non-Priestly narratives have been inserted at a later point, not having formed a separate source of its own before that.⁷ This revival of the Supplementary Hypothesis once more attributes to the source P the position of the basic document that nineteenth-century research rightly denied to it.

Until a short time ago, however, the Documentary Hypothesis was also called into question because of the Priestly source, since the literary coherence in the patriarchal narratives is so weak as to suggest that there was no independent written source here, but that the P material represents a reworking of the older text.⁸ The Priestly source alone is not suited to serve as the basis for the narrative of the whole Pentateuch, even if there are still good reasons for the assumption of an originally independent literary thread.

² See *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (ed. Jan Christian Gertz et al.; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); and my critical review of this volume: Christoph Levin, "Abschied vom Jahwisten?" *TRu* 69 (2004): 329–44, repr. in *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2 (BZAW 431; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 43–58. See also recently *A Farewell to the Yahwist?* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid; SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), and my contribution to this volume: "The Yahwist and the Redactional Link between Genesis and Exodus," repr. below 83–93.

³ See, e.g., Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); idem, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

⁴ See, e.g., Witte, *Die biblische Urgeschichte*.

⁵ Shown by Rainer Kessler, "Die Querverweise im Pentateuch" (Th.D. diss., University of Heidelberg, 1972); Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. J. J. Scullion, JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990; German original 1977), 84–85.

⁶ See Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990).

⁷ Thus, e.g., Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch* (FAT 30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); idem, "Pentateuch V: The Literary and Religious History of the Pentateuch," *RPP* (2011), 9:687–90.

⁸ See Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 301–21; Rendtorff, *Problem of the Process*; Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*.

The composition of the Pentateuch hangs not on a single thread but on a cord plaited together from two strands, the Priestly source and the Yahwist's history. This cord makes it possible for the work as a whole to avoid falling apart when one of the two threads is torn or missing, which is the case several times.

It is certainly true that the material in the books of Genesis to Numbers that does not derive from the Priestly source provides us with a more or less coherent narrative. Even if this coherence cannot have existed when the transmission began because of the disparity of the material, it will not have been produced merely through the late cross-references. There are good reasons why earlier scholars read the non-Priestly Pentateuch as a literary unity.⁹ This is especially true for the Yahwist, whom earlier research rightly recognized as providing the basis of the narrative.¹⁰ It is no counterargument to say that the explicit cross-references between the book of Genesis, on the one hand, and the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy, on the other, are only late. Those references are no more than the stucco on a long-existing building. They are not the supporting beams that hold the construction together. The stucco is external and strikes the eye. But for the stability of the building, it is the supporting beams that are important. Consequently the question about a redaction (or editing process) of the non-Priestly narrative that is at the same time pre-Priestly and non-Deuteronomistic is inescapable. If a redaction of this kind were to be found, it would be the best proof that the Documentary Hypothesis (in the form of the two-source hypothesis, P and J)¹¹ is still the solution that best fits the literary history of the Pentateuch.

For a long time scholars saw the development of the pre-Priestly Pentateuch not as a question of redaction, or editorial, history but as a problem about the history of the transmission. The narrative foundation of the Pentateuch was interpreted as a composition that drew on current oral tradition. The diversity that can be detected behind today's text was put down to popular

⁹ For a survey of the research, see my *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 9–35.

¹⁰ This view was emphatically von Rad's. See his *Problem of the Hexateuch*. Even if his presuppositions about the transmission history have meanwhile been cogently refuted, the conclusion, taken as a redaction-history hypothesis, meets the facts with astonishing accuracy.

¹¹ From the start – that is, from the eighteenth century onwards – the Documentary Hypothesis was so evident that scholars came to apply it again and again to the separate sources. This led to hypotheses such as E (the “Elohist”), N (“Nomadenquelle” [Nomad source]), L (“Laienquelle” [Lay source]), and others. This approach has clearly proved to be mistaken. The fusion of sources as suggested in the Documentary Hypothesis is not the rule in Old Testament literary history but very much an exception. See Paul Volz and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* (BZAW 63; Gießen: Töpelmann, 1933).

narrative tradition.¹² This approach reflects the influence of romanticism; the activity of collectors such as the Brothers Grimm and others at that time suggested a model. But even in the nineteenth century, people became aware of tensions that can be explained only in literary terms. Since the 1960s the internal lack of unity has come to be explained as the result of the redaction history.¹³ It is emerging ever more clearly that the Yahwist is an editorial collection with a distinctive literary profile that has fused older written sources into a new whole.¹⁴ Editorial compositions of this kind do not stand at the beginning of the history of a literary culture. Numerous indications point to the period after the end of the Judean monarchy, that is to say, the sixth century B.C.E.¹⁵

¹² An example of this view is Hermann Gunkel's famous commentary *Genesis* (trans. M. E. Biddle; Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997; German original 3d ed., 1910).

¹³ See Rudolf Kilian, *Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferungen literarkritisch und traditionskritisch untersucht* (BBB 24; Bonn: Hanstein, 1966); Renate Friebe, "Form und Entstehungsgeschichte des Plagenzyklus Exodus 7,8–13,16" (Theol. diss., University of Halle, 1967); Volkmar Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen der Wüstenüberlieferung des Jahwisten* (MThSt 7; Marburg: Elwert, 1970); Erich Zenger, *Die Sinaietheophanie: Untersuchungen zum jahwistischen und elohistischen Geschichtswerk* (FB 3; Würzburg: Echter, 1971); Peter Weimar, *Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (BZAW 146; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977).

¹⁴ I do not agree with John Van Seters' approach in rejecting the concept of an editor J; see his *Der Jahwist als Historiker* (ThSt 134; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1987), and his *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the 'Editor' in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006). The inconsistencies in the Yahwistic source make a separation between narrative and editorial text inescapable. The tensions are literary, even textual, in kind and do not fit the concept of a renarration of traditions by a historian. Because of the lack of differentiation, the "Yahwist" emerges as a literary collection with no distinctive profile; many texts are attributed to him that earlier research rightly saw as non-Yahwistic. For discussion, see Bernard M. Levinson, "Is the Covenant Code an Exilic Composition? A Response to John Van Seters," in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 272–325, here 284–88 and 315–17; Jean-Louis Ska, "A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Redactors," *ST* 59 (2005): 4–18.

¹⁵ Thus Levin, *Der Jahwist*. An outline of the thesis is also to be found in my book *The Old Testament: A Brief Introduction* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005; German original 2001), 61–70. Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 161–65, presents a perfect and sympathetic outline, related to the summary in *Der Jahwist*, 414–35 ("The Yahwist's message"). Unfortunately he does not refer to the redaction-critical proof. My thesis is not initially based on tendency criticism but on analytical literary criticism, form-critical arguments, and language. Nicholson's most important objection is that the universalism of J can be found already in Amos and Isaiah (pp. 165–69). If this is true – there are good reasons for doubting that the respective texts go back to the eighth-century prophets themselves – the universalism of J is just one feature among many others.

II

Let us look more closely at the different blocks of narrative tradition.¹⁶ The *primeval history* (Gen 1–11) rests on a narrative about the origin of human beings, an anthropogony. Like the Babylonian epic about the creation of the world, the *Enuma elish*,¹⁷ this primeval history begins with an account of the state of the world before creation, the great “Not Yet”: “When no plant of the field was yet in the earth” (Gen 2:5) – when there was still no vegetation. In Genesis, unlike in Babylonian mythology, the first act is not the creation of the gods. Here creation begins with the human being (Gen 2–3). A single God goes to work like a potter. After he has blown breath into the nostril of the man he has created, he plants a garden for him in Eden, in the east. Afterwards God creates the animals, and finally the woman, out of the man’s rib. Even the clothing, which distinguishes the human being from other living things, comes from God.

The first two human beings produce a son, Cain (Gen 4). With Cain a series of generations begins that leads to Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.¹⁸ Into this tribal list all kinds of notes have subsequently been interpolated about the differentiations of the arts of civilization: the raising of cattle and arable farming, urban building, music, wrought-iron work. The series leads into the so-called table of the nations (Gen 10), which classifies the peoples in the world of that time according to the place in which they lived and their language, and links them with each other genealogically.¹⁹ At this point the description of the primeval era merges into an account of the historical world. The list of peoples was an already-existing entity, for it is

¹⁶ The outline given here follows the detailed literary-critical analysis in *Der Jahwist*. Since 1993, however, a number of changes have occurred (and others may still follow). See the English translation of the Yahwist’s history, below 25–49.

¹⁷ *COS* 1:111 (Benjamin R. Foster); *ANET*, 60–61 (E. A. Speiser).

¹⁸ Unfortunately the sequence is interrupted between Lamech and Noah. However, the gap can in all probability be closed on the basis of the parallel thread in Gen 5 (P), since the lists of the ancestors in the Priestly source rests on the Yahwist’s account in Gen 4, as Karl Budde has clearly shown in his *Die Biblische Urgeschichte (Gen. 1–12,5)* (Gießen: Ricker, 1883), 89–182.

¹⁹ Usually the table of the nations counts as part of the Priestly source. This is a mistake that is due to the *toledot*-heading in Gen 10:1 through which the redaction J/P imitated the Priestly heading system in order to fit the pentateuchal sources together, thus producing a doublet to Gen 11:10. The Yahwistic parts of the chapter do not form a coherent text but are additions to the original table of the nations. This proves that the table belongs to the pre-Yahwistic sources, not to the Priestly source. The Priestly writer did not focus on geographical and historical details such as are presented here.

divided according to the four regions of the world, which do not match the “three” of Noah’s sons. Since Assyria is mentioned but not Babylon and Persia, the seventh century would seem to be a plausible date for the composition. The interest in the countries of the west is striking.

Just as in the ancient Babylonian Atramhasis epic, the transition from the primeval history to history proper is interrupted by the great *flood* (Gen 6–9).²⁰ Before humankind spreads throughout the earth, chaos returns once more. Noah survives because of the solicitous care of the God Yahweh. The hero of the flood becomes the second father of humankind. That the story of the flood was interpolated later is shown by the detail that, unlike Utnapishtim, the hero of the flood in the Gilgamesh epic, Noah neglects to take the craftsmen with him into the ark.²¹ The details about cultural history in Gen 4 aim to describe the origins of the civilization of the day and do not take into account the fact that after the flood everything begins again from the beginning.²²

With the *second* block of the narrative tradition, the *history of the patriarchs* (Genesis 12–36), we find ourselves in another world. The chief characters in the action are seen as individuals, judging by their names: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are grandfather, father, and son. On a closer look, we see that the composition is based on three great, artistically embroidered narratives: the wooing of a bride for Isaac (Gen 24); Jacob’s theft of a blessing (Gen 27); and Jacob’s marriage with Laban’s daughters (Gen 29–30). With only a few stitches (see Gen 24:67aβ; 25:21bβ, 24, 25*, 26a, 27–28, and Gen [27:42–45;] 28:10) these narratives are joined into a narrative sequence. All the events take place in the framework of the family; moreover, the continued existence of the family is their real subject. What is narrated is solely the sequence of the generations: marriage, descendants, and inheritance. We have to read the story of the patriarchs in its earliest nucleus as the history of a particular family, and as that alone. What is striking is the broad geographical horizon. Abraham settles in the steppe, in the direction of Egypt (Gen 20:1); Isaac in Beersheba, on the southwest border of Judah (Gen 28:10); but the country where their relatives live is northern Syria.

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, is at first childless (Gen 16). She therefore gives Abraham her maid as his wife, with whom he begets Ishmael. When at last Sarah becomes pregnant, Abraham casts off the maid and her son (Gen 21).

²⁰ COS 1:130 (Benjamin R. Foster); Wilfred G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969).

²¹ Thus the account of the flood on the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh epic, line 85, see ANET, 72–99 (E. A. Speiser); COS 1:132 (Benjamin R. Foster).

²² Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* (4th ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963; orig. pub. 1876–78), 10.

The very next scene describes how Sarah's son Isaac acquires a wife (Gen 24). Abraham, who knows that his end is near, commands his servant to take a long journey into Syrian Mesopotamia, where he is to woo Rebekah, the daughter of his brother Nahor.

Rebekah bears twins (Gen 25). In the story, the birth is followed immediately by the quarrel of the grown-up sons about the inheritance of their father (Gen 27). With the help of his mother, the younger twin, Jacob, steals a march on his elder brother, Esau, and receives the blessing of the firstborn from Isaac, who is blind and on his deathbed. To avoid Esau's vengeance, Jacob flees to Haran, to Laban, Rebekah's brother (Gen 28:10). There he desires Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, for his wife (Gen 29). Since he is unable to pay the bride-price, he engages to serve Laban for seven years. When the seven years are up, the wedding is held. On the morning after the wedding night, Jacob discovers that Laban has brought him the wrong woman – his older daughter, Leah. Laban excuses himself on the grounds of custom: "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn" (29:26). At the end of the bridal week he gives Jacob the younger daughter, Rachel, into the bargain. This leads to further complications. In order to free himself from Laban, Jacob chooses to flee (Gen 31). Laban catches up with him, and in the end the two come to an agreement, according to which Laban is given rights of ownership over the women, but Jacob the right of use.²³

Surprisingly enough, this family story has later been embroidered into a kind of history of national origins. The story of Abraham was supplemented by the tradition about Lot (Gen 19). This tells that what is now the Dead Sea was once the city of Sodom, which was destroyed because of the wickedness of its inhabitants. Lot, having escaped the inferno, begets with his two daughters his sons Moab and Ammon, who become the ancestors of the monarchies east of the Jordan. More important are a number of aetiologically key scenes in Gen 31–35 that were added later, forming an appendix to the original narratives about Jacob. When he returns from Laban, Jacob gives the mountains of Gilead their name (Gen 31) and founds Mahanaim east of the Jordan (Gen 32), as well as the place Luz, and builds Rachel's tomb near Ephrath (Gen 35). It is only from this point that Jacob counts as the progenitor, or tribal father, of Israel. It is remarkable that in the story of the patriarchs, developed in this way into a national history, Judah does not appear.²⁴ All the key scenes take place in the northern kingdom of Israel, including Gilead, or in its sphere of influence east of the Jordan.

²³ See Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 237–44.

²⁴ This is a difference compared with the original narratives, in which Beersheba is an important dwelling place (Gen 28:10). In Gen 13:18; 23:2, 19; 35:27 Mamre is equated with Hebron/Kiriath-arba; but these are quite evidently late glosses, see Gen 25:9; 49:30; 50:13. In fact we do not know where Mamre was situated.

The most important episode of this kind is the story about Bethel (Gen 28), which was later inserted at the point of intersection between the cycles of the Jacob–Esau narratives and the Jacob–Laban narratives. Jacob is supposed to have founded the royal sanctuary of the northern kingdom on his flight to Haran. He dreams about a ladder between heaven and earth, which he calls not merely “Beth-El” (“House of God”) but “Gate of Heaven” (28:17). Read with a tiny change as “Gate of the gods” (Akkadian *Bāb-ilī*), the dream can be related to Etemenanki, the Tower of Babel, “the house of the foundation of heaven and earth.” Apparently a Mesopotamian tradition has been transformed into the story of the founding of the Israelite sanctuary.²⁵ This change may be no earlier than the eighth or seventh century. It is striking that in this cultic saga, and elsewhere too, the monarchy plays no part.²⁶ We have to conclude from this that the narrative establishing the national history came into being only after the end of the northern kingdom, which fell to the Assyrians in 722. It could derive from members of the upper class who had fled to Judah on the conquest of Samaria.

With the *third* of the narrative blocks, the *story of Joseph and his brothers* (Gen 37; 39–45), we return to the family sector. In its oldest form this is a fairytale. Like many examples of the genre, it begins with a family conflict. The father favours the youngest son, and excites the jealousy of the brothers. They sell Joseph into Egypt. There, at the end of a path full of humiliations, he rises to become the first man in the state after the pharaoh. Behind the scene with “Potiphar’s wife” and her attempt at seduction is the Egyptian fairytale about the two brothers, which dates from the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty.²⁷ Later, the Joseph story was developed into a novella that interprets the changing fortunes of its hero as an example of Yahweh’s guidance.

Of the *fourth* narrative block, the *stories about Moses*, only the beginning is extant (Exod 2–4). Allegedly born a Levite, Moses is exposed in a basket in the Nile and is adopted by the pharaoh’s daughter (2:1–10). This is intended as an assertion of his Israelite origin, in contrast to his Egyptian name (which, paradoxically, is explained through a Hebrew etymology). When it becomes known that Moses has intervened as avenger in a conflict, he is forced to flee

²⁵ See Nabopolassar’s building inscription for Etemenanki, the Tower of Babel, *TUAT* 2/4:490–93 (Karl Hecker).

²⁶ One may argue that an antimonarchical tendency can be found in the Old Testament (and that the Patriarchal Narratives may represent this tradition). A closer look, however, shows that all the related texts reflect the concept of theocracy that emerged only in postexilic Judaism under the conditions of the Persian Empire. In ancient Israel, as throughout the Ancient Near East, people could not imagine any (religio-)political concept other than monarchy. See Reinhard Müller, *Königtum und Gottesherrschaft: Untersuchungen zur alttestamentlichen Monarchiekritik* (FAT II 3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

²⁷ *ANET*, 23–25 (John A. Wilson); *COS* 1:40 (Miriam Lichtheim); *AEL* 2:203–11.

from the pharaoh (2:16–22). In Midian, in northwest Arabia, he marries into the priest's family. After the pharaoh's death, Moses returns to Egypt (Exod 2:23aα; 4:20a). Here the source breaks off; it provides evidence for the interest in the outstanding priestly figure who is later linked with the memory of Israel's early period. Moses's rank is shown by the fact that the account of his exposure in the Nile draws on the story about the origin of King Sargon of Akkad, a story known to us in a Neo-Assyrian version.²⁸

The *fifth* great unit of tradition describes the *exodus* of the Israelites from Egypt and their wanderings through the desert. The path begins in the delta palace of Ramses II (Exod 12:37) and finds its provisional end on the southern border of Judah, in Kadesh (Num 20:1a), or in Shittim, the place from which the spies set out (Num 25:1a; Josh 2:1). Along this narrative thread, a series of episodes has been strung dealing with the living conditions in the desert: the bitter water in Mara and the palm oasis of Elim (Exod 15), the food provided for the people through quails and through a scale-insect secretion called manna (Exod 16).

The oldest thread in the wilderness narratives was later supplemented by the *miracle at the sea*, which describes the downfall of the pursuing pharaoh (Exod 14–15), and by the scene on the *mountain of God*, which later, in the course of a long literary development, became the place where the Old Testament law was given (Exod 19ff.). Here again we find the figure of Moses, now assuming the role of the leading priest, who proclaims the oracle of salvation before the battle begins (Exod 14:13–14), and who alone is allowed to approach the deity on the mountain (= sanctuary). The notes about the deaths of Miriam (Num 20:1b) and Moses (Deut 34:5*) may also have belonged to this strand of tradition.

Before this conclusion to the narrative, as a *sixth* narrative block, the story about the seer Balaam has been interpolated (Num 22–24). Balaam is hired by the Moabite king Balak to curse Israel but blesses it instead. This reflects the dispute between the northern kingdom of Israel and Moab southeast of the Jordan, which for a time was Israel's vassal state. Here too the date is established through a nonbiblical source: a Balaam tradition in Aramaic dating from the eighth/seventh century was discovered in 1967 at Tell Deir Alla in the Jordan Valley.²⁹

²⁸ The story of the exposed child is widespread; see the survey in Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (trans. W. C. Linss; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989; German original 1985) on Matt 2. The closest parallel, however, is the birth legend of Sargon of Akkad; see *ANET*, 119 (E. A. Speiser); *COS* 1:133 (Benjamin R. Foster).

²⁹ *COS* 2:27 (Baruch A. Levine).

III

Considering the redaction of the Deuteronomistic History, Martin Noth spoke of the “evidence that the work is a self-contained whole.”³⁰ To support his view Noth mentions a number of common characteristics that hold the work together. Similarly, characteristics of redactional composition can be found in the earliest ongoing stratum of the narrative in the Pentateuch, characteristics that shape the work into a literary unity with its own distinct meaning.

The *first* of these characteristics has to do with the *choice of sources*. The fragmentary nature of some of the narrative blocks, and even of individual stories, is evident, for example, the Abraham narratives and the original story of Moses, which suddenly breaks off after Exod 4:20. This shows that the material that has been collected in the Pentateuch is what remains of a still greater wealth of literary tradition that has otherwise been lost. What is extant rests on a selection, and the viewpoints determining it can be described. Since these viewpoints affect all six blocks of tradition in the same way, they provide evidence of the work’s editorial coherence.

The main guiding principle in the choice of sources can be easily detected. All the narratives with a single exception are set outside the country of Israel and Judah. They depict the main actors as *strangers*: Hagar in the desert (Gen 16); Lot in Sodom (Gen 19); Abraham’s servant in Mesopotamia (Gen 24); Isaac among the Philistines (Gen 26); Jacob in Haran (Gen 29–30); Joseph in Egypt (Gen 39–45); in Egypt too, later, the Israelites (Gen 46–Exod 1); Moses in Midian (Exod 2); the people on their journey through the desert (Exod 12–Num 20). That this is the rule is shown by the exception: for the purposes of the stories about Abraham (Gen 12–22), which are set in the Israelite mountains, the country of Israel has been artificially declared a foreign land by way of the distinction between Israelites and Canaanites: “At that time the Canaanites were in the land” (Gen 12:6). This comment is matched by the promise: “To your descendants I will give this land” (Gen 12:7). The Israelite possession of the land is thus supposed still to lie in the future. With the help of this fiction, Abraham too now lives in a foreign country.

The work as a whole relates a history of exile. In order to emphasize this, the sources used have been painted over with vivid colours. The narrative as a whole begins with the expulsion from paradise and ends, as far as we can see, before the gates of the promised land. The road to an alien land is a terrible fate, for it runs counter to a fundamental anthropological fact: the essential ties of the human being (Hebrew אָדָם) with the earth (Hebrew אֲדָמָה). This fundamental premise is the theme of the creation narrative (Gen 2) in the edited version we have today: the human being is created from the earth, and at

³⁰ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. Doull et al.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981; German original 1943), 4.

the end of his life he will return to it. The trees in the garden and the animals too originate from the earth – indirectly the woman also, since she has been fashioned out of the man's rib. The task set for the human's existence is "to till the ground from which he was taken" (Gen 2:5; 3:23) – that is to say, to settle down as farmer. For the relationship between human beings and the earth to be disturbed is a curse. This is what the interpolated scene about the fall tells us (Gen 3). "Death is threatened for non-observance, but what follows ... is not death or social extinction but exile."³¹

Cain's fate is still worse. Because he has soaked the earth with his brother's blood, a curse drives him away from the cultivated land (Gen 4). From now on he wanders over the earth "a fugitive and a wanderer." Yet to exist as a stranger can also be God's charge, as is the case with Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house" (Gen 12:1). In this case the charge is linked with the promise of Yahweh's support and blessing.

In these stories the conditions in which the stranger exists are described in sometimes drastic terms. As someone with fewer rights than the others, he lives among an indigenous majority from whom he is ethnically and religiously divided. Lot experiences the inhabitants of Sodom as a horde of unbridled evildoers who do not hesitate to assault sexually the guest he has taken into his house. At the expense of his two virgin daughters, he tries to pacify the lustful crowd, but the attempt fails: "They said: 'This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.' Then they pressed hard against the man" (Gen 19:9). Isaac has reason to fear that he will be murdered by the Philistines for the sake of his wife, who is a desirable beauty (Gen 26:7). Through the false accusations of his Egyptian master's wife, Joseph lands in prison (Gen 39). The pharaoh compels the Israelites in Egypt to forced labour, with the declared purpose of decimating them (Exod 1). When his plan fails, he commands the midwives to kill the newborn sons of the Hebrews.

In this situation special values and forms of life develop. The less the individual feels in harmony with the majority of those around him, the greater the importance of family and kindred. Marriage with the indigenous population is forbidden, and the segregation is strictly observed. Internal disputes are settled with a reminder of the common bond between the contenders. When a quarrel about grazing rights breaks out, Abraham deems it right to say to Lot: "Let there be no strife between you and me, for we are kinsmen" (Gen 13:8); and in exemplary fashion he gives Lot first choice of the land. Great importance is attached to the sequence of generations. In order to portray this, the natural sequence of marriage, procreation, and birth is disturbed with unnatural

³¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, "A Post-exilic Lay Source in Genesis 1–11" in *Abschied vom Jahwisten* (ed. Gertz et al.), 49–61, here 51.

regularity. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel – all are at first barren, until through Yahweh's influence the heir is born.³² This stylistic device shows that the mere continuance of the family is in itself intended to count as a proof of Yahweh's efficacious help.

Religion too is determined by the conditions of the family. Yahweh has cast off his ties with the land of Israel and Judah. The relationship to him is no longer mediated through the fact that his worshippers settle in the place where this god has his given sphere of influence. The determining fact is now that the clan, the extended family, worships Yahweh. Yahweh becomes "the God of the fathers" who is "characterized not by a firm link with one place, but by a continuous connection with one group of people."³³ Wherever his followers happen to be, he proves his efficacy and confers blessing: "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land" (Gen 28:15). Jacob is given this promise in Bethel and he responds, full of astonishment: "Surely Yahweh is in this place; and I did not know it" (v. 16). If the scene takes place in the sanctuary of the Northern Kingdom, it also means resistance to the claim of the temple in Jerusalem to be the sole legitimate cultic site for Yahweh's worshippers.³⁴ For life in the dispersion, it was vital to put an end to any confinement to the central sanctuary, a limitation that had been elevated to the rank of doctrine only at the end of the seventh century, under King Josiah.³⁵

IV

The *view of history* is the *second* sign of a planned unity. It has been fashioned by the redaction on the basis of selected sources and with the help of its own linguistic methods. It again makes plain the initial situation to which the Yahwist is reacting: the alien status of the Israelites.

The threat hanging over the alien has an external side, which reaches from the exposure to trickery in material and legal affairs to physical violence; and

³² Even the pregnancies of Eve (Gen 4:1), Hagar (birth oracle, Gen 16:11) and Leah (Gen 29:31) are put down to Yahweh.

³³ Albrecht Alt, "The God of the Fathers," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966; German original 1929), 1–77, here 23.

³⁴ For detailed argumentation, especially with regard to the altar law of the Covenant Code, see Christoph Levin, "Das Deuteronomium und der Jahwist," in *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium für Lothar Perlitt zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann; FRLANT 190; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 121–36, repr. in *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 316; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 96–110.

³⁵ The historical link between the earliest Deuteronomic law (Deut 12–26) and Josiah (639–609 B.C.E.) may still be considered the most probable.

it has an inward one, which touches a person's self-esteem. At that time this was reflected in religious ideas. What the majority thinks and does seems of necessity to have a higher claim, and it requires great self-assurance, or the force of circumstance, to refuse worship to the country's gods.

A situation of this kind cries out for compensation. That is why the Yahwist's work recounts salvation history. In this history, Yahweh – in origin the dynastic god of the two minor Palestinian kingdoms of Israel and Judah – is described as “the God of heaven” (Gen 24:3, 7) who directs the destiny of everyone. What we see taking place here is a profound transformation in the history of religion. It is a striking fact that we otherwise meet this Old Testament title only in writings dating from the Persian period, where it has as model Ahura Mazda, the Persian god of heaven. As the god of heaven, Yahweh nevertheless remains bound to his restricted origin. The special relationship to his worshippers in the closer sense still exists – indeed it becomes the real subject of the account.

The work traces the history of the people of Israel from the beginning of the world down to the threshold of the conquest of the Palestinian land. For this purpose the already existing blocks are sewn together by means of a continuous genealogy.³⁶ Abraham now counts as the descendant of Shem, from the table of the nations (Gen 10:21). Moses having been born as the son of a Levite (Exod 2:1) is incorporated into the genealogical line of Jacob in that Levi is declared to have been one of the sons of Jacob (Gen 29:34).

Because a general anthropogony is placed at the beginning, God's people are from the outset put in relation to the rest of humankind as a whole, in the sense that they are set over against all the others. With occasionally shocking logic, the division between the people who belong to Yahweh and the great majority, who are far from him, runs right through the work. The cleft begins with the sons of the first human being. Both sons bring Yahweh an offering. “And Yahweh had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard” (Gen 4:4–5) – no reason for this being given. When, as a result, Cain becomes a murderer, he is cursed (vv. 11–12). Afterwards the first man begets another son, Seth, through whom Yahweh gets a new group of followers: “At that time men began to call upon the name of Yahweh” (v. 26). Noah descends from Seth, and in him Yahweh's partiality is intensified to an unsurpassable degree: he is the only one who finds “favor in the eyes of Yahweh” (Gen 6:8), when all human beings are drowned in the flood.

After the fall of the first human being, existence is subject to a curse: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Gen 3:17). But things do not rest there. When Noah is born, his father, Lamech, declares: “Out of the ground that Yahweh has cursed this one

³⁶ See Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions*, 214–19 (“Genealogies”).

shall bring us relief from our work" (5:29). And after the flood Yahweh does in fact resolve: "I will never again curse the ground because of man" (8:21). With this pronouncement he affirms that the curse is lifted. For Noah and for those who are his, the curse is no longer in force; in its place is an abundance of blessing.

Although the majority who are far from Yahweh are annihilated in the flood, this does not prevent the division of humankind from continuing afterwards, just as the flood too is repeated in spite of the promise – this time as a rain of fire on Sodom. Among Noah's sons, a curse is laid on Ham/Canaan because of an indecent act. In the table of the nations, Nimrod is numbered among Ham's sons. "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Akkad, all of them in the land of Shinar" (Gen 10:10). This Mesopotamian empire counts as the realm of evil. Egypt too is supposed to be the descendant of Ham, as are, of course, the Canaanites, under whom Abraham and Lot are said to have lived as strangers. In Shem, "the father of all the children of Eber" (= all the Hebrews) the group of those who belong to Yahweh stands over against the sons of Ham (v. 21). In spite of all the differentiations in the table of the nations, at the end of the primeval history humankind is divided into two according to a simple pattern, before Yahweh scatters it over the earth, because of the tower of Babel.

The line of blessing and the line of curse run counter to each other until the end of the work. The blessing is expressed in the wealth of Abraham and Lot, and in the birth of Isaac, which Yahweh brings about contrary to all human capacity. It is expressed in the angel's care for Hagar in the desert, in response to which she acknowledges: "You are a God of seeing" (Gen 16:13). It is expressed in Yahweh's support for the hard-pressed Lot, and in the terrible punishment inflicted on the wicked indigenous population, from whom Lot is brought safely away.

Yahweh crowns the journey of Abraham's servant with success. In the Philistine town of Gerar, he promises Isaac the blessing which he fulfils a hundredfold in the year of famine, so that the Philistines envy Isaac, and their king Abimelech acknowledges: "We see plainly that Yahweh is with you" (Gen 26:28). Jacob now lays hold of his father's blessing, not just through deception but also with Yahweh's help: "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Cursed be every one who curses you, and blessed be every one who blesses you!" (Gen 27:29). Under Jacob's care, Laban's cattle multiply greatly. When Joseph is living in the Egyptian's house, his master sees "that Yahweh was with him" (Gen 39:3), and he puts Joseph in charge of his property. "From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, Yahweh blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of Yahweh was upon all that he had, in house and field" (v. 5). Even when Joseph is in prison, the warder "committed to Joseph's care all the

prisoners who were in the prison" (v. 22), and when the pharaoh elevates Joseph to a great position, he does so with the words: "Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you" (Gen 41:40).

The fate of the Israelites in Egypt changes for the worse, since because of Yahweh's blessing the people have become more numerous and stronger than the Egyptians themselves. But Yahweh foils the attempt to decimate them through the imposition of forced labour. He sees their misery and comes down to lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey, going before them in the form of a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. The Egyptians try to prevent the exodus, but they suffer the same fate as the victims of the flood and the inhabitants of Sodom: they are destroyed. Moses's Midianite father-in-law hears of this and can only acknowledge: "Blessed be Yahweh, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods" (Exod 18:10–11).

Finally, when God's people approach their later dwelling-place, "Moab was in great dread because they were many" (Num 22:3). King Balak bids the seer Balaam: "Curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me" (v. 6). But Yahweh commands him: "You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (v. 12b).

V

In all this a *third* characteristic emerges – a theological *leitmotif* that holds the work together from beginning to end, from the curses in Gen 3 and 4 down to Balaam's blessing in Num 24. This guiding theme is the history of *blessing*. In earlier exegesis the promise to Abraham in Gen 12:2–3 was read as a kind of motto for the Yahwist: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."³⁷ The history of God's people in contrast to the rest of the (generally hostile) peoples is presented as the effect of Yahweh's blessing. But this was not what was actually historically experienced. The work of the Yahwist offers a counterpicture to reality as it is. This can be grasped from the promises. They are not just directed to the characters in history as it is here narrated; they are directed beyond these figures to readers in the present. The exemplary fulfilment of the promises, as it is described, for example, in the birth of son and heir, or in Yahweh's helpful guidance in a foreign land, in loneliness, desert, and hostility, as well as in the experiences of deliverance, is designed as an encouragement to hope here and

³⁷ Hans Walter Wolff, "Das Kerygma des Jahwisten" (1964), in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TB 22; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1973), 345–73, here 351–54.

now. The fictitious nature of the account is shown by the enumerated riches in which Yahweh's blessing takes material form, as it were.³⁸ The huge herds, the multitudinous servants, and all the other possessions are a narrative of wishful thinking. We can therefore call it more than chance that the work as we have it loses itself at the end in the wilderness, so to speak. That is to say, it does not lead out of the utopia. The account remains a history of faith.

VI

All the points we have considered suggest that the narrative composed in this way did not leave the already existing sources untouched but linked them and commented on them by way of editorial additions. In these additions a *fourth* overall characteristic emerges: *language and style*. The Yahwist redaction can be recognized from a whole series of individual touches, through which it has its own distinctive literary signature.

From the eighteenth century onwards, the names for God, "Yahweh" and "Elohim," were considered the prime characteristics through which the sources could be differentiated. It is for this reason that we talk about the oldest continuous source as being the work of the "Yahwist." As time went on, this starting point proved to be insufficiently specific, since the older narratives occasionally use "Elohim" as a term for God, while the many later additions continue to use "Yahweh." In fact there are numerous other stylistic features besides the criterion of the divine names. Earlier exegetes were aware of this and compiled actual lists of such features, which defined the work's stylistic coherence.³⁹ It was not yet recognized, however, that these same stylistic features pointed to an editor, not an original author, as was then assumed.⁴⁰ Naturally, the criterion of language must not be applied mechanically. In its use of language, the redaction draws upon its sources, just as it influences the linguistic choices of later authors and the texts that were subsequently added to the Pentateuch.

Here are a few examples of how the editor dealt with his sources:⁴¹

(1) *Gen 19:3–10*. ³He [Lot] urged them [the three men] strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. ⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city [...] surrounded the house; [...] ⁵and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." ⁶Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after

³⁸ Gen 13:2, 5; 24:35; 26:12; 30:43; 32:5; Exod 12:35, 38.

³⁹ See esp. Heinrich Holzinger, *Einleitung in den Hexateuch* (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1893), 93–110.

⁴⁰ Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 399–408.

⁴¹ The editor's additional text is printed in italics. Later non-Yahwistic expansions are omitted and marked by [...].

him, ⁷and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸Behold, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." ⁹But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man [...], and drew near to break the door. ¹⁰But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door.⁴²

(2) *Gen 26:1–14.* ¹Now there was a famine in the land. [...] And Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ²And Yahweh appeared to him, and said, [...] ³"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you." [...] ⁶So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife, lest the men of the place should kill me for the sake of Rebekah; because she is fair to look upon." ⁸When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah his wife. ⁹So Abimelech called Isaac, and said, "Behold, she is your wife; how then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" [...] ¹¹So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death." ¹²And Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. Yahweh blessed him, ¹³and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.⁴³

(3) *Gen 28:12–19a.* ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. [...] ¹⁵Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land." [...] ¹⁶Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Yahweh is in this place; and I did not know it." ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bet-El.⁴⁴

(4) *Gen 39:1–7.* ¹And Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and [...] an Egyptian bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²Yahweh was with Joseph. [...] And he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that Yahweh was with him, [...] ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and attended him. And he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵[...] The blessing of Yahweh was upon all that he had, in house and field. ⁶[...] Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. ⁷And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me."⁴⁵

⁴² For a detailed analysis of Genesis 19, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 159–70.

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of Genesis 26, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 201–6.

⁴⁴ For a detailed analysis of Genesis 28, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 216–20.

⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis of Genesis 39, see Levin, *Der Jahwist*, 274–78, [and "Righteousness in the Joseph-Story," below 65–82, esp. 72–74].