A Word about the Title of the Course

In this course and in this essay, something specific is intended by the phrases “Hebrew Scriptures” and “Modern Scholarship.” “Hebrew Scriptures,” as used here, is a phrase invented for and used in the study of the writings in the Jewish Bible (or Tanakh) and the Christian Old Testament, as they are read outside the Jewish or Christian traditions, from a secular historical or literary point of view. This means that the phrase refers to neither the Jewish scriptures nor the Christian Old Testament.

The term is an attempt to provide specificity with respect to contents, while avoiding allusion to any particular interpretative tradition or theological school of thought. It is widely used in academic writing and interfaith discussion in relatively neutral contexts meant to include dialogue among all religious traditions, but not widely in the inner discourse of the religions which use [the same] text. (Wikipedia article on “Hebrew Bible”)

The phrase “Modern Scholarship” does not mean “recent scholarship,” for scholarly work can be recent without being modern. This is because “modern” denotes not an era but a method used to study these writings from a secular historical or literary point of view. Indeed, modern scholarship as a method dates from the middle of the seventeenth century (though it really blossomed beginning with the nineteenth), and is related to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and to the emergence of the scientific or analytical method.

In the case of Hebrew Scriptures, modern scholarship is not so much interested in the meaning of a text (and especially not meaning within a religious tradition such as Judaism or Christianity), as it is in how the text reveals something of the historical situation in which it was originally composed or how it functions as literature. This is what the course and essay about, and will be illustrated throughout. Modern scholarship as defined here has shown little or no interest in the rabbinic or the Christian exegetical traditions.

Needless to say, all this has not set well with many scholars and leaders within Judaism and Christianity. For a variety of reasons, they have opposed these developments, or at least attempted to neutralize their effect. In 1893 the Presbyterians, for example, tried for heresy an Old Testament scholar at Union Theological Seminary in New York (Charles Augustus Briggs) who was an early advocate of the historical method as applied to the Bible. A Reform Jewish biblical scholar could write in 1919:

> They have failed to realize and to stress that the Old Testament, and particularly the Torah…is entirely a Jewish work, written by Jewish authors and edited by Jewish thinkers, the product of Jewish religious genius and a unit of Jewish religious thought and doctrine…and can, in the final analysis, be correctly understood only when interpreted from a positive Jewish standpoint. (Julian Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation*, quoted in *A Documentary History of Religion in America since 1877*, 2003, edited by Gaustad and Noll, p 359)

These misgivings continue and are, I think, understandable and unavoidable.

Overview of Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts: The Law (or Torah, the “T” in Tanakh), the Prophets (Neviim, the “N” in Tanakh) and the Writings (Kethuvim, the “K” in Tanakh). The actual books are arranged
somewhat differently in the Jewish, Orthodox Christian, Catholic, and Protestant Bibles. And at the time of Jesus, only the Law and the Prophets were cited as scripture; the Writings assumed authoritative status after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (“Common Era”), ostensibly in 90 CE.

The first section is the Torah (or Law). It is made up of five books (hence, sometimes called the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In them, there is as much story as law. This is particularly true of Genesis and Exodus. The story is about primeval history (the creation and flood, and such) and about the deity’s relation to a special people (from Abraham and Sarah through Moses). In the midst of that story, laws are provided to prescribe proper behavior of the people toward the deity (given various names, but most often “God” or Elohim or “the LORD” or Yahweh or Adonai) and among themselves. The deity does things and speaks directly with humans (especially Abraham and Moses).

The second section of the Hebrew Bible is called the Prophets. This is a little strange, because a good bit of it is more like history than prophecy: Joshua, Judges, the Books of Samuel and of Kings. But it is in this part of the Bible that occur the books we are studying: the Hebrew prophets. This literature differs from the Torah or Law in that the deity does not act and gives no general laws. Here the deity speaks, but only to and through emissaries or messengers, and to specific historical situations (“Thus says the LORD”). The prescriptions of the law (for example, the so-called Ten Commandments) are rarely referred to. The principle reference to the Torah is to the Exodus and wilderness experience. The responsibilities of the people are not defined by laws, but by general principles, such as “covenant loyalty,” “righteousness” and “justice,” and these are applied to specific historical situations. But as compared with the Wisdom literature within the Writings, the focus with the prophets is still on the community or people, not the individual. The prophets we study are the great biblical source for those interested in social justice, rather than individual morality.

By the time we get to the third part, or Writings, things are different. There is little or no story and no law. With the exception of the Book of Job, the deity does not act or speak. In the Writings are the Psalms, which contain a wide variety of types of hymns, including communal and personal laments. The remainder of the books can be called Wisdom (for example, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes). In these the focus is on the individual rather than the community, as in the Torah or Law. But instead of divinely given laws, there is common wisdom (Proverbs) or probing human questions (Job and Ecclesiastes).

We now look at examples from each of the three sections: The Book of Genesis from the Law; the Eighth Century Prophets from the Prophets; and the Book of Job from the Writings.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

A Summary Outline of the Book of Genesis
(Sections to be discussed in class are in BOLD)

**Primordial History (Genesis 1-11)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1-2.4a</td>
<td>The Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.4b-3.24</strong></td>
<td>The Garden of Eden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1-16</td>
<td>Cain Murders Abel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17-26</td>
<td>Beginnings of Civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1-32</td>
<td>Generations of Adam to Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1-4</td>
<td>The Sons of God and the Daughters of Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.5-9.17</strong></td>
<td>Noah and the Flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.18-28</td>
<td>The Sons of Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1-32</td>
<td>Nations Descended from Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1-9</td>
<td>The Tower of Babel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.10-32</td>
<td>The Descendants of Shem and Terah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Abraham/Sarah Cycle of Stories (Genesis 12-25.18)

| 12.1-9 | The Call of Abram; the Threefold Promise of Land, Progeny, Blessing |
| 12.10-20 | Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Sarai and Pharaoh) |
| 13.1-18 | Abram and Lot Separate |
| 14.1-16 | Lot’s Captivity and Rescue |
| 14.17-24 | Abram Blessed by Melchizedek |
| 15.1-21 | God’s Covenant with Abram |
| 16.1-15 | The First Story about Hagar; the Birth of Ishmael |
| 17.1-27 | El Shaddai’s Covenant with Abram; Circumcision |
| 18.1-15 | Yahweh Visits Abraham, Promises Son |
| 18.16-33 | Abraham and Yahweh on the Fate of Sodom |
| 19.1-11 | The Depravity of Sodom |
| 19.12-29 | Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed |
| 19.30-38 | Lot and His Daughters: The Origin of Moab and Ammon |
| 20.1-18 | Abraham and Sarah et Gerar (Sarah and King Abimelech) |
| 21.1-7 | The Birth of Isaac |
| 21.8-21 | Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away |
| 21.22-34 | Abraham and Abimelech Make a Treaty |
| **22.1-19** | **The Command to Sacrifice Israel** |
| 22.20-24 | The Children of Nahor |
| 23.1-20 | Sarah’s Death and Burial |
| 24.1-67 | The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah |
| 25.1-6 | Abraham Marries Keturah; Their Children |
| 25.7-11 | The Death of Abraham; Burial by Isaac and Ishmael |
| 25.12-18 | Ishmael’s Decendants |

## The Jacob/Israel Cycle of Stories (Genesis 25.19-36.43)

| 25.19-28 | The Birth and Youth of Esau and Jacob |
| 25.29-34 | Esau Sells His Birthright |
| 26.1-33 | Isaac and Abimelech |
| 26.34-35 | Esau’s Hittite Wives |
| 27.1-40 | Isaac Deceived by Rebekah and Jacob; Isaac Blesses Jacob |
| 27.41-45 | Jacob’s Departure (First Version) to Haran |
| 27.46-28.5 | Jacob’s Departure (Second Version) to Paddan-aram |
| 28.6-9 | Esau Marries Ishmael’s Daughter |
| 28.10-22 | Jacob’s Dream at Bethel |
| 29.1-14 | Jacob Meets Rachel |
| 29.15-30 | Jacob is Deceived by Laban, Marries Leah, then Rachel |
| 29.31-30.24 | The Birth of Jacob’s Children (by two wives and two maids) |
| 29.25-43 | Jacob Prospers at Laban’s Expense |
| 31.1-21 | Jacob Flees with Family and Flocks |
| 31.22-42 | Laban Overtakes Jacob |
| 31.43-32.2 | Laban and Jacob Make a Covenant |
| 32.3-21 | Jacob Sends Presents to Appease Esau |
| **32.22-32** | **Jacob Wrestles at Peniel** |
| 33.1-17 | Jacob and Esau Meet |
| 33.18-20 | Jacob Reaches Shechem |
| 34.1-24 | The Rape of Dinah |
A Brief History of Modern Scholarship on the Book of Genesis

[I have used several very helpful short books from the Guides to Biblical Scholarship series, all of which are available from Amazon in new or used condition: Literary Criticism of the Old Testament (Norman Habel); Form Criticism of the Old Testament (Gene M. Tucker); and Tradition Criticism and the Old Testament (Walter E. Rast). Phyllis Trible’s treatment of Genesis 2-3 is in her God and The Rhetoric of Sexuality, which is available as new and used.]

Literary or Historical Source Analysis

In the Book of Genesis, there are a number of phenomena that beg for explanation. There are duplications or parallel accounts: Abraham claims Sarah is his sister twice (Genesis 12 and 20); Abraham is promised a son three times (15.4, 17.6, 18.10), the name of Isaac is explained four times (17.17-19, 18.12-13, 21.6a, 6b); Hagar is driven out or expelled twice (16.4-16, 21.9-21); Jacob departs twice from Isaac and Rebekah (27.41-45, 27.46-28.5); Jacob twice gives the name Bethel to a place called Luz (28.19, 33.6, 15); Jacob is twice renamed Israel (32.28, 35.10).

There are inconsistencies. In Genesis 1, man and women are created simultaneously and after the rest of creation; in Genesis 2, the man is created first, then the trees, then the animals, and finally the woman. In the
story of the flood, Noah is commanded to take with him one pair of each kind of animal (6.19-20), whereas in 7.2-3 he is commanded to take seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean. In 7.12, the rain of the flood was on the earth 40 days, but in 7.24 the waters prevailed 150 days. In Genesis 10, there is a table of nations, descended from the sons of Noah; in the next chapter “they are one people and one language” and only after attempting to build the tower are they scattered. There are numerous inconsistencies related to people’s ages.

Prior to the modern era, Jewish and Christian writers noticed and commented on a number of these phenomena: the fact that there were two creation stories (Genesis 1.1-2.4a and Genesis 2 and that there were a number of names for the deity—especially Elohim (God) and Yahweh (the LORD). But it was not until the modern era that the analytical tools were developed to give explanation to these phenomena.

Analysis as a tool originated largely as a version of the scientific method, dating from the 18th century. In the case of written documents, and in this case the Book of Genesis, scholars were able to break down the book into smaller units. They did this by identifying distinctive vocabulary, style and point of view. For example, they separated all the passages that used the divine name Elohim (God) from those that used Yahweh (the LORD). They then saw that all the Elohim passages shared similar distinctive vocabulary, style and point of view, and the same held true the Yahweh (the LORD) passages. Next they put all the Elohim passages together, to see if they constituted a continuous account, and the same for the Yahweh passages: they did. They concluded that there were two independent sources, which had been combined to form the Book of Genesis. They named the Elohim passages the “P” source (“P” because the point of view was thought to be predominantly priestly) and the Yahweh passages the “J” source (after the German spelling Jahweh). Actually, they also were able to distinguish two sources within the Elohim material, and named the second “E” for Elohim.

That was the “literary” aspect of their work. The “historical” part sought to find circumstances that would explain the various documents or sources that came to make up the Book of Genesis. They noted that the Priestly source (“P”) had an interest in ritualistic matters (for example, the institution of circumcision in Genesis 17) and in genealogies (Genesis 5, 10, passim). These suggest a situation in which cult was more important than land, and in which ethnic purity and identification was important. The formal style suggested a later time, and the similarity of the account of creation in Genesis 1 (“P”) with the Babylonian creation epic Enuma Elish led them to conclude that “P” was written or compiled during or shortly after the exile to Babylon in the 6th century BCE.

The historians observed that the Yahwist source or document (“J”) had an interest in land beyond the traditional tribal holdings (“from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates,” Genesis 15.18-20) and a history that went back and was grounded in creation itself (Genesis 2). It also had a theory that Yahweh’s purposes could not be frustrated by human folly. All of this suggested an imperialistic mindset and a need for divine assurance—namely, in their mind, the time of David or following David in the court of Solomon (the document is sometimes dated circa 950 BCE).

This literary-historical analysis of the Book of Genesis is most often connected with the name of Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). The next development in textual analysis—Genre (or Form) Analysis—is associated preeminently with Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932).

**Genre (or Form) Analysis**

The next development in analysis had to do with greater attention to smaller units imbedded within the larger documents or sources, and with categorizing them in terms of their purpose or use. Of course, as we shall see when turn to a genre analysis of the whole story of Joseph, the “smaller” unit can be quite large.
This method goes like this. The first step is to identify and separate smaller units, generally by looking for beginning and ending formulas. Coupled with this is the identification of the formulaic structure of each unit. The next step is to translate the recognition of structure into an identification of type or genre (is it a story, is it a song, is it a speech?) Next, the genre or type or form is assigned to the situation within the community life (what Gunkel called *Sitz im Leben*) where the particular genre is “at home.” (Stories about heroes have, for example, a different structure from that of a speech by messenger, or a battle song, and each is only appropriate in a particular setting or for a particular purpose.)

Gunkel and others identified numerous genre or types or forms in Hebrew Scripture. In Genesis, he found among others, myths, legends, sagas, history, the novelette (he had precise definitions for each: a myth, for example, is a story about gods; a saga is about human endeavors). Many of the sagas in Genesis can be further categorized as etiological (or explanation) stories. These are used to explain the origin of a certain place, practice or even of a people. In Genesis 19, for example, we are given the story of origin of Moab and Ammon (they are the offspring of Lot and his daughters). In Chapter 32, where Jacob wrestles, the story of the origin of the place name Peniel is given.

What genres tell us is what people wanted to know and hear in their ongoing and everyday lives—the way hymns in a given hymnal reveal the people who sing them. Where literary-historical analysis reveals how a people saw themselves at a particular time in history (as a cultic people during and after the exile in “P,” as an empire during David and Solomon’s reign in “J”), genre analysis reveals more the characteristics of a people. Some have called it societal, as compared with historical.

**Tradition Analysis**

Tradition analysis, identified with Martin Noth (1902-68) and Gerhard von Rad (1901-72), developed to work in the area between the larger sources (identified by literary-historical analysis as “J,” “E,” and “P”) and the smaller units identified and categorized by genre analysis. “Tradition” as used here refers to the process of handing on. It raises two questions: (1) what is the process by which the individual narratives come together to form a larger whole? and (2) what is the process by which an individual story adds layers of meaning as it is retold?

This method involves looking at larger narratives to see if there is evidence of component parts that suggest an earlier level of development. In the case of the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob stories, for example, evidence was found to suggest that these narratives existed independently before being joined in generational sequence. Put another way, it may be that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had distinguishable gods and lived in distinguishable areas. They were joined together generationally at a later time when the three groups were united under yet another deity, Yahweh.

The Jacob stories have proved to be the most fertile ground for this work. As they stand, they tell the story of Jacob and Esau his brother and of Jacob and his uncle Laban. As structured, the Jacob-Esau stories bracket the Jacob-Laban stories, with certain theophanies (divine appearances) serving as transition. These cycles of stories really have different focal points. Jacob-Esau is about conflicts between two kinds of people (one in the tent, the other out hunting); Jacob-Laban is about having children and getting ahead from a position of relative weakness. Their geographical settings are significant: one is set in a part of Canaan where two cultures (hunting and shepherding) are in conflict, the other in Mesopotamia, the traditional home of Abraham and Sarah. The tradition analysts wonder whether these were not originally two separate unconnected stories and, if so, what dynamics brought them together.
The individual smaller stories in the Jacob cycle also interest the tradition analysts. The two major theophanies have layers of meaning, and the layering appears to have occurred as the stories were retold by different peoples with different interests. Also, the story of the births of Jacob and Esau, and their eventual conflict, appears to be both about the people of tents being in conflict with the hunting peoples, and about the conflict between the peoples of Jacob/Israel and of Esau/Edom (whose “redness” is a play on the Hebrew for Edom). Traditional analysis suggests that the former conflict was transformed into the latter over time as the story was handed down.

Tradition analysis gives us some insight into how meanings change for people over time.

**Literary Analysis**

To call this development in textual analysis “literary,” may be confusing, since the term was also used by the literary/historical critics. But this method is quite different. Whereas the early literary analysts used vocabulary, style and point of view to identify one strand of material from another, these literary analysts are interested in how a given text is put together in order to draw the reader (or hearer) into the piece and to accomplish a certain effect.

They depend upon a very close reading of the text. They look at how a narrative, for example, is structured to gain and sustain the reader’s (or hearer’s) interest, largely through symmetries or parallels. An example is Joel W. Rosenberg’s outline of the garden story in Genesis 2.4b-4.1 (in his introduction to Genesis in the Harper Collins Study Bible):

A  Headnote: “These are the generations” (2.4)
B  No field economy: “no one to till the ground” (2.5-6)
C  Human Beings given life, installed in garden (2.7-17)
   D  Man prefers human companionship over beasts (2.18-22)
   E  Man calls his companion “Woman” (2.23)
   F  Etiological summary: “Therefore z man leaves…” (2.24)
   G  Human couple “naked and…not ashamed” (2.25)
      H  Serpent promises “eyes will be opened” (3.1-5)
      I  Transgression (3.6)
   H’  The couple’s “eyes are opened” (3.7a)
   G’  They experience shame (3.7b-10)
   F’  Etiological summary: “For…you are dust…” (3.19.b)
   E’  Man calls his companion “Eve” (“Life-bearer”) (3.20)
   D’  Man and woman wear skins of beasts
   C’  Human expelled from Garden, denied immortality (3.22-24)
B’  Field economy begins (implied; see 3.23b)
A’  Birth of a child completes one generation (4.1)

They also study how certain words are chosen, placed and repeated for effect. At times two sentences are in parallel with one another; in one case the parallel will be exact, in another the order may be reversed, or the key word may be first in one line and last in the other. Phyllis Trible gives this example (following Hebrew word order) in Genesis 1.27:

And-created God humankind in-his-image
in-the-image-of God created-he him:
  male and-female created he them.
They also place whole passages over against each other, using common themes to revise the meaning of each passage in isolation. Robert Alter, one of the pioneers in literary analysis of the Hebrew Scripture, investigates what appears to be an intrusive story (Judah and Tamar) in the larger context of the story of Joseph and his brothers, using among other things the theme of deception. Truible allows the garden story in Genesis 2-3 to be balanced by the Song of Solomon.

In the earlier forms of analysis, the meaning of the text was found in an outside referent: the history of the times or the social practices of a people. In this form of analysis, the meaning of the text lies not outside the text, but within the text.

**Source Analysis of Genesis 6.1-9.17 (The Story of the Flood)**

Source analysis is a form of literary-historical analysis, the first of the modern scholarly approaches to the Book of Genesis. Using literary tools—the isolation of distinctive terminology, style, and point of view—these analysts have been able to identify sources that were used to construct the present text of Genesis. We will see how this approach works on the flood story (Genesis 6.1-9.17).

The story of the flood in the Book of Genesis, which has striking similarities to the flood story found in Book XI of the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic, goes like this: the deity is dissatisfied with the creation and decides to destroy all living beings, with the exception of Noah, his family, and pairs of land animals and birds. At the command of the deity, Noah constructs an ark and boards his family and the animals. A flood comes, destroying all living beings (except the fish, of course). Eventually the flood subsides, and the human beings and animals disembark. Following the offering of burnt offerings by Noah, the deity establishes a new creation and promises never again to destroy all living things, and sets a bow in the clouds as the sign of that promise.

There are discrepancies. At one place Noah is told to “take with you seven pairs of all clean animals…and a pair of the animals that are not clean”; in another, “of every living thing…you shall bring two of every sort.” The flood results from rain in several passages, and in others from the “fountains of the great deep” and from the “windows of the heavens.” The flood lasts forty days according to some sections, and one hundred fifty days according to others.

The literary critics of the older literary-historical school noticed that the command to take seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean, the reference to rain and to forty days come in a speech by Yahweh to Noah (7.1-6). The simpler command to take a pair of each animal appears in a speech by Elohim (6.19-20), and this is linked to the water bursting from beneath and from on high, and the one hundred fifty days. Moreover, there are two conclusions to the story, one featuring Yahweh and the other Elohim.

They found other distinctive vocabulary. In the several Yahweh sections: “evil” (6.5, 8.21), “heart” (6.6, 8.21), “blot out” (7.4, 23). In the Elohim passages: “corrupt” (6.11, 12), “violence” (6.11, 13), “all flesh” (6.12, 13, 19; 7.21; 8.17; 9.11, 15, 16, 17), “covenant” (6.18; 9.8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17).

As to style, the story with Yahweh is humanlike and matter of fact. Yahweh sees the wickedness of humankind and ponders what he has done: he is sorry that he made them. “It grieved him to his heart.” Noah finds favor in the eyes of Yahweh. When everyone is on board the ark, Yahweh shuts the door. For his part, Noah opens the window at the end of forty days and sends forth a sequence of birds to test the scene. After leaving the ark, Noah builds an altar and offers burnt offerings. Yahweh smells the pleasing odor, again speaks to himself, and resolves not to destroy again.

In contrast, the account with Elohim is formal. Elohim evaluates the situation and makes a decree, instructs Noah on the dimensions of the ark and how to construct it. This version is careful to record the age of
Noah and the date when the flood begins and ends. At the close Elohim issues a new set of rules and makes a formal covenant.

Finally, these scholars noted a distinct point of view in each set of passages. In the story with Yahweh, the problem is humankind (6.6-7). Regretting its creation (6.6-7), Yahweh blots it out, with the exception of Noah, his family, and the pairs of animals. When it is all over, Yahweh sees that destruction was to no avail (“for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth”) and resolves never “to destroy every living creature as I have done” (8.21). With Elohim, on the other hand, the problem is with creation itself (“the earth was corrupt…and was filled with violence,” 6.11-13) and it is creation itself which Elohim decides to destroy (6.13). But the purpose of the destruction is a new creation, blessed and operating within an “everlasting covenant,” complete with a new provision to eat meat (9.1-17).

All of this led the literary-historical analysts to conclude that there are two sources in the story, one with the deity named Yahweh and the other with a deity named Elohim. What was difficult at first and interesting in any case was that these two sources were woven together and had to be extracted from one another. Whereas with the two creation stories in Genesis 1-2, they identified the first (1.1-2.4a) as one source, and the second (2.4b-25) as another source, the flood story starts with one source, switches to the second, and then back and forth ten times. This is the most striking time in Genesis where this form of combination occurs.

Normal Habel (Literary Criticism of the Old Testament, pp. 32-36) provides this source analysis of the Flood Narratives (Genesis 6.5-9.17). [The translation is the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The portions assigned to “J” are in regular type and those assigned to “P” are in italics.]

6 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. 19 And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7 1 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; 3 and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. 4 For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have
made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” 5 And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

6 Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9 two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, 14 they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. 15 They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. 16 And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

17 The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18 The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. 19 And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; 20 the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. 21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; 22 everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. 23 He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. 24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; 2 the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, 3 and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; 4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. 5 And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

6 At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, 7 and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. 8 Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; 9 but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. 10 He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; 11 and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. 12 Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

13 In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. 14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 “Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. 17 Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth.” 18 So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. 19 And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.
Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it.”

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.”

They also saw that the reference to “curse the ground because of mankind” in the conclusion of the Yahweh version was linked to the curse of the ground in the garden story, also a Yahweh story. And they saw that the reference to “be fruitful and multiply” in the conclusion of the Elohim story (along with a revision of eating laws) was linked to the creation story, also an Elohim story. They reasoned that the creation story and the Elohim sections of the flood story were part of a single source, which they called “Priestly” (P), because of its interest in priestly matters. In like manner, they concluded that the garden story and the Yahweh sections in the flood story were part of a single source, which they called “Yahwist” (J).

Eventually, this kind of analysis identified three sources throughout Genesis (“J,” “E” for Elohist, and “P”), and set about to speculate on the historical situation that produced each. What this shows us, I think, is that there are a great variety of religious experiences, insights and points of view imbedded within the text as we have it; how these differ and at the same time are related; and how each is an advocate to us of the time and place that produced it.

Form or Genre Analysis of Genesis 37, 39-47 and 50 (The Joseph Story)

In the case of the Joseph story (Genesis 37, 39-47, and 50), the last of the four major sections of the Book of Genesis, source (literary-historical) and tradition analysis are of little use.

Tradition analysis, which had such success with the first three sections and especially the Jacob story, is of no use with the Joseph account. There are no groupings of stories that can be studied for the process by which they came together and, more important, no independent stories whose earlier layers can be identified.
Source analysis is a bit more successful. Even though the divine names Yahweh and Elohim seldom appear, it is possible to see that the Yahwist and Elohist sources are present, and occasionally interwoven. This is especially evident in the account of the brothers’ effort to kill Joseph (37.1-36), where there are two accounts of a brother who attempts to save Joseph’s life and a group who take him away. In one account, Rueben persuades the brothers to put Joseph in a pit rather than killing him (planning to rescue him later) and the Midianites who find him in the pit and sell him. In the other account it is Judah who attempts to save Joseph’s life by selling him rather than killing him, and it is the Ishmaelites who buy him. The Rueben/Midianites version is attributed to “J” and the Judah/Ishmaelites account is attributed to “E.” There are other evidences of two sources: in the Yahwist accounts, the father is called “Israel,” while in the Elohist, he is called “Jacob.” The dream stories are attributed to “E” (dreams are common to that source), but most of the rest of the story is considered to be from “J.”

It is genre or form analysis that has proved most helpful in understanding the Joseph story. This type of analysis identifies literary (or oral) units, categorizes them as to genre or form, and suggests their use or purpose. Generally this method has been applied to smaller units, and a common genre to which these are assigned is aetiology (or explanation story). This particular genre peppers the first three sections of the Book of Genesis, explaining the origin of practices (e.g., circumcision and the tithe), names of places (e.g., Bethel and Penuel) and the beginning of certain peoples (e.g., Ammon and Moab, as well as Edom).

In the case of the story of Joseph, the literary unit is the whole story (all eleven chapters!), because the whole account tells a complete and integrated story. No part of it stands alone, or could stand alone. Each part is an integral scene within a whole drama.

The form or genre to which this whole story is assigned is the “novella.” What earns it this designation? A “novella,” like its modern counterpart the “novel,” has a plot (or story line) that is a vehicle for character development, and an underlying point. This distinguishes it from both the Abraham-Sarah story and the Jacob story. In the case of the Abraham-Sarah story, there is no plot (unless you consider as a plot a series of incidents in which the deity repeatedly promises a son, finally delivers, and then saves the son from the deity’s own command that he be sacrificed) and there is no character development (how has any of the characters changed during the entire cycle?). In the Jacob story there is a bit more of a plot, but again no character development.

The Joseph story has plot, character development and point. Each scene moves the story forward, and as it moves the characters develop. To begin with, Joseph is the favored son of Jacob, as evidenced by the famous robe (evidently not of many colors, but with long sleeves), and his brothers hate him for it. But there are others reasons for their hatred. He is something of a tattle. And his dreams are demeaning, both of the brothers and even his parents. (The dreams show the members of the family bowing before Joseph, which ironically turns out to be true, later in Egypt.) Given a chance, they plot to kill him, though through the intervention of Rueben and then Judah they end up selling him. They then report him dead to Jacob, who goes into deep mourning. All of this is important for the latter scenes of the story.

Joseph is eventually sold to Potiphar, the chief steward of Pharaoh, who seeing that Yahweh was with Joseph and gave him success in all he did, put him in charge of his household. After a while, Potiphar’s wife “fixed her eye” on Joseph and sought to have him sleep with her. At this point, we get our second view of Joseph’s character (the first being the favored tattling dreamer): he refuses her advances. He is both moral and loyal. However, his morality and loyalty do not result in his vindication, but his imprisonment (Potiphar believes his wife’s false accusation of attempted rape). His situation worsens, from favored son to prisoner.

In prison, Yahweh again was with Joseph; he wins the favor of the chief jailer and is put in charge of all the prisoners. Here a significant turn in the plot occurs: two of Pharaoh’s top officials are out of favor with Pharaoh and are imprisoned. Joseph interprets the dream of each: one will be returned to favor and the other
impaled, and this occurs. (Joseph asks the chief cupbearer to plead his case to Pharaoh, but he forgets.) Two years later, Pharaoh has two dreams, which no one can interpret. The cupbearer then remembers Joseph, who is brought to Pharaoh and interprets the dreams: seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine. Pharaoh says of Joseph, “no one is as discerning and as wise as you,” and appoints him second only to the king in power. Joseph stores grain for seven years, so there is plenty in the seven years of need.

All of this occurs so that Joseph’s brothers have reason to come to Egypt. There is famine in Canaan, and Jacob sends them to buy grain. All but Benjamin (the other son of Rachel) go and bow themselves before Joseph (who remembers that early dream!). Joseph recognizes them, but they do not recognize him. He accuses them of being spies and demands that one remain as his prisoner while the others return home to fetch Benjamin. In his presence but not knowing he can understand them (he speaks to them through an interpreter), they confess to one another the wrong they did to Joseph. Joseph turns away and weeps. This is the turning point of the novella, for it reveals the development of character on all concerned: the brothers are truly repentant, and Joseph is without arrogance and vindictiveness. Subsequently the brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin, and Joseph executes a second test of their character. He creates a ruse by which he can enslave Benjamin. This time Judah pleads, in extended speech and moving terms, for Benjamin’s safety on the basis of Jacob’s well being. Joseph “could no longer control himself” and reveals himself to the brothers. This reinforces the prior revelation of the development of the characters. In Joseph’s case, he exhibits maturity and wisdom: of their having sold him into Egypt, Joseph says, “God sent me before you to preserve life.” The whole family of Jacob moves to Egypt.

We have an extended interconnected plot as a vehicle for character development, but what is the point of the novella? To begin with, this is essentially a human story. The deity is occasionally mentioned and in important ways, but always as a way of interpreting human events. The deity is given credit for Joseph’s successes and as the source of the Egyptian dreams, as well as the way the story turns out. But the deity is never active, nor does it ever speak. There is no divine intervention, and no divine oracles. Joseph is never included in the promises that were spoken to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is a human story throughout, and its title could be “Joseph and His Brothers.”

But the point? That wisdom is gained through experience. Both Joseph and the brothers are different and wiser persons as the story progresses and reaches its end. The fact that increased wisdom is the theme reflects something that was going on in the court of Solomon. Solomon was born to privilege, struggles with his brother Adonijah for the throne, prays for wisdom, and becomes famous for his wisdom. What is interesting is that “wisdom” is a rational concept, as compared with revelation. Revelation is an understanding that is given from without; wisdom is understanding that comes from human experience. To oversimplify somewhat, David lived in a world of revelation (and so the Yahwist version of the Abraham and Jacob stories reflect this), whereas Solomon lived in a world of wisdom. Wisdom is a cosmopolitan idea, and Solomon was cosmopolitan if nothing else—all those foreign wives and his fascination with Egypt. So a novella called “Jacob and His Brothers: Wisdom born of Experience” would resonate with Solomon’s own experience and values.

**Tradition Analysis of Genesis 25.12-35.6**

*(The Story of Jacob)*

Whereas literary-historical analysts seek to identify sources (such as “J,” “E,” and “P”) that were combined to form the present Book of Genesis, tradition analysts are interested in the process by which individual stories and other literary units evolved over time (we will illustrate this when we turn to 32.22-32, the story of Jacob at the River Jabbok) and how they became united with others to form cycles or clusters of stories. They have found the story of Jacob to be especially amenable to their interests and methods.

The story of Jacob follows the story of Abraham and Sarah, and precedes the story of Joseph. Covering roughly eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis (25.19-36.43), it is a coherent story, much more than that of
Abraham and Sarah. It goes like this: after a troubled birth with his brother Esau, Jacob extorts his brother’s birthright, and with his mother deceives his blind father Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing due to Esau. Jacob then flees for fear of Esau’s retaliation, and goes to live with his uncle Laban in the land of his ancestors. On the way he is encountered by the deity at Luz, which he renames Bethel (“house of God”). He works for Laban and marries both of his daughters, Leah and (his true love) Rachel. They and their maids bear him eleven sons (Benjamin is born later) and a daughter. After further trickery against one another on the part of Laban and Jacob, Jacob slips away with his wives, children and possessions to return home. He is pursued by Laban, but they conclude a treaty. About to face Esau, Jacob has an encounter with a strange man who turns out to be a deity—the place is Penuel (after Peniel, “face of God”), and Jacob’s name is changed to Israel. He and Esau meet and are surprisingly reconciled, though each goes his own way.

The tradition analysts noticed, however, that there are two accounts of Jacob’s leaving home. In the first (27.41-45) he goes to Haran; in the second (27.46-28.5) he goes to Paddan-Aram. In one the motive is fear of Esau; in the other it is to preserve the blood line by marrying a daughter of Laban. (In this respect, one recalls the determination of Abraham to get a wife for Isaac from his ancestral home in Haran.) If this latter motive is coupled with the fact that Esau is never mentioned in the stories about Laban, Leah and Rachel, the Jacob-Laban stories appear to be independent of the Jacob-Esau stories.

The tradition analysts concluded that there were originally two independent cycles of stories: the Jacob-Esau story (25.19-27.45 and 32.3-33.17) bracketing the Jacob-Laban story (27.46-32.2). In addition they saw the appearances by a deity (called the theophanies) at Bethel (28.10-22) and at Penuel (32.22-32) as distinct and independent of one another. They then wanted to know what earlier traditions lay behind each of these cycles of stories and divine appearances, and how they came together.

On the Jacob-Laban stories, a central component—consistent with the motive of having the right children by the right women—is the birth of Jacob’s sons. Given the fact that, according to many scholars, there were originally two confederations of tribes that eventually came together under David to form a nation, and that this union was always tenuous and lay behind the division of the kingdom after Solomon died, the birth of the twelve sons by two different wives who were in competition with one another reflected the actual tribal situation.

Also, they found a surprising clue to this cycle of stories in its closing verses, where Jacob and Laban make a territorial treaty. They saw this and also all the struggle between Jacob and Laban as reflecting later disputes between Israel and Aram (Syria). It was especially important, consequently, that this part of the story of Jacob occur in Paddan-Aram (Syria) and not Haran (Mesopotamia).

The Jacob-Esau stories, by contrast, are located in the area on either side of the Jordan, and reflect another set of conflicts. Actually tradition analysts were able to identify a layering of traditions of conflict. A classic story of conflict between brothers (of the Abel-Cain sort), is retold to mirror the struggle between two ways of life vying for the same territory—that of shepherd and hunter. And this in turn is retold as the conflict between Judah and Edom/Seir (Esau’s being “red” plays off the word Edom and his being “hairy” plays off the word Seir). And this finally becomes the story of Jacob and Esau.

The two theophanies (at Bethel and at Penuel) also reveal a similar kind of layering. To begin with, because the deities of the Israelites were not attached to places, but to persons (the “Shield of Abram,” in Genesis 15.1; the “Fear of Isaac,” 31.42, 53; the “Mighty One of Jacob,” 49.24) and adopted Canaanite shrines when they settled in or conquered the area, these stories were originally localized cult legends which were expanded to serve Israelite needs.

In the case of Bethel (28.10-22), the first layer of the story has to do with a pillar that marked a sacred place (a Canaanite practice). The second layer tells of a stairway to and from heaven, and explains the name of
the place “Bethel” (“house of God”). Both of these probably antedate the period of the ancestors, including Jacob (Abram visited Bethel, 12.8). Later an oracle was attached to the story, in which the promises of land and progeny are extended to Jacob, along with divine protection. And there is finally the brief mention of the tithe, which may have become part of pilgrimages to the site.

The account of the divine appearance at Penuel (32.22-32) provides an even clearer instance of layering. This is the story of Jacob wrestling with “a man” through the night, receiving a new name (Israel), a blessing, and a limp. He names the place “Peniel,” “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” The limp explains a dietary prohibition against eating the thigh muscle. The story contains three aetiologies: explanation of the name of the place, explanation of Jacob’s new name, and an explanation of a dietary prohibition. The layering is identified in this way: the name of the place is probably Canaanite (pre-Israelite), to which the story of Jacob’s new name is added during the Israelite period, and the explanation of the dietary prohibition is added at the time of the Exile. The following demonstration of the three aetiologies is based on the discussion by Walter E. Rast (Tradition History and the Old Testament, pp. 51-53):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 32:24-32</th>
<th>Aetiology of Name of Penuel [Pre-Israelite (Canaanite?)]</th>
<th>Aetiology of Name of Israel [Israelite]</th>
<th>Aetiology of Dietary Prohibition [Period of the Exile?]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.</td>
<td>24 .......... was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.</td>
<td>Jacob's</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Then he said, &quot;Let me go, for the day is breaking.&quot; But Jacob said, &quot;I will not let you go, unless you bless me.&quot;</td>
<td>26 Then he said, &quot;Let me go, for the day is breaking.&quot; But .......... said, &quot;I will not let you go, unless you bless me.&quot;</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 So he said to him, &quot;What is your name?&quot; And he said, &quot;Jacob.&quot;</td>
<td>27 So he said to him, &quot;What is your name?&quot; And he said, &quot;Jacob.&quot;</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Then the man said, &quot;You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have</td>
<td>28 Then the man said, &quot;You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.&quot;</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 32:24-32</td>
<td>Aetiology of Name of Penuel [Pre-Israelite (Canaanite?)]</td>
<td>Aetiology of Name of Israel [Israelite]</td>
<td>Aetiology of Dietary Prohibition [Period of the Exile?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevailed.&quot; 29 Then Jacob asked him, &quot;Please tell me your name.&quot; But he said, &quot;Why is it that you ask my name?&quot; And there he blessed him. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, &quot;For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.&quot; 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Jacob</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So we have two distinct cycles of stories related to Jacob (the Jacob-Esau and the Jacob-Laban), and two independent theophanies—what was the process by which they were brought together to constitute the present story of Jacob?

The two cycles of stories related to Jacob reflect a geographical area related to the name Jacob that had two distinct interests. One had to do with the origin of the twelve tribes from two mothers and the border conflicts with Aram (Syria). The other had to do with conflicts first between shepherds and hunters, then between Judah and Edom. At some point the interest of the whole area outweighed the importance of the different cycles of stories, and one story emerged. The Jacob-Laban stories now provided an interlude during which Esau could “cool down.” The two theophanies, each with geographical importance, provided the linkages for bringing the two cycles of stories together. One (Bethel) tells of an experience of Jacob as he leaves home for Laban’s house, and the other (Penuel) of Jacob’s experience as he is caught between Laban and Esau, and does not know what to expect from the latter.

What his method reveals is that all social texts and practices, including those of religion, change over time as needs and realities change, while preserving the insights and achievements of the past.
Rhetorical Analysis of Genesis 2.4b-3.24
(The Story of the Garden)

Rhetorical analysis is another name for, or another form of, literary analysis. Its interest is in discerning what makes a piece work, how it is put together in such a way as to have an effect, or be persuasive, hence rhetorical.

I have chosen Genesis 2.4b-3.24 (the story of the garden) to illustrate how rhetorical analysis works, mainly because of a brilliant treatment of this passage by Professor Phyllis Trible. Using this method, she transforms the story from its traditional reading (something like “The Creation of Man and His Fall”) into “A Love Story Gone Awry,” (the name of the essay on this passage in her book God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality).

(Professor Trible is a feminist biblical scholar, which she once quipped sounds like something of an oxymoron. In her scholarly work she has used rhetorical analysis to uncover within the biblical texts the voice and life of women, which have been hidden within the texts themselves, but more often in later interpretation. In the present case she finds a different picture of the woman while redefining the meaning of the story itself. Another of her books is Texts of Terror, which contains among other things, a new reading of the two stories of Hagar, Genesis 16 and 21).

Other analytical methods also throw a great deal of light on the story of the garden in Genesis 2.4b-3.24. Literary-historical analysis, for example, can demonstrate how this passage lies within the Yahwist source (“J”)—with its interest in land and human folly, and its possible relation to the reigns of David and Solomon Form or genre analysis also provides insight into this passage: it is certainly an etiology, explaining the origin of pain in childbirth and toilsome labor. This is Trible’s translation of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 (New Revised Standard Version, as outlined by her in God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, Chapter 4, and with her translation of Genesis 2.4b-3.24 inserted in the text):

A Love Story Gone Awry

EROS CREATED

Introduction: Genesis 2.4b-7

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth (here the Hebrew is not ha-’adamā but ’eres) and no herb of the field had yet sprung up - - for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth (Hebrew ’eres), and there was no one (Hebrew: ’adam, translated by Trible as earth creature) to till the ground (Hebrew ha-’adamā; translated by Trible as earth) 5 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground -- 7 then the LORD God formed man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-’adam) from the dust of the ground (Trible: earth; Hebrew ha-’adamā), and breathed into his (Trible: its) nostrils the breath of life; and the man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-’adam) became a living being (Hebrew nephesh).

Scene One: The Development of Eros (Genesis 2.7-24)

Episode One: The Earth Creature (2.7-8)

[7 then the LORD God formed man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-’adam) from the dust of the ground (Trible: earth; Hebrew ha-’adamā), and breathed into his (Trible: its) nostrils the breath of life; and the man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-’adam) became a living being (Hebrew nephesh)].

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-’adam) whom he had formed.

Episode Two: Plants (2.9-17)

[9 Out of the ground (Hebrew ha-’adamā) the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-'adam) and put him (Trible: it) in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man (Trible: earth creature; Hebrew ha-'adam), "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Episode Three: Animals (2.18-20)

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man (Trible simply uses the Hebrew ha-'adam) should be alone; I will make him (Trible: it) a helper as his partner (Trible: a companion corresponding to it; Hebrew 'ezer kenegdô)." So out of the ground (Hebrew ha-'adamâ) the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) to see what he (Trible: it) would call them; and whatever the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) called every living creature (Hebrew nephesh), that was its name. The man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) there was not found (Trible: "but as for 'adam, it did not find") a helper as his partner (Trible: a companion corresponding to itself; Hebrew 'ezer kenegdô).

Episode Four: Human Sexuality (2.21-24)

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam), and he (Trible: it) slept; then he took one of his (Trible: its) ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) he made into a (Trible omits "a") woman (Hebrew 'îššâ) and brought her to the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam). Then the man (Trible: Hebrew ha-'adam) said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one (Trible omits “one”) shall be called Woman (Hebrew 'îššâ), for out of Man (Hebrew 'îš) this one was taken (Trible: “was taken this”). Therefore a man (Hebrew 'îš) leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ), and they become one flesh.

EROS CONTAMINATED

Scene Two: The Turning Point of Disobedience (Genesis 2.25-3.7)

And the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) and his wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ) were both naked, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband (Trible: man), who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

EROS CONDEMned

Scene Three: The Disintegration of Eros (Genesis 3.8-24)

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) and his wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ) hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the
man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." 14 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." 16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband (Trible: man; Hebrew 'îš), and he shall rule over you." 17 And to the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ), and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground (Hebrew ha-'adamâ) because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground (Hebrew ha-'adamâ), for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." 20 The man (Hebrew ha-'adam) named (Trible: "called the name of"); note that Trible makes a distinction between “called the name of” here and in verse 19-20 [the naming of the animals] and simply “called” in verse 23 [the calling of the new creature “woman,” Hebrew 'îššâ] his wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ) Eve, because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) and for his wife (Trible: woman; Hebrew 'îššâ), and clothed them. 22 Then the LORD God said, "See, the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" -- 23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man (Hebrew ha-'adam) ; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

The traditional reading of the story has four characters interacting with one another: Yahweh God, man, woman and the serpent. Trible’s reading, on the other hand, reveals four “worlds” in interaction: divine, human, plant, and animal. This new delineation informs a more complex plot. In the first part of the story, the deity (Yahweh God) has not caused any plants to grow, because Yahweh God has not allowed it to rain, because there is no one to tend the plants. When water seeps up from below (on its own?), Yahweh God forms ha-'adam (usually translated “man”; Trible translates “earth creature”) from ha-'adamâ (usually translated “ground”; Trible translates “earth”). Then the plants appear, with one forbidden tree. The animals are created because “it is not good for ha-'adam to be alone,” and when they do not fit the bill, the woman (’îššâ) is formed from the rib of ha-'adam. In the middle part of the story, the deity is absent, but the other tree “worlds” interact.: the animal (the serpent), the human (the woman with the man present), and the plant (the trees and the forbidden tree). In the final section, Yahweh God is back to judge and punish, first the animal (the serpent), then the human (the woman and the man), and finally the plant (“cursed be the earth”).

Traditionally, the focus of the story is the middle part, commonly called the disobedience. This is the story of the intriguing conversation or dialogue between the serpent (not the devil; rather, “the slighest of all the wild beasts that Yahweh God had made” and presumably named by ha-'adam) and the woman, and of the couple eating of the forbidden fruit. Interpreters have almost always held the woman responsible for the disobedience, beginning with the author of 1 Timothy: “the man was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

These interpreters trace the woman’s disobedience to her being derivative, subordinate, inferior, untrustworthy, gullible, and simpleminded. Trible counters this characterization in several ways. As for her being inferior, Trible maintains that derivation does not mean inferiority (else ha-'adam would be inferior to the
ground or earth, ha-’adamâ, from whence ha-’adam was derived). Moreover, she translates ha-’adam as “earth creature,” and holds that it is not sexually differentiated—that is, ha-’adam is not male.

She supports this by noting that the sexually differentiated woman and man are created at the same time and are equal. The woman is not the female of ha-’adam (the feminine of ha-’adam is ha-’adamâ, ground or earth). The woman is (’îššâ), and on her appearance, the man qua male (’îš) is identified for the first time. Sexual differentiation occurs only then. They are “one flesh.” She goes further. The woman was not created as a “helper” (New Jerusalem Bible) or even as “a helper as his partner” (New Revised Standard Version”) but as “a companion corresponding to it,” her translation of ‘ezer kenegdô. The problem the woman solves is that ha-’adam is “alone.” Following her creation, the female (’îššâ) and the male (’îš) are companions of one another.

This is the woman who is engaged by the serpent. Rather than being untrustworthy, gullible and simpleminded, she is intelligent and sophisticated, capable of subtle theological and ethical discourse. Because they are “one flesh,” she speaks and acts for both. The text clearly indicates that the man is present (though many interpreters have him absent, away at work when the traveling salesman comes to visit). He is silent and passive, even brutish and inept (takes the fruit and eats it without question or reflection). In any case, together they are responsible. The sad thing, and the turning point for Trible, is that they (and particularly the man) do not accept joint complicity and responsibility. He in fact turns on her. And therein and thereafter in the story lies the seeds of their estrangement.

There is an interesting example in her treatment of 2.25-3.7 of how she uses a term to frame an incident and to show an important movement of the story. The prologue to the account of disobedience states “And the man and the woman were both naked, and were not ashamed.” The epilogue reads, “and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and make loincloths for themselves.” The word “naked” frames the whole episode: they were naked and were not ashamed; they knew they were naked, and they sewed…” What moves the text from one nakedness to another is “knowing,” and “knowing” plays back to the promise of the serpent: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Things begin to become undone at this point.

The story ends badly. The woman will now bring forth children in pain and she will desire her man (’îš), who will rule over her. The man’s relation to the earth is corrupted: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.” He is expelled from the garden.

For Trible there is an even more ominous ending. When the animals are brought forward for consideration by ha-’adam, it calls the name of each. Naming, in biblical thought, involves control. In this instance, calling the name of each animal “becomes the way in which the earth creature establishes power over the animals” (Trible, p. 99). The formula combines “call” and “the name of” (Trible provides examples from elsewhere in Genesis). In the case of the newly created woman, this formula is not used: “call” is used without “the name of.” Trible claims that “call” by itself is an act of recognition, not naming, and thus implies no exercise of power. This distinction is important for Trible, because in the last part of the story (after the disobedience, the trials, and the punishments), when the woman is named Eve, it is the same formula that was used with the animals. The man names her and thereby exercises power over her. “Now, in effect, the man reduces the woman to the status of an animal by calling her a name” (Trible, p. 133). What was equality becomes domination. What was companionship becomes estrangement.

So for Trible, this is not a story of how God created man, then how—by the wiles of the serpent and the gullibility of an inferior woman—man fell. It is the story of how God wanted a garden, made a creature to care for it, sought a companion for the creature, and succeeded when woman and man established a life of companionship in the fruitful care of the garden, only to see companionship turn to estrangement. This is why she calls it “A Love Story Gone Awry.” In her use of rhetorical analysis, Trible clears a path to new understanding of a familiar text.
Kierkegaard’s Interpretation of Genesis 22 (The Sacrifice of Isaac)

The story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 has been called by numerous titles: “Abraham’s Sacrifice” (Westermann), “The Great Temptation” (von Rad), even “The Ordeal of Isaac” (Speiser). It has invited a wide range of reflection and interpretation. For example, some have understood it as a test of whether Abraham places higher value on God and or the implementation of the God’s promise in Isaac.

In terms of modern scholarship, the literary-historical analysts have identified it as belonging to the Elohist (“E”) source. That source, which we have not discussed thus far, appears largely in combination with J in a number of places: for example, in the account of the first covenant with Abram in Chapter 15 and in the story of Jacob’s dream at Bethel in Chapter 28. This Elohist alone gives the narrative of Abraham’s dealing with Abimelech (the second time Abraham claims Sarah to be his sister) in Chapters 20 and 21, and of this passage, Chapter 22. The Elohist source is marked by the use of “Elohim” as the divine name, but is distinguished from the Priestly (“P”) source, which also uses that name, by its interest in narrative and its attempt to soften the anthropomorphisms of “J” by the introduction of angels to communicate with humans.

Later, the genre analysts saw in Genesis 22 an etiology, explaining the prohibition of human sacrifice. And tradition analysts could investigate how this older (perhaps Canaanite) explanation story came to be a part of the Abraham cycle of stories, which focused on the promise of a son by Sarah.

It is one of the most powerful stories in the Bible, if not all of literature, and lends itself to literary analysis of the later type (of the kind practiced by Trible). To begin with, the parallels with the banishment of Hagar and Abraham’s other son Ishmael in the preceding chapter (21) are striking (both are from “E,” by the way). In the one, Elohim approves of Sarah’s demand that Hagar and her son Ishmael be “cast out”; in the other Elohim commands Abraham to sacrifice his other son Isaac. In both, Abraham “arose early in the morning”: in the first to send them away, and in the second, to begin his journey with Isaac to the appointed place of sacrifice. In both, the child is near death, when an angel intervenes to save the child—in one, Hagar looks up to see a well of water; in the other, Abraham looks up to see a ram with its horns caught in the thicket.

The story itself is sparsely stated. Every word and sentence counts. It moves almost silently, first the command, then the preparation, the journey, the moment of sacrifice, and finally the rescue. What dialogue there is, is poignant—especially when Isaac breaks a long silence between the two of them to ask about the lamb to be sacrificed, and Abraham responds that God will provide the lamb—does he know this, or is he protecting Isaac with a lie? For that matter, does Abraham know from the beginning that he will not have to go through with killing his son? —was all this a command or only a test? In any case, the story is told quickly, but proceeds slowly, and most of it is about the command, the preparation, the journey, and finally the binding of Isaac and the drawing of the knife (actually a butcher knife or cleaver). This is the turning point, very late in the story, and the resolution is quick.

What does the story mean? For our purposes, I have decided to take a break from modern analytical scholarship, and turn to the interpretation of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who used this story to reflect on human existence in his work Fear and Trembling.

Kierkegaard sees three aspects of this story as reflecting the interaction of three distinct states of mind or spirit or ways of being on the part of Abraham. They are the love of Isaac, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the recovery of Isaac. The word he uses to suggest both the distinctiveness of these three states of mind or spirit and the interaction between them is “stage.” “Stage” can be a spatial metaphor, as with the theatrical stage, and refers to the state of mind in which we work out our existence—or what has been called “spheres of existence.” (These, by the way, are similar to but different from the “four paths” of Hinduism.) “Stage” is also a temporal
metaphor, suggesting something like a step—a state of mind through which one moves to another state of mind in a set sequence. (This is similar to the movement of the self in Gnosticism from one state of human consciousness to another—from “flesh” to “soul” to “spirit.”)

There are three such stages in Kierkegaard’s way of thinking about human existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Abraham’s love of Isaac operates in the aesthetic stage; his sacrifice of Isaac in the ethical stage; and the recovery of Isaac in the religious stage.

By the aesthetic, Kierkegaard means what gives us pleasure either superficially or profoundly. The aesthetic stage values the individual person or thing, the finite, “this world.” Kierkegaard knows that the pleasure can be superficial, for individuals flit from one thing to another, seeking momentary satisfaction. And to the degree that true pleasure comes from investing oneself in the object of pleasure, he knows that individuals can diversify their investments (an existential form of hedging one’s investments). But for him true pleasure comes from devoting oneself totally to a single person, thing, or pursuit. This may be difficult, but it is what is ultimately satisfying or pleasurable. Abraham accomplished this level of the aesthetic—“your son, your only son, whom you love.”

In any case, in the aesthetic stage that which is outside us (the external) defines who we are. But the consequence of the aesthetic mode of existence is despair (principally because the object of desire and pleasure is not dependable or constant, since it is susceptible to change and even death).

This lack of constancy in the aesthetic is provided for or overcome by the movement to the ethical—those values and principles of action that remain constant without respect to time and place (what Kierkegaard also calls the ”universal”). This is the realm of duty to the greater good. In this sphere of existence, universal values and principles define us; indeed, in the universal (ethical), the individual qua individual does not exist. That is because the individual exists only in conformity to the ethical or universal. Put another way, the greater good, expressed in the universal ethic, is of greater value than the individual. The finite is lost to the universal. In the Abraham story, this is expressed by the command of God and the obedience of Abraham. When there is a conflict between an individual object of devotion and the greater good, and a deeply difficult choice must be made, we have what Kierkegaard calls the “tragic hero.” The example he uses is the sacrifice of Ephigenia by the king and her father Agamemnon (in Euripides’ play).

But Abraham is not a “tragic hero.” Indeed, Abraham is not ethical, because he cannot explain his act of sacrifice on the basis of any universal principle. Judged ethically, Abraham is—Kierkegaard claims—a murderer. God’s commanding Abraham to sacrifice Isaac does not make it ethical, since gods are often unethical (that is, they act in ways that cannot be explained in terms of universal principles).

Kierkegaard claims that Abraham gets beyond the aesthetic and its inconstancy another way, by being the “knight of infinite resignation.” ”Infinite resignation” means that the single thing to which the individual is completely devoted in the first or aesthetic stage, is completely resigned or given up—the sacrifice of Isaac (“offer him there as a burnt sacrifice”). It is this movement that saves the individual from having the object of total investment taken away from. That object cannot be taken away if it is given up without reservation. (This movement is similar to non-attachment in Buddhism.) Freedom results from infinite resignation. The object of desire is freed from the oppression of expectation and the “knight of infinite resignation” is delivered from the threat of loss. The cost of this resignation is that nothing in the finite world is of any value. Abraham is the “knight of infinite resignation” when he sacrifices Isaac.

Though both the tragic hero and the knight of infinite resignation represent a movement from the aesthetic, they differ. The tragic hero is trapped within the ethical sphere, whereas for the “knight of infinite resignation” there is the possibility of moving to the third stage, the religious.
Infinite resignation may lead to faith. This is what Kierkegaard called the religious stage, but the terms “religious” and “faith” are used by him in special ways. For him, faith is the movement by which Abraham receives Isaac back—and the miracle is not the physical one of rescuing Isaac. The miracle is that Abraham, having completely resigned (and emotionally distanced himself from) Isaac, can now receive and enjoy him without fear of losing him.

Outwardly, the religious person in Kierkegaard's thought appears no different from the pleasure-seeking aesthete. He gives a wonderful description of the "knight of faith" as a bourgeois person walking home for dinner, enjoying everything encountered. Both the aesthete and the "knight of faith" outwardly appear as persons who enjoy the world and the things and persons of the world. The only difference is inward and in the quality of experience.

So each of the three stages has its own mode of existence and its own set of consequences, and each describes a movement from one level of human existence to another (and with the third being a repetition of the first at another level).

However, the movement from infinite resignation to faith is very difficult. Kierkegaard says he finds it impossible. In one illustration he says that it is a bit like a ballet dancer who leaves the ground in a leap and finds it very difficult to land again smoothly (the observer can see the moment of uncertainty in the landing). The same is true of those who have left the world behind and then return to the finite.

For Kierkegaard, the test of Abraham is not the sacrifice of Isaac, but whether Abraham can enjoy Isaac after having completely let him go.

**THE EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS**

We will be looking at four prophets who worked in the eighth century: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah of Jerusalem, and Micah.

Prophets played a distinctive role in the life of Israel. Their role can be compared with the judges (such as Deborah, Samson and Samuel), kings (Saul, David and Solomon), or with priests (Aaron, the Levites, and Eli).

The word “prophet” generally suggests one who predicts or foretells the future, and this is one function of the Hebrew prophets. Christian scriptures, for example, interpret promises by the prophets of a future messianic figure as applying to Jesus. But typically when the Hebrew prophets foretell the future it is related to a circumstance in their own time. It is an announcement of a future calamity resulting from some contemporary failure of the people, or some future saving act in spite of their failure.

Most often, however, “prophecy” and “prophet” are related to the activity of a messenger of the deity in addressing a specific ethical or religious situation. Hebrew prophets are social or religious critics for the most part, and their work is time-bound in nature. One thinks of the prophet Nathan challenging King David on the Bathsheba affair (2 Samuel 11.27b-12.15), or the prophet Elijah confronting Ahab (1 Kings 16.29-21.29), or Micaiah predicting defeat in a war situation (1 Kings 22.1-28). It is this usage people have in mind when they speak of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a prophet. This is the more appropriate meaning in discussing the Hebrew prophets.

The second major collection of books within the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Prophets (the Torah or Law being the first). The first part of this collection is sometimes called the “Former Prophets” and is largely made up of historical accounts, written in prose: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (or 1 and 2 Samuel), and Kings (or 1
and 2 Kings), though they contain accounts of the words and actions of some early prophets: Nathan, Elijah, Micaiah, and Elisha.

But the bulk of the collection called the Prophets are books (composed largely of oracles in verse) sometimes called the “Latter Prophets” and attributed to individuals. These include Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, called by some the “Major Prophets” (probably because of their length), as well as the “Minor Prophets” or the “Twelve,” including Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These “Latter Prophets” (Major and Minor) worked from about 750 BCE (“Before the Common Era”) until about 540 BCE, a little more than two hundred years. This period stretches from a time during the Divided Kingdoms (Israel in the North and Judah in the South, 922-722/721 BCE) through the Exile of Judah in Babylon (597/587-540 BCE).

Since the claim is that these divine messengers addressed specific historical situations, this may be a good place to indicate something of what was going on during the time of the Hebrew prophets (750-540 BCE). The setting is the Fertile Crescent, the arch of land reaching from Egypt to Mesopotamia through the land claimed by Aram (present day Syria) and the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Since the days of David and Solomon, when they ruled a small empire in the Palestinian corridor, the two kingdoms were under constant threat, sometimes from Egypt, but mainly from whatever empire was controlling Mesopotamia (principally the Assyrians, then the Babylonians). These threats led to a crisis in confidence in the national deity, which in turn led to attempted alliances with other nations. Simultaneously, there was an ongoing religious crisis reflected in the dual loyalties to Yahweh (the LORD or Adonai) and Baal, an agricultural god. At the same time, there were issues of economic inequities, concerning the poor and the oppressed in times of general prosperity. It was on this critical stage that the Hebrew prophets appeared.

This is a distinctive body of religious literature. One way to appreciate its special character is to compare the function of the deity in it to other bodies of literature within the Hebrew Bible. In the Torah or Law, for example, the deity both acts and speaks directly with humans (especially Abraham and Moses). In the Writings (the third major collection) the deity is essentially absent and does not communicate with humans (the exception is Job). In the Prophets the deity is very concerned with what is going on in history, but never acts and speaks only through human agents, the prophets. The prescriptions of the law (for example, the so-called Ten Commandments) are rarely referred to. The principle reference to the Torah is to the Exodus and wilderness experience. The responsibilities of the people are not defined by laws, but by general principles, such as “covenant loyalty,” “righteousness” and “justice,” and these are applied to specific historical situations.

Since the “Latter Prophets” are written almost entirely in verse, a related form of literary analysis has been applied. Here the identification of specific units and a study of their poetic structure have been accomplished. Of special interest has been the appearance of parallelism (when a similar reality is portrayed in two ways). An example is Isaiah 40.1-2, given here first in the prose of the King James Version, then the poetry of the New Revised Standard Version:

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins. (KJV)

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. (NRSV)
Form or genre analysis has been able to identify wide variety of genres within the poetry: threats, promises, assurances (“Fear not”), indictments, elegies. An oft cited example of the latter is an elegy applied to Israel in Amos 5.1-2:

5 Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel:
2 Fallen, no more to rise,
is maiden Israel;
forsaken on her land,
with no one to raise her up.

Tradition analysis has been used largely to show how such formulas are recast to address a situation in Israel. Also, it illustrates how themes or motifs from earlier times are given new meaning in prophetic oracles—examples are creation and exodus in Isaiah of the Exile

Source (literary-historical) analysis has been applied to the prophetic books. Perhaps the most important conclusion is that the so-called “Former Prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) constitute a single work initially composed at the time of King Josiah’s reform (late seventh century BCE) to present the history of Israel in light of a set of criteria espoused by the Book of Deuteronomy (D). These criteria—that Israel is rewarded and punished according to its faithfulness to Yahweh—operate under what is called a “conditional” (Mosaic) covenant, as distinguished from the “eternal” or “unconditional” covenant underlying “J” and “P,” and the royal (Davidic) theology.

Another interesting and somewhat related achievement of source analysis is the disentanglement of two traditions in the story of selection of Saul as king (1 Samuel 7-12). One version (1 Samuel 9.1-10.16 and chapter 11), called by some the “Saul” tradition, portrays the monarchy in a positive light. The other (1 Samuel 7.3-8.22, 10.17-27, and chapter 12), called the “Samuel” tradition, pictures the monarch negatively.

In the case of the “Latter Prophets,” literary-historical analysis was able to identify within each of the prophetic books an earlier and a later version—the latter usually being a positive addition or revision from the time of the Exile. The most dramatic instance is the work on the book of Isaiah. Here at least two distinct works, authors, and time of composition delineated. Chapters 1-39 (with a few exceptions) are attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem; Chapters 40-66 to Isaiah of the Exile, living some 150 years later. Some even suggest a “Third Isaiah.”

Perhaps the major achievement of literary-historical analysis has been to place the books within their historical context, and to see how each is addressing a specific set of social, political, economic and religious issues. It is the fruit of this inquiry that we use in looking at the Eighth Century Prophets.

AMOS

Amos is the first of the prophets we study (and indeed the first to whom a written book is ascribed). He worked in the North (Israel), even though he was from the South (Judah), during the reign of Jeroboam II.

The reign of Jeroboam II was marked by peace and prosperity. Assyria, Israel’s perpetual threat was in a period of internal turmoil and lethargy, and Jeroboam had been able to extend Israel’s borders to approximate the old empire of Solomon. In this time of expanded tranquility, Israel had benefited from the increased trade made possible by the Phoenicians. It was a time of economic expansion and wealth.

But, as in often the case, the prosperity was limited to the upper and merchant classes, and there was a large population suffering poverty and legal mistreatment. This was not the result of individual moral failure,
either on the part of the wealthy, privileged, and powerful, or of the poor, the disenfranchised and weak. This situation had resulted from a shift in the way society was structured. It was, as they say, systemic. The shift had been going on since the time of David and Solomon, who had undercut tribal and family values in favor of an efficient royal government. In addition, Solomon had enhanced international relations (all those foreign wives!) and in so doing expanded his empire’s economic base.

By the time of Amos, the society had been restructured from a larger community of tribes and families, to be one characterized by individual wealth and privilege and concomitant poverty and powerlessness—class. It was a situation that required a voice from outside the establishment, and Amos makes clear that he cannot even be called a prophet, but rather a layperson called by Yahweh to this specific task. “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’” (7.14)

It was to this situation that Amos addressed his stinging critique. Using an interesting rhetorical device in which he claims Yahweh’s authority and power over all nations, he indicts the surrounding nations (Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, Moab, even Judah, 1.3-2.5), then turns to Israel:

For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the punishment,
because they sell the righteous for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,
and push the afflicted out of the way; (2.6-7a)

Elsewhere:

Therefore because you trample on the poor
and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone,
but you shall not live in them;
you have planted pleasant vineyards,
but you shall not drink their wine.
For I know how many are your transgressions,
and how great are your sins—
you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe,
and push aside the needy in the gate. (5.11-12)

Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
saying, “When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.” (8.4-6)
His attack is principally against the wealthy:

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,
and like David improvise on instruments of music;
who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!
Therefore they shall now be the first to go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away. (6.4-7)

I will tear down the winter house as well as the summer house;
and the houses of ivory shall perish,
and the great houses shall come to an end,
says the LORD.
Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
who are on Mount Samaria,
who oppress the poor, who crush the needy,
who say to their husbands, “Bring something to drink!” (3.15-4.1)

Amos was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees (in the latter case he may have followed available work and this may explain his presence in the northern kingdom, away from his home in the south). As such he would have been familiar with the underside of the emergent economic system. But his was more than social criticism; since he saw this social situation as a rejection of Yahweh, who had marked this people for a special destiny by delivering them from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness, and giving them the land on which they now lived.

… I brought you up out of the land of Egypt,
and led you forty years in the wilderness,
to possess the land of the Amorite. (2.10)

Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt:
You only have I known. (3.1)
of all the families of the earth;
therefore I will punish you
for all your iniquities.

He is more than a spokesman for the poor. His critique is in the form of proclamations from Yahweh, based on the memory of values that grew out of the Exodus and wilderness experience, memories of communality.

The terms Amos uses to indicate this communality, and what it is that Yahweh expects and finds lacking, are “righteousness” (Hebrew zedaqah) and “justice.” (Hebrew mishpat).

…let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (5.24)

Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood,
and bring righteousness to the ground! (5.7)

…you have turned justice into poison
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. (6.12)
These words have connotations in our usage that are different from those in Hebrew. We tend to think of “righteousness” as a moral category, and “justice” as a term of retribution (hence, in present parlance, “retributive justice”). Gene Tucker, in his Harper-Collins Study Bible notation on 5.24 says, “Justice is the establishment of the right, and of the person in the right, through fair legal procedures (3.15)…Righteousness is that quality of life in relationship with others in the community that gives rise to justice.” Put another way, “righteousness” refers to the cohesiveness of the community in which each party plays an equally important role; “justice” is the concrete manifestation of righteousness in establishing what is due or appropriate for each participant. Not only, for Amos, are persons treated unjustly (the question of justice); the very fabric of society has been corrupted (the question of righteousness). In this setting, to “afflict the righteous” (5.12) or “sell the righteous for silver” (2.6) is the mistreatment of a legitimate member of society.

But social injustice, even as seen as an affront to Yahweh, is not all Amos attacks. What he finds even more offensive is the assumption that religious practice will legitimize wealth and privilege. And more: the cynical attitude that underlies religion. It is instructive that his work was done at Bethel and Gilgal, religious centers, and not the capital Samaria.

“When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat.” (8.4-6)

Come to Bethel—and transgress;
to Gilgal—and multiply transgression;
bring your sacrifices every morning,
your tithes every three days;
bring a thank offering of leavened bread,
and proclaim freewill offerings, publish them;
for so you love to do, O people of Israel! (4.4)

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? (5.21-25)

To the idea that Yahweh will bring a day of even greater wealth and well-being, Amos says,

Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!
Why do you want the day of the LORD?
It is darkness, not light;
as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.
Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it? (5.18-20)

This is a harsh and unblinking book, indicting the privileged and predicting in repeated and varying ways absolute catastrophe. Examples:

See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.” (7.7b-9)

Thus says the LORD: As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the people of Israel who live in Samaria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed. (3.12)

The book ends (9.11-15) with promise of a new day, but since these verses assume the destruction Amos prophesized and are so out of character with the rest of the book, scholars conclude they are a later addition (from the period of the Exile). The tension between judgment and hope is more explicit in later books, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

HOSEA

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, also prophesying in the northern kingdom (Israel) during the reign of Jeroboam II, about 745 BCE. But there the similarities with Amos end. The interest of Hosea lies with religious issues, rather than those of social justice. He never mentions the poor and oppressed, and he rarely speaks of “righteousness” and “justice,” the basic vocabulary of Amos. Hosea addresses religious infidelity.

This is partly explained by what was happening internationally. Assyria, after a period of weakness, was reasserting itself in the region, and was a threat to Aram (Syria), Israel and Judah. The predictions of exile by Amos were about to be fulfilled (the northern kingdom fell within thirty years). In Israel, this led to political instability and a way of dealing with Assyria—sometimes by paying tribute, at other times seeking alliances with other nations (principally Egypt) against the Mesopotamian empire.

Hosea specifically addresses Ephraim’s (that is, Israel’s) venture into tributes to or alliances with other nations.

When Ephraim saw his sickness,
and Judah his wound,
then Ephraim went to Assyria,
and sent to the great king. (5.13)

Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.
Foreigners devour his strength,
but he does not know it…(7.8-9)

Ephraim has become like a dove,
silly and without sense;
they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria. (7.11)
For they have gone up to Assyria,
a wild ass wandering alone;
Ephraim has bargained for lovers. (8.9)
they make a treaty with Assyria,
and oil is carried to Egypt. (12.1)

The irony is, according to Hosea, that Israel will be absorbed by Assyria or Egypt, rather than saved by them.

Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake not turned.
Foreigners devour his strength,
but he does not know it; . (8.8)

Now he will remember their iniquity,
and punish their sins;
they shall return to Egypt. (8.13b)

They shall not remain in the land of the LORD;
but Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
and in Assyria they shall eat unclean food. (9.3)

For even if they escape destruction,
Egypt shall gather them,
Memphis shall bury them. (9.6)

They shall return to the land of Egypt,
and Assyria shall be their king, (11.5)

If anything, Israel will need to be rescued from Egypt and Assyria, rather than saved by them.

They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD. (11.11)

There was something else. When the Hebrew tribes settled or conquered the land, they encountered an indigenous religion that promised a more predictable way to obtain sustenance. This was the religion of Baal. Baal was an agricultural god who operated according to the rhythms of nature. The religion of Baal called for set of seasonal cultic performances that when carried out would awaken the divine fecundity in dependable ways. (It was, by the way, this awakening that occasioned temple prostitution.)

She did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished upon her silver
and gold that they used for Baal. (2.8)

Like grapes in the wilderness,
I found Israel.
Like the first fruit on the fig tree,
in its first season,
I saw your ancestors.
But they came to Baal-peor,
and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame,
and became detestable like the thing they loved. (9.10)

While the international tributes and alliances were prudent measures, given the threat, those who remembered that Yahweh had defeated Pharaoh saw them as a lack of confidence in Yahweh. And while the worship of Baal made sense in an agricultural setting, this too seemed like a rejection of Yahweh who had
provided food as a daily gift in the wilderness. The contest between Baal and Yahweh was of long standing, reflected in the time of Elijah a century earlier.

So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel. Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, “How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” The people did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18.20)

It was Hosea who first used the metaphor of marriage as a way of portraying these perceived rejections of Yahweh. He accused Israel of being an adulteress and a whore. Most commentators claim these are synonyms, but I think they suggest different meanings. By adultery he meant that Israel was seeking its assurance from and giving its loyalty to multiple deities. It was, to use the words of the first of the Ten Commandments, “having other gods beside [Yahweh].” And this caused, in Elijah’s words, a “limping with two different opinions.” But his more consistent charge was that Israel was “playing the whore” (a phrase that appears nine times). Whoredom suggests selling oneself for desired result, and by extension the ability to manipulate. Whatever the meanings, it is the charge Hosea brings.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” (1.2)

Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—
that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts,
or I will strip her naked
and expose her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and turn her into a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.
Upon her children also I will have no pity,
because they are children of whoredom.
For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, “I will go after my lovers;
they give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”
Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns;
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
She shall pursue her lovers,
but not overtake them;
and she shall seek them,
but shall not find them. (2.2-7)

The LORD said to me again, “Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” (3.1)

They shall eat, but not be satisfied;
they shall play the whore, but not multiply;
because they have forsaken the LORD
to devote themselves to whoredom. (4.10)

My people consult a piece of wood,
and their divining rod gives them oracles.
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,
and they have played the whore, forsaking their God. (4.12)

Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with whores, and sacrifice with temple prostitutes; thus a people without understanding comes to ruin. (4.13b-14)

I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know the LORD. (5.3-4)

Do not rejoice, O Israel! Do not exult as other nations do; for you have played the whore, departing from your God. You have loved a prostitute’s pay on all threshing floors.

The temptation of Israel, given that “the spirit of whoredom is within them” (5.4), is to think that it can relate to Yahweh in the same way as to Baal—*quid pro quo*. It doesn’t work.

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering. (6.4-6)

When Ephraim multiplied altars to expiate sin, they became to him altars for sinning. Though I write for him the multitude of my instructions, they are regarded as a strange thing. Though they offer choice sacrifices, though they eat flesh, the LORD does not accept them. (8.11-13)

They shall not pour drink offerings of wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices shall not please him. Such sacrifices shall be like mourners’ bread; all who eat of it shall be defiled; for their bread shall be for their hunger only; it shall not come to the house of the LORD. (9.4)

Whatever it is that Yahweh is looking for, two things are certain. It is the opposite of adultery and whoredom, and it is not principally the righteousness and justice of which Amos spoke. Hosea uses two words: “knowledge” and “steadfast love” (Hebrew *hesed*). “Knowledge” is informed by ideas of closeness,
familiarity, intimacy, devotion, even participation. *Hesed* is variously translated “loyalty,” in 4.1, “steadfast love” in 2.19 and 10.12, and “love” in 6.4,6 and 12.6). Both terms, in this setting, are correlates of the marriage metaphor.

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty (Hebrew *hesed*), and no knowledge of God in the land. (4.1)

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge. (4.6)

For I desire steadfast love (Hebrew *hesed*) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (6.6)

So the consequences are not so much material or military in nature, though there is some of that. The result of adultery and whoredom is a change in the relationship of Israel to Yahweh.

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.” So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And the LORD said to him, “Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.”

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, “Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen.”

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God.” (1.2-9)

for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—(2.2)

For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, “I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.” (2.5)

But Yahweh is determined that that is not the final word. Yahweh does not, according to Hosea, change Israel’s circumstances so much, but rather rescues Israel from its propensity for adultery and whoredom.

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

... his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the LORD. (11.8-11)
Therefore, I will now allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.
From there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, “My husband,” and no longer will you call me, “My Baal.” For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
I will answer the heavens
and they shall answer the earth;
and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel;
and I will sow him for myself in the land.
And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah,
and I will say to Lo-ammi, “You are my people”;
and he shall say, “You are my God.” (2.14-23)

It is the being allured into the wilderness that is the key. The wilderness and with it the deliverance from Egypt are the setting for the creation of community in the midst of the vicissitudes of history and of nature. It is there, where history and nature cannot be predicted or managed, but only received as a gift, that a mysterious form of familiarity or knowledge replaces the attractive illusion of management or control, and a kind of steadfastness or loyalty called love sustains, that existence can be lived out at a more profound and satisfying level.

ISAIAH OF JERUSALEM

Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are often referred to as the major prophets, not because they are the most important, but because the books attributed to them are the longest. In the case of Isaiah, critical analysis of the book in the modern era has shown there are as many as three distinct books within it: Chapters 1-39, Chapters 40-55, and Chapters 56-66. Within Chapters 1-39, there are several sections (some large) that are considered later additions. The remainder of Chapters 1-39 is credited to Isaiah of Jerusalem, who prophesied in the southern kingdom (Judah) in the years 742-700 BCE, just a little later than Amos and Hosea in the north.

On what we may call domestic issues, there are some similarities between Isaiah of Jerusalem and the two northern prophets.

There are fewer similarities with Hosea. Isaiah never mentions Baal, though like Hosea he mocks idols (which Hosea had identified with Baal worship).

Their land is filled with idols;
they bow down to the work of their hands,
to what their own fingers have made. (2.8)

For on that day all of you shall throw away your idols of silver and idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you. (31.7)

The greater similarities are with Amos. Like Amos with Israel, Isaiah predicts a dire future for Judah.
Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah.

Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge; their nobles are dying of hunger, and their multitude is parched with thirst. (5.9b-10, 13)

“Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.”

Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing, when it is felled.” (6.9-13)

Also like Amos, Isaiah condemns the treatment of the poor and the oppressed.

The LORD rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts. (3.13-15)

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! (10.1-2)

And the principle on which this critique is made is “righteousness” and “justice,” as it was with Amos. Isaiah concludes his well-known “Song of Vineyard” in Chapter 5:

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice (Hebrew mishpat),
but saw bloodshed (Hebrew mispach);
righteousness (Hebrew zedaqah),
but heard a cry (Hebrew ze’aqah)! (5.7)

But there the similarities end. Importantly, there is no mention by Isaiah of the deliverance from Egypt
or of the wilderness experience. Instead of what scholars term the Mosaic theology, Judah embraced what is
called a royal theology, based on Yahweh’s everlasting covenant with the Davidic dynasty (which, unlike the
multiple dynasties of Israel, survived intact until the Babylonian Exile). Yahweh was seen as the universal and
cosmic king. David and the Judean kings were Yahweh’s earthly vice-regents, and Jerusalem and the temple
were Yahweh’s chosen earthly residence.

Yahweh the king of the universe is repeatedly characterized as other than human, awesome, “holy”
(Isaiah calls Yahweh the “Holy One” twelve times). At the death of Uzziah, who had reigned for forty years,
Isaiah sees the true king:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of
his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered
their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and
said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the L ORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.
And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean
lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the L ORD of hosts!” (6.1-5)

As for Yahweh’s earthly vice-regents, the Davidic kings, they are commissioned in ideal terms.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the L ORD of hosts will do this. (9.6-7)

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the L ORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the L ORD.
His delight shall be in the fear of the L ORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, 
and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 
The wolf shall live with the lamb, 
the leopard shall lie down with the kid, 
the calf and the lion and the fatling together, 
and a little child shall lead them. 
The cow and the bear shall graze, 
their young shall lie down together; 
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, 
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. 
They will not hurt or destroy 
on all my holy mountain; 
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD 
as the waters cover the sea.  (11.1-9)

As with Hosea in the north, however, it is international events that garner much of Isaiah’s attention. The threat to Judah is Assyria, and the temptation is to attempt to appease it or to enter alliances against it. There were two specific crises, one during the reign of King Ahaz and the other during the time of King Hezekiah.

The threat to Ahaz was only indirectly that of Assyria. During 735-732 BCE, the kingdoms of Aram (Syria) and Israel sought to conquer Judah as part of an effort to mobilize against the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser III. Ahaz was young and not up to the situation, and out of fear of Syria and Israel, turned to Tiglath-pileser for help. Isaiah counsels and chastens Ahaz, largely for his lack of faith in Yahweh, who has promised the permanence of the Davidic line and the imminent defeat of Syria and Israel.

Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. Because Aram—with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah—has plotted evil against you, saying, Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it; therefore thus says the Lord GOD:  
It shall not stand, 
and it shall not come to pass. 
For the head of Aram is Damascus, 
and the head of Damascus is Rezin. 
(Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people.) 
The head of Ephraim is Samaria, 
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. 
If you do not stand firm in faith, 
You shall not stand at all.  (7.4-9)

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.  (7.14b-16)

After Ahaz turned to Assyria for help and subsequently became a vassal state of Assyria (complete with an Assyrian altar in the Temple), Isaiah appears to have retreated to the circle of his disciples and out of the political realm. He returned at the time of a second crisis, during the time of King Hezekiah (715-786 BCE).
During the reign of Hezekiah, the Assyrian king Sargon died (in 705), and the various provinces of Assyria, encouraged by Babylon and a resurgent Egypt, saw an opportunity to free themselves. Judah was courted by both Babylon and Egypt. Hezekiah, an outstanding reform king with ambitions of his own, pondered whether to join the revolutionary movement, which he finally did. Isaiah reappeared to counsel the king, in the much the way he had advised Ahaz, against any alliances.

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel:
In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. (30.15)

Alas for those who go down to Egypt for help
and who rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many
and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
or consult the LORD! (31.1)

As it turned out, Sennacherib of Assyria crushed the rebellion and finally laid siege to Jerusalem itself, only mysteriously to withdraw.

Isaiah was convinced that Judah as he knew it must be destroyed, so that a new Judah could emerge, made up of those who rely solely on Yahweh and Yahweh’s will for the people. The destruction would occur because Yahweh used Assyria for that purpose, even though Assyria in its arrogance itself would ultimately be crushed.

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—
the club in their hands is my fury!
Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. (10.5-6)

When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride. (10.12)

Shall the ax vaunt itself over the one who wields it,
or the saw magnify itself against the one who handles it?
As if a rod should raise the one who lifts it up,
or as if a staff should lift the one who is not wood!
Therefore the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts,
will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors,
and under his glory a burning will be kindled,
like the burning of fire.
The light of Israel will become a fire,
and his Holy One a flame;
and it will burn and devour
his thorns and briers in one day.
The glory of his forest and his fruitful land
the LORD will destroy, both soul and body,
and it will be as when an invalid wastes away.
The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few
that a child can write them down. (10.15-19)
Indeed, the Assyrian yoke will be lifted:

Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: O my people, who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians when they beat you with a rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did. For in a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction. The Lord of hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb: his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt. On that day his burden will be removed from your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck. (10.24-27)

All of this is to allow a new people to emerge from the old. They will “return” to Yahweh. Here Isaiah uses the image of the remnant (the name of Isaiah’s first child, Shear-jashub [“A remnant will return”], 7.3):

On that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on the one who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. (10.20-21)

In that day the Lord of hosts will be a garland of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people; and a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. (28.5-6)

The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (37.31-32)

See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice.
Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest,
like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.
Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed, and the ears of those who have hearing will listen.
The minds of the rash will have good judgment, and the tongues of stammerers will speak readily and distinctly. (31.1-4)

MICAH

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and also prophesied in Judah, possibly as long as from 750 BCE until 687 but more likely from the fall of the northern kingdom in 721 through Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem in 701.

Perhaps the most well-known words in all of the prophets are found in Micah:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (6.8)

Many consider these words to be the summation of the whole prophetic message. For example, the editors of the New Jerusalem Bible in their marginal notes on this passage suggest that it contains the major themes of Amos, Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem.

In the case of Amos, Micah’s phrase “to do justice (Hebrew mishpat)” uses one of the signature terms of Amos in his emphasis on social justice.

But let justice (Hebrew mishpat) roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5.24)

Micah uses a favorite word of Hosea in the line “to love kindness” (also traditionally translated “mercy.”) The Hebrew word is hesed, which Hosea uses six times in important in justice, in steadfast love (Hebrew hesed), and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness and you shall know the LORD.

It is a word that is translated three different ways, one of which is “loyalty.” Several translations of Micah read “loyalty” instead of “kindness.”

Finally, they view Micah’s language “to walk humbly with your God” as reminiscent of the message of Isaiah 7.9 and 30.15.

If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.

In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

There is another famous passage in Micah, because the first part of it is used by the Gospel of Matthew to explain the birthplace of Jesus:

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

But Micah is making a different and important point: the future leader of Judah will come from one of the “little clans of Judah” “whose origin is from old, from ancient days,” and specifically not from Jerusalem. In this Micah departs from Isaiah, who espoused the royal theology of the dynasty of David, ensconced in Jerusalem and in the Temple. Indeed, Micah sees the leadership identified with the two capital cities as being the problem, not the solution:

What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? (1.5)

Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money;
yet they lean upon the LORD and say,  
"Surely the LORD is with us!  
No harm shall come upon us."
Therefore because of you  
Zion shall be plowed as a field;  
Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,  
and the mountain of the house a wooded height. (3.9-12)

But while Micah can bemoan the perversion of justice, he does not follow Amos in protesting the treatment of the poor and oppressed. Indeed, he makes no mention of them, much less the widows and orphans. Nor does he refer primarily to the mercantile class, as Amos had done, as the purveyors of injustice. What Micah attacks is the landed aristocracy who, under the royal system, has taken land from its original stewards.

Alas for those who devise wickedness  
and evil deeds on their beds!  
When the morning dawns, they perform it,  
because it is in their power.  
They covet fields, and seize them;  
houses, and take them away;  
they oppress householder and house,  
people and their inheritance. (2.1-2)

What he protests is the loss of the Mosaic way of life.

O my people, what have I done to you?  
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!  
For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam. (6.3-4)

The prophets combine judgment and hope, and Micah is no exception. In fact, his book is organized with alternating oracles of doom and oracles of salvation (King, Introduction to Micah, HarperCollins Study Bible). And even though Micah shares with Amos and Hosea the perspective of the deliverance from Egypt, and does not embrace with Isaiah the royal theology of the Davidic dynasty, he does agree with Isaiah that there will be a redeemed remnant (though he omits the “shall return” to Yahweh in Isaiah’s usage):

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob,  
I will gather the survivors of Israel;  
I will set them together  
like sheep in a fold,  
like a flock in its pasture;  
it will resound with people. (2.12)

Then the remnant of Jacob,  
surrounded by many peoples,  
shall be like dew from the LORD,  
like showers on the grass,  
which do not depend upon people  
or wait for any mortal.  
And among the nations the remnant of Jacob,  
surrounded by many peoples,  
shall be like a lion among the animals of the forest,  
like a young lion among the flocks of sheep,  
which, when it goes through, treads down  
and tears in pieces, with no one to deliver.  
Your hand shall be lifted up over your adversaries,
and all your enemies shall be cut off. (5.7-8)

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over the transgression
of the remnant of your possession?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in showing clemency.
He will again have compassion upon us;
he will tread our iniquities under foot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.
You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and unswerving loyalty to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our ancestors
from the days of old. (7.18-20)

THE BOOK OF JOB

[The book I have found most helpful is by the Jewish scholar Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job*. It is now out of print, but available as a used book from Amazon and other book sellers.]

The Book of Job appears in the third collection of books within Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament), the "Writings." (The first two collections are the Torah or Law and the Prophets.) This collection contains a variety of types of religious literature. There are 150 hymns in the Book of Psalms, and they contain a variety of types. Curiously, there is history (Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles). There is an extended love poem (Song of Solomon), the touching and revealing story of Ruth, and tales of religious heroism (Esther and Daniel). And there is “Wisdom,” including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Book of Job.

Wisdom has to do with the human condition, with or without reference to the divine. As such, it transcends religious and cultural boundaries. There are several good examples from ancient Egypt, and at least one from Mesopotamia. There is a kind of wisdom born of human experience, and which is largely advisory in nature. It often is characterized by admonitions to prudence. A good example is Proverbs in Hebrew Scriptures. There is another kind of wisdom literature that probes the human condition. Here again there are examples in Egyptian and Mesopotamian ancient literature.

The Book of Job is more of the latter type. It deals with the question whether it is possible to do right without reward or punishment, and the question of the relation of guilt (and innocence) to suffering. It draws on other literary forms appearing toward the end of the southern kingdom and during the exile. One is the lament or complaint. There are seven in Jeremiah (see especially Jeremiah 15.10-31 and 20.14-18) and a number in the Psalms (see especially Psalm 22). Another can be seen in the songs of the suffering servant (Isaiah 42.1-4, 49.1-6, 50.4-11, 52.13-53.12). The focus is on the plight of the individual.

It was probably written during the Babylonian Exile (the sixth century before the Common Era) or, even more probably, during the Persian period (the fifth century and following). It proceeds along the following broad outline:

(1) A prose story in five scenes, alternating between earth and heaven, during which a righteous and prosperous man named Job is tested and passes the test (Chapters 1-2).

(2) A long section (Chapters 3-42.6) in poetic form,
   (a) beginning with Job's lament (Chapter 3),
   (b) continuing for twenty-eight chapters (Chapters 4-31) with a dialogue in three cycles between Job and his friends Eliphaz, Zophar and Bildad,
   (c) then a speech by another figure Elihu in chapters 32-37,
   (d) and finally a response from the Lord and Job's repentance (Chapters 38-42.6).

(3) Another prose section (42.7-17), in which Job's property and family are restored to him.
[To read in the Book of Job itself, I suggest reading the prose sections (Chapter 1-2, then 42.7-17; then Chapter 3 for Job’s lament, to witness the sudden shift in Job's mood. To sample the position of the three friends, read the first speech by Eliphaz (Chapters 4-5). Read Chapters 9-10 for one of the more important responses by Job. Read also 19-25-27. Finally, read the LORD’s speeches and Job’s responses (38.1-42.6).]

The Book of Job abounds in problems. Some have to do with the text—there are different versions of the book in the different manuscripts that have survived, some in Greek, some in Hebrew, and a section is in Aramaic. Some have to do with the structure of the book, particularly the long poetic sections. For example, in the third cycle of speeches by Job and his friends, some speeches are unduly long and others are missing. There is the question of the Elihu speeches in chapter 32-37 (!), which in part appear to duplicate points made later in the speeches by the Lord. All of these had been the occasion of scholarly attention.

There are little things. Some people are troubled by the idea that the deity could be taunted into a wager of sorts which entailed the suffering of human beings (in Chapters 1-2). Indeed, how is it that Satan (“the Accuser”) has such easy access to the deity and the heavenly council? Also, what happens to Job’s wife and Satan in the concluding chapters—especially, why isn’t Satan called to task?

Let us look at another issue, having to do with Job’s state of mind. Following the first “test” in 1.13-19, Job worships and says, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (l.21). Following the second, he says to his wife, “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad? (2.10) These are awesome statements, and it is for these that Job is generally remembered.

But then, and in Chapter 3 at the beginning of the poetry section, Job’s attitude and tone changes:

3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job said:
4 “Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’
5 Let that day be darkness!
   May God above not seek it, or light shine on it.
6 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.
   Let clouds settle upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it.
7 That night—let thick darkness seize it!
   let it not rejoice among the days of the year; let it not come into the number of the months.
8 Yes, let that night be barren;
   let no joyful cry be heard in it.
9 Let those curse it who curse the Sea, those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.
10 Let the stars of its dawn be dark;
   let it hope for light, but have none; may it not see the eyelids of the morning—
11 because it did not shut the doors of my mother’s womb, and hide trouble from my eyes.
12 Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?
13 Why were there knees to receive me, or breasts for me to suck?
14 Now I would be lying down and quiet; I would be asleep; then I would be at rest
15 with kings and counselors of the earth who rebuild ruins for themselves,
or with princes who have gold,  
who fill their houses with silver.

Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child,  
like an infant that never sees the light?

There the wicked cease from troubling,  
and there the weary are at rest.

There the prisoners are at ease together;  
they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.

The small and the great are there,  
and the slaves are free from their masters.

Why is light given to one in misery,  
and life to the bitter in soul,

who long for death, but it does not come,  
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures;

who rejoice exceedingly,  
and are glad when they find the grave?

Why is light given to one who cannot see the way,  
whom God has fenced in?

For my sighing comes like my bread,  
and my groanings are poured out like water.

Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me,  
and what I dread befalls me.

I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;  
I have no rest; but trouble comes.”

In the prose section, the author says of Job, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing” (1.22) and “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2.10). But in the long poetry section, he attributes his misfortune to God.

6 Then Job answered:
2 “O that my vexation were weighed,  
and all my calamity laid in the balances!
3 For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea;  
therefore my words have been rash.
4 For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;  
my spirit drinks their poison;  
the terrors of God are arrayed against me.

9 14 How then can I answer him,  
choosing my words with him?
15 Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;  
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.
16 If I summoned him and he answered me,  
I do not believe that he would listen to my voice.
17 For he crushes me with a tempest,  
and multiplies my wounds without cause;
18 he will not let me get my breath,  
but fills me with bitterness.
19 If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one!  
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?
20 Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;  
though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse.
21 I am blameless; I do not know myself;  
I loathe my life.
22 It is all one; therefore I say,
he destroys both the blameless and the wicked.

23 When disaster brings sudden death,
    he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.

24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
    he covers the eyes of its judges—
    if it is not he, who then is it?

10 15 If I am wicked, woe to me!
    If I am righteous, I cannot lift up my head,
    for I am filled with disgrace
    and look upon my affliction.

16 Bold as a lion you hunt me;
    you repeat your exploits against me.

17 You renew your witnesses against me,
    and increase your vexation toward me;
    you bring fresh troops against me.

18 “Why did you bring me forth from the womb?
    Would that I had died before any eye had seen me,
    and were as though I had not been,
    carried from the womb to the grave.

20 Are not the days of my life few?
    Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort
21 before I go, never to return,
    to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
22 the land of gloom and chaos,
    where light is like darkness.”

There are other instances of Job’s complaint against God, and there are three expressions of hope (which we will note later).

How can we account for this radical shift in attitude and mood on the part of Job? Some, thinking along the lines of the psychology of grief, see the Job of the poetry sections representing a second stage—in this case, acceptance first (Chapter 1 and 2), followed by anger (Chapter 3, et al). Another explanation is that there are actually two Jobs, so to speak, each in its own account. According to this view, the first Job is in the prose sections (Chapters 1-2, then 42.7-17), which was originally an independent tale, in which Job was tested, passed the test, and was restored, along with his family and possessions. This account reminded some of the test of Abraham in Genesis 22.

In this explanation, this prose tale was divided and a separate work in the form of a longer set of poetic speeches (Chapters 3-42.6) was inserted into the split. These pondered the problem of innocent suffering in greater breath and depth. There are, by the way, many reasons for claiming that the prose and poetic sections were independent works—for example, the name for the deity in the prose sections is the LORD (Yahweh) or the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim), names almost totally absent from the poetry, where variations on “god” (El, Elohim, etc.) are used.

This division into two documents allows the poetic sections to express a different world view, one in which suffering requires explanation—either that there is no human explanation when the deity is involved, or that suffering is the result of human action or attitude (that is, sin). The view that suffering results from sin is identified with what is called the Mosaic Covenant, or with the Book of Deuteronomy and the books that agree with its theology (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings).

This theory requires, at a minimum, that the separated prose sections constitute a single coherent story.

1 There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three
daughters. 3 He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4 His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another’s houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, “It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” This is what Job always did.

6 One day the heavenly beings [Hebrew sons of God] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] among them. 7 The LORD said to Satan [Or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan], “Where have you come from?” Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] answered the LORD, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” 8 The LORD said to Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” 9 Then Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] answered the LORD, “Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have you not put a fence around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But stretch out your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” 12 The LORD said to Satan[or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan], “Very well, all that he has is in your power; only do not stretch out your hand against him!” So Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] went out from the presence of the LORD.

13 One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother’s house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabbeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 16 While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 17 While he was still speaking, another came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you.” 18 While he was still speaking, another came and said, “Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you.”

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.

2 One day the heavenly beings [Hebrew sons of God] came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan], “Where have you come from?” Satan[or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] answered the LORD, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” 3 The LORD said to Satan [or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan], “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.” 4 Then Satan[or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] answered the LORD, “Skin for skin! All that people have they will give to save their lives. 5 But stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” 6 The LORD said to Satan[or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan], “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.”

7 So Satan[or the Accuser; Heb ha-satan] went out from the presence of the LORD, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.” 10 But he said to her, “You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

11 Now when Job’s three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. 12 When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air.
upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

*****

42 7 After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. 8 Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done.” 9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job’s prayer.

10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.

12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. 13 He also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. 15 In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job’s daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. 16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children’s children, four generations. 17 And Job died, old and full of days.

When seen together, the two prose sections (Chapters 1-2, then 42.7-17) appear to constitute a single coherent tale. However, there is a problem. When the LORD says to the friends in verse 42.7, “you have not spoken of me what is right,” the friends have never spoken, except poetry section. It appears that the friends of the prose sections (2.11-13 and 42.7-9) are not essential for the tale of Job’s test, but are required (obviously) for the long poetic sections. Several scholars have proposed that the sections with the friends in the prose are “jointures” (to use Robert Gordis’ term) that introduce the friends and indicate their fate, and which were added by whomever introduced the poetic dialogues into the older tale.

If, however, we read the text as it is, not worrying about any “two Jobs” or two documents, we provide another reason for the change in Job’s attitude and mood. It is friends’ presence and, explicitly, their silence that sets Job off.

2 12 When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. 13 They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job said:

3 “Let the day perish in which I was born, and the night that said, ‘A man-child is conceived.’

4 Let that day be darkness!

May God above not seek it,
or light shine on it.

5 Let gloom and deep darkness claim it.

Let clouds settle upon it;

let the blackness of the day terrify it. (for full text, see above, pp 51-52)

The so-called dialogues—thirty-two chapters—follow. There are three cycles of speeches by the friends, each followed by a retort from Job. They are hardly dialogues, if by dialogue is meant a series of interchanges that sequentially move toward some resolution of a question or problem. Nothing of the sort happens in Job.

47
No one answers anyone, at least not immediately or directly. The exchanges are often emotional. Nothing is resolved.

The friends have not spoken until Job’s lament in Chapter 3. Eliphaz speaks first, in Chapter 4 and 5, and sets the tone for all the friends’ speeches:

4  7 “Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?  
Or where were the upright cut off?  
8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity  
and sow trouble reap the same.  
9 By the breath of God they perish,  
and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

This claim—that whoever suffers is not innocent—is developed in a variety of ways; for example, it may well be the children who have sinned, if not Job. Bildad:

8  3 Does God pervert justice?  
Or does the Almighty pervert the right?  
4 If your children sinned against him,  
he delivered them into the power of their transgression.

There is also the assertion, that the wisdom and ways of God are beyond human understanding.

Now—in response to the friends—Job goes on the attack. He attacks them as being undependable (6.15-21):

15 My companions are treacherous like a torrent-bed,  
like freshets that pass away,  
16 that run dark with ice,  
turbid with melting snow.  
17 In time of heat they disappear;  
when it is hot, they vanish from their place.

Such you have now become to me;  
you see my calamity, and are afraid.

Another question: why does Job’s calamity cause the friends to be afraid? Remember that these are all persons of wealth and position—if there is no cause for Job’s suffering, could they be subject to such a fate?

As the interchange heats up, the insults fly. An example of Job’s contribution:

16 Then Job answered:  
2 “I have heard many such things;  
miserable comforters are you all.  
3 Have windy words no limit?  
Or what provokes you that you keep on talking?

Job denies that the guilty suffer. This is his answer to Zophar at the end of the second cycle:

21  6 When I think of it I am dismayed,  
and shuddering seizes my flesh.  
7 Why do the wicked live on,  
reach old age, and grow mighty in power?  
8 Their children are established in their presence,
and their offspring before their eyes.
9 Their houses are safe from fear,
    and no rod of God is upon them.
10 Their bull breeds without fail;
    their cow calves and never miscarries.
11 They send out their little ones like a flock,
    and their children dance around.
12 They sing to the tambourine and the lyre,
    and rejoice to the sound of the pipe.
13 They spend their days in prosperity,
    and in peace they go down to Sheol.

*****

28 For you say, ‘Where is the house of the prince?
    Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?’
29 Have you not asked those who travel the roads,
    and do you not accept their testimony,
30 that the wicked are spared in the day of calamity,
    and are rescued in the day of wrath?
31 Who declares their way to their face,
    and who repays them for what they have done?
32 When they are carried to the grave,
    a watch is kept over their tomb.
33 The clods of the valley are sweet to them;
    everyone will follow after,
    and those who went before are innumerable.
34 How then will you comfort me with empty nothings?
    There is nothing left of your answers but falsehood.”

The heart of Job’s response, however, is his search for a hearing before God. It seems that Satan’s claim that no one serves for nothing was answered by Job’s acceptance of unwarranted suffering. But the friends’ claim that no one suffers without a cause was answered by Job’s request of a hearing. In general, he is not hopeful:

9 Then Job answered, and said,
  2 I surely know that is is so;
      When you say, “How can a man be just before God?”
3 If one wished to contend with him,
      He would not answer once in a thousand times.
4 However wise and stouthearted a man might be,
      Has he ever argued with God and emerged unscathed? (Gordis translation)

In the midst of Job’s speeches, full of anger and disbelief, a flash of hope breaks through three times. In the first, he longs for an arbiter between Job and God, what Gordis calls an appeal “from the God of power to the God of justice” (p.248):

9
32 For he is not a mortal, as I am, that I might answer him,
    that we should come to trial together.
33 There is no umpire between us,
    who might lay his hand on us both.
34 If he would take his rod away from me,
    and not let dread of him terrify me,
35 then I would speak without fear of him,
    for I know I am not what I am thought to be.
The second comes in the midst of a lament, and is for a witness in heaven on Job’s behalf:

16

O earth, do not cover my blood;
let my outcry find no resting place.

19

Even now, in fact, my witness is in heaven,
and he that vouches for me is on high.

The final, and most famous, is for a Redeemer or Vindicator—the Hebrew is actually  קנים, a kinsman, a blood-avenger, who in early Hebrew law was duty-bound to see that justice was done to his injured brother” (Gordis, p. 87).

19

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth…

Finally the LORD answers Job, in two long speeches (38.1-40.2 and 40.6-41.26), after each of which Job submits. The LORD indeed responds to Job’s request for a hearing, but several things are apparent. First, none of Job’s hopes (as indicated above) are fulfilled. Second, the question of Job’s innocence or guilt is not discussed. In fact, the speeches make no mention of human beings, and the implication is that Job’s questions are too anthropocentric. What the LORD is interested in is creation on a much broader scale than human beings or anything human beings can do or understand. Instead of the LORD answering Job, the LORD questions him. The first part of the first speech:

38 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
3 Gird up your loins like a man,
   I will question you, and you shall declare to me.
4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
   Tell me, if you have understanding.
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
   Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 On what were its bases sunk,
   or who laid its cornerstone
7 when the morning stars sang together
   and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?
8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors
   when it burst out from the womb?—
9 when I made the clouds its garment,
   and thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 and prescribed bounds for it,
   and set bars and doors,
11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
   and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?
12 “Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
   and caused the dawn to know its place,
13 so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
   and the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It is changed like clay under the seal,
   and it is dyed like a garment.
15 Light is withheld from the wicked,
   and their uplifted arm is broken.
16 “Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
   or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
   or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

The more explicit attack on Job’s preoccupation with the human situation comes in a set of questions about animals that have not been domesticated (Chapter 39) and about animals that are not beautiful by human standards (40.15-41.26). Actually, the LORD’s second speech ends with a description of the crocodile, which has taken on mythological standing as Leviathan. Samples:

39 9 “Is the wild ox willing to serve you?
Will it spend the night at your crib?
10 Can you tie it in the furrow with ropes,
or will it harrow the valleys after you?
11 Will you depend on it because its strength is great,
and will you hand over your labor to it?
12 Do you have faith in it that it will return,
and bring your grain to your threshing floor?

39 15 “Look at Behemoth (the hippopotamus),
which I made just as I made you;
it eats grass like an ox.
16 Its strength is in its loins,
and its power in the muscles of its belly.
17 It makes its tail stiff like a cedar;
the sinews of its thighs are knit together.
18 Its bones are tubes of bronze,
its limbs like bars of iron.
19 “It is the first of the great acts of God—
only its Maker can approach it with the sword.
20 For the mountains yield food for it
where all the wild animals play.
21 Under the lotus plants it lies,
in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh.
22 The lotus trees cover it for shade;
the willows of the wadi surround it.
23 Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened;
it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth.
24 Can one take it with hooks
or pierce its nose with a snare?

41 “Can you draw out Leviathan (the crocodile) with a fishhook,
or press down its tongue with a cord?
2 Can you put a rope in its nose,
or pierce its jaw with a hook?
3 Will it make many supplications to you?
Will it speak soft words to you?
4 Will it make a covenant with you
to be taken as your servant forever?
5 Will you play with it as with a bird,
or will you put it on leash for your girls?
6 Will traders bargain over it?
Will they divide it up among the merchants?
7 Can you fill its skin with harpoons,
or its head with fishing spears?
8 Lay hands on it;
think of the battle; you will not do it again!
Any hope of capturing it will be disappointed;
were not even the gods overwhelmed at the sight of it?
No one is so fierce as to dare to stir it up.
Who can stand before it?
Who can confront it and be safe
—under the whole heaven, who?

Job’s response to this long series of questions is a pledge to silence and a self-abasement:

40  
4“See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?
I lay my hand on my mouth.
5I have spoken once, and I will not answer;
twice, but will proceed no further.”

42 Then Job answered the LORD:
2“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
3‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
4‘Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.’
5I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
6therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.”

That’s it for the poetic section. What follows is the prose conclusion. The friends are chastised (“My anger is kindled against you…for you have not spoken the truth about Me as has my servant Job,” 42.7)—we have some idea what words the friends have spoken, but which words of Job does the LORD have in mind? As noted earlier, Job’s wife and Satan are missing. Job has twice as many of everything (including sons) but still only three daughters, who however receive names and are given an inheritance by Job.

What are we to make of the LORD’s speeches and Job’s responses? Some claim that the speeches are totally inappropriate and Job’s responses shameful, given all that has gone before. Others attempt to show that the LORD rightfully shifts the focus from the human plight to the larger creation, and is a helpful repudiation of anthropocentrism. In any case, the LORD ignores the divine complicity in Job’s suffering. Does this mean that there was something in the divine consciousness that feared that human beings were measuring their worth by physical well-being, and needed (so to speak) an educational experience (rather than a test) that would drive them to a deeper and broader understanding of what really matters? The problem with this reading is that it mirrors some of what the friends said.

We turn now to how four modern interpreters, none of them biblical scholars, deal with Job: William Blake, Carl Jung, Robert Frost, and Archibald MacLeish.

William Blake's Interpretation of the Book of Job
(based on Blake's Illustrations of the Book of Job, which can be found at http://www.gailgastfield.com/job/job.htm)

In 1825, William Blake issued his Illustrations of the Book of Job, which are hardly illustrations in any traditional sense. Each of the twenty-one “illustrations” contains a highly complex rendition of a scene from the Book of Job (illustration 5 is an exception), combined with quotations from the Bible (both from Job and other books) and border drawings. Rather than illustrating the Book of Job, Blake is interpreting it to render his own view of human existence.
Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet and illustrator, whose work can best be appreciated as part of the Romantic Movement, which in turn can be understood as a reaction to Rationalism and the Enlightenment. One thing this means is that he, like other Romantics, rejected as too limiting the idea that human beings are primarily and basically moral beings (one view of the Rationalists). Instead, also like other Romantics, he held that human beings are primarily creative beings characterized principally by imagination. Life for him is a movement from living under legalistic conceptions to living with risk and change, from innocence to experience.

It was this movement that Blake saw in the experience of Job, and which he reflected in his twenty-one illustrations of the Book of Job. For Blake, the whole drama of Job is enacted in Job's soul, and every character (including God, Satan, his wife and children, his friends) are aspects or dimensions of Job's soul or self-awareness. God looks like Job. Also, by the way, Job is not a single person, but Everyperson; his story is the story of what it means to be human.

The movement or transformation within Job is portrayed by Blake through his illustrations of the Book of Job in several ways, and using certain symbols and scriptural citations. For example, Blake contrasts books of Law (suggesting a legalistic view of life) with scrolls of inspiration, and with musical instruments (suggesting life as art). If we look at the picture of Job's family at the beginning and the end, in illustrations 1 and 21, Job begins holding a book in 1 and ends in 21 playing a musical instrument. (Both Job, his wife, and God are pictured in Illustration 2 holding open books.)

Other pairs of images suggest the legalistic versus the creative views of life. In a highly influential treatment of Blake's illustrations, Joseph Wicksteed (1910/1924) showed that Blake used extensions of the left hand or foot to indicate the wrong (legalistic) self (illustrations 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11), while extensions of the right mark the true (creative, imaginative) self (illustrations 5, 13, 14, 17). In portrayals of architecture, the druidic signifies false religion (5, 6, 7), while the gothic symbolizes the true (1, 4). Blake rejected the cross as being an expression of legalism and the need for punishment for sin (illustrations 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 19). In place of the cross, Blake presents the true God in cruciform, signifying the self-sacrifice that is involved in creative activity (illustrations 13, 14, 18, and perhaps 20).

**Carl Jung's Interpretation of the Book of Job**

(An introduction to Jung's *Answer to Job*)

It is even more important than in the case of Blake, that we understand something of Jung's system of thought, in order to understand his interpretation of Job.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was the son of a Swiss Protestant pastor. Though he traveled widely, he spent his professional life in Switzerland, mostly as a professor at the University of Basel.

Jung was a psychoanalyst (who later identified himself as an analytical psychologist in distinction from Freud) who was close to Freud, but then departed from him in significant ways.

His agreement with Freud remained in his emphasis upon the importance of the unconscious (and with this, the importance of dreams); his departure was in defining the personal unconscious more broadly, and developing the hypothesis of the collective unconscious.

Concerning the personal unconscious--the unconscious that is characteristic of the individual--Freud understood it as largely a reservoir of unresolved or poorly resolved experiences of childhood, stemming from sexuality and from relations to parents. For Freud, healing came from insight into these repressed failures and "re-solving" these developmental tasks.

Jung departed from this in maintaining that the unconscious was a psychic energy seeking to solve present problems. The unconscious was often a healthy force.

Jung saw the human personality as a number of sets of countervailing realities, which could operate out of equilibrium with one another and which need to be restored to equilibrium.
For example, he classified two types of persons: extroverts and introverts. Within each type there are functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Thinking and feeling are paired as intellectual functions, and can be out of balance. Sensation and intuition are likewise paired, and can likewise be out of balance.

When functions are out of balance, one is conscious and the other may operate only in the unconscious--where it is active, but not recognized, and will function in dreams. The goal is to get them in balance and at the conscious level.

In this connection, Jung can speak of the *persona* or public self of a person and the person's *shadow*, those aspects of his or her total self that is hidden or ignored, and will in a sense rebel.

In addition to all this having to do with the person and the personal conscious/ unconscious, Jung developed the hypothesis of the *collective unconscious*, and it is this that informs his thinking about religion. Indeed, it appears that when Jung uses the word God, he has in mind the collective unconscious.

How did Jung become convinced that there was such a reality as the collective unconscious? He observed in dream analysis that certain figures appeared that the person could not identify with anything specific in her or his own life. He also observed that similar such figures appeared in the dreams of many persons. He further observed that these were similar to figures in mythology and literature. He concluded that these figures came from a collective unconscious--they were not invented by human beings, but existed deep within the human psyche per se. They are like Plato's Ideas or Forms--Jung called them *Archetypes*.

But the important thing is that the Archetypes also *exist in pairs*, and can--in the collective unconscious itself--be in and out of equilibrium.

The most important of these are *animus* (masculine), which he characterizes as being related to the drive for perfection, and *anima* (feminine), related to completeness. These are complementary energies seeking balance, and this is occurring within every person, whether male or female, and within the collective unconscious. It is with the collective unconscious and the activity within it, that the *Answer to Job* deals.

*Answer to Job* was published in German in 1952, Jung's 77th year. It is a short book, only 111 pages in the English translation. While the figure of Job plays a role throughout the book, only 21 pages (less than one-fifth of the book) deal directly with the Book of Job.

Jung claimed that the Book of Job revealed God as having such absolute power that God had lost all ability to reflect on (and adjust) God's use of power. Because of the lack, Jung maintained, God needed human beings and especially God's people and in this case Job, to reassure God that God was doing right with the divine might. (This is why God is so jealous.) God suspects that Job is capable of knowing (and comes to know) the consequences of the use of power. Knowing the consequences of the use of power is what constitutes morality, and in this sense Job is morally superior to God.

But within the Book of Job, God learns nothing. God's response to Job is an awesome show of power, and Job is silenced.

The answer to Job, according to Jung, comes outside and after the Book of Job, and it occurs as a change inside of God, in response to Job's insistence that God is capable of more than sheer power. "Job is no more than the outward occasion for an inward process of dialectic in God" (p 16). This change inside of God is witnessed to by a whole body of literature that appears after the Book of Job—in the wisdom literature, including the Book of Proverbs. The change is a reawakening of "Sophia" or wisdom within God, to counterbalance God's power.

Sophia continues her presence inside of the divine life through the Stoic idea of the Logos (Greek for word or reason). In John's Gospel, the Logos is "in the beginning," "with God," and "was God."

But "Sophia" and "Logos" are given further depth by the Incarnation—John: "the Logos became flesh." This is because for God to know as much as Job, God becomes human (to experience the consequences of power). This, by the way, causes Jung to reconceive the purpose of the Incarnation—it is no longer to give a
sacrifice for the sins of human beings, but rather to provide God with a way of being more capable of reflection on the uses of power.

For Jung, the "dialectic in God" is not finished with Jesus. There is a lingering awareness that unreflective power is still around within God (for example, Jung asks, why does Jesus pray to God, "lead us not into temptation"). Moreover, the last book of the Christian scriptures, the Revelation of John, portrays Jesus as a bloodthirsty Lamb, bent on punishing. The balance of power and reflection is not achieved within the New Testament. Jung sees the final, if anticipatory, balance achieved in the dogma of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven (proclaimed in 1950).

All of this development (worked out with greater care and in greater detail) is the "answer to Job," according to Jung.

Robert Frost’s A Masque of Reason

[A Masque of Reason is fewer than twenty pages, and is a delightful read. It is still available very reasonably in used copies of The Poetry of Robert of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged, pages 473-490.]

Robert Frost’s A Masque of Reason (1945), a short verse play (only twenty-three pages), is his interpretation of the Book of Job. In it, Job and God discuss their encounter with one another, a thousand years after the events recorded in the Book of Job. Job’s wife plays a prominent role in the discussion. Satan is a minor figure, introduced late. The friends do not appear at all.

The play is sophisticatedly and humorously written. There are myriad allusions, some of which may be recognizable. Others may be elusive. There are allusions to William Blake, Waller, Milton, Einstein (indirectly), Kipling, Browning, and Chapel Non-Conformism. Dialogue touches on feminism, reason, and tendency.

Humor permeates the work. Examples can be seen in the opening and closing scenes. The play opens with two characters, “Man” and “Wife,” living in an oasis. They notice that someone is entangled in the “incense tree”/“Burning Bush”/“Christmas Tree.” The figure gets loose. Wife recognizes him: “It’s God. I’d know Him by Blake’s picture anywhere.” The play closes with Job’s Wife (who “Wife” has become as “Man” has become “Job”), getting out her Kodak to take a group picture of God, Job, and Satan.

The main dialogue begins with an expression of gratitude by God to Job, some thousand years after their encounter:

I’ve had you on my mind a thousand years
To thank you for the way you helped me
Establish once for all the principle
There’s no connection man can reason out
Between his just deserts and what he gets.
Virtue may fail and wickedness succeed.
‘Twas a great demonstration we put on,
*****
I had to prosper good and punish evil.
You changed all that. You set me free to reign.
You are the Emancipator of your God,
And as such I promote you to a saint.

God admits the conclusion, apology, and appreciation were slow in coming:

I should have spoken sooner had I found
The word I wanted. You would have supposed
One who in the beginning was the Word
Would be in a position to command it.
I have to wait for words like anyone.
This troubles Job. He knows with enough time, anything can be made sense of. He acknowledges the outcome God indicates but wants to know what God had in mind at the time. After several pages of changing the subject, God finally admits having had nothing in mind.

_God_
…I’m going to tell Job why I tortured him
And trust it won’t be adding to the torture.
I was just showing off to the Devil, Job,
As is set forth in chapters One and Two
(Job takes a few steps pacing.) Do you mind?

_Job_
No. No, I musn’t.
‘Twas human of You. I expected more
Than I could understand and what I get
Is almost less than I can understand.

This disenchantment with reason is the position of Job’s Wife (whom he calls Thyatira), who is the central figure in the play. Before God and Job can pursue their conversation, she interrupts and engages God with a protest about the fate of witches:

I want to ask You if it stands to reason
That women prophets should be burned as witches
Whereas men prophets are received with honor.

From beginning to end, she attempts to expose the unreasonableness of everything, and how mistaken are all efforts to find or make reasons for things. From her point of view, all such efforts are the preoccupation of males (including God and Satan). At one point she says to God:

All You can seem to do is lose your temper
When reason-hungry mortals ask for reasons.
Of course, in the abstract high singular
There isn’t any universal reason;
And no one but a man would think there was.
You don’t catch women trying to be Plato.

This negative reference to Greek reason is reflected in allusions to Byzantine art, both at the beginning of the play and in Job’s Wife’s speech that closes the play. She gathers the three male figures (God, Satan, and Job) for a snapshot:

…There, that’s just the right arrangement.
Now someone can light up the Burning Bush
And turn the gold enameled artificial birds on.
I recognize them. Greek artificers
Fashioned them for Alexius Comnenus.
They won’t show in the picture. That’s too bad.
Neither will I show. That’s too bad moreover.
Now if you three have settled anything
You’d as well smile as frown on the occasion.

Given the content of the play, what is the meaning of the title, _A Masque of Reason_? A “masque” is a performance with a point, long on costume and style, with less emphasis on words. Masques were highly popular in the 16th and 17th English Court. While this work is not a “masque” in the strict meaning of the word, it may qualify as a masque in that it can be performed—as a play. The title might then be “A Play about Reason.” But the word “masque” can also mean literally a mask. Thus, the title could be “Reason’s Mask,” or, by extension, “The Unmasking of Reason.”
Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.*

*[J. B.* is in print and reasonably priced (new at $10.20 at Amazon, but also available in used copies).]*

Archibald MacLeish’s verse play *J.B.*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1959, is both a retelling and an interpretation of the Book of Job.

As a retelling, *J.B.* renders the interchange of God and Satan (or the Accuser) as occurring between two circus hands who after closing time decide to play the story. God (“Mr. Zuss”) is a bit pompous; Satan (“Nickles”) is cynical. Their conversation or debate culminates in Scene Ten (pp.133-148). It contains Mr. Zuss’s dissatisfaction with *J.B.*’s repentance, and Nickle’s continuing claim that *J.B.* will not take everything back, as in the biblical account.

MacLeish presents a modern version of *J.B.*’s loss of children and wealth, as well as his health, in six scenes out of a total of eleven (sixty pages out of 113), which in the Book of Job take only thirteen verses out of forty-two chapters! This large expansion (over half the play) allows MacLeish to heighten the drama of *J.B.*’s losses.

By comparison, the dialogue between *J.B.* and his comforters, which take up most of the Book of Job (some thirty-nine chapters out of forty-two), is given only one scene (Scene Nine, pp. 114-132) out of eleven in the play. Here too MacLeish provides a modern version. Eliphaz is portrayed as a Freudian, espousing the Unconscious. Bildad is a Marxist arguing for historical Necessity. Zophar is a theologian, or at least a religionist, offering Mystery (and a version of rationalization closest to the Friends in the Book of Job).

But MacLeish is also interpreting the Book of Job. In its own way, *J.B.* is a love story. It tells of *J.B.*’s attempts to accept his fate (reminiscent of the Prologue in the biblical account), and how this alienates his wife (Sarah in the play). She says to *J.B.* (p. 110):

> I will not stay here if you lie—
> Connive in your destruction, cringe to it:
> Not if you betray my children…
> I will not stay to listen…
> They are
> Dead and they were innocent: I will not
> Let you sacrifice their death
> To make injustice justice and God good!
> ***
> If you buy quiet with their innocence---
> Theirs or yours…
> Softly I will not love you.

Sarah leaves *J.B.* The play closes, in Scene Eleven, with her return. She returns from desolation with a broken twig of the first few petals of forsythia. *J.B.* asks why she left him, and she says (p. 151),

> I loved you.
> I couldn’t help you any more.
> You wanted justice and there was none—
> Only love.
> *J.B.*
> He does not love. He
> Is.

*Sarah:
But we do. That’s the wonder.*
The play closes:

   J.B.
   It’s too dark to see.

   Sarah:
   Then blow on the coal of the heart, my darling.

   J.B.
   The coal of the heart…

   Sarah:
   It’s all the light now.

Sarah comes into the dim room, J.B. behind her. She lifts a fallen chair, sets it straight.

Blow on the coal of the heart.
The candles in churches are out.
The lights have gone out in the sky.
Blow on the coal of the heart
And we’ll see by and by…

J. B. has joined her, lifting and straightening the chairs.

   We’ see where we are.
The wit won’t burn and the wet soul smoulders.
Blow on the coal of the heart and we'll know…
We’ll know.

The light increases, plain white daylight from the door, as they work.

   CURTAIN