

THE INTERSECTION OF GENEALOGY, POLITICS AND HISTORY IN GENESIS

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ABSTRACT: *All societies rationalize their involvement in conflict and warfare. In a kinship-based society, genealogy frequently serves as a political charter, legitimizing both contemporary and historical sociopolitical relations. Portions of the genealogy set forth in Genesis can likewise be understood as a political statement by the ancient Israelites rationalizing and justifying their political relations with neighboring peoples. Upon closer examination, the genealogy contained within Genesis displays an interesting pattern: those neighboring peoples with whom the Israelites were in conflict were claimed by the Israelites to have descended from ancestors guilty of illicit sexual behavior. Significantly, the more intense was the political conflict between a group of people and the Israelites and the more those people had been subordinated by the Israelites, the more offensive was the sexual act performed by that group's eponymous ancestor and the more distant did the Israelites trace a genealogical connection to them.*

KEY WORDS: *Genesis, genealogy, Bible, Biblical politics*

INTRODUCTION

All human societies rationalize their external political relations, including their involvement in conflict and warfare. Such rationalizations often become an integral part of their official history, including their

mythology. One of the more interesting examples of the way in which the rationalizations of a particular group's political relations have become incorporated into its mythology is contained within *Genesis*, the first book of the Hebrew Bible. Portions of the genealogy set forth in *Genesis* can best be understood as a political statement by which the ancient Israelites legitimized and justified their warfare with and conquest of neighboring peoples. Before we can properly examine the political implications of the genealogy contained within *Genesis*, certain key anthropological concepts need to be addressed. These are: *kinship, genealogy* and *myth*.

Kinship

Kinship is the central organizing principle of pre-industrial societies. It is a belief system that defines each individual's social relationship to every other individual. Most importantly, it is an *alliance ideology* that defines both an individual's and group's rights and obligations towards other individuals and groups. Although kinship defines the rights and obligations of individuals to other individuals within the lineage, clan or tribe, it also defines the individual's obligation to the lineage, clan or tribe as a whole --especially in situations that involve conflict with outsiders. Conversely, kinship defines the rights and obligations of the lineage, clan or tribe as a whole towards a specific individual. The relations among groups are simply an extension of the kinship relations that prevail among individuals.

Genealogy

The genealogy of kinship-based societies must be viewed, therefore, not as an accurate account of the biological relations among individuals within the group, but rather as an ideological charter defining the

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social, economic and political relations among individuals, populations and communities. Furthermore, inasmuch as a people's genealogy defines the prevailing sociopolitical relations that exist in their society, genealogy is not as fixed as it may seem. As political relations change, so also does the genealogy. For example, as the Nuer of the southern Sudan in Africa expanded against the Dinka to the south of them, the subordinated Dinka married into the dominant Nuer lineages. In time, the former Dinka traced their descent to Nuer ancestors and their Dinka ancestry became lost (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Sahlins 1961; Newcomer 1972). In the same manner, whole lineages of Galla cattle herders were absorbed into Somali clans in Ethiopia as the Somali expanded into Galla territory over several centuries (Lewis 1967).

The further back in time that a people trace their ancestry, the more mythical become their reputed ancestors. A point is eventually reached where the ancestors becomes *eponymous*, that is, a mythical embodiment of the people themselves. An eponymous ancestor can be a person, an animal, or even an inanimate object. In their mythical tales, the qualities and activities of the eponymous ancestor mirror those that the people attribute to themselves. Myths that describe great feats performed by an ancestor serve to embellish the reputation of a people and their history. Similarly, myths which recount how the eponymous ancestor of one people defeated the eponymous ancestor of another people in battle may reflect the existence of a historical and/or contemporary conflict between the two groups that the eponymous ancestors represent. Also, because a people's eponymous ancestor represents them in mythology, stories in other people's mythology which curse that ancestor or which portray the ancestor in an unflattering

way serve to denigrate the people represented by that ancestor. As we would expect, such myths are quite common among peoples engaged in conflict with one another. Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Canaan, Ammon, Edom, Moab, and Ishmael are just a few of the eponymous ancestors whose actions are recounted in *Genesis*.

Myth

Myths are stories about the past which justify, explain or rationalize the present and which teach a moral lesson. It is because myths are generally linked to sacred (frequently ancestral) beings who form part of the religious tradition of a society that they gain an element of *sanctity* which further justifies their moral message. The *Book of Genesis* was a sacred document to the ancient Israelites, as it is today to many Jews, Christians and Muslims. It describes how order in the world was established by the Israelite god, Yahweh, and by the men laboring under a covenant with Yahweh. As with the myths of other peoples, through its description of historical events, *Genesis* presents a mythologized history of the Israelites which teaches specific moral lessons regarding correct forms of social behavior. From an anthropological perspective, some of the stories and genealogical connections presented in *Genesis* can also be seen as explaining, rationalizing and legitimizing Israelite political history, in particular its relations with neighboring peoples.

UNDERSTANDING GENESIS

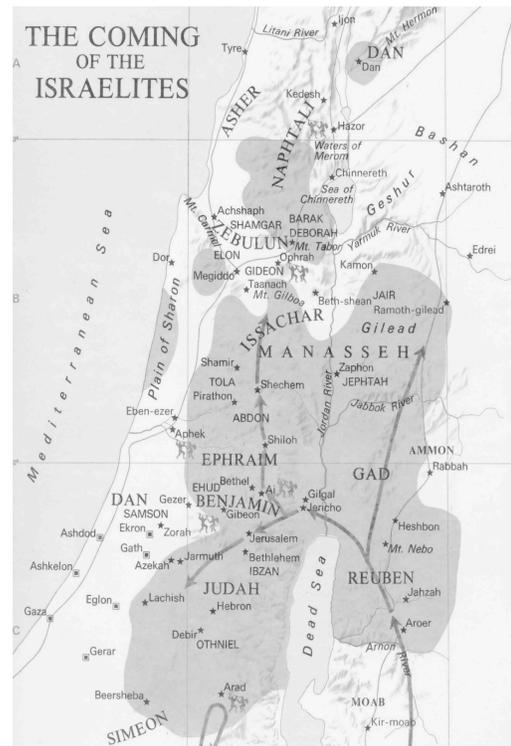
What we commonly call the Bible is not a single book; it has numerous authors. In order to examine the Bible, we have to know who the authors were, when and what they wrote, who their audience was, what their bias was, and what precipitated their writing. There are numerous different

authors in the Bible. Biblical scholars have delineated four major "documents" within the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible): the *E-Document*, *J-Document*, *P-Document* and *Deuteronomy* (see Friedman 1987; Gottwald 1985:137-147). Each document contains a distinct set of stories or a unique version of the same story within one or more of the first five books of the Bible, except Deuteronomy which is a separate book of its own. Each document reflects the interest and perspective of a particular segment of Israelite society. While the E-Document is associated with the former northern tribes and kingdom (*Israel*), the remaining four documents are all associated with the former southern tribes and kingdom (*Judah*) [see Maps 1 and 2]. This north-south distinction reflects the historical separateness (and at times hostility) that existed between these two regions and the political-military dominance of the southern kingdom.

E-Document The E-Document stories in the Torah are recognized by the fact that God is referred to as *Elohim* (*God* in English translations) in these stories. The E-Document stories represent the traditions passed down through the northern tribes of Israel. Prior to being conquered by David, the northern tribes were united into a sovereign kingdom under Saul. David killed Saul, forcibly annexed the northern territory into his kingdom and moved his capitol from Hebron (a southern town) to Jerusalem, which was close to the border between the north and south. David's son, Solomon, consolidated Judah's dominion over the former northern kingdom and expanded his monarchy, establishing alliances with numerous other rulers through marriage (According to the Bible: "And he...(Solomon)... had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (*1Kings* 11:3). The northern kingdom gained its former independence upon the

death of Solomon, with the northern priesthood in Shiloh supporting Jeroboam, while the southern priesthood in Jerusalem supported Rehoboam, Solomon's son. The northern kingdom remained independent until it was defeated by the Persians in 722 BCE. Moses was the hero of the northern priesthood at Shiloh and appears favorably in the E-Document stories.

Map 1



The Tribes of Israel

J-Document The J-Document stories are distinguished by their use of the word *Yahweh* (*Lord* in English translations). This set of stories is referred to as the J-Document due to the German and subsequent English translation of *Yahweh* as *Jehovah*. The phrase *Yahweh Elohim* (*Lord God*) is also used in J-Document stories. The J-Document stories are generally considered less abstract than the E-Document stories, containing talking animals and serpent

stories. The J-Document contains the stories and traditions associated with the Kingdom of Judah and its peoples, including the stories of the Patriarchs, which are not contained in the E-Document stories. Finally, *Aaron* (Moses' brother) rather than Moses is the hero of the J-Document stories, and the priesthood associated with the temple in Jerusalem was referred to as the *Aaronic priesthood*. Judah was the largest and most powerful of all the Israelite tribes and was largely feared by the other tribes. This was, after all, the tribe that expanded its dominion over all of the other tribes.

Map 2



The Northern and Southern Kingdoms

P-Document The P-Document is the priestly document. When the final editor(s) attempted to pull together the northern and

southern traditions into a coherent narrative that promoted the unity of the Israelite people, they encountered numerous contradictions and gaps which needed to be closed. The P-Document is largely impersonal in its tone and contains most of the statistical and genealogical information. This is the document of the "begats". Like the J-Document, the P-Document is a document which reflects more the southern perspective. However, the J-Document stories are more ancient than the P-Document stories. The creation story presented in *Genesis 2* is a J-Document story and differs significantly from the better-known creation story told in *Genesis 1*, which is a P-Document story. Humans are created first in *Genesis 2*, whereas they are created last in the better-known *Genesis 1* version of the story. In addition, the act of creation is more primitive in *Genesis 2* in that God creates humankind through the molding of clay rather than simply through the spoken word. The story of Adam, Eve and the rib is also a J-Document story.

Deuteronomy Deuteronomy is also a southern document. Deuteronomy, which was purportedly discovered during the 18th year of King Josiah's reign (622 BCE), claims that Yahweh made a covenant whereby the house of David will always be the legitimate rulers of Judea, no matter how badly specific individual Davidic kings ruled or behaved. In addition, the stories in Deuteronomy present a history of the Kingdom of Judah in which prosperity and misfortune throughout Judah (including its relations with surrounding kingdoms) are determined by the extent to which the people of Judah submit to Yahweh's authority and adhere to Yahweh's laws. Significantly, Deuteronomy was discovered in the basement of the Temple at the very time Josiah was attempting to establish the primacy of worship in the Temple in

Jerusalem (his capitol) in the face of increasing worship in local communities. Conveniently for Josiah, the first commandment presented in Deuteronomy calls for the consolidation of worship in one place.

A specific example will illustrate how the various documents in the Torah differed, as well as how they presented different perspectives on the same story: the story in which Moses is commanded by God to strike a specific rock in order to produce water for the parched Israelites during their flight from Egypt.

There are two versions of the story in which God commands Moses to strike the rock with his staff in order to produce water for the Israelites while they are wondering in the desert (see below). Not only is the writing style distinctly different between these two versions of the same story, but so also is the outcome and, thus, the lesson to be learned from the story. In the *Exodus* version of the story (which is an E-Document story), Moses strikes the rock as commanded by God and is the hero of the day. In the *Numbers* version of the story (which is a P-Document story), Moses doesn't quite do what God commanded him to do. Instead of striking the rock once, he strikes it twice. God is, therefore, displeased with Moses and punishes him for his lack of faith by not allowing him to take the Israelites into the Promised Land. Also significant is the fact that Moses' brother Aaron is mentioned in the *Numbers* version of the story but not in the *Exodus* version, and Aaron is punished along with Moses for Moses' failure to follow of God's orders, even though Aaron had done nothing. As would be expected, we have an E-Document version of the story in which Moses (the hero of the northern priesthood) is in command of the situation and a P-Document

story in which Aaron (the hero of the southern priesthood) is punished because of Moses' failure. [Conversely, in the story of the Golden Calf (*Exodus* 32), which is an E-document story, it is Aaron who organizes the construction of the calf and Moses who destroys it.]

Exodus 17

(J-Document)

¹ *And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.*

² *Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?*

³ *And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?*

⁴ *And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.*

⁵ *And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.*

⁶ *Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

⁷ *And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?*

Numbers 20

(P-Document)

¹ *Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.*

² *And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.*

³ *And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our*

brethren died before the LORD!

⁴ *And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?*

⁵ *And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.*

⁶ *And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.*

⁷ *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,*

⁸ *Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.*

⁹ *And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.*

¹⁰ *And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?*

¹¹ *And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.*

¹² *And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

¹³ *This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.*

Two more issues need to be addressed before we can examine the genealogy of *Genesis* from an anthropological perspective. First is the overriding importance in *Genesis* that the Israelites maintain their *purity* (separateness) from surrounding peoples: "*Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.*" (1Kings 11:2). The Israelites were, after all, Yahweh's "chosen people."

In order to achieve this purity, it is necessary for the Israelites to descend exclusively from *Terah*, Abraham's father, since it was Abraham who first established the covenant between his people and Yahweh. This necessitates several incestuous marriages, including that between *Abraham* and *Sarah* (*Gen.* 20:12). Abraham twice lends his wife, Sarah, out on the grounds that she is his sister: once to the Pharaoh (see *Gen.* 12:11-20), and once to King Abimilech (see *Gen.* 20:1-12). Sarah was his sister because she was the daughter of one of Abraham's father's wives (not his own mother). In a *patrilineal* society, which the ancient Israelites were, the daughter of one's father is one's sister (not half-sister) because descent is traced through males only. Abraham's son, *Isaac*, similarly marries his cousin Rebecca (*Gen.* 25:20), and Isaac's son, *Jacob* (*Israel*), marries his cousins Rachel and Leah (his mother's brothers daughters). *Esau*, on the other hand, is condemned for marrying a Hittite woman [an outsider] (*Gen.* 36:1-9). Even Solomon, the Israelite's greatest king, is criticized for marrying outsiders: "*But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites*" (1Kings 11:1).

The final issue that must be addressed is the literary style of biblical writings. Many words and phrases appear in the Bible that cannot be translated literally into English. Such words and phrases must be understood in the context of the language of the Bible at the time those words and phrases were written. For example, the statement in the flood story that it rained "*40 days and 40 nights*" must be translated to mean that it rained for a long time, not that it rained exactly for 40 consecutive days and nights. This would be comparable to our own phrase that it is "raining cats and dogs". Someone reading such a statement in the

future would be sorely misled by literally translating this phrase to mean that animals were falling out of the sky. Similarly, the phrase "*preserved the seed thereof*" refers, not to planting crops, but to continuing the patrilineal birth line. Likewise, it is commonly known that the phrase "*and he knew her*" does not mean that a particular man and women were merely acquaintances or friends. It means something quite different: that they had sexual intercourse.

In the same way, the *Cain and Abel* story is not a description of an actual historical event, but an eponymous account of the shift in Israelite history from the time they were formerly nomadic herdsman to when they became settled farmers. The contrasting characteristics of Cain and Abel reflect the nostalgic view that their herding past (Abel) was a time of ease and tranquility and closeness to nature, in contrast to the difficulties and conflicts associated with their subsequent village agricultural existence (Cain).

Finally, the phrase "saw the nakedness thereof" cannot be translated simply to have seen someone unclothed. The Bible distinguishes between *naked* and *nakedness*. When the word "naked" is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to human beings, it generally refers to them being uncovered or without clothes. However, when the word "nakedness" is used in relation to people, it generally refers to more than simply being unclothed; it implies sexuality or sexual behavior. The term nakedness might also be used metaphorically to refer to the fertility of the land. A few examples will illustrate this difference in meaning between "naked" and "nakedness" in the Bible.

Naked

[Genesis 2:25](#)

And they were both naked, the man and his wife,

and were not ashamed.

[Genesis 3:7](#)

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

[Genesis 3:11](#)

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

[1 Samuel 19:24](#)

And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?

[Job 1:21](#)

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Nakedness

[Leviticus 18:8](#)

The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness.

[Leviticus 18:12](#)

Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's sister: she is thy father's near kinswoman.

[Leviticus 18:16](#)

Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness.

[Leviticus 18:19](#)

Also thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is put apart for her uncleanness.

[Leviticus 20:11](#)

And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

[Leviticus 20:20](#)

And if a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless.

THE GENEALOGY OF GENESIS

We are now prepared to examine the stories in *Genesis* which illustrate the political role that the genealogy in *Genesis* plays in placing Israelite's neighbors in greater or lesser social distance from them.

Noah, Ham and the Canaanites

Genesis 9:18-27 describes an event which took place immediately following the flood.

Genesis 9

¹⁸ *And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.*

¹⁹ *These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.*

²⁰ *And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:*

²¹ *And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

²² *And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.*

²³ *And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.*

²⁴ *And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.*

²⁵ *And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*

²⁶ *And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.*

²⁷ *God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.*

If one accepts the distinction given above between naked and nakedness, then what happened while Noah was sleeping was more than Ham simply seeing his father asleep uncovered. Indeed, the wording of *Genesis* 9:24 in which Noah awoke and knew what Ham "*had done unto him*" suggests that some action had taken place. This would explain Noah's cursing of his son so vehemently and claiming that "a servant of servants shall he be unto his

brethren" (*Gen.* 9:25). It is also very significant that the passage: (1) states twice that Ham is "*the father of Canaan*" (*Gen.* 9:18 & 21); (2) states twice that Canaan shall be a servant to his brothers (*Gen.* 9:25 & 27); and (3) states emphatically that the god of Canaan will be a servant of the god of Shem.

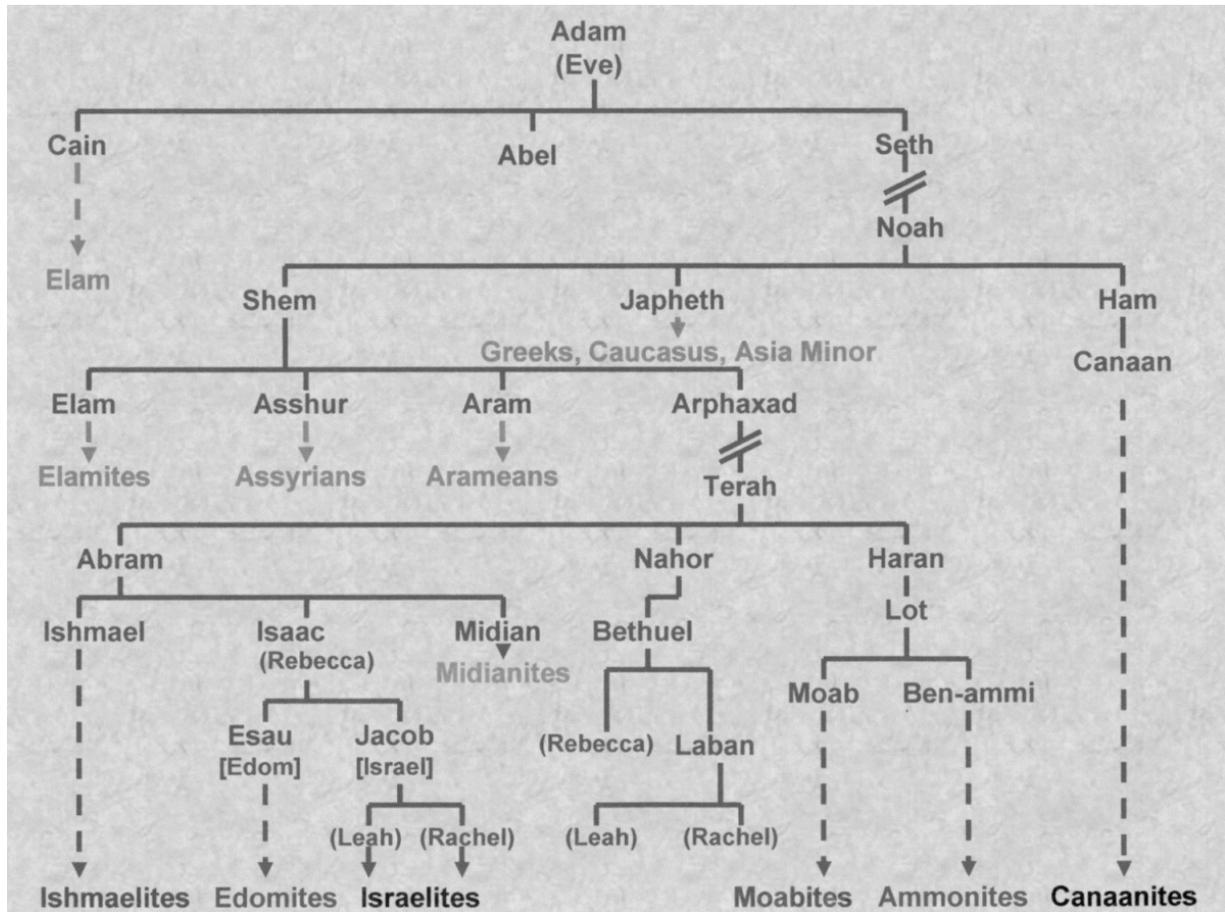
Canaan is the eponymous ancestor of the people of Canaan, the people whose land the Israelites, according to the Bible, invaded in order to establish their kingdom. Canaan was the Promised Land given to the Israelites by God. By portraying Ham, "the father of Canaan", as a despicable individual performing a homosexual incestuous act on Noah (his own father), and by having Noah curse Ham for what he "*had done unto him*", the Bible justifies and legitimizes the ancient Israelites historical conquest of Canaan. It also legitimizes the enslavement of the Canaanites and the imposition of the Israelite religion, since the Israelites are the descendents of Shem (see Figure 2), the person to whom Canaan is to be a slave [Shem refers to the people known today as the Semites].

Also significant is where the Israelites place the Canaanites in their genealogy. The Canaanites are as far removed from the Israelites as is possible and still be human. An Israelite must trace his or her ancestry all the way back to Noah in order to establish a connection with the Canaanites. This is as far back in time as one could go. In a social and political world governed by the norms of kinship and genealogy, the Israelites owe absolutely no allegiance or regard to the Canaanites. Thus, to the ancient Israelites, the people whose land they occupied: (1) were as distantly related to them as a people could be, (2) were descended from a man who committed homosexual incest with his own father (Noah); and (3) were commanded by that father to be the slaves of

the Israelites. This was a perfect ideological justification for having appropriated the

Canaanite's land and for having enslaved them.

Figure 1



Old Testament Genealogy

Lot and his Daughters

A second revealing story is that of Lot and his two daughters.

Genesis 19

²⁹ And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

³⁰ And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

³¹ And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our

father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:

³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

³³ And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

³⁴ And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

³⁵ And they made their father drink wine that

night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

³⁶ Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

³⁷ And the first born bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day.

³⁸ And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

Lot was Abraham's nephew who lived in Sodom, a city (along with Gomorrah) on the plain south of the Dead Sea that Yahweh destroyed because of its wickedness. As Lot, his wife and their two daughters leave Sodom, Lot's wife turns around to see what is happening. This is in clear disobedience to Yahweh's command, and she is turned into a pillar of salt. Eventually, Lot and his two daughters dwell in the mountains outside of Zoar, a town at the southern edge of the Dead Sea.

Fearing that they are the sole survivors on earth, the two daughters devise a plan to get their father drunk, have sex with him and bear his children, so that they "*may preserve seed of our father*" (Gen. 19:32, 34). Each of the daughters has a child as a result of having sexual intercourse with their father. The older daughter gives birth to a son named Moab (the eponymous ancestor of the Moabites), and the younger daughter bears a son named Ben-ammi (the eponymous ancestor of the Ammonites).

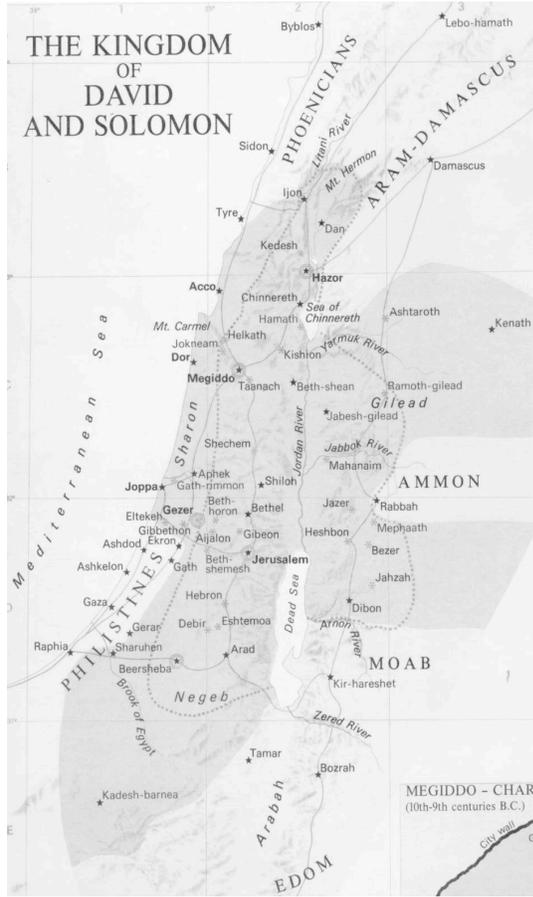
The Moabites and the Ammonites were two semi-independent kingdoms to the east of Israel (see Map 3). These two kingdoms were conquered by the Israelites and owed their allegiance to David and Solomon. However, they were allowed to keep their own governments as long as they maintained the peace, paid tribute to David and Solomon and supported the Israelite kingdom in its wars with other nations.

Although the Moabites and Ammonites were no longer completely sovereign, they were socio-politically superior to the Canaanites, who had been completely defeated and subordinated by the Israelites. The Moabites and Ammonites were also allies with the Israelites against other adversaries. The higher status of the Moabites and Ammonites (compared to the Canaanites) is reflected in the fact that the purported sexual offense of Lot's two daughters was *heterosexual* incest rather than homosexual incest and that the deviant act was done for a noble reason. In kinship-based societies, procreation is highly valued. Having children is both a source of prosperity and a requirement for the survival of the lineage. Consequently, homosexual behavior is strongly condemned in such societies, as it was among the ancient Israelites (see *Leviticus* 18:22; "*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.*").

The higher sociopolitical status of the Moabites and Ammonites in the eyes of the Israelites is also reflected in their placement within the Israelite genealogy. In order to trace a relationship to the Moabites and Ammonites, the Israelites had only to trace their descent back to Terah, Abraham's father (see Figure 1), not all the way back to Noah.

In summation, then, compared to the Canaanites, the sexual act which gave birth to the eponymous ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites was less onerous than the sexually deviant act that was performed by the father of the eponymous ancestor of the Canaanites. In addition, the Moabites and Ammonites could claim a closer genealogical connection to the Israelites than could the Canaanites and, therefore, could make a more legitimate claim to being treated with respect.

Map 3



The Kingdom of David and Solomon

Jacob and Esau

The story of *Jacob and Esau* (see *Gen. 25:19* through *Gen. 28:9*) [not included here because it is too lengthy] also attempts to explain the Israelites' historical relations with one of their neighbors, the Edomites to the south (see Map 3). Jacob (who later becomes Israel, the eponymous ancestor of the Israelites) and Esau are twin brothers who were born to Isaac (Abraham's son) and his wife Rebecca. The two sons never got along and fought constantly. Indeed, *Genesis 25:22* states that the two children even fought while they were still inside their mother's womb. Esau was born first and, therefore, was entitled to inherit his father

property and authority when Isaac died. However, one day when Esau returned from the fields and was near starvation, he asked Jacob for some of the red lentils he was cooking. Jacob agreed to do this, but only if Esau agreed to give up his birthright in exchange for the food (*Gen. 25: 34-35*). As a result, Esau became known as Edom (which means red).

Later, when Isaac was on his deathbed, he called out for Esau in order to give him his birthright. However, Rebecca and Jacob conspired to trick Isaac into giving Esau's birthright to Jacob, whom Rebecca loved best. Rebecca cooked Isaac's favorite food, which Isaac had requested, and had Jacob cover his arm with a goatskin when he brought Isaac the food (because Esau was especially hairy). Rebecca and Jacob managed to fool the old man, and he bequeathed everything to Jacob. When Esau returned and discovered what had happened, he was furious and threatened to kill Jacob. Jacob's mother warned him of Esau's intentions and instructed him to stay with her brother Laban's family until Esau cooled down. In the meantime, Isaac instructed Jacob not to marry any Canaanite women, but told him to travel to Padanaram to marry Laban's daughters (i.e., his mother's brother's daughters). Jacob subsequently married Laban's two daughters: Rachel and Leah. Esau, on the other hand, had previously disappointed his parents by marrying a Hittite woman (*Gen. 26:34-35*). The Hittites were a powerful kingdom in what is today Turkey, which means that she was not descended from Terah.

In order to understand the above story, we need to know the historical political relations that prevailed between the Israelites and the Edomites. The Edomites were a powerful local kingdom prior to the time that the Israelite kingdom dominated the region under David and Solomon. This

is reflected in *Genesis* by the fact that Esau (the eponymous ancestor of the Edomites) was born before Jacob (the eponymous ancestor of the Israelites). The Israelites were never able to conquer the Edomites as they had the Canaanites, or even subordinate them as they had the Moabites and Ammonites. The two kingdoms maintained an intermittent state of hostility with one another instead. The ongoing conflict between the Edomites and Israelites is explained in the story by having Esau and Jacob fighting even in their mother's womb. Indicative of Israelite-Edomite hostility is the fact that several centuries after *Genesis* was written Herod the Great, the Roman-appointed ruler of Judea at the time of Jesus' birth, was strongly disliked by the Jews, in part, because he was an *Idumean*, the name used to refer to the Edomites at that time.

It is also significant that, while Jacob married Leah and Rachel, his mother's brother's daughters who, like him, are descended from Abraham's father, Terah, Esau married a Hittite woman --an outsider not descended from Terah. The sons and grandsons of Jacob's wife Leah are the eponymous ancestors of the southern tribes, while those of Rachel make up the eponymous ancestors of the northern tribes of Israel. This inclusion of two wives explains and rationalizes the historical rivalry and conflict that existed between the northern and southern kingdoms. Significantly, Leah is the older sister, reflecting the primacy of the southern Kingdom of David and Solomon in this J-document story.

CONCLUSION

Upon closer examination, portions of the genealogy contained within *Genesis* displays an interesting political phenomenon: those neighboring peoples with whom the

Israelites were in conflict were claimed by the Israelites to have descended from ancestors guilty of illicit sexual behavior. Significantly, the more intense was the political conflict between a group of people and the Israelites --and the more those people had been subordinated by the Israelites-- the more offensive was the sexual act performed by that group's eponymous ancestor and the more distant did the Israelites trace a genealogical connection to them.

The most heinous sexual crime --homosexual incest-- was that of Ham, the father of Canaan, the eponymous ancestor of the Canaanites whom the Israelites conquered and enslaved. The Canaanites are also as far removed from the Israelites in their genealogy as a people can be and still be human. The Israelites were, thus, not obligated to accord the Canaanites the same respect and consideration that they would someone more closely related to them in their genealogical world view.

Lot's daughter's behavior --having sex with their father-- was also unacceptable, but it was not as heinous as the behavior of Ham. It was, at least, heterosexual incest and was done for altruistic reasons. The Moabites and the Ammonites, the product of Lot's daughter's incest are, therefore, not as distantly placed within the Israelite genealogy, as would befit a people whom the Israelites subordinated but did not colonize.

Closer still is the connection between the Israelites and the Edomites. The Israelites needed only to trace their genealogy back to Isaac in order to establish a connection with the Edomites. At the same time, the Israelites were never able to defeat, let alone conquer or subjugate the Edomites. They remained rivals of relatively equal strength.

Consequently, the "crime" of Esau, their eponymous ancestor, was simply that he married a Hittite woman, someone not descended from Terah. This compromised the purity of his bloodline.

Finally, by distinguishing the sons of Jacob (Israel) as belonging respectively to his two wives, Leah and Rachel, the genealogy attempts to explain the complicated historical relations between the peoples of the northern and southern kingdoms. It is important to remember that the Israelites were originally organized, like most other nomadic pastoral peoples, into independent lineages, clans and tribes which fiercely defended their sovereignty. Only reluctantly did they form into larger and more permanent political organizations, and for only two generations (first under David, then under Solomon) did they comprise a single people organized into a centralized political system. Moreover, the monarchy was established by conquest from the south and was eventually rejected in the north.

Thus, as is the case with other genealogies and histories studied by anthropologists, *Genesis* represents a largely metaphorical document that evolved among the ancient Israelites, in part, to justify, rationalize and legitimize their social and political history. As is the case with other genealogies, *Genesis* can best be understood through an anthropological analysis in which seemingly unique local social behaviors and institutions are examined as specific manifestations of general theoretical principles.

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