A Recontextualization of the Primeval History

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Chapter One
Introduction to a Modern Approach to Scripture

Finding ontological meaning within scripture is a task, which in a postmodern society must be approached with caution. First, when one is faced with a classical text[1] it is difficult at times to find meaning within the text as it relates to one's current situation. One can find oneself distanced from all earlier ways of understanding.[2] In addition, culture is by no means static and it is constantly changing, and thus, older ways of viewing and experiencing the world no longer seem adequate. Since society is constantly changing, it is in a continual process of reexamination of the ideals upon which its life is built. The turning to these classical ideals upon which one finds a solid foundation represents the desire for truth. The classics in this case succeed in challenging one's usual expectations and preunderstandings.[3] The text interacts with the reader, challenging the presuppositions the reader brings to the text. Interaction is a process of reexamination and reinterpreting what previously gave one's life meaning. As one places the classical text within one's own life, a recontextualization occurs.

For Christians, the Bible has fit and continues to fit into the role of a classical text. It gives meaning to a Christian's life and when times of crisis approach one looks to it as a guide in hopes that it will answer questions. Now is a time facing society, not of crisis per se, but more of social uncertainty. It spurns most recently from the attacks of

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[1] By classical text, I am referring to a document, which had and continues to have meaning for a people (i.e for Christians I am referring to the Bible). David Tracy. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986), 7.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid, 16.

September 11 and the uncertainty about the future that an event such as this causes. The gradual build up of uncertainty—to which September 11th contributed—has caused a contrast between the modern era and now the postmodern. The break between the two is not clear-cut because modernism still influences society today, but the uncertainty is evidence that society is moving in a different direction. So how is a postmodern society to appropriate and recontextualize scripture so that it is meaningful for today's audience? More specifically—and what I will be discussing in this paper in hopes of contributing a small part to a recontextualization—how does the church make sense of the primeval history[4] in a post modern society?

As stated previously, society is constantly in a process of reexamining or recontextualizing of its classical texts. In order to recontextualize a text one needs to analyze its previous context (the cultural ideals placed around it before the examination) so one can learn from the misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the text. A recontextualization of the Primeval History must involve an analysis of the previous models of scriptural interpretation (in order to learn from them) and historical criticism. Historical criticism is important for this process because it allows the reader to understand the original context of the document. When applying historical criticism to Genesis 1-11 one will find that Genesis is a result of its political and cultural setting, as is any classical text, and it was written with a specific *kerygma* in mind. The position, which I wish to espouse, is that national myth answers many questions in regards to the

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[4] The Primeval History consists of Genesis 1-11. It is termed the "Primeval History" because it is the time in scripture that precedes the patriarchal history beginning with Abraham.

recontextualization process and can help a postmodern church to appropriate the Primeval History. National myth applied to the Primeval History allows ontological concepts to come forth that were previously hidden. Therefore, national myth helps a postmodern church absorb postmodernity, because it brings forth another level of understanding to which the questions of the postmodernist are seeking answers. I am not suggesting that a recontextualization of Genesis should result in its being disregarded as valid and eternal, but that postmodernity has brought about a need to reexamine the Primeval History. Prior to postmodern society the Primeval History was viewed through, what I call a rational diachronic lens. In a postmodern culture viewing the Primeval History as a literal historical event is dangerous; dangerous because the Primeval History was written in an imaginative style, not empirically. The authors imbedded their accounts with meaning and did intend them to be historical, but as one will see, a different type of history than typically understood in the modern era.

Through the terms "Supernaturalism," "Evangelicalism," "Ecclesial Developmentalism," and "Analogical Developmentalism," a modern approach to scripture will be discussed and applied to the Primeval History. These modern approaches will be followed by a discussion of how viewing the Primeval History through a rational diachronic lens is dangerous and an approach that resolves some of the inaccuracies of the modern modes. In order to proceed to the concept of national myth, the background of the authorship of the Primeval History will be presented to understand the historical-critical aspect of recontextualization. However, using the background of the Primeval History, the concept of national myth will be shown to help the church address some of the challenges of a postmodern society. Then after demonstrating how

national myth can serve the church in a postmodern society, it will be applied to the Primeval History to narrow the focus even more and illustrate how national myth can help the church specifically with the Primeval History.

Terminology

Before moving forward, the specifics of terminology must be clarified. First, I will describe what I mean by modern and postmodern society. When I speak of modern society, I use it not as in the "now," but as a manner of thought. Modern thought is a mode of understanding, which began around the time of the Enlightenment (approx. 1700) to the time when society began a reassessment of the "modern" way of thinking (some time in the middle of the twentieth century). [5] The Enlightenment was a time when scientific reasoning began to dominate how humans (at least those in support of the Enlightenment) understood the world; one can understand what it is to be human through empirical knowledge. Immanuel Kant, in response to the question "what is Enlightenment?" said, "Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority."[6] A beneficial descriptor of modern culture is separation. Kant felt that the individual needed to separate itself from those who thought for them and make use of one's own understanding.

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[5] Darrell Jodock. *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority.* (Mineapolis: Fortpress, 1989), 15.

[6] Mary J. Gregor, ed. and translator. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 11. The term "minority" here refers to those in society that need direction from another outside of themselves.

During and after the Enlightenment, reason and rationality began to be separated from superstition. Everything needed to be explained and justified in a rational manner, even scripture, because many of the modernists were in fact devout Christians. Superstition was too subjective and could not be proven; thus only things, which could be objectified, were pursued. The concept of *a priori* justification was common. *A priori* justification is the proof of a proposition such as "two things cannot occupy the same space" solely through reason, excluding experience.[7] Further, through this pursuit, the concept of progress and the greatness of the human potential took hold; society must understand that which can be explained and through this society will become wholly better.[8] Conversely, postmodern culture is a reaction to the concept of progress through objectification. I will use the term postmodern not as a way to declare a complete break with modern ideals or to say that modern thinkers were completely ensnared by their way of thinking. Postmodern is merely the time after modern; it is still influenced by modernity as any cultural movement is by that which proceeds it. A movement cannot help but be influenced by its predecessor because it is a reaction to it and will naturally carry some of its ideals. In the aftermath of the events of World War II and most recently September 11th, society's concept of progress lost its foundation. This is essentially all that postmodern culture represents, uncertainty of the future—as is shown

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[7] Laurence Bonjour. *In Defense of Pure Reason: Cambridge Studies in Philosophy.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-26. Bonjour's definition *a priori* is that even if one understands the proposition in question based on past *experience* the justification of the proposition must be based solely on pure objective thought.

[8] For a more complete discussion and from where I draw my conclusions on *modern* culture see pages 15-19 of Jodock.

by the fact that the term still has "modern" within it merely to show that society is in a different time than before.

I will also be using the terms *kerygma* and *myth* as they relate to the Primeval History. The term myth in our society has been confused as a story, more specifically a story about the gods as defined by the Grimm brothers in their fairly tales. Therefore, myths are often seen as fictitious and untrue. In addition, *myth* is used to refer to primitive religion and pagan religions in an effort to show beliefs as inferior to the one making the qualification. However, the Greek word μυθος (muthos) referred to a tale or something told. Within its range were phenomena such as public speech, conversation, a proverb, a narrative, and a plot to a play.[9] The Greeks used myths not just as stories, but also as explanations of the world around them. I agree with Robert Oden who suggests, along with others, that myth is the manner in which society presents to its members and wider audience a full conveyance of its deepest beliefs and values.[10] National Myth, as I will use it in this paper, is a story that is paradigmatic for a particular society's life. Myth is different from national myth, in that myth can refer too either the individualistic explanations or that of a society or nation. On the other hand, national myth offers an explanation for a particular country or nation. Lastly, I have used the term *kerygma*. All myths and documents attempting to make one subscribe to a particular view, the Primeval History included, have objectives within them (political, spiritual, etc.). Therefore, *kerygma* is the intent of the author written into the document,

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[9] Bernard Batto. *Slaying the Dragon Mythmaking in the Biblical tradition.* (Louisville: John Knox/ Westminster Press, 1992), 4.

[10] Robert Oden. *The Bible Without Theology.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), 40.

in this case the Primeval History. The *kerygma* of a particular text is important to understand from a historical critical standpoint because the text and or myth are a product of its cultural setting. I remove from this definition, and from my paper, the divine being itself, because this is not something that can be explained. I am only analyzing those aspects of myth, which arise from the culture in which the myth was written.

Modern Approaches to Scripture

First, I will discuss the purpose of the lengthy explication of these modern approaches to scripture. As stated previously, part of the process of recontexualizing the Primeval History is that one must understand the context. Once the context is understood one can move forward and answer the questions that arise from the new cultural setting in which one finds oneself. The questioning of a classical text such as the Bible, and more specifically the Primeval History, results from the need for a new and possibly deeper understanding of the text. Thus, the following section seeks to allow the reader to understand through these four categories the manner in which scripture was and still is approached in relation to modernism. After the four categories are explained and analyzed they will serve as a platform from which to build anew a postmodern understanding of scripture through national myth. These four categories by no means encompass the wealth of means to approaching scripture in the modern era. They merely attempt to serve as a summation of the various modes of interpretation in the modern era. The problem with an assessment of modernism is that one cannot touch on all the matters related to modernism. For this study it is too complex a mode of thought to analyze. Therefore, in the following sections I will be making some generalizations and

conclusions linked to modernism. I understand the error in making such claims; however, it is necessary for me to do so because I need to draw conclusions concerning the two positions and placing them in conversation with each other for a postmodern society. To recontextualize the Primeval History for a postmodern society one needs to be sensitive to modernism in order to learn from it.

Supernaturalism

This is the first of two views discussed that have a static view of history. Even though changes occur within history, this model vies for an unchanging core, an essential element that remains the same diachronistically.[11] In terms of Christianity, God's actions may change throughout history, but this does not mean that God changes; God essentially stays the same. The people who wrote the canonized text and those within the text are the same as we are today and so are their expressions of faith. When applying the static view of the past to Genesis one arrives at the following, since the authors of Genesis experienced the same static God that I am experiencing today the Primeval History contains the same kind of meaning for me as it did for the authors.[12]

More specifically, the supernaturalist, within the static view of the past, bases authority on external miracles that interrupt the natural order. The supernaturalists have a rational view of the world. There are two stories, one for the divine and one for the natural order. God acts within the natural order and adjusts it at points to make one

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[11] Jodock, *The Church's Bible*, 33.

[12] Ibid., 33.

aware of his[13] presence. Miracles, according to the supernaturalist, are happenings that disrupt the natural order but can still be objectively proven.[14] Thus, the supernaturalist supports the idea of objectivity when it gives the same value to religious truth as any other form of truth. Further educed from their view of miracles is that the supernaturalist does not give precedence to the human potential. Because it is still necessary for God to intervene in history, this means that humans still need help; therefore, the supernaturalist has a pessimistic unprogressive view of society.

Due to the way that supernaturalists view the world as constant, they take the following view of scripture: since God is static as well as people, the accounts in all of scripture are actual accounts of the events that took place. In the Primeval History the supernaturalist would point to Genesis 1:1 (NRSV)[15] "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." because this is the very first miracle to occur in the Bible. This is also the time when God established the natural order (1:26) "...let them (humans) have dominion over the fish of the sea...birds...cattle...wild animals." Another such miracle occurs in Gen 2:7 "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground." This event is a disruption of the natural order and thus, evidence for God's adjusting of his order and also, because it is not natural it is evidence of God's greatness.

Saint Augustine provides an excellent example of this type of supernaturalist way to approach scripture. He writes, "Moses tells us in the beginning God made heaven and

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[13] I will be using the pronoun "he" and the possessive pronoun "his" to refer to God realizing its theological limitations.

[14] Jodock, *The Church's Bible*, 39-41

earth and doesn't even mention the Son through whom all things were made; whereas John says in the beginning was the Word."[16] Augustine is equates verses in the gospel of John with those in Genesis because both refer to creation. In the supernaturalist mind, this makes sense because God is static, creation is a miracle, and all miracles are the same; therefore any reference to creation is the same. The main problem that I see with the supernaturalist argument is its emphasis on history that cannot be substantiated. Moreover, it is not possible to find an essential continuity that connects a historical of the stories and the narrative itself. These difficulties will be analyzed in relation to the other static view of history approach. However, one can draw from the supernaturalist positive a positive characteristic that will not only help develop a postmodern understanding, but is necessary to do so.

Evangelicalist Position

This modern approach to scripture also maintains that history is static but focuses much less on the outer, objective world, than do the supernaturalists. The difference between the supernaturalist and the evangelicalist is their view of what is a miracle. The evangelicalist views a miracle as an *inner experience* while the supernaturalist views miracles as an outer objectively testable difference in the workings of the world.[17] An evangelicalist looks at history and sees the same unchanging characteristic that a

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[15] All scriptural references, unless in the original language, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

[16] John E Rotelle, O.S.A, ed,. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st century.* (New York: New City Press, 1990), 169.

[17] Jodock, *The Church's Bible*, 46.

supernaturalist sees. As result of this, the inner experiences of the individuals today represent the experiences of those in the past; I felt God's love so those in the past felt God in the same way.[18] Since one's religious experience is confined to the inside, the evangelicalist sees no reason to deny the workings of the natural world. Similar to the supernaturalists, they accept the barrier between the natural and the divine world, but this barrier breaks down when the Holy Spirit acts upon the individual. This is where the scripture's authority lay, in the individual experience. The evangelicalist sees this inner experience as evidence beyond what a rationalist[19] would say because the inner experience is a source of knowledge. The experience is a source of knowledge because they view this inner experience as direct revelation from God; thus since it is internal it sidesteps the outer world that bases authority on empirical data.

The evangelicalist view can be summed up with the word separation. They separate themselves from science through the subjectivity of miracles, and they separate the individual from the community. In order for progress to occur, the individuals need to be changed; the individual experience of God results in the betterment of the community. One example of an individual bettering society due to the internal nature of God's call in the Primeval History that an evangelicalist might draw attention to is Noah as portrayed in Gen 6:9 "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." The whole of society was corrupt and God chose Noah through

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[18] Ibid, 48.

[19] The rationalist accepts completely the views of modern culture, only the natural and moral laws are valid. Thus within scripture a rationalist would only find meaning where maxims are discussed.

whom he set in motion the betterment of the world. Because of his righteousness, an individual, Noah, received a call to better society.

There is at least one major problem with both the supernaturalist and the evangelistic points of view. The supernaturalist agrees that God acts in a static manner upon and within his created natural order so that society may realize his presence throughout history. Miracles are a subversion of the natural order and this natural order has always existed; therefore God acts statically because his miracles are always a subversion of the order. The evangelicalist sees God's presence in history in the inner miracles of the individual, God also acting statically. If one accepts this postulate, then one is claiming to understand what the unchanging essence of God is, because one needs to draw a conclusion about how God stays the same and how people stay the same. God may have an unchanging essence, but if he acts throughout history the only way that the two groups have found his unchanging essence is to find God inside the various contextual interpretations of his acts and not in the static nature of God, because society has changed and continues to change. One example would be its social mannerisms that have evolved over time; things that were previously unacceptable are now acceptable. It is interesting that the static views of history do not draw upon Job, or try to justify it, when God asks the question "Where were you when..." because here God puts Job in his place for claiming to understand the workings of the world. God is God and a mortal cannot understand him. In the sense of the Primeval History, ontological meaning comes alive when the context in which it was written is understood, because God does act in

history and the Primeval History should be viewed as the authors making sense of the historical beginning of God's current expressions of his power in their time.[20]

However, in the static approaches one finds an important aspect that can be drawn on by postmodern hermeneutics. They rely upon a static system of understanding through which to base the meaningfulness of scripture. The static system supports the modern view of the world functioning mechanistically. This mechanistic understanding requires the proof of a proposition based on empirical data; the proposition fits into the mechanistic model or it does not. The proving of a proposition in terms of hermeneutics becomes useful in terms of historical criticism. The beginnings, but by no means the end, of historical criticism relies on the initial questioning of the occurrence of an event; therefore, this is useful for a postmodern understanding because it provides postmodernism with a starting point.

Ecclesial Developmentalist Position

The ecclesial and analogical (yet to be discussed) developmentalist positions differ from the previous two stances in two respects: they view the divine and the natural world as intertwined, and they see the past as dynamic not static. First, the ecclesial is opposed to the two-story view of the world where the God and the natural order are separated by a barrier, a barrier that the divine must break in order to interact with the natural order.[21] The dynamic view of history breaks this barrier with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To what degree the divine and natural interact, there is a variance of

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[20] Bernard Anderson. *Creation versus Chaos.* (New York: Association Press, 1967), 36.

opinion, but essentially, there is an intermixing of the two. This intermixing occurs throughout the history of the church. From the time of Abraham onward the ecclesial sees God as interacting with the natural order and implementing his plan. This interaction reaches the pinnacle in the incarnation, but nonetheless the entire history of the church is based on the interaction with the spirit, and or son of God.

The other major difference between the static and the dynamic is that the dynamic view of history allows for adaptation from current forms of knowledge. The dynamic view of the past sees history as changing and growing and views this as important to the present. The past can help one to understand the present culture and serves as a valuable source of insight and information.[22] Thus, because they see history and thought as changing in the church, historical criticism is a valuable resource. Through it one can understand the compositional intent of each document so as to understand it better for a contemporary society.

As already stated, the ecclesial developmentalist views history as dynamic; every event that happens in history has the potential of having a divine and a human or natural cause. A miracle to the ecclesial developmentalist has God's presence within it; it is distinguished from a nonmiraculous event (the normal natural order) because God's presence is disclosed to the person/society. Further, because God's presence is observed and known, he affects those who observe the miracle.[23] History to the ecclesial is the history of God communicating through these types of miracles to his church. Jesus was the one who broke the divine/natural barrier. The church and the miracles that are

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[21] Jodock, *The Church's Bible*, 51.

[22] Ibid., 52.

revealed to it is the channel of the spirit, and through this channel, contemporary society remains attached to Jesus.[24] The history of miracles is a history of relative miracles. I will define a relative miracle as God working through the various historical contexts; performing his acts relative to the current situation so that those receiving the miracle understand. As stated before, those who hold a dynamic view of history welcome the idea of historical criticism, and therefore the ecclesial sees each individual book as a development in the history of the church. Religious statements are never separate from their culture but are in part a product of the people or groups that make the statements.[25] The Bible is valuable through this type of historical reasoning, and gains its authority from the fact that it allows the church to remain in contact with the earliest interpretations of God's activity. However, the Bible is communally specific, in that it is not supernaturally produced and universally applicable. Contrary to what a static view of history would say—that the miracles attested in scripture, seeing scripture as a history of miracles, apply universally because they are an interruption of the natural order and appear the same to everyone—the ecclesial would say that miracles apply only to the *ekklesia*, or community of believers.

The ecclesial would see God's action in the Primeval History, and possibly Genesis as a whole, as a separate from the rest of the Bible. The Primeval History is the author's awareness and belief in God's presence when the world was created and functions as evidence for God's plan for creation. The ecclesial sees the theological

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[23] Ibid., 52.

[24] Ibid., 55.

statements concerning God's acts in chapter one of Genesis as historically grounded in the context of the author. The statements attest to God's power over his creation. They would also see the act of creation as a relative miracle with God molding, from preexisting material, as he saw fit to make his creation. This would be the beginning to the history of relative miracles, which define the church. The people of Israel understood that God created the world, and the authors were explaining the enormity of that creation relative to the current situation of the Israelites. The ecclesial would see the flood in Genesis 7 as God's necessary action. The ecclesial developmentalist's view of human progress mirrors the view of miracles. Human beings do have the ability to become better, but they need divine help in order to achieve this betterment of the self. Therefore, God's hand was in the flood working for the greater good of society because society had overstepped its bounds. Opening the text to historical criticism shows that the flood story represents what occurs when a society ignores God and "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (6:5). In the creation stories and the flood narrative, the important component is that in these miracles Israel perceives God's hand through the relative miracle.

Analogical Developmentalist Position

Analogical developmentalism, like ecclesial, holds a dynamic view of the past but with a slight twist. Ecclesial saw history as dynamic as it relates to the historical community of the church, but the analogical shifts away from the historical community to

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[25] This statement serves as a beneficial summation of the ecclesial's beliefs. They tie each text to the historical context in which it was written. Ibid., 57.

the history of the cosmological truths revealed in scripture.[26] Christianity, according to the analogical, through its history of revelation, reveals cosmological truths concerning the functioning of the world. As the ecclesial sees God, working through relative miracles along with culture, so the analogical sees God revealing cosmological truths that follow the development of culture as well.[27] The analogical developmentalist sees a strong correlation between the philosophical or cosmological development as it parallels culture, but not a complete correlation; thus they seek to develop a philosophical paradigm which reveals Christian and cosmological truths for society. The philosophical paradigm that develops must look at history because our current experience is only a small slice of the "picture" so to speak. Each event in history reveals an aspect of God's cosmological truth and can help a contemporary society understand its own situation more fully when coupled with their current cosmological experiences. Therefore, the philosophical paradigm that develops must take into consideration the past and the present; one must look at the past and the present in order to be *au fait* with history; the past influences the present and vice versa. One other major difference within the dynamic views of history lay in the form God takes. To the ecclesial God's action take various forms within the changing social context, but the analogical developmentalist sees God as changing along with culture. According to William Beardslee,

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[26] Ibid., 59.

[27] Jodock states that one may also wish to refer to analogical developmentalism as *cosmological* or *philosophical* developmentalism.

> "God is so deeply involved in the struggle between man and God that he cannot remain the remote and unchanging God or archaic religion. God is concerned...he suffers in and with the world."[28]

If God is to have an affect on the world, he will need to associate within it to reveal his cosmological truths. The concept of involvement is where scriptures draw their authority. The scriptures are not true because they record accurate historical events, but are true because they record accurately God's involvement in the world and thus reveal to the observers and the readers of the Bible his cosmological truth.

What analogical developmentalists value the most are the symbols, images, and stories that are translatable into dynamic ideas, because through these one can deduce the meaning of the passage cosmologically.[29] The biblical account is meaningful because it is a symbol for reality, or a represents reality, it is not reality itself. This is another difference between ecclesial and analogical developmentalism; they understand the development of ideas as serving a different purpose in society. The ecclesial holds the view that ideas are solely for the purpose of expression within a community, and thus, even though both have a developmentalist view of history, their views of the Primeval History are dissimilar. The analogical developmentalist will draw from the Primeval History those things that reveal cosmological truths. At the beginning of each day in the P account of creation[30] God says "Let there be light, sky, water, vegetation....etc" and

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[28] William A. Beardslee. *A House for Hope: A Study in Process and Biblical Thought*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 89. quoted in Jodock *The Church's Bible*, 60.

[29] Ibid, 62.

then what follows is an account of the function of each. The analogical developmentalist sees this as a symbol for a cosmically revealed truth for the correct functioning of the world. God reveals another such truth in Genesis 1:27 "So God created human kind in his image," and then follows it with a command, "Be fruitful and multiply...have dominion over...every living thing that moves." God creates humankind in his image in order that we will live according to his principles of creation; having dominion over the created world from 1:1-25. The analogical developmentalist sees this as a story that points to a revealed order, just as some might see the order revealed in 2:20-25 of the J creation account: "there was not found a helper for man...and the rid that the Lord God had taken...he made into a woman..." as the proper relationship between a man and a woman.

Another such example of cosmological truths revealed through scripture as symbols occurs in Genesis chapter 4. Eve bears Cain and Abel, Cain is a tiller of the ground or gardener, whereas Abel is a keeper of sheep and Cain becomes angry because God does not appreciate his offerings from his garden "but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry" (4:5). Cain proceeds to kill his brother and incurs the following judgment from God: "And now you are cursed from the ground." Thus, an analogical developmentalist would see this as an important process of development. God here is involved with Cain and Abel, thus God, in his dealings with Cain and Abel reveals part of himself. He reproves Cain for attempting to subvert God's order: "If you do well will you not be accepted?" Therefore, the cosmological lesson

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[30] The priestly account of creation is—if one accepts the documentary hypothesis of the Yahwist, Elohist, Priest, and Deuteronomist—Genesis 1:1-2:4a and the J account of creation is 2:4b-3.

that one takes from this—as an analogical developmentalist, and very similar to that of the lesson learned from Genesis chapter 1—is that one should not let jealousy interfere with God's design and to value others.

The most important facet of the ecclesial and analogical developmentalist is that their approach to history is dynamic. The present is immersed in the past, which serves society in the present as a clarifier. The past clarifies for present-day society the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual growth, from which one can learn. Thus, when reading scripture—in order to find valuable application of the past for the present—one must understand the cultural context from which it came, in order to understand more clearly the meaning inherent in the text and how one can make it meaningful for today. However, it is in the application of the meaning procured from the text that the dynamists fall into error in some respects. The ecclesial developmentalist sees God as static, and he communicates to us through relative miracles,[31] which allow contemporary society to remain attached to the history of the church through the Holy Spirit's actions. The ecclesial developmentalist expands the inner miracle of the evangelicalist—that is more individually based—to the entire church. The ecclesial views the truth discovered in the history of miracles as only applicable to the church.

In a postmodern setting one needs to allow for diversity and intimacy of meaning in the text. The ecclesial does well to recognize the changing historical contexts, but for today one cannot distance themselves from previous modes of understanding through viewing the meaning as solely historical. Historical criticism will allow the various

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[31] Recall here that I define a relative miracle as a miracle that is relative to the current situation so that society may understand through their own experiences.

churches to interpret the same data, but each church has its own situation, its own niche through which to interpret the data. The data to which I am referring are the truths that the process of historical criticism reveals be those data empirical or unempirical. The various communities need to attach meaning and bring them into contemporary society to the history of miracles. One cannot use these as the end within their context. However, the element of diversity of the ecclesial developmentalist point of view that finds support in a postmodern culture. Because the ecclesial developmentalist understands the church to be the community of believers—not any particular denominational or geographical expression, postmodernism will find ecclesial developmentalism worthwhile in this respect.

The analogical developmentalist also fails in the application of meaning as they find it in scripture. Varying slightly from the historical relative miracles of the ecclesial the analogical sees the Scriptures as coming from various periods in history and revealing cosmological truths at each juncture. At the risk of sounding hypocritical, the universality of the truths attained from the text is where they fall into error. They understand the cosmological truths to apply universally to everyone. However, one philosophical system will not necessarily allow a person experiencing the text in a different environment to find meaning in scripture. If a single philosophical paradigm is developed for Christianity it cannot be a multifaceted approach encompassing all possibilities. A Christian community in Africa or Central America will not have had the same life experiences of a community in Minnesota; therefore, they may need a distinct paradigm in order to draw meaning from the text. The error of historicity is another aspect of the analogical developmentalist parallels the ecclesial developmentalist. They

have the tendency, due to their dynamic view of history that allows for changing cultural contexts, to view the meaning more historically than a postmodern society needs.

Toward a Post Modern Understanding

Thus, in relation to the dynamic views of history one can draw upon positive and negative attributes for a postmodern rendering of the Primeval History. The ecclesial and analogical developmentalist both see the importance of the changing historical contexts in which the texts are written. The analogical furthers the understanding through the application of symbolic truth to the text discerning from the text the symbolic meaning. However, the time in which the dynamic views situate their understanding poses some problems for a contemporary culture. The static views of history, the supernaturalist and the evangelicalist, also add to the conversation between modern and postmodern hermeneutics. The static system of understanding that they employ provides the starting point from which a postmodern exposé of the Primeval History can begin. The positive elements of the modern approaches—in terms of developing a postmodern understanding of the Primeval History—are necessary for a contemporary audience to find meaning in the text. However, there are faults as well, but this is how a recontextualization occurs; one draws upon the positive attributes of what came before and modifies those that need altering.

These positions allow the reader to understand how modern culture interpreted scripture (i.e. the Primeval History); however, there is an issue that needs addressing.[32] One will recall that they address issues such as "why should one pay attention to the

Genesis creation account?" and find value—in dissimilar ways—in the story and not the interpretation of the story. I am analyzing the positions on the basis of their form of interpretation. This is a justifiable move because the manner of authority one places on the Bible affects how one interprets a specific passage.

The error that I find within the approaches by the various modes of understanding, as stated previously, is in their dealings with history and how this affects the interpretation of scripture. I use error in this paper in the sense that specific qualities of the positions are incorrect, not the whole position. Biblical texts are multilayered and postmodernists are asking questions of the biblical texts that allow one to comprehend a deeper level. This is where the errors of the four approaches originate, because they do not allow these questions to be entertained. An example would be, "So Genesis 1 has a historical context, how does it make sense of my life today?" and not merely questioning the historical context. They fall into error not only in their dealings with history, but in the case of some of the schools the meaning found within history and for what community or individual the history contains meaning. This error of the hermeneutics of history relates to historical solidarity and specificity. History (solidarity will be explained later) in this sense is the aspect of modern history that refers to the answering of factual questions relating the truthfulness of events that occurred. Modern historians, in terms of analyzing the Bible, in part thought of the truthfulness of events in terms of did the event actually happen in an observable and rational—as being able to be defined empirically—manner and basing the answer of yes/no the event happened on those

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[32] Jodock in *The Church's Bible* treats these as primarily theories of biblical authority in response to modern culture, not theories of interpretation.

criteria.[33] History then, in terms of the Bible, is limited to only asking the yes/no questions, to proving whether an event happened or not. This part of history is a modern invention; seeing something as valuable only if it corresponds to the way in which one understands the world today. This does not do justice to biblical history because the Scriptures were not *solely* meant to function as a historical book.

This proposition may seem to be contrary to allowing historical criticism, but this is not so. Historical criticism seeks to allow modern readers to understand the historical situation surrounding the text that one is examining. Historical criticism, as applied to scripture, moves beyond the attempt answer the yes/no questions—if it limits the historical method to asking yes/no questions, this is an incorrect use—it seeks to serve as a platform from which to begin an understanding of the text. Such a platform must be based on both yes/no questions and background history. Historical criticism does see the Bible as a historical book, and the events recorded in scripture may have happened, but the Scriptures are a creative history.

I use creative here in the sense that the Scriptures are meant to record for future generations the meaning imbedded in the events that took place, not serve only as a history in the modern sense.[34] When reading the scriptures today's audience must understand that the authors were writing with the intention of helping society in the

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[33] Anderw G. Vaughn. Vaughn, Andrew. "Can We Write a History of Israel Today." Essay to appear in The Future of Biblical Archaeology, ed. by J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming.1. Vaughn here refers to the process of providing evidence of the testing of the occurrence of an event as negative history. He sees this as a hindrance to the understanding of biblical history; I agree.

current situation understand God. Creative history is useful for moving past the error of seeing scriptures through a certain type of modern lens and allowing them to take on a different meaning. This view of history is the trap into which I feel the supernaturalists and the evangelicalists fall. As one recalls, these two groups see history, and an inner core of humankind, as static. The supernaturalists place more emphasis on the external happenings of God. Since they see humans as unchanging, they accept the concept of rationally interpreting miracles based on the fact that miracles are a subversion of the natural workings of the world. Further, because things are the same today as in the past the authors of scripture must have objectively observed the miracles based on the same criteria as one does today; therefore they actually happened. This elucidation of history is a substantial error because one is looking back on the past through modern eyes instead of attempting to understand the past as itself. The basis of a miracle's meaning relies on the yes/no questions of rational objectivity. The evangelicalist also sees the past as a static entity in tune with the workings of the modern world. However, and this allows for greater receptivity of historical criticism, the evangelists see miracles as the inner workings of God. They still fall into the trap of applying static qualities to God and humankind, which lead to the same errors of the supernaturalist just on an individual level; because individuals are the same today as the individuals in the past the things that they experienced, as reflected in the scripture, are the same as the things one feels today. Both modes of thought fall into the same static error, but there is a difference between the evangelicalist and the supernaturalist due to the modification of the experience of

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[34] Vaughn, on page 11, refers to the process of understanding history not just in terms of yes/no questions as positive history, providing background so one can understand the historical context of a document.

ecclesial. As with the modern concept of history as explicated above, so the concept of knowledge applies to the modern error of understanding. I refer to solidarity in terms of knowledge because of the Enlightenment understanding of knowledge in that knowledge or understanding remains rooted (solid) in the past. One, because of the critical approach of the modern mind the historicity of the texts is valued above contemporary attachment; and two, solid not only in the sense of solid in the past, but solid in terms of a system of understanding. Modern thought sought to understand history through a single lens of judgment and basing the factuality of a proposition as seen through the lens. This system of approach bleeds over into many other areas and results in a universal approach to understanding. The rational modern manner of approaching anything was through the same system of understanding, and therefore it was applied universally. Universal application of a system of understanding to scripture is not realistic because it does not entirely grasp the meaning of the different cultural contexts and ways of understand that are different from the Western. This is the negative aspect of the analogical developmentalist approach to scripture. They attempt to develop a philosophical system in order to understand the process of development in scripture. The analogical developmentalists are drawing upon a means of understanding highlighted in the modern era, the importance of understanding the historical context. However, to say that once the historical context is understood and the cosmological system applied, that this is the essential aspect of the text, leaves out important components. Each culture has a different manner of understanding, a specific situation, and can bring forth different

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Primeval History wrote to show that David's rule was part of God's plan. The authors wrote to help the people understand the current situation.

miracles to the internal versus the external. Because of the validation of miracles solely on the basis of their internal quality the evangelicalists see the static character of God and human kind internally, and if historical criticism discloses the inaccuracy of a biblical figures experience—an example would be that Abraham did not actually go to Egypt—then historical criticism is incorrect. The evangelicalists fall into error because they see historical criticism—as it pertains to an individual's experience—as invalidating scripture. The evangelists and the supernaturalists fall into the same trap of seeing God as static and answering on an internal or external level the yes/no questions as they apply to miracles and God's workings in the world; thus, this would lead to an interpretation in light of the factualness of the external and internal experiences.

Thus, we now understand the term history to mean creative or imaginative history. What the term creative history allows is the inclusion of the answering of the yes/no questions and also the meaning or *kerygma* in the text. The former is necessary, as stated before, in order for the interpretation of the text to begin because one needs to know in order to place limitations on the meaning in the text. The latter takes the reader beyond the answering of the yes/no questions revealing the meaning embedded in the text. The former coupled with the latter places boundaries on the text in that the occurrence of events place boundaries on the *kerygma* so that one cannot move the meaning beyond the general aim of the author.[35] The original context also serves as a means of relating the past to contemporary society. The second half of the term, solidarity applies mainly to the dynamic understandings of history, analogical and

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[35] This does not limit the meaning to only to what the author specifically intended, limits the meaning in terms of broad strokes. As will be seen later, the J author of the

elements; all of these must be recognized when appropriating scripture.[36] One must understand the absence of solidarity when discerning scripture and see it as applicable to various situations and various points in history. The analogical developmentalist leaves out the particulars of the narrative. Their approach becomes detached and allows the text to remain rooted in history, distanced from postmodern culture. There needs to be a connection through *kerygma* so a contemporary society feels tied to the text. Otherwise, how will one be able to acquire meaning for them?

The third part of the term one needs to understand is specificity. This partially applies to solidarity, as something to be avoided. It is in this area where the ecclesial developmentalists fall into error. As one recalls, the ecclesial sees miracles in the contemporary world as the channel of the spirit and God's activity in the world occurs through the church. The church is the channel of the spirit's work. The Christian church is a vast entity and the history of miracles is different for each community, and each interprets the miracles in a dissimilar manner. In this respect, the ecclesial developmentalists will find support in postmodernism because of their support of diversity in that each church has it own history of miracles. However, they, like the analogical developmentalists, also tend to take a historical-critical approach and situate meaning in the past instead of tying it to the present. The supernaturalist may also fall into this ruse because of their appeal to the rational natural order of the world. Miracles are a subversion of this natural functioning of nature; therefore, the miracles will appear

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[36] Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature.* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 195. Haraway in this article argues for situated knowledges as a means of *how* to see the world. She desires epistemologies of location

the same to everyone because the miracle differs from the natural order which can only be understood one way and along with its opposite (this is the miracle).

Therefore, my position stands in opposition to historical solidarity and specificity. One first needs to realize that the authors of the Primeval History wrote their history as a creative history imbedded with imagination and meaning in order to show the significance of the events that occurred. Secondly, one needs to realize that the historical creativity of the authors of Genesis does not remain rooted in the time in which they wrote. One needs to take a step beyond certain pieces of the modern approach to the Primeval History and not view it in terms of historical specificity and solidarity. We today have a situated knowledge of God and we need to attest to God's eternal changing and dynamic action, thus using Genesis 1-11, in light of our situation to understand creation and make it meaningful for today. Also, one needs to realize that in making the Primeval History meaningful for today that every culture that encounters the text will have a distinct interpretation, thus one should not let their specific situated knowledge represent the whole. This aspect of my position finds support in the analogical and ecclesial developmentalist positions due to their substantiation of the dynamic character of history. Both views see context influencing and molding the meaning of a text. National myth as defined before is paradigmatic and constitutive for a society's existence, can help one in understanding Primeval History and not fall into the trap of historical solidarity and specificity. The following chapter sets up the historical context and intent of the authors through a brief historical account of the political situation at the time of authorship and their *kerygma* (used here for intent or purpose). The historical

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in terms of science; the science of multiple subjects instead of one universal view. This

context will be analyzed in order to show how the errors of the modern approaches to scripture offer a negative understanding of the intent of the Primeval History and to provide a platform from which to begin the discussion of National Myth and how it can help appropriate the Primeval History for a postmodern society.

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can be applied to other areas of understanding and not just science.

Chapter Two
A Socio-political Background to the Primeval History

The analysis from this point onward will develop a position for the postmodern society. Beginning with this chapter the reader will be taken through the postmodern hermeneutical process. This position will adopt characteristics of modernism (because one cannot separate oneself from it) from the first chapter avoiding the historically static and specific. Further, the next two chapters introduce separate concepts. This chapter produces a contextual analysis of the two authors' settings, and the next discusses national myth. That will be brought together in the final chapter with the analysis of the Primeval History. However, the question arises why in response to the modern approaches to scripture is a background necessary and how does this serve as a foundation from which to begin discussing national myth? As I stated in the first chapter, establishing this historical context is an important step when a postmodern society attempts to relate to the text. This historical critical, or socio-political analysis, will provide one with an understanding of the culture surrounding the text in question, in this case the Primeval History. It allows one to understand the author, for whom he was writing, what were his sources (if there were any), and other cultural attributes prevalent in the text. In this case the authors named "J" and "P" will be analyzed in light of their contribution to the Primeval History.[37] The second important element of the historical

[37] The title Yahwist (J) and Priestly (P) are part of the documentary hypothesis, consisting of J, E, D, P. presented by Julius Wellhausen, which, in the case of the Primeval History divides it up into verses written by "J" and "P." It should also be noted that depending on the school of thought other feel that there is a R to be added to the four, as a final redactor of the complete volume. For a summary of the documentary hypothesis see: Ernst Nicholson. *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 242.

critical are the limitations it places on interpretation. In a postmodern culture where diversity is celebrated, interpretations need boundaries. The text still remains dynamic, but the *kerygma* of the authors (viewed through the historical data) allows boundaries of meaning to be placed around the text. These are not meant to have a negative effect on interpretation, but are meant to allow the contemporary reader a means to relate to the text. First, a date of composition will be determined followed by a brief digression on the socio-political events surrounding that date. Then material from the text and possible redactions by each author, their objectives become clear. In the coming chapters the analysis of Genesis and the Ancient Near Eastern creation mythology and the authors use of national myth rely heavily on these objectives.[38] Further, these objectives in the next chapter provide the interpreter a means of reaching the next level in a postmodern interpretation. The *kerygma* of the authors will be used to show how they selected and appropriated material to explain their current theological situation.

Two Authors of the Primeval History

The Yahwhist's (J) Account in the Primeval History

First, I will introduce the reasoning behind the documentary hypothesis (in this case two different authors of the Primeval History). Three different people from the 1700's are the pioneers in the identification of two different sources in Genesis. The first was a German minister Henning Bernard Witter in 1711, the second was a French professor of medicine Jean Astruc in 1753, and the third was a scholar by the name of

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[38] The separating of "J" and "P" has been challenged. Some scholars feel that one cannot identify separate authors and feel they are the same.

Gottfried Eichorn in 1780. The third person was the only one to make an impact on the community of faith because it was from a reputable source and he was able to make his findings public.[39] The doublets in the case of the creation story and the flood story gave them good reason to believe in multiple sources. The possibility of two different authors of the Primeval History was first examined due to the dissimilar vocabulary of the doublets. The J creation account refers to the deity as *Yahweh* eleven times as opposed to the first creation account that refers to the deity as *God* thirty-five times.[40] This dissimilar nomenclature is the first reason different sources were proposed for the Primeval History. Another variance among the two creation accounts is the disposition of God in the two stories. In the P account God appears to be much more distant and transcendent and powerful, in control of everything, and lacks all the anthropomorphic qualities ascribed to God in the J account. An example is 1:3 "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." "...God said...and there was..." portrays God as the powerful, transcendent God characterized in the opposite manner from the J God, "...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils" (2:7). Where God is represented as much more personal and directly involved in the creation. He molds man with his hands and breathes into his nostrils. In the first case God commands the earthly agents (meaning elements) and in the second case it

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[39] Richard Elliott Friedman. *Who Wrote the Bible?*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 52. Friedman's approach is a theory among many theories of the context of the J document.

[40] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 51. The Hebrew word for god is *Elohim* as used in the P account of creation. The J account refers to the diety by his name *Yahweh* God.

seems that God is acting as one of the agents.[41] Thus, the J author chooses to base his creation account on the portrayal of God as immanent and involved and on this point he differs from the P author.

Of the two accounts in the Primeval History the J is the older—this is why it will be examined first—and is dated to the time of the rise of the monarchy and during David's reign.[42] The J account consists of Genesis 2:4b-25; 3:1-24; 4:1-16; 4:17-26; 5:29; 6:1-4; 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 7, 10, 12, 16b-20, 22-23; 8:2b-3a, 6, 8-12, 13b, 20-22; 9:18-27; 10:8-19, 21, 24-30.[43] In order to draw from the text a possible date for this source the language of J will be evaluated. The current theory surrounding the J author is that he wrote during the time of the united monarchy under David which, prior to Saul's rule was divided into northern Israel and southern Judah, and that the J author came from the southern region of Judah. One of the first textual proofs of this relates to God's covenant with Abraham. In the J account all of the references to Abraham refer to him coming from the land of Hebron.[44] "So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron" (13:18). Another example is "The Lord appeared to Abram by the oaks of Mamre..." (18:1). This is significant because Hebron was a

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[41] As a side note, the order of creation of the two is different. In the P man is created on the sixth and last day of active creation and in the J account man is made first.

[42] The J account was written at the same time as the E account under David. The E author represented the northern, Mosaic interests, and the J the southern interests of the priests of Aaron.

[43] These verses are based on Friedman's reading of the text. Other scholars do not wholly agree.

[44] I realize that this example falls outside the Primeval History, but it is necessary for validation of J's context.

principal city of Judah, the capital of Judah under David.[45] Therefore, it is natural for an author attempting to legitimize his ruler to begin the story of the patriarchs with the founder, Abraham, as living in a place within the boundaries of his kingdom. A final example pertaining to Abraham locates the land promised to him in the kingdom of Judah, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." The interesting facet of this verse is that the boundaries given are the boundaries of the Kingdom of Judah under David. Hence, once again the J author seeks to legitimate the kingdom of Judah under David by appealing to the patriarch Abraham. One final brief example to solidify the date and location of J comes from Genesis 29:32-35. This is a story of the birth of Jacob's sons, thus the future tribes of Israel. The stories of the tribes that use the name *Yahweh God* are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.[46] In the Ancient Near East birth order was very important since the first-born son naturally would get the largest inheritance. Therefore, one would expect Reuben to receive the inheritance but in the story of the J author Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine and Simeon and Levi massacre the people of Shechem (see 34:25-31) and are criticized by Jacob. The only son left is Judah, and he gets the birthright, and on Jacob's deathbed, according to the J author, he is told, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you..." (49:8) "Reuben...you shall no longer excel...Simeon and Levi...may I never come into their council" (49:3-7).[47] Here it is evident that the J account portrays Judah as the one most worthy of the blessing, thus again reflecting the J author's emphasis on

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[45] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 62.

[46] Ibid., 63.

Judah. This evidence confirms the account's authorship in the time of David who ruled in Judah.

Now that the J account has been located in the time of David, based on the textual evidence, the social and political situation will be analyzed in order to understand better the time period in which the J author wrote. This is the first step in ascertaining the author's *kerygma*. Because the author wrote under the united monarchy of David, certain social implications affect his purpose for composing the J document. These social implications will be explicated in order to uncover a *kerygma* from the text so that the boundaries to interpretation can be placed.

The rise of the monarchy marked the end of the period of the Judges. Samuel was the last of the judges. He was judge, priest, and prophet all in one and lived in the city of Shiloh in the northern part of the land.[48] The period of the Judges is recorded in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, which are a record of how the people, militaristically, came to occupy the Promised Land.[49] The monarchy began in response to the continual invasion of the land by the Philistines. Some, such as Friedman and Alt, suggest that when the Philistines came into the land the tribes could not fight them off alone and thus needed to consolidate their power through the anointing of the first King, Saul.[50] David was a hero from the tribe of Judah and came from a circle of Saul's professional warriors. While he

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[47] Ibid., 64.

[48] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 37.

[49] The three books disagree as to what cities were conquered and in what order.

[50] Rainer Albertz. *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: The Old Testament Library Vol I.* (Louisville: Westminster/John Know Press, 1994),108.

was serving under Saul, David built up for himself a system of power by winning the support of mercenaries. In this way he was able to procure a large amount of land and separate himself from the tribes.[51] Because of his system of power, David naturally became a threat to Saul. Therefore, when Saul was killed in battle against the Philistines, Saul's son Ishbaal came to power over the north and David over the south. The men of Judah anointed him King. Later when Ishbaal died, the northern tribes also anointed him king, and the united monarchy began.

Once in power David proved to be a gifted politician, immediately making efforts to solidify the united monarchy. The first action was to move the capital from Hebron in the south, where he had ruled prior to unification of Jerusalem. This was a brilliant move due to the neutral character of Jerusalem. Formerly in had been occupied by Jebusites and thus it did not favor the northern or the southern tribes. David's second action towards unification was the appointing of two priests, one from the north and one from the south. The north and south had differing traditions, relating mainly to ancestry; the north claimed to be descendants of Moses and the south of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel. When David did this, he politically united two previously separate religious ideas.[52] Also important were David's militaristic moves. David, as he had done under Saul, created a strong and diverse military with soldiers from varying locations to unite further the kingdom under both northern and southern ideals as he had done with the appointments of the priests. David structured this military in a manner that deprived

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Cited in Albertz, Alt. *Formation of the Israelite State*, 223. For a counter opinion, see L. Finkelstein. *The Emergence of the Monarchy in Israel.*

[51] Ibid., 110.

tribal decision makers of their power; hence the military was responsible only to their king.[53] Allegiance to the king was also important in another area, the royal court theology.

In light of the previous political moves toward unifying the northern and the southern kingdoms and the observation that the J author comes from the region of Judah, the *kerygma* of J can be determined. The *kerygma* of the J author can then be applied to the Primeval History coupled with national myth (in chapter 4) to allow for a postmodern interpreter to connect the text to contemporary society. The *kerygma* of a particular text is determined by the author's culture (which was analyzed in the preceding paragraph). What this allows for is a means for contemporary society to apply the text most effectively in current situations. This term *kerygma*, as used by Hans Walter Wolff,[54] will describe the theological objectives of the J author. *Kerygma* is often referred to as "the proclamation of religious truths" especially in relation to the gospels. There are problems with utilizing this term because it is Greek, and because in the early church it referred to religious truths in the Gospels, nothing in relation to the Old Testament. However, despite this, it will be used to refer to the J author's objectives in writing his document. Given that Israel was now unified under David and after him under Solomon, the theology surrounding and supporting the king needed to support his origins and needed to support the fact that unification under him, was the culmination of Israel's

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[52] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 40.

[53] Albertz, *History of the Israelite Religion*, 111. Albertz describes in more detail the political process of depriving tribal leaders of their power.

[54] Hans Walter Wolf and Walter Brueggemann. *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*. (Atlanta: Westminster John Know Press, 1982), 115.

history, or at least that the unification under David was meant to occur. The royal court theology accomplishes this task, not of unification, but of legitimizing the ruler in power. This court theology has a dense history in the Ancient Near East, and resulted in a sacral monarchy.[55] In the Ancient Near East the king was regarded in some manner as God's representative on earth: as God's creation, the son of God, the image of God, or even God himself. The Israelites differed slightly because they never had a god-king, but they did have the king represented as God's son "I will tell you of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you" (Psalm 2:7). This concept of God begetting the king results in a perceived close personal relationship between God and the king, which is what David's court theologians choose to use as a means of elevating David into a close relationship with God. The belief of the closeness of God was previously mentioned in relation to the difference between the J account of creation and the P, but here it takes on meaning due to the background of David's rise to power: "...then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils" (2:7). Since David was viewed as God's begotten son, this verse naturally rouses support for the legitimacy of David's rule. God is close to his creation, personally molding it, and therefore close to David, who is closer to God than the rest of the population. God's love of his begotten son culminates in Nathan's promise in 2 Samuel 7: "...but I will not take my steadfast love from him (David)."[56]

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[55] Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 117.

[56] However, the tradition history of 2 Samuel 7 like almost all the central texts of the Old Testament is so complicated that a generally accepted literary and chronological theory has yet to be found.

The royal court theology of David served the purpose of legitimizing the present relationship of David to God, but in order for his relationship to be solidified, the present situation needs to be in continuity with the past. The continuity with the past allows for a more substantial relationship between God and David, and since this was the goal of the J author, to legitimize David's reign, the historical solidification seems an intelligent step. The first three verses in the twelfth chapter of Genesis accomplish this task, and coupled with the royal court theology, the J author's *kerygma* can be revealed. In the first three verses of chapter 12 the Lord calls upon Abram to leave his homeland, and the Lord tells him why he has chosen him to do so. The first three clauses have promises to Abraham alone "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great." Then in the fourth and fifth clauses the Lord extends his blessing beyond Abraham. Those who bless Abraham will also be blessed. The climax is contained in verse 3*b* "...and all the families of the earth will be blessed."[57] The verb change in verse 3*b* causes Wolff to come to this conclusion because in 3*b* the perfect tense is employed and previously all the verbs were first person imperatives. What this syntactical analysis reveals is the following: the imperatives are simply commands to go and do what the Lord says, and the transition to the perfect in verse 3*b* "...and all the families of the earth *shall bless themselves* by you," allows for completion, because in Hebrew the perfect tense implies completed action, thus being the result of all the prior commands.[58] The thrust of these verses is therefore to show that through acknowledging Abraham, Israel

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[57] Wolf, *Vitality of Old Testament*, 47.

and any other society will be blessed. Those people that do not will be cursed. J's kerygma shows why Israel needs this blessing. Israel needs the blessing because of the state that the Primeval History ends; it ends in a state of hopelessness after the flood narrative. The J author demonstrates through Abraham how the kingdom of David came to be and why they indeed are blessed.

So what does the socio-political situation mean for a postmodern understanding of the Primeval History? First and most importantly, it establishes a historical context. As the dynamic views of history appropriately recognize, this is an important step when one is moving toward a clearer understanding of scripture. The historical context allows for an appropriate base for interpretation for the text of the J document. If one understands the social context of a particular document, one can, on one level, appreciate its message, instead of reading it completely in light of one's current circumstances. Further, through understanding this context, one can better know how the J author appropriated the material of his time so his audience would find meaning for their current situation. Now that the J author's kerygma is established, we can analyze, in the following chapter, his Primeval History and how he used the existing cosmogonies[59] and philosophical ideas of the Ancient Near East. Because of his selectivity of material from the Ancient Near Eastern mythologies the connection of J's *kerygma* with the Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies allows for further development of his *kerygma* as will be seen in the following two chapters.

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[58] Wolff's argument here is that the conquest theology is drastically reduced. It is only "I will show you the land." This is because when the J author writes the people already possess the land, therefore a simple "show" suffices.

The Priestly Document in the Primeval History

Since this paper concerns the recontexualization of the Primeval History, the sociopolitical context and the *kerygma* of it must be explicated. Applying the historical critical method to the P document provides one the same benefits of a postmodern interpretation as with the J document, these being an understanding of the social context and an understanding of his *kerygma.* Both of these allow for an easier appropriation into the postmodern era because of their sensitivity to modernism and necessity to provide limitations to interpretation. As with the J account of the Primeval History the textual evidence for the dating of the P account will be analyzed first, we will then move into the socio-political factors around the P account. The P account in the Primeval History consists of Genesis: 1:1-2:3; 6:9-22; 7:8-9, 11, 13-16a, 21, 24; 8:1-2a, 3b-5, 7, 13a, 14-19; 9:1-7; 10:1b-7, 20, 22-23, 31, 32. The dating of the P account was and still is a controversial topic. The P account was previously ascribed to the Second Temple period.[60] It was thought that the prophets did not quote P; therefore, P was written during a time when there were no prophets. It was also thought that the Tabernacle as described in Exodus 26 was a fiction of the second temple because the Ark of the Covenant was transferred to the temple after Moses. The P author used it as a literary device. The third assumption on the part of biblical scholars was that the P author takes for granted the centralization of sacrifice and ritual at the temple. Professor Eduard

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[59] A cosmogony is a story about how the world was created. This differs from a theogony, which is an account of the origin and genealogy of the gods.

[60] The Second Temple period began in 515/516 BCE when the Jerusalem Temple was rebuilt after its destruction in 587 BCE. During the Second Temple period, there were no prophets as there had been during the First Temple period.

Reuss put forth each of these propositions. A refutation of each and a demonstration that the P author knew of J (and E also) will allow one to date the document. The second trouble with this view is that there were two editions of the P document; the first in the court of Hezekiah due to his support of the Aaronid priests, and a second after the Babylonian exile in 587 BCE.[61]

Regarding the assertion that the prophets do not quote P, one only need look to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 4:23 reads, "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens they had no light." The P account of creation is too similar to be a coincidence.[62] Jeremiah is quoting or drawing on it. Jeremiah commonly reverses P's language, such as in the first seven chapters of Leviticus which contain the sacrificial code "...this is the torah of offering...which Yahweh commanded Moses." Conversely, Jeremiah says "...I did not speak to them or command them." This shows a reversal; however it matters not the manner in which Jeremiah quotes P, only that he is quoting him. Friedman's first suggestion of Jeremiah 4:23 seems less convincing because of the intellectual environment of the time. Jeremiah could be drawing on a general concept of creation and merely reversing it, but it does give weight to the argument because of the similarities of the language, but not as much as the latter example.[63] Since it has been

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[61] For this paper I will focus on the evidence of P_1 (the first edition) because the material that I deal with in regards to national myth are from P_1 (i.e the creation account and the flood narrative). For an ananlysis of both, see: Richard Friedman. *Harvard Semitic Monographs 22: The Exile and Biblical Narative.* (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1981), 81-85.

[62] Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 167.

[63] For other examples of P being quoted by the prophets one can also look to Ezekiel 5 and Leviticus 26.

shown that P is quoted by the prophets, it means that he wrote his account earlier than the prophets did. It is highly unlikely that P would base the entirety of his material on the prophets.

The second proposition, that P assumes centralized sacrifice and therefore writes in the second temple period, is also wrong. Again, Scripture is the splinter in the theory. In Leviticus 17, P commands the very centralization that Reuss said that P presumed. "If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox...outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting...he shall be cut off."[64] The place one is required to sacrifice is unambiguous. If one does not come to the tent to sacrifice, they will be cut off. This ordinance does not assume the centralization of ritual; it demands that central sacrifice be done. Friedman suggests that because the P author wrote before the prophets, this demanding of central sacrifice could be placed in the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah (see 2 Kings 18-24 and 2 Chronicles 29-35 for the reforms made in relation to centralization of worship).

The third and final point to be made in relation to the dating of the P document is that the P author had at his disposal the J and E documents and used these to create a document in opposition to them. This conclusion comes from the intense Aaronid character of the P stories. This places the P account around the time of 722BCE, right after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel left the Aaronid priests of the south in charge of the temple.[65] In Exodus when God is addressing Moses the P author will say "Moses and Aaron." "Thus the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron..." (6:13). The E

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[64] Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 171.

author will only address "Moses," "Then the Lord said to Moses..." (6:1). The reason for bringing E into the picture at this point is merely to illustrate that the P author is reacting to the J and E text (written at the same time), since the P is a later composition (See footnote 41 for information on the E author). Therefore, mentioning Moses only is expected in the E account because when David united the kingdom he chose a priest from the north representing the descendants of Moses (E account) and a priest from the south representing the descendants of Aaron (J account). The Aaronid character of the P account also comes forth in his dealings with sacrifice. In the P account there are no sacrifices of any kind until the last chapter of Exodus when Aaron is named High Priest: "and put on Aaron...so that he may serve me as high priest" (40:13). "He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle..." (40:29). In the J account Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob etc. all perform sacrifices much before the end of Exodus.[66] Another sacrificial example comes from the flood narrative and what type of animals Noah is to bring onto the ark. In the P account Noah is commanded: "of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark to keep alive with you..." (6:19). In the J account Noah is commanded: "Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals...and a pair of the animals that are not clean" (7:2). Because of the "you shall bring two of *every* kind" this second example appears thick with evidence in support of the Aaronid thesis. In J only clean animals are to be brought onto the ark. The concern with clean and unclean relates to the need for a sacrifice once the ark has landed

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[65] Ibid.,191.

[66] Ibid.

on dry land. Since the Aaronid priest wished to show the first sacrifice as taking place in Exodus, he leaves it out of the flood narrative.

The strong Aaronid character of the P account situates it in the court of King Hezekiah. Here we begin the socio-political analysis of the P account. During the reign of Hezekiah various reforms occurred in order to centralize the religion of Israel in favor of the southern Aaronid Priests. As previously established, the P account was written as a reaction to the mass migration of people from the northern tribes when it fell to Samaria. When this migration occurred, political upheaval was the result, and the reforms of centralization were instituted. Hezekiah wanted to revise all of the previous practices of the Yahweh cult.[67] Desiring centralization is a common move among rulers of syncretistic kingdoms. The various cults and altars of the incoming foreigners would be hard to control; therefore, centralizing the religion around the current rulers of the temple makes sense.[68] The views of the P document were perfect for implementing these reforms. As discussed above, they call for the centralization of sacrifice and, as a general statement, the establishing of one central practice of the Yahweh religion.[69] The first reform, or one of the first, was the smashing of the iron serpent Nehushtan. "He (Hezekiah) removed the high places...broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made" (2 Kings 18.4). The significance of this reform is that the statue was something "that Moses had made"; thus, this statue favors the tribes of the north and must be

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[67] Albertz, *History of Israel*, 181.

[68] One might compare this to Constantine's desire to centralize the Roman Empire around Christianity because of the empire's syncretistic policies resulting in a pluralistic environment.

[69] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 210.

destroyed to exult Aaron.[70] The reference to the removal of high places again relates to the centralization of the cult because Hezekiah was attempting to remove all places of worship relating to the Aaronid priests. The author of the P document had many enemies not in favor of the Aaronid priests holding authority over the central altar. Another of his reforms offers evidence of the P document in the court of Hezekiah "Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites...everyone according to his service" (II Chronicles 31:2). This move toward separate duties of the priests and Levites again confirms Hezekiah's desire to centralize his kingdom around the practices of the Aaronid priests, because the Levites from the north saw Moses as their model.

Therefore, at the danger of being repetitious, the P account was written in opposition to the influx of various forms of belief coming from the northern kingdom. This was the *kerygma*, of the P account; to centralize religion around the practice of the Aaronid priests. How the P author deals with Moses is significant in relation to this idea of centralization. In principle he was against the people from the north claiming ancestry from Moses, but in practice when he was writing his account he could not simply eliminate Moses from the history of Israel. P's kerygma can be fine-tuned into a diminishing significance of the Moses ancestry and a propagating of the Aaronic lineage. If one looks at Exodus 17:2-7 and compares it to Numbers 20:2-13 one will see this diminishing significance of Moses. Exodus 17:6 says, "...strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink," and Numbers 20:8 says, "Command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out." The verses in Exodus are of J account, while Numbers is the writing of the P author. Both contain a

command by God to commit an action against the rock, but one is to strike it and the other is to command it. The difference lies in what follows the instructions in Numbers 20:12: "But the Lord said...Because you did not trust me...you shall not bring this people into the land." In Exodus the striking of the rock is a blessing to the people and to Moses, but in Numbers it is the most horrific act Moses could have done, so much that he will not lead his people into the promised land. The P author is at work here, because he has changed the story from its earlier account and made the actions of Moses from a blessing into a curse. It seems rather forced, since there does not appear to be anything wrong with what Moses did. Leaving that aside, P's kerygma—that is of keeping Moses in the history, but diminishing his significance to merely leading the people out of Egypt instead of completing the task of bringing them to the promised land—does come through.

Tying it together

This chapter has analyzed the two accounts contained in the Primeval History, that of the J and the P authors. Each wrote in different times under specific conditions. Coming up with a date for each—J before and during the time of the monarchy under David (approx. 1000-922 BCE) and the first edition of P under Hezekiah (between 722-609 BCE)—allowed for the analysis of each in their socio-political contexts. In the case of the J, David was in the process of uniting the kingdom and needed a perceived close relationship with Yahweh in order to validate his rule through the history of Abraham. The limitations that the historical critical method applies relate to J's relationship to

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[70] Friedman *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 210. Albertz *History of Israel,* 180.

David. Since his document was written with the *kerygma* of legitimizing David's rule by showing his relationship to God, an interpretation must include and not go beyond this. The historical data can be used to allow a contemporary society to better relate to their own context by paralleling it with the context of the text. In a postmodern society, someone might find God's use of dust in the second creation account as evidence for environmental conservation. I am not saying that Christians should ignore the environment, but this text does not speak to that issue. The J author was writing a creation account that would most effectively show God as close to his creation, and David being especially close to God.

In the case of the P author, Hezekiah was amid an influx of foreigners from the north, and with them their cult of Yahweh and needed a document that argued for centralization of worship; therefore the P was influential and influenced by the reign of Hezekiah. The P author's *kerygma* was to establish order amidst a disordered environment, to sort through all the influx of refugees and their religious practices and come out with an established, centralized religion. Therefore, when one is interpreting passages of the P document one needs to see them within the bounds of the *kerygma* of the author (which relies on the historical data presented).

In the next chapter, the concept of national myth will be explored and the ties of David and Abraham will be explored, in order to explain its significance as it applies to the Primeval History. What the concept of national myth allows a postmodern interpreter to recognize is the process the biblical authors went through to write their respective documents. What it will suggest is that today, as the biblical authors appropriated specific material, society can appropriate material in the same imaginative

way. Both of the authors have a particular *kerygma* resulting from their socio-political situation and this comes through more vividly when national myth is understood in light of their *kerygma*. The explication of national myth also advances the process of a postmodern interpretation. It affords a process for a postmodern society to appropriate the Primeval History because it encompasses the historical critical of elements of the dynamic views of history, but it also provides the connection to contemporary society that postmodernity needs.

Chapter Three
National Myth

Chapter two discussed the socio-political situation and kerygma of the authorship of the two documents, J and P, in which this chapter analyzes the idea of a national myth. Now, as one recalls, a national myth was defined as a myth (refer to the section on *terminology* for my use of myth) that is constitutive or paradigmatic for a society. What this means is that it makes a person's life make sense. "Paradigmatic" is used as a model or a pattern; therefore, the national myth functions as something after which to model or pattern a society's life.[71] "Constitutive," as being used here, takes on a similar meaning of establishing as law, or establishing the lawful element. The national myth establishes the lawful part of a society's life, or the model of life a society chooses to follow is based on the myth. Thus, the two terms "constitutive" and "paradigmatic" come together in national myth as a model for a society. Now, the beauty of the definition of national myth is that it allows for hermeneutical flexibility. Hermeneutical flexibility allows for various cultures from various contexts to find meaning within a myth—according to my definition this is slightly redundant because this is a predetermined condition of myth and should not be explicated. Because anyone can read a text and find meaning in it by appropriating those elements that explain their life, this facet of national myth allows for the diversity one finds in a postmodern era.

A second characteristic for which this flexibility allows is a relaxing of the historically specific and the solid that I explained as being a danger to hermeneutics as it relates to the Primeval History. National myth opposes this approach in relation to the

supernaturalists and evangelicalists, because it allows one to move past, but at the same time including, the aspect of historical criticism that seeks only to ask and answer the yes/no questions of history. National myth takes these questions into account and appropriates the historical-factual into its overall view, but it is more concerned with how can we, in light of why the creation accounts were written (this is the historical part), make them paradigmatic for today. Therefore, in this sense, national myth serves as a combination of the modern and postmodern because it incorporates elements of historical criticism and the diversity that the postmodern society demands.

National serves a postmodern society well. One, because it combines (as stated above) facets of modernism and postmodernism by incorporating the historical critical into its process. It does this through the authors of the document, in this case the Primeval History. The authors of the primeval history, as shown from the last chapter, had a specific *kerygma* that was affected by their socio-political setting; thus influencing the writing of the document (this is the historical critical part). This *kerygma* comes through in the process of appropriation of the material from the ancient near east and what theological elements they choose to bring out from it. In this process of appropriation the authors are making sense of their current theological situation, they are tying God to their society through the elements they find meaningful. Here is where national myth places itself in postmodernism. It provides a connection between the past and the present that a postmodern society needs. The process of appropriation will be explained below in light of Abraham and David. In the preceding chapter we had a taste

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[71] Definition taken from *Wedster's Collegiate Dictionary: "paradigm"*. (Springfield, Mass: G and C Merriam Co. Publishers, 1943).

of how David used the Abrahamic covenant to legitimize his kingship.[72] This example of Abraham is important, because it allows one to see how a myth concerning the founding of a nation can be used to explain one's current situation. I will select an example that allows for brevity and clarity so that one may understand the concept of national myth without being bombarded with multiple examples.

Abraham and David

As one will recall from in the previous chapter, the J account of creation was written during the unification of the northern and southern tribes under David. One example of that dating was the story of Abraham and how in the J texts Abraham comes from Mamre and Hebron, two major cities in the southern kingdom. One will see how David adopted Abraham, the patriarch of the Israelites, to legitimize his position as king over the united northern and southern tribes.

Yahweh calls Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 to leave his home and his belongings and go to the Promised Land, but Yahweh does not enact a covenant with him until chapter 15. Genesis 15:1: "The word of Yahweh came...Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." The phrase "your reward shall be great" is not an oracle of salvation directed to a definite situation, but a stylized formula, like a royal oracle given to a king promising him protection.[73] The evidence of a royal

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[72] Another example similar to this is the *Enuma Elish* which tells how the Babylonian god Marduk rose to the head of the pantheon. In the Old Babylonian period, under Hammurapi, Babylon moved to the head of the city-states in Mesopotamia; thus Marduk its god moved to the head of the pantheon.

oracle carries with it a possible parallel to the time of David when a customary oracle was given to a new king. The promise of descendants continues in Genesis 15:5-6, "...count the stars...so shall your descendants be...and he believed the Lord." This verse uses the image of the stars to make the promise of descendants to Abraham. The image does not center on power, but on stability and sheer number. Before, "dust" had been used as a symbol of descendants, and now the term "stars" is used; again, stars suggest stability of the kingdom, whereas dust does not.[74]

In verses 7-12, God makes a different kind of promise to Abraham, a promise that guarantees land and possessions but not descendants. The two different sections (1-6 and 7-18) are similar until verse 9. God commands an act in response to Abraham's question of how he will know. It concerns the ritual of covenant making, which, in a similar form, was well known to many ancient peoples.[75] Abraham prepares the animals and as the sun is going down, a deep sleep falls over him. God then passes through the animals in a cloud of smoke. As Fretheim states in his commentary on these verses, the answer to this question comes not only through God's words, but also through his speech. God binds himself to the covenant by going through the act; he establishes the covenant with Abraham, not only for many descendants, but also for land. In 13-16, a reference is made to Egypt oppressing Abraham's descendants, and then the land that they will posses

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[73] Claus Westermann. *Commentary on Genesis: 12-36.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 218. Westermann draws on the similarities with Isaiah 40:10 as evidence for the royal oracle.

[74] Terrance Fretheim et al.,*Commentary on Genesis.* Vol. 1 of *New Interpreter's Bible.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 444.

[75]Gerald Von Rad. *Commentary on Genesis: Old Testament Library.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972, 186.

is given in 18-21. One might therefore assume that this is a covenant to legitimize the inhabiting of the land for the post-exilic community, but this is incorrect. Only under Solomon and the united monarchy does the land, which is referenced in 18-21, reach that size.[76] Therefore, this is a covenant to the monarchy under Solomon that functions to confirm his reign.

The covenant enacted with David does not point directly to David, but rather to his descendants. In 2 Samuel: 1-7, the text sets forth the concept that David wants to build Yahweh a house, but this is not what Yahweh desires. In verses 8-11 Yahweh describes for David what Yahweh has done for David throughout history and that Yahweh will bless his future and make his name great. 2 Samuel: 11 "...moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you house." This promises David that he will have descendants. The word used for *house* has various meanings: palace, dwelling, temple, or dynasty.[77] In any case, the intent of this verse is to assure David that his name will be great and his descendants numerous. The grace shown to David is not just for David, but also for his line; in turn, this promise is not just for the past, but for the future as well.[78] This promise is similar to the promise made to Abraham. Abraham's line is made solid through God's reference to the stars symbolizing the number and the guarantee of his descendants. Paralleling that is the promise to David of a dynasty,

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[76] Frethiem *Genesis*, 447.

[77] Bruce C. Birch et al. *Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel*. Vol. 2 of *New Interpreter's Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1254.

[78] Ibid., 1257.

which also is a guarantee of many descendants for the future. Then in verses 12-17 God promises to David that through his son God will establish the kingdom forever.

As in the covenant with Abraham the kingdom is promised to a son; they both are the youngest sons, Solomon and Jacob. Both of these kingdoms are established after some sort of disorder. In the case of Abraham, it was the disorder of the primeval history. In David's case, it was the division of the tribes, which are now united under the monarchy. In addition, they both point to the future as being promised unconditionally to each of their descendants.

So why would the J author choose to use the Abrahamic covenant as a model for his kingship? Since both of the covenants refer to the promise of land, they will be connected geographically to further substantiate their relationship. A scholar by the name of Alt found a legend telling how the God of Abraham had first revealed himself and became known as the shield of Abraham.[79] Because that land, descendants, and possessions were the main desires of OT people, the God of this nomadic clan promised them just that. When the land that these peoples were settled in became part of the kingdom, naturally their God became the God of the ruler.[80] A key verse in Genesis, 13:18, states, "So Abraham moved his tent and settled by the oaks at Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord." In Genesis 15, Abraham also builds an altar and makes a covenant with God. Alt concluded that there was an Abraham tradition outside of Canaan, and when Abraham makes an altar, this altar is in Hebron,

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[79] Albrecht. Alt. *The God of the Fathers: Essays on Old Testament History and Religion.* (Oxford: 1966), 48.

since Abraham in Genesis 13 plants himself there.[81] However, there is one problem: in order for a God to promise land to a people, the land must belong to that deity.[82] In addition, covenant traditions are often established based on a settled land, not on a nomadic people. Therefore, Abraham must have made a covenant at the altar in Hebron with the God of the people settled there.[83] When the clan of Abraham came to the location at Hebron, they quite possibly could have infringed on the local deity's rights. As said above, a covenant God is thought to posses the land, so in turn, Abraham was infringing on the owner of the land, and now by the approval of this God, the descendants came to occupy Hebron.[84] Therefore, if the people who inhabited Hebron were Yahweh worshippers, it is only natural that the altar in Mamre had Yahweh's name attached to it.

From the above example of the Abrahamic tradition as it was used by the Davidic monarchy, one can see how the concept of national myth functions. The author of the J text took the tradition that was associated with an area of Judah, and through it the tradition passed into the wider locale of Israel during the time of the united monarchy. The author fashioned this myth in a manner that made it meaningful for the current situation of the monarchy under David; he modeled the royal covenant given to David in a universal manner and laid bare David's relationship to Abraham. I would invite a postmodern culture to partake in this process as well. The concept of national myth

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[80] Ronald E. Clements. *Abraham and David: Its Meaning in Genesis 15.*(London: SCM Press, 1967), 27.

[81] Ibid., 26-27.

[82] Alt, 48.

[83] Clements, *Abraham and David*, 27.

allows a society to read a text and appropriate those parts that explain their life for today. This is not to discredit the remaining text, in this case the Primeval History, but to say that those texts that speak to a culture at a certain time can explain situations they are seeking answers to.

[84] Clements here is using A. Alt for a formulation of this conclusion.

Chapter Four
Genesis and National Myth

The last chapter set up the concept of national myth and how authors can borrow from a tradition and use it for their own purposes. The task of this chapter is to bring together the previous two chapters into a meaningful unity. The first chapter analyzed modern thought as it pertained to biblical authority and demonstrated how today we can be sensitive to modernism. The historical criticism put forth in chapter two allows this sensitivity to modernism. From the last chapter, national myth showed how the J author appropriated material from the Abraham tradition to legitimize the rule of David. The concept of national myth from the last chapter will be used to demonstrate how the authors of the two accounts selected their material based on their specific *kerygma*, as they pertained to their specific situations of authorship. When the concept of national myth is applied to Genesis, the author's *kerygma* comes forth more clearly because they select and appropriate theological concepts based on it. This complete process becomes useful for a postmodern culture. I will show below that the authors of the Primeval History selected Ancient Near Eastern material based on their *kerygma's* through the concept of national myth. A postmodern culture can do the same with the Primeval History—that is appropriate elements from it that provide explanations and guidance for the current situation. This is not to discredit the remainder of the text. The Scriptures are dynamic and if they are to speak to different situations, some texts will do this better than others will. This also finds support in postmodernism due to its sensitiveness to diversity. Various societies and cultures can read the Primeval History and use the concept of national myth to appropriate those aspects of the texts they find meaningful.

In the Primeval History, there is a vast amount of material that could be discussed. However, through selectivity of examples I hope to make known my thesis: that the concept national myth can help a postmodern society appropriate the Primeval History and make it meaningful for today. I will be analyzing the creation account in the P and J documents, 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-3:24 respectively. I will not be looking at each in its entirety, because my intentions are neither to analyze entirely all the material present in the Primeval History nor to arrive at a conclusion as to the sources of the Primeval History.

Genesis 1:1-2

> "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Scholars agree that Genesis 1 is the most similar to the myth of *Enuma Elish.* Some scholars, such as Bernard Batto, argue for sole dependence of chapter 1 on the *Enuma Elish.* I think that sole dependence of the P creation account on the *Enuma Elish* is too easy a claim to make. The account does have aspects of the *Enuma Elish* but it does not solely depend on it. One aspect of dependence comes forth in how the pre-creation state is treated in the *Enuma Elish*: I.1-9

> When on high, no heaven had been named, When no earth had been called...When there was nothing...but Godfather Apsu and Mummu-Timat...When no reed hut was erected...no marsh...no warriors...no names had been called.[85]

The sense of creation of both of the accounts is that the earth is empty. In the case of Genesis the earth is formless and void, but in the case of the *Enuma* the earth has nothing on it to make it meaningful. First to be dealt with is the prepositional phrase "in the beginning." The phrase "in the beginning" in the Genesis account appears to say there was nothing before God created or made the earth productive; however, this meaning depends on how one translates the Hebrew text. One can choose to translate it in the typical manner of "in the beginning God created..." or "when God began to create."[86] According to the first translation the verse stands as a complete sentence, but in the case of the second, the insertion of "when" results in verse two being a temporal clause explaining the state of the earth at creation. The common manner in Ancient Near Eastern creation cosmologies is to open with the concept of "when...god(s) began to create." In fact the word *Enuma* means "when," as one can see from the above translation of the *Enuma Elish* "when there was nothing." Further support comes from 2:4 "in the day..." which has the sense of "when" God's creating began to take place.[87]

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[85] All translations of the Ancient Near Eastern mythologies are done by Thorkild Jacobsen in The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

[86] Brevard S. Childs. *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament: Studies in Biblical Theology no. 27.* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1960), 31. Westermann in his commentary on Genesis also opts for this translation.

[87] Nahum M. Sarna. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis.* (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5.

Next topic to be considered is the state of the earth when God begins to create. The implication of translating the first clause as "when" also introduces other Near Eastern aspects within the first two verses. If one takes it as such, then there is a pre-existent matter separate from God, as opposed to the "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth." The second verse is the bitter verse, so to speak, in this equation, because God's existence is not in question here. It is taken as axiomatic and needs no proof.[88] The key words when one is deciphering the state of the earth are "formless" and "void." If one turns to the Near Eastern view in the *Enuma Elish*, one is confronted with a pre-existing matter before God creates, because it merely describes nothing on the earth to make it useful. Therefore, there is an earth present. The first word "formless" most likely has the sense of "desert." David Tusmura makes the argument that the Hebrew word **תהו** *tohu* (formless) comes from the Ugaritic *thw*. For the sake of clarity, he cites two examples of literature where the word is used and comes to the conclusion that the Hebrew and the Ugaritic word are cognates meaning "desert."[89] Secondly, the Hebrew word **בהו** *bohu* (void) has been explained by its Arabic cognate *bahiya*. The term itself only occurs three times in the Bible and is always with *tohu*. The Arabic word means "to be empty" not in the abstract sense, but in the sense of the emptiness of a tent or a house. Therefore, the text in place of "formless and void" could read "an empty desert."[90] This translation would support the situation described in the

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[88] Ibid.

[89]David Tsumura, "The Earth in Genesis 1," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood,* editors Richard S. Hess and David Tsumura (Winon Lake, Illinois: Eisenbrauns, 1994),313.

pre-creation state of the *Enuma Elish* because this state represents an arid desert, a state in which the earth is not productive. Martin Luther held this reading of the terms "void" and "formless," disregarding his view of *creation ex nihilo*. There is a wider significance than can be produced in translation. The words carry the sense of nothing in that there are no roads, no hills, no valleys, no grass, and no men "such indeed was the appearance of the unfinished earth."[91] His view parallels that of the *Enuma Elish*; there is nothing on earth to make it productive.

Another aspect of these verses that relies on Ancient Near Eastern mythology is the word for "deep" **מהת** (*tehom*) in the second verse. This "deep" is the cosmic abyssal water that enveloped the earth. The interesting thing about this deep is that at some points in scripture it is personified, "Loud roars the deep" (Habakkuk 3:10) and in Genesis 49:25 the deep "crouches below."[92] This personification of the deep has scholars thinking that at one time this *tehom* was a proper name and has often been paralleled to the goddess Timat in the *Enuma Elish*. "Godfather Apsu and Mummu-Tiamat, godmother of all living, two bodies of water becoming one." This myth begins, as does the Genesis 1:1-2 account, with the portrayal of a watery chaos, which then proceeds to combine and produce the other gods. In Genesis and other Ancient Near Eastern myths this chaos was part of the pre-creation state. In almost all cases this chaos is overcome and taken over, and then creation can proceed. In the *Enuma Elish* the god

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[90] Here Tsumura goes onto cite examples from the Bible where the phrases appear and comes up with the following translations: *tohu* (desert, desert-like place, or uninhabited) and with *bohu* as in Jer 4:23 means a state of unproductiveness.

[91] Jaroslav Pelikan editor. *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis chp. 1-5.* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 7.

Marduk eventually conquers Timat in a battle; thus he prevails over the powers of chaos and then proceeds to create humans and his temple so the humans can labor for him. Scholars have for some time felt that the struggle of Marduk versus Timat represents the struggle that occurs in 1:1-2, "...the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said..." Through this action God takes power over chaos, allowing him to create. Childs argues for equating "deep" (*tehom*) with the goddess Timat and feels that this is where the P author directly obtained the idea of victory over chaos. I would disagree—not with the presence of Near Eastern mythical influences, but with equating Tiamat with *tehom*—in light of the place of Apsu and Timat in the *Enuma Elish* creation account. In it the two bodies of water represent on orderly approach to the world, not chaos. The two bodies of water are nothing more than what is present besides the nothingness, "Nothing (was present) but...Apsu...Tiamat." The same occurs in Genesis 1:1-2, where the earth and the deep are merely what is underneath the heavens. God creates the earth and the heavens, leaving out the description of the heavens, the earth is "formless and void" and "darkness covers the face of the deep."[93] From this, one can only assume that the deep is the part of pre-creation that is under the heavens. One comes to the conclusion that the author of the P account is drawing on a similar pre-creation state theme, as represented in the *Enuma Elish*, but is not directly procuring material from it. Even though in the next verse God's spirit moves over the face of the water, thus beginning God's control over creation, the "deep" is merely a part of the pre-creation state under heaven.

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[92] Sarna, *JPS Commentary: Genesis*, 6.

[93] Tsumura, *Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories*, 33.

Here I have argued that one should, in light of the Ancient Near Eastern viewpoint of creation cosmologies, translate the opening verse of Genesis as "When God began to create the earth and the heavens, the earth was an unproductive desert." How does this all play into national myth and the author's socio-political setting? Well, in the case of the former, the author is drawing on a common understandable creation motif for his readers. He utilizes the concept of the Ancient Near East so that his readers will understand that he is speaking of creation. The author makes no claims concerning the factuality of his statements. He is merely making theological assertions concerning the importance of creation and Gods role within it. The importance, or difference, becomes evident in verse 3 when God alone says "Let there be light." This separates the story from the Near East: the Hebrew God alone creates and needs no help. Recall that the P author wrote during a time of influx of northern tribesmen who carried with them the concepts imbedded in the J account of creation of God's closeness to his creation; taking and molding his creation from the dust of the ground. Therefore, the P author formulates a mode of creation from the *Enuma Elish* that a) the people would understand because of their familiarity with creation cosmologies and b) that was in opposition to the immanent God of the other creation account. So how do the statements concerning God made in Genesis 1:1-2 help us today in a postmodern setting?

Genesis 2:4-7

> In the day that the Lord made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up…but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

As 1:1-2 drew heavily from the *Enuma Elish,* so the second chapter of Genesis, or the J account of creation, draws heavily from *Abrahamic.* Not only does the J author draw upon *Abrahamic*, but also the author of *Abrahamic* has taken old Summerian traditions and combined them into one myth. Just briefly, *Abrahamic* is a myth about the gods becoming upset with the human race because of all the noise they create while doing their work. Enlil tries to eliminate the humans, and each time Ea-Enki tells a man named Abrahamic how to thwart Enlil's attempt at eliminating them.

As in Genesis 1:1-2, the second chapter begins in the same manner, with a lack of substance on the earth "no plant...no herb..." These are all materials that the earth needs in order to be productive. This description in Genesis is merely a description of the state of the earth that is a desert lacking rain, vegetation, and humankind.[94] The only thing present on the day when creation began is God. Such is the case in *Abrahamic.* The only thing that exists are the gods and the lesser gods (who work for the higher deities).[95] In both cases this causes a problem for the deities. For Yahweh there was nobody to till and work the earth "...no one to till the ground" and *Abrahamic* needs to "...create workers to labor for the divine assembly." The latter is a response to the rebellion of the initial lesser gods who do not want to do the work for the higher deities. The fascinating aspect of each of the myths is how this labor shortage is dealt with. In Abrahamic the crisis was dealt with by Enki and the mother Goddess creating humans from the clay and blood of one of the rebellious lesser gods:

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[94] Sarna *JPS Commentary: Genesis*, 17.

[95] Batto, *Slaying the Dragon*, 47. See also, Richard Clifford. *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible.* (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994), 74.

> Let the divine assembly sacrifice We-ila (the lesser god), Let them bathe in his blood. Let Nintu thin my clay (this is Enki speaking, he is god of the earth) with his blood. Let Nintu mix clay with blood, the human with the divine.

In the case of Genesis, Yahweh has a similar response to the labor shortage, "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." In both cases the humans are made from the clay or substance of the earth because this is to be their duty, to till and work the earth. To add to this, there is a similarity in the manner in which man becomes alive. In the *Abrahamic* the mixing of the clay (the substance of the body) and the blood (the life giving aspect) causes man to live.[96] Conversely, in the J account of creation clay is present, but God breathing into man that causes him to live. This is a very different approach than the author of *Abrahamic.*[97]

In addition, one will notice that each has an original laborer. In Genesis this is Yahweh because prior to the creation of man he has made a garden, "...and walks in the garden at the time of the evening breeze." The term *eden* has also been thought to mean paradise because of the root *dn* previously known in Hebrew and Syriac. According to Batto the root *dn* turned up in Nehemiah 9:25 and most recently in a bilingual inscription from the site of Tell Fakhariyeh dedicated to the storm god Hadad who is praised as "...master of all rivers, who makes *luxuriant* the whole land." What this use of the word *eden* allows one to see is that, similar to the original worker gods in *Abrahamic*, Yahweh served as a worker of his paradise garden, which was not created for man but for himself.

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[96] David Tsumura author, *I Studied Inscriptions form Before the Flood,* ,37.

[97] Batto also notes on pg. 53 that there is a re-creation aspect to both of the myths. In *Atrahasis* the first creation of the lesser gods does not work, as in Yahweh's first creation of only man. In both cases a second worker is added to make the creation function properly.

There are also other views on how the planting of Eden is influenced by Near Eastern myth. It has been compared to a Summerian myth *Enki and Ninhursag* in which the place named Dilmun is described as "a land that is pure, clean, and bright, a land of the living which knows neither sickness nor death."[98] Both of the stories refer to their respective paradises as in the east "planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (2:8) and "a land somewhere east of Sumer."

Striking are the similarities between *Abrahamic*, *Enki and Ninhursag*, and the J creation account. What this establishes is that the concept of a place of paradise was evident in the Ancient Near Eastern mind and not a product of only the author of the J account. The J author was most likely drawing on a variety of concepts due to the lack of a specific garden in the *Abrahamic* myth. Conversely, each of the god(s) in the J account and *Abrahamic* enjoy divine privileges. Yahweh enjoys his garden, and the higher deities enjoy the fruits of the labor of the lesser gods.

I have shown that the author of the J account drew upon Ancient Near Eastern ideals in the case of the creation of man and in the case of Eden, so how does this play into the concept of national myth and the socio-political setting of the author? Recall that the J author wrote under the Davidic monarchy and sought to legitimize David's reign over the northern and the southern tribes of Israel. The J author had at his disposal many of the myths of the Ancient Near East, so why did he choose for his model aspects of *Abrahamic*? He did so because if one seeks to make the current ruler appear strong one will, in ancient Israel, bolster his image by fostering the idea that he is close to and

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[98] S.N. Kramer. *The Summerians: Their History, Culture, and Character.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 147.

ordained by God. *Abrahamic* (along with other myths) contain an image of man's interrelatedness to God, since man in *Abrahamic* was made from part god (the blood) and part earth (the clay). However, the J author changed this idea slightly to fit his purpose. He causes God to breathe into man with God's own breath; the creator of man breathes into man, as opposed to the God in *Abrahamic* who only molds and does not directly contribute anything to the creation. Here we have the author appropriating the concept of creation from another myth and making it his own, or he molds the conceptions in the myth to fit his political situation. The J author needed to show David as being blessed by God so that the people would believe that he had a close relationship to God and that he legitimately held the throne as his lineage with Abraham attested. If one couples the example from Genesis with the example from the last chapter the kerygma becomes clearer.

The discussions of the Ancient Near Eastern influences in the two creation accounts affect a postmodern society in --- ways. First and most obvious, it allows the reader to see what elements of mythology the authors choose to include in their respective documents. Secondly, this also allows the reader to understand which concepts within Ancient Near Eastern mythology the authors found authoritative. They choose their material based on which aspects would speak to the current society and those aspects the society could find explanatory and helpful for their situation.

Chapter Five
Conclusions

One will recall from the first chapter of the paper that I described the modern approaches to scripture as an older way of examining scripture that was born out of the Enlightenment and its manner of thought. This was in an effort to set up a conversation between the modern mode of scriptural interpretation and what I define as the postmodern. This conversation is a necessary step towards a recontextualization of the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11). As Tracy stated (see footnote 1), a classical text is a document that had and continues to have meaning for a society. The Bible, functioning as a classical text, interacts with the reader and the cultural attributes the reader brings to the text. Thus, in light of our current situation the reader will bring to the text aspects of modernism and postmodernism. The break between modern and postmodern is not black and white; modernism (or scientific and rational thinking) still influences our postmodern setting, so it is more various shades of gray blending. So how is the Primeval History to be read in this postmodern era? The concept of national myth is a model that helps a postmodern society understands scripture in light of these new questions. National myth, defined above as a myth that is paradigmatic and constitutive for a society's existence, can help one in understanding Primeval History and not fall into the trap of historical solidarity and specificity. At the same time, the category of national myth helps make rational sense of the Primeval History even for a postmodern world.

The dangers—in the sense that they do not do not allow for a recontextualization—of the modern approach to scripture is that these approaches allow for historic specificity and solidarity. Now, in a postmodern society the old ways of viewing scripture are being questioned (i.e. supernaturalist, evangelicalist, analogical and

ecclesial developmentalist) allowing for a new approach to scripture to come forth. The previous chapters were set up in a manner to lead the reader through the postmodern hermeneutical process. Chapter two, the historical critical chapter, finds support in the some respects from the modern views. The supernaturalists and the evangelicalists defend historical criticism only if it provides continuity between the biblical narrative and the historical reality (this rarely occurs because of the discrepancies in scripture with the historical reality). The dynamic views support historical criticism because it provides evidence for the changing dynamic character of culture. Because of its support of historical criticism, modernism (those elements that support a critical analysis) contributes in this respect to the postmodern understanding of the primeval history.[99] The historical-critical step is necessary amidst the postmodern celebration of diversity by providing an original context for interpretation today. Historical criticism provides one with a way to link the present to the past by establishing the past. This was the goal of chapter two, to bring out the *kerygma*, through historical criticism, of the authors to provide a means for starting the analysis so that the reader can discern how they should read the text. It can relate the setting of the text to a current situation making it useful.[100]

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[99] One should not forget the tendency of the dynamic views of history to locate historically the meaning of the text due to their emphasis on the development at various points in time of culture.

[100] Andrew Vaughn. "Is Biblical Archaeology Theologically Useful for Today?—Yes, A Programmatic Proposal." In *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology—The First Temple Period*. Edited by Vaughn and Killebrew (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 415. Vaughn refers to this as placing limitations on the text. This means that one will not interpret a text for a current situation unless it applied somehow to a similar situation in the past (from a conceptual standpoint).

However, a postmodern theory cannot end here on what in the modern era seemed the solid rock of historicity.[101]

The third and fourth chapters further the concept of *kerygma* through national myth. In the first, the concept of national myth eliminates the aspect of modern history that only finds meaning in the historical elements of the text. The concept of national myth allows one to appropriate a tradition (i.e. the Primeval History) by combining the historical critical (inclusive of *kerygma*) and postmodern needs to find meaning in the tradition as the authors J and P did with their traditions (creative history). National myth is chapter three was shown to provide a means of authoritative history. What I mean by this is that the J author in relation to the story of Abraham took this tradition, finding it authoritative and used it to help his audience understand their current situation. One sees that national myth is the result of drawing upon tradition, or parts of it, that speak to the current situation. This is one of the demands of a postmodern society; a connection with the story needs to be discovered so a relation can be formed. National myth also breaks down the barrier of solidarity through authority. For example, the J author had a certain intent or *kerygma* when he wrote his account of creation and found certain aspects of mythology to describe his society's situation, but today someone might understand this story in a different light due to the different circumstances. The creation accounts in Genesis with national myth provide an elucidation of this concept by combining the historical critical and *kerygma.*

The two creation stories cited in chapter four provide a platform to combine the socio-political analysis of chapter two and the concept of national myth from chapter

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[101]Vaughn, *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology*, 416 Also cited in, Jodock,

three; thus combining the modern and the postmodern modes of interpretation. The postmodernist can converse with modernism, in terms of the Primeval History, by understanding the *kerygma* of the author through historical criticism. The conversation begins with the modernists, more narrowly the dynamic views of history, with the changing historical contexts and how those play into the meaning of the text allow for boundaries to interpretation. The limitations are placed by understanding the original context of the text, as best as one can with the current data (documentary and archaeological) so that the weight of the message today can remain as analogous as possible to the original. That way, the text will not be interpreted in such a way as to misrepresent the meaning as one understands it today from the historical data. Further, the concept of national myth allows the postmodernist to be in conversation with the modernist on another level, because it entails both modern and postmodern ideals. It is sensitive to locating meaning solely through the critical/historical; the concept of national myth takes into consideration the original context by incorporating *kerygma* of the authors of the Primeval History. The historical (*kerygma)* unpacks the author's culture and imparts to the reader the beginnings of an understanding of the text. The *kerygma* is important for national myth because reveals why the authors choose to appropriate certain elements of Ancient Near Eastern mythology (see chapter 4).

Lastly, national myth provides a model for the postmodernist in that the postmodernists can appropriate or sample those aspects of the Primeval History because national myth allows one to understand the author's *kerygma.* The concept of national myth supplies the postmodern with a process of appropriation in order to make the text

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Church's Bible, 131.

meaningful for today. It allows the postmodernist to feel connected to the text in that a society can find authority in the author's intent as reveal by the criticism. A postmodern society or church may go through the hermeneutical process as follows. First, the historical context of the authors should be understood. The J and the P author's wrote in different periods with dissimilar *kerygmas*, and therefore may be read differently. The P author wrote during a time of disorderly religious practices due to the influx of aliens from the northern tribes and desired order. The J author wrote under the Davidic monarchy and sought to legitimize David's rule buy locating him in a close relationship with God. At this juncture the concept of national myth becomes relevant. In order to propagate their respective *kerygma's* the authors drew upon tradition that was familiar to them and paradigmatically explained their society's current situation. Here is the second step in a postmodern interpretation. A postmodern society or church can participate in this same process in regards to the Bible. A society should understand the original *kerygma* of the text and then when a text speaks to the current situation look to it for guidance. The very same process that the authors of the Primeval History went through can serve a postmodern society well. Therefore, in light of the *kerygma* of the authors of the Primeval History one seeking order amidst disorder might look to Genesis 1 for guidance due to its theological statements concerning God's power and control over his creation. One might also couple this with the second creation account given the J author's desire to connect David to God in such a way that they feel close to God (having been molded from the dust of the ground), but also are aware of God's power over his creation.

This is neither to discredit the rest of the biblical text in terms of the Primeval History, nor the rest of the Bible. A society may only find certain aspects of Genesis 1-11 useful at times. I do not see a problem with this. The Bible, functioning as a classical text, will not change, but being that it follows culture through its changes, certain texts will speak to situations better than others will. One should look to where one finds explanations for the current situation, for other texts will be useful at other times.

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