

# Preface and Acknowledgements

The following commentary is a guided tour of some of the most interesting and discussed chapters of the Bible. Much like a tour guide informs his group about particular features of an often-visited city, this guide to Gen 1–11 discusses aspects of the biblical text that I know the most about and find particularly fascinating. In this case, many other such commentary/tours of Gen 1–11 have been and will be done, and this tour makes no pretense to cover the text comprehensively.<sup>1</sup> Instead, in agreement with the focus of the overall series, I focus on ways that the Bible might be illuminated through a combination of close reading and attention to the original literary contexts of the texts under discussion. In addition, I have tried to bring together diverse worlds and forms of biblical criticism together in this commentary. I attend in the historical exegesis portions to a mix of international perspectives on the philology and formation of the texts discussed, and I include at least some pointers (in the Synthesis) to how such discussions might interact with non-historical approaches to the biblical text.

Having brought this commentary to a close, I have ever more respect for my predecessors who have done the same. I keep learning interesting things about these texts, and so there is never a point of obvious closure. Moreover, as one works on a commentary of this sort over years, the successive stages of learning necessarily end up reflected in diverse diachronic levels of the commentary itself. I and my editors have done our best (perhaps like the editors of Gen 1–11 itself) to bring the whole into a coherent unity. Nevertheless, I hope remaining imperfections can stand as an important reminder that this guide offers an imperfect and partial, but hopefully suggestive mix of ways one might understand the texts in Gen 1–11.<sup>2</sup> It does not, contrary to some concepts of biblical commentary, purport to have mastered the text.

This work would be more imperfect if I had not had the aide of numerous people. I have presented and gained invaluable feedback on my work as I presented it to two seminars on Gen 1–11 at Union Theological Seminary (Fall 2015 and Fall 2019) and two seminars at NYU (Spring 2017; Spring 2019 host Liane Feldman), two meetings of the Columbia University Hebrew Bible seminar (September 2015, May 2019), two Colloquiums on Old Testament at Heidelberg and Tübingen (January 2016; hosts Jan Gertz and Erhard Blum), a conference on scribalism and orality at the College de France (May 2016; host Thomas Römer), a workshop on scribal-

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- 1 In accordance with the focus of this book on commenting on Gen 1–11, the concluding index is selective, aimed primarily at offering guidance to a few topics, Hebrew expressions, specific citation of non-biblical texts, and (for the index of biblical texts) discussions of pericopes in Gen 1–11 that occur outside of the main commentary sections focused on those pericopes.
  - 2 In particular, I must stress that, though I have found comparison of Gen 1–11 with cuneiform texts particularly productive, I have depended throughout on others with specialist knowledge of those texts. I hope this commentary provides a useful entry into such comparison, but I have cited editions and other publications by such specialists and hope that readers use these to verify, correct, and further explore the theses advanced here.

ism and Genesis in Koblenz (February 2016; host Michaela Bauks), a faculty and doctoral student gathering in Zurich (July 2018; host Konrad Schmid), and multiple presentations at both the International SBL (2017) and Annual SBL meeting (2016, 2018, 2019). Along the way, I gained specific help from more people than I can gather and name here. Nevertheless, the following is an alphabetical list of some of the individuals who provided extra comments on my work and/or private copies of theirs: Fynn Adomeit, Joel Baden, Walter Bühner, Simeon Chavel, Colleen Conway, John Day, Paul Delnero, Albert DePury, Liane Feldman, Dan Fleming, Aron Freidenreich, Jan Gertz, Esther Hamori, Robin ten Hoopen, Ki-Eun Jang, Ed Greenstein, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, Konrad Schmid, Stephan Schorch, Mark Smith, and (for discussion of theological matters) my Union Seminary colleagues John Thatamanil and Andrea White.

Above all I thank Erhard Blum for his extraordinary help. Initially he read and discussed my work across a series of visits to Tübingen in Winter 2016 (funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung) and Summer 2017 as we planned then to write this commentary together. Even when he had to withdraw as co-author, he continued to provide generous help up to the final days of the commentary's completion. Along the way I have become ever more convinced that Erhard Blum is one of the premier Hebrew philologists and exegetes of our age. This commentary, especially the translation, is immensely better as a result of his input, even as I must stress that he did not read the final whole and would not agree with some of the positions adopted in it.

One thing that both Erhard Blum and my wife, Colleen Conway, encouraged me to do was to publish my work on Gen 1–11 in two books. My initial work on this commentary ended up being too long to be included in a single volume, and my diachronic discussions of precursors to Gen 1–11 had become too technical. Therefore, I made the decision to include those more technical, diachronic discussions in a separate monograph, *The Formation of Genesis 1–11*, which was published this year (2020) by Oxford University Press (New York). I still treat diachronic issues in this commentary, but the separate publication allowed me to treat them in a more summary way.<sup>3</sup> I apologize in advance to some readers who then must consult a different book to find more detailed coverage of issues that interest

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3 Because I treat diachronic issues in both books and advance similar positions, some overlap between them is inevitable. I have avoided exact duplication wherever possible, but there are some instances where I deemed certain formulations to be useful to both works and mere shift in wording for the sake of variation seemed superfluous. In addition, I note here several existing and forthcoming article-length publications where I pursue topics relevant to this commentary: “Looking at Historical Background, Redaction, and Possible Bad Writing in Gen 6,1–4: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis,” *Biblische Notizen* 181 (2019):7–24; “Standing at the Edge of Reconstructable Transmission History: Signs of a Secondary Sabbath-Oriented Stratum in Gen 1:1–2:3,” *Vetus Testamentum* 70 (2020):17–41; “Scribal Dynamics at the Beginning of the Bible: The Case of Genesis 1–4,” in *Oral et écrit dans l'Antiquité orientale: les processus de rédaction et d'édition. Actes du colloque organisé par le Collège de France, Paris, les 26 et 27 mai 2016*, ed. Thomas Römer, Hervé Gonzalez and Lionel Marti, OBO (Leuven—Paris—Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2020), 31–50; and “On the Meaning and Uses of the Category of ‘Diachrony’ in Exegesis” [in honor of Erhard Blum], in *Exegetik des Alten Testaments*, ed. Joachim Krause and Kristin Weingart, FAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

them. At the same time I hope that this move thus makes this particular volume more accessible to those who do not need as much technical background.

I must stress that most of this commentary is a synthesis of others' work. Of course, I have attempted through footnotes to indicate particular places where I have gotten ideas. Nevertheless, as a result of reading and composing this commentary over a number of years, there are places where I have absorbed something from somewhere and forgotten my source. In particular, I found myself coming back again and again to certain interpreters of Genesis that I found to be unusually good readers, even when I also disagreed with aspects of their positions. They are cited in the relevant parts of the commentary, but I list here some that I found to be particularly useful and interesting resources to be in dialogue with: studies of all of Gen 1–11 by Umberto Cassuto, John Day, Jan Gertz, Benno Jacob (the original German edition of his commentary), Andreas Schüle, Horst Seebass, Gordon Wenham, and Markus Witte; and studies on specific parts of Gen 1–11 by Samuel Abramsky (Gen 10), Norbert Clemens Baumgart (on Gen 4, 6–9), Walter Bühner (especially Gen 1–3; 6:1–4 and 11:1–9), Frank Crüsemann (Gen 2–3, 4 and 10), Karel Deurloo (Gen 4), Ron Hendel (text-criticism of Gen 1–11), Henning Heyde (Gen 4), Annette Schellenberg (Gen 1–3), and Odil Hannes Steck (on Gen 1 and 2–3). If nothing else, I hope the reader discovers in my footnotes some more guides like these to enrich their reading of Gen 1–11. It should be emphasized that I give full information on many materials that I cite at the locus where those materials are discussed, but (as per the style of the commentary) the reader must consult the selective bibliography at the end of this commentary for bibliographic information on items that are cited by author and short title across disparate pages.

The Kohlhammer staff, particularly Florian Specker and Jonathan Robker, have provided fantastic support as I have worked to complete this project. In addition, I must thank my fellow IECOT/IKAT authors. Some paved the way for this commentary by writing earlier volumes in the series, while others provided especially helpful feedback on draft sections of this commentary at IECOT author-editor workshops in November 2017, August 2019 and November 2019. In particular, I benefited from the careful, frank feedback of Christl Maier at those workshops, and feedback from Carolyn Sharp prompted me to engage postmodern and (consciously) ideological readings of Gen 1–11 more than I otherwise would have.

I conclude with three mechanical notes and one dedicatory one. As per the style of the series, I use abbreviations from John Kutsko et al., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Therefore, I do not provide a separate list of abbreviations here aside from noting here my frequent use of Gesenius<sup>18</sup> to refer to the eighteenth edition of the *Gesenius Handwörterbuch*.<sup>4</sup> In addition, even though the Hebrew names in Gen 1–11 often diverge from their common equivalents, I have used standard English forms of biblical names as they generally appear in the Bible (following the NRSV), and I default to the most common form of characters whose names change across the biblical narrative, e.g., Abraham rather than Abram. Along the way, I frequently use the convention of using an asterisk (\*) to indicate a citation of a verse range that is substan-

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4 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament begonnen von D. Rudolf Meyer bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Herbert Donner*, 18th edition (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

tially, though not completely, made up of the texts that I mean to point to. For example, I sometimes refer to priestly elements embedded in Gen 10—Gen 10:1a, 2–7, 20, 22–23, 31–32—with the shorthand Genesis 10\* after I have specified those elements at least once in the prior discussion.

Finally, I dedicate this book to a person who will not be aware of its existence for quite some time: my new (and first) granddaughter, Kaia Comorau, who was born on Oct. 17, 2019 in the later stages of finishing this work. While the outset of the present decade (2020) seems quite fraught and the outlook for earth’s life unclear, Kaia’s birth and that of others in her generation stand as symbols of human commitment to the future. Genesis 1–11 is a story of first births, and it articulates both that potential and certain challenges for human life on this earth. I dedicate this critical analysis of Gen 1–11 to Kaia and other little ones in a prayer for them finding ways to flourish together. To quote a poem by Buddhist teacher and author, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel “For All Beings”:<sup>5</sup>

May all beings be cared for and loved,  
 Be listened to, understood and acknowledged despite different views,  
 Be accepted for who they are in this moment,  
 Be afforded patience,  
 Be allowed to live without fear of having their lives taken away or their  
 bodies violated.  
 May all beings,  
 Be well in its broadest sense,  
 Be fed,  
 Be clothed,  
 Be treated as if their life is precious,  
 Be held in the eyes of each other as family.  
 May all beings,  
 Be appreciated,  
 Feel welcomed anywhere on the planet,  
 Be freed from acts of hatred and desperation including war, poverty, slavery,  
 and street crimes,  
 Live on the planet, housed and protected from harm,  
 Be given what is needed to live fully, without scarcity,  
 Enjoy life, living without fear of one another,  
 Be able to speak freely in a voice and mind of undeniable love.  
 May all beings,  
 Receive and share the gifts of life,  
 Be given time to rest, be still, and experience silence.  
 May all beings,  
 Be awake.

Let us turn now to look at stories of earth, family, and awakening in Gen 1–11.

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5 The poem “For All Beings” comes from Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, *Tell Me Something About Buddhism: Questions and Answers for the Curious Beginner* (Newburyport, MA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2011), 116–117. I thank Zenju Earthlyn Manuel ([www.zenju.org](http://www.zenju.org)) for permission to quote this poem.

# Introduction to the Commentary

## *Initial Overview of the Contents and Literary Patterns in Gen 1–11*

The first eleven chapters of Genesis offer a picture of the origins of their audience's present world—e.g., their agricultural way of life, family relationships, distinction from and relation to animals, and the backgrounds of social groups (e.g., Kenites, Canaanites) and famous foreign loci (e.g., Babylon, Nineveh). The general lack of focus in these chapters on specifically Israelite figures and explicitly Israelite places distinguishes these chapters from the rest of the book of Genesis, indeed from Exodus and other historical books that follow.<sup>1</sup> At the most, the figure of Shem among Noah's sons is identified here as Abraham's direct ancestor (Gen 11:10–26), and he is particularly connected in Gen 10:21 with a group—"all the sons of Eber"—that seems specially related to, though not identical to the "Hebrews" with which Israel is later identified.

This primeval history is split by the great divide of the flood narrative. Indeed, the Jewish liturgical calendar separates Gen 1–11 into two liturgical portions that are read in the first two weeks of the annual Torah-reading cycle: an initial pre-flood portion labeled "in the beginning" from Gen 1:1–6:8 and then a subsequent liturgical reading labeled "Noah" that covers Gen 6:9–11:32.

The text of Gen 1–11 itself contains explicit structuring elements: a series of labels, starting in Gen 2:4a, that designate the following text as concerning the "descendants" (תולדות) —or, by extension, "generations" for Gen 2:4a—of figures featured in the preceding text. Here again the flood features prominently, with both post-flood labels (Gen 10:1; 11:10) stressing the post-flood character of the descendants that they focalize. As indicated in the following overview, most of these labeled subsections feature an element toward their conclusion that anticipates the focus of the following one:<sup>2</sup>

### **In the beginning (Gen 1:1–6:8)**

[God's seven-day creation of heaven, earth and living beings in them (Gen 1:1–2:3)]

"These are the generations of heaven and earth" (Gen 2:4a): first humans along with animals (2:4b–4:26)

Anticipation of the first parts of the following Adam-to-Noah genealogy (Gen 4:25–26)

"This is the book of the descendants of Adam" (Gen 5:1a): Adam-to-Noah genealogy (5:1–32), demigods (6:1–4)

Anticipation of flood destruction/Noah rescue (6:5–8)

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1 In this respect, Gen 1:1–11:9 resembles the book of Job.

2 The latter point is made in Richelle, "Structure littéraire de l'Histoire Primitive," 4.

**Noah (Gen 6:8–11:32)**

“These are the descendants of Noah” (Gen 6:9a): Story of Noah/flood (6:9–9:17), Noah and his sons (Gen 9:20–27)

Anticipation of post-flood humanity from Noah’s sons (Gen 9:18–19)

“These are the descendants of Noah’s sons ... after the flood” (10:1a): The expansion and spreading of post-flood humanity (Gen 10:1–11:9)

“These are the descendants of Shem” (Gen 11:10a): From Shem to Israel’s ancestor, Abraham (11:10–26)

Anticipation of the Abraham story (Gen 11:26)

Though the beginning of the “descendants of Terah” section in Gen 11:27–32 is included in the “Noah” liturgical reading, these verses are not actually part of the primeval history. Instead, they begin the story about Abraham and his family that extends into the following chapters. Therefore this commentary will not cover this section, reserving its treatment for the IECOT volume on the Gen 12–50 ancestral materials.

The orientation of the primeval history around creation and flood means that the story of primeval origins clearly distinguishes the present, experienced world of the audience from the world as God initially created and intended it. Thus, Gen 1–11 does not just present contemporary realities as an immutable, divinely-created order. Instead, these chapters depict present reality as the result of a complex process leading from 1) God’s creation of an initial “very good” order (Gen 1:1–2:3, also 2:4–25) that was then compromised by human actions (Gen 3:1–4:24) to 2) a flood destruction and partial revision of the initial creation order (Gen 6:5–9:17). This depiction starts with an account of God’s ideal creation in Gen 1:1–2:3 and the initial story of  $\Upsilon\eta\omega\eta\varsigma$ ’s creation of an initial human, the first animals, and the first woman as the human’s true counterpart and helper (Gen 2:4–24). These two texts, complexly related and distinguished in numerous respects, both explain some aspects of present reality (e.g., distinct components of the present cosmos [Gen 1], the strong bond of a young man to his wife [Gen 2:24]) and also present ideal “counterworlds” (German *Gegenwelten*) to the audience’s present, where, e.g., humans peacefully dominate animals (Gen 1:26, 28–30; 2:18–20) and survive on plant life (1:29–30; 2:8–9, 15–16).

Starting in Gen 3, however, human disobedience and violence disrupts this ideal picture, and subsequent narratives show other ways that humans act and God must react. In this way, the primeval narratives of Genesis explain non-ideal elements of human life—such as animosity with animals (Gen 3:14–15), hard labor for food (Gen 3:17–19, 23), and violence (Gen 4:8)—as the result of primeval events involving the first humans. Nevertheless, the stories of Adam and Eve in Eden and Cain and Abel are much more complex than the simple “crime and punishment” model that is often applied to them.<sup>3</sup> These pre-flood stories depict the gradual emergence of the first humans from a state of childlike [and animal-like] lack of shame (Gen 2:25), gullibility, and naivete (Gen 3:1–6) into the hard work and hard choices of life

3 Cf., for example, the influential commentary of Westermann, “all narrative passages of Gen 1–11 are concerned in some way with crime and punishment” (“in den erzählenden Bestandteilen von Gen 1–11 geht es in allen hier aufgenommen Erzählungen in irgendeinem Sinn um Schuld und Strafe”; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 66 [abbreviated translation taken from the ET 47]).

outside the garden. This certainly involves human mistakes and misdeeds, partly instigated by other non-human powers—disobedience prompted in part by the snake Gen 3:1–6 and fratricide associated with sin lurking as a demon in Gen 4:7–8. Nevertheless, humans also gain important adult capabilities along the way, such as godlike “knowledge of good and evil” (3:7, 22), and God does not only respond to their actions with anger, but also with compassion (Gen 3:8–24; 4:9–15). We see this mix of divine responses also in the divine response to marriages between the sons of god and human daughters in Gen 6:1–2. There YHWH imposes a 120-year lifespan limit to humanity (6:3), one that both a) allows the potentially immortal children produced by such marriages to live unusually long lives and yet b) reinforces the mortality of such divine-human offspring. Amidst all this, there is little to indicate that God will impose a world-destroying flood on all life. At most, there are subtle anticipations of the coming of diluvian destruction in the names for the last five primeval ancestors in Gen 5 and their age notices.

The following flood narrative echoes and reverses aspects of the Gen 1 and 2 creation stories. To start, Gen 6:5–6 echoes Gen 2 in describing God’s regret at having made (עשה) humans whose formation (יצר) is thoroughly evil (cf. יצר in 2:7) and then Gen 6:11–12 echoes and contrasts with Gen 1 in describing the corruption of the “very good” earth that was created at the outset (cf. Gen 1:31~6:13). God then goes on to destroy all of humanity except Noah (7:6–8:19) before promising not to bring another flood (8:20–9:17). The status of the flood as an uncreation of God’s initial creation is highlighted by parallels between God’s creation of the heavenly plate in Gen 1:6–8, God’s opening of its windows to create the flood in 7:11, and God’s closing of them in 8:2.

The text in Gen 9:18–11:9 then continues the meditation on human possibilities and limits seen in Gen 3:1–6:4. For example, much as the Eden story in Gen 2–3 presented a fundamentally ambivalent picture of human acquisition of wisdom (3:7, 22) and concomitant condemnation to hard labor (Gen 3:17–19, 23–24), the story of Noah combines a picture of him discovering comfort from that hard labor through farming grapes from the ground (Gen 5:29; 9:20–21a) and his accidental descent into a drunken nakedness reminiscent of nakedness in Eden (Gen 9:21b; cf. 2:25; 3:7) and subsequent imposition of a curse (ארר) on his grandson (Gen 9:21–25; cf. Gen 3:17–19). And, as partially indicated in the table below, various other aspects of the post-flood stories in Gen 9:20–11:9 resume themes of human division (e.g., Gen 4:1–26 // Gen 9:25–10:32) and threat to the divine-human boundary (e.g., Gen 3:22; 6:1–2 // 11:1–4) that were seen in the stories leading up to the flood:<sup>4</sup>

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4 The correspondences between these parts of the primeval history are discussed in Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, 236–38. See the following commentary for more nuance on the themes of these texts.

**General (un)creation, three pairings of the nuclear family, divine-human boundary, peoples**

Initial Divine Creation of Humans and the Biome that They Rule (Gen 1:1–2:3)

First Human Couple: End of Nakedness, Start of Farming, Reproduction (Gen 2–3)

Establishment of firm divine-human boundary (of mortality)

First Sibling Pair: Echoes of Eden (Gen 4:1–16)

Kenite Peoples (tents, pastoralists, metalurgists) (Gen 4:20–22)

Sethite Substitute for Abel—Calling on YHWH's Name (4:25–26)

Reinforcement of Divine-Human Boundary (Gen 6:1–4)

Divine Uncreation and Recreation of the Cosmos (6:5–9:17)

Parent-Children Pairing: Echoes of Eden—Farming, Nakedness, and Curse (Gen 9:20–27)

Population of Earth from Noah's Sons (Gen 10)

Spatial Reinforcement of the Divine-Human Boundary (Gen 11:1–9)

(11:1–9 provides background to spread of earth's population in Gen 10)

The flood and post-flood stories (Gen 6:5–11:9) thus unfold themes from the pre-flood section (Gen 1:1–6:4) in two main ways. First, they echo specific elements of Gen 2:1–6:4, describing the continuing development of human farming, unfolding of ethnic divisions, and featuring themes of nakedness, curse, and God's concerns about preserving the divine-human boundary. Second, the flood narrative represents a temporary interruption in the emergence of the current world order, echoing elements of Gen 1–2 in the process of describing God's undoing and revision of God's initial creation work.

## *Major Themes in the History of Interpretation of Gen 1:1–6:4*

The above-surveyed texts in Gen 1–11 have played such an important role in Jewish and Christian interpretation that adequate treatment of that history requires a book (or books) in itself. Therefore, this commentary does not provide a sustained treatment of this area. Nevertheless, I note below a few central foci in the history of interpretation of the texts in Gen 1–11 as a preface to this commentary's diachronic exploration of their formation over time and synchronic reading of the distinct diachronic levels embedded in them.

I start by noting a marked contrast between the Hebrew Bible's general lack of specific reference to stories in Gen 1–11 and the broad and deep reflection on these chapters from the Second Temple period onward. Aside from more general references to creation in a number of biblical texts, the main potential reflections of Gen 1–11 in other Hebrew Bible texts occur in a brief mention of "the garden of YHWH" in Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3, reference to Noah in Ezek 14:14, 20 and Isa 54:9, use of genealogical information from Gen 1–5 in 1 Chr 1:1–4, and a likely reflection on the Gen 1:26–28 picture of God's creation of humans to rule in Ps 8:5–9 (ET



8:4–8; cf. also Ps 136:8–9).<sup>5</sup> In addition, as will be discussed more later, there may be some ways that the garden of Eden story of Gen 2:4–3:24 is responded to or otherwise appropriated in Psalm 82:7 and texts in Ezekiel on the expulsion of a proud figure from the garden of God/“Eden” because of his pretensions to divinity (28:11–19) and of a great world tree in the garden of God/“Eden” (31:3–9).

This general lack of reflection on texts in Gen 1–11 in the rest of the Bible (excepting Ezekiel) stands in marked contrast to the relatively frequent interpretations of Gen 1–11 in Second Temple Jewish literature and even more intense reflection on these chapters in the Christian theological tradition. For example, several early Jewish texts clarify the background of God’s judgment and the world-destroying flood of Gen 6:5–7:23 by seeing the stories of Gen 2:4–6:4 against the background of Hellenistic and Roman-period traditions about demonic powers and fallen angels.<sup>6</sup> In addition, early and later Jewish readers added new semi-divine characters to the mythical world of Gen 1–11—taking the snake in Gen 3 to be Satan (e.g., 4 Macc. 18:7–8; Rev 12:9; Apoc. Mos. 16:4; 17:4; possibly Wis 2:24), the “sons of God” in Gen 6:2, 4 as rebel angels producing evil and violent giants who then caused the flood (e.g., 1 En. 6:2–7:5; Jub. 5:1–5), and the figure of Nimrod in Gen 10:8–12 as a giant, evil rebel warrior who led the project to build the tower in Babylon (11:1–9).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the character of Enoch, who only briefly appears in Gen 5:22–24 as a proto-Noah character who “walked with God” (cf. Gen 6:9), became a much more important figure in several early Jewish texts—moral example, mediator between heaven and earth, sage, and revealer of heavenly secrets (Sir 44:14–16; Ps.-Philo, LAB 1:16; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.85; cf. Heb 11:5).<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, interpreters endeavored to elaborate on the Bible’s brief positive comments about Noah, Gen 6:8, 9; 7:1), developing stories of his righteous attempts to warn his contemporaries of the oncoming flood (Sib. Or. 1:127–131, 149–151; Jos. *Ant.* 1.74) and starting to see him as inaugurating a set of “Noachide laws” about murder and other topics that apply to humanity as a whole (cf. Gen 9:2–6).<sup>9</sup>

Later rabbinic and mystical Jewish interpretation of these chapters have varied widely, depending on the theme under discussion. Overall, interpreters often have tended to reinterpret various parts of the Gen primeval history through the lens of the flood narrative’s report of the pervasive, irremovable evil of humanity

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5 In addition, it should be noted that some have found more subtle reflections of the Genesis primeval history in other Hebrew Bible texts thought to post-date it. See, for example, the overview and judicious evaluation of proposals for links of Ecclesiastes and Gen 1–11 in Katharine Dell, “Exploring Intertextual Links Between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 3–14.

6 Annette Yoshoko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20–120.

7 For an overview of early Jewish and Christian interpretations of Nimrod (including a minority of positive depictions) see Van der Toorn and Van der Horst, “Nimrod,” 16–29. Note also later Jewish and Christian readings of Cain as the offspring of Satan in 1 John 3:10–12; Gos. Phil. 61:5–10; Tertullian, *Patience* 5:15; and Tg. Ps.-J. 4:1. For overview of these and other interpretive traditions, see Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, esp. 98–100, 147, 180–81. See below for more on the giants tradition in the book of the Watchers.

8 VanderKam, *Enoch and the Apocalyptic Tradition*; idem. *Enoch, A Man for All Generations*.

9 For a broader, more differentiated survey, see Lewis, *Interpretation of Noah and the Flood*.

(Gen 6:5–7; also 8:21). For example, an initial stratum in the Enochic Book of the Watchers (1 En. 6:2–7:5) is the earliest tradition to link the evil of the flood (Gen 6:5) with the preceding story of marriages of sons of God and daughters of humanity (Gen 6:1–4) by telling how those marriages produced violent giants whose violence caused the flood.<sup>10</sup> The above-noted tradition about evil Nimrod built on that picture, seeing the “warrior” (גבור) Nimrod of Gen 10:8–9 as a continuation of the line of evil, giant “warriors” noted in Gen 6:4. This interpretation then was complemented by a broad tendency to attribute grave sexual sins to Noah’s son, Ham (Gen 9:22–23), and see the building of Babylon (often seen as Nimrod’s work) as an illustration of the persistence of human evil in the post-flood period (Gen 11:1–9; cf. Gen 8:21).<sup>11</sup> As will be discussed later in this commentary, these negative strands of interpretation of Gen 1–11, particularly those focused on semi-outsider figures in the story world (e.g., Cain, Nimrod), have been used by some to justify exclusion, colonization, or enslavement of perceived others, especially people of African descent, who are often identified with those figures.

Another broader trend to note is the way that the flood narrative’s depiction of the evil of humanity in Gen 6:5–7 appears to have influenced early Jewish and, particularly, Christian readings of the Garden of Eden story (Gen 2–3). We may already see this in the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the Paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus (4Q422 1:11–12), which seems to link the “evil inclination” (יצר ... רע) of humanity mentioned in Gen 6:5 to rebellion of the first human in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3).<sup>12</sup> This idea of original human evil, undergirded by a reading of Gen 2–3 in light of Gen 6:5–7, then appears even more explicitly in Paul’s reading of the Garden of Eden story as an account of the “fall” of all of humanity into sin and death (Rom 5:12–21; also 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45–49).<sup>13</sup> The Eden story served for Paul as a crucial background for his broader theology about Jesus’s salvation of the entire world, both gentile and Jewish. Though there were other stories in Scripture, such as the golden calf incident (Exod 32:1–14), that depicted sins by Israel, Paul focused on the Gen 3 story of disobedience in Eden because of its potential to illustrate a *universal* human deficiency—something suffered by both gentiles and Jews—to which Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection could stand as a universal

10 This commentary on Gen 6:1–4 below joins earlier studies (e.g., Uehlinger, *Weltreich und ‘eine Rede’*, 566–68; Kenneth Pomykala, “A Scripture Profile of the Book of Watchers,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 263–84; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36, 81–108* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 166–68) in concluding that the giants tradition in the book of the Watchers (1 En. 6:2–7:5; cf. 4Q201 [4QEnoch<sup>a</sup> ar]) represents an interpretive adaptation of the Gen 6:1–4 rather than reflecting an earlier non-Biblical tradition.

11 For summary of relevant literature and analysis of the frequently racist and colonialist interpretations of the story of Noah and Ham, see Knust, “Canaan’s Curse.” For survey of early Jewish interpretation of the Babel story, see Phillip Michael Sherman, *Babel’s Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*, BibInt 117 (Boston: Brill, 2013).

12 See Torleif Elgvin, “The Genesis Section of 4Q422 (4QParaGenExod),” *DSD* 1 (1994): 180–96 [here 187] for discussion of questions surrounding this locus.

13 For discussion of issues and scholarship surrounding interpretation of Genesis in 4Q422 and a linking of this retrospective reading to early Christian texts like Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22, Smith, *Genesis of Good and Evil*, 24–27, 110–12 (notes).