TIMOTHY D. FINLAY

The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible

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Preface

This book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation at Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, 2005. The subject arose out of a weekly informal meeting, conducted by Tammi Schneider, in which Hebrew Bible students would read and discuss Genesis. When we came to Gen 21:1–3, we puzzled over the expressions narrating that YHWH "visited" Sarah, that Sarah conceived and bore a son in his old age, and especially the tortuous expression, "And Abraham called the name of his son, the one born to him, the one which Sarah bore to him, 'Isaac'" (Gen 21:3). I volunteered to examine what the standard formulae for these expressions were, and when I reported my initial findings the next week, it was agreed I had a dissertation topic.

With regard to the dissertation itself, the research librarian Betty Clements was invaluable, as she had been throughout my studies at Claremont, but my biggest debt of gratitude is to my doctoral committee – Tammi Schneider, Kristin De Troyer, and above all my advisor, Marvin Sweeney – for their help and encouragement throughout. Dr. Sweeney was especially generous with his time for each chapter of my dissertation.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank certain other college instructors at Ambassador College, Azusa Pacific University and at Claremont for their role in my intellectual development: James Herst, Mark Kaplan, Herman Hoeh, David Wainwright, K. J. Stavrinides, Lynn Losie, John Hartley, Leslie Bergson, James Sanders, Stephen Davis, D. Z. Phillips, Zayn Kassam, and James Barr.

At Claremont, I have been fortunate to count as classmates and friends Ahuva Ho, Brad Reed, Kevin Mellish, Matt Thomas, David Frisk, and Andrew Purvis, among many others. Claremont Graduate University has been exceptionally generous in awarding me fellowship money; and I have been blessed by the support of the Worldwide Church of G-d, especially the Glendora congregation. Particular thanks are due the Leesons, Hanways, Earles, and Joneses, as well as my sister Cherie and the Fox family. Beyond this, I am most deeply indebted to my first Bible instructors, my mother, Jean Finlay, and my father, David Finlay.

In this book, I have used the consonantal forms YHWH, 'LHYM and G-d instead of vocalizing the divine name, even in quotations by other people. As a Christian in Claremont, I have gained immensely from attending the Hillel synagogue and this is one way I can show respect to my Jewish colleagues.

I am very grateful to Hermann Spieckermann and Henning Ziebritzki for accepting this work as a volume in the *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* series. The publishing team at Mohr Siebeck have been wonderful to work with, and I

especially want to thank Mark Smith who read an earlier manuscript and made numerous valuable comments to improve the work.

Last, and most importantly, I wish to thank my long-suffering wife, Eileen, first for her many sacrifices enabling me to complete my dissertation in a timely manner, and second for her enormous help in reformatting the pages of the revised work to produce a camera-ready copy. This book is dedicated to you, my darling.

Claremont, 14 August, 2005

Timothy D. Finlay

Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

1. Introduction to Birth Reports

In a 1983 article that proposes "type-scene" as an alternative to the standard form-critical notion of *Gattung* (usually translated "genre") as the basic approach to recurrent pattern in Biblical narrative, R. Alter illustrates his idea by analyzing what he calls "the annunciation type-scene."[1] According to Alter, the annunciation type-scene is a literary convention of the ancient Hebrews to narrate the birth of a hero through a fixed sequence of three motifs: initial barrenness, divine promise, and the birth of a son.[2] Alter then analyzes the individual annunciation type-scenes that culminate in the births of Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, and the unnamed son of the Shunammite woman, paying special attention to how the variations in the way these three motifs are worded helps further the narratological aims of that particular type-scene. Alter's article successfully demonstrates how a simple literary pattern can be used in inventive ways to produce narratives with a variety of distinct styles and interests. Yet, compared with his discussion of the other two motifs, Alter devotes little attention to how the birth-of-a-son motif is narrated and his analysis is much the poorer for it. Nor is Alter unusual in this respect – indeed, despite considerable scholarly attention to the announcement of birth,[3] there has been a dearth of scholarship regarding the brief reports concerning the births themselves. In this monograph, we shall conduct the first thorough analysis of these "birth reports," as the units are called in form-critical circles.

Because birth reports occur not only in annunciation type-scenes but in other genres also, we shall also examine the relationship of birth reports to the larger literary complexes containing them, thereby addressing the original problem tackled by Alter – that of recurrent pattern in biblical narrative.

The term "birth report" itself has not been adequately defined within form criticism, and includes units with different levels of complexity. For example, S. De Vries labels as birth reports both "And Epha, the concubine of Caleb, bore Haran, Moza, and Gazez" (1 Chr 2:46a) and "And he went into his wife; and she

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[1] R. Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Proof* 3 (1983): 115–130.

[2] Ibid., 118–120.

[3] For a list of scholarship on this subject, see chapter 5 where the topic is discussed at length.

conceived and bore a son. And he called his name, 'Beriah,' because disaster was on his house" (1 Chr 7:23).[4] De Vries defines "notice" as a "very brief report similar to a simple statement."[5] Under this definition, it is better to give 1 Chr 2:46a the more precise label "birth notice" and reserve the term "birth report" for more complicated narratives, such as 1 Chr 7:23. We shall compile all the units narrating births in the Hebrew Bible and categorize them into birth notices and birth reports. Then we shall examine these birth notices and birth reports to establish frequent formulations and patterns of these narrative units.

Anticipating some of our results, we shall see that the birth notice is usually some variant of one of the following two formulae[6]: *wattēled (PN) (lô* or *lĕPN) ʾet-PN**;[7] or *wĕPN*$_1$ *yālĕdâ ʾet-PN*$_2$*.[8] Furthermore, we shall see that the birth report typically consists of an introductory setting and a birth report proper, which in turn consists of a conception element, a birth element, a naming element, and an etiological element. These elements are frequently "notices" but sometimes two elements are combined into one notice. On other occasions, an element may take considerably expanded form. The patterns and standard formulae for each of these elements will also be discussed in the next chapter.

The remainder of our study is devoted to examining the relationship between individual birth notices/reports and the larger narrative text-types in which they are embedded. This task lies at the heart of the form-critical enterprise:

> "Language does not merely consist of an innumerable series of literary types with a clear division between each. . . . There are component literary types, which build up into complex literary types. Formulas in particular, which are the smallest units of speech, are nearly always linked to or are part of greater literary types. . . . Each exegesis must therefore not only define the literary type, but also discover whether this literary type is associated with other, perhaps complex, literary types."[9]

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[4] S. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, (FOTL 11; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 37, 79. The first report contains only one finite verb, but the second uses four verbs to describe various actions taken by two different people.

[5] De Vries, 432.

[6] O. Steck defines a formula as "a short, fixed word association" and gives as one of his examples the clause "I am YHWH (your G-d)" which appears on numerous occasions for the self-presentation of YHWH (*Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology* [tr. J. Nogalski; SBLRBS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998], 101). This example shows that there can be a limited amount of variation (the presence or absence of "your G-d") even in a formula. We shall use the term "formula" the way Steck does, and use the term "formulation" for the precise wording of a given instance of a formula. A particular notice, then, can be expressed with one of a number of different formulae, and each of these formulae can vary in the precise formulation. Steck also distinguishes genre from formula, although it is not clear if this is on the grounds of fixity or of size.

[7] Here, *(PN)* refers to the mother if mentioned, *(lĕPN)* refers to the father if mentioned, and *ʾet-PN** refers to the child or children born.

[8] Here, *PN*$_1$ refers to the mother and *PN*$_2$* refers to the child or children born.

[9] K. Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method* (trans. S. M. Cupitt; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 23–24. Note that Koch, unlike Steck, sees "formula" as the most basic level of a genre. Our approach regards "notice" as the most basic level of a narrative genre and that a particular notice may be expressed by using a formula.

Birth reports can be found in several different genres such as genealogies, narratives discussing prophetic symbolic actions, and annunciation type-scenes. The precise form of any particular birth report is shaped by at least three factors: the basic pattern of the birth report genre, modifications to that pattern caused by the genre of the literary complex within which the birth report is embedded, and the specific concerns of that literary complex itself.[10] It is the second factor – the ways in which a complex genre modifies the form of one of its component genres – that provides a key link between form-criticism and narrative-criticism.

Again, we anticipate some of our results: In a genealogical list, a birth report is typically a simple birth notice that combines the birth and naming elements into one formula; in an annunciation type-scene, it typically has an introductory setting in which the deity intervenes to enable a childless woman to conceive; and in a narrative that discusses prophetic symbolic actions, it typically has a birth element in which G-d commands that the child be given a certain name (rather than the mother naming the child) and an etiological element in the form of a prophetic oracle that involves a word play on the child's name.[11] Because our enterprise revolves around the concept of genre or text-type, our first task is to define our approach to this problem.

2. The Form-Critical Problem: Determining a Text-Type

The Understanding of Gattung by Gunkel and Other Early Form Critics

J. Barton gives a good working definition of how *Gattung* has been understood by form critics:

"A *Gattung* or genre is a conventional pattern recognizable by certain formal criteria (style, shape, tone, particular syntactic or even grammatical structures, recurring formulaic patterns) which is used in a particular society in social contexts which are governed by certain formal conventions."[12]

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[10] Of course, there is a fourth factor than can affect the precise wording of any given birth report: random variations. Even as we "press" the text for maximal meaning by interpreting marked deviations from the standard pattern of birth reports as indicating deliberate authorial shaping of the narrative, we remain aware of the dangers of over interpretation. On some occasions, we shall conclude that a slight deviation from a standard pattern is just random; on other occasions, we shall qualify our contention of authorial shaping with comments expressing the appropriate degree of caution.

[11] Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will be devoted to birth reports in genealogies, annunciation type-scenes, and narratives concerning prophetic symbolic actions, respectively. The birth reports in chapter 6 appear in a variety of larger text-types so that we do not have sufficient data to analyze how those text-types affect the pattern of the birth report. In this chapter, we shall primarily employ narrative criticism, although we shall also use intertextuality and structuralism as methods of approaching certain texts.

[12] J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1996), 32.

A *Gattung* can refer to oral or literary modes of communication.[13] And it can also refer to patterns that occur in large or small units of communication. For example, G. Lohfink writes:

"There are the four Gospels, there are letters and collections of letters, there are books of prophecy and documents of revelation, instructional writings and books of wisdom; there is a whole hymnal – namely, a collection of 150 psalms – and finally there are the so-called historical books. . . . These, in essence, are the genres [*Gattungen*, throughout] of the books of the Bible. But it is very important to note that these large genres contain within themselves the most varied smaller genres. Thus modern exegesis distinguishes in the Bible between historical account, saga, myth, fairy tale, fable, paradigm, homily, admonition, confession, instructive narrative, similitude, parable, illustrative saying, prophetic utterance, juridical saying, wise saying, proverb, riddle, speech, contract, list, prayer, song."[14]

In practice, early form critics focused on these smaller text units. The discipline of form criticism in biblical studies begins[15] with H. Gunkel.[16] In his commentary on Genesis, Gunkel presupposed J. Wellhausen's literary source division of the Pentateuch into J, E, D, and P,[17] but sought insight into the pre-literary stages of the biblical material.[18] Gunkel isolated short, self-contained units that he felt would most closely resemble the oral forms of the individual

[13] The term "genre" in literary studies usually refers to written works, beginning with Aristotle's discussion of epic, drama, and lyric as the three basic genres. W. Doty observes that New Testament scholars distinguish *Gattungen*, which are literary types, from *Formen*, which are pre-literary ("The Concept of Genre in Literary Analysis," *SBL Proceedings* 2 (1972): 418.

[14] G. Lohfink, *The Bible: Now I Get It!* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), 64.

[15] For a survey of work done from Aristotle onwards regarding genres, and of Gunkel's special contribution to the subject of biblical genres, see M. Buss, "The Study of Forms," in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (ed. J. Hayes; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 1–56. See also M. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism in its Context* (JSOTSup 274; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

[16] W. Klatt divides Gunkel's career into three stages (*Hermann Gunkel: Suseiner Theologie der Religionsgeschichte und zur Entstehung der formgeschichtlichen Methode* [FRLANT 100; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969]). In the early period, much of Gunkel's work was tilted toward the New Testament with work on the effects of the Holy Spirit and the significance of apocalyptic literature. This was followed by a *religiongeschichtliche* period. In Gunkel's major work of this period, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), he argues that the protological accounts in Genesis 1–3 and the eschatological visions in Revelation both rely on Babylonian mythical traditions that had a long period of oral transmission. Klatt dates the beginning of the *literaturgeschichtliche* period to Gunkel's commentary on Genesis, and certainly this is where Gunkel develops more consistently his form-critical methodology. However, the emphasis in *Schöpfung* on the earlier oral transmission was clearly a step in this direction.

[17] J. Wellhausen gave the classic formulation of the "documentary hypothesis" (*Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* [Berlin: G. Reimer, 1886]; *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des alten Testaments* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1899]), but he built on the earlier work of J. Eichhorn, W. Leberecht, M. De Wette, K. Graf, and others. For a summary of the history of source criticism, see P. Viviano, "Source Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (eds. S. McKensie and S. Haynes; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 35–57. We give our own approach to source criticism later in this chapter.

[18] H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (tr. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997).

stories that circulated among the people before being joined together in longer narrative cycles. Gunkel began categorizing these units into different *Gattungen.*

According to Gunkel, the most important category in Genesis was the *Sage*, which has been translated in English as both "saga" and "legend."[19] The *Sage* was transmitted orally, frequently included the miraculous and improbable in its subject matter, and its purpose was inspiration and entertainment. Gunkel subdivided the category of *Sage* into mythological (mainly in Genesis 1–11), patriarchal (mainly in Genesis 12–36), and heroic (mainly in later books). The patriarchal *Sage* was further subdivided into historical, ethnographic, and etiological types. Individual *Sagen* became grouped together at the oral level into chains, such as the Abraham-Lot chain or the Jacob-Laban chain, and later written collections added further *Sagen* or other *Gattungen*[20] (again mainly originally oral genres) so that there was a full-scale saga-cycle around the major figures of Abraham and Jacob.

Gunkel's final aim was a history of Israelite literature that would essentially be a history of the genres that were used in ancient Israel.[21] It was at this later

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[19] For a discussion of the debate concerning this term, see R. Neff, "Saga," *Saga, Legend, Fable, Tale, Novella: Narrative forms in Old Testament Literature* (ed. G. Coats; JSOTSup 35; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 17–32.

[20] Other genres include the legend (German *Legende*, as opposed to *Sage*, which was translated "legend," in the translation of Gunkel's introduction to Genesis) and the novella. The legend originally refers to a story about a saint that was read on the saint's day. Gunkel uses the term a bit more loosely and classifies Abram's rescue of Lot in Genesis 14 as a legend. The term in Old Testament form-criticism is usually connected with a narrative about a person who performs a deed that is both wonderful and exemplary. The *Legende* is therefore more oriented toward edification whereas the *Sage* is oriented toward entertainment. See R. Hals, "Legend," *Saga, legend, fable, tale, novella: narrative forms in Old Testament literature*, (ed. G. Coats; JSOTSup 35; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 45–55. The novella – which is primarily exemplified in Genesis by the Joseph narrative – is a longer and more sophisticated genre than the *Sage*, and Gunkel believed that this genre belonged to a later stage in Israel's history.

[21] H. Gunkel, "Die israelitische Literatur," in *Die orientalischen Literaturen* (ed. P. Hinneberg; Kultur der Gegenwart I/7; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1906), 51–102. See also Klatt, 166–191. For a discussion of the subject of genre within literature in general, see K. Hempfer, Gattungstheorie: Information und Synthese (UTB 133; Munich: W. Fink, 1973); A. Fowler, "The Life and Death of Literary Forms," *New Literary History* 2 (1971): 199–216; idem, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Models* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); idem, *A History of English Literature: Forms and Kinds from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); H. Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982); J.-M. Schaeffer, "Literary Genre and Textual Genericity," in *The Future of Literary Theory* (ed. R. Cohen; New York: Routledge, 1989); M. Gerhart, "The Dilemma of the Text: How to 'Belong' to a genre" *Poetics* 18 (1989): 355–373; T. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). Hempfer discusses genre models as reading or writing conventions within a framework of linguistic competence and performance; Fowler notes, among other things, that literature itself is considered a genre, and that the concept of genre is quite fuzzy; Dubrow gives a brief critical history of the subject; Gerhart tries a non-deconstructive method of avoiding prescriptivism; Schaeffer gives a structural model, as opposed to an essentialist one, of how to determine a text's genre; and Beebee argues that literary genres are merely ways of using texts.

stage in his career that Gunkel coined the term *Sitz im Leben* (setting in life).[22] J. Barton comments,

"Form critics discovered that there were *Gattungen* embedded within the written form of the text that must originally have had a *Sitz im Leben* in which they would have been spoken. And the form critics contention was that we could not understand such portions of the text properly if we tried to read them within literary conventions; for the conventions within which they were able to have meaning were essentially the conventions of the social life of ancient Israel, with its great variety of speech-forms appropriate to different public occasions, both formal and informal."[23]

Gunkel also employed his form-critical methodology, analyzing genre and setting, in the areas of prophetic literature[24] and psalms.[25] He then reworked his Genesis commentary and discussed the folktale in the Old Testament.[26] Gunkel's students, S. Mowinckel[27] and A. Alt,[28] emphasized the concept of *Sitz im Leben* in their work and later generations of form-critical scholars continued this trend, so that in the 1960s, K. Koch was able to proclaim,

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In this work, we mainly limit our inquiry into understandings of genre within the field of biblical studies.

[22] For discussions of the concept of *Sitz im Leben*, see Koch, 3–5; G. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1–9; A. Campbell, *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 5–9.

[23] Barton, 33.

[24] H. Gunkel, "The Prophets as Writers and Poets," in *Prophecy in Israel* (ed. D. Petersen; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; London: SCM, 1987), 22–73. As in his commentary on Genesis, Gunkel argues for an evolution from short units to extended ones. The oldest units of prophetic style are short enigmatic sayings, the next stage has prophetic statements of a few lines, only later did the prophets learn to compose speeches of about a chapter in length, and coherent organization at the book level begins with Ezekiel.

[25] H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, (HKAT II/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926); Herman Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, (HKAT supplement; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933).

[26] H. Gunkel, *The Folktale in the Old Testament* (tr. M. Rutter; Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987). See also J. Wilcoxen, "Narrative," in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (ed. J. Hayes; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 57–98 for a discussion of Gunkel's developing understanding of *Sage*, and of the relationship of *Märchen* (folk tale) to *Sage*, in Genesis.

[27] S. Mowinckel, *Psalmenstudien I–VI* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1921–1924); idem, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2 vols., (trans. D. W. Ap-Thomas; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962). In volume II of *Psalmenstudien* and in volume 1 of *Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Mowinckel argues for a large number of "enthronement psalms" that have their setting in the pre-exilic Autumn festival, drawing parallels initially from the Akkadian literature concerning the Akitu festival and later from the Ugaritic literature concerning similar motifs regarding Baal.

[28] A. Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, (trans. R. Wilson; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 101–171, Alt distinguished two main types of laws, each of which had a different setting. Apodictic law, consisting of categorical commands and prohibitions, was part of the unique religious heritage of the ancient Israelite tribes from their desert origins. Casuistic law, formulated with a protasis stating the nature of the infraction and an apodosis stating the penalty incurred, was common to numerous Ancient Near Eastern societies and had its setting in the secular courts after the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan.

"Form criticism is only a few decades old, but already it has made its impact: no biblical text can be adequately understood without a consideration of the setting in life of its literary type. And vice versa: no way of life in ancient Israel and in the early Christian community can be exhaustively detailed without a thorough study of all literary types relating to it."[29]

Nor was Koch limiting his comments to biblical literature. Koch argues that "all literature falls into groups with fixed characteristics of form," with each group performing a particular function within a particular setting.[30] Koch further argues that although a genre can persist for a short while after its original life-setting has disappeared, "no literary type remains in existence for long after it has been entirely severed from its point of origin."[31]

Another way in which form-criticism developed after Gunkel is in the extension of the method from small isolated units to large-scale narratives. G. von Rad began by arguing that Deut 26:5b–9; 6:20–24; and Josh 24:2b–13 were early creedal statements of YHWH's actions on Israel's behalf; then he described how the J author, in a setting in the Davidic court, supposedly expanded the content of these creeds into a fully-fledged narrative; and finally he described the further literary development culminating in the "Hexateuch."[32]

Similarly, M. Noth developed his theory that the books of Deuteronomy through Kings formed a single unit – which he titled the "Deuteronomistic History" – from an examination of several short, self-contained units with similar style and function.[33] Noth also continued Gunkel's attempts to uncover early pre-literary tradition in the Pentateuch. He argued that in a *Grundlage*,

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[29] Koch, *Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, 33.

[30] Ibid., 26–27. Koch discusses the advertising circular as having a setting in the commercial realm of modern civilization and whose function is to establish a market for a company.

[31] Ibid., 33. A similar view is taken by Fowler: "Genres, like biological species, have a relatively circumscribed existence in space and time" ("Life and Death," 207).

[32] G. von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, (trans. E. Trueman Dicken; London: SCM, 1984), 1–78. Von Rad's original article appeared in 1938. The "Hexateuch" is a term for the books of Genesis-Joshua. In his later *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. Stalker; 2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1962–1965), von Rad extends his concept of salvation history, *Heilsgeschichte*, still further so that in effect it becomes the most important principle in understanding Old Testament theology. This is in contrast to W. Eichrodt, who had made "covenant" the center of his two-volume *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Baker; 2 vols.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961).

[33] M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, (trans. E. W. Nicholson; 2nd ed.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981). The original German edition appeared in 1943. Noth, 17–26, observed that at key junctures in this portrayal of Israel's history, an important figure gives a speech which summarizes the history (Joshua 1, 23; 1 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 8) and that the narrator directly gives summaries in Joshua 13, Judg 2:11–23 and 2 Kings 17. These passages contain vocabulary, diction and theological viewpoint reminiscent of Deuteronomy, and Noth postulated that the books of Deuteronomy through Kings formed a united whole. The purpose of this history was to explain why Israel and Judah had been exiled: disobedience to the Deuteronomic law, especially regarding the commands to avoid the Canaanites and their religious practices, to worship only YHWH, and to worship at the one site that YHWH chose (Noth, 134–145).

upon which J and E drew independently (and which may have been oral), the five major themes of the Pentateuch – for Noth, these were the promise to the patriarchs, the Exodus, the revelation at Sinai, the guidance in the wilderness, and the guidance into the land – had already been united.[34] But each theme within the *Grundlage* also contained traditions which developed over time. As Gunkel had developed criteria for determining the *Gattung* of a unit, Noth now developed criteria for distinguishing early traditions from later ones.[35]

In *The Promises to the Fathers*,[36] C. Westermann builds on the work of Gunkel, von Rad and Noth, and examines the interaction between concern or intention and genre by examining the many narratives in Genesis whose main concern is some type of promise – promise of a son, promise of numerous descendants, promise of land, or a combination of these – and raises the question of whether there is a genre of "promise narrative." The form-critical Genesis commentaries of Gunkel, von Rad,[37] and Westermann[38] all provide insights that will inform our study.

Alter's Concept of Type-Scene

In contrast to the notion of *Gattung*, Alter's concept of "type-scene" is specifically a literary convention. Alter takes this term from Homeric scholarship where it refers to "certain fixed situations which the poet is expected to include in his narrative and which he must perform according to a set order of motifs – situations like the arrival, the message, the voyage, the assembly, the oracle, the arming of the hero, and some half-dozen others."[39] Alter then describes the pattern of the visit type-scene in Homer's works: "a guest approaches; someone spots him, gets up, hurries to greet him; the guest is taken by the hand, led into the room, invited to take the seat of honor; the guest is

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[34] M. Noth, *A History of PentateuchalTraditions* (trans. B. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 38–62.

[35] B. Anderson summarizes these criteria as follows: early traditions occur in small units with concise style; they are attached to places and often conclude with an etiology of the place name; they are "cultic" or "theophanic" in nature; they deal with anonymous, typical characters; they stand out awkwardly in the present form of the text; and they are discrete – bracketing of units is secondary ("Introduction: Martin Noth's Tradition-Historical Approach in the Context of Twentieth-Century Biblical Research," *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* [trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972], xxiii–xxv.) For a summary of how form criticism and tradition-historical criticism coalesce in the work of Noth, see R. Di Vito, "Tradition-Historical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (ed. S. McKensie and S. Haynes; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 94–97.

[36] C. Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives* (trans. D. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). The German original dates from 1964.

[37] G. von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961).

[38] C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); idem, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985); idem, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary* (trans. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

[39] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 50.

enjoined to feast; the ensuing meal is described."[40] Alter claims that this approach is relevant for biblical studies because "there is a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical heroes that are analogous to Homeric type-scenes in that they are dependent on the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs."[41] In addition to the annunciation type-scene, Alter lists the following: "the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance; the testament of the dying hero."[42]

Alter deliberately contrasts his approach with that of Gunkel:

> "Through the hypothesis of *Gattung* Gunkel and his followers have sought to determine the so-called life-setting of the various biblical texts, a line of speculation that six decades of investigation have shown to be highly problematic – just as problematic as the concomitant enterprise of dating the texts by identifying an evolution from simple to elaborate versions of the *Gattungen*. In contrast to a *Gattung*, a literary convention may in some instances reflect certain social or cultural realities but is bound to offer a highly mediated, stylized image of such realities: in the literary convention, culture has been transformed into text, which is rather different from form-criticism's tendency to insist on the function performed by text in culture."[43]

Alter points to some definite weaknesses regarding how form criticism has been practiced: the assumption that every *Gattung* must have a *Sitz im Leben*; and the assumption that only small, simple units can yield early tradition. Alter also accuses form criticism of being too preoccupied with "a drive to identify common formulas in different texts" compared to recognizing the individuality of the narratives:

> "One of course needs to recognize the formulas if they are there in order to see what is going on in the text, but as I shall try to illustrate, what is finally more significant is the inventive freshness with which formulas are recast and redeployed in each new instance."[44]

Alter's attention to the individuality of each narrative – and especially its relationship to its larger literary context – yields many excellent insights and can be applied to text-types other than annunciation type-scenes. However, his own approach has limitations as well. His acknowledgment of the need to recognize formulae is rarely accompanied by a comparison of the relevant texts to establish what those formulae are. Another difficulty is that Alter seems to

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[40] Ibid., 51.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid. This emphasis on themes and motifs contrasts with the genre analysis of many biblical scholars. For example, Doty writes, "Generic definitions should focus upon the formal, structural composition of literary works rather than upon thematology. It may be necessary to keep characteristic motifs in view, but identifications of subject matter are of dubious value, since related subjects may be expressed in several different genres" ("Concept of Genre," 439). Our approach on this question contrasts with Doty and is closer to the views of Alter, and also S. Chapman, in considering content and themes relevant to the discussion of genre.

[43] Alter, "Convention," 119.

[44] Ibid.

have merely replaced *Sitz im Leben* with literary convention as a universal tool. But even if we grant that all of the various type-scenes Alter postulates are the result of literary conventions, this only accounts for a portion of the narrative books, and a considerably lower proportion of the entire Hebrew Bible. It would certainly be possible for some other text-types to be primarily shaped by the conventions of the social life in ancient Israel.

The Program of R. Knierim and the FOTL Series

Alter's point regarding the *Sitz im Leben* had been anticipated within the discipline of form criticism itself. In 1973, R. Knierim stated,

> "After a genre has been identified with great effort on morphological grounds, those studies continue to look for a setting at any cost, postulating, creating, fabricating one even if – sometimes admittedly – there is no evidence for it; and all that simply because the methodology demands a setting without which a genre would be unthinkable."[45]

Knierim recognizes that the coherence of genre and setting "can no longer be upheld in the sense form criticism has done" and advocates that "the relationship between genre and setting must remain an open one."[46] Knierim further comments that "there is reason to believe that individual texts are dependent not only on typical settings, but at least as much on the specific situations to which they owe their existence."[47]

With regard to Alter's point about the evolution from simple to elaborate genres, the work of A. Parry[48] and A. Lord[49] made untenable the earlier form-critical assumption that oral compositions were necessarily short, learned by memory and recited, and form-critics appropriately included these findings in later studies.[50] Further, Knierim challenged the practice of assuming that the

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[45] R. Knierim, "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Interpretation* 27 (1973), 448.

[46] Ibid., 449.

[47] Ibid., 465.

[48] A. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971). This volume contains articles by Parry from the 1920s onwards. At first, Parry argues that standard Homeric epithets were traditional and formulaic rather than original to Homer. Parry later learned that when Yugoslavian *guslars* performed long poems before live audiences, each performance was improvised by combining standardized verse-units within an open-ended overall structure. Parry saw similarities between these standardized verse-units and the Homeric epithets and concluded that Homer's poetry was oral in nature.

[49] A. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1970). Lord had done field work with Parry in Yugoslavia, and after Parry's death, Lord continued doing field work there and published the material that he and Parry had gathered. Lord also refined Parry's method for determining whether a piece of poetry had its origin in oral literature.

[50] See, for example, B. Long, "Recent Field Studies in Oral Literature and their bearing on OT Criticism," *VT* 26 (1976): 187–98; M. Floyd, *Oral Tradition as a Problematic Factor in the Historical Interpretation of Poems in the Law and the Prophets*, (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1980).

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