Focus on the Family in Genesis:
Domestic Dysfunctions and Scriptural Narrative Ethics

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I

Scriptural narrative offers ethical, moral instruction. At one level, the testimonies and actions of God himself along with the authoritative narrator explain ethical and moral attitudes and behavior. At another level, narratives teach ethics of redemptive righteousness and covenantal law by means of moral and immoral, ethical and unethical, and even ethically ambiguous thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of human characters.

While the long scriptural narratives from Genesis through Acts tell the redemptive story as their primary function, they constantly offer instruction in righteousness as a real and entirely interrelated purpose. This study focuses on ways Genesis functions for theological and ethical guidance through manifold family dysfunctions.

David L. Petersen began an address on "Genesis and Family Values" by pushing against the claims of biblical bases by certain American family lobbying organizations including Focus on the Family. With what might be considered understated humor Petersen decided to look for family values in the Bible. He discovered several values in Genesis at odds with those touted by evangelical based family lobbying organizations.[1] Social conventions in Genesis, however, do not become ethically normative simply by their place in scriptural narration.

This study proceeds by interacting with a small set of proposals concerning two challenges: Genesis tells stories peppered with immorality and they are set before Sinai law. In response, the thesis stated above is illustrated by case study on Judah's troubled family life in Genesis 38 (chosen for its compact showcasing of a range of scriptural narrative ethical challenges). Three appendices follow: Appendix A catalogues narrative ethical judgments on domestic dysfunctions across Genesis; and Appendices B and C summarize aspects of ancient concubinage and our Lord's teaching in Matthew 19 which effectively excludes polygamy and concubinage.

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[1] For the SBL presidential address, see David L. Petersen, "Genesis and Family Values," *JBL* 124.1 (2005): 5-23. The values Petersen found in Genesis include an expansive view of family in contrast to nuclear family, patrilineal endogamy favoring "polycoity" (sexual access to multiple wives) to produce heirs including even the husband's half-sister and a pair of sisters and their slaves, and nonviolent resolution of family conflicts.

II

The commonplace disparagement of ethical value in Genesis because of misbehaving protagonists as well as the narrative's unique biblical setting before the provision of Mosaic law requires attention. Although studies on Old Testament ethics were fairly rare a half a century ago, they have become many in recent decades. A large part of these take philosophical, ideological, thematic, and/or theological approaches.[2] Briefly interacting with a handful of interpretive solutions from textually focused studies on biblical ethics will help frame the present proposal on the ethical function of the Genesis narrative itself within the scriptural framework.[3]

Brevard S. Childs situated the problem of ethical interpretation of Genesis within the context of the canon. Both his *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* and *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* offer chapters on the obedient life and raise issues about the ethical value of Genesis.[4] In the former Childs opens an historical overview of the problem of ethics in the patriarchal narratives with a rhetorical question: "How can one ever use the response of the Hebrew patriarchs as an ethical norm when their conduct is filled with flagrant immorality?"[5] He then works though how the various genres of the Old Testament handle the ethical problems of the patriarchal narratives (Psalms, wisdom, prophets, narrative). In speaking of psalms 105 and 106 Childs previews his major conclusion: "It is astonishing to see the extent to which the ethical difficulties of the Genesis story are completely disregarded.

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[2] Many approaches offer valuable insight, even while little agreement has been achieved. Christopher J. H. Wright summarizes about two dozen more recent approaches including his own and Walter Brueggemann, John Barton, John Goldingay, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Terence E. Fretheim, Brevard Childs, Gordon Wenham, as well as some advocacy and postmodern approaches. See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics of the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), kindle ed., chap 13. In the first edition of Wright's book he claimed that treatments of Old Testament ethics were scarce (1983), but notes a dramatic increase in the 2d edition (see preface). Many recent books for general readership take sensationalistic approaches, see, e.g., Matthew Richard Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), chaps. 6, 7, 8; David Lamb, *Prostitutes and Polygamists: A Look at Love, Old Testament Style* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). Lamb uses clever puns, cultural references, and analogies of all sorts, like comparing ancestresses of Christ to "prostitute Barbie" based on the lady of the night who inspired the design of the modern toy doll (87), a play on a children's Sunday school song to title one section "Father Abraham had Many Wives" (72), and referring to Abraham as "the Pimping Patriarch" (91).

[3] This study uses the terms "ethical" and "moral" identically to refer to that which is upright and righteous according to the standards of the Christian Bible. Terms and ideas of "righteous" and "sinful" are used to refer to human attitudes and behaviors as they accord or not with God's will expressed in scripture. The term "dysfunctional" is being used in its conventional sense of impaired family relationships, including interrelated social and/or ethical impairments.

[4] See Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), kindle ed., chap. 18; idem., *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), kindle ed., chap. 6 part X.

[5] Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context*, chap. 18, sec. ii c. For another example of rejecting significance to Christians from a difficult Genesis narrative, see Douglas S. Earl, "Toward a Christian Hermeneutic of Old Testament Narrative: Why Genesis 34 Fails to Find Christian Significance," *CBQ* 73 (2011); 30-49.

The narrative is read to illustrate something entirely different, namely the faithfulness of God."[6] Childs argues that the Genesis narrative itself shares this "eschatological" or "promise" framework and presents the patriarchs within the story of Israel's redemption. He sees "everything else" as "pushed into the background."[7] Childs' view rests on both his commitment to the unity of the larger canonical framework (shared with and by the canonical shaping of Genesis) and that righteousness is not an ideal or norm, but a "right relationship" with God.[8] In the latter, Childs reaffirms his point that Genesis does not offer a "single moralistic interpretation." He suggests that an "ethic of character formation" is foreign to the patriarchal narratives.[9]

Childs rightly insists on the heart and end of righteousness as the relationship between God and his people. But such a view does not quarantine righteousness from the demands of an ethical, moral way of life. Faithful obedience includes adherence to biblical standards of upright attitude, thought, and behavior. Although Childs follows von Rad on righteous as relationship, von Rad rightly contends that righteousness (צדקה) includes both relationship to God and to fellow humans. He insists that these are not independent, "secular" versus "religious" ideals, since the Lord not only provided his people with salvation "but also issued the orders of life which alone made men's life together possible."[10]

Childs does well to emphasize interpreting the narratives of the Hebrew ancestors within the larger redemptive canonical framework. When Childs concludes that the immoral narratives themselves are irrelevant to the narrative's function within the larger redemptive thrust of the scriptures, however, this severely truncates the said continuity. The theological unity Childs speaks of is achieved only if biblical writers used ancestral narratives selectively, ignoring issues of morality for a theocentric focus on the ancestors as a witness to God's saving grace. The idea that coherent instruction comes only if unethical details of the stories are suppressed or passed over undermines the significant gains he promotes. Misbehaviors are not merely neutral narrative props.

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[6] Childs, *Old Testament Theology in Canonical Context*, chap. 18, sec. iii a; also see sec. iii d.

[7] See ibid., esp. chap. 18, sec. iii d.

[8] Childs finds convincing von Rad's view that "righteousness" (צדקה) is not so much an ideal or absolute norm but about a right relationship with God (see frequent affirmations in ibid., chap 18, esp. ii a, iii d). Von Rad provides an extensive discussion of the righteousness of God and Israel. Two of his emphases are that redemption precedes commands and righteous character turns on loyalty to God's will. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1: 370-83, esp. 371, 378.

[9] See Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, chap. 6, sec. X 2 d.

[10] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1: 374; also see 1: 370-71.

The prophets use misbehaviors of Genesis to warn their auditors (e.g., Hos 12:2-6, 12; Obad 10; Mal 1:2), especially the doom of the quartet of cities of the plain (e.g., Isa 1:9-10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46ff; Hos 11:8; Amos 4:11). The New Testament is anything but shy about using Genesis narratives of domestic dysfunction for ethical and moral arguments and instruction, including difficult stories (e.g., Rom 9:11-12; Gal 4:22-31) and strong warning based on the destruction of the towns of Sodom an company (e.g., Matt 10:15; 11:23-24; 2 Pet 2:6-8; Jude 7, 11). The ethical use of narratives of domestic misbehavior in Genesis is, of course, an extremely small subset of Old Testament narratives of rebellion and sin put to use for moral and ethical instruction throughout the Old and New Testaments. Childs rightly contends that the stories of the Hebrew ancestors signify God's covenantal fidelity. Yet contrary to Childs, the messy Genesis stories of domestic dysfunction offer manifold theological implications and ethical instruction.

Richard Neville separates the law from creation, and in effect from Genesis (though he only intends the former). He argues that the creation accounts of Genesis do not provide context for understanding or interpreting the relationship between God and his people or ethics of the law. Neville is pushing back against what he sees as overemphasis by Old Testament scholars who use creation as an all too flexible way of framing legal ethics. He claims that interpreting Israel's legal ethics this way "make it possible for the reader to discover creation at any point in the law that modern sensibilities would wish it."[11] For Neville, the universal and inclusive outlook of creation has almost nothing to do with exclusive national law.[12] Neville rightly notes the strong emphasis on the redemption from Egypt across the Mosaic law, but he also boldly states: "Creation had no role to play in the establishment of YHWH's relationship with Israel, and no place in the rehearsals that served to retain the memory of their deliverance from Egypt and encourage Israel's fidelity to YHWH."[13]

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[11] Richard Neville, "On Exaggerating Creation's Role in Biblical Law and Ethics," *TynBul* 66.1 (2015): 16 [1-17]. Neville cites examples of over-reading creation into biblical law and ethics by Walter Brueggemann, Terrence Fretheim, Bruce Waltke, John Goldingay, Gordon Wenham, Christopher J. H. Wright, and others (see 1-3).

[12] See ibid., 17. Neville cites the fourth commandment and a few other verses across the Mosaic law which explicitly allude to creation. He acknowledges these as exceptional to redemption as the prevailing basis for law.

[13] Ibid., 14. As part of a larger argument, Christine Hayes framed the relative peculiarity of Sinai law in a different manner. Hayes takes Greenberg's arguments concerning the significance of the uniqueness of the divine origin of the law, and extrapolates, applies, and contrasts the significance of divinely given law against competing models of law in classic antiquity. See Christian Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law?: Early Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law" (1960), reprinted in Moshe Greenberg, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 25-41. In a manner that resembles, in certain respects, Neville's attempt to bifurcate the universality of creation from the particularity of redemption and Mosaic law, Hayes emphasizes, according to scripture, Sinai law as grounded in

The relative merits of Neville's claim that many modern Old Testament scholars overemphasize the function of creation for ethics and theology falls outside the scope of the present study. But whether there is a relationship between God's will in creation and redemption makes up an important subset of whether Israel's particularity excludes overlap with broader ethics, like those which might be evident in Genesis. In one place Neville claims he is not seeking to separate Genesis and Exodus, simply creation in Genesis 1-2 from the law.[14] Yet Neville applies his point beyond creation per se when he argues that "laws governing appropriate sexual partners" in Leviticus 18 and 20 are "addressed to Israel in terms peculiar to Israel, and not in terms that are applicable to all human beings."[15]

The problem with Neville's claims about Leviticus 18 and 20 are that Israel's forbidden sexual practices are identical to those by which the Canaanites defiled themselves (Lev 18:24-25). In this context, Israel is told "do not do according to the deeds" of the Egyptians or Canaanites (18:2).[16] Israel is warned that if they disobey these sexual prohibitions, then their judgment will be like the judgment against the nations who previously lived in the land of

divine will versus natural order, particular versus general, nonrational and arbitrary versus rational and universal, and that divine law evolves (see chap. 1, secs. 1 I, II, III). Conversely, for Hayes, this is only one side of the story. She shows that the scriptures also emphasize Sinai's divine law as universal order, rational, static, and wisdom and (following Blenkinsopp) Deuteronomy "sapientializing" instruction (see chap. 1, secs. 2 I, II, III, IV). To accomplish these two (seemingly) competing views of laws Hayes uses a little sleight of hand, comparing two somewhat different things. She says the arbitrary and evolving view of the law refers to the distinctive Israelite holiness laws (chap. 1, sec. I) and the universal and static view refers, in the main, to the scriptures' manifold comments on the law in general. While it would benefit readers for Hayes to have more carefully explained these two biblical visions of Sinai law, whether or not she finds them incompatible, it is not required for the broad ranging argument of her book. When Hayes speaks of the particular and nonrational purity laws (chap 1, sec. 1 II) it seems akin to the traditional Christian designation ceremonial law (versus moral and civil law) as that subcategory of law, temporarily and provisionally established for Israel (see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], kindle ed., IV.xx.14-16; cf. McNeil's discussion, II.vii, nn. 1, 5). While I find inadequate the traditional splitting between moral and ceremonial law, but it can work here as a loose way to refer to God's moral demands for all humans and his inclusive covenantal standards for Israel. For the way I have handled what Calvin calls ceremonial law, see *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), chaps. 17, 18. Also see Christine Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* (Yale University Press, 2012), chap. 9; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986, 1996), chap. 8.

[14] See Neville, "On Exaggerating Creation's Role in Biblical Law and Ethics," 3. Others who might agree with Neville regarding the differences between universal law to all humans versus particular law to Israel might not wish to contrast them so categorically. For example, although Neville cites Levenson in support of his own views, at another point Jon D. Levenson states: "The subsequent establishment of covenants with all Abrahamites (Genesis 17) and with all Israelites (Exodus 24) is to be read against the background of this universal covenant [Gen 9 to Noah]" ("The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett [Leiden: Brill, 1996], 147 [143-69]). The fact that "the ethic of the covenant-community was not thought to reduce to the universal moral law" (157-8) does not mean the law of Israel is categorically separate from universal law.

[15] See Neville, "On Exaggerating Creation's Role in Biblical Law and Ethics," 5. Neville says he is contending against Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, though Neville does not list a page number and seems to be using Wright's argument in general. *Contra* Neville's inference, Wright actually grounds the immorality of Lev 18 in Canaanite fertility rites and other pagan practices (see chap. 10, sec. "Rejection and prohibition"; and see appendix).

[16] Biblical translations mine from *BHQ* (where available), *BHS*, NA28, and LXX from Rahlfs (except as noted).

promise (see 18:26-28). The context even connects Israel's particular dietary regulations into the broader moral framework of being set apart from these nations in sexual purity (20:22-26, esp. 20:25). The close comparison between the standards for sexual purity between Israel and the nations of the land seem hard to deny when the immoralities warned against are emphasized as identical—"do not defile yourselves by any of these, for by all of these the nations defiled themselves" (18:24; cf. 18:26, 27, 30; 20:23). The judgments for violation also correspond by using כַּאֲשֶׁר with the sense of כ *like, as, according to* (18:28).[17] Israel's standards for obedience are higher than the nations, including ritual purity regulations here signified by dietary relations (Lev 11; cf. Deut 14), but these particular covenantal requirements have been embedded directly into sexual purity standards common to Israel and the nations (20:25). The judgment for the immorality of the peoples of the land of promise in Leviticus 18 and 20 fits well with the judgment God had revealed against them to Abraham long ago (see Gen 15:16).

The law does contain particular commands to which Israel is uniquely responsible. But this standard for righteousness is not set apart entirely from God's moral standards for all nations. God charged Israel with inclusive moral standards of sexual purity transgressed by the Canaanites (among other moral obligations) as well as exclusive ceremonial standards for tabernacle worship. Deuteronomy 29 presents the terrible judgment against the cities of the plain in Genesis (Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim) as paradigmatic of the judgment awaiting Israel when they would rebel against the covenant by presuming election as a right irrespective of responsibility (Deut 29:19, 23). The prophets persistently use the judgment of the cities of the plain as a symbol characterizing Israel's rebellion and the coming judgment of God (see above for list of texts).

Neville has rightly noted the dominance of redemption as basis for the law to Israel. However, neither the relative exclusivity of the redemption nor the higher standard of the dietary and ceremonial commands can separate Israel from the same judgment meted out against the rebellious cities of the plain in Genesis or the Canaanites through the conquest. More broadly, when faced with the looming exile and its threat to remove the symbols of covenantal identity (e.g., land, city, temple, king) the prophets were quick to emphasize God the creator as faithful to the covenant with his people. As early as Amos, threats against Israel are tied together with the power of God as creator (see Amos 4:12, 13; 5:8, 9; 9:5, 6). And in the last days of Jerusalem

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[17] See GKC § 161 *b, c*; cf. § 118 *s-x*; *HALOT*.

Jeremiah grounds God's covenantal fidelity upon his power over creation (see Jer 31:35-37).[18]

Isaiah speaks of the Lord creating (ברא), forming (יצר), and redeeming (גאל) his people, all as

part of the hope for restoration from exile (see Isa 43:1, 7, 14-16).[19] The point is not simply that

Isaiah weaves together from Genesis and Exodus language and imagery of creation and

redemption for the sake of homiletical and poetic crosspollination. Rather, Isaiah is explaining

the hope for a new exodus based on a unified and coherent vision of God's work as creator of all

humans and redeemer of Israel. The prophets expected their auditors to see a close relationship

between Genesis and the rest of the Torah.

The last few solutions considered here come from Gordon J. Wenham in his attempt to

answer the "silence" of the author on glaring immoral and unethical circumstances and events in

Genesis. Wenham frames the problem in practical terms: "How do we discern the author's

standpoint on the events he relates?"[20] Wenham considers this a difficult problem since moral

comments are "rare" and the author of Genesis offers "few clues as to what he thinks about the

actors' behavior."[21] Although I originally accepted Wenham's sweeping generalizations which

give rise to his set of hermeneutical solutions, the evidence is not as categorical as he makes it

sound. I will return to the alleged ethical ambiguity of Genesis after considering the merits of

three suggestions from Wenham's practical and valuable approach.

First, Wenham seeks help from modern ethics of fiction theory and rhetorical criticism to

interpret Genesis ethically. For example, Wenham defines the interpreter's central goal in terms

of discovering the outlook of "implied author" as opposed to the real author.[22] Wenham provides

intermittent interactions with several ethics of fiction theorists.[23] However, Wenham gives and

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[18] While Jer 31:35-37 is much rearranged in MT versus LXX [38:35-37], both versions sustain the point I making.

[19] Isaiah's reading together imagery from Gen 1, 2 and Exod 14, 15, may take advantage of the shared language between these two contexts, including רוּחַ (Gen 1:2; Exod 14:21; 15:8, 10) יַבָּשָׁה (Exod 14:22) though the two contexts use different terms for separating the waters בדל (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18) and בקע (Exod 14:21). Elsewhere the Torah uses these two broad concepts together, speaking of God having rights over all creation and yet electing Israel (see Exod 19:5; Deut 10:14, 15; cf. Isa 43:1).

[20] Gordon J. Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context*, eds. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 24 [17-31]. This essay boils down for general readership the somewhat choppy and disjointed fuller treatment in, idem., *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

[21] Ibid. Others have suggested that Genesis may use intentional ambiguity in special cases to draw readers into discussion of an issue, see Ronald Hyman, "Final Judgment: The Ambiguous Moral Question that Culminates Genesis 34," *JBQ* 28.2 (2000): 100-1 [93-101]

[22] See Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 8-9.

[23] See esp. Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Also see idem., "Why Ethical Criticism Can Never Be Simple," 23-35, and idem., "Who Is Responsible in Ethical Criticism?" 79-98, both in *Ethics, Literature, and Theory: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Stephen K. George

takes, and seems, in the main, to use fiction ethics theory to diagnose a biblical narrative phenomenon and then solve it another way. Wenham ostensively accepts the pluralism of William Booth's approach, for example, as pertinent since Old Testament narratives "seldom contain explicit moral judgments, but much more often leave the events to speak for themselves, thereby encouraging the reader to reflect on and relate past events to him- or herself."[24] But then he immediately provides a page full of examples in Genesis and elsewhere in which the narrator interferes with supposed open-endedness by offering explicit moral comments and theological judgments.[25] While an array of biblical scholars have made heavy use of literary approaches also used for interpreting fiction, it is not clear that the modern ethics of fiction theory touted by Wenham provides a way forward for interpreting biblical narrative ethically.[26]

Second, Wenham argues that part of the perceived ethical problems of Genesis can be solved by sorting out ancient social customs from the ethical instruction of the narrator. Wenham illustrates that some things which challenge modern readers are actually cultural differences rather than ethical dilemmas. Large patriarchal family compounds and Jacob telling his adult sons what to do point to social differences not immorality.[27] He suggests some of the challenges with Jacob's marriage arrangements stem from his lack of parental advocacy and financial support for the bridal price.[28] Conversely, Wenham suggests that Genesis criticizes bigamous marriages by the vicious character of Lamech and the unhappy household of Jacob.[29]

While it seems easy to agree that many ancient social behaviors might be different without being wrong, the idea that unhappy outcomes signify moral disapproval does not work. Joseph interprets his own string of painful circumstances as part of God's plan to bring mercy and salvation to many hungry people during an extended economic depression (Gen 45:5; 50:19-20).

(Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2005). For a review of Booth and other approaches to the ethical function of fiction, see Erika Silver Hillinger, "Literature as Narrative Ethics: Ethics, Religion, and Scripture in Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 2007, 15-52. Hillinger considers the main purposes of Kingsolver's novel to promote tolerance and demonstrate the subjective nature of Christianity and the Bible (see 11-12).

[24] Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 14.

[25] For similar framing of ethical challenges with ethics of fiction theory, only to seek solutions through conventional biblical interpretation, see ibid., 78-79, 100-1.

[26] For a survey of ways evangelicals have appropriated literary approaches, see J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (2009): 3-18.

[27] See Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," 18, 21-22.

[28] See ibid., 24-25.

[29] See ibid., 26-27.

Third, Wenham solves apparent ethical challenges by interpreting individual stories of Genesis within the book as a whole.[30] He argues that some of the principles that undergird the ethical standards of the ancestral narratives are rooted in creation and other events recorded earlier in Genesis. God's rebuke of Cain and the Noahic covenant including its ban of murder based on the image of God in human beings provide important examples (9:6).[31]

Wenham argues that the beginning of narratives set standards.[32] Wenham applies this to Genesis by emphasizing the creation of humans as one male and one female in divinely sanctioned heterosexual monogamy over and against polygamy and homosexuality. He says that God did not create "several Eves" or male companions for Adam indicating "divine approval of heterosexual monogamy."[33] If that is an argument from silence, Wenham elsewhere says more cautiously:

> God deliberately created mankind in two sexes in order that he should "be fruitful and multiply." This is the first command given to man and is repeated after the flood. … In that homosexual acts are not even potentially procreative, they have no place in the thinking of Gen 1. Nor do they fit in with Gen 2. … It therefore seems most likely that Israel's repudiation of homosexual intercourse arises out of the doctrine of creation.[34]

While Wenham's numerous deductions from narrative details may be contested, his use of book as interpretive context and the corollary principles of interpreting from the beginning work well.

Wenham's several attempts to solve the problem of how Genesis offers ethical instruction in the absence of Mosaic law are helpful, even if not as definitive as he infers. But revisiting and adjusting Wenham's premise offers a better way forward. At first Wenham's common sense observations regarding the rarity of moralizing commentary in Genesis cited above seem agreeable, yet upon scrutiny they overstate the case. Appendix A lists the domestic dysfunctions across Genesis. While neither the narrator personally nor his presentation of God's view are provided for every immoral attitude and action, the overall situation is far from ambiguous. Though Genesis seems to fit in the sliding scale between narratives such as Kings with its

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[30] See Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 43

[31] See ibid., 83.

[32] See ibid., 24; Wenham, "Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality," 262.

[33] See Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," 26-27; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 85.

[34] Gordon Wenham, "Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality," Expository Times 102.9 (1991): 263 [259-63]. Others take a similar approach. John Murray starts with Christ's remarks that divorce and remarriage are concessions for hard-heartedness, and argues for a universal, constant biblical ethic. Yet, based on the principle of progressive revelation these practices are judged more strictly with greater revelation. See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 14-19. For a study of "sexual difference" (moral significance of two sexes versus social significance of genders) through major Christian figures across the centuries, see Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007).

constant editorial commentary like "he did evil in the eyes of the Lord" and Luke with very rare editorial commentary, the style of Genesis resisters ethical judgment in a variety of ways.[35]

If ethical judgments of the narrator, God, and characters are considered together mostly within the immediate context, but in a few case within Genesis as a book, very few ambiguous loose ends are left over. In the case of the contested issue of incest, for example, even Pharaoh and Abimelech understand that one's spouse should not be one's sibling (though other instances are not clarified until Lev 18). Every domestic dysfunction considered sinful elsewhere in scripture comes off as unethical in Genesis with few exceptions, concubinage and polygamy and some cases of incest (see Table 2 in appendix A for details). Handling these as mere cultural differences is inadequate because of the nature of the cases. Thus, these exceptions are taken up in appendices B and C.

A brief summary of the positive results of evaluating solutions to the problems of the ancestral narratives of Genesis as unethical and their being set before the Mosaic law, may help before illustrating these points. First, ethical instruction within the scriptures derives from both virtuous, exemplary and despicable, immoral attitudes and actions. Second, while redemption rather than creation serves as the dominant explicit logic for the Mosaic law itself, God's judgment against the immorality of the nations provides bases for both the call for Israel's obedience of the law and as a paradigm for Israel's rebellion against the law. The narratives of the Hebrew ancestors among the nations in Genesis offer instruction within which to interpret the purpose of the law. Third, explicit and implicit moral and ethical judgments by the narrator, God, and characters provide intended implications and instructional value of a narrative. Fourth, ancient cultural differences like those in Genesis do not of themselves signify ethical implications. Fifth, the context of the book of Genesis itself serves as a guide for interpreting its ethical instruction. With few exceptions, the ethical and moral vision of Genesis accords with the Christian Bible.

III

Genesis 38 offers an array of unethical attitudes and behaviors which makes it an ideal episode to illustrate the challenges and prospects for interpreting Genesis ethically.[36] What follows is limited sharply to what is directly related to the present proposal.

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[35] For a brief description of lack of narrative comments along with a list of rare comments in Luke, see "Appendix B" in David Lee, *Luke's Stories of Jesus: Theological Reading of Gospel Narrative and the Legacy of Hans Frei*, JSNTSS 185 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 342-46.

Biblical narratives typically feature two frames of reference simultaneously, the characters in the story and the narrator and God who transcend the characters' limitations, which function well for moral and theological interpretation. Diegetic refers to elements which originate within the interior of the story and nondiegetic to elements of framing provided for the auditor, reader, or viewer.[37] Today's films may have music, occasional words typed on the screen to indicate location, time, or the like, though heavy voiceover direct narration and routinely interspersed title cards are out of fashion. Likewise Genesis 38 provides auditors with a much fuller frame of reference than known by any of the human characters. No eyewitness within story space could have the interpretive perspective of readers. The fuller perspective includes not only the rest of the book of Genesis and the entire Christian Bible, but all of the narrative apparatus within the episode itself.

Nondiegetic narrative interpretive clues may be indirect, deduced from context, allusion, or the like. They may also be authorized interpretations by the narrator or the narrator's disclosing God's motives, thoughts, or judgments directly to readers. At another level, diegetic reality of characters provides human drama but also morally ambiguous details. Yet, here the narrator may help the reader by disclosing someone's motives or thoughts (whether narrative online or offline), or by juxtaposing narrative elements leading to readerly deductions or speculations. At other times the gap between the diegetic and nondiegetic perspectives creates irony, or other more subtle inferences. While all of this is the normal stuff of human stories, the special authoritative character of the scriptures themselves raises the significance of ethical implications as something which makes demands upon readers.

Judah's separation from his family and his marriage to a Canaanite woman are not inert facts within the narrative (38:1, 2). Departing carries the baggage of the pattern of separation by

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[36] For a survey of early Judaic interpretations of Gen 38 and their concerns, see Stefan C. Reif, "Early Rabbinic Exegesis of Genesis 38," in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, eds. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 221-44.

[37] For general discussion of how diegetic and nondiegetic elements function in film, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thomson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 56-57. Diegetic/nondiegetic are not identical to vayyitols as mainline/online/foreground versus offline/off-the/line/background in narrative syntax in discourse analysis studies. Discourse analysis approaches count vayyiqtols as narrative mainline even if it refers to an action or decision of God. While this approach helpfully clarifies narrative flow, background commentary, and the relative function of verb forms within larger narrative structures it does not distinguish diegetic/nondiegetic which is needed to clarify ethical function. In this context, several nondeigetic elements are part of the narrative mainline by using vayyiqtols. For listing of all off-the-line versus narrative mainline phrases in Gen 38, see David W. Baker with Jason A. Riley, *Genesis 37-50, A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 51-83. Baker works with several previous studies, esp. Roy L. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations: An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Studies 55 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004); also see Endo Yoshinobu, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story: An Approach from Discourse Analysis*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica 32 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996).

other family members, Lot and Esau, neither of whose setting out independently went well (13:11; 36:6). The narrative baggage of Judah's Canaanite spouse also includes both an ancient curse from Noah and an oath taken by an angst-ridden servant with his hand under his master's thigh not to take a wife for Isaac from the Canaanites (9:25; 24:3; cf. 26:34; 27:46). Rashi seeks to avoid the problem by claiming Canaanite here does not mean Canaanite but "merchant."[38] Rashi's suggestion seems strained in light of the repeated descriptive style in 38:1 and 2 (עַד־אִישׁ עֲדֻלָּמִי וּשְׁמוֹ חִירָה "toward an Adullamite man and his name [was] Hirah" and בַּת־אִישׁ כְּנַעֲנִי וּשְׁמוֹ שׁוּעַ "daughter of a Canaanite man and his name [was] Shua"). If there were such a thing as considering this episode's beginning without knowledge of anything from the book of Genesis, then maybe these would be neutral details. But readers suspect Shua the Canaanite has heard of his ancestor's curse and that Judah knows of his grandfather's and father's securing wives from the right family. These traditions make up the "givens" of their families' heritages but which readers need to be told.

The narrator does not tell readers what Er did which caused Yahweh to kill him (38:7). Even without that secret knowledge readers interpret the death of Tamar's first husband with fuller nondiegetic divine judgment, (apparently) not perceived by anyone within the story. A significant constellation of ethical issues arise from the Onan debacle stemming from too much information, some diegetic and some nondiegetic. Readers know what Onan did, and why he did it, during a series of intimate moments with his brother's widow. Onan's sin is economically captured by a series of sexual wordplays and made habitual by אִם "and Onan knew (ידע) that the seed (זרע) would not be his, so whenever (אִם) he came into the wife of his brother then he would spill upon the ground, otherwise he would give seed (זרע) to his brother" (38:9).[39] Readers also know Yahweh's judgment, killing Onan for his sin (38:10). And, contrary to his express intentions the narrator explains Judah's internal reasoning for not allowing a third son into a bedroom with Tamar (38:11). Judah later admits this wrongful deception (38:26).

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[38] Rashi, *The Metsudah Chumash*, 4th ed., trans. Avrohom Davis (Hoboken: Ktav, 1996), 430 [Gen 38:2]; see *HALOT* for this meaning in Isa 23:8. The several places names in Gen 38, Adullam, Chezib, Timnah, and Enam, later stand within Judah's tribal allotment, see Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 264, 265, 268.

[39] The use of a perfect verb with hypothetical particle אִם־בָּא signifies repeated action, "whenever he came into," see GKC § 112*gg*; *IBHS* § 32.2.6.10.

Onan's repeated immorality does not signify an immoral narrative. The explicit divine condemnation against Onan for his crude, greed-based birth control teaches theology and ethics. The creator's interest in human life did not cease on the sixth day. The identical question of Jacob to the wife he loved and Joseph to the brothers he had forgiven points to God alone as author of life and death. They each said "Am I in the place of God?" in one case of withholding life and in another of withholding death (30:2; 50:19). By refusing to finish relations with his brother's widow, Onan takes God's role. God stopped Onan from interfering with the divine prerogative to create human life. The greed and arrogance of Onan activates the divine prerogative to end his life. The creator alone takes life and withholds life.

The narrative makes plain the immorality of Er and Onan, but readers may wonder why Judah considered it Onan's responsibility to sire children with his brother's widow (38:8). The readership of Genesis as it stands see the shared language and look to the law of levirate marriage legislated in the time of Moses but recognize this as long after the time of Hebrew ancestors (see Deut 25:5-10).[40] A typical solution is that the levirate law codifies an old tradition going back to the days of the Hebrew ancestors.[41] The Hittites had such a law which even provided that if the brother(s) die the father-in-law shall take her.[42]

While the basis of the story of Tamar as a serial bride in Judah's family suggests an ancient levirate like custom or law, the narrative itself activates considering implications of the Mosaic levirate law. The ethical obligations of the brother-in-law to his sibling's heritage and spouse are unexplained "givens" in Genesis. The differences invoke additional ethical consideration. The later levirate law is not mandatory but at the discretion of the brother-in-law; the penalty for refusal being a public shame ceremony not death (25:7-10).[43] Readers familiar

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[40] Gen 36:31 "These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king ruled over the Israelites" infers a time at least during the Hebrew monarchic period. For a discussion of implications of post-Mosaic elements of Genesis for traditional and evangelical concerns, see Michael A. Grisanti, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in and Inerrant View of Scripture," *JETS* 44.4 (2001): 577-98. Also, יבם "to brother-in-law" appears only in Gen 38:8; Deut 25:5, 7; see *HALOT*.

[41] See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, *Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 37-38.

[42] See HL § 193 (*COS* 2.19:118; c. 1650-1500 BCE). Theophile J. Meek supplies this law to a gap in MAL § 33 (see *ANET*, 182), but Martha Roth leaves the gap blank, with extant law only stating a widow will live with her father-in-law if her father dies (*COS* 2.132:357; c. 11th cent.).

[43] The only other biblical example contains several complications making direct comparison difficult; including the framing of the allusion to levirate marriage within a land sale of Elimelech's widow (i.e., extrapolating and connecting selected details from Jubilee and levirate laws, Lev 25:25-28; Deut 25:5-10), a challenging Ketiv/Qere (Ruth 4:5), and an explanation of a public sandal custom as signifying transaction (4:7) rather than part of a levirate shame ceremony (Deut 25:9-10). The potential motives for the near kinsman's initial agreement and then refusal to secure Naomi's land depend on the Ketiv/Qere of Ruth 4:5 (see *BHQ* apparatus which favors Qere). That the kinsman wishes to avoid ruining his inheritance is plain, but how so? If Boaz says "I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess" (Ketiv) then the near kinsman may realize that the likelihood of Mahlon's name being shortly restored

with the levirate law may wonder why God killed Onan rather than shaming him. Onan's tacit acceptance of Judah's command for him to act as brother-in-law and his habitual spilling based on self-serving motives provide an answer. Also important in this context is Onan tacitly committing one thing to Tamar and doing another, as Judah also does subsequently (Gen 38:11, 26).

The story of Onan infers polygamy as accepted within an ancient levirate marriage like custom. Onan's anxieties when having relations with his brother's widow relate to his express intention for his own "seed" (by his own wife). Presumably he already had children or he was not yet married to his own wife since the story does not deal with Judah's third son needing to sire both Er's and Onan's children. Er's marriage itself created the basis for obligations by his family to see that he had an heir. Moreover, a readership comparing the narrative details to the law of levirate marriage presupposes this special case of legal bigamy to serve the higher purpose of preventing the late brother's name from being blotted out. This example of accepted polygamy seems tame compared to the other polygamous households within the pages of Genesis.

A legion of intertwined ethical issues bear on the extensive set of details related to Judah "accidentally" siring twins with his daughter-in-law by an act of adultery on her part.[44] While Judah attempts to make good on his pledge to pay one whom he thought a shrine prostitute, he valued avoiding ridicule above his integrity to a prostitute (38:23).[45] Judah's hypocrisy regarding his own sexual license in contrast to his calling for Tamar's capital punishment by burning for

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via levirate issue. If Boaz says "you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabitess" (Qere) then the near kinsman may be worried about not having the means to support another wife and children or he may be refusing to marry a Moabitess because of the law of the assembly (Deut 23:4-7 [3-6]). The potential allusion one way or the other between the near kinsman's anxiety over "spoiling" (שחת) his inheritance and Onan "spilling" (שחת) on the ground while he is worrying his inheritance connects these two would-be levirs. For a brief review of the implications of the minority interpretation of 4:5 with Ketiv, see Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, AB (New York: Doubleday), 146-47. For further discussion of Gen 38:8-11 and Deut 25:5-10, see Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 55-59. Also, note the law of the levirate marriage sustaining the name (שֵׁם) of the deceased occurs three times (Deut 25:6, 7; cf. 25:10).

The term שֵׁם name occurs fourteen times in Ruth playing off sustaining the name in the law of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). The anonymous near kinsman who refuses to acquire Naomi's land is referred to as "so and so" (פְּלֹנִי אַלְמֹנִי Ruth 4:2) while the name through Boaz and Ruth, Mahlon's name remains (4:11).

[44] Defining Judah and Tamar's sexual relations as adultery is based on her betrothal to Shelah, see Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), 369.

[45] "Prostitute" (זֹנָה) and "cultic prostitute" (קְדֵשׁ) are used interchangeably (Gen 38:14, 21, 22). Steven D. Mathewson contends that Judah was not seeking to worship Canaanite deities but simply sexual gratification (see "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 38," *BSac* 146 [1989]: 379, n. 33 [373-92]).

her adulterous pregnancy astonishes and instructs readers (38:24).[46] Even Judah's statement about her in third person "She is more righteous than I" invites readerly evaluation (38:26). The comparative language helps readers navigate more and less righteous, without need to categorically condone Tamar's incestuous, adulterous deception. Von Rad rightly defines the accolade of Tamar: "But what in the world has this to do with our concept of righteousness?"[47] Still, Judah's judgment signifies that righteousness is the currency of ethics in Genesis.

Judah's statement about his relative immoral character provides opportunity to connect his spectacular hypocrisy against his daughter-in-law with his treachery against his own brother in the previous episode. Readers need to make this connection for the sake of the larger context. The depth of Judah's hardened domestic immorality provides the baseline for the dramatic change of character evident in his speech offering himself in place of another half-brother at the climatic point of the book of Genesis (44:18-34).[48] Elsewhere the Deuteronomistic narrator categorically condemns Manasseh in line with the prophet's indictment (see 2 Kgs 21:10-15; 23:26-27; 24:3-4; Jer 15:4). This provides the Chronicler an ideal opportunity to offer hope to a much later postexilic readership by telling of Manasseh's dramatic repentance (2 Chron 33:10-19). If there is hope for the likes of Manasseh and Judah to get right with God and family, there is hope for any biblical reader.

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[46] For burning as judgment for a priest's daughter who fornicates see Lev 21:9; Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.8.23 [§248]. For a study accenting the contradiction between Judah's righteous appearances and his actions against Tamar, see Diane M. Sharon, "Some Structural Semiotic Analysis of the Story of Judah and Tamer," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 289-318. While Tamar may be compared in a general way to others, Adams makes the unlikely comparisons between Ruth's "sexual trickery" (which seems a flat contradiction of Ruth 3) and Judith's prayer of deceit using sexuality and drunkenness to behead Holofernes (see Jdt 9-13; esp. 9:10; 12:20; 13:2), see Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), kindle ed., chap 2, "Status of Widows."

[47] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:374. For a different view wherein Tamar's righteousness is compared to that of Noah, unconvincingly translating the phrase as "She is the righteous one, not I," see Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *CBQ* 66.4 (2004): 530-31 [519-32].

[48] On the relationship between Gen 38 and 44 and the entire book of Genesis, see Schnittjer, *Torah Story*, chap. 9. On the importance of Judah's speech in Gen 44, see David A. Diewert, "Judah's Argument for Life as Wise Speech," in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, eds. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 61-74; Mark A. O'Brien, "The Contribution of Judah's Speech, Genesis 44:18-34, to the Characterization of Joseph," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 429-47. For a study which sees Gen 38 as a miniature version of the larger context in which is embedded, see David A. Bosworth, *The Story within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, CBQMS 45 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008), 37-69. For other views of how Gen 38 fits in the larger context, or not, see André Wénin, "*L'Aventure de Judah en Genèse 38 et l'Histoire de Joseph*," *Revue Biblique* 111 (2004): 5-27; Freidemann W. Golka, "Genesis 37-50: Joseph Story of *Israel*-Joseph Story?," *CurBR* 2.2 (2004): 154-60 [153-77]. For an argument focused on the priority of the relationship between 2 Sam 13 and Gen 38 (over and against Gen 37, 38, 39), see Mark Leuchter, "Genesis 38 in Social and Historical Perspective," *JBL* 132.2 (2013): 109-27. For a widely cited literary treatment of Gen 38 as integral to the broader context, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2d ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 1-13.

While this narrative context ignores incestuous sexual relations, intentional for Tamar but accidental for Judah, it provides yet another opportunity for ethical instruction by comparison with the Mosaic law. Readers realize the pre-law setting of the relations between Tamar and her father-in-law, and yet evaluate the "forbidden degrees" of incestuous relationships from Leviticus 18 in light of this antecedent act.[49] Elsewhere in Genesis Jacob explicitly condemns an example of transgressing a similar forbidden degree of son with father's concubine (Gen 49:4; 35:22; cf. 19:32-38). The stigma of unauthorized relations sits alongside the levirate like custom to make it seem that something akin Israel's covenantal standards were in the air the Hebrew ancestors breathed long before God's spoke his will to Moses at mount Sinai.

The relations of Judah and Tamar produce children. Lot's daughters used wine to seduce him into siring Moab and Ben-ammi (19:32-38) and Tamar used ritual sex trafficking (38:14-15, 21). The narrator makes explicit the ignorance of Lot and Judah (19:33, 35; 38:16).[50] The narrator also discloses the motives of Lot's daughters to preserve seed (19:32, 34) and Tamar motivated by Judah's refusal to grant her Shelah (38:14). All of this provokes comparison to the law of the assembly as it forbids מַמְזֵר "offspring of illegitimate unions" which would include Tamar's twin boys (Deut 23:2 [3]) and Moabites and Ammonites (23:3-6 [4-7]).

Genesis 38 provides abundance of detail—what, why, how—so readers have an interpretive advantage over each of the participants themselves. Just as the preceding examples, so too the story of Tamar's twins provokes interpretation at two levels, the ethical implications of the human actions and the redemptive significance at a providential level. Whereas the story of the sins of Tamar's husbands used nondiegetic heavy voiceover narration explaining directly to readers the sin of Er and the motives Onan and the divine judgment upon each, the account of her twins works more subtly. The graphic detail of the red thread draws attention to the younger over the older pattern running through Genesis—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh (see esp. 25:23). In the context of Genesis, the younger brother's achievement is limited, in this case, to bursting out of Tamar before his older brother, earning the name Perez (38:29). The combination of strong narrative pattern of younger over older, graphic details of Perez's birth, and the royal blessing of Judah (49:8-12) gives readers sufficient reason to wonder

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[49] The Mishnah speaks at length about variables and complications of how the law of levirate marriage relates to the "forbidden degrees" (m. Yebamoth 1-16). Speaking of brother-in-law, not father-in-law as in Gen 38, it rules that sexual relations with the brother's widow seals marriage even if the relations were accidental or forced (see 6:1).
[50] For a comparison of some of the details between the seductions of Lot and Judah, see James E. Miller, "Sexual Offences in Genesis," *JSOT* 90.1 (2000): 42-43 [41-53].

what will become of the line of Perez.[51] The larger canonical context provides connection between Perez and David (see Ruth 4:18-22; 1 Chron 2:5-15; esp. 28:4). Luke includes Perez (3:33) and Matthew includes Perez and Tamar (1:3) in their presentations of the line of Messiah.

In sum, the stories of Judah's severely dysfunctional family teach ethics. It is not news to anyone that Genesis 38 can make readers blush and teachers skip to the next page with Joseph's integrity and purity in the face of strong temptation. But thinking that ethical teaching comes exclusively from accounts of righteousness is a category error. The sins of Er, Onan, Judah, and Tamar warn readers of the dangers of rebellion, greed, arrogance, and hypocrisy. The case of Judah, Tamar, and their twins also point toward a hope that can only come from God's mercy.

IV

Genesis offers theological narration of the beginning of the gospel infused with ethical instruction. Genesis is generally mediates ethical instruction through unethical and immoral thoughts, attitudes, and actions. One way to access ethical teachings starts by reading episodes at two levels.

One level of the Genesis stories displays God's invisible judgments and workings, made visible by the scriptural narrator. The storymakers also provide the interior dialogue of characters, the arrangement, juxtaposition, framing, and presentation of the episodes of the Hebrew ancestors' domestic affairs to guide interpretation. On another level the typically unrighteous attitudes and actions of the ancestral domestic dysfunctions warn and teach God's people. The ethical value of obscene private and outrageous public sins derives from the function of these events as warnings to the characteristically unfaithful people of the covenant.

Family sin stories of Genesis do not celebrate reckless living. They signal the dangers of defying God's righteous standards. Other episodes, to be sure, remain ambiguous and ethically challenging. These narratives are difficult because neither God nor the narrator condemns what seems like it needs it, but these narratives are not isolated. The challenging dysfunctional family narratives of Genesis stand within the authoritative canon of scripture. The magnetic dialectic between ancient family sins and an array of teachings from the law, prophets, wisdom, and New Testament rightly invites the sustained intense ethical interpretations it has received since

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[51] Gerhard von Rad registers the apparent unfinished business of the story: "The conclusion to the narrative, however, is somewhat unsatisfactory. Is v. 30 its conclusion at all?" (*Genesis, A Commentary*, OTL, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972], 361).

antiquity. The immoral ways of the Hebrew ancestors offer an ideal vehicle to warn younger generations of Christians and challenge them to pursue the law of Christ.

Wenham offers perhaps his most significant comment in what seems a concession at the end of a chapter sorting out ethical ideals from legal standards within biblical narratives. Noting alternating behaviors of the ancestors, Wenham says their most characteristic behavior is "mixed, neither outstandingly virtuous nor catastrophic."[52] The need to sort out the moral and immoral within complex settings makes Genesis an ideal vehicle for ethical instruction. Too often the impulse to reduce a character or a story's ending to single terms like good or bad obstructs interpretation and badly needed instruction. Definitive judgments have their place. But real life and real people are complex. The complications and messiness of biblical narratives increase their value for theological and ethical instruction.

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[52] Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 107.

Appendix A:
Narrative Comments on Domestic Dysfunctions in Genesis

Table 1 catalogues domestic dysfunctions in Genesis and corresponding narrative ethical judgements. Many passages are debatable, and each individual context requires careful attention in its own right. The purpose, therefore, is general tendencies. The designation of (im)moral and social domestic issues are relative to the Christian Bible.

Table 1 serves an intermediate function. The table itself reveals that Genesis houses a large number of domestic dysfunctions. Some dysfunctions are social impairments or irregularities, but most are incidents of unethical and immoral behavior. In the main, details of the larger biblical context (right column) are only filled in if the immediate context (center column) has "no comment" or is ambiguous. Table 2 below collates the data from Table 1 and provides specific interpretive results.

Table 1: Narrative Ethical Judgments on Domestic Dysfunctions in Genesis

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral by scriptural standards, [S] social impairment (an ambiguous category re: problematic relationships, but not necessarily unethical and/or lack of adequate evidence)	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
2:18	human being alone [S]	[+D]	
3:6	human couple rebel against garden command [E]	[+D] see 3:14-19	
3:16	male/female desire and rule [S]	[+D]	
4:5	sibling rivalry/jealousy [E]	[+D] see 4:6f	
4:8	sibling murder [E]	[+D] see 4:10ff	
4:19	Lamech polygamy [E]	--	+Exod 21:10 [A]; +Deut 21:15-17 [A]; +25:5-10 [A]; ~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendix C)
4:23	Lamech prideful disclosure of immorality [E]	[~] see 4:10ff (the murder itself is condemned by Lamech himself)	
6:4	"fallen ones" as offspring of sons of God and daughters of humans [E]	[D] see 6:5, 6	
9:21	drunkenness per se of Noah [E?, S?]	[~] depending on significance of 9:21b "and exposed himself" (גלה Hith vayyiqtol) in the privacy of his own tent	(~cf. pattern Gen 9:21f with 19:32ff); +Lev 10:9 [I]; ~Prov 20:1; ~31:4; +23:29-35 [I]; ~Isa 5:11, 22; 22:13; 28:7; 56:12 [I]; +Gal 5:21 [I]; Eph 5:18 [I]; 1 Tim 3:3, 8[I]; 1 Pet 4:3 [I]

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
9:22	incestuous sexuality of Ham with parent [E]	[+C] see 9:22-24	
11:31	Terah's failure to take his family to Canaan [E]	[~N]	
12:11-13	Abraham conspiring deception with wife about marital status [E]	[D] see 12:17; [+C] see 12:18	
12:15	(accidental) attempted adultery	[+C] 12:17, 18	
13:6-7	financial tensions between Abraham and Lot [S]	[+C] see 13:8-9	
13:10-11	Lot set up family residency in immoral populace [E]	[+N] see 13:13	
15:2 (etc.)	Infertility of Sarah [S]	[+C]	
16:2-4	enslaved concubinage of Hagar	--	~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendices B and C)
16:6	mistreatment of Hagar based on jealousy [E]	[+C] see 16:9-11 (acknowledgement of affliction and commanded to return and submit to mistress)	
17:17	Abraham's disbelief in promised fertility for he and Sarah [E]	[~C] see 18:13-14	
18:12	Sarah's disbelief in promised fertility for he and Sarah [E]	[+C] see 18:13-15	
19:5	attempted same sex rape [E]	[+C] see 18:20, 21; 19:13 (cf. [+N] see Gen 13:13)	
19:8	Lot offers his daughters for illicit sexual relations [E]	[~N]	+Lev 19:29; 21:9 [I]
19:14	Disregard for mortal warning, from father-in-law (Lot), to protect families [E]	--	~Gen 50:20 (cf. 37:26-28) [I]; +Eph 5:28-31 [I]
19:26	Mrs. Lot turns from flight with family [E]	[+C] see 19:17	
19:32-37	conspiracy, drunkenness, and incest twice [E]	[+C] 19:32, 33, 35	on incest: ~Lev 18:6[53] [I]; ~Deut 23:2 [23:3] [I]; (on drunkenness see note on 9:21 above)
20:2, 11, 13	Abraham conspiring deception with wife about marital status [E]	[+C] 18:4-6 (see on 12:11-13 above)	

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[53] The omission of father-daughter from the list forbidden incestuous relationships in Lev 18 is much discussed. Since Lev 21:2 defines "close relatives" as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and sister, the blanket statement forbidding sexual relations with close relatives in 18:6 forbids father-daughter sexual relations (see Susan Rattray, "Marriage Rules, Kinship Terms and Family Structure in the Bible," in Kent H. Richards, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers*, no. 26 [Atlanta: Scholars, 1987], 542 [537-42]). And/or, perhaps 18:7 includes child-parent incest by forbidding sexual relations with parents (see Doug C. Mohrmann, Making Sense of Sex: A Study of Leviticus 18," *JSOT* 29.1 [2004]: 70 [57-79]; and see Miller, "Sexual Offences in Genesis," 42-43).

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
20:3	(accidental) attempted adultery [E]	[+D] 18:3, 6 (cf. 2:24-25 [N])	
20:12	incest: Sarah is Abraham's step-sister [E]	[~C] 20:10-12	+Lev 18:9 [I]
21:9	Ishmael bullying step-brother	[+C] 21:10	
21:10	disowning son and concubine [S]	[+C] 21:11-12	
21:15	leaving child to die of thirst in a desperate situation [S]	[+C] 21:16	
22:7, 8	deception regarding fatal intentions [E]	--	+Gen 4:8; 9:6 [I]
22:9, 10	attempted child sacrifice [E]	--	+Lev 20:2-5 [I]; +Deut 12:31; 18:10 [I]; +Jer 7:31; 32:35 [I]; +Ps 106:37-40 [I] (this is a complicated matter since in this context God approves of Abraham's faithfulness, Gen 22:12; Heb 11:17-19; James 2:21)
22:24	Nahor takes Reumah as concubine [E]	--	~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendices B and C)
25:6	Abraham's concubines summarized (Keturah called wife 25:1) [E]	--	~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendices B and C)
25:21	infertility of Rebekah [S]	[+C]	
25:22, 23, 31-34	sibling rivalry even in womb, for inheritance [S]	[+C] 25:22; [+N] 25:34	
25:28	parental favoritism [E]	~based on negative outcomes [C] 27:12, 13	
26:7	deception about marital status [E]	[+C] 26:10, 11 (cf. on Gen 12; 20)	
26:8-10, 20, 24	deception and sibling rivalry [S]	~ based on negative outcomes [C] 27:12, 13, 35-37	
26:34, 35	polygamy [E] and marriage to foreigners [E]	-- on polygamy; on marriage to foreigners [+N] 26:35; [+C] 27:46 (though note Rebekah's complicit motives here)	on polygamy: +Exod 21:10 [A]; +Deut 21:15-17 [A]; +25:5-10 [A]; ~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendix C); (marriage to foreigners +Gen 24:2-4; +Exod 34:16 [I]; +Deut 7:3 [I])
26:29	master of sibling(s) [S]	~[C] 27:37	
26:41	plotting murder [E]	[+C] 26:42	murder condemned +9:5, 6 [I];
29:23	deception with wrong bride [E]	[+C] 29:25	

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
29:28	polygamous marriage to sisters/incest, and spousal favoritism [E, S]	on polygamy --; on incest --; on negative social outcomes (unloved) [+N] 29:30, [+D] 29:31	against marrying sister wives Lev 18:18 [I][54]; against favoritism in polygamous marriage: +Exod 21:10 [I]; +Deut 21:15-17 [I]; +25:5-10 [A]; against polygamy ~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendix C)
29:32-34; 30:1, 24	wrong motives for sibling rivalry procreation contest [E]	--	~Gen 37 (hatred, treachery, deception [I]); +Lev 19:17 [I]
30:1, 2	infertility of Rachel [S]	[+C]	
30:3-13	concubinage of slaves for sibling rivalry procreation contest [E]	--	~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendices B and C)
30:15-20	bartering for conjugal rights with spouse for sibling rivalry procreation contest [E]	--	~Gen 37 (hatred, treachery, deception [I]); +Lev 19:17 [I]
30:27	(divination and/or) deception [E]	--	(+Exod 22:18 [I]; +Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27 [I]; +Deut 18:10, 11 [I])
30:41, 42	Jacob strengthens his own herds at Laban's expense [E]	[+C] 31:10-12 Jacob infers permission by vision to overcome deception (31:7)	~Exod 23:4 [I] (concern for well-being of enemy's material gains/losses)
31:1, 2, 43	family rivalry and contention [E]	[+C] 31:5, 6, 15-16 , 42	
31:19, 20	robbery [E] and devotion to false gods [E]	stealing [+C] 31:30-32	false gods +Gen 35:2-4 [I]
32:7	anticipating sibling rivalry will escalate to physical harm [S]	[+N] 32:7; [+C] 32:20	
33:13-17	sibling deception [E]	--	~see Gen 12; 20; 26 (also motivated by fear of physical harm)
34:2, 4	illicit sexual relations (whether rape or fornication) [E], proposed marriage to (uncircumcised) foreigners [E]	[+C] 34:14, 31	(marriage to foreigners +Gen 24:2-4; ~26:35; 27:46-28:2; +Exod 34:16 [I]; +Deut 7:3 [I])
34:5, 13-16, 25-29	Jacob selects not to seek justice for defilement of daughter [E], brothers deceive and murder [E]	[+C] 34:30, 31	
34:23	deceptive agreement to false circumcision [E] to gain Israel's wealth	--	~Deut 23:7, 8
35:4	family devotion to false gods [E]	[+C] 35:2	
35:18	naming son for own bitterness [S]	~[+C] 35:18 Jacob renames son	

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[54] Leah and Rachel are Jacob's cousins, and Rebekah is Isaac's first cousin once removed (she is daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel) (see Gen 22:23; 24:48, 67). These relationships are not forbidden in Lev 18.

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
35:22	incestuous relations with father's concubine (step-mother's slave) [E]	--	+Gen 49:3, 4 [I]
36:12	Timna is concubine to Eliphaz [E]	--	~Exod 17:14 [A] (negative outcome in terms of bearing Amalek namesake of Israel's mortal enemies); ~Matt 19:9 [I] (see appendix C)
37:2-11	sibling rivalry and hatred cause by parental favoritism [E]	[+N] 37:8b, 11 [+C] 37:10	
37:18-20	plot to murder brother, and deception to rescue brother [E]	[+C] 37:22	murder condemned +9:5, 6 [I]; (~Reuben's deception to rescue Joseph appear to be selfish, perhaps hoping to regain birthright o firstborn after illicit sex with Bilhah, see 37:22 with 35:22; 42:37; 49:3, 4)
37:26-28	selling brother into foreign slavery [E]	[+C] 37:29	+Gen 42:21 [I]; 50:20 [I]; also cf. 45:5-9
37:32	deception of father to cover up treachery against brother [E]	[+C] 37:30	
37:35	parental favoritism of perpetual mourning over son presumed dead over living children [E]	--	~Gen 24:67 (3 years of mourning based on correlation of 23:1; 25:20)
38:1	Judah marries foreigner [E]	--	marriage to foreigners +Gen 24:2-4; ~26:35; 27:46-28:2; +34:14 (though this applied to unconverted foreigners); +Exod 34:16 [I]; +Deut 7:3 [I]
38:8	Onan's refusal to sire children with levirate wife [S/E]	[+D] 38:10	(+Deut 25:7-10 [A])
38:11	Judah's refusal to permit levirate relations between son and daughter-in-law [S/E]	[+C] 38:26	(levirate marriage can be avoided through humiliation ceremony +Deut 25:7-10 [A])
38:14-16	Tamar's deception leading to incestuous adultery [E]; Judah's intention to have relations with cultic prostitute (he thought her a זֹנָה prostitute [38:15], and later refers to her as a cultic prostitute קְדֵשָׁה [38:21]) [E]	[+C] 38:24 [Judah's concern for his illicit sexual relations seems confined to social humiliation for losing his identification to a disappearing prostitute 38:23]	illicit sexual relations with (cultic) prostitute +Lev 19:29 [I]; +Deut 23:17-18 [I]; incestuous relations with daughter-in-law +Lev 18:15; 20:12 [I]; ~Amos 2:7 [I]
38:24	Judah's mortal hypocrisy regarding sexual infidelity of Tamar [E]	[+C] 38:26	
39:7-12	Mrs. Potiphar's attempted adultery [E]	[+C] 39:9, 19	

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
39:14-16	Mrs. Potiphar's deception regarding frustrated attempted adultery [E]	[+D] 39:21, 23	
42:4, 38	parental favoritism [S]	--	Jacob's favoritism of Rachel (29:28) migrated to Joseph (37:2-11) and Benjamin (42:4; cf. 35:18) [I], corresponds with manifold younger-over-older sibling theme in Gen [A]
42:7-19, 23-25	Joseph's deception and bullying [E]	[+C] 42:21, 22	
42:36	Jacob's self-centeredness [E]	[+C] 42:28	
43:6	Jacob's anger at sons for their lack of deception [E]	--	pattern of previous deceptions ~Gen 12 [I]; 20 [I]; 26 [I]; 37 [I]; etc.
43:34	sibling favoritism [S]	--	see note of 42:4, 38 for chain reaction of favoritism [I]
43:34	celebratory drinking	--	ironic irresponsibility of brothers via pattern of inebriation leading to vulnerability to wicked attacks, see 9:21; 19:32-35 (on drunkenness see note on 9:21 above)
44:1-5, 15, 17	Joseph's deception, bullying, and involvement in divination [E]	--	on divination +Exod 22:18 [I]; +Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27 [I]; +Deut 18:10, 11 [I]
44:20, 27	Judah recounts Jacob's favoritism of Rachel and her sons [E]	--	~see note on 42:4, 38 for chain reaction of favoritism [I]
47:9	Jacob's disappointment at his short and challenging 130 year life so far [S]	--	~negative connotation may play off chain of favoritism, see on 42:4, 38 [I]
48:5, 22	Jacob's favoritism of Joseph by granting firstborn right to sons [S]	~[C] 48:7 (with 44:20, 27)	
48:14	Jacob's favoritism of Ephraim over Manasseh [S]	[+C] 48:17-19	see manifold younger-over-older sibling theme in Gen (Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Perez) [A]
49:4-7	on deathbed Jacob cursed several sons for unforgiven transgression long ago [S]	--	Gen 34:30; 35:22 [A]
49:8	predicted dominion of Judah over brothers [S]	--	echoes sibling rivalry of 25:23; 27:29; 37:5-11 [A]
49:15-20	Jacob spoke of anticipated troubles for most tribes of concubines [S]	--	echoes menial labor of concubines' sons in 37:2 [A]

Text	Narrated dysfunction: [E] unethical and/or immoral, [S] social impairment	Immediate context: + direct comment by [N] narrator, [D] divine being, [C] character, or ~ inference, or -- no comment	Larger biblical context: Genesis, Pentateuch, or New Testament; [A] allowed sub-ideal and/or unsanctioned, [I] illegal and/or immoral, + explicit, ~ inferred
49:26	Jacob manifests favoritism of Joseph in his blessing [E]	--	~see note of 42:4, 38 for chain reaction of favoritism [I]
50:15-18	brothers' scheming to seek solace from potential vengeance of Joseph	[+C] 50:19, 20	

In broad terms the data in Table 1 reveals that although most incidents of domestic dysfunction in Genesis draw direct or inferred negative comment in the immediate context, many cases pass by without comment. This is true as far as it goes, but further refining challenges this surface observation. Table 2 organizes the data of Table 1 and provides a way past typical generalizations of unethical incidents in Genesis. The organization and summary in Table 2 supports more specific interpretive observations noted below.

Table 2 collates and categorizes domestic dysfunctions in Genesis and notes if there are explicit or implicit ethical judgments in the immediate context, elsewhere in Genesis (only listed if not in immediate context), and Torah, OT outside Torah, or Christian Bible (only listed if not in Genesis). The two main categories are sexual and non-sexual incidents.[55] Beyond these are social impairments and irregularities which are not unethical and immoral, as well as other incidents, many of which lack adequate details to support conclusions. Finally, I have bracketed out Genesis 22 as a special case.

The purpose of Table 2 is to indicate general tendencies. For specific detail about the collated data of Table 2 see Table 1 which is its source. Sorting out manifold examples of attitudes and motives of favoritism, rivalry, selfishness, hypocrisy, and the like, from actions made in relation to motives like deception, conspiracy, murder, illicit sexual actions, and the like is drastically oversimplified. I have collected three kinds of data separately in Table 2 to avoid confusion: (1) social problems which are not ethical per se (e.g., isolation, infertility, etc.); (2) several incidents without adequate information though all or nearly all of these are judged negatively in immediate context (e.g., lack of belief, inaction); (3) several domestic issues in Genesis 22 seem to be special cases.

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[55] While I have chosen to list specific acts only once in the category which is a better fit (e.g., 35:22 as incest rather than adultery) complex incidents include multiple infractions (e.g., in Gen 38 Judah intended illicit sexuality but Tamar intended incestuous adultery via deception, whether justified or not). Because of overlap and subtlety at times Table 1 should be consulted for further detail.

Domestic Dysfunctions in Genesis	Explicit and/or implicit ethical judgments in …		
	immediate context	elsewhere in Genesis	Torah, OT elsewhere, NT
Sexual incidents:			
concubinage (6x) (16:2-4; 22:24; 25:6; 30:3-13; 36:12)	--	--	~banned in NT (see appendix C)
other polygamy (4x) (4:19; 26:34-35; 29:28)	--	--	+regulated in Torah, ~banned in NT (see appendix C)
incest (5x) (19:32-37; 20:12; 29:28[56]; 35:22); incestuous sexuality (1x) (9:22)	+3x, ~1x, --2x		+Torah
mixed marriage (4x) (6:4; 26:34-35; 34:4; 38:1)[57]	+3x	+1x	
refusal of levirate responsibilities (2x) (38:8, 11)	+2x		
illicit sexual relations or attempted (5x) (19:5, 8; 34:2; 38:14-16; 39:7-12)	+5x		
(accidental) attempted adultery (2x) (12:15; 20:3)	+2x		
Non-sexual incidents:			
murder of and/or involving family member(s) (5x) (4:8, 23; 26:41; 35:25-29; 37:18-20)	+5x		
violence (2x) (16:6; 21:9)	+1x, ~1x		
deception and/or conspiracy and/or hypocrisy (c. 18x) (3:6; 12:11-13; 19:32-37; 20:2, 11, 13; 26:7, 8-10; 29:23; 30:27; 33:13-17; 37:32; 38:24; 39:21-23; 42:7-25; 43:6; 44:1-5, 20, 27; 50:15-18)[58]	+10x, ~2x, --2x	~4x	
drunkenness (4x) (9:21; 19:32-37; 43:34)	+2, (~1 cf. Table 1)	~1x	+Torah; OT; NT
favoritism and/or rivalry and/or selfishness[59] (c. 13x) (25:28; 29:28; 32-34; 30:15-20, 24, 41-42; 31:1-2, 19-20; 32:7; 34:23; 37:2-11, 35; 42:36; 49:26)	+7x, ~1x	~4x	~1x Torah
human trafficking (1x) (37:29)	+1x		
Domestic social impairment rather than ethical and/or immoral incidents:			
various (2:18; 3:16; 15:2; 21:10, 16; 25:61; 26:29; 30:1, 2; 35:18; 42:4, 38; 43:34; 47:9; 48:5, 14, 22; 49:4-7, 8, 15-20)	+all		
Other domestic incidents:			
inadequate ethical evidence (11:31; 17:17; 18:12; 19:14, 26; 25:22-23; 34:5; 35:4)			
special situation (Gen 22)			

Key: explicit judgment (+), inferred (~), absence of judgment (--)

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[56] Jacob's incest with Rachel, his first wife's sister, is not stigmatized per se in immediate context or Genesis, though Jacob's consequential favoritism and associated rivalry it instigated is condemned repeatedly. For banning of sister wives see Lev 18:18 and related notes in appendix C below.

[57] Marriage to Canaanites and sons of God is included here. Marriage to Egyptians per se is not included and does not seem to be an issue in several occurrences (see Gen 12; 16; 42:50; cf. Deut 23:8-9 [7-8]).

[58] The two underlined passages do not condemn the deceptions.

[59] Sibling rivalry seems nearly constant in parts of Genesis. I have not included here sibling rivalry that ends in murder as that is counted as murder, and so forth.

Differing judgments on several contested elements in Tables 1 and 2 would realign the following interpretive observations by proportionate degrees. Allowing for such relative slippage, Table 2 still supports a couple of general interpretive observations.

First, and most importantly, the vast majority of unethical and immoral behaviors in Genesis are judged as such explicitly or implicitly in the immediate context. These incidents are judged immoral or unethical in several different kinds of ways: by embedded discourse from God or human characters, or by the narrator's direct comments or inferred narrative framing. Most of the unethical and immoral incidents not condemned in the immediate context are understood with negative connotation in the book of Genesis. The evidence contradicts commonplace disparagement of Genesis as unethical.

Second, the most significant cluster of unethical domestic behaviors without explicit condemnation in Genesis revolve around sexual fidelity and legal exclusive sexual rights in marriage and concubinage. While five or six examples of incest in Genesis are treated negatively because of attendant circumstances, incestuous relations themselves are not directly condemned. Leviticus 18 and 20 ban incestuous relations as capital offences. Polygamy and concubinage per se are not condemned in Genesis even while they often lead to other domestic dysfunctions which are condemned. Neither polygamy nor concubinage merits much attention in scripture. The Torah regulates polygamy and the Old Testament occasionally notes transgression of polygamous regulations. Both polygamy and concubinage are banned by inference of the Lord's teaching in Matthew 19. These are taken up in appendices B and C.

Appendix B: On Concubinage in Scripture

Fornication is sin (Deut 22:20, 21). Prostitution and adultery are unlawful and inherently sinful (see Exod 20:14; Lev 19:29; 21:9).

The social and legal categories of concubinage, slavery, and polygamy lend themselves to diverse rights and obligations.[60] Whereas "consort" or "mistress" can be used within long term

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[60] Discussion here indebted to Raymond Westbrook, "The Female Slave," in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook*, vol. 2, *Cuneiform and Biblical Sources*, eds. Bruce Wells and F. Rachel Magdalene (Eisenbrauns, 2009), 2: 149-74; Raymond Westbrook and Bruce Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), chap 3; K. Engelken "פִּלֶגֶשׁ," *TDOT*, 11:459-51; V. Hamilton, "Marriage, OT and ANE," *ABD*, 4: 565. Westbrook argues that ancient Near East law codes do not allow a person to simultaneously own a spouse as a slave (whether as wife or concubine), the laws consider her either property or spouse (whether concubine or wife) (see "Female Slave," 2: 171). At the same time, a slave could be given for sexual use by her owner, who also owns the salves sexual capacities (2: 150). This accounts for why Hagar, Bilhah, Zilpah, could at one time be slaves of the matriarchs and given as concubines to the patriarchs.

adulterous relations, "concubine" (פִּלֶגֶשׁ) is a legal status of a female who whose exclusive sexual rights are granted to a man, but of lower status than a wife. While a concubine has no rights of inheritance for her or her offspring, her husband is financially obligated to care for her and her children.[61] The owner of a female servant/slave may decide on the sexual relations of the slave and also has rights of ownership of the slave's offspring in certain circumstances (see Exod 21:4; while Hagar's son counts as Sarah's son, 16:2, Hagar parentally arranges for Ishmael's bride after being banished, 21:21). Concubinage may be entered voluntarily or as a slave.[62]

Gideon's concubine (פִּלֶגֶשׁ) (Judg 8:31) is elsewhere referred to as his maidservant (אָמָה) (9:18) a term typically used of involuntary servitude. The reason that females cannot be redeemed from debt slavery seems to rest on the husband/master's financial commitment to her as involuntary concubine once he has had sexual relations with her (see Exod 21:7-11). The permanence of debt slavery for daughters is the basis for the outcry against Nehemiah and other Judean leaders who financially oppressed commoners into selling their daughter as (sex) slaves (see Neh 5:5).

In Genesis concubines explicitly belonged to Nahor (22:24), Eliphaz (36:12), Abraham (25:6 [Hagar, Keturah]; cf. 1 Chron 1:32), and Jacob (35:22).[63] Hagar, Keturah, Bilhah, and Zilpah are each referred to as wife (16:3; 25:1; 30:4, 9; 37:2).

The scriptures do not speak directly to the relative (im)morality of concubinage per se. Excessive concubinage is unlawful indirectly in the prohibition against too many royal spouses (see Deut 17:17; cf. 1 Kgs 11:3, 4). Concubinage is indirectly banned in Matthew 19 by means of the inferred prohibition against polygamy (see Appendix C).

Appendix C:
The Lord's Instruction in Matthew 19 which Excludes Lawful Polygamy

The practice of polygamy and concubinage appear in biblical narratives without comment (see appendix B).[64] Covenantal law allows for polygamy and provides regulations against excess by

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[61] Unlike Hellenistic and Roman views, royal offspring in the Persian empire were not stigmatized as illegitimate and, in exceptional circumstances, could even rule. See Josef Wiesehöfer, :The Achaemenid Policy of Reproduction," in Marvin Lloyd Miller, Ehud Ben Zvi, and Gary N. Knoppers, eds., *The Economy of Ancient Judah in Historical Context* (Winona Lake: IN: 2015), 169 [165-73].

[62] *Contra* Victor Hamilton, "פִּלֶגֶשׁ," *NIDOTTE*, 3: 618-19.

[63] While the word concubine is used of Bilhah (Gen 35:22) it is not used explicitly of Zilpah.

[64] Christian interpreters are sharply divided on this issue. Walter Kaiser works through a series of biblical texts and concluding the scriptures nowhere allow for polygamy. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Tough Questions about God and His Actions in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2015), 89-102. In his conclusion regarding

monarchs (Deut 17:17), and regulations to protect vulnerable parties (Exod 21:10; Deut 21:15-17).[65] In the case of a childless widow, the law of levirate marriage encourages, but does not require, polygamy for the sake of the inheritance of the deceased (see 25:5-10).

In Matthew 19 Christ provides new instruction designed to increase protection for the weaker party in divorce laws which had been applied with excessive leniency in favor of the stronger party. The new instruction by inference effectively eliminates previous allowances for polygamy, and the corollary polygamous practice of concubinage.[66]

The narrative set up to the new instruction lines up with a typical array of positions of how to apply the covenant's law of divorce. The Mishnah (c. 180 CE) frames the competing views efficiently.

> The School of Shammai say: "A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, 'Because he has found in her *indecency* in anything.'" And the School of Hillel say, "[He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, 'Because he has found in her indecency *in anything*.'" R. Akiba says, "Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, 'And it shall be *if she find no favor in his eyes* …'" (m. Gittin 9.5 [Danby]; cf. m. Yebamoth 6.6).[67]

this issue Kaiser quotes Karl Barth to the contrary: "We can hardly point with certainty to a single text in which polygamy is expressly forbidden and monogamy is universally decreed. If, then, we approach the Bible legalistically, new cannot honestly conclude that in this matter we are dealing with an unconditional law of God" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957], 4.3:199, quoted in Kaiser, *Tough Questions*, 101). Kaiser then takes issue with Barth using qualifiers ("hardly," "with certainty," "expressly," and "universally"), and Kaiser concludes that the scriptures categorically affirm monogamy (102). Kaiser's point is fine as far as it goes, but the quotation stands in the middle of a long discussion promoting monogamy as the obligation of the Christian Bible, and unpacking its significance. Barth says, contra Kaiser's framing of him, Christians cannot think "legalistically" but need to think "biblically," which means that, in this case, the monogamy of Genesis 2 trumps the custom of polygamy on display elsewhere in the Old Testament (see 199; and see larger discussion 195-203).

[65] On the acceptance of polygamy within traditional Jewish contexts, see Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 4; William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). Some have understood וְאִשָּׁה אֶל־אֲחֹתָהּ לֹא תִקָּח "and you shall not take a wife and her sister" in Lev 18:18, not as biological sisters but as fellow female persons on analogy of using "brother" of a non-related friendly associate. This reading sees Lev 18:18 not as a forbidden degree of incest like the rest of the similar laws in the chapter, but forbidding polygamy. See Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 193-98; Angelo Tosato, "The Law of Leviticus 18:18: A Reexamination," *CBQ* 46 (1984): 199-214. One line of evidence for Davidson and Tosato comes from CD IV.12b-V.14a which interpreted Lev 18:18 as forbidding polygamy. Also see Jennifer A. Glancy, "The Sexual Use of Slaves: A Response to Kyle Harper on Jewish and Christian *Porneia*," *JBL* 134.1 (2015): 221, n. 26 [215-29].

[66] A strong argument may be made that Mosaic law is "temporary" based on Christ's explaining divorce as permitted over and against the creational design of permanent monogamous marriage (Mark 10:4//Matt 19:8). See N. T. Wight, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 175-195, esp. 188. (While Wright's book was previously released in United Kingdom and American editions in 2005, these did not contain the chapter on monogamy.)

[67] For a different set of ancient concerns by Romans and Philo which may be similar to concerns of Deut 24:1-4, regarding remarrying a wife after her second marriage as adultery and pimping, see Mary R. D'Angelo, "Roman 'Family Values' and the Apologetic Concerns of Philo and Paul: Reading the Sixth Commandment," *NTS* 61 (2015): 537 [525-46]. Similarly Westbrook suggests a scenario by which the first husband marries back his ex-wife after her second marriage ends as a way to secure "indecent" financial profit extracted from her second husband which Deut 24:1-4 seeks to prevent (see "The Prohibition on Restoration of Marriage in Deuteronomy 24:1-4," in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber*, 2: 387-402; for an opposing view see Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 400-5).

The Lord's opponents seem to be asking him about Deuteronomy 24:1 from a position like the one in the Mishnah with the greatest latitude: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" (Matt 19:3). At first, Christ excludes divorce on the grounds that marriage was designed as a permanent institution, citing Genesis 1:27 with 2:24. The opposing teachers push back insisting he acknowledge the case law on divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. At this point, Christ frames the law as a less-than-ideal allowance to compensate for hard-heartedness, and then gives his new instruction.[68] "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual infidelity (πορνεία), and marries another, commits adultery" (19:9).

The new instruction eliminates divorce based on poor cooking or the like, or a no cause divorce for the dissatisfied spouse who finds someone (apparently) better, and only allows divorce for sexual unfaithfulness. Christ glosses the obscure and somewhat flexible term עֶרְוָה as πορνεία.[69] While the LXX of Deuteronomy 24:1 uses the more generic term ἄσχημον for shameful or indecent thing which can be used of genitalia,[70] πορνεία carries a decidedly negative and/or illicit sexual connotation.[71] Within the Septuagintal reading world πορνεία / πορνευω and

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[68] Wenham suggests that laws reflect the "floor" of what is tolerated (see *Torah as Story*, 80). In this sense he sees Christ's new teaching raise the minimum standard (comments by Wenham following an ETS conferences paper, Valley Forge, PA, 17 Nov 2005). Conversely, Goldingay says Christ does not introduce higher standard but simply recovers the higher standard of the Torah (see John Goldingay, *Do We Need the New Testament?: Letting the Old Testament Speak for Itself* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015], kindle ed., chap. 8, "Ideal and Condescension").

[69] On the range of עֶרְוָה, see *HALOT*.

[70] See BDAG; 1 Cor 12:23. The LXX gloss fits well here since עֶרְוָה is used of defecation in Deut 23:15, which the LXX also glosses with ἀσχημοσύνη.

[71] See BDAG. Kyle Harper suggests the sense in Christ's teaching connotes shame for illicit sexual actions similar to זנה (Kyle Harper, "*Porneia*: The Making or a Christian Sexual Norm," *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 375-76 [363-83]). Harper's larger argument is that πορνεία expanded in its sense within the second temple context, esp. due to its use glossing the semantically diverse זנה (unchaste, extramarital sex). Harper claims that by the time of Philo and the New Testament, πορνεία functioned as a broad catch all term for sexual relations outside of marriage. Harper interprets Paul's use in 1 Cor 5-7 as innovatively applying πορνεία to illicit sexuality with dishonored women (377-79). Glancy rejects many of Harper's claims based on close reading of the second temple and biblical passages cited by Harper (e.g., Sirach 41:22; Testament of Reuben 1:6; passages in Philo). Glancy's central argument is that sexual use of slaves was fully accepted within the empire, and falls outside of the stigma of πορνεία. While free women were honored, neither Jew nor Romans regarded sexual exploitation of slaves as taboo (see Glancy, "Sexual Use of Slaves," 215-29). Glancy admits that neither Philo nor Paul condones sexual relations with an enslaved person, but she suspects that if Paul's logic were extrapolated he would accept sexual use slaves and enslaved concubines as upright and ethical (228). Glancy's extrapolation from silence makes her argument vulnerable to the same kinds of problems she repeatedly cites against Harper's arguments from silence. While it seems that ancient Hellenistic and Roman culture generally accepted the sexual use of slaves (male or female), the argument that Paul might have condoned such activity (if he were asked) seems quite strained, given all of the qualifications needed for such an argument. Rather, Paul locates sexual activity between man and wife in 1 Cor 7:1ff, and urges restraint and purity in virgins and widows. A similar sentiment is found in the Lord's remarks on the rarity of remaining single in the service of God (see Matt 19:10ff). For a different view see Joseph A. Marchal, "The Usefulness of an Onesimus:

cognates seem to have the same kind of function as זנה in its conjugations for which πορνεία / πορνευω is used consistently.[72] In scripture זנה denotes and connotes sexual misconduct.[73] It is worth noting that both ἄσχημον and πορνεία are broader than committing adultery (μοιχεία), a capital offense in Torah.[74] The implication seems to be that sexual infidelity effectively nullifies the marriage contract and frees the wronged spouse from the failed marriage. The disciples express dissatisfaction to a more permanent institution of marriage in view of their master's teaching. The disciples presumably realize they have no more "easy out" from marriage (19:10). The Lord takes the opportunity opened by their displeasure to explain the virtues of celibate life for ministry (19:11, 12).[75] But there is more.

If a married person divorces on any grounds short of sexual infidelity and remarries, Christ declares it adultery. More specifically, he frames the law in a typical male-oriented manner and says that any man who divorces his wife without cause of sexual infidelity and remarries, commits adultery, since (apparently) the first marriage still binds him before God.[76] The punchline relative to the question of polygamy: If a person commits adultery by remarrying after a socially legal but theological immoral divorce because there is no sexual infidelity, then how much more is it adultery to marry another when the person is still legally married to the first

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The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul's Letter to Philemon," *JBL* 130.4 (2011): 749-770. Glancy finds a contradiction between Marchal's argument that Paul found Onesimus "sexually useful" versus Paul's instruction on sexual abstinence in 1 Cor 7, his self-description in 1 Cor 7:8, and his opposition to same-sex eroticism in Rom 1:26-27 ("Sexual Use of Slaves," 228. n. 52). All of this not only gets at the complications of Glancy's argument against Harper's arguments from silence, which seems valid, but also highlights the many variables and contingencies of sexual mores in the empire.

[72] See T. Muraoka, *A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Two-way Index to the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), 99-100, 192. The only potential exception is the suggestion that the hapax ἑταιριζομένη (ptc) in Sirach 9:3 may be glossing זנה as γυναικὶ ἑταιριζομένη "loose woman" (NRSV) "female escort" (NETS) (see LEH, 183) or זוּר "strange woman" (BDB 266; *HALOT*, 279; and see Muraoka, 51). In the few exceptions when the LXX uses πορνεία (variously conjugated) to gloss other terms (see 99-100), these are also carry sexually illicit negative connotations, e.g., מַמְזֵר "one of forbidden union," קָדֵשׁ "cultic prostitute" (see *HALOT*), or for גַּב "curved base of altar" or mounds used for cultic prostitution in Ezek 16:24, 39 (see *NIDOTTE*).

[73] זנה as noun, participle, or other forms refers to illicit sexual persons and actions, harlot, act as harlot, fornication, fornicate, adulterous sexual infidelity, and the like (see BDB; *HALOT*; *CDCH*). As a verb זנה typically takes human female subjects, or in masculine metaphorically referring to infidelity of nations (see *NIDOTTE*; *TWOT*).

[74] While sabbath-breaking incurred capital punishment in Torah (Exod 35:2, 3; Num 15:32-36), capital punishment did not play any role in judging post-exilic sabbath-breakers (see Neh 13:15-22). The same kinds of legal shifts could apply to marital sexual infidelity (see Matt 1:19).

[75] For a helpful interpretation of this passage, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 720-21.

[76] Traditional Judaic interpretation contends that only females, not males, can commit adultery. "Since biblical law permitted polygamy, adultery is defined, from a biblical perspective, by the marital status of the woman and only the woman" (Barry Freundel, *Contemporary Orthodox Judaism's Response to Modernity* [Ktav, 2004], 285).

spouse.[77] By inference, therefore, Christ's new instruction regarding divorce eliminates any potential moral grounds for polygamy and concubinage.

Christ's teaching in Matthew 19 is rooted upon the exclusive sexual rights of monogamous marriage by design in Genesis 1 and 2. Christ's authoritative teaching closes a Mosaic loophole. Whatever discretion spouses once enjoyed for legitimately dissolving permanent marriage unions is eliminated. According to Christ, entry into marriage entails permanent exclusive sexual rights by the spouse (banning sexuality with another spouse even if legally divorced from ex-spouse). The only exception is sexual infidelity which dissolves permanent commitment for the wronged spouse, who may divorce and remarry. Relations which do not honor the exclusive sexual rights of monogamous marriage are deemed adulterous, which includes additional spouses, concubines, or sex slaves.

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[77] For this same point, see Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 144.