The fundamental assertion of this study has been that the Genesis narrative can be read as a single whole moving from complication to dénouement. This is a different organizing principle than history as we are used to it, whether causally or chronologically organized, and requires a different kind of reading strategy. I’ve referred to this reading strategy as a muthos-logical reading of the text where muthos is derived from Aristotle’s Poetics and is usually translated into English as plot or plot-structure. It is plot-logic where plot is a single action, and the whole of it, with events brought into relationship so that they lead, as noted, from complication to dénouement.

The Paradigm Shift of Muthos-logical Reading

The fact that this strategy involves a paradigm shift for modern readers can be readily seen in our interpretation of the Cain and Abel narrative as the matrix of the plot-structure for the book of Genesis. Genesis 3, I argued, sets up the plot of the Bible by introducing the complication that drives our expectations for all of Scripture. Humanity has been cursed and exiled from God’s creation-sanctuary. Now we wonder if there is any hope of a return to that previous, blessed state. The text indicates that our hope of returning is located in the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. At the end of Gen 3, this is all the information we are given. We do not know who or what the seed is, nor do we know when the seed will come or what the nature of the struggle will be. The fact that we have this small nugget of information, however, is an advantage because we have only this clue to follow as we read on—the seed of the woman. If we are tuned in to a muthos-logical reading of the text, we will read on with the expectation that the plot will continue, in a single action, to develop the idea of the woman’s seed. Who is the seed? What will the seed be like? What is the nature of the struggle?

As we then read Gen 4, we discovered that the text does pick up on just these questions. Both Cain and Abel are potential seeds of the woman and yet neither can be the seed that defeats the seed of the serpent. It cannot be Abel because he does not survive and it cannot be Cain because he does not master sin. In the end, God provided another seed in place of Abel, whom Cain killed and the plot moves forward, encouraging us to continue reading with a new
complication in mind for the book of Genesis. Will the seed master sin (will it be righteous) and will it survive?

When we read chronologically, the Cain and Abel story is told after the fall of Adam and Eve because it is the next significant event that happened in time. If we read causally, then the Cain and Abel narrative demonstrates how one failure leads to another and only gets worse over time. In either case, there is an altogether different logic that drives interpretation and leads in turn to a different understanding of how one pericope relates to surrounding pericopae and to how it contributes to the overall flow of the narrative. In the end, this can lead to a rather different understanding of the narrative. And this is where we can appreciate the impact of this paradigm shift. It is alarmingly simple, and obvious, that if the seed of the woman is the key to the resolution of the biblical plot, then we should expect Cain and or Abel to either be that seed or at least to somehow interact with our understanding of the nature of the seed and its struggle. As far as I know, however, such readings are nearly absent from the history of interpretation.

**Evaluating the Plot-structure with Two Control Questions**

If a reading is both seemingly obvious and absent from millenia of multi-faith interpretation then it bears a heavy burden of proof. I have therefore suggested two control questions based on the nature of plot as I have defined it, that will help us evaluate the legitimacy of the proposed reading. Drawing on Aristotle, I argued that plot is a single action, and the whole of it, that is organized according to a narrative movement from complication to dénouement or tension to resolution. As a single action, each part of the text plays a role in moving the text toward resolution. Therefore, if this reading strategy is successful then each pericope should contribute to this movement. Above all, the narrative must come to a satisfactory solution. It does not have to be a happy end, but it must be an ending that follows from the previous events and completes the single action of the plot by resolving the complication. Therefore, the most basic test of the validity of my thesis is whether the proposed plot-structure provides an unforced, unified reading of the Genesis narrative. The following synopsis of the Genesis plot will summarize the single action that this reading strategy has proposed.

**Do All the Narrative Episodes Contribute to the Plot-structure?**

The book of Genesis sets in motion not only the plot of the Genesis narrative but the plot of the Bible. The Biblical plot is set in motion with the complication