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By

Date

STATUE OF SAINT PETER · ST. PETER'S SQUARE, VATICAN CITY



*“And so I say to you, you are Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my church . . .
I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven . . .”*

MATTHEW 16:18-19

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NEW TESTAMENT

Nihil Obstat

Stephen J. Hartdegen, O.F.M., L.S.S.
Census Deputatus

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Given in the city of Washington, the District of Columbia, on the Feast of Saint Jerome, Priest and Doctor of the Church, the 30th day of September, in the year of our Lord 2010.

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
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THE SUCCESSION OF POPES

MANY years ago the eminent historian Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote an excellent and insightful essay on the enduring nature of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the centuries. What he said as long ago as 1840 remains true today.

“There is not, and there never was, on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together the two great ages of human civilization. No other institution is left standing which carries the mind back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon and when leopards and tigers bounded in the Flavian amphitheater. The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs. That line we trace back to an unbroken series, from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century, to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eighth; and far beyond the time of Pepin the august dynasty extends, till it is lost in the twilight of fable. The republic of Venice came next in antiquity. But the republic of Venice was modern when compared with the Papacy; and the republic of Venice is gone, and the Papacy remains. The Papacy remains, not in decay, not a mere antique; but full of life and youthful vigor. The Catholic Church is still sending forth to the farthest ends of the world missionaries as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustine, and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila. The number of her children is greater than in any age. Her acquisitions in the New World have more than compensated her for what she has lost in the Old. Her spiritual ascendancy extends over the vast countries which lie between the plains of the Missouri and Cape Horn, countries which, a century hence, may not improbably contain a population as large as that which now inhabits Europe. The members of her communion are certainly not fewer than a hundred and fifty million; and it will be difficult to show that all the other Christian sects united amount to a hundred and twenty million. Nor do we see any sign which indicates the term of her long domination is approaching. She saw the commencement of all governments, and of all

the ecclesiastical establishments, that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain - before the Frank had passed the Rhine - when Grecian eloquence still flourished at Antioch - when idols were still worshiped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigor when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.” *Edinburgh Review* 72 (1840) pp. 227- 28.

There have, of course, been many changes since Macaulay wrote this in the 19th century. Other empires have fallen, including the British empire, though London Bridge and St. Paul's still stands. There is also something else Macaulay does not mention but perhaps had in mind as he wondered about the Roman Catholic Church's endurance. Throughout its long history it has weathered continual threats to its existence from inside as well as outside its ranks. Today is no different. The threats still abound. Notwithstanding such threats, the Roman Catholic Church continues to vigorously assert its divine mission. The membership of its communion has now grown to exceed one billion souls.

It is interesting to note that Lord Macaulay was no friend of the Papacy or of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently the endurance of the Church and the Papacy was regarded by him as an astounding historical phenomenon. As Roman Catholics we, of course, believe that it is much more than this. We believe that the Roman Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ who promised, “I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:20). Again, He said, “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16:18).

The wonder of the great endurance of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy is dramatically evident upon viewing a list of the Popes from Peter, the first Pope, down through the ages, to the present time. Following is a list of the succession of Popes.

St. Peter (-67)	(615-618)	Benedict VII (974-983)	Boniface IX (1389-1404)
St. Linus (67-76)	Boniface V (619-625)	John XIV (983-984)	Innocent VII (1404-1406)
St. Anacletus (76-88)	Honorius I (625-638)	John XV (985-996)	Gregory XII (1406-1415)
St. Clement (88-97)	Severinus (640-640)	Gregory V (996-999)	Martin V (1417-1431)
St. Evaristus (97-105)	John IV (640-642)	Sylvester II (999-1003)	Eugene IV (1431-1447)
St. Alexander I (105-115)	Theodore I (642-649)	John XVII (1003-1003)	Nicholas V (1447-1455)
St. Sixtus I (115-125)	St. Martin I (649-655)	John XVIII (1004-1009)	Callistus III (1455-1458)
St. Telesphorus (125-136)	St. Eugene I (654-657)	Sergius IV (1009-1012)	Pius II (1458-1464)
St. Hyginus (136-140)	St. Vitalian (657-672)	Benedict VIII (1012-1024)	Paul II (1464-1471)
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St. Soter (166-175)	St. Agatho (678-681)	Sylvester III (1045-1045)	Alexander VI (1492-1503)
St. Eleutherius (175-189)	St. Leo II (682-683)	Benedict IX (1045-1045)	Pius III (1503-1503)
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St. Zephyrinus (199-217)	John V (685-686)	Clement II (1046-1047)	Leo X (1513-1521)
St. Callistus I (217-222)	Conon (686-687)	Benedict IX (1047-1048)	Adrian VI (1522-1523)
St. Urban I (222-230)	St. Sergius I (687-701)	Damasus II (1048-1048)	Clement VII (1523-1534)
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St. Sixtus II (257-258)	St. Zachary (741-752)	B1. Victor III (1086-1087)	Gregory XIII (1572-1585)
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St. Eusebius (309?-310?)	Stephen IV (V) (816-817)	Celestine II (1143-1144)	Paul V (1605-1621)
St. Melitades (311-314)	St. Paschal I (817-824)	Lucius II (1144-1145)	Gregory XV (1621-1623)
St. Sylvester I (314-335)	Eugene II (824-827)	B1. Eugene III (1145-1153)	Urban VIII (1623-1644)
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St. Boniface I (418-422)	Marinus I (882-884)	Innocent III (1198-1216)	Innocent XIII (1721-1724)
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THE
OLD TESTAMENT

PREFACE TO THE REVISED NEW AMERICAN BIBLE OLD TESTAMENT

The first step in the genesis of the New American Bible was taken in 1936 when His Excellency, the Most Reverend Edwin V. O'Hara, D.D., chairman of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, invited a group of Catholic Scripture scholars to plan for a revised edition of the Challoner-Rheims New Testament, primarily on the basis of the Vulgate; the plans soon expanded to include the revision of the Old Testament. Archbishop O'Hara's initiative resulted in the formation of the Catholic Biblical Association, whose principal activity in its early years was this work of revision and translation. (For information on the work done on the New Testament, see the "Preface to the New American Bible: First Edition of the New Testament" and "Preface to the Revised Edition.") In 1943 His Holiness Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*, which encouraged Scripture scholars to translate the Scriptures from the original languages. He wrote: "We ought to explain the original text which was written by the inspired author himself and has more authority and greater weight than any, even the very best, translation whether ancient or modern. This can be done all the more easily and fruitfully if to the knowledge of languages be joined a real skill in literary criticism of the same text." Although at this point work on almost twenty of the Old Testament books was completed or near completion, that work was abandoned and the new project of translating from the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic was undertaken.

The completed books of the Old Testament were initially published, as they became available, in four volumes: Genesis–Ruth (1952), Job–Sirach (1955), Isaiah–Malachi (1961), and Samuel–Maccabees (1969). Some fifty scholars collaborated on this project; these were mainly Catholics, but, in accord with the suggestion of Vatican II that "with the approval of the church authority, these translations be produced in cooperation with separated brothers" so that "all Christians may be able to use them" (*Dei Verbum*, No. 22), non-Catholics also participated in the work. To this point the translation had been known under the name of the "Confraternity of Christian Doctrine" or CCD for short, but when these parts of the Old Testament were combined with the New Testament in a single volume, it was given the name "New American Bible," in part to reflect its ecumenical character. In producing the new volume certain changes were made from the original four volumes: a retranslation of the Book of Genesis, cross-references, new and expanded exegetical notes.

New translations and revision of existing translations are required from time to time for various reasons. For example, it is important to keep pace with the discovery and publication of new and better ancient manuscripts (e.g., the Dead Sea Scrolls) so that the best possible textual tradition will be followed, as required by *Divino afflante spiritu*. There are advances in linguistics of the biblical languages which make possible a better understanding and more accurate translation of the original languages. And there are changes and developments in vocabulary and the cultural background of the receptor language. An obvious example of this is the abandonment in English of the second person singular (use of "thee," "thou," "sayest," "hearest"), which had a major impact on Bible translations. Other changes are less obvious but are nevertheless present. There have been changes in vocabulary; for example, the term "holocaust" is now normally reserved for the sacrilegious attempt to destroy the Jewish people by the Third Reich. Concerns such as these are reflected in what Pope John Paul II has

spoken of as the “three pillars” of good biblical translation: “A good translation is based on three pillars that must contemporaneously support the entire work. First, there must be a deep knowledge of the language and the cultural world at the point of origin. Next, there must be a good familiarity with the language and cultural context at the point where the work will arrive. Lastly, to crown the work with success, there must be an adequate mastery of the contents and meaning of what one is translating”—and he praises the translation that “utilizes the vocabulary and idioms of everyday speech” (“le parole e le forme della lingua di tutti i giorni”). (From an address to the United Bible Societies, November 26, 2001.)

This new edition is a thorough revision of the already excellent *New American Bible* Old Testament of 1970. The revision of the Psalter was done between 1988 and 1991, the work of thirty revisors and a board of six editors. Work on the other books of the Old Testament, begun in 1994 and completed in 2001, was done by forty revisors and a board of eight editors. As suggested in the comments above, the revision aimed at making use of the best manuscript traditions available (see below), translating as accurately as possible, and rendering the result in good contemporary English. In many ways it is a more literal translation than the original *NAB* and has attempted to be more consistent in rendering Hebrew (or Greek) words and idioms, especially in technical contexts, such as regulations for sacrifices. In translating the Psalter special effort was made to provide a smooth, rhythmic translation for easy singing or recitation in the liturgy.

The present translation has generally made all references to human beings inclusive in the recognition that “man,” “men,” and “he” are increasingly heard as gender-specific in North American English. Unfortunately, in literary/proverbial registers old usage of such words persists. It has not been possible in every instance to adopt inclusive language, for some circumlocutions are awkward.

Where the Old Testament translation supposes the received text—Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek, as the case may be—ordinarily contained in the best-known editions, as the original or the oldest extant form, no additional remarks are necessary. Where the translators have departed from those received texts, e.g., by following the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text, accepting a reading of what is judged to be a better textual tradition, as from a Qumran manuscript, or by emending a reading apparently corrupted in transmission, such changes are recorded in the revised edition of the *Textual Notes on the New American Bible*. Additional information on the textual tradition for some books may be found in the introduction to the book in the same *Textual Notes*.

In particular, important manuscripts from Cave 4 of Qumran, as well as the most useful recensions of the Greek Old Testament, have been consulted in the preparation of 1 and 2 Samuel. Fragments of the lost Book of Tobit in Aramaic and in Hebrew, recovered from Cave 4 of Qumran, are in substantial agreement with the Sinaiticus Greek recension used for the translation of this book. The lost original Hebrew text of 1 Maccabees is replaced by its oldest extant form in Greek. Judith, 2 Maccabees, and parts of Esther are also translated from the Greek. The translation of The Wisdom of Ben Sira is based on the original Hebrew as far as it is preserved, with corrections from the ancient versions; otherwise, the Greek of the Septuagint is followed. In the Book of Baruch the basic text is the Greek of the Septuagint, with some readings derived from an underlying Hebrew form no longer extant. In the deuterocanonical sections of Daniel (Dn 3:24–90; and 13:1–14:42), the basic text is the Greek text of so-called Theodotion, occasionally revised according to the Greek text of the Septuagint.

THE PENTATEUCH

The Pentateuch (Greek for “five books”) designates the first five books of the Jewish and Christian Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Jewish tradition calls the five books Torah (Teaching, Law) because of the centrality of the Sinai covenant and legislation mediated through Moses.

The unity of the Pentateuch comes from the single story it tells. God creates the world and destines human beings for the blessings of progeny and land possession (Gn 1–3). As the human race expands, its evil conduct provokes God to send the flood to wipe out all but righteous Noah’s family. After the flood, the world is repopulated from his three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Gn 4–9). From them are descended the seventy nations of the civilized world whose offense this time (building a city rather than taking their assigned lands, Gn 10–11) provokes God to elect one family from the rest. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, landless and childless, are promised a child and the land of Canaan. Amid trials and fresh promises, a son (Isaac) is born to them and Abraham takes title to a sliver of Canaanite land, a kind of down payment for later possession (Gn 12–25). Gn 25–36 tells how their descendant Jacob becomes the father of twelve sons (because of which he is called “Israel”), and Gn 37–50 tells how the rejected brother Joseph saves the family from famine and brings them to Egypt.

In Egypt, a pharaoh who knew not Joseph subjects “the seventy sons of Jacob” (“the Hebrews”) to hard labor, keeping them from their land and destroying their male progeny (Ex 1). Moses is commissioned to lead the people out of Egypt to their own land (Ex 2–6). In ten plagues, the Lord defeats Pharaoh. Free at last, the Hebrews leave Egypt and journey to Mount Sinai (Ex 7–18), where they enter into a covenant to be the people of the Lord and be shaped by the Ten Commandments and other laws (Ex 19–24). Though the people commit apostasy when Moses goes back to the mountain for the plans of the dwelling (tabernacle), Moses’ intercession prevents the abrogation of the covenant by God (Ex 32–34). A principle has been established, however: even the people’s apostasy need not end their relationship with God. The book ends with the cloud and the glory taking possession of the tent of meeting (Ex 36:34–38). “The sons of Israel” in Ex 1:1 are the actual sons of Jacob/Israel the patriarch, but at the end of the book they are the nation Israel, for all the elements of nationhood in antiquity have been granted: a god (and temple), a leader, a land, and an authoritative tradition.

Israel remains at the holy mountain for almost a year. The entire block of material from Ex 19:1 to Nm 10:11 is situated at Sinai. The rituals of Leviticus and Numbers are delivered to Moses at the holy mountain, showing that Israel’s worship was instituted by God and part of the very fabric of the people’s life. Priestly material in the Book of Exodus (chaps. 25–31, 35–40) describes the basic institutions of Israelite worship (the tabernacle, its furniture, and priestly vestments). Leviticus, aptly called in rabbinic tradition the Priests’ Manual, lays down the role of priests to teach Israel the distinction between clean and unclean and to see to their holiness. In Nm 10:11–22:1, the journey is resumed, this time from Sinai through the wilderness to Transjordan; Nm 22:2–36:13 tells of events and laws in the plains of Moab.

The final book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, consists of four speeches by Moses to the people who have arrived at the plains of Moab, ready to conquer the land: 1:1–4:43; 4:44–28:68; 29:1–32:52; 33:1–34:12. Each speech is introduced by the formula “This is the law / words / blessing.”

The Priestly editor used literary formulas. The formula “These are the generations (the wording can vary) of . . .” occurs five times in the primordial history (Gn 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1;

11:10) and five times in the ancestral history (11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 [v. 9 is secondary]; 37:2). In Exodus and Numbers the formula (with slight variations) "They departed from (place name) and encamped at (place name)" occurs in two groups of six: A. Ex 12:37a; 13:20; 14:1–2; 15:22a; 16:1; 17:1a; and B. Ex 19:2; Nm 10:12; 20:1a; 20:22; 21:10–11; 22:1.

Who wrote the Pentateuch, and when? Up to the seventeenth century, the virtually unanimous answer of Jews and Christians was "Moses." Moses wrote the Pentateuch as David wrote the Psalter and Solomon wrote the wisdom literature. Though scholars had noted inconsistencies (compare Ishmael's age in Gn 16:16 and 21:5, 14) and duplications (Gn 12, 20, and 26), they assumed Mosaic authorship because of the prevalent theory of inspiration: God inspired authors while they wrote. With the rise of historical criticism, scholars began to use the doublets and inconsistencies as clues to different authors and traditions.

By the late nineteenth century, one theory of the sources of the Pentateuch had been worked out that proved acceptable in its main lines to the majority of scholars (apart from Christian and Jewish conservatives) then and now. It can be quickly sketched. In the premonarchic period of the Judges (ca. 1220–1020 B.C.), the twelve tribes had an oral form of their story from creation to the taking of the land. With the beginnings of monarchy in the late eleventh and tenth centuries, the oral material was written down, being known as the Yahwist account (from its use of the divine name Yhwh). Its abbreviation, "J," comes from the German spelling of the divine name. In the following century, another account took shape in the Northern Kingdom (called E after its use of Elohim as a divine name); some believe the E source is simply a supplement to J. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722/721 B.C., the E version was taken to Jerusalem where it was combined with the J version to produce J-E. During the exile (conventionally dated 587–539 B.C.) or thereafter, an editor recast J-E to make it relevant for the exiled population. This editor is conventionally known as P (=Priestly) because of the chronological and ritual interests apparent in the work. P can also designate archival material and chronological notices. The audience for the Priestly edition no longer lived in the land and was deeply concerned about its survival and its claim on the land.

Deuteronomy (=D) stands alone in style, genre (preaching rather than narrative), and content. How did it come to be the fifth book of the Pentateuch? The J-E narrative actually ends in Numbers, when Israel arrives at the plains of Moab. Many scholars believe that Deuteronomy was secondarily attached to Numbers by moving the account of Moses' death from its original place in the J-E version in Numbers to the end of Deuteronomy (chap. 34). Deuteronomy was attached to Genesis–Numbers to link it to another great work, the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to Kings). Deuteronomy is now the fifth book of the Pentateuch and the first book of the Deuteronomistic History.

In the last three decades, the above consensus on the composition of the Pentateuch has come under attack. Some critics are extremely skeptical about the historical value of the so-called early traditions, and a few doubt there ever was a preexilic monarchy of any substance. For such scholars, the Pentateuch is a retrojection from the fourth or third centuries B.C. Other scholars postulate a different sequence of sources, or understand the sources differently.

How should a modern religiously minded person read the Pentateuch? First, readers have before them the most significant thing, the text of the Pentateuch. It is accurately preserved, reasonably well understood, and capable of touching audiences of every age. Take and read! Second, the controversies are about the sources of the Pentateuch, especially their antiquity and character. Many details will never be known, for the evidence is scanty. Indeed, the origin of many great literary works is obscure.

The Pentateuch witnesses to a coherent story that begins with the creation of the world and ends with Israel taking its land. The same story is in the historical Ps 44, 77, 78, 80, 105, 114, and 149, and in the confessions Dt 26:5–9, Jos 24:2–13, and 1 Sm 12:7–13. Though the narrative enthralls and entertains, as all great literature does, it is well to remember that it is a theopolitical charter as well, meant to establish how and why descendants of the patriarchs are a uniquely holy people among the world's nations.

The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and deportation of Israelites in the sixth century B.C. seemed to invalidate the charter, for Israel no longer possessed its land in any real sense.

The last chapter of the ancient narrative—Israel dwelling securely in its land—no longer held true. The story had to be reinterpreted, and the Priestly editor is often credited with doing so. A preface (Gn 1) was added, emphasizing God's intent that human beings continue in existence through their progeny and possess their own land. Good news, surely, to a devastated people wondering whether they would survive and repossess their ancestral land. The ending of the old story was changed to depict Israel at the threshold of the promised land (the plains of Moab) rather than in it. Henceforth, Israel would be a people oriented toward the land rather than possessing it. The revised ending could not be more suitable for Jews and Christians alike. Both peoples can imagine themselves on the threshold of the promised land, listening to the word of God in order to be able to enter it in the future. For Christians particularly, the Pentateuch portrays the pilgrim people waiting for the full realization of the kingdom of God.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), the first section of the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. Its title in English, “Genesis,” comes from the Greek of Gn 2:4, literally, “the book of the generation (*genesis*) of the heavens and earth.” Its title in the Jewish Scriptures is the opening Hebrew word, *Bereshit*, “in the beginning.”

The book has two major sections—the creation and expansion of the human race (2:4–11:9), and the story of Abraham and his descendants (11:10–50:26). The first section deals with God and the nations, and the second deals with God and a particular nation, Israel. The opening creation account (1:1–2:3) lifts up two themes that play major roles in each section—the divine command to the first couple (standing for the whole race) to produce offspring and to possess land (1:28). In the first section, progeny and land appear in the form of births and genealogies (chaps. 2–9) and allotment of land (chaps. 10–11), and in the second, progeny and land appear in the form of promises of descendants and land to the ancestors. Another indication of editing is the formulaic introduction, “this is the story; these are the descendants” (Hebrew *toledôt*), which occurs five times in Section I (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 10:31) and five times in Section II (11:10; 25:12, 19; 36:1 [v. 9 is an addition]; 37:2).

The Composition of the Book. For the literary sources of Genesis, see Introduction to the Pentateuch. As far as the sources of Genesis are concerned, contemporary readers can reasonably assume that ancient traditions (J and E) were edited in the sixth or fifth century B.C. for a Jewish audience that had suffered the effects of the exile and was now largely living outside of Palestine. The editor highlighted themes of vital concern to this audience: God intends that every nation have posterity and land; the ancestors of Israel are models for their descendants who also live in hope rather than in full possession of what has been promised; the ancient covenant with God is eternal, remaining valid even when the human party has been unfaithful. By highlighting such concerns, the editor addressed the worries of exiled Israel and indeed of contemporary Jews and Christians.

Genesis 1–11. The seven-day creation account in Gn 1:1–2:3 tells of a God whose mere word creates a beautiful universe in which human beings are an integral and important part. Though Gn 2:4–3:24 is often regarded as “the second creation story,” the text suggests that the whole of 2:4–11:9 tells one story. The plot of Gn 2–11 (creation, the flood, renewed creation) has been borrowed from creation-flood stories attested in Mesopotamian literature of the second and early first millennia. In the Mesopotamian creation-flood stories, the gods created the human race as slaves whose task it was to manage the universe for them—giving them food, clothing, and honor in temple ceremonies. In an unforeseen development, however, the human race grew so numerous and noisy that the gods could not sleep. Deeply angered, the gods decided to destroy the race by a universal flood. One man and his family, however, secretly warned of the flood by his patron god, built a boat and survived. Soon regretting their impetuous decision, the gods created a revised version of humankind. The new race was created mortal so they would never again grow numerous and bother the gods. The authors of Genesis adapted the creation-flood story in accord with their views of God and humanity. For example, they attributed the fault to human sin rather than to divine miscalculation (6:5–7) and had God reaffirm without change the original creation (9:1–7). In the biblical version God is just, powerful, and not needy.

How should modern readers interpret the creation-flood story in Gn 2–11? The stories are neither history nor myth. “Myth” is an unsuitable term, for it has several different meanings and connotes untruth in popular English. “History” is equally misleading, for it suggests that the events actually took place. The best term is creation-flood story. Ancient Near Eastern thinkers did not have our methods of exploring serious questions. Instead, they used narratives for issues that we would call philosophical and theological. They added and subtracted narrative details and varied the plot as they sought meaning in the ancient stories. Their stories reveal a privileged time, when divine decisions were made that determined the future of the human race. The origin of something was thought to explain its present meaning, e.g., how God acts with justice and generosity, why human beings are rebellious, the nature of sexual attraction and marriage, why there are many peoples and languages. Though the stories may initially strike us as primitive and naive, they are in fact told with skill, compression, and subtlety. They provide profound answers to perennial questions about God and human beings.

Genesis 11–50. One Jewish tradition suggests that God, having been rebuffed in the attempt to forge a relationship with the nations, decided to concentrate on one nation in the hope that it would eventually bring in all the nations. The migration of Abraham’s family (11:26–31) is part of the general movement of the human race to take possession of their lands (see 10:32–11:9). Abraham, however, must come into possession of his land in a manner different from the nations, for he will not immediately possess it nor will he have descendants in the manner of the nations, for he is old and his wife is childless (12:1–9). Abraham and Sarah have to live with their God in trust and obedience until at last Isaac is born to them and they manage to buy a sliver of the land (the burial cave at Machpelah, chap. 23). Abraham’s humanity and faith offer a wonderful example to the exilic generation.

The historicity of the ancestral stories has been much discussed. Scholars have traditionally dated them sometime in the first half of the second millennium, though a few regard them as late (sixth or fifth century B.C.) and purely fictional. There is unfortunately no direct extra-biblical evidence confirming (or disproving) the stories. The ancestral stories have affinities, however, to late second-millennium stories of childless ancestors, and their proper names fit linguistic patterns attested in the second millennium. Given the lack of decisive evidence, it is reasonable to accept the Bible’s own chronology that the patriarchs were the ancestors of Israel and that they lived well before the exodus that is generally dated in the thirteenth century.

Gn 25:19–35:43 are about Jacob and his twelve sons. The stories are united by a geographical frame: Jacob lives in Canaan until his theft of the right of the firstborn from his brother Esau forces him to flee to Paddan-Aram (alternately Aram-Naharaim). There his uncle Laban tricks him as he earlier tricked his brother. But Jacob is blessed with wealth and sons. He returns to Canaan to receive the final blessing, land, and on the way is reconciled with his brother Esau. As the sons have reached the number of twelve, the patriarch can be given the name Israel (32:28; 35:10). The blessings given to Abraham are reaffirmed to Isaac and to Jacob.

The last cycle of ancestor stories is about Jacob’s son Joseph (37:1–50:26, though in chaps. 48–49 the focus swings back to Jacob). The Joseph stories are sophisticated in theme, deftly plotted, and show keen interest in the psychology of the characters. Jacob’s favoring of Joseph, the son of his beloved wife Rachel, provokes his brothers to kill him. Joseph escapes death through the intercession of Reuben, the eldest, and of Judah, but is sold into slavery in Egypt. In the immediately following chap. 38, Judah undergoes experiences similar to Joseph’s. Joseph, endowed by God with wisdom, becomes second only to Pharaoh in Egypt. From that powerful position, he encounters his unsuspecting brothers who have come to Egypt because of the famine and tests them to see if they have repented. Joseph learns that they have given up their hatred because of their love for Israel, their father. Judah, who seems to have inherited the mantle of the failed oldest brother Reuben, expresses the brothers’ new and profound appreciation of their father and Joseph (chap. 44). At the end of Genesis, the entire family of Jacob/Israel is in Egypt, which prepares for the events in the Book of Exodus.

Genesis in Later Biblical Books. The historical and prophetic books constantly refer to the covenant with the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hos 10 sees the traits of Jacob in the

behavior of the Israel of his own day. Is 51:2 cites Abraham and Sarah as a model for his dispirited community, for though only a couple, they became a great nation. In 1, "In the beginning was the word," alludes to Gn 1:1 (and Prv 8:22) to show that Jesus is creating a new world. St. Paul interprets Jesus as the New Adam in Rom 5:14 and 1 Cor 15:22, 24, whose obedience brings life just as the Old Adam's disobedience brought death. In Rom 4, Paul cites Abraham as someone who was righteous in God's eyes centuries before the Law was given at Sinai.

OUTLINE OF GENESIS.

Preamble. The Creation of the World (1:1-2:3)

I. The Story of the Nations (2:4-11:26)

A. The Creation of the Man and the Woman, Their Offspring, and the Spread of Civilization (2:4-4:26)

B. The Pre-flood Generations (5:1-6:8)

C. The Flood and the Renewed Blessing (6:9-9:29)

D. The Populating of the World and the Proudful City (10:1-11:9)

E. The Genealogy from Shem to Terah (11:10-26)

II. The Story of the Ancestors of Israel (11:27-50:26)

A. The Story of Abraham and Sarah (11:27-25:18)

B. The Story of Isaac and Jacob (25:19-36:43)

C. The Story of Joseph (37:1-50:26)

Preamble. The Creation of the World

CHAPTER 1

The Story of Creation.* 1In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the

* [1:1-2:3] This section, from the Priestly source, functions as an introduction, as ancient stories of the origin of the world (cosmogonies) often did. It introduces the primordial story (2:4-11:26), the stories of the ancestors (11:27-50:26), and indeed the whole Pentateuch. The chapter highlights the goodness of creation and the divine desire that human beings share in that goodness. God brings an orderly universe out of primordial chaos merely by uttering a word. In the literary structure of six days, the creation events in the first three days are related to those in the second three.

- 1. light (day)/darkness (night) = 4. sun/moon
2. arrangement of water = 5. fish + birds from waters
3. a) dry land b) vegetation = 6. a) animals b) human beings: male/female

The seventh day, on which God rests, the climax of the account, falls outside the six-day structure.

Until modern times the first line was always translated, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Several comparable ancient cosmogonies, discovered in recent times, have a "when . . . then" construction, confirming the translation "when . . . then" here as well. "When" introduces the pre-creation

earth—and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters— Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and

state and "then" introduces the creative act affecting that state. The traditional translation, "In the beginning," does not reflect the Hebrew syntax of the clause.

[1:2] This verse is parenthetical, describing in three phases the pre-creation state symbolized by the chaos out of which God brings order: "earth," hidden beneath the encompassing cosmic waters, could not be seen, and thus had no "form"; there was only darkness; turbulent wind swept over the waters. Commencing with the last-named elements (darkness and water), vv. 3-10 describe the rearrangement of this chaos: light is made (first day) and the water is divided into water above and water below the earth so that the earth appears and is no longer "without outline." The abyss: the primordial ocean according to the ancient Semitic cosmogony. After God's creative activity, part of this vast body forms the salt-water seas (vv. 9-10); part of it is the fresh water under the earth (Ps 33:7; Ez 31:4), which wells forth on the earth as springs and fountains (Gn 7:11; 8:2; Prv 3:20). Part of it, "the upper water" (Ps 148:4; Dn 3:60), is held up by the dome of the sky (vv. 6-7), from which rain descends on the earth (Gn 7:11; 2 Kgs 7:2, 19; Ps 104:13). A mighty wind: literally, "spirit or breath [ruah] of God"; cf. Gn 8:1.

a. [1:1] Gn 2:1, 4; 2 Mc 7:28; Ps 8:4; 33:6; 89:12; 90:2; Wis 11:17; Sir 16:24; Jer 10:12; Acts 14:15; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2-3; 3:4; 11:3; Rev 4:11.—b. [1:2] Jer 4:23.—c. [1:3] 2 Cor 4:6.

the darkness he called “night.” Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

⁶Then God said: Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other. ⁷God made the dome,[†] and it separated the water below the dome from the water above the dome. And so it happened.^d ⁸God called the dome “sky.” Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

⁹Then God said: Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear. And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared.^e ¹⁰God called the dry land “earth,” and the basin of water he called “sea.” God saw that it was good. ¹¹^fThen God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And so it happened: ¹²the earth brought forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw that it was good. ¹³Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

¹⁴Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the seasons, the days and the years,^g ¹⁵and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: ¹⁶God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars.^h ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. ¹⁹Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

²⁰ⁱThen God said: Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the

* [1:5] In ancient Israel a day was considered to begin at sunset.

† [1:7] **The dome:** the Hebrew word suggests a gigantic metal dome. It was inserted into the middle of the single body of water to form dry space within which the earth could emerge. The Latin Vulgate translation *firmamentum*, “means of support (for the upper waters); firmament,” provided the traditional English rendering.

d. [1:7] Prv 8:27–28; 2 Pt 3:5.—e. [1:9] Jb 38:8; Ps 33:7; Jer 5:22.—f. [1:11] Ps 104:14.—g. [1:14] Jb 26:10; Ps 19:2–3; Bar 3:33.—h. [1:16] Dt 4:19; Ps 136:7–9; Wis 13:2–4; Jer 31:35.—i. [1:20] Jb 12:7–10.

sky. ²¹God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of crawling living creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, ²²and God blessed them, saying: Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth.^j ²³Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

²⁴^kThen God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: ²⁵God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good. ²⁶Then God said: Let us make[†] human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.

²⁷God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female[§] he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.[¶] Have dominion over the fish of

‡ [1:26] **Let us make:** in the ancient Near East, and sometimes in the Bible, God was imagined as presiding over an assembly of heavenly beings who deliberated and decided about matters on earth (1 Kgs 22:19–22; Is 6:8; Ps 29:1–2; 82; 89:6–7; Jb 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). This scene accounts for the plural form here and in Gn 11:7 (“Let us then go down . . .”). Israel’s God was always considered “Most High” over the heavenly beings. **Human beings:** Hebrew *‘adam* is here the generic term for humankind; in the first five chapters of Genesis it is the proper name Adam only at 4:25 and 5:1–5. **In our image, after our likeness:** “image” and “likeness” (virtually synonyms) express the worth of human beings who have value in themselves (human blood may not be shed in 9:6 because of this image of God) and in their task, dominion (1:28), which promotes the rule of God over the universe.

§ [1:27] **Male and female:** as God provided the plants with seeds (vv. 11, 12) and commanded the animals to be fertile and multiply (v. 22), so God gives sexuality to human beings as their means to continue in existence.

¶ [1:28] **Fill the earth and subdue it:** the object of the verb “subdue” may be not the earth as such but earth as the territory each nation must take for itself (chaps. 10–11), just as Israel will later do (see Nm 32:22, 29; Jos 18:1). The two divine commands define the basic tasks of the human race—to continue in existence through generation and to take possession of one’s God-given territory. The dual command would have had special meaning when Israel was in exile and deeply anxious about whether they would continue as a nation and return to their ancient territory. **Have dominion:** the whole human race is made in the “image” and “likeness” of God and has “dominion.” Comparable literature

j. [1:22] Gn 8:17.—k. [1:24] Sir 16:27–28.—l. [1:26–27] Gn 5:1, 3; 9:6; Ps 8:5–6; Wis 2:23; 10:2; Sir 17:1, 3–4; Mt 19:4; Mk 10:6; Jas 3:7; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.^m 29ⁿ God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food;³⁰ and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened.³¹ God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.^o

CHAPTER 2

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed.^p 21 On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.^q 22 God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.^r

I. The Story of the Nations

The Garden of Eden. 4 This is the story^s of the heavens and the earth at their creation. When the LORD God made the earth and the

of the time used these words of kings rather than of human beings in general; human beings were invariably thought of as slaves of the gods created to provide menial service for the divine world. The royal language here does not, however, give human beings unlimited power, for kings in the Bible had limited dominion and were subject to prophetic critique.

* [1:29] According to the Priestly tradition, the human race was originally intended to live on plants and fruits as were the animals (see v. 30), an arrangement that God will later change (9:3) in view of the human inclination to violence.

† [2:2] The mention of the seventh day, repeated in v. 3, is outside the series of six days and is thus the climax of the account. The focus of the account is God. The text does not actually institute the practice of keeping the Sabbath, for it would have been anachronistic to establish at this point a custom that was distinctively Israelite (Ex 31:13, 16, 17), but it lays the foundation for the later practice. Similarly, ancient creation accounts often ended with the construction of a temple where the newly created human race provided service to the gods who created them, but no temple is mentioned in this account. As was the case with the Sabbath, it would have been anachronistic to institute the temple at this point, for Israel did not yet exist. In Ex 25–31 and 35–40, Israel builds the tabernacle, which is the precursor of the Temple of Solomon.

‡ [2:4] This is the story; the distinctive Priestly formula introduces older traditions, belonging to the tradition called Yahwist, and gives them a new setting. In the first part of Genesis, the formula “this is the story” (or a similar phrase) occurs five times (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10), which corresponds to the five occurrences of the formula in the second part of the book (11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1[9]; 37:2). Some interpret the formula here as retrospective (“Such is the story”), referring back to chap. 1, but all its other occurrences introduce rather than summarize. It is introductory here; the Priestly source would hardly use the formula to introduce its own material in chap. 1.

m. [1:28] Gn 8:17; 9:1; Ps 8:6–9; 115:16; Wis 9:2.—n. [1:29–30] Gn 9:3; Ps 104:14–15.—o. [1:31] 1 Tm 4:4.—p. [2:1] Is 45:12; Jn 1:3–q. [2:2] Ex 20:9–11; 31:17; Heb 4:4, 10.—r. [2:3] Ex 20:11; Dt 5:14; Neh 9:14.

heavens—⁵there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the LORD God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man^s to till the ground,⁶ but a stream^t was welling up out of the earth and watering all the surface of the ground—⁷then the LORD God formed the man^u out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.^v

⁸The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,^{††} and placed there the man whom he had formed.^t ^{9††}Out of the ground the LORD

The cosmogony that begins in v. 4 is concerned with the nature of human beings, narrating the story of the essential institutions and limits of the human race through their first ancestors. This cosmogony, like 1:1–3 (see note there), uses the “when . . . then” construction common in ancient cosmogonies. The account is generally attributed to the Yahwist, who prefers the divine name “Yhwh” (here rendered LORD) for God. God in this story is called “the LORD God” (except in 3:1–5); “LORD” is to be expected in a Yahwist account but the additional word “God” is puzzling.

§ [2:5] Man: the Hebrew word *adam* is a generic term meaning “human being.” In chaps. 2–3, however, the archetypal human being is understood to be male (Adam), so the word *adam* is translated “man” here.

¶ [2:6] Stream: the water wells up from the vast flood below the earth. The account seems to presuppose that only the garden of God was irrigated at this point. From this one source of all the fertilizing water on the earth, water will be channeled through the garden of God over the entire earth. It is the source of the four rivers mentioned in vv. 10–14. Later, with rain and cultivation, the fertility of the garden of God will appear in all parts of the world.

** [2:7] God is portrayed as a potter molding the human body out of earth. There is a play on words in Hebrew between *adam* (“human being,” “man”) and *adama* (“ground”). It is not enough to make the body from earth; God must also breathe into the man’s nostrils. A similar picture of divine breath imparted to human beings in order for them to live is found in Ez 37:5, 9–10; Jn 20:22. The Israelites did not think in the (Greek) categories of body and soul.

†† [2:8] Eden, in the east: the place names in vv. 8–14 are mostly derived from Mesopotamian geography (see note on vv. 10–14). Eden may be the name of a region in southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), the term derived from the Sumerian word *eden*, “fertile plain.” A similar-sounding Hebrew word means “delight,” which may lie behind the Greek translation, “The Lord God planted a paradise [= pleasure park] in Eden.” It should be noted, however, that the garden was not intended as a paradise for the human race, but as a pleasure park for God; the man tended it for God. The story is not about “paradise lost.”

The garden in the precincts of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem seems to symbolize the garden of God (like gardens in other temples); it is apparently alluded to in Ps 1:3; 80:10; 92:14; Ez 47:7–12; Rev 22:1–2.

‡† [2:9] The second tree, the tree of life, is mentioned here and at the end of the story (3:22, 24). It is identified with Wisdom in Prv 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4, where the pursuit of wisdom gives back to human beings the life that is made inaccessible to them in Gn 3:24. In the new creation described in the Book of Revelation, the tree of life is once again made available to human beings (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). Knowledge of good and evil: the meaning is disputed. According to some, it signifies moral autonomy, control over morality (symbolized by “good and evil”), which would be inappropriate for mere human beings; the phrase

s. [2:7] Gn 3:19; 18:27; Tb 8:6; Jb 34:15; Ps 103:14; 104:29; Eccl 3:20; 12:7; Wis 7:1; Sir 33:10; 1 Cor 15:45.—t. [2:8] Is 51:3; Ez 31:9.

God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹¹

¹⁰A river rises in Eden⁹ to water the garden; beyond there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is the Pishon; it is the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹²The gold of that land is good; bdellium and lapis lazuli are also there. ¹³The name of the second river is the Gihon; it is the one that winds all through the land of Cush.¹⁰ ¹⁴The name of the third river is the Tigris; it is the one that flows east of Asshur. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.¹⁰ ¹⁶The LORD God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden⁸ ¹⁷except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.¹⁹

¹⁸The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.^{8z} ¹⁹So the LORD God formed out of the

would thus mean refusal to accept the human condition and finite freedom that God gives them. According to others, it is more broadly the knowledge of what is helpful and harmful to humankind, suggesting that the attainment of adult experience and responsibility inevitably means the loss of a life of simple subordination to God.

* [2:10–14] **A river rises in Eden:** the stream of water mentioned in v. 6, the source of all water upon earth, comes to the surface in the garden of God and from there flows out over the entire earth. In comparable religious literature, the dwelling of god is the source of fertilizing waters. The four rivers represent universality, as in the phrase “the four quarters of the earth.” In Ez 47:1–12; Zec 14:8; Rev 22:1–2, the waters that irrigate the earth arise in the temple or city of God. The place names in vv. 11–14 are mainly from southern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), where Mesopotamian literature placed the original garden of God. The Tigris and the Euphrates, the two great rivers in that part of the world, both emptied into the Persian Gulf. Gihon is the modest stream issuing from Jerusalem (2 Sm 5:8; 1 Kgs 1:9–10; 2 Chr 32:4), but is here regarded as one of the four great world rivers and linked to Mesopotamia, for Cush here seems to be the territory of the Kassites (a people of Mesopotamia) as in Gn 10:8. The word Pishon is otherwise unknown but is probably formed in imitation of Gihon. Havilah seems, according to Gn 10:7 and 1 Chr 1:9, to be in Cush in southern Mesopotamia though other locations have been suggested.

† [2:17] **You shall die:** since they do not die as soon as they eat from the forbidden tree, the meaning seems to be that human beings have become mortal, destined to die by virtue of being human.

‡ [2:18] **Helper suited to him:** lit., “a helper in accord with him.” “Helper” need not imply subordination, for God is called a helper (Dt 33:7; Ps 46:2). The language suggests a profound

u. [2:9] Gn 3:22; Prv 3:18; Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14.—v. [2:13] Sir 24:25.—w. [2:15] Sir 7:15.—x. [2:16] Ps 104:14–15.—y. [2:17] Gn 3:2–3; Rom 6:23.—z. [2:18] Tb 8:6; Sir 36:24; 1 Cor 11:9; 1 Tm 2:13.

ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.

²¹So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.⁴

²²The LORD God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, ²³the man said:

“This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of man this one has been taken.”^{8s}

²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.[¶]

²⁵The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.^{**}

CHAPTER 3

Expulsion from Eden. ¹Now the snake was the most cunning^{††} of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He asked the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden?’” ²The woman answered the snake: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.’” ⁴But the snake said to the woman: “You certainly will

affinity between the man and the woman and a relationship that is supportive and nurturing.

§ [2:23] The man recognizes an affinity with the woman God has brought him. Unlike the animals who were made from the ground, she is made from his very self. There is a play on the similar-sounding Hebrew words *’ishsha* (“woman,” “wife”) and *’ishi* (“man,” “husband”).

¶ [2:24] **One body:** lit., “one flesh.” The covenant of marriage establishes kinship bonds of the first rank between the partners.

** [2:25] **They felt no shame:** marks a new stage in the drama, for the reader knows that only young children know no shame. This draws the reader into the next episode, where the couple’s disobedience results in their loss of innocence.

†† [3:1] **Cunning:** there is a play on the words for “naked” (2:25) and “cunning/wise” (Heb. *’arum*). The couple seek to be “wise” but end up knowing that they are “naked.”

a. [2:21] Sir 17:1; 1 Cor 11:8–9; 1 Tm 2:13.—b. [2:24] Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7; 1 Cor 7:10–11; Eph 5:31.—c. [3:3] Gn 2:17; Rom 6:23.

not die!^d ⁵God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know^e good and evil.” ⁶The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.^e ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸When they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day,^f the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.^f ⁹The LORD God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you? ¹⁰He answered, “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid.” ¹¹Then God asked: Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat? ¹²The man replied, “The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it.” ¹³The LORD God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, “The snake tricked me, so I ate it.”^g

¹⁴Then the LORD God said to the snake:

Because you have done this,
cursed are you
among all the animals, tame or
wild;

On your belly you shall crawl,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.^h

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the
woman,
and between your offspring and
hers;

They will strike at your head,
while you strike at their heel.ⁱ

¹⁶To the woman he said:

I will intensify your toil in childbearing;
in pain^l you shall bring forth
children.

Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.

¹⁷To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it,

Cursed is the ground^m because of you!
In toil you shall eat its yield
all the days of your life.^j

¹⁸Thorns and thistles it shall bear for
you,
and you shall eat the grass of the
field.

¹⁹By the sweat of your brow
you shall eat bread,
Until you return to the ground,
from which you were taken;
For you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.^k

²⁰The man gave his wife the name “Eve,”
because she was the mother of all the living.^{††}

§ [3:15] **They will strike . . . at their heel:** the antecedent for “they” and “their” is the collective noun “offspring,” i.e., all the descendants of the woman. Christian tradition has seen in this passage, however, more than unending hostility between snakes and human beings. The snake was identified with the devil (Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; Rev 12:9; 20:2), whose eventual defeat seemed implied in the verse. Because “the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8), the passage was understood as the first promise of a redeemer for fallen humankind, the protoevangelium. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. A.D. 130–200), in his *Against Heresies* 5.21.1, followed by several other Fathers of the Church, interpreted the verse as referring to Christ, and cited Gal 3:19 and 4:4 to support the reference. Another interpretive translation is *ipsa*, “she,” and is reflected in Jerome’s Vulgate. “She” was thought to refer to Mary, the mother of the messiah. In Christian art Mary is sometimes depicted with her foot on the head of the serpent.

¶ [3:16] **Toil . . . pain:** the punishment affects the woman directly by increasing the toil and pain of having children. He shall rule over you: the punishment also affects the woman’s relationship with her husband. A tension is set up in which her urge (either sexual urge or, more generally, dependence for sustenance) is for her husband but he rules over her. But see Sg 7:11.

** [3:17–19] **Cursed is the ground:** the punishment affects the man’s relationship to the ground (“*adam* and “*adamah*”). **You are dust:** the punishment also affects the man directly insofar as he is now mortal.

†† [3:20] The man gives his wife a more specific name than “woman” (2:23). The Hebrew name *hava* (“Eve”) is related

i. [3:15] Rom 16:20; 1 Jn 3:8; Rev 12:17.—j. [3:17] Gn 5:29; Rom 5:12; 8:20; Heb 6:8.—k. [3:19] Gn 2:7; Jb 10:9; 34:15; Ps 90:3; 103:14; Eccl 3:20; 12:7; Wis 15:8; Sir 10:9; 17:2; Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21; Heb 9:27.

* [3:5] Like gods, who know: or “like God who knows.”

† [3:8] The breezy time of the day: lit. “the wind of the day.” Probably shortly before sunset.

‡ [3:14] Each of the three punishments (the snake, the woman, the man) has a double aspect, one affecting the individual and the other affecting a basic relationship. The snake previously stood upright, enjoyed a reputation for being shrewder than other creatures, and could converse with human beings as in vv. 1–5. It must now move on its belly, is more cursed than any creature, and inspires revulsion in human beings (v. 15).

d. [3:4–5] Wis 2:24; Sir 25:14; Is 14:14; Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3.—e. [3:6] Gn 3:22; 1 Tm 2:14.—f. [3:8] Jer 23:24.—g. [3:13] 2 Cor 11:3.—h. [3:14] Is 65:25; Mi 7:17; Rev 12:9.

²¹The LORD God made for the man and his wife garments of skin, with which he clothed them. ²²Then the LORD God said: See! The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil! Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life, and eats of it and lives forever? ²³The LORD God therefore banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴He expelled the man, stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the garden of Eden, to guard the way to the tree of life.

CHAPTER 4

Cain and Abel. ¹The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, saying, "I have produced a male child with the help of the LORD." ²Next she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground. ³In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the ground, ⁴while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion[‡] of the firstlings of his flock.[¶] The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and dejected. ⁶Then the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected? ⁷If you act rightly, you will be accepted;[§] but if

to the Hebrew word *hay* ("living"); "mother of all the living" points forward to the next episode involving her sons Cain and Abel.

* [4:1] The Hebrew name *qayin* ("Cain") and the term *qaniti* ("I have produced") present a wordplay that refers to metal-working; such wordplays are frequent in Genesis.

† [4:2] Some suggest the story reflects traditional strife between the farmer (Cain) and the nomad (Abel), with preference for the latter reflecting the alleged nomadic ideal of the Bible. But there is no disparagement of farming here, for Adam was created to till the soil. The story is about two brothers (the word "brother" occurs seven times) and God's unexplained preference for one, which provokes the first murder. The motif of the preferred younger brother will occur time and again in the Bible, e.g., Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David (1 Sm 16:1-13).

‡ [4:4] **Fatty portion:** it was standard practice to offer the fat portions of animals. Others render, less satisfactorily, "the choicest of the firstlings." The point is not that Abel gave a more valuable gift than Cain, but that God, for reasons not given in the text, accepts the offering of Abel and rejects that of Cain.

§ [4:7] **You will be accepted:** the text is extraordinarily condensed and unclear. "You will be accepted" is a paraphrase of one Hebrew word, "lifting." God gives a friendly warning to Cain that his right conduct will bring "lifting," which could refer to acceptance (*lifting*) of his future offerings or of himself (as in the Hebrew idiom "*lifting of the face*") or *lifting up* of his head in honor (cf. note on 40:13), whereas wicked conduct will make him vulnerable to sin, which is personified as a force ready to attack. In any case, Cain has the ability to do the right

l. [3:22] Gn 2:9; Rev 22:2, 14.—m. [4:4] Ex 34:19; Heb 11:4.

not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it."

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out in the field."[¶] When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.[¶] ⁹Then the LORD asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰God then said: What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! ¹¹Now you are banned from the ground[¶] that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.[¶] ¹²If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth. ¹³Cain said to the LORD: "My punishment is too great to bear. ¹⁴Look, you have now banished me from the ground. I must avoid you and be a constant wanderer on the earth. Anyone may kill me at sight." ¹⁵Not so! the LORD said to him. If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged seven times. So the LORD put a mark^{††} on Cain, so that no one would kill him at sight. ¹⁶Cain then left the LORD's presence and settled in the land of Nod,^{‡‡} east of Eden.

Descendants of Cain and Seth. ¹⁷^{§§}Cain had intercourse with his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. Cain also became the founder of a city, which he named after his son Enoch. ¹⁸To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael; Mehujael

thing. **Lies in wait:** sin is personified as a power that "lies in wait" (Heb. *robes*) at a place. In Mesopotamian religion, a related word (*rabisu*) refers to a malevolent god who attacks human beings in particular places like roofs or canals.

¶ [4:8] **Let us go out in the field:** to avoid detection. The verse presumes a sizeable population which Genesis does not otherwise explain.

** [4:11] **Banned from the ground:** lit., "cursed." The verse refers back to 3:17 where the ground was cursed so that it yields its produce only with great effort. Cain has polluted the soil with his brother's blood and it will no longer yield any of its produce to him.

†† [4:15] **A mark:** probably a tattoo to mark Cain as protected by God. The use of tattooing for tribal marks has always been common among the Bedouin of the Near Eastern deserts.

‡‡ [4:16] **The land of Nod:** a symbolic name (derived from the verb *nud*, to wander) rather than a definite geographic region.

§§ [4:17-24] Cain is the first in a seven-member lineal genealogy ending in three individuals who initiate action (Jabal, Jubal, and Tubalcain). Other Genesis genealogies also end in three individuals initiating action (5:32 and 11:26). The purpose of this genealogy is to explain the origin of culture and crafts among human beings. The names in this genealogy are the same (some with different spellings) as those in the ten-member genealogy (ending with Noah), which has a slightly different function. See note on 5:1-32.

n. [4:7] Sir 7:1; Jude 11.—o. [4:8] Wis 10:3; Mt 23:35; Lk 11:51; 1 Jn 3:12; Jude 11.—p. [4:11] Dt 27:24.

became the father of Methusael, and Methusael became the father of Lamech. ¹⁹Lamech took two wives; the name of the first was Adah, and the name of the second Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal, who became the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and keep livestock. ²¹His brother's name was Jubal, who became the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the reed pipe. ²²Zillah, on her part, gave birth to Tubalcain, the ancestor of all who forge instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. ²³Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
wives of Lamech, listen to my
utterance:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for bruising me.
²⁴If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven
times.”

²⁵Adam again had intercourse with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she called Seth. “God has granted me another offspring in place of Abel,” she said, “because Cain killed him.” ²⁶To Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh.

At that time people began to invoke the LORD by name.^g

CHAPTER 5

Generations: Adam to Noah.^h ¹This is the record of the descendants of Adam. When

^a [4:23–24] Lamech's boast shows that the violence of Cain continues with his son and has actually increased. The question is posed to the reader: how will God's creation be renewed?

^b [4:25–26] The third and climactic birth story in the chapter, showing that this birth, unlike the other two, will have good results. The name Seth (from the Hebrew verb *shat*, “to place, replace”) shows that God has replaced Abel with a worthy successor. From this favored line Enosh (“human being/humankind”), a synonym of Adam, authentic religion began with the worship of Yhwh; this divine name is rendered as “the LORD” in this translation. The Yahwist source employs the name Yhwh long before the time of Moses. Another ancient source, the Elohist (from its use of the term *Elohim*, “God,” instead of *Yhwh*, “LORD,” for the pre-Mosaic period), makes Moses the first to use Yhwh as the proper name of Israel's God, previously known by other names as well; cf. Ex 3:13–15.

^c [5:1–32] The second of the five Priestly formulas in Part I (“This is the record of the descendants . . .”; see 2:4a; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10) introduces the second of the three linear genealogies in Gn 1–11 (4:17–24 and 11:10–26). In each, a list of individuals (six in 4:17–24, ten in 5:1–32, or nine in 11:10–26) ends in three people who initiate action. Linear genealogies (father to son) in ancient societies had a communicative function, grounding

q. [4:26] 1 Chr 1:1; Lk 3:38.—r. [5:1] Gn 1:27; Wis 2:23; Sir 17:1; Jas 3:9.

God created human beings, he made them in the likeness of God; ²he created them male and female. When they were created, he blessed them and named them humankind.

^{3s}Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he begot a son in his likeness, after his image; and he named him Seth.^t ⁴Adam lived eight hundred years after he begot Seth, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵The whole lifetime of Adam was nine hundred and thirty years; then he died.

⁶When Seth was one hundred and five years old, he begot Enosh. ⁷Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he begot Enosh, and he had other sons and daughters. ⁸The whole lifetime of Seth was nine hundred and twelve years; then he died.

⁹When Enosh was ninety years old, he begot Kenan. ¹⁰Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he begot Kenan, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹¹The whole lifetime of Enosh was nine hundred and five years; then he died.

¹²When Kenan was seventy years old, he begot Mahalalel. ¹³Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years after he begot Mahalalel, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴The whole lifetime of Kenan was nine hundred and ten years; then he died.

¹⁵When Mahalalel was sixty-five years old, he begot Jared. ¹⁶Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he begot Jared, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷The whole lifetime of Mahalalel was eight hundred and ninety-five years; then he died.

¹⁸When Jared was one hundred and sixty-two years old, he begot Enoch. ¹⁹Jared lived eight hundred years after he begot Enoch, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁰The

the authority or claim of the last-named individual in the first-named. Here, the genealogy has a literary function as well, advancing the story by showing the expansion of the human race after Adam, as well as the transmission to his descendant Noah of the divine image given to Adam. Correcting the impression one might get from the genealogy in 4:17–24, this genealogy traces the line through Seth rather than through Cain. Most of the names in the series are the same as the names in Cain's line in 4:17–19 (Enosh, Enoch, Lamech) or spelled with variant spellings (Mahalalel, Jared, Methuselah). The genealogy itself and its placement before the flood shows the influence of ancient Mesopotamian literature, which contains lists of cities and kings before and after the flood. Before the flood, the ages of the kings ranged from 18,600 to 36,000 years, but after it were reduced to between 140 and 1,200 years. The biblical numbers are much smaller. There are some differences in the numbers in the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

s. [5:3–32] 1 Chr 1:1–4; Lk 3:36–38.—t. [5:3] Gn 4:25.

whole lifetime of Jared was nine hundred and sixty-two years; then he died.

²¹When Enoch was sixty-five years old, he begot Methuselah. ²²Enoch walked with God after he begot Methuselah for three hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters. ²³The whole lifetime of Enoch was three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God,^{*} and he was no longer here, for God took him.[†]

²⁵When Methuselah was one hundred and eighty-seven years old, he begot Lamech. ²⁶Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he begot Lamech, and he had other sons and daughters. ²⁷The whole lifetime of Methuselah was nine hundred and sixty-nine years; then he died.

²⁸When Lamech was one hundred and eighty-two years old, he begot a son ^{29†}and named him Noah, saying, "This one shall bring us relief from our work and the toil of our hands, out of the very ground that the LORD has put under a curse."[‡] ³⁰Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he begot Noah, and he had other sons and daughters. ³¹The whole lifetime of Lamech was seven hundred and seventy-seven years; then he died.

³²When Noah was five hundred years old, he begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.^{‡†}

CHAPTER 6

Origin of the Nephilim.[§] ¹When human beings began to grow numerous on the earth

* [5:24] Enoch is in the important seventh position in the ten-member genealogy. In place of the usual formula "then he died," the change to "Enoch walked with God" implies that he did not die, but like Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11–12) was taken alive to God's abode. This mysterious narrative spurred much speculation and writing (beginning as early as the third century B.C.) about Enoch the sage who knew the secrets of heaven and who could communicate them to human beings (see Sir 44:16; 49:14; Heb 11:5; Jude 14–15 and the apocryphal work 1 Enoch).

† [5:29] The sound of the Hebrew word *noah*, "Noah," is echoed in the word *yenahamenu*, "he will bring us relief"; the latter refers both to the curse put on the soil because of human disobedience (3:17–19) and to Noah's success in agriculture, especially in raising grapes for wine (9:20–21).

‡ [5:32] **Shem, Ham, and Japheth:** like the genealogies in 4:17–24 and 11:10–26, the genealogy ends in three individuals who engage in important activity. Their descendants will be detailed in chap. 10, where it will be seen that the lineage is political-geographical as well as "ethnic."

§ [6:1–4] These enigmatic verses are a transition between the expansion of the human race illustrated in the genealogy of chap. 5 and the flood depicted in chaps. 6–9. The text, apparently

u. [5:24] Wis 4:10–11; Sir 44:16; 49:14; Heb 11:5.—v. [5:29] Gn 3:17–19.—w. [5:32] Gn 6:10; 10:1.

and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God[¶] saw how beautiful the daughters of human beings were, and so they took for their wives whomever they pleased.^x ³Then the LORD said: My spirit shall not remain in human beings forever, because they are only flesh. Their days shall comprise one hundred and twenty years.

⁴The Nephilim appeared on earth in those days, as well as later,^{**} after the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of human beings, who bore them sons. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.[‡]

Warning of the Flood. ^{5††}When the LORD saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil,^z ⁶the LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and his heart was grieved.^{‡‡}

⁷So the LORD said: I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created, and not only the human beings, but also the ani-

alluding to an old legend, shares a common ancient view that the heavenly world was populated by a multitude of beings, some of whom were wicked and rebellious. It is incorporated here, not only in order to account for the prehistoric giants, whom the Israelites called the Nephilim, but also to introduce the story of the flood with a moral orientation—the constantly increasing wickedness of humanity. This increasing wickedness leads God to reduce the human life span imposed on the first couple. As the ages in the preceding genealogy show, life spans had been exceptionally long in the early period, but God further reduces them to something near the ordinary life span.

¶ [6:2] **The sons of God:** other heavenly beings. See note on 1:26.

** [6:4] **As well as later:** the belief was common that human beings of gigantic stature once lived on earth. In some cultures, such heroes could make positive contributions, but the Bible generally regards them in a negative light (cf. Nm 13:33; Ez 32:27). The point here is that even these heroes, filled with vitality from their semi-divine origin, come under God's decree in v. 3.

†† [6:5–8:22] The story of the great flood is commonly regarded as a composite narrative based on separate sources woven together. To the Yahwist source, with some later editorial additions, are usually assigned 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 7–10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22–23; 8:2b–3a, 6–12, 13b, 20–22. The other sections are usually attributed to the Priestly writer. There are differences between the two sources: the Priestly source has two pairs of every animal, whereas the Yahwist source has seven pairs of clean animals and two pairs of unclean; the floodwater in the Priestly source is the waters under and over the earth that burst forth, whereas in the Yahwist source the floodwater is the rain lasting forty days and nights. In spite of many obvious discrepancies in these two sources, one should read the story as a coherent narrative. The biblical story ultimately draws upon an ancient Mesopotamian tradition of a great flood, preserved in the Sumerian flood story, the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, and (embedded in a longer creation story) the Atrahasis Epic.

‡‡ [6:6] **His heart was grieved:** the expression can be misleading in English, for "heart" in Hebrew is the seat of memory and judgment rather than emotion. The phrase is actually parallel to the first half of the sentence ("the LORD regretted . . .").

x. [6:2] Mt 24:38; Lk 17:26–27.—y. [6:4] Wis 14:6; Bar 3:26.—z. [6:5] Ps 14:2–3.

imals and the crawling things and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them.* ⁸But Noah found favor with the LORD.

⁹These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man and blameless in his generation,^a Noah walked with God. ¹⁰Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹But the earth was corrupt^b in the view of God and full of lawlessness.^b ¹²When God saw how corrupt the earth had become, since all mortals had corrupted their ways on earth,^c ¹³God said to Noah: I see that the end of all mortals has come, for the earth is full of lawlessness because of them. So I am going to destroy them with the earth.^d

Preparation for the Flood. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of gopherwood,^e equip the ark with various compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵This is how you shall build it: the length of the ark will be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.^f ¹⁶Make an opening for daylight^g and finish the ark a cubit above it. Put the ark's entrance on its side; you will make it with bottom, second and third decks. ¹⁷I, on my part, am about to bring the flood waters on the earth, to destroy all creatures under the sky in which there is the breath of life; everything on earth shall perish.^e ¹⁸I will establish my covenant with you. You shall go into

* [6:7] Human beings are an essential part of their environment, which includes all living things. In the new beginning after the flood, God makes a covenant with human beings and every living creature (9:9–10). The same close link between human beings and nature is found elsewhere in the Bible; e.g., in Is 35, God's healing transforms human beings along with their physical environment, and in Rom 8:19–23, all creation, not merely human beings, groans in labor pains awaiting the salvation of God.

† [6:11] **Corrupt:** God does not punish arbitrarily but simply brings to its completion the corruption initiated by human beings.

‡ [6:14] **Gopherwood:** an unidentified wood mentioned only in connection with the ark. It may be the wood of the cypress, which in Hebrew sounds like "gopher" and was widely used in antiquity for shipbuilding.

§ [6:15] Hebrew "cubit," lit., "forearm," is the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches (a foot and a half). The dimensions of Noah's ark were approximately 440 × 73 × 44 feet. The ark of the Babylonian flood story was an exact cube, 120 cubits (180 feet) in length, width, and height.

¶ [6:16] **Opening for daylight:** a conjectural rendering of the Hebrew word *sohar*, occurring only here. The reference is probably to an open space on all sides near the top of the ark to admit light and air. The ark also had a window or hatch, which could be opened and closed (8:6).

a. [6:9] Wis 10:4; Sir 44:17.—b. [6:11] Jb 22:15–17.—c. [6:12] Ps 14:2.—d. [6:13] Sir 40:9–10; 44:17; Mt 24:37–39.—e. [6:17] Gn 7:4, 21; 2 Pt 2:5.

the ark, you and your sons, your wife and your sons' wives with you.^f ¹⁹Of all living creatures you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, one male and one female,^g to keep them alive along with you. ²⁰Of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal, and of every kind of thing that crawls on the ground, two of each will come to you, that you may keep them alive. ²¹Moreover, you are to provide yourself with all the food that is to be eaten, and store it away, that it may serve as provisions for you and for them. ²²Noah complied; he did just as God had commanded him.^{††}

CHAPTER 7

¹Then the LORD said to Noah: Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone in this generation have I found to be righteous before me.⁸ ²Of every clean animal, take with you seven pairs, a male and its mate; and of the unclean animals, one pair, a male and its mate; likewise, of every bird of the air, seven pairs, a male and a female, to keep their progeny alive over all the earth. ⁴For seven days from now I will bring rain down on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and so I will wipe out from the face of the earth every being that I have made.^h ⁵Noah complied, just as the LORD had commanded.

The Great Flood. ⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came upon the earth. ⁷Together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, Noah went into the ark because of the waters of the flood.ⁱ ⁸Of the clean animals and the unclean, of the birds,

** [6:19–21] **You shall bring two of every kind . . . , one male and one female:** For the Priestly source (P), there is no distinction between clean and unclean animals until Sinai (Lv 11), no altars or sacrifice until Sinai, and all diet is vegetarian (Gn 1:29–30); even after the flood P has no distinction between clean and unclean, since "any living creature that moves about" may be eaten (9:3). Thus P has Noah take the minimum to preserve all species, one pair of each, without distinction between clean and unclean, but he must also take on provisions for food (6:21). The Yahwist source (J), which assumes the clean-unclean distinction always existed but knows no other restriction on eating meat (Abel was a shepherd and offered meat as a sacrifice), requires additional clean animals ("seven pairs") for food and sacrifice (7:2–3; 8:20).

†† [6:22] **Just as God had commanded him:** as in the creation of the world in chap. 1 and in the building of the tabernacle in Ex 25–31, 35–40 (all from the Priestly source), everything takes place by the command of God. In this passage and in Exodus, the commands of God are carried out to the letter by human agents, Noah and Moses. Divine speech is important. God speaks to Noah seven times in the flood story.

f. [6:18] Gn 9:9; Wis 14:6; Heb 11:7; 1 Pt 3:20.—g. [7:1] Wis 10:4; Sir 44:17; 2 Pt 2:5.—h. [7:4] Gn 6:17; 2 Pt 2:5.

and of everything that crawls on the ground,⁹ two by two, male and female came to Noah into the ark, just as God had commanded him.^j ¹⁰When the seven days were over, the waters of the flood came upon the earth.

¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month: on that day

All the fountains of the great abyss^{*}
burst forth,
and the floodgates of the sky were
opened.

¹²For forty days and forty nights heavy rain poured down on the earth.

¹³On the very same day, Noah and his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of Noah's sons had entered the ark, ¹⁴together with every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, every kind of crawling thing that crawls on the earth, and every kind of bird. ¹⁵Pairs of all creatures in which there was the breath of life came to Noah into the ark. ¹⁶Those that entered were male and female; of all creatures they came, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷The flood continued upon the earth for forty days. As the waters increased, they lifted the ark, so that it rose above the earth. ¹⁸The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth, but the ark floated on the surface of the waters. ¹⁹Higher and higher on the earth the waters swelled, until all the highest mountains under the heavens were submerged. ²⁰The waters swelled fifteen cubits higher than the submerged mountains. ²¹All creatures that moved on earth perished: birds, tame animals, wild animals, and all that teemed on the earth, as well as all humankind.^k ²²Everything on dry land with the breath of life in its nostrils died. ²³The LORD wiped out every being on earth: human beings and animals, the crawling things and the birds of the air; all were wiped out from the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ark were left.

²⁴And when the waters had swelled on the earth for one hundred and fifty days,

CHAPTER 8

¹God remembered Noah and all the animals, wild and tame, that were with him in the ark. So God made a wind sweep over the earth, and the waters began to subside. ²The fountains of the abyss and the floodgates of the sky were closed, and the downpour from the sky was held back. ³Gradually the waters receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days, the waters had so diminished ⁴that, in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.[†] ⁵The waters continued to diminish until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains appeared.

⁶At the end of forty days Noah opened the hatch of the ark that he had made, ⁷and he released a raven. It flew back and forth until the waters dried off from the earth. ⁸Then he released a dove, to see if the waters had lessened on the earth. ⁹But the dove could find no place to perch, and it returned to him in the ark, for there was water over all the earth. Putting out his hand, he caught the dove and drew it back to him inside the ark. ¹⁰He waited yet seven days more and again released the dove from the ark. ¹¹In the evening the dove came back to him, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! So Noah knew that the waters had diminished on the earth. ¹²He waited yet another seven days and then released the dove; but this time it did not come back.

¹³In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the water began to dry up on the earth. Noah then removed the covering of the ark and saw that the surface of the ground had dried. ¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

[†] [8:4] The mountains of Ararat: the mountain country of ancient Ararat in northwest Iraq, which was the highest part of the world to the biblical writer. There is no Mount Ararat in the Bible.

[‡] [8:7–12] In the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, Utnapishtim (the equivalent of Noah) released in succession a dove, a swallow, and a raven. When the raven did not return, Utnapishtim knew it was safe to leave the ark. The first century A.D. Roman author Pliny tells of Indian sailors who release birds in order to follow them toward land.

[§] [8:13–14] On the first day of the first month, the world was in the state it had been on the day of creation in chap. 1. Noah had to wait another month until the earth was properly dry as in 1:9.

^{*} [7:11] Abyss: the subterranean ocean; see note on 1:2.

i. [7:7] Wis 14:6; 1 Pt 3:20; 2 Pt 2:5.—j. [7:9] Gn 6:19.—k. [7:21–23] Jb 22:16; Mt 24:39; Lk 17:27; 2 Pt 3:6.

¹⁵Then God said to Noah: ¹⁶Go out of the ark, together with your wife and your sons and your sons' wives. ¹⁷Bring out with you every living thing that is with you—all creatures, be they birds or animals or crawling things that crawl on the earth—and let them abound on the earth, and be fertile and multiply on it.¹ ¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives; ¹⁹and all the animals, all the birds, and all the crawling creatures that crawl on the earth went out of the ark by families.

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹When the LORD smelled the sweet odor, the LORD said to himself: Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, since the desires of the human heart are evil from youth; nor will I ever again strike down every living being, as I have done.^m

²²All the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, Summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.ⁿ

CHAPTER 9

Covenant with Noah. ¹God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth.^o ²Fear and dread of you shall come upon all the animals of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon all the creatures that move about on the ground and all the fishes of the sea; into your power they are delivered. ³Any living creature that moves about shall be yours to eat; I give them all to you as I did the green plants. ⁴Only meat with its lifeblood still in it you

* [9:1] God reaffirms without change the original blessing and mandate of 1:28. In the Mesopotamian epic *Atrahasis*, on which the Genesis story is partly modeled, the gods changed their original plan by restricting human population through such means as childhood diseases, birth demons, and mandating celibacy among certain groups of women.

† [9:2–3] Pre-flood creatures, including human beings, are depicted as vegetarians (1:29–30). In view of the human propensity to violence, God changes the original prohibition against eating meat.

l. [8:17] Gn 1:22, 28.—m. [8:21] Sir 44:18; Is 54:9; Rom 7:18.—n. [8:22] Jer 33:20, 25.—o. [9:1] Gn 1:22, 28; 8:17.—p. [9:3] Gn 1:29–30; Dt 12:15.

shall not eat.[†] ⁵Indeed for your own lifeblood I will demand an accounting; from every animal I will demand it, and from a human being, each one for the blood of another, I will demand an accounting for human life.[†]

⁶Anyone who sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall that one's blood be shed; For in the image of God have human beings been made.^s

⁷Be fertile, then, and multiply; abound on earth and subdue it.[†]

⁸God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you^u and with every living creature that was with you: the birds, the tame animals, and all the wild animals that were with you—all that came out of the ark. ¹¹I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth.^v ¹²God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: ¹³wI set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so that the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being.^x ¹⁶When the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and

‡ [9:4] Because a living being dies when it loses most of its blood, the ancients regarded blood as the seat of life, and therefore as sacred. Jewish tradition considered the prohibition against eating meat with blood to be binding on all, because it was given by God to Noah, the new ancestor of all humankind; therefore the early Christian Church retained it for a time (Acts 15:20, 29).

§ [9:6] The image of God, given to the first man and woman and transmitted to every human being, is the reason that no violent attacks can be made upon human beings. That image is the basis of the dignity of every individual who, in some sense, "represents" God in the world.

¶ [9:8–17] God makes a covenant with Noah and his descendants and, remarkably, with all the animals who come out of the ark: never again shall the world be destroyed by flood. The sign of this solemn promise is the appearance of a rainbow.

q. [9:4] Lv 7:26–27; 17:4; Dt 12:16, 23; 1 Sm 14:33; Acts 15:20.—r. [9:5] Gn 4:10–11; Ex 21:12.—s. [9:6] Gn 1:26–27; Lv 24:17; Nm 35:33; Jas 3:9.—t. [9:7] Gn 1:28; 8:17; 9:2; Jas 3:7.—u. [9:9] Gn 6:18.—v. [9:11] Sir 44:18; Is 54:9.—w. [9:13] Sir 43:12.

remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature—every mortal being that is on earth. ¹⁷God told Noah: This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and every mortal being that is on earth.

Noah and His Sons. ¹⁸The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah, and from them the whole earth was populated.

²⁰Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ²¹He drank some of the wine, became drunk, and lay naked inside his tent. ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness, and he told his two brothers outside. ²³Shem and Japheth, however, took a robe, and holding it on their shoulders, they walked backward and covered their father's nakedness; since their faces were turned the other way, they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said:

"Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
shall he be to his brothers."^a

²⁶He also said:

"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem!
Let Canaan be his slave.
²⁷May God expand Japheth,[†]
and may he dwell among the tents
of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave."[‡]

²⁸Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. ²⁹The whole lifetime of Noah was nine hundred and fifty years; then he died.

* [9:18–27] The character of the three sons is sketched here. The fault is not Noah's (for he could not be expected to know about the intoxicating effect of wine) but Ham's, who shames his father by looking on his nakedness, and then tells the other sons. Ham's conduct is meant to prefigure the later shameful sexual practices of the Canaanites, which are alleged in numerous biblical passages. The point of the story is revealed in Noah's curse of Ham's son Canaan and his blessing of Shem and Japheth.

[†] [9:27] In the Hebrew text there is a play on the words *yapt* ("expand") and *yepet* ("Japheth").

x. [9:15] Is 54:9.—y. [9:18] Gn 5:32; 10:1.—z. [9:21] Lam 4:21; Hb 2:15.—a. [9:25] Dt 27:16; Wis 12:11.

CHAPTER 10

Table of the Nations.[‡] ¹These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, to whom children were born after the flood.

^{2b}The descendants of Japheth: Gomer,[§] Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.^{c,3} The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz,[¶] Diphath and Togarmah. ⁴The descendants of Javan: Elishah,^{**} Tarshish, the Kittim and the Rodanim. ⁵From these branched out the maritime nations.

These are the descendants of Japheth by their lands, each with its own language, according to their clans, by their nations.

⁶The descendants of Ham: Cush,^{††} Mizraim, Put and Canaan. ⁷The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and

‡ [10:1–32] Verse 1 is the fourth of the Priestly formulas (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 11:10) that structure Part I of Genesis; it introduces 10:2–11:9, the populating of the world and the building of the city. In a sense, chaps. 4–9 are concerned with the first of the two great commands given to the human race in 1:28, "Be fertile and multiply!" whereas chaps. 10–11 are concerned with the second command, "Fill the earth and subdue it!" ("Subdue it" refers to each nation's taking the land assigned to it by God.) Gn 9:19 already noted that all nations are descended from the three sons of Noah; the same sentiment is repeated in 10:5, 18, 25, 32; 11:8. The presupposition of the chapter is that every nation has a land assigned to it by God (cf. Dt 32:8–9). The number of the nations is seventy (if one does not count Noah and his sons, and counts Sidon [vv. 15, 19] only once), which is a traditional biblical number (Jgs 8:30; Lk 10:1, 17). According to Gn 46:27 and Ex 1:5, Israel also numbered seventy persons, which shows that it in some sense represents the nations of the earth.

This chapter classifies the various peoples known to the ancient Israelites; it is theologically important as stressing the basic family unity of all peoples on earth. It is sometimes called the Table of the Nations. The relationship between the various peoples is based on linguistic, geographic, or political grounds (v. 31). In general, the descendants of Japheth (vv. 2–5) are the peoples of the Indo-European languages to the north and west of Mesopotamia and Syria; the descendants of Ham (vv. 6–20) are the Hamitic-speaking peoples of northern Africa; and the descendants of Shem (vv. 21–31) are the Semitic-speaking peoples of Mesopotamia, Syria and Arabia. But there are many exceptions to this rule; the Semitic-speaking peoples of Canaan are considered descendants of Ham, because at one time they were subject to Hamitic Egypt (vv. 6, 15–19). This chapter is generally considered to be a composite from the Yahwist source (vv. 8–19, 21, 24–30) and the Priestly source (vv. 1–7, 20, 22–23, 31–32). Presumably that is why certain tribes of Arabia are listed under both Ham (v. 7) and Shem (vv. 26–28).

§ [10:2] Gomer: the Cimmerians; Madai: the Medes; Javan: the Greeks.

¶ [10:3] Ashkenaz: an Indo-European people, which later became the medieval rabbinic name for Germany. It now designates one of the great divisions of Judaism, Eastern European Yiddish-speaking Jews.

** [10:4] Elishah: Cyprus; the Kittim: certain inhabitants of Cyprus; the Rodanim: the inhabitants of Rhodes.

†† [10:6] Cush: biblical Ethiopia, modern Nubia. Mizraim: Lower (i.e., northern) Egypt; Put: eastern Punt in East Africa or Libya.

b. [10:2–8] 1 Chr 1:5–10.—c. [10:2] Ez 38:2.

Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

⁸Cush[†] became the father of Nimrod, who was the first to become a mighty warrior on earth. ⁹He was a mighty hunter in the eyes of the LORD; hence the saying, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in the eyes of the LORD."¹⁰ His kingdom originated in Babylon, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.[†] ¹¹From that land he went forth to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir[‡] and Calah, ¹²as well as Resen, between Nineveh and Calah,[§] the latter being the principal city.

¹³Mizraim became the father of the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, ¹⁴the Pathrusim,[¶] the Casluhim, and the Caphthorim from whom the Philistines came.

¹⁵Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and of Heth;^{**} ¹⁶also of the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, ¹⁷the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁸the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward, the clans of the Canaanites spread out, ¹⁹so that the Canaanite borders extended from Sidon all the way to Gerar, near Gaza, and all the way to Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, near Lasha.

²⁰These are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

²¹To Shem also, Japheth's oldest brother and the ancestor of all the children of Eber,^{††} children were born. ²²The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud and Aram. ²³The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether and Mash.

²⁴Arpachshad became the father of Shelah, and Shelah became the father of Eber.

* [10:8] **Cush**: here seems to be Cossea, the country of the Kassites; see note on 2:10–14. **Nimrod**: possibly Tukulti-Ninurta I (thirteenth century B.C.), the first Assyrian conqueror of Babylonia and a famous city-builder at home.

† [10:10] **Shinar**: the land of ancient Babylonia, embracing Sumer and Akkad, present-day southern Iraq, mentioned also in 11:2; 14:1.

‡ [10:11] **Rehoboth-Ir**: lit., "wide-streets city," was probably not the name of another city, but an epithet of Nineveh; cf. Jon 3:3.

§ [10:12] **Calah**: Assyrian Kalhu, the capital of Assyria in the ninth century B.C.

¶ [10:14] **The Pathrusim**: the people of Upper (southern) Egypt; cf. Is 11:11; Jer 44:1; Ez 29:14; 30:13. **Caphthorim**: Crete; for Caphthor as the place of origin of the Philistines, cf. Dt 2:23; Am 9:7; Jer 47:4.

** [10:15] **Heth**: the biblical Hittites; see note on 23:3.

†† [10:21] **Eber**: the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews, that is, the one to whom they traced their name.

²⁵To Eber two sons were born: the name of the first was Peleg, for in his time the world was divided,^{‡‡} and the name of his brother was Joktan.

²⁶Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²⁷Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²⁸Obal, Abimael, Sheba, ²⁹Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were descendants of Joktan. ³⁰Their settlements extended all the way from Mesha to Sephar, the eastern hill country.

³¹These are the descendants of Shem, according to their clans, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

³²These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their origins and by their nations. From these the nations of the earth branched out after the flood.

CHAPTER 11

Tower of Babel.^{§§} ¹The whole world had the same language and the same words. ²When they were migrating from the east, they came to a valley in the land of Shinar^{¶¶} and settled there. ³They said to one another, "Come, let us mold bricks and harden them with fire." They used bricks for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky,^{***} and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth."

⁵The LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built. ⁶Then the LORD said: If now, while they are one people and all have the same language, they have started to do this, nothing they presume to do will be out of their reach. ⁷Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that no one will understand the speech of another. ⁸So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹That is why it was called

‡‡ [10:25] In the Hebrew text there is a play on the name *Peleg* and the word *niplegta*, "was divided."

§§ [11:1–9] This story illustrates increasing human wickedness, shown here in the sinful pride that human beings take in their own achievements apart from God. Secondly, the story explains the diversity of languages among the peoples of the earth.

¶¶ [11:2] **Shinar**: see note on 10:10.

*** [11:4] **Tower with its top in the sky**: possibly a reference to the chief ziggurat of Babylon, *E-sag-ila*, lit., "the house that raises high its head."

Babel,^{*} because there the LORD confused the speech of all the world. From there the LORD scattered them over all the earth.

Descendants from Shem to Abraham.[†]

^{10†}These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was one hundred years old, he begot Arpachshad, two years after the flood. ¹¹Shem lived five hundred years after he begot Arpachshad, and he had other sons and daughters. ¹²When Arpachshad was thirty-five years old, he begot Shelah.[‡] ¹³Arpachshad lived four hundred and three years after he begot Shelah, and he had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴When Shelah was thirty years old, he begot Eber. ¹⁵Shelah lived four hundred and three years after he begot Eber, and he had other sons and daughters.

¹⁶When Eber[§] was thirty-four years old, he begot Peleg. ¹⁷Eber lived four hundred and thirty years after he begot Peleg, and he had other sons and daughters.

¹⁸When Peleg was thirty years old, he begot Reu. ¹⁹Peleg lived two hundred and nine years after he begot Reu, and he had other sons and daughters.

²⁰When Reu was thirty-two years old, he begot Serug. ²¹Reu lived two hundred and seven years after he begot Serug, and he had other sons and daughters.

²²When Serug was thirty years old, he begot Nahor. ²³Serug lived two hundred years after he begot Nahor, and he had other sons and daughters.

* [11:9] **Babel**: the Hebrew form of the name "Babylon"; the Babylonians interpreted their name for the city, *Bab-ili*, as "gate of god." The Hebrew word *balal*, "he confused," has a similar sound.

† [11:10–26] The second Priestly genealogy goes from Shem to Terah and his three sons Abram, Nahor, and Haran, just as the genealogy in 5:3–32 went from Adam to Noah and his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This genealogy marks the important transition in Genesis between the story of the nations in 1:1–11:26 and the story of Israel in the person of its ancestors (11:27–50:26). As chaps. 1–11 showed the increase and spread of the nations, so chaps. 12–50 will show the increase and spread of Israel. The contrast between Israel and the nations is a persistent biblical theme. The ages given here are from the Hebrew text; the Samaritan and Greek texts have divergent sets of numbers in most cases. In comparable accounts of the pre-flood period, enormous life spans are attributed to human beings. It may be an attempt to show that the pre-flood generations were extraordinary and more vital than post-flood human beings.

‡ [11:12] The Greek text adds Kenan (cf. 5:9–10) between Arpachshad and Shelah. The Greek listing is followed in Lk 3:36.

§ [11:16] **Eber**: the eponymous ancestor of the Hebrews, "descendants of Eber" (10:21, 24–30); see note on 14:13.

f. [11:10–26] 1 Chr 1:24–27; Lk 3:34–36.

²⁴When Nahor was twenty-nine years old, he begot Terah. ²⁵Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years after he begot Terah, and he had other sons and daughters.

²⁶When Terah was seventy years old, he begot Abram,[¶] Nahor and Haran.[§]

II. The Story of the Ancestors of Israel

Terah. ²⁷These are the descendants of Terah.^{**} Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran begot Lot. ²⁸Haran died before Terah his father, in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans.^{††} ²⁹Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai,^{‡‡} and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah, daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah.^{‡‡‡} ³⁰Sarai was barren; she had no child.

³¹Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and brought them out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go to the land of Canaan. But when they reached Haran, they settled there.^{‡‡‡‡} ³²The lifetime of Terah was two hundred and five years; then Terah died in Haran.^{§§}

¶ [11:26] Abram is a dialectal variant of Abraham. God will change his name in view of his new task in 17:4.

** [11:27] **Descendants of Terah**: elsewhere in Genesis the story of the son is introduced by the name of the father (25:12, 19; 36:1; 37:2). The Abraham-Sarah stories begin (11:27–32) and end with genealogical notices (25:1–18), which concern, respectively, the families of Terah and of Abraham. Most of the traditions in the cycle are from the Yahwist source. The so-called Elohist source (E) is somewhat shadowy, denied by some scholars but recognized by others in passages that duplicate other narratives (20:1–18 and 21:22–34). The Priestly source consists mostly of brief editorial notices, except for chaps. 17 and 23.

†† [11:28] **Ur of the Chaldeans**: Ur was an extremely ancient city of the Sumerians (later, of the Babylonians) in southern Mesopotamia. The Greek text has "the land of the Chaldeans." After a millennium of relative unimportance, Ur underwent a revival during the Neo-Babylonian/Chaldea empire (625–539 B.C.). The sixth-century author here identified the place by its contemporary name. As chap. 24 shows, Haran in northern Mesopotamia is in fact the native place of Abraham. In the Genesis perspective, the human race originated in the East (3:24; 4:16) and migrated from there to their homelands (11:2). Terah's family moved from the East (Ur) and Abraham will complete the journey to the family's true homeland in the following chapters.

‡‡ [11:29] **Sarai**: like Abram, a dialectal variant of the more usual form of the name Sarah. In 17:15, God will change it to Sarah in view of her new task.

‡‡‡ [11:32] Since Terah was seventy years old when his son Abraham was born (v. 26), and Abraham was seventy-five when he left Haran (12:4), Terah lived in Haran for sixty years after Abraham's departure. According to the tradition in the Samaritan text, Terah died when he was one hundred and forty-five years old, therefore, in the same year in which Abraham left Haran. This is the tradition followed in Stephen's speech: Abraham left Haran "after his father died" (Acts 7:4).

‡‡‡‡ g. [11:26] Jos 24:2; 1 Chr 1:26–27.—h. [11:29] Gn 17:15.—i. [11:31] Jos 24:3; Neh 9:7; Jdt 5:6–9; Acts 7:4.

CHAPTER 12

Abram's Call and Migration. ¹The LORD said to Abram: Go forth^r from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.^j ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.^k ³I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.^{*}

^{4m}Abram went as the LORD directed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. ^{5s}Abram took his wife Sarai, his brother's son Lot, all the possessions that they had accumulated, and the persons they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ^{6l}Abram

* [12:1-3] Go forth . . . find blessing in you: the syntax of the Hebrew suggests that the blessings promised to Abraham are contingent on his going to Canaan.

† [12:2] The call of Abraham begins a new history of blessing (18:18; 22:15-18), which is passed on in each instance to the chosen successor (26:2-4; 28:14). This call evokes the last story in the primeval history (11:1-9) by reversing its themes: Abraham goes forth rather than settle down; it is God rather than Abraham who will make a name for him; the families of the earth will find blessing in him.

‡ [12:3] Will find blessing in you: the Hebrew conjugation of the verb here and in 18:18 and 28:14 can be either reflexive ("shall bless themselves by you" = people will invoke Abraham as an example of someone blessed by God) or passive ("by you all the families of earth will be blessed" = the religious privileges of Abraham and his descendants ultimately will be extended to the nations). In 22:18 and 26:4, another conjugation of the same verb is used in a similar context that is undoubtedly reflexive ("bless themselves"). Many scholars suggest that the two passages in which the sense is clear should determine the interpretation of the three ambiguous passages: the privileged blessing enjoyed by Abraham and his descendants will awaken in all peoples the desire to enjoy those same blessings. Since the term is understood in a passive sense in the New Testament (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8), it is rendered here by a neutral expression that admits of both meanings.

§ [12:5] The ancestors appear in Genesis as pastoral nomads living at the edge of settled society, and having occasional dealings with the inhabitants, sometimes even moving into towns for brief periods. Unlike modern nomads such as the Bedouin, however, ancient pastoralists fluctuated between following the herds and sedentary life, depending on circumstances. Pastoralists could settle down and farm and later resume a pastoral way of life. Indeed, there was a symbiotic relationship between pastoralists and villagers, each providing goods to the other. **Persons:** servants and others who formed the larger household under the leadership of Abraham; cf. 14:14.

¶ [12:6] Abraham's journey to the center of the land, Shechem, then to Bethel, and then to the Negeb, is duplicated in Jacob's journeys (33:18; 35:1, 6, 27; 46:1) and in the general route of the conquest under Joshua (Jos 7:2; 8:9, 30). Abraham's journey is a symbolic "conquest" of the land he has been promised. In building altars here (vv. 7, 8) and elsewhere, Abraham acknowledges his God as Lord of the land.

j. [12:1] Acts 7:3; Heb 11:8.—k. [12:2] Gn 17:6; Sir 44:20-21; Rom 4:17-22.—l. [12:3] Gn 18:18; 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8.—m. [12:4-5] Gn 11:31; Jos 24:3; Acts 7:4.

passed through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, by the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said: To your descendants I will give this land. So Abram built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.ⁿ ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel, pitching his tent with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar there to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name. ⁹Then Abram journeyed on by stages to the Negeb.^{**}

Abram and Sarai in Egypt. ^{††} ¹⁰There was famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, since the famine in the land was severe.^o ¹¹When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai: "I know that you are a beautiful woman. ¹²When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is his wife'; then they will kill me, but let you live. ¹³Please say, therefore, that you are my sister,^{‡‡} so that I may fare well on your account and my life may be spared for your sake."^{¶¶} ¹⁴When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵When Pharaoh's officials saw her they praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶Abram fared well on her account, and he acquired sheep, oxen, male and female servants, male and female donkeys, and camels.^{§§}

¹⁷But the LORD struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.^{¶¶} ¹⁸Then Pharaoh summoned Abram and said to him: "How could you do this to me! Why did you not tell me she was your wife? ¹⁹Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now, here is your wife. Take her and leave!"

** [12:9] The Negeb: the semidesert land south of Judah.

†† [12:10-13:1] Abraham and Sarah's sojourn in Egypt and encounter with Pharaoh foreshadow their descendants' experience, suggesting a divine design in which they must learn to trust. The story of Sarah, the ancestor in danger, is told again in chap. 20, and also in 26:1-11 with Rebekah instead of Sarah. Repetition of similar events is not unusual in literature that has been orally shaped.

‡‡ [12:13] You are my sister: the text does not try to excuse Abraham's deception, though in 20:12 a similar deception is somewhat excused.

§§ [12:16] Camels: domesticated camels did not come into common use in the ancient Near East until the end of the second millennium B.C. Thus the mention of camels here (24:11-64; 30:43; 31:17, 34; 32:8, 16; 37:25) is seemingly an anachronism.

n. [12:7] Ex 33:1; Dt 34:4; Acts 7:5.—o. [12:10] Gn 26:1.—p. [12:13] Gn 20:12-13; 26:7.—q. [12:17] Ps 105:14.

²⁰Then Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning Abram, and they sent him away, with his wife and all that belonged to him.

CHAPTER 13

Abram and Lot Part. ¹From Egypt Abram went up to the Negeb with his wife and all that belonged to him, and Lot went with him.^r ²Now Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold.^s ³From the Negeb he traveled by stages toward Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly stood, ⁴the site where he had first built the altar; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.^t

⁵Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶so that the land could not support them if they stayed together; their possessions were so great that they could not live together. ⁷There were quarrels between the herders of Abram's livestock and the herders of Lot's livestock. At this time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land.

⁸So Abram said to Lot: "Let there be no strife between you and me, or between your herders and my herders, for we are kindred. ⁹Is not the whole land available? Please separate from me. If you prefer the left, I will go to the right; if you prefer the right, I will go to the left."^u ¹⁰Lot looked about and saw how abundantly watered the whole Jordan Plain was as far as Zoar, like the LORD's own garden, or like Egypt. This was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. ¹¹Lot, therefore, chose for himself the whole Jordan Plain and set out eastward. Thus they separated from each other. ¹²Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom. ¹³Now the inhabitants of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.^v

* [13:2-18] In this story of Abraham and Lot going their separate ways, Abraham resolves a family dispute by an act that shows both trust in God and generosity toward his nephew. The story suggests Lot rather than Abraham is the natural choice to be the ancestor of a great family; he is young and he takes the most fertile land (outside the land of Canaan). In contrast to Lot, who lifts his eyes to choose for himself (vv. 10-11), Abraham waits for God to tell him to lift his eyes and see the land he will receive (v. 14). Chaps. 18-19 continue the story of Abraham and Lot. Abraham's visionary possession of the land foreshadows that of Moses (Dt 3:27; 34:4).

r. [13:1] Gn 12:9.—s. [13:2] Ps 112:1-3; Prv 10:22.—t. [13:4] Gn 12:8.—u. [13:13] Gn 18:20; Ez 16:49; 2 Pt 2:6-8; Jude 7.

¹⁴After Lot had parted from him, the LORD said to Abram: Look about you, and from where you are, gaze to the north and south, east and west;^w ¹⁵all the land that you see I will give to you and your descendants forever.^w ¹⁶I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth; if anyone could count the dust of the earth, your descendants too might be counted.^x ¹⁷Get up and walk through the land, across its length and breadth, for I give it to you. ¹⁸Abram moved his tents and went on to settle near the oak of Mamre, which is at Hebron. There he built an altar to the LORD.^y

CHAPTER 14

The Four Kings. ¹When Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goim ²made war on Bera king of Sodom, Birshab king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar), ³all the latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea^z). ⁴For twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings allied with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, ⁶and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El-paran, close by the wilderness.^z ⁷They then turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they subdued the whole country of both the Amalekites and the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar. ⁸Thereupon the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out, and in the Valley of Siddim they went into battle against them: ⁹against Chedorlaomer

+ [14:1] Abraham plays a role with other world leaders. He defeats a coalition of five kings from the east (where, later, Israel's enemies lived) and is recognized by a Canaanite king as blessed by God Most High. The historicity of the events is controverted; apart from Shinar (Babylon), Tidal (Hittite Tudhaliya), and Elam, the names and places cannot be identified with certainty. The five cities were apparently at the southern end of the Dead Sea, and all but Bela (i.e., Zoar) were destined for destruction (19:20-24; Hos 11:8). The passage belongs to none of the traditional Genesis sources; it has some resemblance to reports of military campaigns in Babylonian and Assyrian royal annals.

[14:3] The Salt Sea: the Dead Sea.

v. [13:14] Gn 28:14.—w. [13:15] Gn 12:7; Mt 5:5; Lk 1:55, 73; Acts 7:5; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:16.—x. [13:16] Gn 22:17; Nm 23:10.—y. [13:18] Gn 14:13.—z. [14:6] Dt 2:12.

king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five.¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the king of Sodom and the king of Gomorrah fled, they fell into these, while the rest fled to the mountains.¹¹ The victors seized all the possessions and food supplies of Sodom and Gomorrah and then went their way.¹² They took with them Abram's nephew Lot, who had been living in Sodom, as well as his possessions, and departed.^a

¹³A survivor came and brought the news to Abram the Hebrew,^{*} who was camping at the oak of Mamre the Amorite, a kinsman of Eshcol and Aner; these were allies of Abram.¹⁴ When Abram heard that his kinsman had been captured, he mustered three hundred and eighteen of his retainers,[†] born in his house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.¹⁵ He and his servants deployed against them at night, defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.¹⁶ He recovered all the possessions. He also recovered his kinsman Lot and his possessions, along with the women and the other people.

¹⁷When Abram returned from his defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were allied with him, the king of Sodom went out to greet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

¹⁸Melchizedek, king of Salem,[‡] brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God

* [14:13] **Abram the Hebrew:** "Hebrew" was used by biblical writers for the pre-Israelite ancestors. Linguistically, it is an ethnic term; it may be built on the root Eber, who is the eponymous ancestor of the Israelites, that is, the one to whom they traced their name (10:21, 24–25; 11:14–17), or it may reflect the tradition that the ancestors came from beyond (*eber*) the Euphrates. It is used only by non-Israelites, or by Israelites speaking to foreigners.

† [14:14] **Retainers:** the Hebrew word *hanik* is used only here in the Old Testament. Cognate words appear in Egyptian and Akkadian texts, signifying armed soldiers belonging to the household of a local leader.

‡ [14:18] Melchizedek, king of Salem (Jerusalem, cf. Ps 76:3), appears with majestic suddenness to recognize Abraham's great victory, which the five local kings were unable to achieve. He prepares a feast in his honor and declares him blessed or made powerful by God Most High, evidently the highest God in the Canaanite pantheon. Abraham acknowledges the blessing by giving a tenth of the recaptured spoils as a tithe to Melchizedek. The episode is one of several allusions to David, king at Jerusalem, who also exercised priestly functions (2 Sm 6:17). Heb 7 interprets Melchizedek as a prefiguration of Christ. **God Most High:** in Heb. *El Elyon*, one of several "El names" for God in Genesis, others being *El Olam* (21:33), *El* the God of Israel (33:20), *El*

a. [14:12] Gn 13:10–12.

Most High.¹⁹ He blessed Abram with these words:^b

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth;
²⁰And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand."

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the captives; the goods you may keep."²² But Abram replied to the king of Sodom: "I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High,[§] the creator of heaven and earth,²³ that I would not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap from anything that is yours, so that you cannot say, 'I made Abram rich.'²⁴ Nothing for me except what my servants have consumed and the share that is due to the men who went with me—Aner, Eshcol and Mamre; let them take their share."

CHAPTER 15

The Covenant with Abram.[¶] ¹Some time afterward, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great.

²But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what can you give me, if I die childless and have only a servant of my household, Eliezer of Damascus?"³ Abram continued, "Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant of my household will be my heir."⁴ Then the word

Roi (16:13), *El Bethel* (35:7), and *El Shaddai* (the usual P designation for God in Genesis). All the sources except the Yahwist use El as the proper name for God used by the ancestors. The god El was well-known across the ancient Near East and in comparable religious literature. The ancestors recognized this God as their own when they encountered him in their journeys and in the shrines they found in Canaan.

§ [14:22] In vv. 22–24, Abraham refuses to let anyone but God enrich him. Portrayed with the traits of a later Israelite judge or tribal hero, Abraham acknowledges that his victory is from God alone.

¶ [15:1–21] In the first section (vv. 1–6), Abraham is promised a son and heir, and in the second (vv. 7–21), he is promised a land. The structure is similar in both: each of the two promises is not immediately accepted; the first is met with a complaint (vv. 2–3) and the second with a request for a sign (v. 8). God's answer differs in each section—a sign in v. 5 and an oath in vv. 9–21. Some scholars believe that the Genesis promises of progeny and land were originally separate and only later combined, but progeny and land are persistent concerns especially of ancient peoples and it is hard to imagine one without the other.

b. [14:19] Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6, 10; 7:1.

of the LORD came to him: No, that one will not be your heir; your own offspring will be your heir.^e He took him outside and said: Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so, he added, will your descendants be.^d ^{6c}Abram put his faith in the LORD, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness.^a

He then said to him: I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.^f ⁸"Lord God," he asked, "how will I know that I will possess it?" ⁹He answered him: Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.^g ¹⁰He brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. ¹¹Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram scared them away. ¹²As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great, dark dread descended upon him.

¹³Then the LORD said to Abram: Know for certain that your descendants will reside as aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.^h ¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and after this they will go out with great wealth.ⁱ ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation[§] your descendants will

* [15:6] Abraham's act of faith in God's promises was regarded as an act of righteousness, i.e., as fully expressive of his relationship with God. St. Paul (Rom 4:1–25; Gal 3:6–9) makes Abraham's faith a model for Christians.

† [15:9–17] Cutting up animals was a well-attested way of making a treaty in antiquity. Jer 34:17–20 shows the rite is a form of self-imprecation in which violators invoke the fate of the animals upon themselves. The eighth-century B.C. Sefire treaty from Syria reads, "As this calf is cut up, thus Matti'el shall be cut up." The smoking fire pot and the flaming torch (v. 17), which represent God, pass between the pieces, making God a signatory to the covenant.

‡ [15:13–16] The verses clarify the promise of the land by providing a timetable of its possession: after four hundred years of servitude, your descendants will actually possess the land in the fourth generation (a patriarchal generation seems to be one hundred years). The iniquity of the current inhabitants (called here the Amorites) has not yet reached the point where God must intervene in punishment. Another table is given in Ex 12:40, which is not compatible with this one.

§ [15:16] **Generation:** the Hebrew term *dor* is commonly rendered as "generation," but it may signify a period of varying length. A "generation" is the period between the birth of children and the birth of their parents, normally about twenty to

c. [15:4] Gn 17:16.—d. [15:5] Gn 22:17; 28:14; Ex 32:13; Dt 1:10; Sir 44:21; Rom 4:18; Heb 11:12.—e. [15:6] 1 Mc 2:52; Rom 4:3, 9, 22; Gal 3:6–7; Jas 2:23.—f. [15:7] Gn 11:31; 12:1; Ex 32:13; Neh 9:7–8; Acts 7:2–3.—g. [15:9] Lv 1:14.—h. [15:13] Ex 12:40; Nm 20:15; Jdt 5:9–10; Is 52:4; Acts 13:20; Gal 3:17.—i. [15:14] Ex 3:8, 21–22.

return here, for the wickedness of the Amorites is not yet complete.^j

¹⁷When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates,^k ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, ²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

CHAPTER 16

Birth of Ishmael.^{**} ¹Abram's wife Sarai had borne him no children. Now she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar.^m ²Sarai said to Abram: "The LORD has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse with my maid; perhaps I will have sons through her." Abram obeyed Sarai.^{†††} ³Thus, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, his wife Sarai took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. ⁴He had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. As soon as Hagar knew she was pregnant, her mistress lost stature in her eyes.^{‡‡‡} ⁵So Sarai said to Abram:

twenty-five years. The actual length of a generation can vary, however; in Jb 42:16 it is thirty-five and in Nm 32:13 it is forty. The meaning may be life spans, which in Gn 6:3 is one hundred twenty years and in Is 65:20 is one hundred years.

¶ [15:18–21] The Wadi, i.e., a gully or ravine, of Egypt is the Wadi-el-'Arish, which is the boundary between the settled land and the Sinai desert. Some scholars suggest that the boundaries are those of a Davidic empire at its greatest extent; others that they are idealized boundaries. Most lists of the ancient inhabitants of the promised land give three, six, or seven peoples, but vv. 19–21 give a grand total of ten.

** [16:1–16] In the previous chapter Abraham was given a timetable of possession of the land, but nothing was said about when the child was to be born. In this chapter, Sarah takes matters into her own hands, for she has been childless ten years since the promise (cf. 12:4 with 16:16). The story is about the two women, Sarah the infertile mistress and Hagar the fertile slave; Abraham has only a single sentence. In the course of the story, God intervenes directly on the side of Hagar, for she is otherwise without resources.

†† [16:2] The custom of an infertile wife providing her husband with a concubine to produce children is widely attested in ancient Near Eastern law; e.g., an Old Assyrian marriage contract states that the wife must provide her husband with a concubine if she does not bear children within two years.

‡‡ [16:4] Because barrenness was at that time normally blamed on the woman and regarded as a disgrace, it is not surprising that Hagar looks down on Sarah. Ancient Near Eastern

j. [15:16] 1 Kgs 21:26.—k. [15:18] Ex 32:13; Neh 9:8; Ps 105:11; Sir 44:21.—l. [15:19–20] Dt 7:1.—m. [16:1] Gn 11:30.—n. [16:2] Gn 21:8–9; Gal 4:22.—o. [16:4] 1 Sm 1:6; Pvr 30:23.—p. [16:5–16] Gn 21:10–19.

“This outrage against me is your fault. I myself gave my maid to your embrace; but ever since she knew she was pregnant, I have lost stature in her eyes. May the LORD decide between you and me!”⁶ Abram told Sarai: “Your maid is in your power. Do to her what you regard as right.” Sarai then mistreated her so much that Hagar ran away from her.

⁷The LORD’s angel[†] found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur,^g ⁸and he asked, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She answered, “I am running away from my mistress, Sarai.” ⁹But the LORD’s angel told her: “Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority. ¹⁰I will make your descendants so numerous,” added the LORD’s angel, “that they will be too many to count.” ¹¹Then the LORD’s angel said to her:

“You are now pregnant and shall bear a son;
you shall name him Ishmael,[†]
For the LORD has heeded your affliction.
¹²He shall be a wild ass of a man,
his hand against everyone,
and everyone’s hand against him;
Alongside[‡] all his kindred
shall he encamp.”^s

¹³To the LORD who spoke to her she gave a name, saying, “You are God who sees me”;[§]

legal practice addresses such cases of insolent slaves and allows disciplining of them. Prv 30:23 uses as an example of intolerable behavior “a maidservant when she ousts her mistress.”

* [16:7] The LORD’s angel: a manifestation of God in human form; in v. 13 the messenger is identified with God. See note on Ex 3:2.

† [16:11] Ishmael: in Hebrew the name means “God has heard.” It is the same Hebrew verb that is translated “heeded” in the next clause. In other ancient Near Eastern texts, the name commemorated the divine answer to the parents’ prayer to have a child, but here it is broadened to mean that God has “heard” Hagar’s plight. In vv. 13–14, the verb “to see” is similarly broadened to describe God’s special care for those in need.

‡ [16:12] Alongside: lit., “against the face of”; the same phrase is used of the lands of Ishmael’s descendants in 25:18. It can be translated “in opposition to” (Dt 21:16; Jb 1:11; 6:28; 21:31), but here more likely means that Ishmael’s settlement was near but not in the promised land.

§ [16:13] God who sees me: Hebrew *el-ro’i* is multivalent, meaning either “God of seeing,” i.e., extends his protection to me, or “God sees,” which can imply seeing human suffering (29:32; Ex 2:25; Is 57:18; 58:3). It is probable that Hagar means to express both of these aspects. Remained alive: for the ancient notion that a person died on seeing God, see Gn 32:31; Ex 20:19; Dt 4:33; Jgs 13:22.

q. [16:7] Ex 15:22.—r. [16:10] Gn 17:20; 21:13, 18; 25:12–18.—s. [16:12] Gn 21:20; 25:18.

she meant, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after he saw me?”¹⁴ That is why the well is called Beer-lahai-roi.[¶] It is between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram named the son whom Hagar bore him Ishmael.^u ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

CHAPTER 17

Covenant of Circumcision.^v ¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said: I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.^v ²Between you and me I will establish my covenant, and I will multiply you exceedingly.^w

³Abram fell face down and God said to him: ⁴For my part, here is my covenant with you: you are to become the father of a multitude of nations.^x ⁵No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham,^{††} for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations.^y ⁶I will make you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings will stem from you. ⁷I will maintain my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting covenant, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.[‡] ⁸I will give to you and to your descendants after you the land in which you are now residing as aliens, the whole land of Canaan, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God.[§]

¶ [16:14] Beer-lahai-roi: possible translations of the name of the well include: “spring of the living one who sees me”; “the well of the living sight”; or “the one who sees me lives.” See note on v. 13.

** [17:1–27] The Priestly source gathers the major motifs of the story so far and sets them firmly within a covenant context; the word “covenant” occurs thirteen times. There are links to the covenant with Noah (v. 1 = 6:9; v. 7 = 9:9; v. 11 = 9:12–17). In this chapter, vv. 1–8 promise progeny and land; vv. 9–14 are instructions about circumcision; vv. 15–21 repeat the promise of a son to Sarah and distinguish this promise from that to Hagar; vv. 22–27 describe Abraham’s carrying out the commands. The Almighty: traditional rendering of Hebrew *El Shaddai*, which is P’s favorite designation of God in the period of the ancestors. Its etymology is uncertain, but its root meaning is probably “God, the One of the Mountains.”

†† [17:5] Abram and Abraham are merely two forms of the same name, both meaning, “the father is exalted”; another variant form is Abiram (Nm 16:1; 1 Kgs 16:34). The additional *-ha-* in the form Abraham is explained by popular etymology as coming from *ab-hamon goyim*, “father of a multitude of nations.”

t. [16:13] Gn 24:62.—u. [16:15] Gn 16:2; Gal 4:22.—v. [17:1] Gn 35:11; Ex 6:3.—w. [17:2] Gn 12:2; 13:16; Ex 32:13.—x. [17:4] Sir 44:21; Rom 4:17.—y. [17:5] Neh 9:7.—z. [17:7] Ps 105:42; Lk 1:72–73; Gal 3:16.—a. [17:8] Ex 32:13; Dt 1:8; 14:2; Lk 1:55; Acts 7:5.

⁹God said to Abraham: For your part, you and your descendants after you must keep my covenant throughout the ages. ¹⁰This is the covenant between me and you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised.^b ¹¹Circumcise the flesh of your foreskin. That will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.^c ¹²Throughout the ages, every male among you, when he is eight days old, shall be circumcised, including houseborn slaves and those acquired with money from any foreigner who is not of your descendants.^d ¹³Yes, both the houseborn slaves and those acquired with money must be circumcised. Thus my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴If a male is uncircumcised, that is, if the flesh of his foreskin has not been cut away, such a one will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

¹⁵God further said to Abraham: As for Sarai your wife, do not call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.⁺ ¹⁶I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. Her also will I bless; she will give rise to nations, and rulers of peoples will issue from her.^e ¹⁷Abraham fell face down and laughed[‡] as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah give birth at ninety?"^f ¹⁸So Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael could live in your favor!" ¹⁹God replied: Even so, your wife Sarah is to bear you a son, and you shall call him Isaac. It is with him that I will maintain my covenant as an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him.^g ²⁰Now as for Ishmael, I will heed you: I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and will multiply him exceedingly. He will become the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation.^h ²¹But my covenant I will maintain with Isaac,

* [17:10] **Circumcised:** circumcision was widely practiced in the ancient world, usually as an initiation rite for males at puberty. By shifting the time of circumcision to the eighth day after birth, biblical religion made it no longer a "rite of passage" but the sign of the eternal covenant between God and the community descending from Abraham.

+ [17:15] Sarai and Sarah are variant forms of the same name, both meaning "princess."

‡ [17:17] **Laughed:** *yishaq*, which is also the Hebrew form of the name "Isaac"; similar explanations of the name are given in Gn 18:12 and 21:6.

b. [17:10] Jn 7:22; Acts 7:8; Rom 4:11.—c. [17:11] Sir 44:20.—d. [17:12] Lv 12:3; Lk 1:59; 2:21.—e. [17:16] Gn 18:10; Gal 4:23.—f. [17:17] Rom 4:19; Heb 11:11–12.—g. [17:19] Gn 11:30; 21:2; Ex 32:13; Sir 44:22.—h. [17:20] Gn 16:10; 21:13, 18; 25:12–16.

whom Sarah shall bear to you by this time next year.ⁱ ²²When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God departed from him.

²³Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all his slaves, whether born in his house or acquired with his money—every male among the members of Abraham's household—and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that same day, as God had told him to do. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised,^j ²⁵and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when the flesh of his foreskin was circumcised. ²⁶Thus, on that same day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; ²⁷and all the males of his household, including the slaves born in his house or acquired with his money from foreigners, were circumcised with him.

CHAPTER 18

Abraham's Visitors. ¹⁸The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. ²Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground,^k ³he said: "Sir,^l if it please you, do not go on past your servant. ⁴Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. ⁵Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way." "Very well," they replied, "do as you have said."

§ [18:1] Chapters 18 and 19 combined form a continuous narrative, concluding the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot that began in 13:2–18. The mysterious men visit Abraham in Mamre to promise him and Sarah a child the following year (18:1–15) and then visit Lot in Sodom to investigate and then to punish the corrupt city (19:1–29). Between the two visits, Abraham questions God about the justice of punishing Sodom (18:16–33). At the end of the destruction of Sodom, there is a short narrative about Lot as the ancestor of Moab and the Ammonites (19:30–38).

¶ [18:3] Abraham addresses the leader of the group, whom he does not yet recognize as the Lord; in the next two verses he speaks to all three men. The other two are later (Gn 19:1) identified as angels. The shifting numbers and identification of the visitors are a narrative way of expressing the mysterious presence of God.

i. [17:21] Gn 18:14; 21:2; 26:2–5; Rom 9:7.—j. [17:24] Gn 17:10; Rom 4:11.—k. [18:2] Heb 13:1–2.

⁶Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick, three measures* of bran flour! Knead it and make bread." ⁷He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸Then he got some curds[†] and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.

⁹"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There in the tent," he replied. ¹⁰One of them[‡] said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son." Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, just behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her menstrual periods.[‡] ¹²So Sarah laughed[§] to herself and said, "Now that I am worn out and my husband is old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?" ¹³But the LORD said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really bear a child, old as I am?' ¹⁴Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son."[¶] ¹⁵Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," because she was afraid. But he said, "Yes, you did."

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom. ¹⁶With Abraham walking with them to see them on their way, the men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom. ¹⁷The LORD considered: Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸now that he is to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth are to find blessing in him?[¶] ¹⁹Indeed, I have singled him out that he may direct his children and his household in the future to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD may put into effect for Abraham the promises he made about him. ²⁰So the LORD said: The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great,

and their sin so grave,[¶] ²¹that I must go down to see whether or not their actions are as bad as the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out.

²²As the men turned and walked on toward Sodom, Abraham remained standing before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham drew near and said: "Will you really sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there were fifty righteous people in the city; would you really sweep away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike! Far be it from you! Should not the judge of all the world do what is just?"[¶] ²⁶The LORD replied: If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake. ²⁷Abraham spoke up again: "See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am only dust and ashes!" ²⁸What if there are five less than fifty righteous people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?" I will not destroy it, he answered, if I find forty-five there. ²⁹But Abraham persisted, saying, "What if only forty are found there?" He replied: I will refrain from doing it for the sake of the forty. ³⁰Then he said, "Do not let my Lord be angry if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?" He replied: I will refrain from doing it if I can find thirty there. ³¹Abraham went on, "Since I have thus presumed to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?" I will not destroy it, he answered, for the sake of the twenty. ³²But he persisted: "Please, do not let my Lord be angry if I speak up this last time. What if ten are found there?" For the sake of the ten, he replied, I will not destroy it.[§]

* [18:6] Three measures: Hebrew *seah*; three seahs equal one ephah, about half a bushel.

† [18:8] Curds: a type of soft cheese or yogurt.

‡ [18:10] One of them: i.e., the Lord.

§ [18:12] Sarah laughed: a play on the verb "laugh," which prefigures the name of Isaac; see note on 17:17.

¶ [18:10] Gn 17:19; 21:1; 2 Kgs 4:16; Rom 9:9.—m. [18:11] Gn 17:17; Rom 4:19; Heb 11:11–12.—n. [18:14] Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 1:37; 18:27; Rom 4:21.—o. [18:18] Lk 1:55.—p. [18:20] Gn 19:13; Is 3:9; Lk 17:28; Jude 7.

¶ [18:20] The immorality of the cities was already hinted at in 13:13, when Lot made his choice to live there. The "outray" comes from the victims of the injustice and violence rampant in the city, which will shortly be illustrated in the treatment of the visitors. The outcry of the Hebrews under the harsh treatment of Pharaoh (Ex 3:7) came up to God who reacts in anger at mistreatment of the poor (cf. Ex 22:21–23; Is 5:7). Sodom and Gomorrah became types of sinful cities in biblical literature. Is 1:9–10; 3:9 sees their sin as lack of social justice, Ez 16:46–51, as disregard for the poor, and Jer 23:14, as general immorality. In the Genesis story, the sin is violation of the sacred duty of hospitality by the threatened rape of Lot's guests.

¶ [18:25] Dt 32:4; Jb 8:3, 20; Wis 12:15.—r. [18:27] Sir 10:9; 17:27.—s. [18:32] Jer 5:1; Ez 22:30.

³³The LORD departed as soon as he had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned home.

CHAPTER 19

Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. ¹The two angels reached Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he got up to greet them; and bowing down with his face to the ground, ²he said, "Please, my lords, [†] come aside into your servant's house for the night, and bathe your feet; you can get up early to continue your journey." But they replied, "No, we will pass the night in the town square."[†] ³He urged them so strongly, however, that they turned aside to his place and entered his house. He prepared a banquet for them, baking unleavened bread, and they dined.

⁴Before they went to bed, the townsmen of Sodom, both young and old—all the people to the last man—surrounded the house. ⁵They called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to your house tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have sexual relations with them." ⁶Lot went out to meet them at the entrance. When he had shut the door behind him, ⁷he said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not do this wicked thing! ⁸I have two daughters who have never had sexual relations with men. Let me bring them out to you, [‡] and you may do to them as you please. But do not do anything to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." ⁹They replied, "Stand back! This man," they said, "came here as a resident alien, and now he dares to give orders! We will treat you worse than them!" With that, they pressed hard against Lot, moving in closer to break down the door.[†] ¹⁰But his guests put out their hands, pulled Lot inside with them, and closed the door; ¹¹they struck

the men at the entrance of the house, small and great, with such a blinding light[§] that they were utterly unable to find the doorway.

¹²Then the guests said to Lot: "Who else belongs to you here? Sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters, all who belong to you in the city—take them away from this place!"[†] ¹³We are about to destroy this place, for the outcry reaching the LORD against those here is so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it."[†] ¹⁴So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had contracted marriage with his daughters. ¹⁵"Come on, leave this place," he told them; "the LORD is about to destroy the city." But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

¹⁵As dawn was breaking, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Come on! Take your wife with you and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city." ¹⁶When he hesitated, the men, because of the LORD's compassion for him, seized his hand and the hands of his wife and his two daughters and led them to safety outside the city. ¹⁷As soon as they had brought them outside, they said: "Flee for your life! Do not look back or stop anywhere on the Plain. Flee to the hills at once, or you will be swept away."[†] ¹⁸"Oh, no, my lords!" Lot replied to them. ¹⁹"You have already shown favor to your servant, doing me the great kindness of saving my life. But I cannot flee to the hills, or the disaster will overtake and kill me. ²⁰Look, this town ahead is near enough to escape to. It is only a small place." Let me flee there—is it not a small place?—to save my life." ²¹"Well, then," he replied, "I grant you this favor too. I will not overthrow the town you have mentioned. ²²Hurry, escape there! I cannot do anything until you arrive there." That is why the town is called Zoar.[‡]

* [19:1–29] The story takes place in one day (counting a day from the previous evening): evening (v. 1), dawn (v. 15), and sunrise (v. 23). The passage resembles Jgs 19:15–25, which suggests dependence of one story on the other.

† [19:2] My lords: Lot does not yet know that the men are God's messengers; cf. 18:3.

‡ [19:8] Let me bring them out to you: the authority of a patriarch within his house was virtually absolute. Lot's extreme response of offering his daughters to a violent mob seems to be motivated by the obligation of hospitality.

t. [19:2] Heb 13:1–2.—u. [19:4–9] Jgs 19:22–25; Jude 7.—v. [19:9] Gn 13:12; 2 Pt 2:7–8.

§ [19:11] Blinding light: an extraordinary flash that temporarily dazed the wicked men and revealed to Lot the true nature of his guests.

¶ [19:14] It is uncertain whether Lot's sons-in-law were fully married to his daughters or only "engaged" to them (Israelite "engagement" was the first part of the marriage ceremony), or even whether the daughters involved were the same as, or different from, the two daughters who were still in their father's house.

** [19:20] A small place: the Hebrew word *misar*, lit., "a little thing," has the same root consonants as the name of the town Zoar in v. 22.

w. [19:12] 2 Pt 2:7–9.—x. [19:13] Is 1:7, 9; Ez 16:49–50; Zep 2:9.—y. [19:17] Wis 10:6.—z. [19:22] Wis 10:6.

²³The sun had risen over the earth when Lot arrived in Zoar, ²⁴and the LORD rained down sulfur upon Sodom and Gomorrah, fire from the LORD out of heaven.^a ²⁵He overthrew* those cities and the whole Plain, together with the inhabitants of the cities and the produce of the soil.^b ²⁶But Lot's wife looked back, and she was turned into a pillar of salt.^c

²⁷The next morning Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the LORD. ²⁸As he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole region of the Plain,[†] he saw smoke over the land rising like the smoke from a kiln.^d

²⁹When God destroyed the cities of the Plain, he remembered Abraham and sent Lot away from the upheaval that occurred when God overthrew the cities where Lot had been living.

Moabites and Ammonites.[‡] Since Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar, he and his two daughters went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country, where he lived with his two daughters in a cave. ³¹The firstborn said to the younger: "Our father is getting old, and there is not a man in the land to have intercourse with us as is the custom everywhere. ³²Come, let us ply our father with wine and then lie with him, that we may ensure posterity by our father." ³³So that night they plied their father with wine, and the firstborn went in and lay with her father; but he was not aware of her lying down or getting up. ³⁴The next day the firstborn said to the younger: "Last night I lay with my father. Let us ply him with wine again tonight, and then you go in and lie with him, that we may ensure posterity by our father." ³⁵So that night, too,

they plied their father with wine, and then the younger one went in and lay with him; but he was not aware of her lying down or getting up.

³⁶Thus the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. ³⁷The firstborn gave birth to a son whom she named Moab, saying, "From my father."[§] He is the ancestor of the Moabites of today.^e ³⁸The younger one, too, gave birth to a son, and she named him Ammon, saying, "The son of my kin."[¶] He is the ancestor of the Ammonites of today.^f

CHAPTER 20

Abraham at Gerar.^{**} ¹From there Abraham journeyed on to the region of the Negeb, where he settled between Kadesh and Shur.^{††} While he resided in Gerar as an alien, ²Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent and took Sarah. ³But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him: You are about to die because of the woman you have taken, for she has a husband. ⁴Abimelech, who had not approached her, said: "O Lord, would you kill an innocent man? ⁵Was he not the one who told me, 'She is my sister'? She herself also stated, 'He is my brother.' I acted with pure heart and with clean hands."^{‡‡} God answered him in the dream: Yes, I know you did it with a pure heart. In fact, it was I who kept you from sinning against me; that is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷So now, return the man's wife so that he may intercede for you, since he is a prophet,^{§§} that you

* [19:25] Overthrew: this term, lit., "turned upside down," is used consistently to describe the destruction of the cities of the Plain. The imagery of earthquake and subsequent fire fits the geology of this region.

† [19:28–29] In a deft narrative detail, Abraham looks down from the height east of Hebron, from which he could easily see the region at the southern end of the Dead Sea, where the cities of the Plain were probably located.

‡ [19:30–38] This Israelite tale about the origin of Israel's neighbors east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea was told partly to ridicule these ethnically related but rival nations and partly to give popular etymologies for their names. The stylized nature of the story is seen in the names of the daughters ("the firstborn" and "the younger"), the ease with which they fool their father, and the identical descriptions of the encounters.

a. [19:24] Ps 9:6; 11:6; 107:34; Wis 10:7; Sir 16:8; Is 1:9; Lk 17:29; 2 Pt 2:6.—b. [19:25] Dt 29:22; Is 13:19; Jer 50:40; Lam 4:6; Am 4:11.—c. [19:26] Wis 10:7; Lk 17:32.—d. [19:28] Rev 9:2; 14:10–11.

§ [19:37] From my father: in Hebrew, *me'abi*, similar in sound to the name "Moab."

¶ [19:38] The son of my kin: in Hebrew, *ben-ammi*, similar in sound to the name "Ammonites."

** [20:1–18] Abraham again passes off his wife Sarah as his sister to escape trouble in a foreign land (cf. 12:10–13:1, the J source). The story appears to be from a different source (according to some, E) and deals with the ethical questions of the incident. Gn 26:6–11 is yet another retelling of the story, but with Isaac and Rebekah as characters instead of Abraham and Sarah.

†† [20:1] Kadesh and Shur: Kadesh-barnea was a major oasis on the southernmost border of Canaan, and Shur was probably the "way to Shur," the road to Egypt. Gerar was a royal city in the area, but has not been identified with certainty.

‡‡ [20:6] Abimelech is exonerated of blame, but by that fact not cleared of the consequences of his act. He is still under the sentence of death for abducting another man's wife; the consequences result from the deed not the intention.

§§ [20:7] Prophet: only here is Abraham explicitly called "prophet," Hebrew *na'ibi* (cf. Ps 105:15).

e. [19:37] Dt 2:9.—f. [19:38] Dt 2:19.

may live. If you do not return her, you can be as he had promised.^h Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time that God had stated.ⁱ Abraham gave the name Isaac to this son of his whom Sarah bore him.^j When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded.^k Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah then said, "God has given me cause to laugh,^s and all who hear of it will laugh with me.^l Who would ever have told Abraham," she added, "that Sarah would nurse children! Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great banquet on the day of the child's weaning.

Early the next morning Abimelech called all his servants and informed them of everything that had happened, and the men were filled with fear.⁹ Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him: "What have you done to us! What wrong did I do to you that you would have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have treated me in an intolerable way.¹⁰ What did you have in mind," Abimelech asked him, "that you would do such a thing?"¹¹ Abraham answered, "I thought there would be no fear of God in this place, and so they would kill me on account of my wife.¹² Besides, she really is my sister,[†] but only my father's daughter, not my mother's; and so she became my wife.¹³ When God sent me wandering from my father's house, I asked her: 'Would you do me this favor? In whatever place we come to, say: He is my brother.'¹⁴ Then Abimelech took flocks and herds and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him.¹⁵ Then Abimelech said, "Here, my land is at your disposal; settle wherever you please."¹⁶ To Sarah he said: "I hereby give your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This will preserve your honor before all who are with you and will exonerate you before everyone."¹⁷ Abraham then interceded with God, and God restored health to Abimelech, to his wife, and his maidservants, so that they bore children;¹⁸ for the LORD had closed every womb in Abimelech's household on account of Abraham's wife Sarah.

Sarah noticed the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing with her son Isaac;¹⁰ so she demanded of Abraham: "Drive out that slave and her son! No son of that slave is going to share the inheritance with my son Isaac!"¹¹ Abraham was greatly distressed because it concerned a son of his.¹² But God said to Abraham: "Do not be distressed about the boy or about your slave woman. Obey Sarah, no matter what she asks of you; for it is through Isaac that descendants will bear your name."¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also," since he too is your offspring.¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham got some bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. Then, placing the child on her back,^{††} he sent her away. As she roamed

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vv. 1-7 is exclusively on Sarah and Isaac, and the focus of vv. 8-21 is exclusively on Hagar and Ishmael. The promise of a son to the barren Sarah and elderly Abraham has been central to the previous chapters and now that promise comes true with the birth of Isaac. The other great promise, that of land, will be resolved, at least in an anticipatory way, in Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah in chap. 23. The parallel births of the two boys has influenced the Lucan birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus (Lk 1-2).

[§] [21:6] Laugh: for the third time (cf. 17:17 and 18:12) there is laughter, playing on the similarity in Hebrew between the pronunciation of the name Isaac and words associated with laughter.

[¶] [21:11] A son of his: Abraham is the father of both boys, but Sarah is the mother only of Isaac. Abraham is very concerned that Ishmael have a sufficient inheritance.

^{**} [21:13] I will make a nation of him also: Ishmael's descendants are named in 25:12-18.

^{††} [21:14] Placing the child on her back: a reading based on an emendation of the traditional Hebrew text. In the traditional

h. [21:1] Gn 17:19; 18:10.—i. [21:2] Gal 4:23; Heb 11:11.—j. [21:3] Mt 1:2; Lk 3:34.—k. [21:4] Gn 17:10-14; Acts 7:8.—l. [21:6] Gn 17:17.—m. [21:10] Jgs 11:2; Gal 4:30.—n. [21:12] Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18.

CHAPTER 21

Birth of Isaac.[§] ¹The LORD took note of Sarah as he had said he would; the LORD did for her

* [20:11] Fear of God is the traditional though unsatisfactory rendering of Hebrew *yir'at YHWH*, literally, "revering Yahweh." The phrase refers neither to the emotion of fear nor to religious reverence of a general kind. Rather it refers to adherence to a single deity (in a polytheistic culture), honoring that deity with prayers, rituals, and obedience. The phrase occurs again in 26:24; 43:23; and 50:19. It is very common in the wisdom literature of the Bible.

† [20:12] My sister. Marrying one's half sister was prohibited later in Israel's history.

‡ [21:1-21] The long-awaited birth of Isaac parallels the birth of Ishmael in chap. 16, precipitating a rivalry and expulsion as in that chapter. Though this chapter is unified, the focus of

g. [20:13] Gn 12:13.

aimlessly in the wilderness of Beer-sheba,¹⁵ the water in the skin was used up. So she put the child down under one of the bushes,¹⁶ and then went and sat down opposite him, about a bowshot away; for she said to herself, "I cannot watch the child die." As she sat opposite him, she wept aloud.¹⁷ God heard the boy's voice, and God's angel called to Hagar from heaven: "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not fear; God has heard the boy's voice in this plight of his."¹⁸ Get up, lift up the boy and hold him by the hand; for I will make of him a great nation."¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and then let the boy drink.

²⁰God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert Bowman.²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran. His mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

The Covenant at Beer-sheba. ²²At that time Abimelech, accompanied by Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham: "God is with you in everything you do."²³ So now, swear to me by God at this place[†] that you will not deal falsely with me or with my progeny and posterity, but will act as loyally toward me and the land in which you reside as I have acted toward you."²⁴ Abraham replied, "I so swear."

²⁵Abraham, however, reproached Abimelech about a well that Abimelech's servants had seized by force.²⁶ "I have no idea who did that," Abimelech replied. "In fact, you never told me about it, nor did I ever hear of it until now."

Hebrew text, Abraham put the bread and the waterskin on Hagar's back, while her son apparently walked beside her. In this way the traditional Hebrew text harmonizes the data of the Priestly source, in which Ishmael would have been at least fourteen years old when Isaac was born; compare 16:16 with 21:5; cf. 17:25. But in the present Elohist (?) story, Ishmael is obviously a little boy, not much older than Isaac; cf. vv. 15, 18.

* [21:22] Of the two related promises of progeny and land, that of progeny has been fulfilled in the previous chapter. Now the claim on the land begins to be solidified by Abimelech's recognition of Abraham's claim on the well at Beer-sheba; it will be furthered by Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah in chap. 23. Two levels of editing are visible in the story: (1) vv. 22-24, 27, 32, the general covenant with Abimelech; (2) vv. 25-26, 28-30, 31, Abraham's claim on the well. Both versions play on the root of the Hebrew word *sheba*, which means "seven" and "swear," and the place name Beer-sheba.

† [21:23] This place: Beer-sheba (v. 31). Abimelech had come from Gerar (20:2), about thirty miles west of Beer-sheba.

o. [21:17] Gn 16:7.

²⁷Then Abraham took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech and the two made a covenant.²⁸ Abimelech also set apart seven ewe lambs of the flock,²⁹ and Abimelech asked him, "What is the purpose of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?"³⁰ Abraham answered, "The seven ewe lambs you shall accept from me that you may be my witness that I dug this well."³¹ This is why the place is called Beer-sheba; the two of them took an oath there.³² When they had thus made the covenant in Beer-sheba, Abimelech, along with Phicol, the commander of his army, left to return to the land of the Philistines.[‡]

³³Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba, and there he invoked by name the LORD, God the Eternal.[§] ³⁴Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

CHAPTER 22

The Testing of Abraham. [¶]Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test and said to him: Abraham! "Here I am!" he replied.[¶] ²Then God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.[¶] ³Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac, and after

‡ [21:32] Philistines: one of the Sea Peoples, who migrated from Mycenaean Greece around 1200 B.C. and settled on the coastland of Canaan, becoming a principal rival of Israel. Non-biblical texts do not use the term "Philistine" before ca. 1200 B.C.; it is probable that this usage and those in chap. 26 are anachronistic, perhaps applying a later ethnic term for an earlier, less-known one.

§ [21:33] God the Eternal: in Hebrew, *'el 'olam*, perhaps the name of the deity of the pre-Israelite sanctuary at Beer-sheba, but used by Abraham as a title of God; cf. Is 40:28.

¶ [22:1-19] The divine demand that Abraham sacrifice to God the son of promise is the greatest of his trials; after the successful completion of the test, he has only to buy a burial site for Sarah and find a wife for Isaac. The story is widely recognized as a literary masterpiece, depicting in a few lines God as the absolute Lord, inscrutable yet ultimately gracious, and Abraham, acting in moral grandeur as the great ancestor of Israel. Abraham speaks simply, with none of the wordy evasions of chaps. 13 and 21. The style is laconic; motivations and thoughts are not explained, and the reader cannot but wonder at the scene. In vv. 15-18, the angel repeats the seventh and climactic promise. **Moriah**: the mountain is not given a precise geographical location here, though 2 Chr 3:1 identifies Moriah as the mountain of Jerusalem where Solomon built the Temple; Abraham is thus the first to worship there. The word "Moriah" is a play on the verb "to see" (Heb. *ra'ah*); the wordplay is continued in v. 8, "God will provide (lit., "see")" and in v. 14, *Yahwehyireh*, meaning "the Lord will see/provide."

p. [22:1] Sir 44:20.—q. [22:2] 2 Chr 3:1; 1 Mc 2:52; Heb 11:17.

cutting the wood for the burnt offering, set out for the place of which God had told him.

⁴On the third day Abraham caught sight of the place from a distance. ⁵Abraham said to his servants: "Stay here with the donkey, while the boy and I go on over there. We will worship and then come back to you." ⁶So Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, while he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two walked on together, ⁷Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. "Father!" he said. "Here I am," he replied. Isaac continued, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" ⁸"My son," Abraham answered, "God will provide the sheep for the burnt offering." Then the two walked on together.

⁹When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he bound his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am," he answered. ¹²"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the angel. "Do not do the least thing to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you did not withhold from me your son, your only one."¹³ Abraham looked up and saw a single ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴Abraham named that place Yahweh-yireh,[†] hence people today say, "On the mountain the LORD will provide."

¹⁵A second time the angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven ¹⁶and said: "I

* [22:9] Bound: the Hebrew verb is *'aqad*, from which is derived the noun *Akedah*, "the binding (of Isaac)," the traditional Jewish name for this incident.

† [22:13] While the Bible recognizes that firstborn males belong to God (Ex 13:11–16; 34:19–20), and provides an alternate sacrifice to redeem firstborn sons, the focus here is on Abraham's being tested by God (v. 1). But the widely attested practice of child sacrifice underscores, for all its horror today, the realism of the test.

‡ [22:14] *Yahweh-yireh*: a Hebrew expression meaning "the LORD will see/provide." See note on vv. 1–19.

§ [22:15–19] The seventh and climactic statement of the blessings to Abraham. Unlike the other statements, which were

r. [22:9] Jas 2:21.—s. [22:10] Wis 10:5.—t. [22:12] Rom 8:32; 1 Jn 4:9.—u. [22:16–17] Gn 15:5; Ex 32:13; Lk 1:73; Rom 4:13; Heb 6:13–14; 11:12.

swear by my very self—oracle of the LORD—that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your son, your only one, ¹⁷I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants will take possession of the gates of their enemies," ¹⁸and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing, because you obeyed my command."^w

¹⁹Abraham then returned to his servants, and they set out together for Beer-sheba, where Abraham lived.

Nahor's Descendants. ²⁰Some time afterward, the news came to Abraham: "Milcah too has borne sons to your brother Nahor: ²¹Uz, his firstborn, his brother Buz, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²²Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." ²³Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

CHAPTER 23

Purchase of a Burial Plot. ¹The span of Sarah's life was one hundred and twenty-seven years. ²She died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan, and Abraham proceeded to mourn and weep for her. ³Then he left the side of his deceased wife

purely promissory, this one is presented as a reward for Abraham's extraordinary trust.

¶ [22:20–24] The descendants to the second generation of Nahor, Abraham's brother, who married Milcah. Of Terah's three sons (11:27), the oldest, Abraham, fathered Isaac (21:1–7), and the youngest, Haran (who died in Ur), fathered Lot. Abraham is now told that Nahor had eight children by Milcah and four by his concubine Reumah. Apart from the notice about the children born to Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (25:1–6), all the information about Terah's family to the second generation is now complete. It is noteworthy that Jacob will, like Nahor, have eight children by his wives and four by his concubines.

** [23:1–20] The occasion for purchasing the land is the need for a burial site for Sarah, for it would be unthinkable to bury Sarah outside of the promised land. One of the two great promises to Abraham, that of progeny, has been fulfilled (21:1–7). And now the promise of land is to be fulfilled, through a kind of down payment on the full possession that will take place only with the conquest under Joshua and during the reign of David. This purchase has been prepared for by Abimelech's recognition of Abraham's claim to the well at Beer-sheba (21:22–34). Among the ancestral stories this narrative is one of two that are entirely from the P source (chap. 17 being the other). The Priestly writers may have intended to encourage the generation of the exile to a renewed hope of repossessing their land.

v. [22:17] Gn 24:60.—w. [22:18] Gn 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; Sir 44:21; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:16.

and addressed the Hittites:⁴ “Although I am a resident alien[†] among you, sell me from your holdings a burial place, that I may bury my deceased wife.”^x ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham: “Please, ⁶sir, listen to us! You are a mighty leader among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial sites. None of us would deny you his burial ground for the burial of your dead.” ⁷Abraham, however, proceeded to bow low before the people of the land, the Hittites, ⁸and said to them: “If you will allow me room for burial of my dead, listen to me! Intercede for me with Ephron, son of Zohar, ⁹so that he will sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns; it is at the edge of his field. Let him sell it to me in your presence at its full price for a burial place.”

¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting with the Hittites. So Ephron the Hittite replied to Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his city: ¹¹“Please, sir, listen to me! I give you both the field and the cave in it; in the presence of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead!” ¹²But Abraham, after bowing low before the people of the land, ¹³addressed Ephron in the hearing of these men: “If only you would please listen to me! I will pay you the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴Ephron replied to Abraham, “Please, ¹⁵sir, listen to me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels[‡] of silver—what is that between you and me? Bury your dead!” ¹⁶Abraham accepted Ephron’s terms; he weighed out to him the silver that Ephron had stipulated in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver at the current market value.[§]

* [23:3] **The Hittites:** in the Bible the term is applied to several different groups—inhabitants of the second-millennium Hittite empire in Asia Minor and northern Syria, residents of the Neo-Hittite kingdoms in northern Syria in the first part of the first millennium, and (following Assyrian terminology) the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine. The third group is meant here.

† [23:4] **A resident alien:** such a one would normally not have the right to own property. The importance of Abraham’s purchase of the field in Machpelah, which is worded in technical legal terms, lies in the fact that it gave his descendants their first, though small, land rights in the country that God had promised the patriarch they would one day inherit as their own. Abraham therefore insists on purchasing the field and not receiving it as a gift.

‡ [23:15] **Four hundred shekels:** probably an exorbitant sum; Jeremiah (32:9) paid only seventeen shekels for his field in Anathoth, though the Babylonian invasion no doubt helped to reduce the price.

§ [23:16] **The current market value:** the standard weight called a shekel varied according to time and place.

x. [23:4] Gn 33:19; Acts 7:16; Heb 11:9.—y. [23:16] Acts 7:16.

¹⁷Thus Ephron’s field in Machpelah, facing Mamre, together with its cave and all the trees anywhere within its limits, was conveyed ¹⁸to Abraham by purchase in the presence of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of Ephron’s city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. ²⁰Thus the field with its cave was transferred from the Hittites to Abraham as a burial place.

CHAPTER 24

Isaac and Rebekah.[¶] ¹Abraham was old, having seen many days, and the LORD had blessed him in every way. ²Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all his possessions: “Put your hand under my thigh,[‡] ³and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live,^b ⁴but that you will go to my own land and to my relatives to get a wife for my son Isaac.” ⁵The servant asked him: “What if the woman is unwilling to follow me to this land? Should I then take your son back to the land from which you came?” ⁶Abraham told him, “Never take my son back there for any reason! ⁷The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and the land of my relatives, and who confirmed by oath the promise he made to me, ‘I will give this land to your descendants’—he will send his angel before you, and you will

¶ [24:1–67] The story of Abraham and Sarah is drawing to a close. The promises of progeny (21:1–7) and land (chap. 23) have been fulfilled and Sarah has died (23:1–2). Abraham’s last duty is to ensure that his son Isaac shares in the promises. Isaac must take a wife from his own people (vv. 3–7), so the promises may be fulfilled. The extraordinary length of this story and its development of a single theme contrast strikingly with the spare style of the preceding Abraham and Sarah stories. It points ahead to the Jacob and Joseph stories.

The length of the story is partly caused by its meticulous attention to the sign (vv. 12–14), its fulfillment (vv. 15–20), and the servant’s retelling of sign and fulfillment to Rebekah’s family to win their consent (vv. 34–49).

** [24:2] **Put your hand under my thigh:** the symbolism of this act was apparently connected with the Hebrew concept of children issuing from their father’s “thigh” (the literal meaning of “direct descendants” in 46:26; Ex 1:5). Perhaps the man who took such an oath was thought to bring the curse of sterility on himself if he did not fulfill his sworn promise. Jacob made Joseph swear in the same way (Gn 47:29). In both these instances, the oath was taken to carry out the last request of a man upon his death.

z. [23:17–18] Gn 49:29–30.—a. [24:2–3] Gn 47:29.—b. [24:3] Gn 24:37; 28:1–2; Jgs 14:3; Tb 4:12.

get a wife for my son there.^c 8 If the woman is unwilling to follow you, you will be released from this oath to me. But never take my son back there!" 9 So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰The servant then took ten of his master's camels, and bearing all kinds of gifts from his master, he made his way to the city of Nahor in Aram Naharaim. ¹¹Near evening, at the time when women go out to draw water, he made the camels kneel by the well outside the city. ¹²Then he said: "LORD, God of my master Abraham, let it turn out favorably for me[†] today and thus deal graciously with my master Abraham. ¹³While I stand here at the spring and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water, ¹⁴if I say to a young woman, 'Please lower your jug, that I may drink,' and she answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels, too,' then she is the one whom you have decided upon for your servant Isaac. In this way I will know that you have dealt graciously with my master."

¹⁵He had scarcely finished speaking when Rebekah—who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor—came out with a jug on her shoulder. ¹⁶The young woman was very beautiful, a virgin, untouched by man. She went down to the spring and filled her jug. As she came up, ¹⁷the servant ran toward her and said, "Please give me a sip of water from your jug." ¹⁸"Drink, sir," she replied, and quickly lowering the jug into her hand, she gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels, too, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰With that, she quickly emptied her jug into the drinking trough and ran back to the well to draw more water, until she had drawn enough for all the camels. ²¹The man

^a [24:10] Nahor: it is uncertain whether this is the place where Abraham's brother Nahor (11:27) had lived or whether it is the city Nahur, named in the Mari documents (nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C.), near the confluence of the Balikh and Middle Euphrates rivers. *Aram Naharaim*, lit., "Aram between the two rivers," is the Yahwist designation for Terah's homeland. The two rivers are the Habur and the Euphrates. The Priestly designation for the area is Paddan-aram, which is from the Assyrian *pādāna*, "road or garden," and Aram, which refers to the people or land of the Arameans.

[†] [24:12] Let it turn out favorably for me: let me have a favorable sign; cf. end of v. 14.

c. [24:7] Gn 12:7; Ex 6:8; Tb 5:17; Gal 3:16.—d. [24:15] Gn 22:23.

watched her the whole time, silently waiting to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful. ²²When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose-ring weighing half a shekel, and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels for her wrists. ²³Then he asked her: "Whose daughter are you? Tell me, please. And is there a place in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴She answered: "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor. ²⁵We have plenty of straw and fodder," she added, "and also a place to spend the night." ²⁶The man then knelt and bowed down to the LORD, ²⁷saying: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not let his kindness and fidelity toward my master fail. As for me, the LORD has led me straight to the house of my master's brother."

²⁸Then the young woman ran off and told her mother's household what had happened. ²⁹Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban. Laban rushed outside to the man at the spring. ³⁰When he saw the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms and when he heard Rebekah repeating what the man had said to her, he went to him while he was standing by the camels at the spring. ³¹He said: "Come, blessed of the LORD! Why are you standing outside when I have made the house ready, as well as a place for the camels?" ³²The man then went inside; and while the camels were being unloaded and provided with straw and fodder, water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. ³³But when food was set before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my story." "Go ahead," they replied.

³⁴"I am Abraham's servant," he began. ³⁵"The LORD has blessed my master so abundantly that he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys. ³⁶My master's wife Sarah bore a son to my master in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. ³⁷My master put me

† [24:30] Laban becomes hospitable only when he sees the servant's rich gifts, which is in humorous contrast to his sister's spontaneous generosity toward the servant. Laban's opportunism points forward to his behavior in the Jacob stories (31:14–16).

e. [24:29] Gn 27:43.

under oath, saying: 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I live; ³⁸instead, you must go to my father's house, to my own family, to get a wife for my son.' ³⁹When I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not follow me?' ⁴⁰he replied: 'The LORD, in whose presence I have always walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful, and so you will get a wife for my son from my own family and my father's house.' ⁴¹Then you will be freed from my curse. If you go to my family and they refuse you, then, too, you will be free from my curse.'

⁴²"When I came to the spring today, I said: 'LORD, God of my master Abraham, please make successful the journey I am on.' ⁴³While I stand here at the spring, if I say to a young woman who comes out to draw water, 'Please give me a little water from your jug,' ⁴⁴and she answers, 'Drink, and I will draw water for your camels, too—then she is the woman whom the LORD has decided upon for my master's son.'

⁴⁵"I had scarcely finished saying this to myself when Rebekah came out with a jug on her shoulder. After she went down to the spring and drew water, I said to her, 'Please let me have a drink.' ⁴⁶She quickly lowered the jug she was carrying and said, 'Drink, and I will water your camels, too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also. ⁴⁷When I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' she answered, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, borne to Nahor by Milcah.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. ⁴⁸Then I knelt and bowed down to the LORD, blessing the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹Now, if you will act with kindness and fidelity toward my master, let me know; but if not, let me know that too. I can then proceed accordingly."

⁵⁰Laban and Bethuel said in reply: "This thing comes from the LORD; we can say nothing to you either for or against it. ⁵¹Here is Rebekah, right in front of you; take her and go, that she may become the wife of your

master's son, as the LORD has said." ⁵²When Abraham's servant heard their answer, he bowed to the ground before the LORD. ⁵³Then he brought out objects of silver and gold and clothing and presented them to Rebekah; he also gave costly presents to her brother and mother. ⁵⁴After he and the men with him had eaten and drunk, they spent the night there.

When they got up the next morning, he said, "Allow me to return to my master."^h ⁵⁵Her brother and mother replied, "Let the young woman stay with us a short while, say ten days; after that she may go." ⁵⁶But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go back to my master." ⁵⁷They answered, "Let us call the young woman and see what she herself has to say about it." ⁵⁸So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" She answered, "I will."[†] ⁵⁹At this they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse with Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰They blessed Rebekah and said:

"Sister, may you grow
 into thousands of myriads;
 And may your descendants gain
 possession
 of the gates of their enemies!"ⁱ

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her attendants started out; they mounted the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

⁶²Meanwhile Isaac had gone from Beer-lahai-roi and was living in the region of the Negeb.^j ⁶³One day toward evening he went out to walk in the field, and caught sight of camels approaching. ⁶⁴Rebekah, too, caught sight of Isaac, and got down from her camel. ⁶⁵She asked the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking through the fields toward us?" "That is my master," replied the servant. Then she took her veil and covered herself.

⁶⁶The servant recounted to Isaac all the things he had done. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah. He

* [24:41] Curse: this would be the consequence of failing to carry out the oath referred to in v. 3.

f. [24:40] Tb 5:17; 10:13.—g. [24:50–51] Tb 7:11–12.

† [24:58] Marriages arranged by the woman's father did not require the woman's consent, but marriages arranged by the woman's brother did. Laban is the brother and Rebekah is therefore free to give her consent or not.

h. [24:54] Tb 7:14; 8:20.—i. [24:60] Gn 22:17.—j. [24:62] Gn 16:13–14; 25:11.

took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her and found solace after the death of his mother.

CHAPTER 25

Abraham's Sons by Keturah. ^{1*}Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. ⁴The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All of these were descendants of Keturah.

⁵Abraham gave everything that he owned to his son Isaac. ⁶To the sons of his concubines, however, he gave gifts while he was still living, as he sent them away eastward, to the land of Kedem,[§] away from his son Isaac.

Death of Abraham. ⁷The whole span of Abraham's life was one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Then he breathed his last, dying at a ripe old age, grown old after a full life; and he was gathered to his people. ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, son of Zohar the Hittite, which faces Mamre,^m the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there he was buried next to his wife Sarah. ¹¹After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac, who lived near Beer-lahai-roi.

Descendants of Ishmael. ^{12¶}These are the descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael,

* [25:1–11] As with the story of Terah in 11:27–32, this section lists all the descendants of Abraham as a means of concluding the story. The Jacob story ends similarly with the listing of the twelve sons (35:22–26), the death of Isaac (35:27–29), and the descendants of Esau (chap. 36). **Abraham took another wife:** though mentioned here, Abraham's marriage to a "concubine," or wife of secondary rank, is not to be understood as happening chronologically after the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

† [25:2] Three of the six names can be identified: the Midianites are a trading people, mentioned in the Bible as dwelling east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwest Arabia; Ishbak is a north Syrian tribe; Shuah is a city on the right bank of the Middle Euphrates. The other names are probably towns or peoples on the international trade routes.

‡ [25:5] Amid so many descendants, Abraham takes steps that Isaac will be his favored heir.

§ [25:6] **The land of Kedem:** or "the country of the East," the region inhabited by the Kedemites or Easterners (29:1; Jgs 6:3, 33; Jb 1:3; Is 11:14). The names mentioned in vv. 2–4, as far as they can be identified, are those of tribes in the Arabian desert.

¶ [25:12] Like the conclusion of the Jacob story (chap. 36), where the numerous descendants of the rejected Esau are listed, the descendants of the rejected Ishmael conclude the story.

k. [25:1–4] 1 Chr 1:32–33.—l. [25:3] Is 21:13.—m. [25:9–10] Gn 23:3–20.

whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham. ^{13†}These are the names of Ishmael's sons, listed in the order of their birth: Ishmael's firstborn Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,^o ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. ¹⁶These are the sons of Ishmael, their names by their villages and encampments; twelve chieftains of as many tribal groups.[†]

¹⁷The span of Ishmael's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. After he had breathed his last and died, he was gathered to his people. ¹⁸The Ishmaelites ranged from Havilah, by Shur, which is on the border of Egypt, all the way to Asshur; and they pitched camp[‡] alongside their various kindred.[¶]

Birth of Esau and Jacob. ^{19††}These are the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram^{‡‡} and the sister of Laban the Aramean.[†] ²¹Isaac entreated the LORD on behalf of his wife, since she was sterile. The LORD heard his entreaty, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²²But the children jostled each other in the womb so much that she exclaimed, "If it is like this,^{§§} why go on living!" She went to consult the LORD, ²³and the LORD answered her:

** [25:18] **Pitched camp:** lit., "fell"; the same Hebrew verb is used in Jgs 7:12 in regard to the hostile encampment of desert tribes. The present passage shows the fulfillment of the prediction contained in Gn 16:12.

†† [25:19–36:43] The Jacob cycle is introduced as the family history of Isaac (Jacob's father), just as the Abraham stories were introduced as the record of the descendants of Terah (Abraham's father, 11:27). The cycle, made up of varied stories, is given unity by several recurring themes: birth, blessing and inheritance, which are developed through the basic contrasts of barrenness/fertility, non-blessing/blessing, and inheritance/exile/homeland. The large story has an envelope structure in which Jacob's youth is spent in Canaan striving with his older brother Esau (25:19–28:22), his early adulthood in Paddan-aram building a family and striving with his brother-in-law Laban (chaps. 29–31), and his later years back in Canaan (chaps. 32–36).

‡‡ [25:20] **Paddan-aram:** the name used by the Priestly tradition for the northwest region of Mesopotamia, between the Habur and the Euphrates rivers. In Assyrian, *pādāna* is a road or a garden, and Aram refers to the people or the land of the Arameans. The equivalent geographical term in the Yahwist source is Aram Naharaim, "Aram between two rivers."

§§ [25:22] If it is like this: in Hebrew, the phrase *lamah zeh* is capable of several meanings; it occurs again in v. 32 ("What good . . .?"), 32:30 ("Why do you want . . .?"), and 33:15 ("For what reason?"). It is one of several words and motifs that run through the story, suggesting that a divine pattern (unknown to the actors) is at work.

n. [25:13–16] 1 Chr 1:29–31.—o. [25:13] Is 60:7.—p. [25:16] Gn 17:20.—q. [25:18] Gn 16:12.—r. [25:20] Gn 24:67.

Two nations are in your womb,
 two peoples are separating while
 still within you;
 But one will be stronger than the other,
 and the older will serve the
 younger.⁵

²⁴When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb.[†] ²⁵The first to emerge was reddish,[†] and his whole body was like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Next his brother came out, gripping Esau's heel,[‡] so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.[¶]

²⁷When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; whereas Jacob was a simple[§] man, who stayed among the tents.[¶] ²⁸Isaac preferred Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah preferred Jacob. ²⁹Once, when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰He said to Jacob, "Let me gulp down some of that red stuff;[¶] I am famished." That is why he was called Edom. ³¹But Jacob replied, "First sell me your right as firstborn."^{¶¶} ³²"Look," said Esau, "I am on the point of dying. What good is the right as firstborn to me?" ³³But Jacob said, "Swear to me first!" So he sold Jacob his right as firstborn under oath.[¶] ³⁴Jacob then gave

* [25:23] **The older will serve the younger:** Rebekah now knows something that no one else knows, that God favors Jacob over Esau. The text does not say if she shared this knowledge with anyone or kept it to herself, but, from their actions, it seems unlikely that either Isaac or Esau knew. That fact must be borne in mind in assessing Rebekah's role in chap. 27, the theft of Esau's blessing.

† [25:25] **Reddish:** in Hebrew, *admoni*, a reference to Edom, another name for Esau (v. 30; 36:1). Edom was also the name of the country south of Moab (southeast of the Dead Sea) where the descendants of Esau lived. It was called the "red" country because of its reddish sandstone. Moreover, "red" points ahead to the red stew in the next scene. **Hairy:** in Hebrew, *se'ar*, a reference to Seir, another name for Edom (36:8).

‡ [25:26] **Heel:** in Hebrew *aqeb*, a wordplay on the name Jacob; cf. 27:36. The first of three scenes of striving with Esau. The second is vv. 27-34, and the third, chap. 27. In all the scenes, Jacob values the blessing more than his ardent but unreflective brother Esau does.

§ [25:27] **Simple:** the Hebrew word denotes soundness, integrity, health, none of which fit here. Whatever its precise meaning, it must be opposite to the qualities of Esau.

¶ [25:30] **Red stuff:** in Hebrew, *adom*; another play on the word Edom, the "red" land.

¶¶ [25:31] **Right as firstborn:** the privilege that entitled the firstborn son to a position of honor in the family and to a double share in the possessions inherited from the father. There is a persistent wordplay between *bekorah*, "right of the firstborn," and *berakah*, "the blessing," contrary to custom, the preference here is for the younger son, as it was in the choice of Isaac over Ishmael.

s. [25:23] Gn 27:29; Nm 24:18; Mal 1:2-5; Rom 9:10-13.—t. [25:24] Hos 12:4.—u. [25:26] Mt 1:2.—v. [25:27] Gn 27:6-7.—w. [25:31] Dt 21:17.—x. [25:33] Heb 12:16.

him some bread and the lentil stew; and Esau ate, drank, got up, and went his way. So Esau treated his right as firstborn with disdain.

CHAPTER 26

Isaac and Abimelech. ^{1††}There was a famine in the land, distinct from the earlier one that had occurred in the days of Abraham, and Isaac went down to Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar.[‡] ²The LORD appeared to him and said: Do not go down to Egypt, but camp in this land wherever I tell you. ³Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I will give all these lands, in fulfillment of the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.[¶] ⁴I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and I will give them all these lands, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing—^b ⁵this because Abraham obeyed me, keeping my mandate, my commandments, my ordinances, and my instructions.

^{6††}So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked questions about his wife, he answered, "She is my sister." He was afraid that, if he called her his wife, the men of the place would kill him on account of Rebekah, since she was beautiful. ⁸But when they had been there for a long time, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. ⁹He called for Isaac and said: "She must certainly be your wife! How could you have said, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac replied, "I thought I might lose my life on her account." ¹⁰"How could you have done this to us!" exclaimed Abimelech. "It would have taken very little for one of the people to lie with your wife, and so you would have brought guilt upon us!" ¹¹Abimelech then commanded all the

†† [26:1] The promise of land and numerous descendants given to Abraham (12:1-3; 15; 17; 22:17-18) is renewed for his son Isaac. The divine blessing to Isaac is mentioned also in vv. 12, 24, and 29.

‡ [26:6-11] This scene is the third version of the wife-in-danger story (cf. chaps. 12 and 20). The mention of the famine in 26:1 recalls the famine in 12:10; the name Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar, recalls 20:2. The deception, according to all the stories, is the claim that the wife is a sister. This story (from the Yahwist source) departs from the two previous accounts in that the wife is not taken into the harem of the foreign king.

y. [26:1-14] Gn 12:10.—z. [26:1] Gn 12:10.—a. [26:3] Gn 12:7; 15:18; Ex 32:13; Ps 105:9; Sir 44:22; Heb 11:9.—b. [26:4] Gn 12:3; 22:17-18; 28:14; Ex 32:13.

people: "Anyone who maltreats this man or his wife shall be put to death."

¹²Isaac sowed a crop in that region and reaped a hundredfold the same year. Since the LORD blessed him, ¹³he became richer and richer all the time, until he was very wealthy. ¹⁴He acquired flocks and herds, and a great work force, and so the Philistines became envious of him. ¹⁵^dThe Philistines had stopped up and filled with dirt all the wells that his father's servants had dug back in the days of his father Abraham. ¹⁶So Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us; you have become far too numerous for us." ¹⁷Isaac left there and camped in the Wadi Gerar where he stayed. ¹⁸Isaac reopened the wells which his father's servants had dug back in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; he gave them names like those that his father had given them. ¹⁹But when Isaac's servants dug in the wadi and reached spring water in their well, ²⁰the shepherds of Gerar argued with Isaac's shepherds, saying, "The water belongs to us!" So he named the well Esek,[†] because they had quarreled there. ²¹Then they dug another well, and they argued over that one too; so he named it Sitnah.[‡] ²²So he moved on from there and dug still another well, but over this one they did not argue. He named it Rehoboth,[§] and said, "Because the LORD has now given us ample room, we shall flourish in the land."

²³From there Isaac went up to Beer-sheba. ²⁴The same night the LORD appeared to him and said: I am the God of Abraham, your father. Do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for the sake of Abraham, my servant.^e ²⁵So Isaac built an altar there and invoked the LORD by

* [26:12–33] The dispute is over water rights. In a sparsely watered land, wells were precious and claims on water could function as a kind of claim on the land. Scholars generally judge the account of the dispute over water rights and its settlement by a legal agreement between Isaac and Abimelech to be a Yahwist version of the similar story about Abraham in 21:22–34. Here, Abimelech realizes that Isaac has brought blessing to his people and thus desires a covenant with him. The feast in v. 30 is part of the covenant ceremony.

† [26:20] Esek: "quarrel."

‡ [26:21] Sitnah: "opposition."

§ [26:22] Rehoboth: "wide spaces," i.e., ample room to live; site is probably SW of modern day Beer-sheba.

c. [26:13–14] Jb 1:3.—d. [26:15–24] Gn 21:25–31.—e. [26:24] Gn 46:3.

name. After he had pitched his tent there, Isaac's servants began to dig a well nearby.

²⁶Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath, his councilor, and Phicol, the general of his army. ²⁷Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have driven me away from you?" ²⁸They answered: "We clearly see that the LORD has been with you, so we thought: let there be a sworn agreement between our two sides—between you and us. Let us make a covenant with you: ²⁹you shall do no harm to us, just as we have not maltreated you, but have always acted kindly toward you and have let you depart in peace. So now, may you be blessed by the LORD!" ³⁰Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. ³¹Early the next morning they exchanged oaths. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.

³²That same day Isaac's servants came and informed him about the well they had been digging; they told him, "We have reached water!" ³³He called it Shibah;[¶] hence the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day. ³⁴When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hivite.[§] ³⁵But they became a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

CHAPTER 27

Jacob's Deception.^{††} ¹When Isaac was so old that his eyesight had failed him, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son!" "Here I am!" he replied. ²Isaac then said, "Now I have grown old. I do not know

¶ [26:33] Shibah: the place name Shibah is a play on two Hebrew words, *shebu'ah*, "oath," and *shiv'ebaa'*, "seven." In v. 31, they exchanged oaths.

** [26:34–35] These verses from the Priestly source introduce the next section on Esau's loss of his right as firstborn by suggesting a motivation for this in Isaac's and Rebekah's dislike for Esau's Canaanite wives.

†† [27:1–45] The chapter, a literary masterpiece, is the third and climactic wrestling away of the blessing of Esau. Rebekah manages the entire affair, using perhaps her privileged information about Jacob's status (25:23); Jacob's only qualm is that if his father discovers the ruse, he will receive a curse instead of a blessing (vv. 11–12). Isaac is passive as he was in chaps. 22 and 24. The deception is effected through clothing (Jacob wears Esau's clothing), which points ahead to a similar deception of a patriarch by means of clothing in the Joseph story (37:21–33). Such recurrent acts and scenes let the reader know a divine purpose is moving the story forward even though the human characters are unaware of it.

f. [26:26–33] Gn 21:22–31; Prv 16:7.—g. [26:34–35] Gn 27:46.

when I might die. ³So now take your hunting gear—your quiver and bow—and go out into the open country to hunt some game for me. ⁴Then prepare for me a dish in the way I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you^j before I die.”

⁵Rebekah had been listening while Isaac was speaking to his son Esau. So when Esau went out into the open country to hunt some game for his father,^k Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father tell your brother Esau, ⁷Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you with the LORD’s approval before I die.^l ⁸Now, my son, obey me in what I am about to order you. ⁹Go to the flock and get me two choice young goats so that with these I might prepare a dish for your father in the way he likes. ¹⁰Then bring it to your father to eat, that he may bless you before he dies.” ¹¹But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned!ⁱ ¹²Suppose my father feels me? He will think I am making fun of him, and I will bring on myself a curse instead of a blessing.” ¹³His mother, however, replied: “Let any curse against you, my son, fall on me! Just obey me. Go and get me the young goats.”

¹⁴So Jacob went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared a dish in the way his father liked. ¹⁵Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau that she had in the house, and gave them to her younger son Jacob to wear; ¹⁶and with the goatskins she covered up his hands and the hairless part of his neck. ¹⁷Then she gave her son Jacob the dish and the bread she had prepared.

¹⁸Going to his father, Jacob said, “Father!” “Yes?” replied Isaac. “Which of my sons are you?” ¹⁹Jacob answered his father: “I am Esau, your firstborn. I did as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may bless me.” ²⁰But Isaac said to his son, “How did you get it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “The LORD, your God, directed

me.” ²¹Isaac then said to Jacob, “Come closer, my son, that I may feel you, to learn whether you really are my son Esau or not.” ²²So Jacob moved up closer to his father. When Isaac felt him, he said, “Although the voice is Jacob’s, the hands are Esau’s.” ²³(He failed to identify him because his hands were hairy, like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him.) ²⁴Again Isaac said, “Are you really my son Esau?” And Jacob said, “I am.” ²⁵Then Isaac said, “Serve me, my son, and let me eat of the game so that I may bless you.” Jacob served it to him, and Isaac ate; he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶Finally his father Isaac said to him, “Come closer, my son, and kiss me.” ²⁷As Jacob went up to kiss him, Isaac smelled the fragrance of his clothes. With that, he blessed him, saying,

“Ah, the fragrance of my son
is like the fragrance of a field
that the LORD has blessed!^l

²⁸May God give to you
of the dew of the heavens
And of the fertility of the earth
abundance of grain and wine.

²⁹May peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you;
Be master of your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow
down to you.
Cursed be those who curse you,
and blessed be those who bless
you.”

³⁰Jacob had scarcely left his father after Isaac had finished blessing him, when his brother Esau came back from his hunt. ³¹Then he too prepared a dish, and bringing it to his father, he said, “Let my father sit up and eat some of his son’s game, that you may then give me your blessing.” ³²His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?” He said, “I am your son, your firstborn son, Esau.” ³³Isaac trembled greatly. “Who was it, then,” he asked, “that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it all just before you came, and I blessed him. Now he is blessed!” ³⁴As he heard his father’s words, Esau burst into loud, bitter sobbing and said, “Father, bless me too!” ³⁵When Isaac said, “Your brother

* [27:4] I may bless you: Isaac’s blessing confers fertility (vv. 27–28) and dominion (v. 29). The “dew of heaven” is rain that produces grain and wine, two of the principal foodstuffs of the ancient Near East. The “fertility of the earth” may allude to oil, the third basic foodstuff. The full agricultural year may be implied here: the fall rains are followed by the grain harvests of the spring and the grape harvest of late summer, and then the olive harvest of the fall (cf. Dt 11:14; Ps 104:13–15).

h. [27:5] Gn 25:28.—i. [27:11] Gn 25:25.

j. [27:27] Gn 22:17–18; Heb 11:20.—k. [27:29] Gn 25:23; 49:8; Nm 24:9.

came here by a ruse and carried off your blessing," ³⁶Esau exclaimed, "He is well named Jacob, is he not! He has supplanted me^c twice! First he took away my right as firstborn, and now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not saved a blessing for me?" ³⁷Isaac replied to Esau: "I have already appointed him your master, and I have assigned to him all his kindred as his servants; besides, I have sustained him with grain and wine. What then can I do for you, my son?" ³⁸But Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me too, father!" and Esau wept aloud. ³⁹His father Isaac said in response:

"See, far from the fertile earth
will be your dwelling;
far from the dew of the heavens
above!"^d

⁴⁰By your sword you will live,
and your brother you will serve;
But when you become restless,
you will throw off his yoke from
your neck."^e

⁴¹Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. Esau said to himself, "Let the time of mourning for my father come, so that I may kill my brother Jacob."^f ⁴²When Rebekah got news of what her older son Esau had in mind, she summoned her younger son Jacob and said to him: "Listen! Your brother Esau intends to get his revenge by killing you. ⁴³So now, my son, obey me: flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, ⁴⁴and stay with him a while until your brother's fury subsides— ⁴⁵until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back. Why should I lose both of you in a single day?"

Jacob Sent to Laban. ⁴⁶Rebekah said to Isaac: "I am disgusted with life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob also should marry a Hittite woman, a native of the land, like these women, why should I live?"^g

* [27:36] He has supplanted me: in Hebrew, *vayyaqebeni*, a word-play on the name Jacob, *ya'aqob*; see Jer 9:3 and Gn 25:26. There is also a play between the Hebrew words *bekorah* ("right of the firstborn") and *berakah* ("blessing").

l. [27:36] Gn 25:26, 29–34; Hos 12:4.—m. [27:38] Heb 12:17.—n. [27:39] Heb 11:20.—o. [27:40] 2 Kgs 8:20, 22; 2 Chr 21:8.—p. [27:41] Wis 10:10; Ob 10.—q. [27:46] Gn 26:34–35.

CHAPTER 28

¹Isaac therefore summoned Jacob and blessed him, charging him: "You shall not marry a Canaanite woman!" ²Go now to Paddan-aram, to the home of your mother's father Bethuel, and there choose a wife for yourself from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. ³May God Almighty bless you and make you fertile, multiply you that you may become an assembly of peoples. ⁴May God extend to you and your descendants the blessing of Abraham, so that you may gain possession of the land where you are residing, which he assigned to Abraham."[†] ⁵Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way; he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, and brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau."

⁶Esau noted that Isaac had blessed Jacob when he sent him to Paddan-aram to get himself a wife there, and that, as he gave him his blessing, he charged him, "You shall not marry a Canaanite woman," ⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸Esau realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac, ⁹so Esau went to Ishmael, and in addition to the wives he had, married Mahalath, the daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.[‡]

Jacob's Dream at Bethel. ¹⁰Jacob departed from Beer-sheba and proceeded toward

† [28:1–9] A glimpse of Rebekah's shrewdness is provided by 27:42–28:2. She is aware of Esau's murderous plot against Jacob (27:42–45) but realizes the episode of the stolen blessing is still painful to Isaac; she therefore uses another motive to persuade Isaac to send Jacob away—he must marry within the family (endogamy), unlike Esau. Esau, unreflective as usual, realizes too late he also should marry within the family but, significantly, marries from Abraham's rejected line. At this point in the story, Jacob (and his mother) have taken the blessing for themselves. Their actions have put Jacob in a precarious position: he must flee the land because of his brother's murderous intent and find a wife in a far country. One might ask how God's blessing can be given to such an unworthy schemer. There is a biblical pattern of preferring the younger brother or sister over the older—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Rachel over Leah, Joseph over his older brothers, Ephraim over Manasseh (Gn 48:14), David over his older brothers.

‡ [28:10–22] As Jacob is leaving the land on his way to an uncertain future in Paddan-aram, God appears to him at a sacred place that Jacob had visited only to take a night's rest. Jacob's unawareness of the holiness of the place underscores the graciousness of the gift. On his return to Canaan, he will again encounter a divine visitor in the form of the mysterious attacker (32:23–33) and, after his return and reconciliation with Esau, he will again go to Bethel (35:1–15).

r. [28:1] Gn 24:3–4; 26:35.—s. [28:2] Gn 22:22.—t. [28:4] Ex 32:13.—u. [28:5] Jdt 8:26.—v. [28:9] Gn 36:2–3.

Haran. ¹¹When he came upon a certain place,^{*} he stopped there for the night, since the sun had already set. Taking one of the stones at the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²Then he had a dream: a stairway[†] rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's angels were going up and down on it.[‡] ¹³And there was the LORD standing beside him and saying: I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants.[§] ¹⁴Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and through them you will spread to the west and the east, to the north and the south. In you and your descendants all the families of the earth will find blessing.[¶] ¹⁵I am with you and will protect you wherever you go, and bring you back to this land. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you.[‡]

¹⁶When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "Truly, the LORD is in this place and I did not know it!" ¹⁷He was afraid and said: "How awesome this place is! This is nothing else but the house of God, the gateway to heaven!" ¹⁸Early the next morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head, set it up as a sacred pillar,[‡] and poured oil on top of it.^d ¹⁹He named that place Bethel,[§] whereas the former name of the town had been Luz.^b

* [28:11] **Place:** the Hebrew word is often used specifically of a sacred site. The ambiguous word "place" is used here, for the text emphasizes that Jacob has no idea the place he has come upon is sacred; only when he wakes up does he realize it is sacred. The place was Bethel (v. 19), a sacred site as early as the time of Abraham (12:8).

† [28:12] **Stairway:** in Hebrew, *sullam*, traditionally but inaccurately translated as "ladder." The corresponding verb, *salal*, means "to heap up" something, such as dirt for a highway or a ramp. The imagery in Jacob's dream may be derived from the Babylonian ziggurat or temple tower, "with its top in the sky" (11:4), and with brick steps leading up to a small temple at the top.

‡ [28:18] **Sacred pillar:** in Hebrew, *masseba*, a stone which might vary in shape and size, set upright and usually intended for some religious purpose. The custom of erecting such sacred pillars in Palestine went back to its pre-Israelite period; but since their polytheistic associations were often retained, later Israelite religion forbade their erection (Lv 26:1; Dt 16:22) and ordered the destruction of those that were associated with other religions (Ex 34:13; Dt 12:3).

§ [28:19] **Bethel:** i.e., "house of God"; the reference is to the house of God in v. 17.

w. [28:12] Jn 1:51.—x. [28:13] Dt 1:8; Mi 7:20.—y. [28:14] Gn 12:3; 13:14–15; 15:5–6; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:4; Dt 19:8; Sir 44:21.—z. [28:15] Gn 31:3.—a. [28:18] Gn 31:13; 35:14–15.—b. [28:19] Gn 35:6; 48:3; Jos 18:13; Jgs 1:23; Hos 12:5.

²⁰Jacob then made this vow:[¶] "If God will be with me and protect me on this journey I am making and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, ²¹and I come back safely to my father's house, the LORD will be my God. ²²This stone that I have set up as a sacred pillar will be the house of God. Of everything you give me, I will return a tenth part to you without fail."

CHAPTER 29

Arrival in Haran.^{**} ^{1c}After Jacob resumed his journey, he came to the land of the Kedemites. ²Looking about, he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep huddled near it, for flocks were watered from that well. A large stone covered the mouth of the well.^d ³When all the shepherds were assembled there they would roll the stone away from the mouth of the well and water the sheep. Then they would put the stone back again in its place over the mouth of the well.

⁴Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We are from Haran," they replied. ⁵Then he asked them, "Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?" "We do," they answered.^e ⁶He inquired further, "Is he well?" "He is," they answered; "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." ⁷Then he said: "There is still much daylight left; it is hardly the time to bring the animals home. Water the sheep, and then continue pasturing them."[†] ⁸They replied, "We cannot until all the shepherds are here to roll the stone

¶ [28:20] **This vow:** knowing well that Esau's murderous wrath stands between him and the possession of the land promised him, Jacob makes his vow very precise. He vows to make the God who appeared to him his own if the God guides him safely to Paddan-aram and back to this land.

** [29:1–14] **Jacob's arrival in Haran.** The sight of Rachel inspires Jacob to the superhuman feat of rolling back the enormous stone by himself. The scene evokes the meeting of Abraham's steward and Jacob's mother Rebekah at a well (24:11–27).

The verse begins the story of Jacob's time in Mesopotamia (29:1–31:54), which is framed on either side by Jacob's time in Canaan, 25:19–28:22 and 32:1–36:43. In these chapters, Jacob suffers Laban's duplicity as Esau had to suffer his, though eventually Jacob outwits Laban and leaves Mesopotamia a wealthy man. An elaborate chiasmic (or envelope) structure shapes the diverse material: (A) Jacob's arrival in Haran in 29:1–4; (B) contract with Laban in 29:15–20; (C) Laban's deception of Jacob in 29:21–30; (D) the center, the birth of Jacob's children in 29:31–30:24; (C') Jacob's deception of Laban in 30:25–43; (B') dispute with Laban in 31:17–42; (A') departure from Laban in 31:43–54. As the chiasm reverses, so do the fortunes of Laban and Jacob. **Kedemites:** see note on 25:6.

c. [29:1] Wis 10:10.—d. [29:2] Gn 24:11–12.—e. [29:5] Tb 7:4.

away from the mouth of the well; then can we water the flocks."

⁹While he was still talking with them, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, for she was the one who tended them. ¹⁰As soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of Laban, he went up, rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well, and watered Laban's sheep. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹²Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative, Rebekah's son. So she ran to tell her father. ¹³When Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him. After embracing and kissing him, he brought him to his house. Jacob then repeated to Laban all these things, ¹⁴and Laban said to him, "You are indeed my bone and my flesh."

Marriage to Leah and Rachel. After Jacob had stayed with him a full month, ¹⁵Laban said to him: "Should you serve me for nothing just because you are a relative of mine? Tell me what your wages should be." ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the older was called Leah, the younger Rachel. ¹⁷Leah had dull eyes,[†] but Rachel was shapely and beautiful. ¹⁸Because Jacob loved Rachel, he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."[§] ¹⁹Laban replied, "It is better to give her to you than to another man. Stay with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, yet they seemed to him like a few days because of his love for her.^f

²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, that I may consummate my marriage with her, for my term is now completed." ²²So Laban invited all the local inhabitants and gave a banquet. ²³At nightfall he took

* [29:14] **Bone and . . . flesh:** the Hebrew idiom for English "flesh and blood" (cf. 2:23; Jgs 9:2; 2 Sm 5:1 = 1 Chr 11:1).

† [29:15–30] Laban's deception and Jacob's marriages. There are many ironies in the passage. Jacob's protest to Laban, "How could you do this to me?" echoes the question put to Abraham (20:9) and Isaac (26:10) when their deceptions about their wives were discovered. The major irony is that Jacob, the deceiver of his father and brother about the blessing (chap. 27), is deceived by his uncle (standing in for the father) about his wife.

‡ [29:17] **Dull eyes:** in the language of beauty used here, "dull" probably means lacking in the luster that was the sign of beautiful eyes, as in 1 Sm 16:12 and Sg 4:1.

§ [29:18] Jacob offers to render service (Jos 15:16–17; 1 Sm 17:25; 18:17) to pay off the customary bridal price (Ex 22:15–16; Dt 22:29).

f. [29:20] Hos 12:13.

his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he consummated the marriage with her. ²⁴Laban assigned his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maidservant. ²⁵In the morning, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban: "How could you do this to me! Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why did you deceive me?" ²⁶Laban replied, "It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. ²⁷Finish the bridal week^g for this one, and then the other will also be given to you in return for another seven years of service with me."[§]

²⁸Jacob did so. He finished the bridal week for the one, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. ²⁹Laban assigned his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. ³⁰Jacob then consummated his marriage with Rachel also, and he loved her more than Leah. Thus he served Laban another seven years.^h

Jacob's Children.^{**} ³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he made her fruitful, while Rachel was barren. ³²Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben;^{††} for she said, "It means, 'The LORD saw my misery; surely now my husband will love me.'" ³³She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "It means, 'The LORD heard that I was unloved,' and therefore he has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon.^{‡‡} ³⁴Again she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, since I have now borne him

g [29:27] **The bridal week:** an ancient wedding lasted for seven days; cf. Jgs 14:12, 17.

** [29:31–30:24] The note of strife, first sounded between Jacob and Esau in chaps. 25–27, continues between the two wives, since Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30). Jacob's neglect of Leah moves God to make her fruitful (29:31). Leah's fertility provokes Rachel. Leah bears Jacob four sons (Reuben, Levi, Simeon, and Judah) and her maidservant Zilpah, two (Gad and Asher). Rachel's maidservant Bilhah bears two (Dan and Naphtali). After the mandrakes (30:14–17), Leah bears Issachar and Zebulun and a daughter Dinah. Rachel then bears Joseph and, later in the land of Canaan, Benjamin (35:18).

†† [29:32] **Reuben:** the literal meaning of the Hebrew name is disputed. One interpretation is *re'u ben*, "look, a son!"; but here in Genesis (as also with the names of all the other sons of Jacob), it is given a symbolic rather than an etymological interpretation. Name and person were regarded as closely interrelated. The symbolic interpretation of Reuben's name, according to the Yahwist source, is based on the similar-sounding *ra'a be'oniy*, "he saw my misery." In the Elohist source, the name is explained by the similar-sounding *ye'ehabani*, "he will love me."

‡‡ [29:33] **Simeon:** in popular etymology, related to *shama'*, "he heard."

g. [29:27] Hos 12:13.—h. [29:30] Dt 21:15–17.—i. [29:32] Gn 49:3.

three sons"; that is why she named him Levi.³⁵ Once more she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "This time I will give thanks to the LORD"; therefore she named him Judah.[†] Then she stopped bearing children.^j

CHAPTER 30

¹When Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Jacob, she became envious of her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children or I shall die!"^k Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?"³¹ She replied, "Here is my maidservant Bilhah. Have intercourse with her, and let her give birth on my knees,[‡] so that I too may have children through her."^m So she gave him her maidservant Bilhah as wife,[§] and Jacob had intercourse with her.⁵ When Bilhah conceived and bore a son for Jacob, ⁶Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed he has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan.[¶] ⁷Rachel's maidservant Bilhah conceived again and bore a second son for Jacob, ⁸and Rachel said, "I have wrestled strenuously with my sister, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali.^{**}

⁹When Leah saw that she had ceased to bear children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as wife. ¹⁰So Leah's maidservant Zilpah bore a son for Jacob. ¹¹Leah then said, "What good luck!" So she named him Gad.^{††} ¹²Then Leah's maidservant Zilpah bore a second son to Jacob; ¹³and Leah said, "What good fortune, because women

will call me fortunate!" So she named him Asher.^{‡‡}

¹⁴One day, during the wheat harvest, Reuben went out and came upon some mandrakes^{§§} in the field which he brought home to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."¹⁵ Leah replied, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you must now take my son's mandrakes too?" Rachel answered, "In that case Jacob may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes."¹⁶ That evening, when Jacob came in from the field, Leah went out to meet him. She said, "You must have intercourse with me, because I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So that night he lay with her, ¹⁷and God listened to Leah; she conceived and bore a fifth son to Jacob. ¹⁸Leah then said, "God has given me my wages for giving my maidservant to my husband"; so she named him Issachar.^{¶¶} ¹⁹Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob; ²⁰and Leah said, "God has brought me a precious gift. This time my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons"; so she named him Zebulun.^{***} ²¹Afterwards she gave birth to a daughter, and she named her Dinah.

²²Then God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and made her fruitful. ²³She conceived and bore a son, and she said, "God has removed my disgrace."ⁿ ²⁴She named him Joseph,^{†††} saying, "May the LORD add another son for me!"

Jacob Outwits Laban.^{‡‡‡} ²⁵After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban:

‡‡ [30:13] Asher: explained by the term *be'oshri*, lit., "in my good fortune," i.e., "what good fortune," and by the term *ye'ashsheruni*, "they call me fortunate."

§§ [30:14] Mandrakes: an herb whose root was thought to promote conception. The Hebrew word for mandrakes, *duda'im*, has erotic connotations, since it sounds like the words *daddyaim* ("broats") and *doDim* ("sexual pleasure").

¶¶ [30:18] Issachar: explained by the terms, *sekari*, "my reward," and in v. 16, *sikor sekartika*, "I have hired you."

*** [30:20] Zebulun: explained by the terms, *zabedani . . . zebed tob*, "he has brought me a precious gift," and *yizbeleini*, "he will honor me."

††† [30:24] Joseph: explained by the words *yosep*, "may he add," and in v. 23, *asap*, "he has removed."

‡‡‡ [30:25-43] Jacob's deception of Laban. Jacob has been living in Laban's household as an indentured worker paying off the bride price. Having paid off all his obligations, he wants to settle his accounts with Laban. His many children attest to the fulfillment of the Lord's promise of numerous progeny; the birth of Joseph to his beloved Rachel signals the fulfillment in a special way. To enter into the Lord's second promise, the land, he must now return to Canaan.

n. [30:23] Lk 1:25.

* [29:34] Levi: related to *yillawehi*, "he will become attached."

† [29:35] Judah: related to *ודה*, "I will give thanks, praise."

‡ [30:3] On my knees: in the ancient Near East, a father would take a newborn child in his lap to signify that he acknowledged it as his own; Rachel uses the ceremony in order to adopt the child and establish her legal rights to it.

§ [30:4] As wife: in 35:22 Bilhah is called a "concubine" (Heb. *pilegeshi*). In v. 9, Zilpah is called "wife," and in 37:2 both women are called wives. The basic difference between a wife and a concubine was that no bride price was paid for the latter. The interchange of terminology shows that there was some blurring in social status between the wife and the concubine.

¶ [30:6] Dan: explained by the term *dannani*, "he has vindicated me."

** [30:8] Naphtali: explained by the Hebrew term *naftulim*, lit., "contest" or "struggle."

†† [30:11] Gad: explained by the Hebrew term *begad*, lit., "in luck," i.e., "what good luck!"

j. [29:35] Mt 1:2; Lk 3:33.—k. [30:1] Prv 30:16.—l. [30:2] 2 Kgs 5:7.—m. [30:3] Gn 16:2-4.

"Allow me to go to my own region and land.²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I served you and let me go, for you know the service that I rendered you."²⁷ Laban answered him: "If you will please! I have learned through divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."²⁸ He continued, "State the wages I owe you, and I will pay them."²⁹ Jacob replied: "You know what work I did for you and how well your livestock fared under my care;³⁰ the little you had before I came has grown into an abundance, since the LORD has blessed you in my company. Now, when can I do something for my own household as well?"³¹ Laban asked, "What should I give you?" Jacob answered: "You do not have to give me anything. If you do this thing for me, I will again pasture and tend your sheep.³² Let me go through your whole flock today and remove from it every dark animal among the lambs and every spotted or speckled one among the goats. These will be my wages.³³ In the future, whenever you check on my wages, my honesty will testify for me: any animal that is not speckled or spotted among the goats, or dark among the lambs, got into my possession by theft!"³⁴ Laban said, "Very well. Let it be as you say."

³⁵That same day Laban removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats, all those with some white on them, as well as every dark lamb, and he put them in the care of his sons.³⁶ Then he put a three days' journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.

³⁷Jacob, however, got some fresh shoots of poplar, almond and plane[†] trees, and he

* [30:32] Dark . . . lambs . . . spotted or speckled . . . goats: in the Near East the normal color of sheep is light gray, whereas that of goats is dark brown or black. A minority of sheep in that part of the world have dark patches, and a minority of goats, white markings. Laban is quick to agree to the offer, for Jacob would have received only a few animals. But Jacob gets the better of him, using two different means: (1) he separates out the weaker animals and then provides visual impressions to the stronger animals at mating time (a folkloric belief); (2) in 31:8–12, he transmits the preferred characteristics through controlled propagation. It should be noted that Jacob has been told what to do in a dream (31:10) and that God is behind the increase in his flocks.

† [30:35] By giving the abnormally colored animals to his sons, Laban not only deprived Jacob of his first small wages, but he also schemed to prevent the future breeding of such animals in the flock entrusted to Jacob.

‡ [30:37] Plane: also called the Oriental Plane, a deciduous tree found in riverine forests and marshes.

peeled white stripes in them by laying bare the white core of the shoots.³⁸ The shoots that he had peeled he then set upright in the watering troughs where the animals came to drink, so that they would be in front of them. When the animals were in heat as they came to drink,³⁹ the goats mated by the shoots, and so they gave birth to streaked, speckled and spotted young.⁴⁰ The sheep, on the other hand, Jacob kept apart, and he made these animals face the streaked or completely dark animals of Laban. Thus he produced flocks of his own, which he did not put with Laban's flock.⁴¹ Whenever the hardier animals were in heat, Jacob would set the shoots in the troughs in full view of these animals, so that they mated by the shoots;⁴² but with the weaker animals he would not put the shoots there. So the feeble animals would go to Laban, but the hardy ones to Jacob.⁴³ So the man grew exceedingly prosperous, and he owned large flocks, male and female servants, camels, and donkeys.

CHAPTER 31

Flight from Laban. ¹Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything that belonged to our father, and he has produced all this wealth from our father's property."² Jacob perceived, too, that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had previously been.³ Then the LORD said to Jacob: Return to the land of your ancestors, where you were born, and I will be with you.⁴

⁵So Jacob sent for Rachel and Leah to meet him in the field where his flock was.⁶ There he said to them: "I have noticed that your father's attitude toward me is not as it was in the past; but the God of my father has been with me.⁷ You know well that with all my strength I served your father; ⁸yet your father cheated me and changed my wages ten times. God, however, did not let him do me any harm."⁹ Whenever your father said, "The speckled animals will be your wages," the entire flock would bear speckled young;

§ [31:1–54] Jacob flees with his family from Laban. The strife that has always accompanied Jacob continues as Laban's sons complain, "he has taken everything that belonged to our father"; the brothers' complaint echoes Esau's in 27:36. Rachel and Leah overcome their mutual hostility and are able to leave together, a harbinger of the reconciliation with Esau in chap. 33.

o. [31:3] Gn 26:3; 28:15; 32:10.—p. [31:7] Jdt 8:26.

whenever he said, 'The streaked animals will be your wages,' the entire flock would bear streaked young. ⁹So God took away your father's livestock and gave it to me. ¹⁰Once, during the flock's mating season, I had a dream in which I saw he-goats mating that were streaked, speckled and mottled. ¹¹In the dream God's angel said to me, 'Jacob!' and I replied, 'Here I am!' ¹²Then he said: 'Look up and see. All the he-goats that are mating are streaked, speckled and mottled, for I have seen all the things that Laban has been doing to you. ¹³I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a sacred pillar and made a vow to me. Get up now! Leave this land and return to the land of your birth.'"^q

¹⁴Rachel and Leah answered him: "Do we still have an heir's portion in our father's house? ¹⁵Are we not regarded by him as outsiders? He not only sold us; he has even used up the money that he got for us! ¹⁶All the wealth that God took away from our father really belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."^r ¹⁷Jacob proceeded to put his children and wives on camels, ¹⁸and he drove off all his livestock and all the property he had acquired in Pad-dan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹Now Laban was away shearing his sheep, and Rachel had stolen her father's household images. ²⁰Jacob had hoodwinked[†] Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was going to flee. ²¹Thus he fled with all that he had. Once he was across the Euphrates, he headed for the hill country of Gilead.

* [31:15] **Outsiders:** lit., "foreign women"; they lacked the favored legal status of native women. **Used up:** lit., "eaten, consumed"; the bridal price that a man received for giving his daughter in marriage was legally reserved as her inalienable dowry. Perhaps this is the reason that Rachel took the household images belonging to Laban.

† [31:19] **Household images:** in Hebrew, *teraphim*, figurines used in divination (Ez 21:26; Zec 10:2). Laban calls them his "gods" (v. 30). The traditional translation "idols" is avoided because it suggests false gods, whereas Genesis seems to accept the fact that the ancestors did not always live according to later biblical religious standards and laws.

‡ [31:20] **Hoodwinked:** lit., "stolen the heart of," i.e., lulled the mind of. **Aramean:** the earliest extra-biblical references to the Arameans date later than the time of Jacob, if Jacob is dated to the mid-second millennium; to call Laban an Aramean and to have him speak Aramaic (Jegar-sahadutha, v. 47) is an apparent anachronism. The word may have been chosen to underscore the growing estrangement between the two men and the fact that their descendants will be two different peoples.

q. [31:13] Gn 28:18.—r. [31:16] Wis 10:10–11.—s. [31:19] Gn 31:34; 1 Sm 19:13.

²²On the third day, word came to Laban that Jacob had fled. ²³Taking his kinsmen with him, he pursued him for seven days^s until he caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴But that night God appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream and said to him: Take care not to say anything to Jacob.^t

Jacob and Laban in Gilead. ²⁵When Laban overtook Jacob, Jacob's tents were pitched in the hill country; Laban also pitched his tents in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶Laban said to Jacob, "How could you hoodwink me and carry off my daughters like prisoners of war?^u ²⁷Why did you dupe me by stealing away secretly? You did not tell me! I would have sent you off with joyful singing to the sound of tambourines and harps. ²⁸You did not even allow me a parting kiss to my daughters and grandchildren! Now what you have done makes no sense. ²⁹I have it in my power to harm all of you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Take care not to say anything to Jacob!' ³⁰Granted that you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house, why did you steal my gods?" ³¹Jacob replied to Laban, "I was frightened at the thought that you might take your daughters away from me by force. ³²As for your gods, the one you find them with shall not remain alive! If, with our kinsmen looking on, you identify anything here as belonging to you, take it." Jacob had no idea that Rachel had stolen the household images.

³³Laban then went in and searched Jacob's tent and Leah's tent, as well as the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he went into Rachel's. ³⁴Meanwhile Rachel had taken the household images, put them inside the camel's saddlebag, and seated herself upon them. When Laban had rummaged through her whole tent without finding them,^v ³⁵she said to her father, "Do not let my lord be angry

§ [31:23] **For seven days:** lit., "a way of seven days," a general term to designate a long distance; it would actually have taken a camel caravan many more days to travel from Haran to Gilead, the region east of the northern half of the Jordan. The mention of camels in this passage is apparently anachronistic since camels were not domesticated until the late second millennium.

¶ [31:26] **Prisoners of war:** lit., "women captured by the sword"; the women of a conquered people were treated as part of the victor's spoil; cf. 1 Sm 30:2; 2 Kgs 5:2.

** [31:34] As in chap. 27, a younger child (Rachel) deceives her father to gain what belongs to him.

t. [31:24] Wis 10:12.—u. [31:34] Gn 31:19.

that I cannot rise in your presence; I am having my period.” So, despite his search, he did not find the household images.

³⁶Jacob, now angered, confronted Laban and demanded, “What crime or offense have I committed that you should hound me? ³⁷Now that you have rummaged through all my things, what have you found from your household belongings? Produce it here before your kinsmen and mine, and let them decide between the two of us.

³⁸“In the twenty years that I was under you, no ewe or she-goat of yours ever miscarried, and I have never eaten rams of your flock. ^{39a}I never brought you an animal torn by wild beasts; I made good the loss myself. You held me responsible for anything stolen by day or night.” ⁴⁰Often the scorching heat devoured me by day, and the frost by night, while sleep fled from my eyes! ⁴¹Of the twenty years that I have now spent in your household, I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, while you changed my wages ten times. ⁴²If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, you would now have sent me away empty-handed. But God saw my plight and the fruits of my toil, and last night he reproached you.”^w

⁴³Laban replied to Jacob: “The daughters are mine, their children are mine, and the flocks are mine; everything you see belongs to me. What can I do now for my own daughters and for the children they have borne? ⁴⁴Come, now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and it will be a treaty between you and me.”

⁴⁵Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a sacred pillar.^x ⁴⁶Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” So they got stones

and made a mound; and they ate there at the mound. ⁴⁷Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha,[§] but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸Laban said, “This mound will be a witness from now on between you and me.” That is why it was named Galeed—⁴⁹and also Mizpah,[¶] for he said: “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are out of each other’s sight. ⁵⁰If you mistreat my daughters, or take other wives besides my daughters, know that even though no one else is there, God will be a witness between you and me.”

⁵¹Laban said further to Jacob: “Here is this mound, and here is the sacred pillar that I have set up between you and me. ⁵²This mound will be a witness, and this sacred pillar will be a witness, that, with hostile intent, I may not pass beyond this mound into your territory, nor may you pass beyond it into mine. ⁵³May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us!” Jacob took the oath by the Fear of his father Isaac.^{**} ⁵⁴He then offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited his kinsmen to share in the meal. When they had eaten, they passed the night on the mountain.

CHAPTER 32

¹Early the next morning, Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he set out on his journey back home. ²Meanwhile Jacob continued on his own way, and God’s angels encountered him. ³When Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s encampment.” So he named that place Mahanaim.^{##}

Envoys to Esau. ⁴Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom,^y ⁵ordering them:

* [31:39] Jacob’s actions are more generous than the customs suggested in the Code of Hammurabi: “If in a sheepfold an act of god has occurred, or a lion has made a kill, the shepherd shall clear himself before the deity, and the owner of the fold must accept the loss” (par. 266); cf. Ex 22:12.

† [31:43–54] In this account of the non-aggression treaty between Laban and Jacob, the different objects that serve as witness (sacred pillar in v. 45, cairn of stones in v. 46), their different names (Jegar-sahadutha in v. 47, Mizpah in v. 49), and the two references to the covenant meal (vv. 46, 54) suggest that two versions have been fused. One version is the Yahwist source, and another source has been used to supplement it.

‡ [31:44–54] The treaty is a typical covenant between two parties: Jacob was bound to treat his wives (Laban’s daughters) well, and Laban was bound not to cross Jacob’s boundaries with hostile intent.

v. [31:39] Ex 22:12.—w. [31:42] Gn 31:24, 29.—x. [31:45] Gn 28:18; 35:14.

§ [31:47–48] Jegar-sahadutha: an Aramaic term meaning “mound of witness.” Galeed: in Hebrew, “the mound of witness.”

¶ [31:49] Mizpah: a town in Gilead; cf. Jgs 10:17; 11:11, 34; Hos 5:1. The Hebrew name *mispa* (“lookout”) is allied to *yisph yltwh* (“may the Lord keep watch”), and also echoes the word *masseba* (“sacred pillar”).

** [31:53] Fear of . . . Isaac: an archaic title for Jacob’s God of the Father.

[32:1–22] Jacob’s negotiations with Esau. Laban kisses his daughters and grandchildren good-bye but not Jacob. On leaving Mesopotamia, Jacob has an encounter with angels of God (vv. 2–3), which provokes him to exclaim, “This is God’s encampment,” just as he exclaimed upon leaving Canaan, “This is the house of God, the gateway to heaven” (28:11–17).

[32:3] Mahanaim: a town in Gilead (Jos 13:26, 30; 21:38; 2 Sm 2:8; etc.). The Hebrew name means “two camps.” There are other allusions to the name in vv. 8, 11.

y. [32:4] Gn 36:6.

"Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: 'Thus says your servant Jacob: I have been residing with Laban and have been delayed until now. ⁶I own oxen, donkeys and sheep, as well as male and female servants. I have sent my lord this message in the hope of gaining your favor.'" ⁷When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, "We found your brother Esau. He is now coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him."

⁸Jacob was very much frightened. In his anxiety, he divided the people who were with him, as well as his flocks, herds and camels, into two camps. ⁹"If Esau should come and attack one camp," he reasoned, "the remaining camp may still escape." ¹⁰Then Jacob prayed: "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac! You, LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your land and your relatives, and I will be good to you.'^z ¹¹I am unworthy of all the acts of kindness and faithfulness that you have performed for your servant: although I crossed the Jordan here with nothing but my staff, I have now grown into two camps. ¹²Save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau! Otherwise I fear that he will come and strike me down and the mothers with the children. ¹³You yourself said, 'I will be very good to you, and I will make your descendants like the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.'"^a

¹⁴After passing the night there, Jacob selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau: ¹⁵two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats; two hundred ewes and twenty rams; ¹⁶thirty female camels and their young; forty cows and ten bulls; twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁷He put these animals in the care of his servants, in separate herds, and he told the servants, "Go on ahead of me, but keep some space between the herds." ¹⁸He ordered the servant in the lead, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? To whom do these animals ahead of you belong?' ¹⁹tell him, 'To your servant Jacob, but they have been sent as a gift to my lord Esau. Jacob himself is right behind us.'" ²⁰He also ordered the second servant and the third and all the others

who followed behind the herds: "Thus and so you shall say to Esau, when you reach him; ²¹and also tell him, 'Your servant Jacob is right behind us.'" For Jacob reasoned, "If I first appease him with a gift that precedes me, then later, when I face him, perhaps he will forgive me." ²²So the gifts went on ahead of him, while he stayed that night in the camp.

Jacob's New Name. ²³That night, however, Jacob arose, took his two wives, with the two maidservants and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²⁴After he got them and brought them across the wadi and brought over what belonged to him, ²⁵Jacob was left there alone. Then a man^f wrestled with him until the break of dawn. ²⁶When the man saw that he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob's hip at its socket, so that Jacob's socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him.^b ²⁷The man then said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." ²⁸"What is your name?" the man asked. He answered, "Jacob."^c ²⁹Then the man said, "You shall no longer be named Jacob, but Israel,^g because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed." ³⁰Jacob then asked him, "Please tell me your name." He answered, "Why do you ask for my name?" With that, he blessed him. ³¹Jacob named the place Peniel,^h "because I

* [32:23–33] As Jacob crosses over to the land promised him, worried about the impending meeting with Esau, he encounters a mysterious adversary in the night with whom he wrestles until morning. The cunning Jacob manages to wrest a blessing from the night stranger before he departs. There are folkloric elements in the tale—e.g., the trial of the hero before he can return home, the nocturnal demon's loss of strength at sunrise, the demon protecting its river, the power gained by knowledge of an opponent's name—but these have been worked into a coherent though elliptical narrative. The point of the tale seems to be that the ever-striving, ever-grasping Jacob must eventually strive with God to attain full possession of the blessing.

† [32:25] A man: as with Abraham's three visitors in chap. 18, who appear sometimes as three, two, and one (the latter being God), this figure is fluid; he loses the match but changes Jacob's name (v. 29), an act elsewhere done only by God (17:5, 15). A few deft narrative touches manage to express intimate contact with Jacob while preserving the transcendence proper to divinity.

‡ [32:29] Israel: the first part of the Hebrew name *Yisrael* is given a popular explanation in the word *saritha*, "you contended"; the second part is the first syllable of *'elohim*, "divine beings." The present incident, with a similar allusion to the name Israel, is referred to in Hos 12:5, where the mysterious wrestler is explicitly called an angel.

§ [32:31] Peniel: a variant of the word Penuel (v. 32), the name of a town on the north bank of the Jabbok in Gilead (Jgs 8:8–9, 17; 1 Kgs 12:25). The name is explained as meaning "the face of God," *peni-'el*. Yet my life has been spared: see note on 16:13.

z. [32:10] Gn 31:3.—a. [32:13] Gn 28:14; 48:16; Ex 32:13; Heb 11:12.

b. [32:26] Hos 12:5.—c. [32:28] Gn 35:10; 1 Kgs 18:31; 2 Kgs 17:34.

have seen God face to face," he said, "yet my life has been spared."^d

³²At sunrise, as he left Penuel, Jacob limped along because of his hip. ³³That is why, to this day, the Israelites do not eat the sciatic muscle that is on the hip socket, because he had struck Jacob's hip socket at the sciatic muscle.

CHAPTER 33

Jacob and Esau Meet. ¹Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and with him four hundred men. So he divided his children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants, ²putting the maidservants and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. ³He himself went on ahead of them, bowing to the ground seven times, until he reached his brother. ⁴Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, and flinging himself on his neck, kissed him as he wept.

⁵Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children and asked, "Who are these with you?" Jacob answered, "They are the children with whom God has graciously favored your servant." ⁶Then the maidservants and their children came forward and bowed low; ⁷next, Leah and her children came forward and bowed low; lastly, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed low. ⁸Then Esau asked, "What did you intend with all those herds that I encountered?" Jacob answered, "It was to gain my lord's favor." ⁹Esau replied, "I have plenty; my brother, you should keep what is yours." ¹⁰"No, I beg you!" said Jacob. "If you will do me the favor, accept this gift from me, since to see your face is for me like seeing the face of God—and you have received me so kindly. ¹¹Accept the gift I have brought you. For God has been generous toward me, and I have an abundance." Since he urged him strongly, Esau accepted.

* [33:1–20] The truly frightening confrontation seems to have already occurred in Jacob's meeting the divine stranger in the previous chapter. In contrast, this meeting brings reconciliation. Esau, impulsive but largehearted, kisses the cunning Jacob and calls him brother (v. 9). Jacob in return asks Esau to accept his blessing (*berakah*, translated "gift," v. 11), giving back at least symbolically what he had taken many years before and responding to Esau's erstwhile complaint ("he has taken away my blessing," 27:36). Verses 12–17 show that the reconciliation is not total and, further, that Jacob does not intend to share the ancestral land with his brother.

d. [32:31] Jgs 13:22.

¹²Then Esau said, "Let us break camp and be on our way; I will travel in front of you."

¹³But Jacob replied: "As my lord knows, the children are too young. And the flocks and herds that are nursing are a concern to me; if overdriven for even a single day, the whole flock will die. ¹⁴Let my lord, then, go before his servant, while I proceed more slowly at the pace of the livestock before me and at the pace of my children, until I join my lord in Seir." ¹⁵Esau replied, "Let me at least put at your disposal some of the people who are with me." But Jacob said, "Why is this that I am treated so kindly, my lord?" ¹⁶So on that day Esau went on his way back to Seir, ¹⁷and Jacob broke camp for Succoth.[†] There Jacob built a home for himself and made booths for his livestock. That is why the place was named Succoth.

¹⁸Jacob arrived safely at the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram. He encamped in sight of the city.^e ¹⁹The plot of ground on which he had pitched his tent he bought for a hundred pieces of money[‡] from the descendants of Hamor, the father of Shechem.^f ²⁰He set up an altar there and invoked "El, the God of Israel."^g

CHAPTER 34

The Rape of Dinah. ¹Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit some of the women of the land. ²When Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite,[§] the

† [33:17] **Succoth**: an important town near the confluence of the Jabbok and the Jordan (Jos 13:27; Jgs 8:5–16; 1 Kgs 7:46). **Booths**: in Hebrew, *sukkot*, of the same sound as the name of the town.

‡ [33:19] **Pieces of money**: in Hebrew, *qesita*, a monetary unit of which the value is unknown. **Descendants of Hamor**: Amorites, "the people of Hamor"; cf. Jgs 9:28. Hamor was regarded as the eponymous ancestor of the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Shechem.

§ [34:1–31] The story of the rape of Dinah and the revenge of Jacob's sons on the men of the city of Shechem may reflect the relations of the tribes of Simeon and Levi to their Canaanite neighbors around Shechem; the tribes are represented by their eponymous ancestors. Jacob's farewell testament (49:5–7) cites this incident as the reason for the decline of the tribes of Simeon and Levi. Ominously, vv. 30–31 leave the situation unresolved, with Jacob concerned about the welfare of the whole family, and Simeon and Levi concerned only about the honor of their full sister. The danger to the family from narrow self-interest will continue in the Joseph story.

¶ [34:2] **Hivite**: the Greek text has "Horite"; the terms were apparently used indiscriminately to designate the Hurrian or other non-Semitic elements in Palestine.

e. [33:18] Gn 12:6; Jn 4:5.—f. [33:19] Jos 24:32; Jn 4:5; Acts 7:16.—g. [33:20] Jgs 6:24.

leader of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force.³ He was strongly attracted to Dinah, daughter of Jacob, and was in love with the young woman. So he spoke affectionately to her.⁴ Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this young woman for a wife."

⁵Meanwhile, Jacob heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were out in the field with his livestock, Jacob kept quiet until they came home.⁶ Now Hamor, the father of Shechem, went out to discuss the matter with Jacob,⁷ just as Jacob's sons were coming in from the field. When they heard the news, the men were indignant and extremely angry. Shechem had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter; such a thing is not done.⁸ Hamor appealed to them, saying: "My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife.⁹ Intermarry with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.¹⁰ Thus you can live among us. The land is open before you. Settle and move about freely in it and acquire holdings here."¹¹ Then Shechem appealed to Dinah's father and brothers: "Do me this favor, and whatever you ask from me, I will give.¹² No matter how high you set the bridal price and gift, I will give you whatever you ask from me; only give me the young woman as a wife."

Revenge of Jacob's Sons. ¹³Jacob's sons replied to Shechem and his father Hamor with guile, speaking as they did because he had defiled their sister Dinah.¹⁴ They said to them, "We are not able to do this thing: to give our sister to an uncircumcised man. For that would be a disgrace for us.¹⁵ Only on this condition will we agree to that: that you become like us by having every male among you circumcised.¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters in marriage; we will settle among you and become one people.¹⁷ But if you do not listen to us and be circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

¹⁸Their proposal pleased Hamor and his son Shechem.¹⁹ The young man lost no time in acting on the proposal, since he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was more highly

* [34:10] Hamor seems to be making concessions to Jacob's family in the hope of avoiding warfare between the two families.

h. [34:7] 2 Sm 13:12.

regarded than anyone else in his father's house.²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and said to the men of their city:²¹ "These men are friendly toward us. Let them settle in the land and move about in it freely; there is ample room in the land for them. We can take their daughters in marriage and give our daughters to them.²² But only on this condition will the men agree to live with us and form one people with us: that every male among us be circumcised as they themselves are.²³ Would not their livestock, their property, and all their animals then be ours? Let us just agree with them, so that they will settle among us."

²⁴All who went out of the gate of the city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and all the males, all those who went out of the gate of the city,[†] were circumcised.²⁵ On the third day, while they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, brothers of Dinah, each took his sword, advanced against the unsuspecting city and massacred all the males.ⁱ ²⁶After they had killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, they took Dinah from Shechem's house and left.^j ²⁷Then the other sons of Jacob followed up the slaughter and sacked the city because their sister had been defiled.²⁸ They took their sheep, cattle and donkeys, whatever was in the city and in the surrounding country.²⁹ They carried off all their wealth, their children, and their women, and looted whatever was in the houses.^k

³⁰Jacob said to Simeon and Levi: "You have brought trouble upon me by making me repugnant to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I have so few men that, if these people unite against me and attack me, I and my household will be wiped out."³¹ But they retorted, "Should our sister be treated like a prostitute?"

CHAPTER 35

Bethel Revisited. ¹⁴God said to Jacob: Go up now to Bethel. Settle there and build an

† [34:24] All those who went out of the gate of the city: apparently meaning all the residents. By temporarily crippling the men through circumcision, Jacob's sons deprived the city of its defenders.

‡ [35:1-7] Jacob returns to Bethel and founds the sanctuary, an event that forms a "bookend" to the first visit to Bethel in 28:10-22. To enter the Lord's sanctuary, one must purify oneself

i. [34:25] Gn 49:6.—j. [34:26] Jdt 9:2.—k. [34:29] Jdt 9:3-4.

altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.¹ ²So Jacob told his household and all who were with him: "Get rid of the foreign gods^s among you; then purify yourselves and change your clothes. ³Let us now go up to Bethel so that I might build an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴They gave Jacob all the foreign gods in their possession and also the rings they had in their ears^t and Jacob buried them under the oak that is near Shechem. ⁵Then, as they set out, a great terror fell upon the surrounding towns, so that no one pursued the sons of Jacob.

⁶Thus Jacob and all the people who were with him arrived in Luz (now Bethel) in the land of Canaan.^u ⁷There he built an altar and called the place El-Bethel,^s for it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.^v

⁸Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. She was buried under the oak below Bethel, and so it was named Allon-bacuth.^s

⁹On Jacob's arrival from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. ¹⁰God said to him:

Your name is Jacob.

You will no longer be named Jacob, but Israel will be your name.^o

So he was named Israel. ¹¹Then God said to him: I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply. A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, will stem from you, and kings will issue from your loins. ¹²The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you; and to your descendants after you I will give the land.^p

and get rid of all signs of allegiance to other gods (Jos 24:23; Jgs 10:16). Jacob also seems to initiate the custom of making a pilgrimage to Bethel (see Ps 122:1 and Is 2:3, 5).

^s [35:2] **Foreign gods**: divine images, including those of household deities (see note on 31:19), that Jacob's people brought with them from Paddan-aram.

^t [35:4] **Rings . . . their ears**: the earrings may have belonged to the gods because earrings were often placed on statues.

^u [35:7] **El-Bethel**: probably to be translated "the god of Bethel." This is one of several titles of God in Genesis that begin with *El* (= God), e.g., *El Olam* (21:33), *El Elyon* (14:18), *El* the God of Israel (33:20), *El Roi* (16:13), and *El Shaddai*. Most of these (except *El Shaddai*) are tied to specific Israelite shrines.

^v [35:8] **Allon-bacuth**: the Hebrew name means "oak of weeping."

l. [35:1] Gn 28:12-13.—m. [35:6] Gn 28:19; Jos 18:13; Jgs 1:22-23.—n. [35:7] Gn 28:12-13.—o. [35:10] 1 Kgs 18:31; 2 Kgs 17:34.—p. [35:12] Ex 32:13; Heb 11:9.

¹³Then God departed from him. ¹⁴In the place where God had spoken with him, Jacob set up a sacred pillar, a stone pillar, and upon it he made a libation and poured out oil.^q ¹⁵Jacob named the place where God spoke to him Bethel.

Jacob's Family. ¹⁶Then they departed from Bethel; but while they still had some distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel went into labor and suffered great distress. ¹⁷When her labor was most intense, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for now you have another son." ¹⁸With her last breath—for she was at the point of death—she named him Ben-oni;^q but his father named him Benjamin. ¹⁹Thus Rachel died; and she was buried on the road to Ephrath (now Bethlehem).^r ²⁰Jacob set up a sacred pillar on her grave, and the same pillar marks Rachel's grave to this day.

²¹Israel moved on and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder. ²²While Israel was encamped in that region, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine. When Israel heard of it, he was greatly offended.^{††}

The sons of Jacob were now twelve. ²³The sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; ²⁴the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; ²⁵the sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali; ²⁶the sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

²⁷Jacob went home to his father Isaac at Mamre, in Kiriath-arba (now Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had resided. ²⁸The length of Isaac's life was one hundred and eighty

^q [35:18] **Ben-oni**: means either "son of my vigor" or, more likely in the context, "son of affliction." **Benjamin**: "son of the right hand," meaning a son who is his father's help and support.

^r [35:19] **Bethlehem**: the gloss comes from a later tradition that identified the site with Bethlehem, also called Ephrath or Ephratha (Jos 15:59; Ru 4:11; Mi 5:1). But Rachel's grave was actually near Ramah (Jer 31:15), a few miles north of Jerusalem, in the territory of Benjamin (1 Sm 10:2).

^{††} [35:22] The genealogy in vv. 23-29 is prefaced by a notice about Reuben's sleeping with Bilhah, his father's concubine. Such an act is a serious challenge to the authority of the father (cf. 2 Sm 3:7 and 16:21). In his final testament in chap. 49, Jacob cites this act of Reuben as the reason for Reuben's loss of the authority he had as firstborn son (49:4). Reuben's act is one more instance of strife in the family and of discord between father and son.

^{‡‡} [35:24-26] Benjamin is here said to have been born in Paddan-aram, apparently because all twelve sons of Jacob are considered as a unit.

q. [35:14] Gn 28:18; 31:45.—r. [35:19] Gn 48:7; 1 Sm 10:2; Mi 5:1.—s. [35:22] Gn 49:4; 1 Chr 5:1.

years;²⁹ then he breathed his last. He died as an old man and was gathered to his people. After a full life, his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

CHAPTER 36

Edomite Lists.^{*} ¹These are the descendants of Esau (that is, Edom). ²Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women: Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite; Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah the son of Zibeon the Hivite;³ and Basemath, daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. ⁴Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau; Zibeon bore Reuel;⁵ and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.⁶

⁶Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock, all his cattle, and all the property he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to the land of Seir, away from his brother Jacob.⁷ Their possessions had become too great for them to dwell together, and the land in which they were residing could not support them because of their livestock. ⁸So Esau settled in the highlands of Seir. (Esau is Edom.)^x ⁹These are the descendants of Esau,[†] ancestor of the Edomites, in the highlands of Seir.

¹⁰These are the names of the sons of Esau: Eliphaz, son of Adah, wife of Esau, and Reuel, son of Basemath, wife of Esau. ^{11y}The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. ¹²Timna was a concubine

* [36:1-43] The line of Esau. In the preceding chapter (35:22-26), the list of Jacob's children completes the narrative of Jacob; in this chapter, the narrative of Esau is complete when his descendants are listed. The notice of Abraham's death and burial in 25:7-10 was followed by a list of the line of his elder son Ishmael (25:12-18) and here Jacob's death and burial are followed by the line of Esau. The lines of both Ishmael and Esau are introduced by the same double formula, "These are the descendants of . . ." (25:12; 36:9) and "These are the names of the sons of . . ." (25:13; 36:10). The chapter consists of diverse material: vv. 1-3, Esau's wives; vv. 9-14, Esau's descendants; vv. 15-19, the clans of Esau; vv. 20-30, the Horites of Seir; vv. 31-39, the Edomite kings; vv. 40-43, the Edomites.

† [36:2-14] The names of Esau's wives and of their fathers given here differ considerably from their names cited from other old sources in 26:34 and 28:9. Zibeon the Hivite: in v. 20 he is called a "Horite"; see note on 34:2.

‡ [36:9] These are the descendants of Esau: the original heading of the genealogy is preserved in v. 10 ("These are the names of the sons of Esau"). This use of the Priestly formula is secondary and should not be counted in the list of ten such formulas in Genesis.

t. [36:2] Gn 26:34.—u. [36:4] 1 Chr 1:35.—v. [36:5] 1 Chr 1:35.—w. [36:6] Gn 32:4.—x. [36:8] Dt 2:4-5; Jos 24:4.—y. [36:11-12] 1 Chr 1:36.

of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the sons of Adah, the wife of Esau. ¹³These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Those were the sons of Basemath, the wife of Esau.^z ¹⁴These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah—the daughter of Anah, son of Zibeon—whom she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.^a

¹⁵These are the clans of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, Esau's firstborn: the clans of Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz,¹⁶ Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. These are the clans of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Adah. ¹⁷These are the sons of Reuel, son of Esau: the clans of Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These are the clans of Reuel in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Basemath, wife of Esau. ¹⁸These were the sons of Oholibamah, wife of Esau: the clans of Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the clans of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah. ¹⁹These are the sons of Esau—that is, Edom—according to their clans.

²⁰These are the sons of Seir the Horite,[§] the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,^b ²¹Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; those are the clans of the Horites, sons of Seir in the land of Edom. ²²The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam, and Lotan's sister was Timna. ²³These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Mahanath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. ²⁴These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. He is the Anah who found water in the desert while he was pasturing the donkeys of his father Zibeon. ²⁵These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah, daughter of Anah. ²⁶These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. ²⁷These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. ²⁸These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. ²⁹These are the clans of the Horites: the clans of Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,³⁰ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; those are the clans of the Horites, clan by clan, in the land of Seir.

^{31d}These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over

§ [36:20] Seir the Horite: according to Dt 2:12, the highlands of Seir were inhabited by Horites before they were occupied by the Edomites.

z. [36:13] 1 Chr 1:37.—a. [36:14] 1 Chr 1:35.—b. [36:20-21] 1 Chr 1:38.—c. [36:22-28] 1 Chr 1:39-42.—d. [36:31-43] 1 Chr 1:43-54.

the Israelites.³² Bela, son of Beor, became king in Edom; the name of his city was Dinhabah.³³ When Bela died, Jobab, son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him as king.³⁴ When Jobab died, Husham, from the land of the Temanites, succeeded him as king.³⁵ When Husham died, Hadad, son of Bedad, succeeded him as king. He is the one who defeated Midian in the country of Moab; the name of his city was Avith.³⁶ When Hadad died, Samlah, from Masrekah, succeeded him as king.³⁷ When Samlah died, Shaul, from Rehoboth-on-the-River, succeeded him as king.³⁸ When Shaul died, Baal-hanan, son of Achbor, succeeded him as king.³⁹ When Baal-hanan, son of Achbor, died, Hadad succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Pau. His wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, son of Mezahab.

⁴⁰These are the names of the clans of Esau identified according to their families and localities: the clans of Timna, Alvah, Jetheth,⁴¹ Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon,⁴² Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar,⁴³ Magdiel, and Iram. Those are the clans of the Edomites, according to their settlements in their territorial holdings—that is, of Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites.

CHAPTER 37

Joseph Sold into Egypt. ¹Jacob settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan.² This is the story of the family of Jacob.³ When Joseph was seventeen years old, he was tending the flocks with his brothers;

* [36:31] Before any king reigned over the Israelites: obviously this statement was written after the time of Saul, Israel's first king. According to 1 Sm 14:47, Saul waged war against the Edomites; according to 2 Sm 8:2, 13-14 and 1 Kgs 11:14-17, David made Edom a vassal state and nearly wiped out the royal line. These events reflect the words of the Lord to Rebekah at the birth of the boys, "the older shall serve the younger" (25:23).

† [37:1] The statement points ahead to 47:27, "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen." These two statements frame the Joseph narrative; the later material (47:28-49:33) is about Jacob; chap. 50 brings to a conclusion themes remaining from the earlier story. One aim of the Joseph story is to explain how Israel came to Egypt after sojourning so long in Canaan.

‡ [37:2] The Joseph story is great literature not only in its themes but in its art. The stories show an interest in the psychology of the characters; everyone acts "in character" yet there is never a doubt that a divine purpose is bringing events to their conclusion. According to a literary analysis, vv. 1-4 set the scene; vv. 5-36 introduce the dramatic tension in the form of a conflict within the family; chaps. 38-41 describe the journeys away from their family of the eponymous ancestors of the two great tribes of later times, Judah (chap. 38) and Joseph (chaps. 39-41) and their preliminary conclusions; chaps. 42-44 detail the famine and journeys for food (chaps. 42, 43) that bring the brothers and (indirectly) the father into fresh contact with a mature Joseph who now has the power of life and death over

he was an assistant to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah, and Joseph brought their father bad reports about them.³ Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him a long ornamented tunic.[§] ⁴When his brothers saw that their father loved him best of all his brothers, they hated him so much that they could not say a kind word to him.

⁵Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers, they hated him even more.^e ⁶He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had. ⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf rose to an upright position, and your sheaves formed a ring around my sheaf and bowed down to it." ⁸His brothers said to him, "Are you really going to make yourself king over us? Will you rule over us?" So they hated him all the more because of his dreams and his reports.^f

⁹Then he had another dream, and told it to his brothers. "Look, I had another dream," he said; "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰When he told it to his father and his brothers, his father reprovved him and asked, "What is the meaning of this dream of yours? Can it be that I and your mother and your brothers are to come and bow to the ground before you?" ¹¹So his brothers were furious at him but his father kept the matter in mind.

¹²One day, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flocks at Shechem, ¹³Israel said to Joseph, "Are your brothers not tending our flocks at Shechem? Come and I will send you to them." "I am ready," Joseph answered. ¹⁴"Go then," he replied; "see if all is well with your brothers and the

them; 45:1-47:27 is the resolution (reconciliation of Joseph to his brothers) and the salvation of the family.

§ [37:3] Jacob's favoring Joseph over his other sons is a cause of the brothers' attempt on his life. Throughout the story, Jacob is unaware of the impact of his favoritism on his other sons (cf. vv. 33-35; 42:36). Long ornamented tunic the meaning of the Hebrew phrase is unclear. In 2 Sm 13:18-19, it is the distinctive dress of unmarried royal daughters. The "coat of many colors" in the Septuagint became the traditional translation. Ancient depictions of Semites in formal dress show them with long, ornamented robes and that is the most likely meaning here. Possibly, the young Joseph is given a coat that symbolizes honor beyond his years. Later, Pharaoh will clothe Joseph in a robe that symbolizes honor (41:42).

¶ [37:5-10] Joseph's dreams of ruling his brothers appear at first glance to be merely adolescent grandiosity, and they bring him only trouble. His later successes make it clear, however, that they were from God. Another confirmation of their divine source is the doubling of dreams (cf. 41:32).

e. [37:5] Gn 42:9.—f. [37:8] Gn 50:17-18.

flocks, and bring back word." So he sent him off from the valley of Hebron. When Joseph reached Shechem, ¹⁵a man came upon him as he was wandering about in the fields. "What are you looking for?" the man asked him. ¹⁶"I am looking for my brothers," he answered. "Please tell me where they are tending the flocks." ¹⁷The man told him, "They have moved on from here; in fact, I heard them say, 'Let us go on to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan. ¹⁸They saw him from a distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. ¹⁹They said to one another: "Here comes that dreamer! ²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the cisterns here; we could say that a wild beast devoured him. We will see then what comes of his dreams."⁸

²¹But when Reuben heard this, he tried to save him from their hands, saying: "We must not take his life." ²²Then Reuben said, "Do not shed blood! Throw him into this cistern in the wilderness; but do not lay a hand on him." His purpose was to save him from their hands and restore him to his father.^h

²³So when Joseph came up to his brothers, they stripped him of his tunic, the long ornamented tunic he had on; ²⁴then they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵Then they sat down to eat. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with gum, balm, and resin to be taken down to Egypt.ⁱ ²⁶Judah said to his brothers: "What is to be gained by killing our brother and concealing his blood?" ²⁷Come, let us sell him to these Ishmaelites, instead of doing away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed.

²⁸Midianite traders passed by, and they pulled Joseph up out of the cistern. They

⁸ [37:21–36] The chapter thus far is from the Yahwist source, as are also vv. 25–28a. But vv. 21–24 and 28b–36 are from another source (sometimes designated the Elohist source). In the latter, Reuben tries to rescue Joseph, who is taken in Reuben's absence by certain Midianites; in the Yahwist source, it is Judah who saves Joseph's life by having him sold to certain Ishmaelites. Although the two variant forms in which the story was handed down in early oral tradition differ in these minor points, they agree on the essential fact that Joseph was brought as a slave into Egypt because of the jealousy of his brothers.

g. [37:20] Gn 44:28.—h. [37:22] Gn 42:22.—i. [37:25] Gn 43:11.—j. [37:26] Jb 16:18.

sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver[†] to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.^k ²⁹When Reuben went back to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not in it, he tore his garments,[‡] ³⁰and returning to his brothers, he exclaimed: "The boy is gone! And I—where can I turn?" ³¹They took Joseph's tunic, and after slaughtering a goat, dipped the tunic in its blood. ³²Then they sent someone to bring the long ornamented tunic to their father, with the message: "We found this. See whether it is your son's tunic or not." ³³He recognized it and exclaimed: "My son's tunic! A wild beast has devoured him! Joseph has been torn to pieces!"^l ³⁴Then Jacob tore his garments, put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned his son many days. ³⁵Though his sons and daughters tried to console him, he refused all consolation, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol."[§] Thus did his father weep for him.^m

³⁶The Midianites, meanwhile, sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh and his chief steward.ⁿ

CHAPTER 38

Judah and Tamar.[¶] ¹About that time Judah went down, away from his brothers, and pitched his tent near a certain Adullamite named Hirah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua; he married

[†] [37:28] They sold Joseph . . . silver: editors tried to solve the confusion, created by different sources, by supposing that it was the Midianite traders who pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to Ishmaelites. In all probability, one source had the brothers selling Joseph to Ishmaelites, whereas the other had them cast him into the pit whence he was taken by Midianite traders.

[‡] [37:29] Tore his garments: the traditional sign of mourning in the ancient Near East.

[§] [37:35] Sheol: see note on Ps 6:6.

[¶] [38:1–30] This chapter has subtle connections to the main Joseph story. It tells of the eponymous founder of the other great tribe of later times, Judah. Having already been introduced as one of the two good brothers in 37:26–27, he appears here as the father-in-law of the twice-widowed Tamar; he has reneged on his promise to provide his son Shelah to her in a levirate marriage. Unjustly treated, Tamar takes matters into her own hands and tricks Judah into becoming the father of her children, Perez and Zerah. Judah ultimately acknowledges that his daughter-in-law was right ("She is in the right rather than I," v. 26). In contrast to Judah's expectations, the family line does not continue through his son Shelah, but through the children of Tamar. Similarities relate this little story to the main narrative: the deception involving an article of clothing (the widow's garments of Tamar, Judah's seal, cord, and staff) point back to the bloody tunic that deceives Jacob in 37:31–33; a woman attempts the seduction of a man separated from his family, for righteous purposes in chap. 38, for unrighteous purposes in chap. 39.

k. [37:28] Ps 105:17; Wis 10:13; Acts 7:9.—l. [37:33] Gn 44:28.—m. [37:35] Gn 42:38.—n. [37:36] Ps 105:17.

her, and had intercourse with her.³ She conceived and bore a son, whom she named Er.⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, whom she named Onan.⁵ Then she bore still another son, whom she named Shelah. She was in Chezib^{*} when she bore him.⁶

⁶Judah got a wife named Tamar for his firstborn, Er.⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, greatly offended the LORD; so the LORD took his life.⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, "Have intercourse with your brother's wife, in fulfillment of your duty as brother-in-law, and thus preserve your brother's line."⁹ Onan, however, knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he had intercourse with his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground, to avoid giving offspring to his brother.¹⁰ What he did greatly offended the LORD, and the LORD took his life too.¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he feared that Shelah also might die like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

¹²Time passed, and the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died. After Judah completed the period of mourning, he went up to Timnah, to those who were shearing his sheep, in company with his friend Hirah the Adullamite.¹³ Then Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way up to Timnah to shear his sheep."¹⁴ So she took off her widow's garments, covered herself with a shawl, and having wrapped herself sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah; for she was aware that, although Shelah was now grown up, she had not been given to him in marriage.¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, since she had covered her face.¹⁶ So he went over to her at the roadside and said, "Come, let me have intercourse with you," for he did not realize that she was his daughter-in-law. She replied, "What will you pay me for letting you have intercourse with me?"¹⁷ He answered, "I will send you a young goat

from the flock." "Very well," she said, "provided you leave me a pledge until you send it."¹⁸ Judah asked, "What pledge should I leave you?" She answered, "Your seal and cord,[†] and the staff in your hand." So he gave them to her and had intercourse with her, and she conceived by him.¹⁹ After she got up and went away, she took off her shawl and put on her widow's garments again.

²⁰Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to recover the pledge from the woman; but he did not find her.²¹ So he asked the men of that place, "Where is the prostitute,[‡] the one by the roadside in Enaim?" But they answered, "No prostitute has been here."²² He went back to Judah and told him, "I did not find her; and besides, the men of the place said, 'No prostitute has been here.'"²³ "Let her keep the things," Judah replied; "otherwise we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you did not find her."

²⁴About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has acted like a harlot and now she is pregnant from her harlotry." Judah said, "Bring her out; let her be burned."²⁵ But as she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "It is by the man to whom these things belong that I am pregnant." Then she said, "See whose seal and cord and staff these are."²⁶ Judah recognized them and said, "She is in the right rather than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah." He had no further sexual relations with her.

²⁷When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb.²⁸ While she was giving birth, one put out his hand; and the midwife took and tied a crimson thread on his hand, noting, "This one came out first."²⁹ But as he withdrew his hand, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he

* [38:5] **Chezib**: a variant form of Achzib (Jos 15:44; Mi 1:14), a town in the Judean Shephelah.

† [38:8] **Preserve your brother's line**: lit., "raise up seed for your brother"; an allusion to the law of levirate, or "brother-in-law," marriage; see notes on Dt 25:5; Ru 2:20. Onan's violation of this law brought on him God's punishment (vv. 9–10).

o. [38:2] 1 Chr 2:3.—p. [38:5] 1 Chr 4:21.—q. [38:7] 1 Chr 2:3.—r. [38:8] Dt 25:5; Mt 22:24; Mk 12:19; Lk 20:28.—s. [38:14] Prv 7:10.

‡ [38:18] **Seal and cord**: the cylinder seal, through which a hole was bored lengthwise so that it could be worn from the neck by a cord, was a distinctive means of identification. Apparently one's staff could also be marked with some sign of identification (cf. Nm 17:17–18).

§ [38:21] **Prostitute**: the Hebrew term *qedesha*, lit., "consecrated woman," designates a woman associated with a sanctuary whose activities could include prostitution; cf. Dt 23:18; Hos 4:14, where the same Hebrew word is used. In 38:15 and 24 the common word for prostitute, *zona*, is used.

t. [38:27] 1 Chr 2:4.—u. [38:29] Ru 4:12; Mt 1:3; Lk 3:33.

was called Perez.* ³⁰Afterward his brother, who had the crimson thread on his hand, came out; he was called Zerah.[†]

CHAPTER 39

Joseph's Temptation. ¹When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, an Egyptian, Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. ^{2a}The LORD was with Joseph and he enjoyed great success and was assigned to the household of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that the LORD was with him and brought him success in whatever he did, ⁴he favored Joseph and made him his personal attendant; he put him in charge of his household and entrusted to him all his possessions.[‡] ⁵From the moment that he put him in charge of his household and all his possessions, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the LORD's blessing was on everything he owned, both inside the house and out. ⁶Having left everything he owned in Joseph's charge, he gave no thought, with Joseph there, to anything but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome. ⁷After a time, his master's wife looked at him with longing and said, "Lie with me."[§] ⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, as long as I am here, my master does not give a thought to anything in the house, but has entrusted to me all he owns. ⁹He has no more authority in this house than I do. He has withheld from me nothing but you, since you are his wife. How, then, could I do this great wrong and sin against God?" ¹⁰Although she spoke to him day after day, he would not agree to lie with her, or even be near her.[¶]

¹¹One such day, when Joseph came into the house to do his work, and none of the household servants were then in the house, ¹²she laid hold of him by his cloak, saying, "Lie with me!" But leaving the cloak in her hand, he escaped and ran outside. ¹³When

she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand as he escaped outside, ¹⁴she cried out to her household servants and told them, "Look! My husband has brought us a Hebrew man to mock us! He came in here to lie with me, but I cried out loudly. ¹⁵When he heard me scream, he left his cloak beside me and escaped and ran outside."

¹⁶She kept the cloak with her until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she told him the same story: "The Hebrew slave whom you brought us came to me to amuse himself at my expense. ¹⁸But when I screamed, he left his cloak beside me and escaped outside." ¹⁹When the master heard his wife's story in which she reported, "Thus and so your servant did to me," he became enraged. ²⁰Joseph's master seized him and put him into the jail where the king's prisoners were confined.[‡] And there he sat, in jail.

²¹But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him kindness by making the chief jailer well-disposed toward him.[¶] ²²The chief jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners in the jail. Everything that had to be done there, he was the one to do it. ²³The chief jailer did not have to look after anything that was in Joseph's charge, since the LORD was with him and was bringing success to whatever he was doing.

CHAPTER 40

The Dreams Interpreted. ¹Some time afterward, the royal cupbearer and baker offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ²Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³and he put them in custody in the house of the chief steward, the same jail where Joseph was confined. ⁴The chief steward assigned Joseph to them, and he became their attendant.

After they had been in custody for some time, ⁵the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt who were confined in the jail both had dreams on the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they looked disturbed.

* [38:29] He was called Perez: the Hebrew word means "breach."
 † [38:30] He was called Zerah: a name connected here by popular etymology with a Hebrew word for the red light of dawn, alluding apparently to the crimson thread.

v. [38:30] Nm 26:20; 1 Chr 2:4; Mt 1:3.—w. [39:2] 1 Sm 3:19; 10:7; 18:14; 2 Sm 5:10; 2 Kgs 18:7; Acts 7:9.—x. [39:4] Dn 1:9.—y. [39:10] 1 Mc 2:53.

‡ [40:1] Joseph interprets the dreams of the Pharaoh's two officials. His ability to interpret the dreams shows that God is still with him and points forward to his role of dream interpreter for Pharaoh in chap. 41.

¶ [39:20] Ps 105:18.—a. [39:21] Acts 7:9–10.

⁷So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why do you look so troubled today?" ⁸They answered him, "We have had dreams, but there is no one to interpret them." Joseph said to them, "Do interpretations not come from God? Please tell me the dreams."^b

⁹Then the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. "In my dream," he said, "I saw a vine in front of me, ¹⁰and on the vine were three branches. It had barely budded when its blossoms came out, and its clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; so I took the grapes, pressed them out into his cup, and put it in Pharaoh's hand." ¹²Joseph said to him: "This is its interpretation. The three branches are three days; ¹³within three days Pharaoh will single you out^c and restore you to your post. You will be handing Pharaoh his cup as you formerly did when you were his cupbearer. ¹⁴Only think of me when all is well with you, and please do me the great favor of mentioning me to Pharaoh, to get me out of this place. ¹⁵The truth is that I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and I have not done anything here that they should have put me into a dungeon."

¹⁶When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to him: "I too had a dream. In it I had three bread baskets on my head; ¹⁷in the top one were all kinds of bakery products for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸Joseph said to him in reply: "This is its interpretation. The three baskets are three days; ¹⁹within three days Pharaoh will single you out and will impale you on a stake, and the birds will be eating your flesh."

²⁰And so on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, when he gave a banquet to all his servants, he singled out the chief cupbearer and chief baker in the midst of his servants. ²¹He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, so that he again handed the cup to Pharaoh; ²²but the chief baker he impaled—just as Joseph had told them in his interpretation. ²³Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.

* [40:13] Single you out: lit., "lift up your head" (see also vv. 19, 20).

b. [40:8] Gn 41:16.

CHAPTER 41

Pharaoh's Dream. ¹After a lapse of two years, Pharaoh had a dream. He was standing by the Nile, ²when up out of the Nile came seven cows, fine-looking and fat; they grazed in the reed grass. ³Behind them seven other cows, poor-looking and gaunt, came up out of the Nile; and standing on the bank of the Nile beside the others, ⁴the poor-looking, gaunt cows devoured the seven fine-looking, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

⁵He fell asleep again and had another dream. He saw seven ears of grain, fat and healthy, growing on a single stalk. ⁶Behind them sprouted seven ears of grain, thin and scorched by the east wind; ⁷and the thin ears swallowed up the seven fat, healthy ears. Then Pharaoh woke up—it was a dream!

⁸Next morning his mind was agitated. So Pharaoh had all the magicians[‡] and sages of Egypt summoned and recounted his dream to them; but there was no one to interpret it for him. ⁹Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh: "Now I remember my negligence! ¹⁰Once, when Pharaoh was angry with his servants, he put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the chief steward. ¹¹Later, we both had dreams on the same night, and each of our dreams had its own meaning. ¹²There was a Hebrew youth with us, a slave of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us and explained for each of us the meaning of his dream.^c ¹³Things turned out just as he had told us: I was restored to my post, but the other man was impaled."

¹⁴Pharaoh therefore had Joseph summoned, and they hurriedly brought him from the dungeon. After he shaved and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh.^d ¹⁵Pharaoh then said to Joseph: "I had a dream but there was no one to interpret it. But I hear it said of

† [41:1–57] Joseph correctly interprets Pharaoh's dream and becomes second in command over all Egypt.

‡ [41:8] Magicians: one of the tasks of the "magicians" was interpreting dreams. The interpretation of dreams was a long-standing practice in Egypt. A manual of dream interpretation has been found, written in the early second millennium and republished later in which typical dreams are given ("If a man sees himself in a dream. . .") followed by a judgment of "good" or "bad." Interpreters were still needed for dreams, however, and Pharaoh complains that none of his dream interpreters can interpret his unprecedented dream. The same term will be used of Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus.

c. [41:12] Dn 1:17.—d. [41:14] Ps 105:20.

you, 'If he hears a dream he can interpret it.'" ¹⁶"It is not I," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God who will respond for the well-being of Pharaoh."^e

¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, ¹⁸when up from the Nile came seven cows, fat and well-formed; they grazed in the reed grass. ¹⁹Behind them came seven other cows, scrawny, most ill-formed and gaunt. Never have I seen such bad specimens as these in all the land of Egypt! ²⁰The gaunt, bad cows devoured the first seven fat cows. ²¹But when they had consumed them, no one could tell that they had done so, because they looked as bad as before. Then I woke up. ²²In another dream I saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing on a single stalk. ²³Behind them sprouted seven ears of grain, shriveled and thin and scorched by the east wind; ²⁴and the seven thin ears swallowed up the seven healthy ears. I have spoken to the magicians, but there is no one to explain it to me."

²⁵Joseph said to Pharaoh: "Pharaoh's dreams have the same meaning. God has made known to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years—the same in each dream. ²⁷The seven thin, bad cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven thin ears scorched by the east wind; they are seven years of famine. ²⁸Things are just as I told Pharaoh: God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹Seven years of great abundance are now coming throughout the land of Egypt; ³⁰but seven years of famine will rise up after them, when all the abundance will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. When the famine has exhausted the land, ³¹no trace of the abundance will be found in the land because of the famine that follows it, for it will be very severe. ³²That Pharaoh had the same dream twice means that the matter has been confirmed by God and that God will soon bring it about.

³³"Therefore, let Pharaoh seek out a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh act and appoint overseers for the land to organize it during the seven years of abundance. ³⁵They

should collect all the food of these coming good years, gathering the grain under Pharaoh's authority, for food in the cities, and they should guard it. ³⁶This food will serve as a reserve for the country against the seven years of famine that will occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine."

³⁷This advice pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.^f ³⁸"Could we find another like him," Pharaoh asked his servants, "a man so endowed with the spirit of God?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph: "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. ⁴⁰You shall be in charge of my household, and all my people will obey your command. Only in respect to the throne will I outrank you."^g ⁴¹Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Look, I put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." ⁴²With that, Pharaoh took off his signet ring^h and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He then had him ride in his second chariot, and they shouted "Abrek!"ⁱ before him.

Thus was Joseph installed over the whole land of Egypt. ⁴⁴"I am Pharaoh," he told Joseph, "but without your approval no one shall lift hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵Pharaoh also bestowed the name of Zaphenath-paneah^j on Joseph, and he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. ⁴⁶Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

After Joseph left Pharaoh, he went throughout the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven years of plenty, when the land produced

* [41:42] Signet ring: a finger ring in which was set a stamp seal, different from the cylinder seal such as Judah wore; see note on 38:18. By receiving Pharaoh's signet ring, Joseph was made vizier of Egypt (v. 43); the vizier was known as "seal-bearer of the king of Lower Egypt." The gold chain was a symbol of high office in ancient Egypt.

† [41:43] Abrek: apparently a cry of homage, though the word's derivation and actual meaning are uncertain.

‡ [41:45] Zaphenath-paneah: a Hebrew transcription of an Egyptian name meaning "the god speaks and he (the newborn child) lives." Asenath: means "belonging to (the Egyptian goddess) Neith." Potiphera: means "he whom Ra (the Egyptian god) gave"; a shorter form of the same name was borne by Joseph's master (37:36). Heliopolis: in Hebrew, *On*, a city seven miles northeast of modern Cairo, site of the chief temple of the sun god; it is mentioned also in v. 50; 46:20; Ez 30:17.

e. [41:16] Gn 40:8.

f. [41:37] Acts 7:10.—g. [41:40] 1 Mc 2:53; Ps 105:21; Wis 10:14; Acts 7:10.

abundant crops, ⁴⁸he collected all the food of these years of plenty that the land of Egypt was enjoying and stored it in the cities, placing in each city the crops of the fields around it. ⁴⁹Joseph collected grain like the sands of the sea, so much that at last he stopped measuring it, for it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰Before the famine years set in, Joseph became the father of two sons, borne to him by Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis. ⁵¹Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget entirely my troubles and my father's house"; ⁵²and the second he named Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

⁵³When the seven years of abundance enjoyed by the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had said. Although there was famine in all the other countries, food was available throughout the land of Egypt. ⁵⁵When all the land of Egypt became hungry and the people cried to Pharaoh for food, Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians: "Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you." ⁵⁶When the famine had spread throughout the land, Joseph opened all the cities that had grain and rationed it to the Egyptians, since the famine had gripped the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷Indeed, the whole world came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, for famine had gripped the whole world.

CHAPTER 42

The Brothers' First Journey to Egypt. ¹When Jacob learned that grain rations were for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons: "Why do you keep looking at one another?" ²He went on, "I hear that grain is for sale in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, that we may stay

* [41:51] *Manasseh*: an allusion to this name is in the Hebrew expression, *nishshanti*, "he made me forget."

† [41:52] *Ephraim*: related to the Hebrew expression *hiphrani*, "(God) has made me fruitful." The name originally meant something like "fertile land."

‡ [42:1–38] The first journey of the brothers to Egypt. Its cause is famine, which was also the reason Abraham and Sarah undertook their dangerous journey to Egypt. The brothers bow to Joseph in v. 6, which fulfills Joseph's dream in 37:5–11. Endowed with wisdom, Joseph begins a process of instruction or "discipline" for his brothers that eventually forces them to recognize the enormity of their sin against him and the family. He controls their experience of the first journey with the result that the second journey in chaps. 43–44 leads to full acknowledgment and reconciliation.

h. [41:50] Gn 46:20; 48:5.—i. [41:54] Ps 105:16; Acts 7:11.

alive and not die."³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he thought some disaster might befall him. ⁵And so the sons of Israel were among those who came to buy grain, since there was famine in the land of Canaan.^k

⁶Joseph, as governor of the country, was the one who sold grain to all the people of the land. When Joseph's brothers came, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. ⁷He recognized them as soon as he saw them. But he concealed his own identity from them and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked them. They answered, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food."

⁸When Joseph recognized his brothers, although they did not recognize him, ⁹he was reminded of the dreams he had about them. He said to them: "You are spies.^m You have come to see the weak points^s of the land." ¹⁰"No, my lord," they replied. "On the contrary, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹All of us are sons of the same man. We are honest men; your servants have never been spies." ¹²But he answered them: "Not so! It is the weak points of the land that you have come to see." ¹³"We your servants," they said, "are twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in Canaan; but the youngest one is at present with our father, and the other one is no more."ⁿ ¹⁴"It is just as I said," Joseph persisted; "you are spies. ¹⁵This is how you shall be tested: I swear by the life of Pharaoh that you shall not leave here unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶So send one of your number to get your brother, while the rest of you stay here under arrest. Thus will your words be tested for their truth; if they are untrue, as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" ¹⁷With that, he locked them up in the guard-house for three days.

¹⁸On the third day Joseph said to them: "Do this, and you shall live; for I am a God-fearing man. ¹⁹If you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in this prison, while the rest of you go and take home grain

§ [42:9, 12] *Weak points*: lit., "the nakedness of the land"; the military weakness of the land, like human nakedness, should not be seen by strangers.

j. [42:2] Acts 7:12.—k. [42:5] Jdt 5:10; Acts 7:11.—l. [42:6] Ps 105:21.—m. [42:9] Gn 37:5.—n. [42:13] Gn 44:20.

for your starving families. ²⁰But you must bring me your youngest brother. Your words will thus be verified, and you will not die." To this they agreed. ²¹To one another, however, they said: "Truly we are being punished because of our brother. We saw the anguish of his heart when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen. That is why this anguish has now come upon us."^p ²²Then Reuben responded, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you would not listen! Now comes the reckoning for his blood."^q ²³They did not know, of course, that Joseph understood what they said, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. ²⁴But turning away from them, he wept. When he was able to speak to them again, he took Simeon from among them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵Then Joseph gave orders to have their containers filled with grain, their money replaced in each one's sack, and provisions given them for their journey. After this had been done for them, ²⁶they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed.

²⁷At the night encampment, when one of them opened his bag to give his donkey some fodder, he saw his money there in the mouth of his bag. ²⁸He cried out to his brothers, "My money has been returned! Here it is in my bag!" At that their hearts sank. Trembling, they asked one another, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹When they got back to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. ³⁰"The man who is lord of the land," they said, "spoke to us harshly and put us in custody on the grounds that we were spying on the land. ³¹But we said to him: 'We are honest men; we have never been spies. ³²We are twelve brothers, sons of the same father; but one is no more, and the youngest one is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³Then the man who is lord of the land said to us: 'This is how I will know if you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, then take grain for your starving families and go. ³⁴When you bring me your youngest brother, and I know that you are not spies but honest men, I will restore your brother to you, and you may move about freely in the land.'"

³⁵When they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his moneybag! At the sight of their moneybags, they and their father were afraid. ³⁶Their father Jacob said to them: "Must you make me childless? Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin away! All these things have happened to me!" ³⁷Then Reuben told his father: "You may kill my own two sons if I do not return him to you! Put him in my care, and I will bring him back to you." ³⁸But Jacob replied: "My son shall not go down with you. Now that his brother is dead, he is the only one left. If some disaster should befall him on the journey you must make, you would send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

CHAPTER 43

The Second Journey to Egypt. ¹Now the famine in the land grew severe. ²So when they had used up all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food." ³But Judah replied: "The man strictly warned us, 'You shall not see me unless your brother is with you.' ⁴If you are willing to let our brother go with us, we will go down to buy food for you. ⁵But if you are not willing, we will not go down, because the man told us, 'You shall not see me unless your brother is with you.'"^r ⁶Israel demanded, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man that you had another brother?" ⁷They answered: "The man kept asking about us and our family: 'Is your father still living? Do you have another brother?' We answered him accordingly. How could we know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down here?'"

⁸Then Judah urged his father Israel: "Let the boy go with me, that we may be off and on our way if you and we and our children are to keep from starving to death." ⁹I myself will serve as a guarantee for him. You can hold me responsible for him. If I fail to bring him back and set him before you, I will bear

o. [42:20] Gn 43:5.—p. [42:21] Gn 37:18–27.—q. [42:22] Gn 37:22.

* [43:1–34] The second journey to Egypt. Joseph the sage has carefully prepared the brothers for a possible reconciliation. In this chapter and the following one Judah steps forward as the hero, in contrast to chaps. 37 and 42 where Reuben was the hero. Here Judah serves as guarantee for Benjamin.

r. [42:38] Gn 37:35.—s. [43:3] Gn 44:23.—t. [43:5] Gn 42:20.—u. [43:8] Gn 42:37.

the blame before you forever.⁹ ¹⁰Had we not delayed, we could have been there and back twice by now!"

¹¹Israel their father then told them: "If it must be so, then do this: Put some of the land's best products in your baggage and take them down to the man as gifts: some balm and honey, gum and resin, and pistachios and almonds.¹⁰ ¹²Also take double the money along, for you must return the amount that was put back in the mouths of your bags; it may have been a mistake. ¹³Take your brother, too, and be off on your way back to the man. ¹⁴May God Almighty grant you mercy in the presence of the man, so that he may let your other brother go, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to suffer bereavement, I shall suffer it."

¹⁵So the men took those gifts and double the money and Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt and presented themselves before Joseph. ¹⁶When Joseph saw them and Benjamin, he told his steward, "Take the men into the house, and have an animal slaughtered and prepared, for they are to dine with me at noon." ¹⁷Doing as Joseph had ordered, the steward conducted the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸But they became apprehensive when they were led to his house. "It must be," they thought, "on account of the money put back in our bags the first time, that we are taken inside—in order to attack us and take our donkeys and seize us as slaves."

¹⁹So they went up to Joseph's steward and talked to him at the entrance of the house. ²⁰"If you please, sir," they said, "we came down here once before to buy food.^x ²¹But when we arrived at a night's encampment and opened our bags, there was each man's money in the mouth of his bag—our money in the full amount! We have now brought it back.^y ²²We have brought other money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our bags." ²³He replied, "Calm down! Do not fear! Your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your bags for you. As for your money, I received it." With that, he led Simeon out to them.

²⁴The steward then brought the men inside Joseph's house. He gave them water to wash their feet, and gave fodder to their

donkeys. ²⁵Then they set out their gifts to await Joseph's arrival at noon, for they had heard that they were to dine there. ²⁶When Joseph came home, they presented him with the gifts they had brought inside, while they bowed down before him to the ground. ²⁷After inquiring how they were, he asked them, "And how is your aged father, of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?"^z ²⁸"Your servant our father is still alive and doing well," they said, as they knelt and bowed down. ²⁹Then Joseph looked up and saw Benjamin, his brother, the son of his mother. He asked, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you told me?" Then he said to him, "May God be gracious to you, my son!"^a ³⁰With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was so overcome with affection for his brother that he was on the verge of tears. So he went into a private room and wept there.

³¹After washing his face, he reappeared and, now having collected himself, gave the order, "Serve the meal." ³²It was served separately to him, to the brothers, and to the Egyptians who partook of his board. Egyptians may not eat with Hebrews; that is abhorrent to them. ³³When they were seated before him according to their age, from the oldest to the youngest, they looked at one another in amazement; ³⁴and as portions were brought to them from Joseph's table, Benjamin's portion was five times as large as^f anyone else's. So they drank freely and made merry with him.

CHAPTER 44

Final Test.[‡] ¹Then Joseph commanded his steward: "Fill the men's bags with as much

* [43:32] Separately to him: that Joseph did not eat with the other Egyptians was apparently a matter of rank.

† [43:34] Five times as large as: probably an idiomatic expression for "much larger than." Cf. 45:22.

‡ [44:1–34] Joseph's pressure on his brothers and Judah's great speech. Judah has the longest speech in the Book of Genesis; it summarizes the recent past (vv. 18–29), shows the pain Joseph's actions have imposed on their aged father (vv. 30–32), and ends with the offer to take the place of Benjamin as servant of Joseph (vv. 33–34). The role of Judah in the entire story is exceedingly important and is easily underrated: he tries to rescue Joseph (37:26–27), his "going down away from the brothers" is parallel to Joseph's (chap. 38) and prepares him (as it prepares Joseph) for the reconciliation, his speech in chap. 44 persuades Joseph to reveal himself and be reconciled to his brothers. Here, Judah effectively replaces Reuben as a spokesman for the brothers. Jacob in his testament (chap. 49) devotes the most attention to Judah and Joseph. In one sense, the story can be called the story of Joseph and Judah.

v. [43:9] Gn 44:32.—w. [43:11] Gn 45:23.—x. [43:20] Gn 42:3.—y. [43:21] Gn 42:27–28.

z. [43:27] Tb 7:4.—a. [43:29] Gn 42:13.

food as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his bag.² In the mouth of the youngest one's bag put also my silver goblet, together with the money for his grain." The steward did as Joseph said.³ At daybreak the men and their donkeys were sent off.⁴ They had not gone far out of the city when Joseph said to his steward: "Go at once after the men! When you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil? Why did you steal my silver goblet? ⁵Is it not the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination? What you have done is wrong.'"

⁶When the steward overtook them and repeated these words to them,⁷ they said to him: "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing!⁸ We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How could we steal silver or gold from your master's house? ⁹If any of your servants is found to have the goblet, he shall die, and as for the rest of us, we shall become my lord's slaves."¹⁰ But he replied, "Now what you propose is fair enough, but only the one who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you can go free."¹¹ Then each of them quickly lowered his bag to the ground and opened it;¹² and when a search was made, starting with the oldest and ending with the youngest, the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag.¹³ At this, they tore their garments. Then, when each man had loaded his donkey again, they returned to the city.

¹⁴When Judah and his brothers entered Joseph's house, he was still there; so they flung themselves on the ground before him.¹⁵ "How could you do such a thing?" Joseph asked them. "Did you not know that such a man as I could discern by divination what happened?" ¹⁶Judah replied: "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead or how try to prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt.¹ Here we are, then, the slaves of my lord—the rest of us no less than the one in whose possession the goblet

was found."¹⁷ Joseph said, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only the one in whose possession the goblet was found shall become my slave; the rest of you may go back unharmed to your father."

¹⁸Judah then stepped up to him and said: "I beg you, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not become angry with your servant, for you are the equal of Pharaoh.¹⁹ My lord asked his servants,² 'Have you a father, or another brother?' ²⁰So we said to my lord, 'We have an aged father, and a younger brother, the child of his old age. This one's full brother is dead, and since he is the only one by his mother who is left, his father is devoted to him.'²¹ Then you told your servants, 'Bring him down to me that I might see him.'²² We replied to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; his father would die if he left him.'²³ But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see me again.'²⁴ When we returned to your servant my father, we reported to him the words of my lord.

²⁵"Later, our father said, 'Go back and buy some food for us.'²⁶ So we reminded him, 'We cannot go down there; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go, for we may not see the man if our youngest brother is not with us.'²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons.²⁸ One of them, however, has gone away from me, and I said, 'He must have been torn to pieces by wild beasts!' I have not seen him since.'²⁹ If you take this one away from me too, and a disaster befalls him, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief.'

³⁰"So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, whose very life is bound up with his, he will die as soon as he sees that the boy is missing;³¹ and your servants will thus send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief.³² Besides, I, your servant, have guaranteed the boy's safety for my father by saying, 'If I fail to bring him back to you, father, I will bear the blame before you forever.'³³ So now

* [44:5] **Divination:** seeking omens through liquids poured into a cup or bowl was a common practice in the ancient Near East; cf. v. 15. Even though divination was frowned on in later Israel (Lv 19:31), it is in this place an authentic touch which is ascribed to Joseph, the wisest man in Egypt.

† [44:16] **Guilt:** in trying to do away with Joseph when he was young.

‡ [44:19] **My lord asked his servants:** such frequently repeated expressions in Judah's speech show the formal court style used by a subject in speaking to a high official.

b. [44:20] Gn 42:13.—c. [44:23] Gn 43:3.—d. [44:28] Gn 37:20, 33.—e. [44:32] Gn 43:9.

let me, your servant, remain in place of the boy as the slave of my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.³⁴How could I go back to my father if the boy were not with me? I could not bear to see the anguish that would overcome my father.”

CHAPTER 45

The Truth Revealed.^{*} ¹Joseph could no longer restrain himself in the presence of all his attendants, so he cried out, “Have everyone withdraw from me!” So no one attended him when he made himself known to his brothers.²But his sobs were so loud that the Egyptians heard him, and so the news reached Pharaoh’s house.³“I am Joseph,” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could give him no answer, so dumbfounded were they at him.

⁴“Come closer to me,” Joseph told his brothers. When they had done so, he said: “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.⁵But now do not be distressed, and do not be angry with yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you.⁶“The famine has been in the land for two years now, and for five more years cultivation will yield no harvest.⁷God, therefore, sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance.⁸So it was not really you but God who had me come here; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh,[†] lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.

⁹“Hurry back, then, to my father and tell him: ‘Thus says your son Joseph: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay.^h ¹⁰You can settle in the region of Goshen,[§] where you will be near me—you and your children and children’s children,

* [45:1–28] Joseph reveals his identity and the family is reconciled.

† [45:8] **Father to Pharaoh:** a term applied to a vizier in ancient Egypt.

‡ [45:9–15] In these verses, as in 46:31–47:5a, all from the Yahwist source, Joseph in his own name invites his father and brothers to come to Egypt. Only after their arrival is Pharaoh informed of the fact. On the other hand, in 45:16–20, which scholars have traditionally attributed to the Elohist source, it is Pharaoh himself who invites Joseph’s family to migrate to his domain.

§ [45:10] **The region of Goshen:** the meaning of the term is unknown. It is found in no Egyptian source. It is generally

f. [45:3–4] Acts 7:13.—g. [45:5] Gn 50:20.—h. [45:9] Acts 7:14.

your flocks and herds, and everything that you own.¹¹I will provide for you there in the five years of famine that lie ahead, so that you and your household and all that are yours will not suffer want.¹²Surely, you can see for yourselves, and Benjamin can see for himself, that it is I who am speaking to you.¹³Tell my father all about my high position in Egypt and all that you have seen. But hurry and bring my father down here.”¹⁴Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept on his shoulder.¹⁵Joseph then kissed all his brothers and wept over them; and only then were his brothers able to talk with him.

¹⁶The news reached Pharaoh’s house: “Joseph’s brothers have come.” Pharaoh and his officials were pleased.¹⁷So Pharaoh told Joseph: “Say to your brothers: ‘This is what you shall do: Load up your animals and go without delay to the land of Canaan.¹⁸There get your father and your households, and then come to me; I will assign you the best land in Egypt, where you will live off the fat of the land.’¹⁹Instruct them further: ‘Do this. Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your children and your wives and bring your father back here.²⁰Do not be concerned about your belongings, for the best in the whole land of Egypt shall be yours.’”

²¹The sons of Israel acted accordingly. Joseph gave them the wagons, as Pharaoh had ordered, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey.²²He also gave to each of them a set of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes.²³Moreover, what he sent to his father was ten donkeys loaded with the finest products of Egypt and another ten loaded with grain and bread and provisions for his father’s journey.²⁴As he sent his brothers on their way, he told them, “Do not quarrel on the way.”

²⁵So they went up from Egypt and came to the land of Canaan, to their father Jacob.²⁶When they told him, “Joseph is still alive—in fact, it is he who is governing all the land of Egypt,” he was unmoved, for he did not believe them.²⁷But when they recounted to

thought to be in the modern Wadi Tumilat in the eastern part of the Nile Delta.

i. [45:18] Acts 7:14.

him all that Joseph had told them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob came to life. ²⁸“Enough,” said Israel. “My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die.”

CHAPTER 46

Migration to Egypt. ¹Israel set out with all that was his. When he arrived at Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ²There God, speaking to Israel in a vision by night, called: Jacob! Jacob! He answered, “Here I am.” ³Then he said: I am God,[†] the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you a great nation. ⁴I will go down to Egypt with you and I will also bring you back here, after Joseph has closed your eyes.

⁵So Jacob departed from Beer-sheba, and the sons of Israel put their father and their wives and children on the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. ⁶They took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in the land of Canaan. So Jacob and all his descendants came to Egypt.[‡] ⁷His sons and his grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters—all his descendants—he took with him to Egypt.

⁸These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his children, who came to Egypt.

Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn,^k ⁹and the sons of Carmi.[‡] ¹⁰The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, son of a Canaanite woman.^m ¹¹The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.ⁿ ¹²The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah—but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan; and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.^o ¹³The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron.^p ¹⁴The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.^q ¹⁵These were the sons

whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, along with his daughter Dinah—thirty-three persons in all, sons and daughters.

¹⁶The sons of Gad: Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arod, and Areli.^r ¹⁷The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, with their sister Serah; and the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel.^s ¹⁸These are the children of Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah; these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons in all.

¹⁹The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰In the land of Egypt Joseph became the father of Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis, bore to him.^t ²¹The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ahiram, Shupham, Hupham, and Ard.^u ²²These are the sons whom Rachel bore to Jacob—fourteen persons in all.

²³The sons of Dan: Hushim.^v ²⁴The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.^w ²⁵These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel; these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.

²⁶Jacob’s people who came to Egypt—his direct descendants, not counting the wives of Jacob’s sons—numbered sixty-six persons in all.^x ²⁷Together with Joseph’s sons who were born to him in Egypt—two persons—all the people comprising the household of Jacob who had come to Egypt amounted to seventy persons^y in all.^y

²⁸Israel had sent Judah ahead to Joseph, so that he might meet him in Goshen. On his arrival in the region of Goshen, ²⁹Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. As soon as Israel made his appearance, Joseph threw his arms around him and wept a long time on his shoulder. ³⁰And Israel said to Joseph, “At last

* [46:1-47:26] Jacob and his family settle in Egypt. Joseph’s economic policies.

† [46:3] I am God: more precisely according to the Hebrew text, “I am El.” “El” is here a divine name, not the common noun “god.”

‡ [46:9-27] This genealogical list is based on the clan lists (Nm 26:5-50) from the Mosaic period.

j. [46:6] Ex 1:1; Jos 24:4; Jdt 5:10; Acts 7:15.—k. [46:8] Ex 1:2.—l. [46:9] Ex 6:14; Nm 26:5; 1 Chr 5:3.—m. [46:10] Ex 6:15; Nm 26:12; 1 Chr 4:24.—n. [46:11] Ex 6:16; Nm 3:17; 26:57; 1 Chr 6:1.—o. [46:12] Gn 38:3-10, 29-30; Nm 26:19; Ru 4:12; 1 Chr 2:5.—p. [46:13] Nm 26:23-24; 1 Chr 7:1.—q. [46:14] Nm 26:26.

§ [46:27] Seventy persons: it is difficult to get this exact number by adding up the persons mentioned in the preceding genealogies. One might assume it refers to Jacob and sixty-nine descendants, excluding Er and Onan but including Dinah. Ex 1:5 repeats the number but excludes Jacob. Dt 10:22 refers to seventy persons descending to Egypt. The best solution is to take the number as expressing totality. Since there are seventy nations in chap. 10, it is likely that the text is drawing a parallel between the two entities and suggesting that Israel “represents” the nations before God.

r. [46:16] Nm 26:15-16.—s. [46:17] Nm 26:44; 1 Chr 7:30-31.—t. [46:20] Gn 41:50; Nm 26:28, 35.—u. [46:21] Nm 26:38; 1 Chr 7:6; 8:1-4.—v. [46:23] Nm 26:42.—w. [46:24] Nm 26:48-49; 1 Chr 7:13.—x. [46:26] Ex 1:5.—y. [46:27] Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22; Acts 7:14.

I can die, now that I have seen for myself that you are still alive."

³¹Joseph then said to his brothers and his father's household: "I will go up and inform Pharaoh, telling him: 'My brothers and my father's household, whose home is in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³²The men are shepherds, having been owners of livestock;' and they have brought with them their flocks and herds, as well as everything else they own.' ³³So when Pharaoh summons you and asks what your occupation is, ³⁴you must answer, 'We your servants, like our ancestors, have been owners of livestock from our youth until now,' in order that you may stay in the region of Goshen, since all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians."

CHAPTER 47

Settlement in Goshen. ¹Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers have come from the land of Canaan, with their flocks and herds and everything else they own; and they are now in the region of Goshen." ²He then presented to Pharaoh five of his brothers whom he had selected from their full number. ³When Pharaoh asked them, "What is your occupation?" they answered, "We, your servants, like our ancestors, are shepherds. ⁴We have come," they continued, "in order to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, because the famine has been severe in the land of Canaan. So now please let your servants settle in the region of Goshen."² ⁵Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Now that your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶the land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and brothers in the pick of the land. Let them settle in the region of Goshen. And if you know of capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." ⁷Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸Then Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" ⁹Jacob replied: "The years I have lived as a wayfarer amount to a hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been

* [46:32] **Owners of livestock:** the phrase occurs only here and in v. 34. The difference between this term and "shepherds" is not clear, for the brothers do not mention it to Pharaoh in 47:3.

z. [47:4] Ex 23:9; Dt 23:8.

these years of my life, and they do not compare with the years that my ancestors lived as wayfarers."[†] ¹⁰Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and withdrew from his presence.

¹¹Joseph settled his father and brothers and gave them a holding in Egypt on the pick of the land, in the region of Rameses,[‡] as Pharaoh had ordered. ¹²And Joseph provided food for his father and brothers and his father's whole household, down to the youngest.

Joseph's Land Policy. ¹³Since there was no food in all the land because of the extreme severity of the famine, and the lands of Egypt and Canaan were languishing from hunger, ¹⁴Joseph gathered in, as payment for the grain that they were buying, all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan, and he put it in Pharaoh's house. ¹⁵When all the money in Egypt and Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, pleading, "Give us food! Why should we perish in front of you? For our money is gone."¹⁶ "Give me your livestock if your money is gone," replied Joseph. "I will give you food in return for your livestock."¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and their donkeys. Thus he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock in that year. ¹⁸That year ended, and they came to him in the next one and said: "We cannot hide from my lord that, with our money spent and our livestock made over to my lord, there is nothing left to put at my lord's disposal except our bodies and our land. ¹⁹Why should we and our land perish before your very eyes? Take us and our land in exchange for food, and we will become Pharaoh's slaves and our land his property; only give us seed, that we may survive and not perish, and that our land may not turn into a waste."

²⁰So Joseph acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. Each of the Egyptians sold his field, since the famine weighed heavily upon them. Thus the land passed over to Pharaoh, ²¹and the people were reduced to slavery, from one end of Egypt's territory to the other. ²²Only the priests' lands Joseph did not

† [47:9] **Wayfarer . . . wayfarers:** human beings are merely sojourners on earth; cf. Ps 39:13.

‡ [47:11] **The region of Rameses:** same as the region of Goshen; see note on 45:10.

acquire. Since the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived off the allowance Pharaoh had granted them, they did not have to sell their land.

²³Joseph told the people: "Now that I have acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is your seed for sowing the land. ²⁴But when the harvest is in, you must give a fifth of it to Pharaoh, while you keep four-fifths as seed for your fields and as food for yourselves and your households and as food for your children." ²⁵"You have saved our lives!" they answered. "We have found favor with my lord; now we will be Pharaoh's slaves." ²⁶Thus Joseph made it a statute for the land of Egypt, which is still in force, that a fifth of its produce should go to Pharaoh. Only the land of the priests did not pass over to Pharaoh.

Joseph Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh.

²⁷Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen. There they acquired holdings, were fertile, and multiplied greatly. ²⁸Jacob lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years; the span of his life came to a hundred and forty-seven years. ²⁹When the time approached for Israel to die, he called his son Joseph and said to him: "If it pleases you, put your hand under my thigh as a sign of your enduring fidelity to me; do not bury me in Egypt. ³⁰When I lie down with my ancestors, take me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." ³¹"I will do as you say," he replied. ³²But his father demanded, "Swear it to me!" So Joseph swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed. [†]

CHAPTER 48

^{1†}Some time afterward, Joseph was informed, "Your father is failing." So he took along with

* [47:28–50:26] Supplements to the Joseph story. Most of the material in this section centers on Jacob—his blessing of Joseph's sons, his farewell testament, and his death and burial in Canaan. Only the last verses (50:15–26) redirect attention to Jacob's sons, the twelve brothers; they are assured that the reconciliation will not collapse after the death of the patriarch.

† [47:31] Israel bowed at the head of the bed: meaning perhaps that he gave a nod of assent and appreciation as he lay on his bed. The oath and gesture are the same as Abraham's in 24:2. Israel's bowing here suggests the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams in 37:9–10, when parents and brothers bowed down to Joseph (cf. 42:6; 43:26). By using different vowels for the Hebrew word for "bed," the Greek version translated it as "staff," and understood the phrase to mean that he bowed in worship, leaning on the top of his staff; it is thus quoted in Heb 11:21.

‡ [48:1–22] Jacob continues his preparations for death. In a scene that evokes the nearly blind Isaac blessing Jacob and

a. [47:27] Ex 1:7.—b. [47:30] Gn 50:5.

him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ²When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up in bed.

³Jacob then said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz³ in the land of Canaan, and blessing me, ⁴he said, 'I will make you fertile and multiply you and make you into an assembly of peoples, and I will give this land to your descendants after you as a permanent possession.' ⁵So now your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I joined you here, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine as much as Reuben and Simeon are mine. ⁶Progeny born to you after them shall remain yours; but their heritage shall be recorded in the names of their brothers. ⁷I do this because, when I was returning from Paddan, your mother Rachel died, to my sorrow, during the journey in Canaan, while we were still a short distance from Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath [now Bethlehem]."[†]

⁸When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he asked, "Who are these?" ⁹"They are my sons," Joseph answered his father, "whom God has given me here." "Bring them to me," said his father, "that I may bless them." ¹⁰Now Israel's eyes were dim from age; he could not see well. When Joseph brought his sons close to him, he kissed and embraced them. ¹¹Then Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your descendants as well!"

¹²Joseph removed them from his father's knees and bowed down before him with his face to the ground. ¹³Then Joseph took the two, Ephraim with his right hand, to Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand, to Israel's right, and brought them up to him. ¹⁴But Israel, crossing his hands, put out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, although he was the younger, and his left

Esau (chap. 27), Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons. He adopts them, elevating them to a status equal to that of Jacob's first sons Reuben and Simeon (cf. 1 Chr 5:1). The adoption is one more instance of Jacob's favoring Rachel and those born of her. The mention of Jacob's failing eyesight and his selection of the younger son over the older evokes the great deathbed scene in chap. 27. He reaffirms to Joseph the ancient divine promise of progeny and land.

§ [48:3] Luz: an older name of Bethel (28:19).
¶ [48:7] Since her early death prevented Rachel from bearing more than two sons, Jacob feels justified in treating her two grandsons as if they were her own offspring.

c. [48:3–4] Gn 28:12–15; 35:6.—d. [48:7] Gn 35:19.

hand on the head of Manasseh, although he was the firstborn. ¹⁵Then he blessed them with these words:

“May the God in whose presence
my fathers Abraham and Isaac
walked,

The God who has been my shepherd
from my birth to this day;^e

¹⁶The angel who has delivered me from
all harm,
bless these boys

That in them my name be recalled,
and the names of my fathers,

Abraham and Isaac,
And they may become teeming
multitudes
upon the earth!”

¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father had laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, this seemed wrong to him; so he took hold of his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's, ¹⁸saying, “That is not right, father; the other one is the firstborn; lay your right hand on his head!” ¹⁹But his father refused. “I know it, son,” he said, “I know. That one too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall surpass him, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” ²⁰So he blessed them that day and said, “By you shall the people of Israel pronounce blessings, saying, ‘God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’” Thus he placed Ephraim before Manasseh.^f

²¹Then Israel said to Joseph: “I am about to die. But God will be with you and will restore you to the land of your ancestors.

^{22g}As for me, I give to you, as to the one above his brothers, Shechem, which I captured from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”

* [48:22] Both the meaning of the Hebrew and the historical reference in this verse are obscure. By taking the Hebrew word for Shechem as a common noun meaning shoulder or mountain slope, some translators render the verse, “I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I captured . . .” The reference may be to the capture of Shechem by the sons of Jacob (34:24–29). Shechem lay near the border separating the tribal territory of Manasseh from that of Ephraim (Jos 16:4–9; 17:1–2, 7).

e. [48:15] Heb 11:21.—f. [48:20] Heb 11:21.—g. [48:22] Jos 17:14, 17–18; Jn 4:5.

CHAPTER 49

Jacob's Testament. [†] Jacob called his sons and said: “Gather around, that I may tell you what is to happen to you in days to come.

²“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob,
listen to Israel, your father.

³“You, Reuben, my firstborn,
my strength and the first fruit of
my vigor,
excelling in rank and excelling in
power!

⁴Turbulent as water, you shall no longer
excel,
for you climbed into your father's
bed
and defiled my couch to my
sorrow.^h

⁵⁴“Simeon and Levi, brothers indeed,
weapons of violence are their
knives.[§]

⁶Let not my person enter their council,
or my honor be joined with their
company;

For in their fury they killed men,
at their whim they maimed oxen.ⁱ

⁷Cursed be their fury so fierce,
and their rage so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob,
disperse them throughout Israel.

⁸“You, Judah, shall your brothers praise
—your hand on the neck of your
enemies;

† [49:1–27] The testament, or farewell discourse, of Jacob, which has its closest parallel in Moses' farewell in Dt 33:6–25. From his privileged position as a patriarch, he sees the future of his children (the eponymous ancestors of the tribes) and is able to describe how they will fare and so gives his blessing. The dense and archaic poetry is obscure in several places. The sayings often involve wordplays (explained in the notes). The poem begins with the six sons of Leah (vv. 2–15), then deals with the sons of the two secondary wives, and ends with Rachel's two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Reuben, the oldest son, loses his position of leadership as a result of his intercourse with Bilhah (35:22), and the words about Simeon and Levi allude to their taking revenge for the rape of Dinah (chap. 34). The pre-eminence of Judah reflects his rise in the course of the narrative (mirroring the rise of Joseph). See note on 44:1–34.

‡ [49:5–7] This passage probably refers to their attack on the city of Shechem (Gn 34). Because there is no indication that the warlike tribe of Levi will be commissioned as a priestly tribe (Ex 32:26–29; Dt 33:11), this passage reflects an early, independent tradition.

§ [49:5] Knives: if this is the meaning of the obscure Hebrew word here, the reference may be to the knives used in circumcising the men of Shechem (34:24; cf. Jos 5:2).

h. [49:4] Gn 35:22; 1 Chr 5:1–2.—i. [49:6] Gn 34:25.

the sons of your father shall bow
down to you.
 9⁹Judah is a lion's cub,
you have grown up on prey, my
son.
 He crouches, lies down like a lion,
like a lioness—who would dare
rouse him?ⁱ
 10¹⁰The scepter shall never depart from
Judah,
or the mace from between his feet,
Until tribute comes to him,^{*}
and he receives the people's
obedience.
 11¹¹He tethers his donkey to the vine,
his donkey's foal to the choicest
stem.
 In wine he washes his garments,
his robe in the blood of grapes.[†]
 12¹²His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth are whiter than milk.
 13¹³Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore;
he will be a haven for ships,
and his flank shall rest on Sidon.
 14¹⁴Issachar is a rawboned donkey,
crouching between the saddlebags.
 15¹⁵When he saw how good a settled life
was,
and how pleasant the land,
He bent his shoulder to the burden
and became a toiling serf.
 16¹⁶Dan shall achieve justice[‡] for his
people
as one of the tribes of Israel.
 17¹⁷Let Dan be a serpent by the roadside,
a horned viper by the path,
That bites the horse's heel,
so that the rider tumbles
backward.

* [49:10] Until tribute comes to him: this translation is based on a slight change in the Hebrew text, which, as it stands, would seem to mean, "until he comes to Shiloh." A somewhat different reading of the Hebrew text would be, "until he comes to whom it belongs." This last has been traditionally understood in a messianic sense. In any case, the passage aims at the supremacy of the tribe of Judah and of the Davidic dynasty.

† [49:11] In wine... the blood of grapes: Judah's clothes are poetically pictured as soaked with grape juice from trampling in the wine press, the rich vintage of his land; cf. Is 63:2.

‡ [49:16] In Hebrew the verb for "achieve justice" is from the same root as the name Dan.

18¹⁸I long for your deliverance, O LORD![§]
 19¹⁹Gad shall be raided by raiders,
but he shall raid at their heels.[¶]
 20²⁰Asher's produce is rich,
and he shall furnish delicacies for
kings.
 21²¹Naphtali is a hind let loose,
which brings forth lovely fawns.
 22²²Joseph is a wild colt,
a wild colt by a spring,
wild colts on a hillside.
 23²³Harrying him and shooting,
the archers opposed him;
 24²⁴But his bow remained taut,
and his arms were nimble,
By the power of the Mighty One of
Jacob,
because of the Shepherd, the Rock
of Israel,
 25²⁵The God of your father, who helps
you,^{**}
God Almighty, who blesses you,
With the blessings of the heavens
above,
the blessings of the abyss that
crouches below,
The blessings of breasts and womb,
 26²⁶the blessings of fresh grain and
blossoms,
the blessings of the everlasting
mountains,
the delights of the eternal hills.
 May they rest on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of the prince among
his brothers.
 27²⁷Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
mornings he devours the prey,
and evenings he distributes the
spoils."

Farewell and Death. ²⁸All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said about them, as he blessed them. To each he gave a suitable blessing. ²⁹Then

§ [49:18] This short plea for divine mercy has been inserted into the middle of Jacob's testament.

¶ [49:19] In Hebrew there is assonance between the name Gad and the words for "raided," "raiders," and "raid."

** [49:25-26] A very similar description of the agricultural riches of the tribal land of Joseph is given in Dt 33:13-16.

he gave them this charge: "Since I am about to be gathered to my people, bury me with my ancestors in the cave that lies in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰the cave in the field of Machpelah, facing on Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial ground.^k ³¹There Abraham and his wife Sarah are buried, and so are Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there, too, I buried Leah— ³²the field and the cave in it that had been purchased from the Hittites."

³³When Jacob had finished giving these instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

CHAPTER 50

Jacob's Funeral. ¹Joseph flung himself upon his father and wept over him as he kissed him. ²Then Joseph ordered the physicians in his service to embalm his father. When the physicians embalmed Israel, ³they spent forty days at it, for that is the full period of embalming; and the Egyptians mourned him for seventy days. ⁴When the period of mourning was over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's household. "If you please, appeal to Pharaoh, saying: ⁵'My father made me swear: 'I am dying. Bury me in my grave that I have prepared for myself in the land of Canaan.' So now let me go up to bury my father. Then I will come back.'⁶ Pharaoh replied, "Go and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath."

⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went all of Pharaoh's officials who were senior members of his household and all the other elders of the land of Egypt, ⁸as well as Joseph's whole household, his brothers, and his father's household; only their children and their flocks and herds were left in the region of Goshen. ⁹Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him; it was a very imposing retinue.

¹⁰When they arrived at Goren-ha-ataḏ, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a

^k [50:10–11] Goren-ha-ataḏ: "Threshing Floor of the Brambles." Abel-mizraim: although the name really means "watercourse of the Egyptians," it is understood here, by a play on the first part of the term, to mean "mourning of the Egyptians." The site has not been identified through either reading of the name. But it is difficult to see why the mourning rites should have been held in the land beyond the Jordan when the burial was at Hebron.

k. [49:30] Gn 23:17.—l. [50:5] Gn 47:30.

very great and solemn memorial service; and Joseph observed seven days of mourning for his father. ¹¹When the Canaanites who inhabited the land saw the mourning at Goren-ha-ataḏ, they said, "This is a solemn funeral on the part of the Egyptians!" That is why the place was named Abel-mizraim. It is beyond the Jordan.

¹²Thus Jacob's sons did for him as he had instructed them. ¹³They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, facing on Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought for a burial ground from Ephron the Hittite.^m

¹⁴After Joseph had buried his father he returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all who had gone up with him for the burial of his father.

Plea for Forgiveness. ¹⁵Now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful and thought, "Suppose Joseph has been nursing a grudge against us and now most certainly will pay us back in full for all the wrong we did him!" ¹⁶So they sent to Joseph and said: "Before your father died, he gave us these instructions: ¹⁷'Thus you shall say to Joseph: Please forgive the criminal wrongdoing of your brothers, who treated you harmfully.' So now please forgive the crime that we, the servants of the God of your father, committed." When they said this to him, Joseph broke into tears. ¹⁸Then his brothers also proceeded to fling themselves down before him and said, "We are your slaves!" ¹⁹But Joseph replied to them: "Do not fear. Can I take the place of God? ²⁰Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve this present end, the survival of many people."^o ²¹So now, do not fear. I will provide for you and for your children." By thus speaking kindly to them, he reassured them.^o

Perhaps an earlier form of the story placed the mourning rites beyond the Wadi of Egypt, the traditional boundary between Canaan and Egypt (Nm 34:5; Jos 15:4, 47).

[†] [50:15–26] The final reconciliation of the brothers. Fearful of what may happen after the death of their father, the brothers engage in a final deception, inventing the dying wish of Jacob. Again, Joseph weeps, and, again, his brothers fall down before him, offering to be his slaves (44:16, 33). Joseph's assurance is also a summation of the story: "Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve this present end, the survival of many people" (v. 20). Joseph's adoption of the children of Manasseh's son Machir recalls Jacob's adoption of his grandchildren (48:5, 13–20); the adoptions reflect tribal history (cf. Jgs 5:14).

m. [50:13] Gn 23:16; Jos 24:32; Acts 7:16.—n. [50:20] Gn 45:5.—o. [50:21] Gn 47:12.

²²Joseph remained in Egypt, together with his father's household. He lived a hundred and ten years. ²³He saw Ephraim's children to the third generation, and the children of Manasseh's son Machir were also born on Joseph's knees.^p

Death of Joseph. ²⁴Joseph said to his brothers: "I am about to die. God will surely

take care of you and lead you up from this land to the land that he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."^q ²⁵Then, putting the sons of Israel under oath, he continued, "When God thus takes care of you, you must bring my bones up from this place."^r ²⁶Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. He was embalmed and laid to rest in a coffin in Egypt.^s

p. [50:23] Nm 32:39; Jos 17:1.

q. [50:24] Ex 3:8; Heb 11:22.—r. [50:25] Ex 13:19; Heb 11:22.—s. [50:26] Sir 49:15.