THE JPS TORAH COMMENTARY

GENESIS בראשית

In the last century, a new way of looking at the Bible developed. Research into the ancient Near East and its texts recreated for us the civilizations out of which the Bible emerged. In this century, there has been a revival of Jewish biblical scholarship; Israeli and American scholars, in particular, concentrating in the fields of archaeology, biblical history, Semitic languages, and the religion of Israel, have opened exciting new vistas into the world of the Scriptures. For the first time in history, we have at our disposal information and methodological tools that enable us to explore the biblical text in a way that could never have been done before. This new world of knowledge, as seen through the eyes of contemporary Jewish scholars and utilizing at the same time the insights of over twenty centuries of traditional Jewish exegesis, is now available for the first time to a general audience in *The JPS Torah Commentary.*

The *Commentary* is published in five volumes, each by a single author who has devoted himself to the study of the text. Given the wide range of perspectives that now exist in biblical scholarship, the JPS has recognized the individual expertise of these authors and made no attempt to impose uniformity on the methodology or content of their work.

The Hebrew text is that of the Leningrad Codex B 19^{A}, the oldest dated manuscript of the complete Hebrew Bible. Copied from a text written by the distinguished Masoretic scholar Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, who lived in the first half of the 10th century C.E., the manuscript was completed in 1009 C.E. In this edition it has been arranged according to the weekly synagogue Torah readings. The format has been adjusted to correspond to that adopted by the TANAKH, the new translation of the Hebrew Bible, published by the Jewish Publication Society and utilized in the present Commentary.

The Jewish Publication Society has completed this project with a full awareness of the great tradition of Jewish Bible commentary, with a profound sense of the sanctity of the biblical text and an understanding of the awe and love that our people has accorded its Bible. The voice of our new *Commentary* resounds with the spirit and concerns of our times—just as the Jewish spirit has always found its most sincere and heartfelt expression in its appreciation of the Bible; yet it acknowledges the intrinsic value of the tools of modern scholarship in helping to establish the original sense and setting of Scripture.

With all this fixed firmly in mind, the Jewish Publication Society commits its good name and its decades of pioneering in the world of English-language Jewish publishing to this *Torah Commentary* with the hope that it will serve as the contemporary addition to the classic commentaries created by Jews during past epochs in Jewish history.

Nahum M. Sarna, GENERAL EDITOR
Chaim Potok, LITERARY EDITOR

וְהַמַּשְׂכִּילִים יַזְהִרוּ כְּזֹהַר הָרָקִיעַ
וּמַצְדִּיקֵי הָרַבִּים כַּכּוֹכָבִים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד

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And those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.

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GENESIS בראשית

The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation

Commentary by NAHUM M. SARNA

THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

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To my parents ז״ל

ר׳ יעקב יהודה ומרת מלכה סרנה
מורי הראשונים למקרא ולערכיו

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Nahum M. Sarna

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INTRODUCTION

The Title

The Hebrew name for the first book of the Bible is *Bereshit*—the first word of the book. In rabbinic sources, this name is sometimes expanded to *Sefer Bereshit* (The Book of Bereshit).[1] The practice of naming a book by its opening word or words was widespread in the ancient Near East. Occasionally, other titles for this book were current among Jews, such as *Sefer ha-Yashar* (The Book of the Upright),[2] which refers to the patriarchs, whose lives inform the bulk of the work.[3] A tenth-century C.E. composition, the *Dikdukei ha-Te'amim* (§70) by Aaron ben Moses Ben-Asher, mentions "The Book of *Bereshit*, the First Book, which is the *Sefer ha-Yesharim*" (The Book of the Upright Ones). Still another title, found in medieval manuscripts, is *Sefer Beri'at ha-'Olam* (The Book of the Creation of the World).

The English title Genesis is derived from the Latin version known as the Vulgate. This, in turn, goes back, via the Old Latin (pre-4th cent. C.E.), to the Greek Bible—the Septuagint. A famous manuscript copy, the mid-fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus now in the British Museum, features the title *Genesis Kosmou* (The Origin of the Universe). This Greek name may well derive from the pre-Christian Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt. The shorter, more common, title Genesis (origin) may perhaps be traced to the Greek rendering of the initial clause of 2:4: "This is the book of the genesis of heaven and earth."

The Lectionary Divisions

Although all present-day editions divide the Book of Genesis into fifty chapters, this practice does not have its roots in Jewish tradition. Rather, it was borrowed from the Christian Bibles by Rabbi Solomon ben Ishmael (ca. 1330) during a time of medieval religious polemics. The Christian-Jewish debates, which often focused upon the interpretation of scriptural passages, necessitated a common, standardized system of reference.

The introduction of these chapter divisions displaced an earlier Jewish system based upon the weekly Torah readings. In Palestine and Egypt, the readings were usually completed in triennial, or three-year, cycles. The Book of Genesis was variously divided into forty-three or forty-five such *sedarim*, as the lectionaries were called. Eventually, the Babylonian practice of completing the reading of the entire Torah in one year became universal. In this system, Genesis was completed in twelve weeks, each division being known as a *parashah* (pl. *parashot* or *parshiyot*) or *sidra(h)* (pl. *sedarot*).

The Contents and Role of Genesis

Genesis is a book about origins: the origins of humankind, the origins of Israel, and the origins of the unique relationship between God and a particular people.

The fifty chapters of Genesis divide into three main subject units, presented chronologically: a description of Creation (1:1–2:3); the emergence, development, and degeneration of the human race (2:4–11:26); and (in the bulk of the book) the account of the lives of the founding fathers of the people of Israel (11:27–50:26). In its entirety the book claims to cover a time span of 2,309 years, a figure that is computed from the data found in the narratives and the genealogies in the traditional Hebrew text. It offers a rapid sketch of 1,948 years of universal human history, from Adam to the birth of Abraham, with the remaining 361 years to the death of Joseph comprising the bulk of the work. Put otherwise: Nearly 80 percent of the contents of Genesis is devoted to about 17 percent of the time span that is covered.

This imbalance is there by design. The theme of Creation, important as it is, serves merely as an introduction to the book's central motif: God's role in history. The opening chapters are a prologue to the historical drama that begins in chapter 12. In other words, in order to understand the divinely ordained history and destiny of Israel, the nature of God, the nature of humankind created by God, and the relationships between the two—the entire Hebrew Bible is both God-centered and Israel-centered—one must look back to the beginning of things. The early chapters serve to set forth the world views and the values of the civilization of the Bible, the pillars upon which the religion of Israel rests. The chapters, thus, comprise the fountainhead of ideas and concepts from which all future developments spring.

The God of Genesis is the wholly self-sufficient One, absolutely independent of nature, the supreme, unchallengeable Sovereign of the world, who is providentially involved in human affairs. He is, therefore, Lord of history. And the human being in Genesis—the pinnacle of Creation—is a creature of infinite preciousness who enjoys a unique relationship with God. Humankind is endowed with free will and, consequently, is also charged with moral responsibility and inescapable accountability. Moreover, the human race constitutes a single family whose ultimate destiny is determined by God Himself.

This universal opening serves as the background for the rest of the Book of Genesis and, indeed, for the remainder of the Bible. Following the perverse exercise of freedom of will that fractured the unity of the human family, God singled out from this divided humanity one people as His chosen instrument destined to fill a central role in the unfolding of His plan of history. This people comes into being through a successive series of generational selectivity in which Noah and Abraham signify fixed points: Ten generations separate Noah from Adam, and ten more Abraham from Noah.

The narratives about the patriarchs of Israel are framed by two historic migrations: into the promised land and out of the promised land. Between those migrations we are not given a continuous history but cycles of individual episodes about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book closes with the assurance of redemption.

These generally disconnected stories serve a variety of purposes. Some are intended as guides for the individual in formulating principles of behavior. Others demonstrate the moral degeneration of the inhabitants of Canaan, thereby implicitly providing the explana-

tion for the displacement of these peoples by the Israelites. The major theme of the patriarchal narratives is the divine promises of nationhood and national territory, both of which constitute the essential introduction to the Book of Exodus.

The Singularity and Antiquity of the Traditions

Although the rest of the Torah would not be intelligible without the background provided in the Book of Genesis, this work nevertheless constitutes a distinct and discrete unit within that literary corpus. Its individuality and antiquity are asserted in numerous ways:

Divine Names. One unique feature of the book is the divine title "God of the father." (This is discussed fully in the Commentary, pp. 396). Another outstanding characteristic is the large number of divine names that never recur in the Torah and, with very few exceptions, are not found again in the rest of the Bible. These are the combinations El Elyon,[4] El Shaddai,[5] in significant numbers; El-roi,[6] El Olam,[7] El Beth-el,[8] El-elohe-yisrael,[9] Elohe ha-shamayim,[10] Paḥad-yitsḥak,[11] Avir-yaakov;[12] and the descriptive *Koneh shamayim va-'arets.*[13]

The Stone Pillar (matsevah).[14] This cultic object is sternly forbidden in Leviticus 26:1 and Deuteronomy 16:21–22 as being abhorrent to God; yet the Genesis narratives do not hesitate to ascribe its use to the patriarch Jacob. It is clear that the texts were not altered to conform to the standards of a later age. The same conclusion may be drawn from the report about Abraham planting a tamarisk and engaging in worship at the site,[15] an act prohibited in the legislation of Deuteronomy 16:21. Conversely, although the patriarchs build altars in various places, they never do so in Jerusalem. The later exclusive sanctity of that city is not made to rest upon any patriarchal connections to it, as might be expected were we dealing with late compositions.

Family Life. Abraham married his half sister,[16] an act that is repeatedly forbidden in the law collections.[17] Jacob was simultaneously married to two sisters, mothers of the tribes of Israel, a marriage arrangement that is outlawed in Leviticus 18:18. Judah and Tamar understand that the levirate obligation extends even to the father of the deceased, childless husband; but according to Deuteronomy 25:5–10, it is restricted to the brothers.[18] Indeed, the offspring of the union of Judah and Tamar—which would later be considered an illicit union—becomes the ancestor of the royal line of David.[19] And whereas intermarriage with foreigners, natives of Canaan, is prohibited in Exodus 34:16 and Deuteronomy 7:3, no such interdiction is either assumed or implied in the narratives of Genesis. Simeon and Levi voice no religious objection to the proposal of the Shechemites to intermarry with Jacob's family.[20] Their sole concern is the violation of their sister. Both Judah and Simeon married Canaanite women;[21] and Joseph took to wife the daughter of an Egyptian priest,[22] a union that produces two of the tribes of Israel. In general, religious differences between the patriarchs and foreigners[23] are never a source of tension. The only sins attributed to non-Israelites are of the moral kind; idolatry, a major theme in the rest of the Bible, is never mentioned.

Angelology. The very frequency of the phenomenon of angels in Genesis is extraordinary.[24] So too is the fact that the angels are unnamed and have no individuality; they possess no independence of action and are not depicted as having wings.[25] The only biblical instances of angels calling to humans from heaven occur in this book. Also, the conven-

tional vocabulary of divine self-revelation is absent from Genesis: The standard verbs *y-sh-v* and *sh-k-n* are never used of God's immanence in a shrine; nor is the noun ***kavod*** employed for the divine Presence.

Customs, Legal Procedures, and Social Settings. The practice of accompanying oath-taking by the gesture of placing a hand "under the thigh" of the adjurer[26] never recurs. Similarly, the institution of concubinage for the purpose of vicarious procreation in the case of marriages that did not produce offspring[27] is attested nowhere else in Scripture; nor is the possibility of a first-born son renouncing his birthright and relinquishing and transferring the privileges that flow from this status.[28] In fact, freedom of testation in disregard of natural seniority, as practiced by Isaac[29] and Jacob,[30] is illegal and invalid according to the provisions of Deuteronomy 21:15–17. Another oddity is the absence of any reference to writing, even where it would be most expected. Abraham purchases the Cave of Machpelah by an oral transaction,[31] in glaring contrast to the carefully prepared written documents that seal Jeremiah's acquisition of landed property.[32]

Personal Names. Of the thirty-eight names by which the patriarchs and their families are called, twenty-seven are never found again in the Bible. Moreover, the preponderance of divine names that are compounded of El correlates with the relatively large number of personal names composed of that element. Further, there is a total absence of names formed with *yahu* or its variants, which are derived from the divine name YHVH. This accords neatly with the tradition of Exodus 6:2–3 that informs us that YHVH was not the standard name of God in the pre-Mosaic period. In other words, we do not encounter anachronisms: Personal *yahu* names from a later period are not retrojected into the earlier era.

Place-names. Only in Genesis is Hebron called Mamre,[33] and only there is Paddan-aram mentioned.[34] The latter is especially significant in light of Israel's long relationship with the Arameans.

Ethnographic and Implicit Historical Data. Genesis 15:19–21 list ten peoples who inhabit the land of Canaan in the days of Abraham and who are to be displaced in the course of the Israelite conquest and settlement. But the inclusion of certain names and the exclusion of others indicates that this list reflects pre-Mosaic reality. It is headed, for instance, by the Kenites, who do not appear in any subsequent listings of names and who were friendly to Israel in the days of Moses and later.[35] The Kenizzites similarly disappear from all other such rosters because they were absorbed into the tribe of Judah.[36] Caleb, who, together with Joshua, remained faithful in reconnoitering the land, is described as a Kenizzite.[37] Othniel, leader of Israel in the days of the judges,[38] was "a son of Kenaz." Neither the Kenites nor the Kenizzites appear among the peoples against whom the Israelites fought in conquering the land. On the other hand, the Philistines are never included in any list detailing the pre-Israelite peoples who are to be displaced. As depicted in Genesis, they in no way correspond to the picture of the same people whose activities are recorded in Judges and Samuel. Both Abraham and Isaac conclude pacts with them.[39] Yet there was constant enmity between Israel and Philistia until David's day. Similarly, although the Arameans in the days of the monarchy are the implacable enemies of Israel who menace the northern kingdom for centuries, the patriarchs live with them in peace and regard them as kinfolk and as the most desirable people from whom to seek wives for their sons.[40] Jacob makes a pact with them regulating their spheres of influence.[41] Another reliable historical memory of kinship must underlie the representation of Esau-Edom as the brother of Jacob-Israel,[42] for such a tradition would be otherwise inexplicable given the ruthless enmity that characterized the

relationships between Israel and Edom throughout the period of the monarchy and beyond.

Finally, other authentic, pre-Mosaic historical information can be gleaned from some of the narratives about the tribes. The alliance of Simeon and Levi against the Shechemites[43] must precede the absorption of Simeon by Judah.[44] And there is no conceivable explanation for inventing tales about the original and lost first-born status of Reuben[45] and Manasseh,[46] so it is not unreasonable to assume that the narratives preserve traditions that derive from the very early history of these tribes.

The cumulative effect of all this internal evidence leads to the decisive conclusion that the patriarchal traditions in the Book of Genesis are of great antiquity. This assertion is quite independent of the external material culled from thousands of documents uncovered in the towns of Mari, Nuzi, Alalakh, and Ugarit, as well as in other ancient sites in the Near East. These texts issue from the second millennium B.C.E. and provide numerous parallels with patriarchal traditions. It may be contended that many of the analogues were widespread throughout the Mesopotamian region over a long period of time and were still current in the first millennium, thereby calling into question their value as a chronological index. By the same token, however, the stubborn conservatism and tenacity of tradition that characterized that part of the world also deprive a late documentation of its reliability as a guide for dating a biblical parallel. The many different kinds of internal biblical evidence cited above reinforce the case viewing Genesis as an authentic mirror of early historical tradition and weaken a claim of later inventiveness.

The Commentary

For nearly two millennia and a half, the exposition of Scripture has been the subject of intense preoccupation on the part of Jewish scholars. In fact, Jewish intellectual and spiritual history may be said to be essentially the record of the variegated attempts to unfold the sense, meanings, purposes, intents, and applications of the biblical texts. The multiple sense of Scripture has ever been a cardinal principle of rabbinic Judaism: "Just as a hammer shatters rock[47] and generates numerous splinters, so may a single verse yield a multiplicity of meanings."[48] Put otherwise, the Hebrew Bible is a prism that refracts varieties of truth. Characteristically, Jewish tradition has always refused to absolutize any single approach or stance.

Modern scholarship has paid increasing attention to the fact that the numerous and wide-ranging traditions preserved in the Book of Genesis do not constitute a continuous history but are, rather, a series of largely disconnected, individual incidents that have undergone a process of careful sifting. We no longer know the criteria of selectivity: why some traditions were perpetuated and accepted as sacred and others were rejected and disappeared. Nor do we possess any information about the origin and transmission of the individual units. In the absence of clear and definitive records, scholars have advanced various theories over the past century to explain the origins, development, and redactional composition of the Book of Genesis. All of them subscribe to a nonunitary approach; that is, they postulate the one-time existence of various blocks and collections of traditions that were eventually combined into a single work. This line of enquiry is known as the "documentary hypothesis." By the critical application of such analytical tools as textual, stylistic, literary, ideological, and historical criteria, scholars claim to be able to isolate

certain basic documents that are labeled J (for JHVH; i.e., it is characterized by the use of the divine name YHVH), E (standing for Elohim, "God," used instead of YHVH), and P (for "priestly," it being surmised to have originated in priestly circles). It should be added that in the case of many passages there is no consensus about the documentary differentiation, and some scholars identify still other major sources. Whatever the merits or demerits of this type of analysis, it is beyond doubt that the Book of Genesis came down to us, not as a composite of disparate elements but as a unified document with a life, coherence, and integrity of its own. For this reason, a fragmentary approach to it cannot provide an adequate understanding of the whole. To be preoccupied with the smallest units of literary tradition may have its purposes; but the exercise is ultimately of limited value. A totality—things in combination—often possesses properties and engenders qualities neither carried by nor necessarily inherent in any of its discrete components. The meaning of a word or phrase in context is bound to be lost if it is dismembered for purposes of phonetic analysis and if attention is concentrated on the classification of the component consonants and vowels. What can biologists tell us about the human being at the end of the evolutionary scale if they focus solely upon the structure of the primitive cell from which all life springs?

The present Commentary is primarily concerned with the completed edifice and only to a minor extent with building blocks. It is not based on the coroner's approach, that is, on dissecting a literary corpse. The Bible is and always has been a living literature and a dynamic force in history, endowed with the ability to move men and transform civilizations. Its vitality and impact reflect themselves in the immense literature of exposition and interpretation that has grown up over two and half millennia. In every generation, the study of the Bible has been at one and the same time a religious obligation, a spiritual experience, a mode of worship, and a moral as well as an intellectual discipline. In the pursuit of these goals, every generation has drawn upon the accumulated wisdom of the past and upon its contemporary store of new learning and scholarship. This Commentary follows this venerable and commonsense tradition. It attempts to distill and integrate the results of a wide spectrum of modern specialized research in many varied disciplines, while at the same time availing itself of the best of the insights of generations of Jewish commentators. It is hoped that the intelligent, educated layman, for whom this work is primarily intended, will find the result of the endeavor informative, enlightening, and edifying.

Notes to the Introduction

1. TJ Meg.3:1(74a); TJ Sot.1:10(17c); Gen. R.3:5.
2. Cf. Josh.10:13; 2 Sam.1:18.
3. Av. Zar.25a; TJ Sot.1:10(17c).
4. Gen.14:18,19,22, found again only in Pss.78:35.
5. Gen.17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; cf.49:25; Exod.6:3.
6. Gen.16:13; cf. 24:62.
7. Gen.21:33.
8. Gen.31:13; 35:7.
9. Gen.33:20.
10. Gen.24:3,7.
11. Gen.31:42.

12. Gen.49:24, found again only in Isa. 49:26; 60:16; cf. 1:24.
13. Gen.14:19,22.
14. Gen.28:18,22; 31:13; 35:14; cf. 31:45–46; 35:20. It should be noted that the twelve pillars set up by Moses are not cultic but commemorative (Exod.24:4).
15. Gen.21:33.
16. Gen.20:12.
17. Lev.18:9,11; 20:17; Deut.27:22.
18. Gen.38.
19. Gen.38:29; Ruth 4:18–22.
20. Gen.34:9.
21. Gen.38:2; 46:10.
22. Gen.41:45.
23. Gen.31:53; 35:2; cf. Josh.34:2.
24. Gen.16:7ff.; 18; cf. 19:1,15; 21:17; 22:11,15; 24:7,40; 28:12; 31:11; 32:2; 48:16.
25. In 28:12 they climb ladders to ascend and descend; contrast Isa.6:2,6; cf. Ezek.1:6–9.
26. Gen.24:2–3,9; 47:29.
27. Gen.16; 30:1–13.
28. Gen.25:31–34.
29. Gen.27.
30. Gen.48:13–20.
31. Gen.23.
32. Jer.32:10–14.
33. Gen.13:18; 14:13; 18:1; 23:17,19; 25:9; 35:27; 49:30; 50:13.
34. Gen.25:20; 28:2,5–7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9,26; 46:15; cf.48:7.
35. Judg.1:16; 4:11,17; 5:24; 1 Sam.15:6.
36. 1 Chron.4:13.
37. Num.32:12; Josh.14:6,14.
38. Josh.15:17; Judg.1:13; 3:9,11.
39. Gen.21:22–34; 26:1,28–31.
40. Gen.22:20–23; 24; 28:2,5.
41. Gen.31:44–54.
42. Gen.25:19–26; Obad.10,12; Mal.1:2.
43. Gen.34.
44. Judg.1:3,17; cf. Josh.19:1–9; 15:26–32,42.
45. Gen.49:3; 1 Chron.5:1.
46. Gen.45:1; 46:20; 48:1,13–20.
47. Jer.23:29.
48. Sanh.34a; cf. Shab.88b.

GLOSSARY

Abraham ben Moses ben Maimon (1186–1237) Son of Moses Maimonides, religious philosopher. Egypt.

Abravanel, Isaac ben Judah (1437–1508) Statesman, Bible commentator, religious philosopher. Portugal and Spain.

Aggadah The nonhalakhic (nonlegal) homiletic side of rabbinic teaching, mostly anchored to the biblical text.

Akedat Yitsḥak A compilation of sermons and philosophic discourses on the biblical text by Isaac ben Moses Arama (ca. 1420–1494). Spain.

Akkadian An ancient Semitic language spoken in Mesopotamia; its chief dialects were Babylonian and Assyrian.

Aquila A convert to Judaism from Pontus, Anatolia, and a disciple of Rabbi Akiba. He translated the standardized biblical Hebrew text into Greek in the 2nd century C.E.

Aramaic A Semitic language closely related to biblical Hebrew and known in many dialects and phases, including Syriac. Aramaic flourished throughout the Biblical period and thereafter, and is the language of the Targums, the Gemaras, and large sections of Midrash.

Avot de-Rabbi Nathan An exposition of an early form of Mishnah Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), transmitted in two versions.

Baal ha-Turim Commentary on the Torah by Jacob ben Asher (?1270–1340). Germany and Spain.

Baḥya ben Asher (13th century) Bible commentator and kabbalist. Saragossa, Spain.

Bekhor Shor Commentary on the Torah by Joseph ben Isaac, 12th century. Northern France.

Dunash ben Labrat (mid-10th century) Linguist, grammarian, and poet. Spain.

Exodus Rabba Aggadic midrash on the Book of Exodus, originally two separate compositions, combined ca. 11th or 12th centuries.

Gemara An exposition of the Mishnah in Aramaic and Hebrew.

Genesis Apocryphon An elaboration of the Genesis narratives in Aramaic from 1st century B.C.E. or C.E., found in cave 1 at Qumran near the Dead Sea.

Genesis Rabba Palestinian aggadic midrash on the Book of Genesis, edited ca. 425 C.E.

Genesis Rabbati Midrash on the Book of Genesis ascribed to Rabbi Moses ha-Darshan of Narbonne, 11th century.

Gersonides See Ralbag.

Halakhah The individual and collective rabbinic legal rulings that regulate all aspects of Jewish life, both individual and corporate.

Ḥizkuni Commentary on the Torah by Hezekiah ben Rabbi Manoah, mid-13th century. France.

Ibn Ezra, Abraham (1089–1164) Poet, grammarian, Bible commentator. Spain.

Ibn Janaḥ, Jonah (first half 11th century) Grammarian, lexicographer. Spain.

Judah ben Samuel he-Ḥasid (the Pious) (ca. 1150–1217) Ethical writer and mystic; authored a commentary on the Torah. Regensburg.

Judah Halevi (before 1075–1141) Poet, philosopher, and author of *The Kuzari.* Spain.

Kara, Joseph (b. ca. 1060) Bible commentator. Northern France.

Kere The way the Masorah requires a word to be read, especially when it diverges from the *kethib*.

Kethib The way a word, usually unvocalized, is written in the Bible; see *kere*.

Kimḥi See Radak.

Lekaḥ Tov A midrashic compilation on the Torah and the Five Megillot by Tobias ben Eliezer, 11th century. Balkans.

Maimonides, Moses ben Maimon, known as Rambam (1135–1204) Halakhic codifier (*Yad Hazakah = Mishneh Torah*), philosopher (*Moreh Nevukhim, Guide of the Perplexed*), and commentator on the Mishnah. Spain and Egypt.

Malbim (1809–1879) Acronym for Meir Loeb ben Yehiel Michael. Rabbi, preacher, and Bible commentator. Eastern Europe.

Masorah The traditional, authoritative Hebrew text of the Bible with its consonants, vowels, and cantillation signs, as well as marginal notes that relate to orthographic, grammatical and lexicographic oddities; developed by the school of Masoretes in Tiberias between the 6th and 9th centuries.

Mekhilta Halakhic midrash on the Book of Exodus in two forms, the Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael and the Mekhilta de-R. Simeon ben Yoḥai, 1st and 2nd centuries C.E.

Menahem ben Jacob ibn Saruq (10th century) Authored *Maḥberet,* a dictionary of biblical Hebrew. Spain.

Midrash Legal and homiletical expositions of the biblical text, and anthologies and compilations of such.

Mishnah The written compilation of orally transmitted legal teachings covering all aspects of Jewish law, arranged in six orders that, in turn, are divided into tractates; executed by Judah ha-Nasi, ca. 200 C.E. Palestine.

Naḥmanides See Ramban.

Natziv (1817–1893) Acronym for Naphtali Zevi Yehuda Berlin. Rabbinic scholar and head of yeshivah at Volozhin, Poland. Authored *Ha'amek Davar,* a commentary on the Torah.

Peshitta A translation of the Bible into Syriac, parts of which are said to have been made in the first century C.E.

Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer Aggadic work on scriptural narratives. 8th century. Palestine.

Pesikta de-Rav Kahana Homilies on the synagogue lectionaries. (?)5th century C.E. Palestine.

Pesikta Rabbati Medieval midrash on the festivals.

Qumran The site of the caves where Bible manuscripts were found in 1949/50. The manuscripts are identified by such symbols as 4QSam^{a} (for manuscript *a* of Samuel, found in the fourth cave of Qumran); 1QIS^{a} (for manuscript *a* of Isaiah found in the first cave of Qumran).

Radak Acronym for Rabbi David ben Joseph Kimḥi (?1160–?1235) Grammarian, lexicographer, and bible commentator. Narbonne, Provence.

Ralbag Acronym for Rabbi Levi ben Gershom, known as Gersonides (1248–1344) Mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, Bible commentator. Southeastern France.

Rambam See Maimonides.

Ramban Acronym for Rabbi Moses ben Naḥman, known as Naḥmanides (1194–1270) Philosopher, halakhist, Bible commentator. Spain.

Rashbam Acronym for Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (ca. 1080–1174) Grandson of Rashi. Commentator on Bible and Talmud. Northern France.

Rashi Acronym for Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–1105) Commentator on Bible and Talmud. Troyes, France.

Saadia ben Joseph (882–942) Philosopher, halakhist, liturgical poet, grammarian, and Bible commentator and translator. Gaon (head of academy) of Pumbedita, Babylonia.

Samuel ben Hofni (d. 1013) Talmudist, Bible commentator. Gaon of Sura, Babylonia.

Seder Olam (Rabba) Midrashic chronological work ascribed to Yose ben Ḥalafta, 2nd century C.E. Palestine.

Septuagint The Greek translation of the Torah made for the Jewish community of Alexandria, Egypt, 3rd century B.C.E.

Sforno, Obadiah ben Jacob (ca. 1470–ca. 1550) Bible commentator. Italy.

Shadal Acronym for Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865) Italian scholar, philosopher, Bible commentator, and translator.

Sherira ben Hanina (ca. 906–1006) Halakhist, author of numerous responsa. Gaon of Pumbedita, Babylonia.

Sifra = Torat Kohanim Tannaitic midrashic commentary to the Book of Leviticus, probably compiled about the end of the 4th century C.E. Palestine.

Sifrei Tannaitic halakhic midrash to the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, probably compiled at the end of the 4th century C.E.

Sumerian A non-Semitic language, written in cuneiform, spoken in the southern part of ancient Babylonia.

Symmachus (2nd century C.E.) Translator of the Bible into Greek.

Talmud The body of rabbinic law, dialectic, and lore comprising the Mishnah and Gemara, the latter being an exposition and elaboration of the former in Hebrew and Aramaic. Two separate talmudic compilations exist: the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud (also known as Jerusalem Talmud).

Tanḥuma (Yelammedenu) Collection of homiletical midrashim on the Torah, arranged according to the triennial lectionary cycle. Attributed to Tanḥum bar Abba, Palestinian preacher, 4th century C.E.

Tanna(im) The Palestinian sages of the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. whose rulings are cited in the Mishnah.

Targum Literally, "translation," specifically of the Bible into Aramaic.

Targum Jonathan An unofficial Aramaic free translation of the Torah, erroneously ascribed to Jonathan ben Uzziel through misinterpretation of the initials "T.Y." (= Targum Yerushalmi). That scholar is the reputed author of the Targum to the Prophets.

Targum Onkelos The standard, official Aramaic translation of the Torah. Attributed to Onkelos, reputed nephew of the Roman emperor Hadrian and convert to Judaism; 2nd century C.E. The name is probably a corruption of Aquila.

Theodotian (2nd century C.E.) Reviser of the Septuagint.

Tosefta A compilation of tannaitic rulings either omitted from the Mishnah or containing material parallel or supplementary to it. It is arranged according to the six orders of the Mishnah.

Ugaritic A language of inscriptions found at Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast, in the second millennium B.C.E. Both the language and its literature have shed much light on the Hebrew Bible.

Vulgate The Latin translation of the Bible made by the Church father Jerome about 400 C.E. It became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church.

Yalkut Shimoni Midrashic anthology on the Bible attributed to a certain Simeon, 13th century.

Ziyyoni, Menahem (late 14th–early 15th century) Kabbalist and Bible commentator. Cologne.

ABBREVIATIONS

AASOR	*Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
AB	Anchor Bible
ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AHW	W. von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
Akk.	Akkadian
ANEP	J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near East in Pictures*
ANET	J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*
Ant.	Josephus, *Antiquities*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
Aq.	Aquila
Ar.	Arakhin
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
ARM	*Archives royales de Mari*
$ARN^{1,2}$	Avot de-Rabbi Nathan, versions 1 and 2, ed. S. Schechter (1887, reprinted 1967)
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute,* Jerusalem
AusBR	*Australian Biblical Review*
Av. Zar.	Avodah Zarah
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAP	E. C. Kraeling, ed., *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeologist Reader*
BARev	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BB	Bava Batra
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
Bek.	Bekhorot
Ber.	Berakhot
Bets.	Betsah
Bib	*Biblica*
BIES	*Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* (= *Yediot*)
Bik.	Bikkurim
BK	Bava Kamma
BM	Bava Metsia
BO	*Bibliotheca orientalis*
BR	*Biblical Research*

BTS	*Bible et terre sainte*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
CAP	A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B. C.*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CD	Damascus Document from the Cairo Genizah
CRAIBL	*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*
Dem.	Demai
Deut. R.	Deuteronomy Rabba
DISO	C.-F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*
Eduy.	Eduyyot
EncJud	*Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971)
Er.	Eruvin
Exod. R.	Exodus Rabba
Exp Tim	*Expository Times*
Gen. Apoc.	Genesis Apocryphon
Gen. R.	Genesis Rabba
Git.	Gittin
Gk.	Greek
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* ed. E. Kautzsch and trans. A. E. Cowley
Ḥag.	Ḥagigah
Ḥal.	Ḥallah
HALAT	W. Baumgartner et al., *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexicon zum Alten Testament*
Heb.	Hebrew
HKAT	*Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*
Hor.	Horayot
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
Ḥul.	Ḥullin
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
Int	*Interpretation*
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPOS	*Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KAI	H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*
Ker.	Keritot
Ket.	Ketubbot
Kid.	Kiddushin

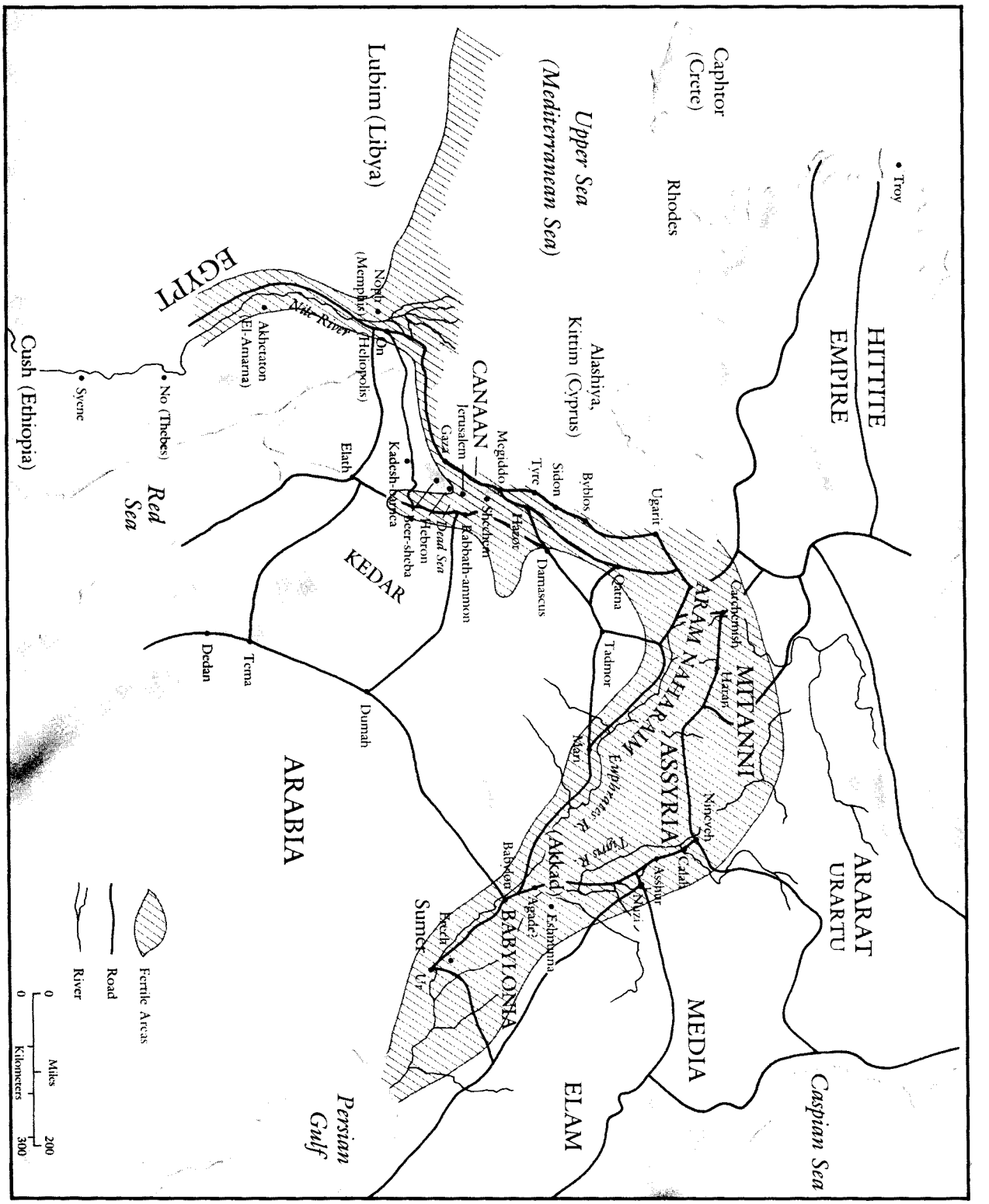
Kil.	Kilayim
Kin.	Kinnim
Lam. R.	Lamentations Rabba
Lev. R.	Leviticus Rabba
LXX	Septuagint
Maʿas.	Maʿaserot
Maʿas. Sh.	Maʿaser Sheni
Mak.	Makkot
Makhsh.	Makhshirin
Meg.	Megillah
Meʿil.	Meʿilah
MdRY	Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael
MdRSbY	Mekhilta de-R. Simeon bar Yoḥai
Men.	Menaḥot
Mid.	Midrash
Mid. Ag.	Midrash Aggadah
Mik.	Mikva'ot
Mish.	Mishnah
MK	Moʿed Katan
Naz.	Nazir
Ned.	Nedarim
Neg.	Negaʿim
Nid.	Niddah
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation
Num. R.	Numbers Rabba
OB	Old Babylonian
Oho.	Oholot
Or.	Orlah
OrAnt	*Oriens antiquus*
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
Par.	Parah
PdRE	Pesikta de-Rav Eliezer
PdRK	Pesikta de-Rav Kahana
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
Pes.	Pesaḥim
Pesh.	Peshitta
Pesik.	Pesikta
Phoen.	Phoenician
PJ	*Palästina-Jahrbuch*
PRU	*Le Palais royal d'Ugarit*
Q	Qumran
1QIsa[a]	First copy of Isaiah from Qumran, cave 1
1QM	War between the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness from Qumran, cave 1
1QS	Rule of the Congregation from Qumran, cave 1
4QDeut	Manuscript of Deuteronomy from Qumran, cave 4
4QGen	Manuscript of Genesis from Qumran, cave 4
11QTemple	Temple Scroll from Qumran, cave 11
RA	*Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*

RB	*Revue biblique*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RH	Rosh Ha-Shanah
Sam.	Samaritan
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
SANT	*Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*
SBT	*Studies in Biblical Theology*
Sem	*Semitica*
SER	Seder Eliyahu Rabba
Shab.	Shabbat
Shek.	Shekalim
Shev.	Shevi'it
Shevu.	Shevu'ot
Sif.	Sifrei
Sif. Zut.	Sifrei Zuta
Sifra	Sifra
SOR	Seder Olam Rabba
Sot.	Sotah
Suk.	Sukkah
Sum.	Sumerian
Sym.	Symmachus
Syr.	Syriac
SyroP.	Syro-Palestinian
Ta'an.	Ta'anit
Tam.	Tamid
Tanḥ.	Tanḥuma
Targ.	Onkelos
Targ. Jon.	Targum Jonathan
Targ. Neof.	Targum Neofiti
Targ. Yer.	Targum Yerushalmi
TDOT	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
Tem.	Temurah
Ter.	Terumot
Theod.	Theodotian
TJ	Jerusalem Talmud
TLA	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
Toh.	Tohorot
Tosafot	Tosafot
Tosef.	Tosefta
TY	Tevul Yom
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
Uk.	Uktsin
UT	C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (1965)
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum: Supplements*
Vulg.	Vulgate
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*

Yad.	Yadayim
Yal.	Yalkut
Yal. Reub.	Yalkut Reubeni
YD	Yoreh De'ah
Yev.	Yevamot
Zav.	Zavim
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
Zev.	Zevahim

The editors have adopted a popular system for transliteration of Hebrew, except for the following letters, which have no English equivalent:

' = alef
' = ayin
ḥ = ḥet (pronounced as the guttural "ch" in German)
kh = khaf (pronounced as the guttural "ch" in German)



THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

THE PATRIARCHAL WANDERINGS

THE COMMENTARY TO GENESIS

CHAPTER 1

Creation (1:1–2:3)

Be-re'shit

The story of Creation, or cosmology, that opens the Book of Genesis differs from all other such accounts that were current among the peoples of the ancient world. Its lack of interest in the realm of heaven and its economy of words in depicting primeval chaos are highly uncharacteristic of this genre of literature. The descriptions in Genesis deal solely with what lies beneath the celestial realm, and still the narration is marked by compactness, solemnity, and dignity.

There is abundant evidence that other cosmologies once existed in Israel. Scattered allusions to be found in the prophetic, poetic, and wisdom literature of the Bible testify to a popular belief that prior to the onset of the creative process the powers of watery chaos had to be subdued by God. These mythical beings are variously designated Yam (Sea), Nahar (River), Leviathan (Coiled One), Rahab (Arrogant One), and Tannin (Dragon).[1] There is no consensus in these fragments regarding the ultimate fate of these creatures. One version has them utterly destroyed by God; in another, the chaotic forces, personalized as monsters, are put under restraint by His power.

These myths about a cosmic battle at the beginning of time appear in the Bible in fragmentary form, and the several allusions have to be pieced together to produce some kind of coherent unity. Still, the fact that these myths appear in literary compositions in ancient Israel indicates clearly that they had achieved wide currency over a long period of time. They have survived in the Bible solely as obscure, picturesque metaphors and exclusively in the language of poetry. Never are these creatures accorded divine attributes, nor is there anywhere a suggestion that their struggle against God could in any way have posed a challenge to His sovereign rule.

This is of particular significance in light of the fact that one of the inherent characteristics of all other ancient Near Eastern cosmologies is the internecine strife of the gods. Polytheistic accounts of creation always begin with the predominance of the divinized powers of nature and then describe in detail a titanic struggle between the opposing forces. They inevitably regard the achievement of world order as the outgrowth of an overwhelming exhibition of power on the part of one god who then manages to impose his will upon all other gods.

The early Israelite creation myths, with all their color and drama, must have been particularly attractive to the masses. But none became the regnant version. It was the austere account set forth in the first chapter of Genesis that won unrivaled authority. At first it could only have been the intellectual elite in ancient Israel, most likely the priestly and scholarly circles, who could have been capable of realizing and appreciating the compact forms of symbolization found in Genesis. It is they who would have cherished and nurtured this version until its symbols finally exerted a decisive impact upon the religious consciousness of the entire people of Israel.

The mystery of divine creativity is, of course, ultimately unknowable. The Genesis narrative does not seek to make intelligible what is beyond human ken. To draw upon human language to explain that which is outside any model of human experience is inevitably to confront the inescapable limitations of any attempt to give verbal expression to this subject. For this reason alone, the narrative in its external form must reflect the time and place of its composition. Thus it directs us to take account of the characteristic modes of literary expression current in ancient Israel. It forces us to realize that a literalistic approach to the text must inevitably confuse idiom with idea, symbol with reality. The result would be to obscure the enduring meaning of that text.

The biblical Creation narrative is a document of faith. It is a quest for meaning and a statement of a religious position. It enunciates the fundamental postulates of the religion of Israel, the central ideas and concepts that animate the whole of biblical literature. Its quintessential teaching is that the

universe is wholly the purposeful product of divine intelligence, that is, of the one self-sufficient, self-existing God, who is a transcendent Being outside of nature and who is sovereign over space and time.

This credo finds reiterated expression in the narrative in a number of ways, the first of which is the literary framework. The opening and closing lines epitomize the central idea: "God created." Then there is the literary structure, which presents the creative process with bilateral symmetry. The systematic progression from chaos to cosmos unfolds in an orderly and harmonious manner through a series of six successive and equal units of time. The series is divided into two parallel groups, each of which comprises four creative acts performed in three days. The third day in each group is distinguished by two productions. In each group the movement is from heaven to terrestrial water to dry land. Moreover, the arrangement is such that each creation in the first group furnishes the resource that is to be utilized by the corresponding creature in the second group. The chart below illustrates the schematization.

The principle of order, deliberation, and direction is further inculcated by means of the progression from inorganic matter to the lowest forms of organic life to four categories of living creatures: fish and fowl, reptiles, the higher animals, and finally humankind. In addition, the entire narrative adheres to a uniform literary pattern. Each of the literary units begins with a declaration formula, "God said," followed by a command, a statement recording its fulfillment, a notice of divine approbation, and a closing formula, "There was evening and there was morning," with the accompanying numbered day.

Finally, the Narrator employs the device of number symbolism, the heptad, to emphasize the basic idea of design, completion, and perfection. The opening proclamation contains seven words; the description of primal chaos is set forth in twice seven words; the narrative's seven literary units feature seven times the formula for the effectuation of the divine will and the statement of divine approval; and the six days of creation culminate in the climactic seventh.

This seven-day typology is widely attested in the ancient world. As early as the twenty-second century B.C.E., King Gudea of Lagash, in southern Mesopotamia, dedicated a temple with a seven-day feast. The literatures of Mesopotamia and Ugarit are replete with examples of seven-day units of time. Most common is a state of affairs that lasts for six days with a climactic change taking place on the seventh. While the Creation narrative conforms to this literary convention, it is unique in that a different action occurs each day, with no activity at all on the seventh.

THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

Group I The Resource		*Group II The Utilizer*	
Day	*Creative Act*	*Day*	*Creative Act*
1	Light	4	The luminaries
2	Sky, leaving terrestrial waters	5	Fish and fowl
3	Dry land	6	Land creatures
	Vegetation		Humankind
	(Lowest form of organic life)		(Highest form of organic life)

1 When God began to create heaven and earth—[2]the earth בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת

*1. **When God began to create*** This rendering of the Hebrew looks to verse 3 for the completion of the sentence. It takes verse 2 to be parenthetical, describing the state of things at the time when God first spoke. Support for understanding the text in this way comes from 2:4 and 5:1, both of which refer to Creation and begin with "When." The Mesopotamian creation epic known as ***Enuma Elish*** also commences the same way. In fact, ***enuma*** means "when." Apparently, this was a conventional opening style for cosmological narratives. As to the peculiar syntax of the Hebrew sentence—a noun in the construct state *(be-re'shit)* with a finite verb *(bara')*—analogies may be found in Leviticus 14:46, Isaiah 29:1, and Hosea 1:2. This seems to be the way Rashi understood the text.

The traditional English translation reads: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." This rendering construes the verse as an independent sentence complete in itself, a solemn declaration that serves as an epitomizing caption to the entire narrative. It takes the initial word ***be-re'shit***[2] to mean "at the beginning of time" and thus makes a momentous assertion about the nature of God: that He is wholly outside of time, just as He is outside of space, both of which He proceeds to create. In other words, for the first time in the religious history of the Near East, God is conceived as being entirely free of temporal and spatial dimensions.

In favor of the traditional English translation are the arguments that ***be-re'shit*** does not have to be in the construct state and that the analogies of 2:4 and 5:1, as well as of ***Enuma Elish,*** are inexact. In each instance, the word translated "when" is literally "in the day," which is not the case in this verse.

God Unlike the pagan cosmologies, Genesis exhibits no interest in the question of God's origins. His existence prior to the world is taken as axiomatic and does not even require assertion, let alone proof. There is no definition of God or any mystical speculation about His nature. God's nature finds expression not in philosophical abstractions but through His acts and through the demands He makes on human beings.

The term for God used here and throughout the present account of Creation is ***'elohim.*** This is not a personal name but the general Hebrew word for deity. It can even refer to pagan gods. Although plural in form, only rarely is it not constructed with a singular verb or adjective.[3] The plural form may signify majesty or serve to intensify the basic idea. The preference for the use of ***'elohim*** in this chapter, rather than the sacred divine name YHVH, may well be conditioned by theological considerations; the term ***'elohim,*** connoting universalism and abstraction, is most appropriate for the transcendent God of Creation.

create The Hebrew stem ***b-r-'***[4] is used in the Bible exclusively of divine creativity. It signifies that the product is absolutely novel and unexampled, depends solely on God for its coming into existence, and is beyond the human capacity to reproduce. The verb always refers to the completed product, never to the material of which it is made. As Ibn Ezra observed, ***bara'*** does not of itself denote the creation of something out of nothing ***(creatio ex nihilo).*** This doctrine seems to have been first articulated in the late Second Temple work, 2 Maccabees: "Look up to heaven and earth and see all that is therein, and know that God made them out of things that did not exist" (7:28). However, the Genesis narrative does contain intimations of such a concept. Precisely because of the indispensable importance of preexisting matter in the pagan cosmologies, the very absence of such mention here is highly significant. This conclusion is reinforced by the idea of creation by divine fiat without reference to any inert matter being present. Also, the repeated biblical emphasis upon God as the exclusive Creator would seem to rule out the possibility of preexistent matter. Finally, if ***bara'*** is used only of God's creation, it must be essentially distinct from human creation. The ultimate distinction would be ***creatio ex nihilo,*** which has no human parallel and is thus utterly beyond all human comprehension.

heaven and earth The definite article in the Hebrew specifies the observable universe. The use here of a merism, the combination of opposites, expresses the totality of cosmic phenomena,[5] for which there is no single word in biblical Hebrew. The subsequent usage of each term separately refers to the sky and the dry land in the more restricted and concrete sense. We are not told how the cosmos

being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—

הָאָרֶץ׃ ² וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם׃

came into being, but other texts point to a tradition of its creation by means of divine fiat. Thus, Psalm 33:6 and 9 declare: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, / by the breath of His mouth, all their host . . . / For He spoke, and it was; / He commanded, and it endured." The postbiblical 2 Esdras 6:38 has the same notion: "I said, O Lord, You have indeed spoken from the beginning of creation; on the first day You said: 'Let heaven and earth be made,' and Your word accomplished the work."

2. Following the general comprehensive statement comes a detailed description of the primordial state of the world.

unformed and void Hebrew *tohu va-vohu.* This compound phrase appears again in the Bible in Jeremiah's prophetic vision of the return of the primal chaos (Jer. 4:23–27), thus leaving no doubt that the phrase designates the initial chaotic state of the earth.[6] That God should create disorganized matter, only to reduce it to order, presents no more of a problem than does His taking six days to complete creation instead of instantaneously producing a perfected universe. The quintessential point of the narrative is the idea of ordering that is the result of divine intent. It is a fundamental biblical teaching that the original, divinely ordained order in the physical world has its counterpart in the divinely ordained universal moral order to which the human race is subject.

darkness Throughout the Bible darkness is often a symbol of evil, misfortune, death, and oblivion.[7] Here it seems to be not just the absence of light but a distinct entity, the origin of which is left unclear. Isaiah 45:7, however, explicitly ascribes its existence to divine creation.

the deep Hebrew *tehom,* the cosmic abyssal water that enveloped the earth. The text says nothing about how or when this watery mass came into existence. Proverbs 8:22–24 makes it one of God's creations. In many unrelated mythologies water is the primal element, a notion that most likely arose from its amorphous nature. To the ancients, this characteristic seemed to represent appropriately the state of affairs before chaos was reduced to order and things achieved stable form.

It is instructive that *tehom* is treated as a Hebrew proper name; like all such names, it never appears with the definite article. Although not feminine in grammatical form, it is frequently employed with a feminine verb or adjective.[8] At times it is personified. In Genesis 49:25 and Deuteronomy 33:13 it "couches below," and in Habakkuk 3:10, "Loud roars the deep" in panic at the wrathful approach of God. Lastly, *tehom* appears in Isaiah 51:10 in a mythic context. All these facts suggest that *tehom* may once have been the name of a mythical being much like the Mesopotamian Tiamat, the female dragonesque personification of the primordial salt-water ocean, representing the aggressive forces of primitive chaos that contended against the god of creativity. Here in Genesis, *tehom* is thoroughly demythologized.

a wind from God Hebrew *ruaḥ* means "wind, breath, spirit." "Wind" is the most popular rendering of the word in ancient and medieval Jewish sources.[9] As a physical phenomenon, wind conforms to the general picture of primal chaos evoked by this verse, except that, unlike darkness and water, it is not mentioned again in the Creation story. One possible explanation may be that wind reappears as the agent by means of which the water is separated—that is, blown back—as in Genesis 8:1 at the conclusion of the Flood and in Exodus 14:21 at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Wind often functions as a divine agent in the Bible. Another interpretation takes *ruaḥ* in the sense of God's creative, life-giving, sustaining energy. Still a third possibility lies in its use as a term heralding the arrival of God, expressing His immanence, or symbolizing His presence. The last two explanations connect the phrase with the following verse, thus alerting us to an imminent, dramatic development: God is about to transform the inert, disorganized matter, to affect it by His presence, to animate it with His spirit.

sweeping The Hebrew stem *r-ḥ-f* appears otherwise in Deuteronomy 32:11, where it describes an eagle hovering over its young, a meaning it also possesses in Ugaritic;[10] but in Jeremiah

[3]God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. [4]God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. [5]God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר: 4 וַיַּרְא
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין
הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: 5 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים ׀ לָאוֹר יוֹם
וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לָיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד:

23:9 it refers to bones trembling or shaking. The basic idea of the stem is vibration, movement. Hitherto all is static, lifeless, immobile. Motion, which is the essential element in change, originates with God's dynamic presence.

water This is either the cosmic ocean believed by the ancients to surround the earth or the same water referred to in verses 6, 7, 9, and 10, namely, the water covering the solid mass of earth. It is doubtful that the two were really differentiated in the Hebrew mind.

THE FIRST GROUP (vv. 3–13)

DAY ONE

3. God said The divine word shatters the primal cosmic silence and signals the birth of a new cosmic order. Divine fiat is the first of the several modalities of creativity employed in this account. "God said" means "God thought" or "God willed." It signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of His creation. It implies effortlessness and absolute sovereignty over nature.

Let there be The directive *yehi,* found again in verses 6 and 14, is reserved for the creation of celestial phenomena. Its usage here may be an allusion to the divine personal name YHVH.

light The first creation by God's utterance is fittingly that which serves in the Bible as a symbol of life, joy, justice, and deliverance.[11] The notion of light independent of the sun appears again in Isaiah 30:26 and Job 38:19–20. Most likely it derives from the simple observations that the sky is illuminated even on cloudy days when the sun is obscured and that brightness precedes the rising of the sun.

The source of this supernal, nonsolar light of creation became a subject of rabbinic and mystical speculation. Genesis Rabba 3:4 expresses the view that this light is the effulgent splendor of the Divine Presence. Psalms 104:2, with its theme of creation, describes God as "wrapped in a robe of light."

and there was light God's commanding utterance possesses the inherent power of self-realization and is unchallengeable. The sevenfold repetition of the execution formula, "and there was," emphasizes the distinction between the tension, resistance, and strife that are characteristic of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies and the fullness of divine power that we find here.

4. God saw Not visual examination but perception. The formula of divine approbation, "God saw that [it] was good," affirms the consummate perfection of God's creation, an idea that has important consequences for the religion of Israel. Reality is imbued with God's goodness. The pagan notion of inherent, primordial evil is banished. Henceforth, evil is to be apprehended on the moral and not the mythological plane.

God separated Separation, or rather differentiation, is the second modality of creation. Light, like darkness, is viewed as a discrete entity, a notion made explicit in Isaiah 45:7 and Job 38:19.

5. God called According to the conceptions of the ancient Near East, possessing no name was equivalent to nonexistence. An Egyptian text describes precreation as the time "when no name of anything had yet been named," and *Enuma Elish* similarly designates primeval chaos as the period "when on high the heaven had not [yet] been named, and below the firm ground had not [yet] been given a name." Name-giving was thus associated with creation and, by extension, with domination, for the one who gives a name has power over the object. In the present narrative, day and night,

6God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." 7God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. 8God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

9God said, "Let the water below the sky be gathered into

פ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם
וִיהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לָמָיִם: 7 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
הָרָקִיעַ וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ
וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ וַיְהִי־כֵן: 8 וַיִּקְרָא
אֱלֹהִים לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמָיִם וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם
שֵׁנִי: פ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקָּווּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת

the sky, and the earth and sea are all named by God.[12] This is another way of expressing His absolute sovereignty over time and space, the latter in both its celestial and terrestrial dimensions. It should be noted that in Genesis name-giving finalizes the creative act but does not initiate it or cause it to come about.

evening . . . morning Hebrew *'erev* and *boker* mean, strictly speaking, the "sunset" and the "break of dawn," terms inappropriate before the creation of the sun on the fourth day. Here the two words, respectively, signify the end of the period of light, when divine creativity was suspended, and the renewal of light, when the creative process was resumed.

As Rashbam noted, the day is here seen to begin with the dawn. The same idea dictates the order of words in the oft used phrase "day and night,"[13] and it underlies the regulations of Leviticus 7:15 and 22:30, which mark off the morning following the bringing of certain sacrifices as the time limit by which they may be eaten. This accords with the Egyptian practice of reckoning the day from one morning to the next. On the other hand, the Mesopotamian concept of the day as beginning at eventide also has its counterpart in the Bible in the phrase "night and day" and in the observance of the Day of Atonement "from evening to evening," as laid down in Leviticus 23:32. This is the system that governs the Jewish religious calendar, by which the Sabbath and festivals commence at sunset and terminate at the start of the following night.

a first day Hebrew *'eḥad* functions both as a cardinal number ("one") and an ordinal number ("first") in many texts.[14]

DAY TWO

6. an expanse The Hebrew noun *rakia'* is unparalleled in cognate languages. The verbal form is often used for hammering out metal or flattening out earth,[15] which suggests a basic meaning of "extending." It is unclear whether the vault of heaven was here viewed as a gigantic sheet of metal or as a solid layer of congealed ice. The latter interpretation might be inferred from Ezekiel 1:22, which is how Josephus understood it as well.

water from water The purpose of the expanse is to create a void that separates what was taken to be the source of rain above from the water on earth.

7. God made This verb *'-s-h,* used again in verses 16 and 25, simply means that the divine intention became a reality. It does not represent a tradition of creation by deed as opposed to word. This is clear from a passage like Psalms 33:6, which features God's creative word and deed with no perceptible difference between them: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made (Heb. *na'asu*) / by the breath of His mouth, all their host." In the same way, several texts indiscriminately interchange "create" *(b-r-')* and "make" *('-s-h),* with God as the actor.[16]

and it was so Henceforth this is the standard formula for expressing the execution of the divine command. It was only the brevity of God's initial utterance in verse 3 that permitted repetition of its content without stylistic clumsiness. Ibn Janaḥ observed that the formula should follow verse 6 by analogy with verses 24–25. In fact, each occurrence immediately follows the divine speech, which is how it appears in the Septuagint version of the text. The formula *ki tov,* "that it was good," is omitted because rain has no value unless there is dry land to be fructified; the creative acts relating to water are not completed until the third day, the account of which appropriately records the formula twice.

one area, that the dry land may appear." And it was so. 10God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. 11And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. 12The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; 15and they shall serve as

הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד וְתֵרָאֶה הַיַּבָּשָׁה וַיְהִי־כֵן׃
10 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים׀ לַיַּבָּשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם
קָרָא יַמִּים וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֱלֹהִים תַּדְשֵׁא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע
עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ־בוֹ עַל־
הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃ 12 וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב
מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה־פְּרִי אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ־בוֹ
לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב׃ 13 וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־
בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי׃ פ שני 14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם
וּבֵין הַלָּיְלָה וְהָיוּ לְאֹתֹת וּלְמוֹעֲדִים וּלְיָמִים
וְשָׁנִים׃ 15 וְהָיוּ לִמְאוֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהָאִיר

DAY THREE

9. The two acts of this day are interconnected, the first being the prerequisite of the second.

below the sky That is, the terrestrial waters.

the dry land The terrain now visible to man.

11. ***Let the earth sprout*** This creative act constitutes an exception to the norm that God's word directly effectuates the desired product. Here the earth is depicted as the mediating element, implying that God endows it with generative powers that He now activates by His utterance. The significance of this singularity is that the sources of power in what we call nature, which were personified and deified in the ancient world, are now emptied of sanctity. The productive forces of nature exist only by the will of one sovereign Creator and are not independent spiritual entities. There is no room in such a concept for the fertility cults that were features of ancient Near Eastern religions.

vegetation Hebrew *deshe'* is the generic term, which is subdivided into plants and fruit trees. A similar botanical classification is found in Leviticus 27:30. The function of these productions is revealed in verses 29–30.

seed-bearing That is, endowed with the capacity for self-replication.

of every kind That is, the various species that collectively make up the genus called *deshe'*. That this is the meaning of Hebrew *le-mino* is clear from several texts.[17]

THE SECOND GROUP (vv. 14–31)

DAY FOUR

14. ***Let there be lights*** This pronouncement corresponds to verse 3, "Let there be light." The emergence of vegetation prior to the existence of the sun, the studied anonymity of these luminaries, and the unusually detailed description have the common purpose of emphasizing that sun, moon, and stars are not divinities, as they were universally thought to be; rather, they are simply the creations of God, who assigned them the function of regulating the life rhythms of the universe. With regard to the particulars, apart from the alternating cycle of day and night, there is some uncertainty as to interpretation.

signs for the set times Hebrew *'otot* and *mo'adim* are here treated as hendiadys, a single thought expressed by two words. The "set times" are then specified as "the days and the years." It is also possible to take *'otot* as the general term meaning "time determinant," a gauge by which "fixed times" *(mo'adim)* such as new moons, festivals, and the like are determined, as well as the days and the years.

lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth." And it was so. 16God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. 17And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, 18to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. 19And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 21God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. 22God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי־כֵן׃ 16 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי
הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת־הַמָּאוֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת
הַיּוֹם וְאֶת־הַמָּאוֹר הַקָּטֹן לְמֶמְשֶׁלֶת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֵת
הַכּוֹכָבִים׃ 17 וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם
לְהָאִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 18 וְלִמְשֹׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה
וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־
טוֹב׃ 19 וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי׃ פ
20 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל־הָאָרֶץ עַל־פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמָיִם׃
21 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים וְאֵת
כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת אֲשֶׁר שָׁרְצוּ הַמַּיִם
לְמִינֵהֶם וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים
כִּי־טוֹב׃ 22 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ
וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ׃
23 וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם חֲמִישִׁי׃ פ

חסר י׳ בתראה v. 21.

15. to shine upon earth To focus their light downward, not upward upon heaven.[18]

16. Here the general term "luminaries" is more precisely defined. Significantly, no particular role is assigned to the stars, which are not further discussed. This silence constitutes a tacit repudiation of astrology. Jeremiah 10:2 reads: "Thus said the LORD: / Do not learn to go the way of the nations, / And do not be dismayed by portents in the sky; / Let the nations be dismayed by them!"

DAY FIVE

The process of Creation is now sufficiently advanced to sustain life, which is classified according to its habitat: creatures that colonize the waters and creatures that populate the sky.

20. Let the waters bring forth swarms Water does not here possess inherent, independent generative powers as it does in the pagan mythologies. It produces marine life only in response to the divine command.

living creatures Hebrew *nefesh ḥayyah* means literally "animate life," that which embodies the breath of life. It is distinct from plant life, which was not considered to be "living." It is unclear why the formula "and it was so" is omitted here. It appears in the Septuagint version.

across the expanse of the sky Literally, "over the face of," that is, from the viewpoint of an earth observer looking upward.

21. God created This is the first use of *bara'* after verse 1. Here it signifies that a new stage has been reached with the emergence of animate beings.

the great sea monsters This specification expresses an unspoken antipagan polemic. Hebrew *tannin* appears in Canaanite myths from Ugarit, together with Leviathan, as the name of a primeval dragon-god who assisted Yam (Sea) in an elemental battle against Baal, the god of fertility. Fragments of this myth, in a transformed Israelite version, surface in several biblical poetic texts in which the forces of evil in this world are figuratively identified with Tannin (Dragon), the embodiment of the chaos that the Lord vanquished in primeval time.[19] By emphasizing that "God created the great sea monsters" late in the cosmogonic process, the narrative at once strips them of divinity.

22. God blessed them Animate creation receives the gift of fertility. Plant life was not so blessed, both because it was thought to have been initially equipped with the capacity for self-repro-

[24]God said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind." And it was so. [25]God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. [26]And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth." [27]And God created man in His image, in the image

שלישי 24 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וָרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיְתוֹ־אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ
וַיְהִי־כֵן: 25 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ
וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְאֵת כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה
לְמִינֵהוּ וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב: 26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ בִדְגַת הַיָּם
וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־
הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ: 27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־

duction by nonsexual means and because it is later to be cursed. The procreation of animate creatures, however, requires individual sexual activity, mating. This capacity for sexual reproduction is regarded as a divine blessing.

DAY SIX

The drama of Creation is moving toward its final act, the production of animate beings whose natural habitat is dry land. The unusual expansiveness of this section, the enhanced formula of approbation, and the exceptional use of the definite article with the day number indicate that the narrative is reaching its climax.

The section is divided into two parts. Verses 24–25 describe the emergence of the animal kingdom, which is classified according to three categories: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts. The drama then culminates in verses 26–30 with the creation of the human being.

24. Let the earth bring forth It is uncertain whether the production of animals from earth is a reflex of the concept of "mother earth" or is simply a figurative way of expressing the natural environment of these creatures.

25. The execution of the divine utterance reverses the order of verse 24 so as to juxtapose *'adamah,* "earth," to *'adam,* "human being," in the next verse.

creeping things A general term for creatures whose bodies appear to move close to the ground. Here it seems to encompass reptiles, creeping insects, and very small animals.

The absence of a blessing upon these categories of animals is striking. It may be that, whereas the natural habitat of fish and fowl allows for their proliferation without encroaching adversely upon man's environment, the proliferation of animals, especially the wild variety, constitutes a menace. This idea is actually expressed in Exodus 23:29 and Leviticus 26:22.

26. The second section of the sixth day culminates the creative process. A human being is the pinnacle of Creation. This unique status is communicated in a variety of ways, not least by the simple fact that humankind is last in a manifestly ascending, gradational order. The creation of human life is an exception to the rule of creation by divine fiat, as signaled by the replacement of the simple impersonal Hebrew command (the jussive) with a personal, strongly expressed resolve (the cohortative). The divine intent and purpose are solemnly declared in advance, and the stereotyped formula "and it was so" gives way to a thrice-repeated avowal that God created the man, using the significant verb *b-r-'*. Human beings are to enjoy a unique relationship to God, who communicates with them alone and who shares with them the custody and administration of the world.

At the same time, the pairing of the creation of man in this verse with that of land animals, and their sharing in common a vegetarian diet, focuses attention on the dual nature of humankind, the creatureliness and earthiness as well as the Godlike qualities.

The mysterious duality of man—the awesome power at his command and the starkness of his utter insignificance as compared with God—is the subject of the psalmist who, basing himself on the present narrative, exclaims: "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, / the moon and stars that You set in place, / what is man that You have been mindful of him, / mortal man that You have taken note of him, / that You have made him little less than divine, / and adorned him with

glory and majesty; / You have made him master over Your handiwork, / laying the world at his feet" (Pss. 8:4–7).

Let us make The extraordinary use of the first person plural evokes the image of a heavenly court in which God is surrounded by His angelic host.[20] Such a celestial scene is depicted in several biblical passages. This is the Israelite version of the polytheistic assemblies of the pantheon—monotheized and depaganized. It is noteworthy that this plural form of divine address is employed in Genesis on two other occasions, both involving the fate of humanity: in 3:22, in connection with the expulsion from Eden; and in 11:7, in reference to the dispersal of the human race after the building of the Tower of Babel.

man Hebrew *'adam* is a generic term for humankind; it never appears in Hebrew in the feminine or plural. In the first five chapters of Genesis it is only rarely a proper name, Adam. The term encompasses both man and woman, as shown in verses 27–28 and 5:1–2, where it is construed with plural verbs and terminations.[21]

in our image, after our likeness This unique combination of expressions, virtually identical in meaning, emphasizes the incomparable nature of human beings and their special relationship to God. The full import of these terms can be grasped only within the broader context of biblical literature and against the background of ancient Near Eastern analogues.

The continuation of verse 26 establishes an evident connection between resemblance to God and sovereignty over the earth's resources, though it is not made clear whether man has power over nature as a result of his being like God or whether that power constitutes the very essence of the similarity. A parallel passage in 9:6–7 tells of God's renewed blessing on the human race after the Flood and declares murder to be the consummate crime precisely because "in His image did God make man." In other words, the resemblance of man to God bespeaks the infinite worth of a human being and affirms the inviolability of the human person. The killing of any other creature, even wantonly, is not murder. Only a human being may be murdered. It would seem, then, that the phrase "in the image of God" conveys something about the nature of the human being as opposed to the animal kingdom; it also asserts human dominance over nature. But it is even more than this.

The words used here to convey these ideas can be better understood in the light of a phenomenon registered in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, whereby the ruling monarch is described as "the image" or "the likeness" of a god. In Mesopotamia we find the following salutations: "The father of my lord the king is the very image of Bel *(ṣalam bel)* and the king, my lord, is the very image of Bel"; "The king, lord of the lands, is the image of Shamash"; "O king of the inhabited world, you are the image of Marduk." In Egypt the same concept is expressed through the name Tutankhamen *(Tut-ankh-amun)*, which means "the living image of (the god) Amun," and in the designation of Thutmose IV as "the likeness of Re."

Without doubt, the terminology employed in Genesis 2:26 is derived from regal vocabulary, which serves to elevate the king above the ordinary run of men. In the Bible this idea has become democratized.[22] All human beings are created "in the image of God"; each person bears the stamp of royalty. This was patently understood by the author of Psalm 8, cited above. His description of man in royal terms is his interpretation of the concept of the "image of God" introduced in verse 26. It should be further pointed out that in Assyrian royal steles, the gods are generally depicted by their symbols: Ashshur by the winged disk, Shamash by the sun disk, and so forth. These depictions are called: "the image *(ṣalam)* of the great gods." In light of this, the characterization of man as "in the image of God" furnishes the added dimension of his being the symbol of God's presence on earth. While he is not divine, his very existence bears witness to the activity of God in the life of the world. This awareness inevitably entails an awesome responsibility and imposes a code of living that conforms with the consciousness of that fact.

It should be added that the pairing of the terms *tselem* and *demut,* "image" and "likeness," is paralleled in a ninth-century B.C.E. Assyrian-Aramaic bilingual inscription on a statue at Tell Fekheriyeh in Syria. The two terms are used interchangeably and indiscriminately and obviously cannot be used as criteria for source differentiation.

They shall rule The verbs used here and in verse 28 express the coercive power of the monarch, consonant with the explanation just given for "the image of God." This power, however, cannot include the license to exploit nature banefully, for the following reasons: the human race is

of God He created him; male and female He created them. [28]God blessed them and God said to them, "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."

[29]God said, "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. [30]And to all the animals

הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר
וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם׃ 28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁהָ
וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה
הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃ 29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה
נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֹרֵעַ זֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי
כָל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ פְרִי־עֵץ זֹרֵעַ
זָרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָה׃ 30 וּלְכָל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ

not inherently sovereign, but enjoys its dominion solely by the grace of God. Furthermore, the model of kingship here presupposed is Israelite, according to which, the monarch does not possess unrestrained power and authority; the limits of his rule are carefully defined and circumscribed by divine law, so that kingship is to be exercised with responsibility and is subject to accountability. Moreover, man, the sovereign of nature, is conceived at this stage to be functioning within the context of a "very good" world in which the interrelationships of organisms with their environment and with each other are entirely harmonious and mutually beneficial, an idyllic situation that is clearly illustrated in Isaiah's vision of the ideal future king (Isa. 11:1–9). Thus, despite the power given him, man still requires special divine sanction to partake of the earth's vegetation, and although he "rules" the animal world, he is not here permitted to eat flesh (vv. 29–30; cf. 9:3–4).

There is one other aspect to the divine charge to man. Contrary to the common beliefs of the ancient world that the forces of nature are divinities that may hold the human race in thralldom, our text declares man to be a free agent who has the God-given power to control nature.

27. ***male and female He created them*** No such sexual differentiation is noted in regard to animals. Human sexuality is of a wholly different order from that of the beast. The next verse shows it to be a blessed gift of God woven into the fabric of life. As such, it cannot of itself be other than wholesome. By the same token, its abuse is treated in the Bible with particular severity. Its proper regulation is subsumed under the category of the holy, whereas sexual perversion is viewed with abhorrence as an affront to human dignity and as a desecration of the divine image in man.

The definition of the human community contained in this verse is solemnly repeated in 5:1–2, an indication of its seminal importance. Both sexes are created on the sixth day by the hand of the one God; both are made "in His image" on a level of absolute equality before Him. Thus the concept of humanity needs both male and female for its proper articulation.

It is noteworthy that the recurrent formula "of every kind," hitherto encountered with the emergence of every living thing, is here omitted. There is only one human species. The notion of all humankind deriving from one common ancestry directly leads to the recognition of the unity of the human race, notwithstanding the infinite diversity of human culture. The sages of the Mishnah, in Sanhedrin 4:5, observed that mankind was created as a single unit in order to inculcate the idea that the destruction of a single life is tantamount to the destruction of the entire world and, conversely, the preservation of a single life is the preservation of the entire world. The sages further understood that God, in order to promote social harmony, intended that no person have claim to unique ancestry as a pretext for asserting superiority over others.

28. ***God blessed them and God said to them*** The difference between the formulation here and God's blessing to the fish and fowl in verse 22 is subtle and meaningful. Here God directly addresses man and woman. The transcendent God of Creation transforms Himself into the immanent God, the personal God, who enters into unmediated communion with human beings.

Be fertile and increase Some commentators have understood this blessing of fertility to encompass a religious duty of procreation as well.[23] However, only in its repetition in 9:7, following the depopulation of the earth by the Flood, is it clearly prescriptive.[24]

30. God makes provision for the sustenance of man and beast—a reminder that man is still a creature totally dependent on the benevolence of God. The narrative presupposes a pristine state of

on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food." And it was so. 31And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

וּלְכָל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכֹל רוֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־
בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת־כָּל־יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאָכְלָה וַיְהִי־כֵן׃
31 וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב
מְאֹד וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי׃ פ

2 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. 2On the seventh day God finished the work that He

ב וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם׃ 2 וַיְכַל
אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

vegetarianism. Isaiah's vision of the ideal future in 11:7 and 65:25 sees the carnivorous animals becoming herbivorous.

very good A verdict on the totality of Creation, now completed.

the sixth day The exceptional definite article here and with the seventh day points to the special character of these days within the scheme of Creation.

CHAPTER 2 THE SEVENTH DAY (vv. 1–3)

The ascending order of Creation, and the "six-plus-one" literary pattern that determines the presentation of the narrative, dictates that the seventh day be the momentous climax. Man is indeed the pinnacle of Creation, but central to the cosmogonic drama is the work of God, the solo performer. The account of Creation opened with a statement about God; it will now close with a statement about God. The seventh day is the Lord's Day, through which all the creativity of the preceding days achieves fulfillment. The threefold repetition of the day number indicates its paramount importance within the cosmic whole. The seventh day is in polar contrast to the other six days, which are filled with creative activity. Its distinctive character is the desistance from labor and its infusion with blessing and sanctity. This renders unnecessary the routine approbation formula. An integral part of the divinely ordained cosmic order, it cannot be abrogated by man. Its blessed and sacred character is a cosmic reality entirely independent of human effort.

The human institution of the Sabbath does not appear in the narrative. Indeed, the Hebrew noun ***shabbat*** is absent, and we have only the verbal forms of the root. There are several possible reasons for the omission. First, the expression "the seventh day" is required by the conventional, sequential style of the creation narrative in which numbered day follows numbered day in an ascending series. Further, the term ***shabbat*** connotes a fixed institution recurring with cyclic regularity. This would be inappropriate to the present context and, in general, inapplicable to God. Finally, as we read in Exodus 31:13, 16, and 17, the Sabbath is a distinctively Israelite ordinance, a token of the eternal covenant between God and Israel. Its enactment would be out of place before the arrival of Israel on the scene of history.

Nevertheless, there cannot be any doubt that the text provides the unspoken foundation for the future institution of the Sabbath. Not only is the vocabulary of the present passage interwoven with other Pentateuchal references to the Sabbath,[1] but the connection with Creation is made explicit in the first version of the Ten Commandments, given in Exodus 20:8–11. "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day . . . and hallowed it." The biblical institution of the weekly Sabbath is unparalleled in the ancient world. In fact, the concept of a seven-day week is unique to Israel, as is also, so far, the seven-day cosmogonic tradition. Both these phenomena are extraordinary in light of the widespread use of a seven-day unit of time, both as a literary convention and as an aspect of cultic observance in the ancient Near East. The wonderment is compounded by additional data. The other major units of time—day, month, and year—are uniformly based on the phases of the moon and the

had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. 3And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. 4Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה׃
3 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ כִּי
בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים
לַעֲשׂוֹת׃ פ רביעי [שני לספרדים]

movement of the sun, and the calendars of the ancient world are rooted in the seasonal manifestations of nature. Remarkably, the Israelite week has no such linkage and is entirely independent of the movement of celestial bodies. The Sabbath thus underlines the fundamental idea of Israelite monotheism: that God is wholly outside of nature.

It is still a moot point whether the noun *shabbat* is derived from the verb *sh-b-t,* "to cease," or vice versa. Attempts have been made to connect it with the Babylonian-Assyrian calendrical term ***shapattu,*** which is described as ***ūm nūḥ libbi,*** "the day of the quieting of the heart (of the god)," that is, the day when he is appeased. This day, however, is defined as the fifteenth of the month, the day of the full moon. It is not certain that every full moon was called *shapattu,* nor is it clear how the term would have been transferred to the Israelite cyclical seventh day freed of any lunar association. The etymology and exact meaning of that term still remain problematical. In fact, the likelihood exists that ***shapattu*** is itself a loan word in Akkadian. In addition, there is no evidence that the day entailed a cessation from labor. Whatever its etymology, the biblical Sabbath as an institution is unparalleled in the ancient world.

1. ***all their array*** Hebrew *tsava',* in the sense used here, is strictly speaking applicable only to "heaven"; but, by the figure of speech known as zeugma, it is extended to apply to the "earth" as well.[2]

2. ***On the seventh day*** This phrase caused embarrassment to ancient translators and commentators,[3] for it seems to be out of harmony with the context, implying some divine activity also on this day. However, the preposition can easily mean "by," and the verb can be taken as a pluperfect, "had finished," or as a declarative, "pronounced finished," just as "he declared it holy" in verse 3.

He ceased This is the primary meaning of *sh-b-t;* the idea of resting is secondary.[4]

3. ***God blessed . . . declared it holy*** Unlike the blessings of verses 22 and 28, which are verbal, specific, material, and relate to living creatures, this blessing is undefined and pertains to time itself. The day becomes imbued with an extraordinary vital power that communicates itself in a beneficial way. That is why the routine day-formula is here omitted. God, through His creativity, has already established His sovereignty over space; the idea here is that He is sovereign over time as well. Through his weekly suspension of normal human activity, man imitates the divine pattern and reactualizes the original sacred time of God, thereby recovering the sacred dimension of existence. Paradoxically, he also thereby rediscovers his own very human dimension, his earthliness, for the Sabbath delimits man's autonomy, suspends for a while his creative freedom, and declares that on that one day each week nature is inviolable.

holy This first use of the key biblical concept of holiness relates to time. This is in striking contrast to the Babylonian cosmology, which culminates in the erection of a temple to Marduk by the gods, thereby asserting the sanctification of space.

all the work of creation that He had done This smooth English conceals a difficulty in the Hebrew, which literally translates "all His work that God created to do." Ibn Ezra and Radak understood the final verb as connoting "[for man] to [continue to] do [thenceforth]." Ibn Janaḥ and Ramban connected the final verb with the preceding "ceased," thereby taking it to mean: "He ceased to perform all His creative work."[5]

When the LORD God made earth and heaven—[5]when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field

4 אֵ֚לֶּה תּוֹלְד֣וֹת הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וְהָאָ֖רֶץ בְּהִבָּרְאָ֑ם* בְּי֗וֹם
עֲשׂ֛וֹת יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהִ֖ים אֶ֥רֶץ וְשָׁמָֽיִם׃ 5 וְכֹ֣ל׀ שִׂ֣יחַ

ה׳ זעירא v. 4.

Eden and the Expulsion: The Human Condition (2:4–3:24)

While God the Creator was the primary subject of the previous chapter, the focus of attention now shifts to humankind. This change in perspective and emphasis is signaled by the inversion of the regular sequence "heaven and earth" in the opening sentence. The almost unique expression "earth and heaven" suggests pride of place for terrestrial affairs. Information about the physical world is offered only to provide essential background for the understanding of the narrative, which seeks to explain the nature of man and the human condition.

Chapter 2 is not another creation story. As such it would be singularly incomplete. In fact, it presupposes a knowledge of much of the preceding account of Creation. Many of the leading ideas in the earlier account are here reiterated, though the mode of presentation is different. Thus, in both narratives God is the sovereign Creator, and the world is the purposeful product of His will. To human beings, the crown of His Creation, God grants mastery over the animal kingdom. In chapter 1, this idea is formulated explicitly; in the present section it is inferred from the power of naming invested in man. Both accounts view man as a social creature. Both project the concept of a common ancestry for all humanity. The notion that the human race was originally vegetarian is implied in 2:16–17, as in 1:29. Finally, one of the most serious questions to which the present narrative addresses itself—the origin of evil—would be unintelligible without the fundamental postulate of the preceding cosmology, repeated there seven times: the essential goodness of the divine creation.

The startling contrast between this vision of God's ideal world and the world of human experience requires explanation. How did the pristine harmony between God, man, and nature come to be disturbed? How are we to explain the harsh, hostile workings of nature, the recalcitrance of the soil to man's arduous labors? If God ordered man and woman to procreate, why then does woman suffer the pangs of childbirth in fulfilling God's will? If God created the human body, why does nudity in the presence of others instinctively evoke embarrassment? In short, how is the existence of evil to be accounted for?

The biblical answer to this fundamental question, diametrically opposed to prevalent pagan conceptions, is that there is no inherent, primordial evil at work in the world. The source of evil is not metaphysical but moral. Evil is not transhistorical but humanly wrought. Human beings possess free will, but free will is beneficial only insofar as its exercise is in accordance with divine will. Free will and the need for restraint on the liberties of action inevitably generate temptation and the agony of choosing, which only man's self-mastery can resolve satisfactorily. The ensuing narrative demonstrates that abuse of the power of choice makes disaster inescapable.

THE CREATION OF MAN (vv. 4–7)

Whereas the previous chapter simply recorded without detail the creation of humankind, male and female, the creations of man and woman are now described separately.

*4. **Such is the story*** The *'elleh toledot* formula is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Book of Genesis.[6] In each of its other ten occurrences, it introduces what follows, invariably in close connection with the name of a person already mentioned in the narrative. Its use indicates that a new and significant development is at hand. Deriving from the verb *y-l-d,* "to give birth," the noun form would mean "begettings" or "generations," and in most instances it precedes genealogies that are sometimes interspersed with narrative material. In 25:19 and 37:2, where no family tree follows but only stories of subsequent events, the formula is used figuratively for "a record of events." This is the meaning it bears in the present passage. In this sense, the entire verse may be understood as a unity

had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, 6but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—7the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם
יִצְמָח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ
וְאָדָם אַיִן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה׃ 6 וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן־
הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאֲדָמָה׃ 7 וַיִּיצֶר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח

referring to what follows. Further support for this interpretation lies in its parallel structure, not to mention its poetic chiasm, "heaven and earth," "earth and heaven."[7]

the LORD God This combination of the personal divine name YHVH with the general term *'elohim* appears twenty times in the present literary unit, but only once again in the Torah, in Exodus 9:30. It is exceedingly rare in the rest of the Bible. The repeated use here may be to establish that the absolutely transcendent God of Creation *('elohim)* is the same immanent, personal God (YHVH) who shows concern for the needs of human beings. Admittedly, however, the remarkable concentration of the combination of these divine names in this narrative and their virtual absence hereafter have not been satisfactorily explained.

5. This passage is not a cosmogonic account but simply a description of the initial, barren state of the earth after the formation of dry land, which was briefly recorded in 1:9–10. The existence of both celestial and subterranean stores of water are presupposed here. The earth itself is still a desert. It lacks rain, verdure, and humankind.

rain Rain is not conceived simply as a phenomenon of nature; it is a source of blessing to man from God.

no man to till the soil Agriculture is considered to be the original vocation of man, whose bond to the earth is an essential part of his being.

6. ***a flow*** The idea seems to be that the primordial, subterranean waters would rise to the surface to moisten the arid earth,[8] thereby making it receptive to the growth and survival of vegetation and providing the raw material with the proper consistency for being molded into man.

7. Nothing was said in 1:27 of the substance from which man was created. Here it is given as "dust," a word that can be used synonymously with "clay."[9] The verb "formed" (Heb. *va-yitser)* is frequently used of the action of a potter *(yotser),* so that man's creation is portrayed in terms of God molding the clayey soil into shape and then animating it. This image is widespread in the ancient world. In Egyptian art the god Khnum is shown before a potter's wheel busily fashioning man, and in the Wisdom of Amen-em-opert (chap. 35), it is stated that "man is clay and straw, and the god is his builder." Mesopotamian texts, in particular, repeatedly feature this notion. The same is found in the Greek myth about Prometheus, who created a man, and about Hephaestus, who molded the archetypal woman Pandora from earth.

The poetic imagery evoked by the Genesis text is graphically explicit in the Book of Job: "Consider that You fashioned me like clay" (10:9); "You and I are the same before God; / I too was nipped from clay" (33:6). The human body is a "house of clay," and human beings are described as "those who dwell in houses of clay, / Whose origin is dust" (4:19).

Here in Genesis, the image simultaneously expresses both the glory and the insignificance of man. Man occupies a special place in the hierarchy of Creation and enjoys a unique relationship with God by virtue of his being the work of God's own hands and being directly animated by God's own breath. At the same time, he is but dust taken from the earth, mere clay in the hands of the divine Potter, who exercises absolute mastery over His Creation.

man . . . earth Hebrew *'adam . . . 'adamah.* This word play, not given in chapter 1, once more expresses man's essential bond to the earth. An oft-cited equivalent is "homo . . . humus."

the breath of life The uniqueness of the Hebrew phrase *nishmat ḥayyim* matches the singular nature of the human body, which, unlike the creatures of the animal world, is directly inspirited by God Himself.[10]

בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה׃
8 וַיִּטַּע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גַּן־בְּעֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם וַיָּשֶׂם שָׁם
אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר׃ 9 וַיַּצְמַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־
הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נֶחְמָד לְמַרְאֶה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל וְעֵץ

[8]The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. [9]And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life

THE GARDEN OF EDEN (vv. 8–17)

Man's first domicile is a garden planted by God. The narrative is very sparing of detail about its nature and function. Other biblical references indicate that a more expansive, popular story about man's first home once circulated widely in Israel. A phrase like "the garden of the Lord," as well as the figurative use of "Eden" or "Garden of Eden" as symbols of luscious vegetation, suggests a background not given here.[11] Ezekiel 28:13; 31 testify to the one-time existence of a tale about a wondrous "garden of God," rich in a large variety of precious stones, beautifully wrought gold, and an assortment of trees.

Ancient Near Eastern literature provides no parallel to our Eden narrative as a whole, but there are some suggestions of certain aspects of the biblical Eden. The Sumerian myth about Enki and Ninhursag tells of an idyllic island of Dilmun, now almost certainly identified with the modern island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf. It is a "pure," "clean," and "bright" land in which all nature is at peace, where beasts of prey and tame cattle live together in mutual amity. Sickness and old age are unknown. The Gilgamesh Epic likewise knows of a garden of jewels. It is significant that our Genesis account omits all mythological details, does not even employ the phrase "garden of God," and places gold and jewels in a natural setting.

8. a garden The Greek version, the Septuagint, translated this word by *parádeisos,* a term that originated in the Old Persian *pairi-daeza,* meaning "an enclosed park, a pleasure ground." The translation was taken over by the Vulgate version and so passed from Latin into other European languages.[12] Because Hebrew *'eden* was interpreted to mean "pleasure," "paradise" took on an exclusively religious connotation as the place of reward for the righteous after death. Such a meaning for *'eden* is not found in the Hebrew Bible.

in Eden Clearly, Eden designates a wider geographical location of which the garden was a part.[13] The name has been derived from the Sumerian *edinu,* "a plain," but an Aramaic-Akkadian bilingual inscription suggests that the real meaning is "luxuriance."

in the east Hebrew *mi-kedem,* here interpreted spatially, can also have a temporal meaning, "in primeval times," and was so rendered in some ancient versions and exegesis.[14] This would preclude the possibility that the garden was planted after the creation of man.

9. The verse tells nothing about the greening of the earth in general, only about the garden, which is pictured as a tree park. This accords with the description of the "garden of God" in Ezekiel 31:8–9. The idea is that man's food was ever ready at hand. The attractive, nutritious, and delectable qualities of the fruit are stressed with the next episode in mind. The human couple will not be able to plead deprivation as the excuse for eating the forbidden fruit.

The two special trees are brought to our attention in a deliberately casual manner; their significance will become obvious later on. The "tree of life" is mentioned first, the "tree of knowledge" second. Only the first is given prominence in the garden, while the second gives the appearance of being an appendage to the verse. Yet as the narrative unfolds, the sequence is reversed. Only the "tree of knowledge" comes into focus, only its fruit is prohibited, only it is mentioned in the subsequent dialogues.

This shift in emphasis signals another breach with the central pagan theme of man's quest for immortality, as illustrated, for example, in the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic and the Story of Adapa.[15] It is not the mythical pursuit of eternal life but the relationship between God and man that is the primary concern here.

the tree of life It is clear from 3:22 that the fruit of this tree was understood to bestow immortality upon the eater.[16] What is uncertain is whether a single bite was thought to suffice or whether steady ingestion was needed to sustain a process of continuous rejuvenation. Either way, the text presupposes a belief that man, created from perishable matter, was mortal from the outset but

in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

[10]A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. [11]The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. ([12]The gold of that land is

הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגָּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע׃ {ס} י וְנָהָר
יֹצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת־הַגָּן וּמִשָּׁם יִפָּרֵד וְהָיָה
לְאַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁים׃ יא שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא
הַסֹּבֵב אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ הַחֲוִילָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הַזָּהָב׃

that he had within his grasp the possibility of immortality. The "tree of life" is not included in the prohibition in verse 17.

the tree of knowledge of good and bad The interpretation of this enigmatic designation, which is unparalleled anywhere outside the present narrative, hinges upon the definition of "knowledge" and the scope of "good and bad." Ibn Ezra, followed by many moderns, understood carnal knowledge to be intended since the first human experience after eating the forbidden fruit is the consciousness of nudity accompanied by shame; moreover, immediately after the expulsion from Eden it is said, "Now the man knew his wife Eve."

Against this interpretation is the fact that at this stage woman is not yet created, that sexual differentiation is made by God Himself (cf. 1:27), that the institution of marriage is looked upon in verse 25 as part of the divinely ordained order, and that, according to 3:5, 22, "knowledge of good and bad" is a divine characteristic. Thus it will not do to take "good and bad" as the human capacity for moral discernment. Aside from the difficulty of understanding why God should be opposed to this, there is the additional argument that a divine prohibition would be meaningless if man did not already possess this faculty. Indeed, from 3:3 it is clear that the woman knows the meaning of disobedience; that is, she is already alert to the difference between right and wrong, which can have no other meaning than obedience or otherwise.

It is more satisfactory, however, to understand "good and bad" as undifferentiated parts of a totality, a merism meaning "everything." True, man and woman do not become endowed with omniscience after partaking of the fruit, but the text does seem to imply that their intellectual horizons are immeasurably expanded. Passages like 2 Samuel 14:17, 20 lend support to this interpretation. It should also be noted that "good and bad," exactly in the Hebrew form used here *(tov vara')*, occurs again only in Deuteronomy 1:39: "Moreover, your little ones who you said would be carried off, your children who do not yet know good from bad . . ." There the context leaves no doubt that not to know good and bad means to be innocent, not to have attained the age of responsibility. In the present passage, then, it is best to understand "knowledge of good and bad" as the capacity to make independent judgments concerning human welfare.

THE RIVERS OF PARADISE (vv. 10–14)

The story of man is abruptly interrupted by a description of the geographical setting of the garden. This pause functions as a tension-building device, for the reader is left wondering about the role of the two special trees. The identical literary stratagem is employed in the story of Joseph, where the digression of chapter 38 heightens the reader's suspense at a critical moment in the development of the plot.

A single river "issues from Eden." Its source appears to be outside the garden, which it irrigates as it passes through. Here, as in Genesis 13:10, which reflects this same tradition, the garden is made independent of the vagaries of seasonal rainfall. Somewhere beyond the confines of the garden the single river separates into four branches that probably represent the four quarters of the inhabited world. In other words, the river of Eden also nourishes the rest of the world with its life-giving waters. While the Tigris and the Euphrates are of course well known, the other two names defy positive identification. They may stand for another great river civilization corresponding to that of the Mesopotamian plain, perhaps the Nile Valley.

11–12. Pishon is an unknown name.[17] It is said to be a meandering river associated with "the land of Havilah." If this latter name is Hebrew, it means "sandy land." There are two biblical sites identified by the name Havilah, one within the Egyptian sphere of influence, the other in Arabia. Here the place is described as a source of gold and precious materials.

good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.) 13The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. 14The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. 16And the LORD God

12 וְזֹהַב הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא טוֹב שָׁם הַבְּדֹלַח וְאֶבֶן
הַשֹּׁהַם: 13 וְשֵׁם־הַנָּהָר הַשֵּׁנִי גִּיחוֹן הוּא הַסּוֹבֵב
אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ: 14 וְשֵׁם הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי
חִדֶּקֶל הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת אַשּׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הָרְבִיעִי
הוּא פְּרָת: 15 וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם
וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ: 16 וַיְצַו יְהוָה

As far as Egypt is concerned, its primary sources of bullion and jewels were the mines of Nubia, a region south of Egypt that corresponds roughly to present-day Nilotic Sudan. In fact, the name Nubia is derived from Egyptian *nb,* meaning "gold." The term "good gold"—that is, high-grade ore—was used in Egyptian commercial transactions. It is also possible that the mention of gold in connection with the river refers not to lode or vein mining but to alluvial gold and reflects the ancient method of washing gold-bearing sands and gravel deposited by streams and rivers.

The description in verses 11–12 might also fit an Arabian location. In 10:29, Havilah is stated to be a "brother" of Ophir, which is the name of a country celebrated for its gold. It is not absolutely certain, however, that Ophir was in Arabia.

Bdellium is mentioned again only in Numbers 11:7, where it is assumed to be a well-known substance. From ancient times, opinion has been divided as to whether it was a precious stone or a much valued aromatic resin called ***bdellion*** by the Greeks and mentioned in Akkadian sources as ***budulḫu,*** which corresponds to Hebrew ***bdolaḥ.***[18] This product was an important export of Nubia.

lapis lazuli Hebrew ***shoham*** is an oft-mentioned precious stone;[19] its exact identity is uncertain. Ezekiel 28:13 lists it among the gems found in the Garden of Eden.

13. Gihon is the name of a spring in a valley outside of Jerusalem. The stem *g-y-ḥ* means "to gush forth."[20] No river of this name is otherwise known. The association with "the land of Cush" complicates the identification because in 10:6–10 Cush is a "brother" of Egypt and is also connected with South Arabia and with Mesopotamia. There also seems to be another Cush in Midian on the northeastern shore of the Gulf of Akaba.[21] Generally in the Bible, Cush refers to Nubia. If this is the case here too, then Pishon and Gihon may be terms for the Blue Nile and the White Nile. These two rivers unite at Khartoum to form the mightiest river of Africa, which finally empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

14. ***Tigris*** Hebrew *ḥiddekel* is mentioned again only in Daniel 10:4.[22]

east of Asshur Hebrew ***kidmat*** means literally "in front of," that is, eastward, from the vantage point of one facing the rising sun, which is the standard orientation in the Bible. "Asshur" may be either the city of Ashur, which lay west of the Tigris, or the larger region of Assyria, to which it gave its name. The parallel with "the land of Cush" would favor the second possibility, but the Tigris actually bisects Assyria, so that here the city itself, not otherwise mentioned in Scripture, is more likely intended.

Euphrates To an Israelite, this was the river par excellence and therefore required no topographical description.[23]

THE PROHIBITION (vv. 15–17)

15. The opening line of this section repeats the contents of verse 8. This resumptive repetition, or recapitulation after a digression, occurs again in 39:1 = 37:36 and in 43:24 = verse 17.

to till it and tend it The man is not indigenous to the garden. He is fashioned elsewhere and finds himself in it solely by the grace of God. True, his needs are easily taken care of, but his life in the garden is not to be one of indolence. He has duties to perform. It is his responsibility to nurture and conserve the pristine perfection of the garden. This he must do by the labor of his hands. Yet, no strenuous exertion is required, for nature responds easily to his efforts.

commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; [17]but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die."

[18]The LORD God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." [19]And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living

אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכֹּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אָכֹל
תֹּאכֵל: 17 וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל
מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת: 18 וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־
לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ: 19 וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה
כָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמָיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל־
הָאָדָם לִרְאוֹת מַה־יִּקְרָא־לוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָא־לוֹ
הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ: [שלישי

16–17. Just as in the Creation narrative of chapter 1, the human race is here assumed to have been originally vegetarian.

you must not eat Unrestricted freedom does not exist. Man is called upon by God to exercise restraint and self-discipline in the gratification of his appetite. This prohibition is the paradigm for the future Torah legislation relating to the dietary laws.

you shall die The threat of death would have been intelligible to the man only if he had witnessed the demise of animals and birds. Even without understanding the meaning of death, he would have inferred that disobedience incurs divine disapproval.

As noted in the Comment to verse 9, man was mortal from the beginning. Logically, therefore, the transgression should incur immediate capital punishment, not mortality as opposed to immortality. But man and woman did not die at once, and it is not stated that God rescinded the death penalty. For these reasons, "you shall die"[24] must here mean being deprived of the possibility of rejuvenation by means of the "tree of life," as existed hitherto—in other words, inevitable expulsion from the garden.

THE CREATION OF WOMAN (vv. 18–24)

Curiously, the extant literature of the ancient Near East has preserved no other account of the creation of primordial woman. The present narrative is therefore unique. Moreover, whereas the creation of man is told briefly, in a single verse, the creation of woman is described in six verses. This detail is extraordinary in light of the generally nondescriptive character of the biblical narrative and as such is indicative of the importance accorded this event. With the appearance of woman, Creation is complete.

18. ***It is not good*** The emphatic negative contrasts with the verdict of 1:31 that everything was "very good," this after the creation of male and female. The idea here is that man is recognized to be a social being. Celibacy is undesirable. Genesis Rabba 17:2 expresses this point as follows: "Whoever has no wife exists without goodness, without a helpmate, without joy, without blessing, without atonement . . . without well-being, without a full life; . . . indeed, such a one reduces the representation of the divine image [on earth]."

I will make This divine declaration of intent balances that preceding the creation of the man in 1:26. It is God who takes the initiative to provide the wife for Adam.

a fitting helper Literally, "a helper corresponding to him."[25] This term cannot be demeaning because Hebrew *'ezer*,[26] employed here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often used of God in His relation to man.

19. As noted above, the dominant theme of this section, to which all else is subordinated, is man and the human condition. The narrative now focuses on humankind's mastery over the animals. Mention of their creation is therefore made incidentally, not for its own sake, and is no indication of sequential order in regard to the creation of man.

creature, that would be its name. 20And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. 21So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. 22And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He

[לספרדים] 20 וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁמוֹת לְכָל־
הַבְּהֵמָה וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְכֹל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם
לֹא־מָצָא עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ׃ 21 וַיַּפֶּל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
תַּרְדֵּמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אַחַת מִצַּלְעֹתָיו
וַיִּסְגֹּר בָּשָׂר תַּחְתֶּנָּה׃ 22 וַיִּבֶן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
הַצֵּלָע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיְבִאֶהָ אֶל־

and all the birds of the sky Another example of zeugma, as in 2:1. The birds were actually created out of the water and the animals out of the earth, according to 1:21, 24. The apparent contradiction between the two accounts is resolved by the Talmud in Ḥullin 27b, with the assumption that the origin of fowl life was alluvial mud.

and brought them to the man In chapter 1 God bestows names only on the cosmic phenomena connected with time and space. Here He assigns to man the role of naming terrestrial animates, which, as explained in the Comment to 1:5, is another way of expressing the bestowal of authority and dominion over them, the idea contained in 1:28.

20. The Bible offers no speculation about the origin of language, only a theory about the diversity of languages, which is presented in chapter 11. Here the first man is assumed to have been initially endowed with the faculty of speech, with a level of intellect capable of differentiating between one creature and another and with the linguistic ability to coin an appropriate name for each.

Adam The Hebrew vocalization *le-'adam* makes the word a proper name for the first time,[27] probably because the narrative now speaks of the man as a personality rather than an archetypal human.

no fitting helper was found The review of the subhuman creation makes the man conscious of his own uniqueness, of his inability to integrate himself into that whole biological order or feel direct kinship with the other animate beings. At the same time, by observing the otherwise universal complementary pairing of male and female, he becomes aware of his own exceptional status and of his solitariness.

21. God empathizes with man's loneliness.

a deep sleep Hebrew *tardemah* is used of abnormally heavy sleep,[28] divinely induced. It has here the dual function of rendering the man insensible to the pain of the surgery and oblivious to God at work.

one of his ribs The mystery of the intimacy between husband and wife and the indispensable role that the woman ideally plays in the life of man are symbolically described in terms of her creation out of his body. The rib taken from man's side thus connotes physical union and signifies that she is his companion and partner, ever at his side.

This correspondence between the part of the body and the role of the one identified with it is found in both Mesopotamian and Greek literatures. In the former, Ea, the god of wisdom, is described as "the ear of [the god] Ninurta" because the ear was regarded as the seat of intelligence. In Greek mythology, Athena, goddess of wisdom, sprang from the forehead of Zeus, the seat of the brain; and Aphrodite, goddess of love, generation, and fertility, is said to have sprung from the foam in the sea that collected about the severed male organ of the god Uranus.

22. ***The LORD God fashioned*** Literally, "built," the only use of this verb in the Creation narratives. It certainly harks back to ancient Near Eastern poetic traditions, in which it is widely used for the action of the deity in creating mankind.[29] At the same time, it well fits Hebrew *tsela'*, "rib," which frequently appears as an architectonic term in building texts. In a word play, Genesis Rabba

brought her to the man. 23Then the man said,
"This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,
For from man was she taken."
24Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

הָאָדָם׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם
זֹאת הַפַּעַם
עֶצֶם מֵעֲצָמַי
וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי
לְזֹאת יִקָּרֵא אִשָּׁה
כִּי מֵאִישׁ לֻקְחָה־זֹּאת׃
24 עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזָב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק

18:1 connects the present use of *b-n-h,* "to build," with *b-y-n,* "to discern," indicating that "woman was endowed with intelligence surpassing that of man."

He brought her to the man As noted in a midrash, the image may well be that of God playing the role of the attendant who leads the bride to the groom. Without doubt, the verse conveys the idea that the institution of marriage is established by God Himself.[30]

23. Man's first recorded speech is a cry of ecstatic elation at seeing the woman.

This one at last In contrast to the animals.

shall be called Woman Insofar as the power of naming implies authority, the text voices the social reality of the ancient Near East. Yet the terminology used here differs from that employed in verse 20 for naming the animals. Here the man gives her a generic, not a personal, name, and that designation is understood to be derived from his own, which means he acknowledges woman to be his equal. Moreover, in naming her *'ishah,* he simultaneously names himself. Hitherto he is consistently called *'adam;* he now calls himself *'ish* for the first time. Thus he discovers his own manhood and fulfillment only when he faces the woman, the human being who is to be his partner in life.

Woman . . . man Hebrew *'ishah . . . 'ish,* though actually derived from distinct and unrelated stems, are here associated through folk etymology by virtue of assonance. The corresponding tacit word play for the man was noted in the Comment to verse 7.

24. ***Hence*** Hebrew *'al ken* is not part of the narration, but it introduces an etiological observation on the part of the Narrator;[31] that is, the origin of an existing custom or institution is assigned to some specific event in the past. In this case, some interrelated and fundamental aspects of the marital relationship are traced to God's original creative act and seen as part of the divinely ordained natural order. The fashioning of the woman from the man's body explains why his bond to his wife takes precedence over his ties to his parents. It accounts for the mystery of physical love and the intense emotional involvement of male and female, as well as for their commonality of interests, goals, and ideals.

clings . . . one flesh There is a seeming contradiction here since Hebrew *d-v-k,* "to cling," essentially expresses the idea of two distinct entities becoming attached to one another while preserving their separate identities. To become "one flesh" refers to the physical aspects of marriage, as though the separated elements seek one another for reunification. The underlying meaning of the paradox is clear, if it is noted that the verb *d-v-k* is often used to describe human yearning for and devotion to God.[32] Sexual relations between husband and wife do not rise above the level of animality unless they be informed by and imbued with spiritual, emotional, and mental affinity.

25. This verse forms the transition to the next episode by means of a word play on "naked" (Heb. *'arom,* pl. *'arummim*) and "shrewd" (Heb. *'arum*). It also conveys an anticipatory hint at what is related in 3:7.

they felt no shame The Hebrew expresses mutuality. So long as the harmony with God remained undisturbed, the pristine innocence and dignity of sexuality was not despoiled.

3 [25]The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. [1]Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" [2]The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. [3]It is only about fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you

בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד: 25 וַיִּהְיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם
עֲרוּמִּים הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְלֹא יִתְבּשָׁשׁוּ:

ג וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה עָרוּם מִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אַף כִּי־
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ מִכֹּל עֵץ הַגָּן: 2 וַתֹּאמֶר
הָאִשָּׁה אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ מִפְּרִי עֵץ־הַגָּן נֹאכֵל: 3 וּמִפְּרִי

CHAPTER 3

The work of God's Creation has been termed "very good"; the idyllic life of man and woman in the Garden of Eden has been described. How did evil come into existence? Evil is seen to be the inevitable result of human violation of God's law. Human beings are free moral agents; hence, they must bear the consequences of their actions.

THE TRANSGRESSION (vv. 1–7)

*1. **the serpent*** The serpent has always been a creature of mystery. With its venomous bite, it can inflict sudden and unexpected death. It shows no limbs, yet it is gracefully and silently agile. Its glassy eyes—lidless, unblinking, strangely lustrous—have a fixed and penetrating stare. Its longevity and the regular, recurrent sloughing of its skin impart an aura of youthfulness, vitality, and rejuvenation. Small wonder that the snake simultaneously aroused fascination and revulsion, awe and dread. Throughout the ancient world, it was endowed with divine or semidivine qualities; it was venerated as an emblem of health, fertility, immortality, occult wisdom, and chaotic evil; and it was often worshipped. The serpent played a significant role in the mythology, the religious symbolism, and the cults of the ancient Near East. As noted in the Introduction to Genesis 1, biblical poetic texts such as Isaiah 27:1 demonstrate that there once existed in Israel popular compositions in which the serpent, a monster representing primeval chaos, challenged, to its own ruin, God's creative endeavors.[1]

This background is essential for an understanding of the demythologizing that takes place in the present narrative. Here the serpent is introduced simply as one of "the creatures that the LORD God had made." In the wording of the curse imposed on it in verse 14, the phrase "all the days of your life" underlines its mortal nature. Of the three parties to the transgression, the serpent alone is summarily sentenced without prior interrogation—a token of God's withering disdain for it. Further, the voluble creature does not utter a word—a sure sign of its impotence in the presence of the Deity. In sum, the serpent is here reduced to an insignificant, demythologized stature. It possesses no occult powers. It is not demonic, only extraordinarily shrewd. Its role is to lay before the woman the enticing nature of evil and to fan her desire for it. The serpent is not the personification of evil; in fact, its identification with Satan is not encountered before the first century B.C.E., when it appears for the first time in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 2:24.

the shrewdest The serpent's cunning reveals itself in the way it frames the question, in its knowledge of the divine proscription, in its claim to be able to probe God's mind and intent, and in the selection of its victim.

to the woman She, rather than her husband, is approached because she has not received the prohibition directly from God. She is therefore the more vulnerable of the two, the more susceptible to the serpent's insidious verbal manipulation.

say The serpent subtly softens the severity of the prohibition by using this word in place of the original "command." Then it deliberately misquotes God so that the woman cannot give a one-word reply but is drawn into conversation that forces her to focus upon the forbidden tree that he had not mentioned.

*3. **or touch it*** In correcting her enquirer, she either unconsciously exaggerates the stringency of the divine prohibition or is quoting what her husband told her. Either way, she introduces into her own mind the suggestion of an unreasonably strict God.

die.'" 4And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, 5but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad." 6When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ־הַגָּן אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לֹא תֹאכְלוּ
מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא תִגְּעוּ בּוֹ פֶּן־תְּמֻתוּן: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ
אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה לֹא־מוֹת תְּמֻתוּן: 5 כִּי יֹדֵעַ אֱלֹהִים כִּי
בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם וִהְיִיתֶם
כֵּאלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע: 6 וַתֵּרֶא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב
הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תַאֲוָה־הוּא לָעֵינַיִם וְנֶחְמָד הָעֵץ
לְהַשְׂכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפִּרְיוֹ וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם־לְאִישָׁהּ
עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכַל: 7 וַתִּפָּקַחְנָה עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי
עֵירֻמִּם הֵם וַיִּתְפְּרוּ עֲלֵה תְאֵנָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם

4–5. The serpent emphatically contradicts the very words God used in 2:17. In this way it removes her fears. It then proceeds to ascribe self-serving motives to God, thus undermining His credibility in her eyes. Finally, it appeals to an attractive standard of utility: eating of the tree's fruit elevates one to a higher plane of existence.

5. ***your eyes will be opened*** You will be endowed with new mental powers,[2] with the capacity for reflection that allows one to make decisions independently of God.

like divine beings Hebrew *'elohim* is a comprehensive term for supernatural beings and is often employed for angels.[3] Any possible ambiguity inherent in the use of the same word for "God" and for "divine beings" is here removed by the plural form of the verb "know" *(yode'ei)* and by verse 22 ("one of us"). As tractate Soferim 4:5(4) points out, "the first *'elohim* [in this verse] is sacred, the second non-sacred."

who know good and bad See Comment to 2:9. The notion that such is a prerogative of the angelic host is found again in 2 Samuel 14: "For my lord the king is like an angel of God, understanding . . . good and bad" (v. 17); and "My lord is as wise as an angel of God, and he knows all that goes on in the land" (v. 20). A polytheistic version of this sentiment is found in Gilgamesh: "Wise art thou, O Enkidu, like a god art thou."[4] What the serpent is saying is that the woman and the man will have the capacity to make judgments as to their own welfare independently of God. The insidious nature of its discourse lies in the implication that defiance of God's law constitutes the indispensable precondition for human freedom.

The serpent had initially pretended total ignorance of the situation. The woman had merely referred to "the tree in the middle of the garden." By "coincidentally" using the phrase "to know good and bad," God's own words in 2:17, the creature cleverly enhances the listener's receptivity to its words.

6. The word of the serpent prevails over the word of God. The allure of the forbidden has become irresistible. There is an undertone of irony in the formulation that she "saw that it was good," for it echoes God's recurring judgment about His creation in chapter 1. Now, however, good has become debased in the woman's mind. Its definition is no longer God's verdict but is rooted in the appeal to the senses and in utilitarian value. Egotism, greed, and self-interest now govern human action.

as a source of wisdom Hebrew *le-haskil* is the capacity for making decisions that lead to success. The Targums as well as the Septuagint, Latin, and Syriac versions all derive the verb from the stem *s-k-l,* "to see, contemplate."[5]

and he ate The woman is not a temptress. She does not say a word but simply hands her husband the fruit, which he accepts and eats. The absence of any hint of resistance or even hesitation on his part is strange. It should be noted, however, that in speaking to the woman, the serpent consistently used the plural form. This suggests that the man was all the time within ear's reach of the conversation and was equally seduced by its persuasiveness. In fact, the Hebrew text here literally means, "She also gave to her husband *with her ('immah),*" suggesting that he was a full participant in the sin, thereby refuting in advance his later excuse.

7. ***the eyes . . . were opened*** Just as the serpent had foretold! But, ironically, the new insight they gain is only the consciousness of their own nakedness, and shame is the consequence.

[8]They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. [9]The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" [10]He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." [11]Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" [12]The man said, "The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate." [13]And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate." [14]Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

חָגֹרֹת׃ 8 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת־קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְהַלֵּךְ
בַּגָּן לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגָּן׃ 9 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָאָדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶת־קֹלְךָ שָׁמַעְתִּי בַגָּן וָאִירָא כִּי־עֵירֹם אָנֹכִי
וָאֵחָבֵא׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עֵירֹם אָתָּה
הֲמִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לְבִלְתִּי אֲכָל־מִמֶּנּוּ
אָכָלְתָּ׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה
עִמָּדִי הִוא נָתְנָה־לִּי מִן־הָעֵץ וָאֹכֵל׃ 13 וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לָאִשָּׁה מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂית וַתֹּאמֶר
הָאִשָּׁה הַנָּחָשׁ הִשִּׁיאַנִי וָאֹכֵל׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ

fig leaves The fig tree has unusually large and strong leaves. Incidentally, it is indigenous to the Land of Israel, where it was cultivated very early, but it was not known in Babylon; hence, this detail reflects a West Semitic, not a Mesopotamian, cultural background.

loincloths Their pristine innocence is gone. In a sense, this action has already taken them outside Eden, for clothing is a characteristic of civilization. In the Gilgamesh Epic, putting on clothes is one of the tokens of the wild Enkidu's abandonment of his outdoor life with the beasts of the field.[6]

THE INTERROGATION (vv. 8–13)

The foregoing dialogue and action had proceeded as though God were backstage. Now, prompted by a guilty conscience, the disobedient couple suddenly becomes aware of the Divine Presence. God re-emerges and moves to the center of the stage.

8. ***hid from the LORD*** The attempt to evade God is tantamount to an admission of guilt.

9. ***God called out to the man*** Not the woman, because only he had heard the prohibition directly from God.

Where are you? The question is merely a formal civility, often used as a way of opening conversation.[7]

10. The man's evasive words contain a hint of irony, for in Hebrew the words "I heard the sound of You" can also be translated "I obeyed You," which, of course, is the opposite of the truth.

I was afraid because I was naked Another evasion of the truth. The statement itself voices the Israelite ethos that it is improper for man to appear naked before God. This finds practical expression in the laws of Exodus 20:26 and 28:42–43 that regulate the proper dress code for the act of worship. There is probably an underlying protest here against pagan fertility cults and a reaction against a Near Eastern practice of priests, such as in Sumer, where the cultic ritual was performed in the nude.

11. Man's self-awareness discloses the radical change that has taken place in the human condition. The consciousness of nakedness can have meaning only in contrast to the consciousness of being clothed, a new condition that came about only because of his sin.

forbidden Literally, "commanded not to," in contrast to the softer verb used by the serpent in verses 1 and 3.

12–13. The confessions are compromised by each shifting the blame onto the other. The man does not say why he ate. He stands self-condemned, for he unquestioningly did what his wife told him to do but did not do as God told him.

"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat
All the days of your life.
15I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."
16And to the woman He said,
"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."

כִּי עָשִׂיתָ זֹּאת
אָרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה
וּמִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה
עַל־גְּחֹנְךָ תֵלֵךְ
וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל
כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ׃
15 וְאֵיבָה אָשִׁית בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה
וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ
הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ
וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עָקֵב׃ ס
16 אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר
הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה עִצְּבוֹנֵךְ וְהֵרֹנֵךְ
בְּעֶצֶב תֵּלְדִי בָנִים
וְאֶל־אִישֵׁךְ תְּשׁוּקָתֵךְ
וְהוּא יִמְשָׁל־בָּךְ׃ ס

THE PUNISHMENT (vv. 14–19)

Human beings have arrogated the right to make decisions concerning human welfare independently of God and in defiance of His norms. They have lost their innocence and must assume full responsibility for their actions. Accordingly, God now metes out punishment on each transgressor in turn, in the order of their original appearance on the scene. In each case, the judgment is of a twofold nature: it affects what is of central concern in the life of each entity, and it regulates a basic relationship. The snake is punished in its manner of self-propulsion and in its contacts with human beings; the woman is doomed to suffer in childbearing, and her relationship to her husband is defined; the man is fated to a life of arduous labor, and his interaction with the soil is to be disagreeable.

14. more cursed . . . than Hebrew *'arur mi-kol* evokes the description in verse 1, . . . *'arum mi-kol,* "more shrewd than," in a kind of literary framework expressing the idea of measure for measure.[8]

On your belly This reflects a popular notion, often represented in the art of the ancient Near East, that the serpent originally walked erect. Having arrogantly aggrandized itself in a challenge to God, it is now permanently doomed to a posture of abject humiliation.[9]

dirt shall you eat The transgression involved eating, and so does the punishment. As the serpent slithers on its way, its flickering tongue appears to lick the dust.[10]

15. enmity This curse seeks to explain the natural revulsion of humans for the serpent. Clearly, when it entered into conversation with the woman, it could not have been so regarded; indeed, it posed as her friend, solicitous of her interests. The imprecation may also carry antipagan undertones, as if to say that the serpent is neither a fertility symbol, as in Canaan, nor a protective emblem, as among Egyptian royalty, but a hostile object of aversion.

the woman She is singled out because she conducted the dialogue with it, but she is here representative of the entire human race, as the reference to her "offspring" shows.

16. Your pangs in childbearing This verse, like the preceding, presupposes the blessing of 1:28, "Be fertile and increase." Now, however, its fulfillment is to be accompanied by pain and suffering, which include the disorders occurring during pregnancy as much as the rigors of par-

17 וּלְאָדָם אָמַר כִּי־שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתֶּךָ וַתֹּאכַל
מִן־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ
אֲרוּרָה הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּרֶךָ
בְּעִצָּבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה
כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ׃
18 וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר תַּצְמִיחַ לָךְ
וְאָכַלְתָּ אֶת־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה׃

17To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'

Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it
All the days of your life:
18Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

turition itself. Intense pain in childbearing is unique to the human species and generally unknown to other female mammals. It therefore calls for explanation. While the rigors of childbearing are presented here as a consequence of partaking of the tree of knowledge, modern biology traces the woman's condition to the enlargement of the human skull that was entailed by the evolutionary increase in the size of the human brain, especially that part of the brain, the neocortex, that is associated with human intelligence.

your urge The import of this phrase is unclear. Rashi understood this, together with the next clause, to refer to the satisfaction of female sexuality being traditionally dependent upon the husband's initiative. Ramban took it to mean that despite the discomforts and pain attendant upon childbearing, the woman still longs for the sexual act that brings about this condition. Another possibility is to see the two provisions as a reflection of social reality. Historically, the woman was wholly dependent for her sustenance upon what her husband could eke out of the soil, in striking contrast to the situation in Eden where her food was readily and independently available at all times. It should be noted that the "curse" is used in connection with the judgments on the serpent and the man, but not in relation to the woman.

he shall rule over you It is quite clear from the description of woman in 2:18,23 that the ideal situation, which hitherto existed, was the absolute equality of the sexes. The new state of male dominance is regarded as an aspect of the deterioration in the human condition that resulted from defiance of divine will.

17. The longest address is reserved for the man, for his is the greatest share of culpability since it was he who received the prohibition directly from God. His cowardly shifting of the blame is rejected. The individual is morally autonomous and must bear responsibility for his actions.

Adam See Comment to 2:20.

Cursed be the ground Once again, the punishment is related to the offense. The sin of eating forbidden food results in complicating the production of goods. The man himself is not cursed, only the soil. The matter from which he sprang turns against him. His pristine harmony with nature is disturbed by his transgression. This notion of moral ecology is a major biblical theme; it is explicitly formulated in Leviticus 18:24–28 and 20:22, and it underlies the great exhortations of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

By toil Hebrew *'itsavon* is the same term as is used in verse 16 for the woman's anguish. The man's backbreaking physical labor is regarded as the male equivalent of the labor of childbearing. The curse lies not in the work itself, which is decreed for man even in Eden (2:15), but in the uncooperative nature of the soil, so that henceforth the wresting of subsistence from it entails unremitting drudgery.

All the days of your life The same phrase as used of the serpent in verse 14. Man and beast were created mortal from the start. The formula is absent in verse 16 because childbearing does not occur all the days of a woman's life.

18. ***Thorns and thistles*** Weeds that rob the cultivated plants of light, water, and the soil's nutrients and that require much effort to control. And this occurs in the face of mankind's need to subsist on the grasses of the field! Humankind is once again viewed as being vegetarian, and agriculture is taken to be man's earliest occupation.

19 בְּזֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם
עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה
כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לֻקָּחְתָּ
כִּי־עָפָר אַתָּה
וְאֶל־עָפָר תָּשׁוּב׃
20 וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הִוא הָיְתָה
אֵם כָּל־חָי׃ 21 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם
וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כָּתְנוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם׃ פ חמישי
[רביעי לספרדים] 22 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן

19 By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground—
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return."
20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. 21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

19. The sentencing ends on an ironic note. Human beings had attempted to elevate themselves to the level of the divine. All they achieved was to condemn themselves to a ceaseless, brutal struggle for subsistence, with the consciousness of the fragility of life ever hanging over them.

A MEASURE OF RAPPROCHEMENT (vv. 20–21)

These verses interrupt the flow of the narrative, which draws to its logical conclusion in verses 22–24. Such apparently intrusive data is one of the recurring literary features of the Genesis narratives. Generally, their function is to provide the background for the understanding of future developments. Verse 20 signifies a restoration of relationships between man and wife, indispensable to the development in 4:1; verse 21 indicates a measure of reconciliation between human beings and God. Both are essential for survival after the expulsion from Eden.

20. ***The man named his wife*** Previously he had given her a generic name (2:23). Now she acquires a personal one that expresses her nature and destiny positively and sympathetically. The woman's procreative role is implied in verse 15 and made central in verse 16. It is appropriate that she now receive a name that symbolizes its actualization, which is shortly to take place. The man's act is thus an affirmation of life.

Eve Hebrew *ḥavvah,* which seems to be an archaic form of *ḥayyah,* could mean "living thing," life personified. This is how the Septuagint understood it when it rendered the name here *Zōē.* The vocalization suggests an intensive form, so that "propagator of life" is also a possible meaning. There might, in addition, be a word play involved, for Aramaic *ḥivya* means a serpent, as noted in Genesis Rabba 20:11; 22:2. In the Sfire inscription (I.A.31), the word for serpent is actually written *ḥvvh.*

mother of all the living This description is closely paralleled in Near Eastern mythology, where it belongs to the mother goddess. Here it is demythologized and naturalized to express the biblical concept of the unity of the human race and of woman's primary role—motherhood. On the former, see Comment to 1:27.

21. Despite their transgression and punishment, Adam and Eve are not wholly alienated from God, who now displays His parental concern for their welfare. Since nakedness now evokes shame,[11] God restores human dignity by providing clothing. Also, the garments will afford protection against the harsh conditions of life they are to encounter outside Eden.

garments Hebrew *kutonet* was a kind of long- or short-sleeved shirt, generally made of linen or wool, that reached down to the knees or even the ankles. It became fashionable in the Late Bronze Age and standard dress in the Iron Age.

of skins This supposes that the earliest clothing was made of animal skins. An interesting tradition, preserved in the Targum Jonathan, has it fashioned from the sloughed-off skin of the serpent.[12] As noted in Genesis Rabba 20:12 and Sotah 14a, the Hebrew can also yield "garments for the skin." This leaves unspecified the material of their composition.

[22]And the LORD God said, "Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" [23]So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. [24]He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאַחַד מִמֶּנּוּ לָדַעַת טוֹב וָרָע וְעַתָּה
פֶּן־יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מֵעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וָחַי
לְעֹלָם: 23 וַיְשַׁלְּחֵהוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִגַּן־עֵדֶן לַעֲבֹד
אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לֻקַּח מִשָּׁם: 24 וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֶת־
הָאָדָם וַיַּשְׁכֵּן מִקֶּדֶם לְגַן־עֵדֶן אֶת־הַכְּרֻבִים וְאֵת
לַהַט הַחֶרֶב הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת לִשְׁמֹר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ
הַחַיִּים: ס

THE EXPULSION FROM EDEN (vv. 22–24)

By his transgression, man distanced himself spiritually from Eden. God's punishment inevitably entailed physical separation from its precincts. This is now promptly brought about.

22. Man, having already exceeded the limits of creaturehood, has radically altered the perspective of human existence. He lives henceforth in the consciousness of his mortality. He may therefore be tempted to change his condition by artificial means, rather than by restoring the ruptured harmony between divine will and human will, the harmony that is ultimately the definition of paradise.

like one of us See Comment to verse 5.

the tree of life See Comment to 2:9.

23. ***to till the soil*** As noted above, agriculture seems to be regarded as man's earliest occupation.

from which he was taken This refers back to 2:7–8. Man was created from earth outside of Eden and is now returned to his place of origin.

24. ***drove . . . out*** Hebrew *geresh* is harsher and more explicit than *shillaḥ* in the previous verse. The same two verbs also appear in tandem in Exodus 6:1 in connection with the Exodus.

east of the garden The entrance was envisaged as being on the east side, facing the rising sun. It is assumed that Adam and Eve could walk back into the garden if they so desired. Steps must be taken to prevent this from occurring.

the cherubim Neither here nor anywhere else is there a clearcut definition or description of these beings. The use of the definite article presupposes a familiarity with them on the part of the reader, probably because they figured in popular legend and folklore. An example of such is Ezekiel's dirge over the king of Tyre in 28:11–19. See Excursus 1.

and the fiery ever-turning sword This is a separate, protective instrument, not said to be in the hands of the cherubim. It too carries the definite article and so was also something well known to the Israelite imagination, even though it is not again mentioned in the Bible precisely in this form.

CHAPTER 4

Reality Outside Eden

The narrative now turns to the fortunes of humankind in the harsh world outside Eden. The flow of time that separates the events of chapter 3 from those about to be described is of no consequence and therefore goes unmentioned. The focus of the narrative is not history but the human condition.

The previous and present chapters are closely linked by several common themes: free will, personal responsibility, and inevitable punishment for wrongdoing. The opening verse harks back to 3:16,20 as the woman begins to fulfill her appointed destiny: propagation of the species—the continuity of life through the constant regeneration of the human race. Outside of Eden, this is the answer of humankind to the quest for immortality; it is a perpetual triumph over death.

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained a male child with the help of the LORD." 2She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became

ד וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד
אֶת־קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה׃ 2 וַתֹּסֶף
לָלֶדֶת אֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־הָבֶל וַיְהִי־הֶבֶל רֹעֵה צֹאן

The preceding narrative focuses on the role of greed and unbridled ambition, and the present chapter deals with the place of the irrational in human conduct. The former offense was against God; now it is man against his brother, which also is an offense against God. It was the "fruit of the tree" that led to the downfall of Adam and Eve; it is the "fruit of the soil" that leads to Cain's undoing. The first human was worried about death; now the experience of death becomes a reality.

Apart from these thematic parallels, several other correspondences tighten the bond between the two chapters: the name Eve occurs here too and never again in the Bible; the verb "to know" appears four times in each chapter; verse 7 here virtually reproduces 3:16; the divine question to the culprit in each case—"Where?"—receives an evasive reply in both chapters; the wording of the curse upon Adam in 3:14 is echoed in that upon Cain in 4:11; the son, like his parents in the previous chapter, is "banished" and settles to the east of Eden.

The present chapter divides into four distinct units: Cain and Abel (vv. 1–16), the Genealogy of Cain (vv. 17–22), the Song of Lamech (vv. 23–24), and Seth and Enosh (vv. 25–26). Tying together these apparently discrete units are notices about the developments in civilization that each contains. These developments number seven in all: agriculture, sheep-breeding, urbanism, pastoralism, music, metallurgy, religion. The symbolic number seven is featured repeatedly: sevenfold vengeance is invoked (vv. 15,24); Lamech is the seventh generation from Adam; his song refers to "sevenfold" and "seventy-seven"; the number of souls mentioned in all, from Adam to Lamech's offspring, is twice seven; and the name Abel appears seven times, as do also the words "brother" and "name."

CAIN AND ABEL (vv. 1–16)

This narrative has often been interpreted as a reflection of the traditional conflict between the farmer and the nomad, and its supposed bias in favor of the latter is seen as representing a nomadic ideal in Israel. This is unlikely. The evidence for such an ideal in biblical literature is extremely flimsy. Further, there is not the slightest suggestion in the text of any comparative evaluation of the vocations of Cain and Abel, nor is there the slightest disparagement of the tiller of the soil. On the contrary, agriculture is regarded as the original occupation of man in the Garden of Eden as well as outside it. The sentence upon Cain is restricted to him alone; his sons are not made into vagrants or stigmatized in any way. Finally, the three pillars of seminomadic culture, as set forth in verses 20–22, are actually said to have originated with the descendants of Cain.

The narrative, which is extraordinarily terse and sketchy here, gives no explicit reason for the unacceptability of Cain's offering and no explanation for the manner by which this is revealed. Cain lived in an unpopulated world. Of whom was he afraid? And who was there for him to marry? The presumption is inescapable that an independent narrative, in which these details presented no problem, was once well known in Israel. The difficulties now apparent arose when the Torah chose only the bare bones of the story as a vehicle for the expression and inculcation of certain fundamental truths about some of life's most perplexing problems.

*1. **the man knew*** "Knowing" in the Bible is not essentially intellectual activity, not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and, above all, relational. Thus, in 18:19, when God says of Abraham, "I have singled him out" or to Israel, in Amos 3:2, "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth," the true connotation is "I have entered into a special relationship with you." For that reason, the Hebrew stem *y-d-ʿ* can encompass a range of meanings that includes involvement, interaction, loyalty, and obligation. It can be used of the most intimate and most hallowed relationships between man and wife and between man and God. Significantly, the verb is never employed for animal copulation.

The Hebrew construction here employed usually indicates a pluperfect sense; that is, it would normally be rendered "the man had known." This leads Rashi to conclude that coition had already taken place in the Garden of Eden before the expulsion, an interpretation that finds support in 3:20.

a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. 3In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil; 4and Abel, for his part, brought

וְקַ֖יִן הָיָ֣ה עֹבֵ֣ד אֲדָמָ֑ה: 3 וַיְהִ֣י מִקֵּ֣ץ יָמִ֔ים וַיָּ֥בֵא קַ֛יִן
מִפְּרִ֥י הָאֲדָמָ֖ה מִנְחָ֣ה לַיהוָ֑ה: 4 וְהֶ֣בֶל הֵבִ֔יא גַּם־

There is nothing to sustain the idea that sexual activity first occurred outside Eden. A text like 1 Samuel 1:19—"Elkanah knew his wife Hannah"—shows that the Hebrew phrase in our text does not need to imply that we have here the first occurrence of sexual experience.

saying Once again, as in 2:23, a midrash based on assonance accounts for the selection of the name.

I have gained Hebrew *kaniti,* which derives from a stem *k-n-h,* is here connected with the name "Cain," which can only be related to *k-y-n.* The former verb usually means "to acquire, own," while the latter, in several Semitic languages, denotes "to form, fashion, forge."[1] In fact, in Arabic and Aramaic, *kayn* means a "smith." However, there is evidence of a secondary stem, *k-n-h,* meaning "to produce, create," which appears in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Phoenician. It is present in the divine epithet used in Genesis 14:19, which is discussed in Excursus 8, as well as in the name Elkanah. In Ugaritic, the goddess Asherat bears the description *qnyt ilm,* "progenitress of the gods."

a male child Hebrew *'ish,* "man," never otherwise refers to a newborn babe.[2] The usage here is influenced by Adam's jubilant cry in 2:23 at the creation of woman. Eve now says, in effect: "I, woman *('ish(sh)ah),* was produced from man *('ish);* now I, woman, have in turn produced a man."

with the help of the LORD In Hebrew *'et* YHVH; the sign of the accusative often has the sense of "together with." A similar phrase is used in the Akkadian Atraḫasis Epic when the mother goddess Mami, who has been ordered to create man, replies that she can do so only with the help of the god Enki (*itti Enki-ma*).

The role of God in human procreation is frequently acknowledged in the Bible.[3] As Niddah 31a expresses it, "There are three copartners in the production of a human being: God, father, and mother."

the LORD The most sacred divine name YHVH is here uttered by a human being, a woman, for the first time.

2. ***his brother*** The absence of the formula "she conceived and bore"[4] led to the tradition that Cain and Abel were twins.

Abel No explanation for this choice is given. Hebrew *hevel* means "breath, nothingness."[5] The name may augur his destiny; or, if it was given after his death, it may be a reflection of his fate. *Hevel* is often used to express the fleeting nature of life. The name may alternatively, or perhaps simultaneously, contain a reference to his vocation in that Syriac *hablâ* means a "herdsman."

keeper of sheep . . . tiller of the soil Adapting to the new ecological conditions encountered outside Eden, human society produces a mixed subsistence economy based on stockbreeding and agriculture. Labor becomes specialized. Cain, the first-born, follows his father's occupation, while Abel branches out to new areas. The two parts of the economy supplement each other. Since, in the biblical view, mankind was vegetarian until after the Flood, the function of animal husbandry at this point was to supply milk, hides, and wool.

It should be noted that, for aesthetic effect, the names in verses 1–2 are mentioned chiastically: Cain–Abel, Abel–Cain.

3–5. The two sons, unlike their parents in Eden, subsisted through the toil of their hands. In the fruits of their labors they recognized divine blessing, and they felt gratitude to God for His bounty. Their offerings were spontaneous, not a response to divine command. The reason for God's different reactions may be inferred from the descriptions of the offerings: Abel's is characterized as being "the choicest of the firstlings of his flock"; Cain's is simply termed as coming "from the fruit of the soil," without further detail. Abel appears to have demonstrated a quality of heart and mind that Cain did not possess. Cain's purpose was noble, but his act was not ungrudging and openhearted. Thus the narrative conveys the fundamental principle of Judaism that the act of worship must be informed by genuine devotion of the heart. It also teaches that the two aspects of divine worship—

the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, 5but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. 6And the Lord said to Cain,

"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?
7Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

8Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. 9The

הֽוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמֵחֶלְבֵהֶן׃ וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל־
הֶבֶל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ׃ 5 וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא
שָׁעָה וַיִּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֶל־קָיִן
לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ
וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָנֶיךָ׃
7 הֲלוֹא אִם־תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת
וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לַפֶּתַח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ
וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ
וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל־בּוֹ׃
8 וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה
וַיָּקָם קַיִן אֶל־הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה

ב׳ רפה v. 4.

the cultic act and the verbal element—are separate in origin. Further on, in verse 26, prayer is said to be a later development, independent of sacrifice. This constitutes a revolutionary development in the religious thinking of the ancient world, where the two elements were inextricably interconnected, the one inoperative without the other, because the religious act was essentially magical and required for its effectiveness both the spoken word and the praxis. By severing the two, the religion of Israel stressed the exceptional, nonmagical nature of prayer. In the same vein, the official priestly sacrificial ritual prescribed in the Book of Leviticus is not accompanied by prayer. Tradition consistently ascribes the institutions of sacrifice to Moses and the introduction of the recitation of psalms to David.

4. ***paid heed*** Based on such passages as Leviticus 9:24, Judges 6:21, 1 Kings 18:38, and 2 Chronicles 7:1, ancient and medieval commentators imagined fire descending from heaven and devouring Abel's offering but leaving Cain's untouched.[6]

distressed Cain's mood is depression, not anger. Hebrew *ḥarah l-* expresses despondency or distress, as opposed to *ḥarah 'af,* which means "to be angry."[7]

his face fell This too is a figure of sadness and depression, not only in Hebrew but in several other ancient Near Eastern texts as well.

7. The Hebrew text bristles with difficulties.[8] Yoma 52a–b designates the passage as one of those in which the precise syntax cannot be decided. It seems to be a forewarning to Cain of the dangerous potentialities inherent in his present mood. The underlying idea is that man is endowed with moral autonomy, with freedom of choice. He can subdue his primitive passions by an act of will; otherwise, they will control him.

8. ***Cain said to his brother Abel ...*** The three dots draw attention to the lacuna. The Aramaic Targums, like the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions of the text, add: "Come let us go into the field." This is also the reading of the Samaritan text. Ramban also took this to be the sense of the passage. On the basis of the usage in Exodus 19:25 and Esther 1:18, many Jewish commentators took the unexpressed object of the verb to be the foregoing words of God. Others took Hebrew ***va-yo'mer*** to mean "He had words with him."[9]

in the field Hebrew *sadeh* refers to the open, uninhabited country away from the settled areas. It was often the scene of crime, as may be inferred from Deuteronomy 22:25 and 2 Samuel 14:6.

killed him Cain's depression gives way to an irrational act of aggression. The first recorded death is not from natural causes but by human hands, an ironic comment on the theme of chapter 3. Man and woman had striven to gain immortality, but their first-born brings the reality of death into the world. The narrative illustrates one of the most lamentable aspects of the human condition, one

LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! 11Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."

13Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is too great to bear! 14Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!"

אֶל־קַ֣יִן אַ֣י הֶ֣בֶל אָחִ֔יךָ וַיֹּ֖אמֶר לֹ֣א יָדַ֑עְתִּי הֲשֹׁמֵ֥ר
אָחִ֖י אָנֹֽכִי׃ 10 וַיֹּ֖אמֶר מֶ֣ה עָשִׂ֑יתָ קֹ֚ול דְּמֵ֣י אָחִ֔יךָ
צֹעֲקִ֥ים אֵלַ֖י מִן־הָאֲדָמָֽה׃ 11 וְעַתָּ֥ה אָר֖וּר אָ֑תָּה
מִן־הָאֲדָמָ֗ה אֲשֶׁ֤ר פָּצְתָה֙ אֶת־פִּ֔יהָ לָקַ֖חַת אֶת־
דְּמֵ֥י אָחִ֖יךָ מִיָּדֶֽךָ׃ 12 כִּֽי־תַעֲבֹ֤ד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה֙ לֹא־
תֹסֵ֣ף תֵּת־כֹּחָ֔הּ לָ֖ךְ נָ֣ע וָנָ֑ד תִּהְיֶ֖ה בָּאָֽרֶץ׃
13 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר קַ֖יִן אֶל־יְהוָ֑ה גָּד֥וֹל עֲוֹנִ֖י מִנְּשֹֽׂא׃ 14 הֵ֣ן
גֵּרַ֤שְׁתָּ אֹתִי֙ הַיֹּ֔ום מֵעַ֖ל פְּנֵ֣י הָאֲדָמָ֑ה וּמִפָּנֶ֙יךָ֙
אֶסָּתֵ֔ר וְהָיִ֥יתִי נָ֛ע וָנָ֖ד בָּאָ֑רֶץ וְהָיָ֕ה כָּל־מֹצְאִ֖י

that is a recurrent theme in the Bible—namely, the corruption of religion. An act of piety can degenerate into bloodshed.

9. the LORD God at once intervenes. None can escape His all-embracing, sovereign rule.

Where . . . ? As in Genesis 3:9, the question is a means of opening the conversation, perhaps eliciting confession and contrition. The implication is either that Cain at once fled the scene of his crime or that he immediately buried his victim.

I do not know Cain defiantly lies, stifling all conscience and expressing no remorse.

Am I my brother's keeper? The sevenfold stress in this chapter on the obvious fraternal relationship of Cain and Abel emphatically teaches that man is indeed his brother's keeper and that all homicide is fratricide.

10. What have you done? Not a question, but a cry of horror.

Hark Hebrew *kol* is here used as an exclamation.[10] Being singular in number, it cannot be the subject of the following plural verb.

blood Hebrew *damim* is plural, a usage that, with rare exceptions, appears in a context of bloodshed or bloodguilt. The Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, so the Targums, takes the plural to include, apart from the blood of the victim, also that of the potential offspring now doomed never to be born: "Whoever takes a single life destroys thereby an entire world."

cries out The Hebrew stem *ts-ʿ-k* has a legal setting. It connotes a plea for help or redress on the part of the victim of some great injustice. See Comment to 18:20 for further discussion of this verb.

11–12. A breach of the moral law inevitably sets in motion countervailing forces that must ultimately prevail because they are sustained by God Himself. Cain, tiller of the soil, whose criminal act was the outcome of his offering the fruits of the soil, stained the earth with his brother's blood. It is fitting, then, that the earth be the instrument of his punishment.[11] It will no longer yield him its produce, and so he can no longer pursue his vocation. He must perforce become a vagrant and an outcast. Genesis Rabba 22:26 notes that Cain is not condemned to death because death had not yet been experienced, and he had no way of knowing that his blow would extinguish his brother's life. He is guilty of homicide, not murder.

13. My punishment Hebrew *ʿavon* means both sin and its penalty[12] because in the biblical world view the two are inseparable, the latter inhering in the former. For this reason, the text contains an ambiguity. Apart from the translation given here, it can also be rendered "My sin is too great to be forgiven" or "Is my sin too great to be forgiven?"

14. I must avoid Your presence A crime against another human being is simultaneously a sin against God. The spiritual ties that unite man to his Maker have become severely strained. Cain fears that he can no longer receive God's providential care.

15The LORD said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him. 16Cain left the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

17Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his

יַהֲרֻגֵנִי׃ 15 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה לָכֵן כָּל־הֹרֵג קַיִן שִׁבְעָתַיִם יֻקָּם וַיָּשֶׂם יְהוָה לְקַיִן אוֹת לְבִלְתִּי הַכּוֹת־אֹתוֹ כָּל־מֹצְאוֹ׃ 16 וַיֵּצֵא קַיִן מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־נוֹד קִדְמַת־עֵדֶן׃ 17 וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת־ אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־חֲנוֹךְ וַיְהִי בֹּנֶה עִיר וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הָעִיר כְּשֵׁם בְּנוֹ חֲנוֹךְ׃ 18 וַיִּוָּלֶד

anyone who meets me In the present context of the narrative, this can only be understood to mean that future offspring of Adam and Eve would feel free to exact blood vengeance.

15. The manner in which God responds to Cain is of special interest. The initial Hebrew *lakhen,* here rendered "I promise,"[13] frequently introduces a solemn declaration, while the formulation of the reassurance derives from the realm of law. The unusually emphatic language is directed first to Cain, in order to allay his mortal fear, and then to the world at large, as a kind of royal proclamation that has the force of law. It states that despite his crime, Cain still remains under God's care.

sevenfold Saadiah, Bekhor Shor, and Radak take this simply as a figure of speech meaning "abundantly" or "severely." Others take the number literally, meaning that seven of the assailant's family would be killed or that vengeance would continue to the seventh generation.[14]

vengeance This is one of the few passages in which the biblical Hebrew stem ***n-k-m*** has its primitive meaning of exacting revenge. Otherwise, it has the sense of redressing the imbalance of justice.

a mark This phrase has been persistently misunderstood. The reference is not to a stigma of infamy but to a sign indicating that the bearer is under divine protection. Hebrew *'ot* here probably involves some external physical mark, perhaps on the forehead, as in Ezekiel 9:4–6, serving the same function as the blood of the paschal lamb smeared on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite house in Egypt.[15] It is also possible, though less likely, that the "sign" consists of some occurrence that serves to authenticate the divine promise as being inviolable. In that case, the text would be rendered: "The LORD gave Cain a [confirmatory] sign that no one who met him would kill him."

16. ***left the presence of the LORD*** The audience with God, sovereign Judge of the world, is now concluded.[16]

the land of Nod A symbolic name. Hebrew ***nod*** means "wandering," as in verses 12 and 14.

THE GENEALOGY OF CAIN (vv. 17–22)

The first killing has taken place, and justice has been done. A human life has been extinguished, but life must go on. Humankind proliferates. Cain and his descendants are now listed, seven generations in all. The genealogy is linear, with only the first-born mentioned until the seventh generation; then the list becomes segmented, and more than one branch is included. Brief narrative material about the development of the arts of civilization is interspersed throughout the list. It is possible that at one time all the names were associated in popular traditions with stories about their achievements. The Torah has chosen to highlight only a few.

The list constitutes a silent polemic against the mythological concepts of the ancient world, which attributed the advance of culture to divine or semidivine figures. Mesopotamian tradition knew of the seven *Apkallu,* or mythical sages, half-fish and half-man, who rose out of the sea to reveal to man the sciences, the social system, writing, and art. Enlil, the air god, created the mattock; Enki-Ea, god of watery chaos, was closely associated with magic, wisdom, the arts and crafts, and music. For Egyptians, it was the god Thot who invented the scales and the balances; Osiris who taught humans agriculture and the arts of life; and Ptah who was the special patron of artists, artificers, and

son Enoch. 18To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. 19Lamech took to himself two wives: the

לַחֲנוֹךְ אֶת־עִירָד וְעִירָד יָלַד אֶת־מְחוּיָאֵל
וּמְחִיָּאֵל יָלַד אֶת־מְתוּשָׁאֵל וּמְתוּשָׁאֵל יָלַד אֶת־
לֶמֶךְ: [חמישי לספרדים] 19 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ לֶמֶךְ

men of letters. In the Ugaritic-Phoenician area, the god Koshar, the divine artisan and smith, was credited with the discovery of the use of iron and the fishing tackle. In the Greek sphere, it was Athena who invented the plough and the rake and who taught both the useful and the elegant arts, while Apollo founded towns and invented the flute and the lyre.

This phenomenon, known as euhemerism or the divinization of the benefactors of humanity, was common to the ancient world. In this chapter it is tacitly rejected. The development of human culture is demythologized and historicized. The seven-day divine creation of the cosmos is paralleled by these seven generations of human creativity. Man became a copartner with God in the world of creation. At the same time, the ascription of the origins of technology and urban life to Cain and his line constitute an unfavorable, or at least a qualified, judgment of man's material progress on the part of the Narrator, a recognition that it frequently outruns moral progress and that human ingenuity, so potentially beneficial, is often directed toward evil ends.

The line of Cain is not mentioned again in the Bible. No details are given of his span of life, and even the fact of his death is not noted. The same is true of the list of his descendants. The entire line passes into oblivion.

17. ***his wife*** A tradition mentioned in Jubilees 4:9 and Sanhedrin 58b has Cain marrying his sister. This is probably based on 5:4. Actually, in the present narrative context no other possibility exists.

Enoch The basic meaning of the stem *ḥ-n-kh* has to do with initiation, dedication, and education. Thus the name may be symbolic, signifying the regeneration of life.

he then founded a city He was the founder of urban culture. The soil, being accursed and unproductive for Cain, is put to use by him for wholly new purposes. This notice exhibits a consciousness of the importance and prominence of the city as a political and social unit. The idea of a city owing its existence to individual initiative accords well with ancient Near Eastern experience. Furthermore, the notion that the farmer originated the city is consistent with the fact that the rise of urban centers historically followed in the wake of the development of agriculture.

The association of Cain with settled urban existence seems to contradict his fated life of vagrancy. Accordingly, the Narrator must have had in mind that the city served his son, not Cain himself. For another suggestion, see Comment to verse 18.

after his son Compare 1 Kings 16:24.

Enoch Because in 25:4 one of the sons of Midian is also Enoch and the Midianites are closely connected with the Kenites in several biblical texts, the town of Ḥanakiya in the region of Midian has been proposed as the site referred to here.[17]

18. ***Irad*** The name has not been satisfactorily explained. Curiously, in Sumerian traditions, the first city was Eridu, now Tell abu Shahrain, in southern Mesopotamia, which excavations have revealed to be the oldest site in that part of the world. It has been suggested, therefore, that the statement in verse 17, "He founded a city, and named the city after his son," really belongs here, so that Enoch, not Cain, built the first city and named it Irad (=Eridu) after his son.[18]

Mehujael The name has been variously derived from *ḥ-y-h,* meaning "God makes live"; from *m-ḥ-h,* meaning "blotted out by God"; and from Akkadian *maḫḫû,* "an ecstatic," meaning "seer of God."[19]

Methusael The first element of this name, *mt,* appears in Hebrew,[20] Ugaritic, and Egyptian as "man, husband," and in Akkadian as "husband, man, warrior." The name *mutba'al,* "man of Baal," occurs in Ugaritic. Methusael would mean "the man of Shael," with the latter element originally being *she'ol,* "the underworld."

Lamech A similar word in Arabic means "a strong young man."

name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. 20Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. 21And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. 22As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who

שְׁתֵּי נָשִׁים שֵׁם הָאַחַת עָדָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית צִלָּה׃
20 וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת־יָבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי יֹשֵׁב אֹהֶל
וּמִקְנֶה׃ 21 וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוּבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי כָּל־
תֹּפֵשׂ כִּנּוֹר וְעוּגָב׃ 22 וְצִלָּה גַם־הִוא יָלְדָה אֶת־

19. Lamech is apparently the first polygamist, though his two wives are identified only in order to make the following poem intelligible. It is uncertain whether the ascription of polygamy to a descendant of Cain is meant to be a tacit condemnation of the institution.

Adah . . . Zillah The names may respectively mean "dawn" and "dusk," the first being connected with Arabic *ghadāt,* the second with Hebrew *ts-l-l,* "shade." Adah may also derive from Hebrew *'adi,* a "jewel," and Zillah from Hebrew *ts-l-l,* "to tingle." This name would then be the equivalent of the modern English name Melody.

The seventh natural-born generation comprises three brothers, and to each of them a major advance in material culture is attributed. By this time labor has become still more specialized, and an artisan class has arisen. An intriguing question is the reason for highlighting only the three ingredients of civilization mentioned here. The similarity of sound between the three personal names and the common fatherhood suggests a closeness of relationship between the pastoral, musical, and metalworking arts, which in fact is well founded. The name Cain, which means a "smith," also means "to sing" in several Semitic languages, though Hebrew ***kinah*** is restricted to mournful song. The Cypriot god Cinyras, to whom was attributed the invention of the lyre, was revered by the Greeks both as a musician and as the archetypal smith. Pan, Greek god of flocks and shepherds, was the inventor of the flute. Similarly, Apollo, the deity who protected flocks and cattle, was also the god of song and music, and still another tradition has Hermes, god of shepherds, as inventor of the lyre.

The three main specializations depicted in verses 20–23 are well illustrated by a wall painting from the rock tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan, about 160 miles (257 km.) south of Cairo and dating to ca. 1900 B.C.E. This portrays the arrival of a caravan of Asiatics, and prominently featured among their baggage are livestock, a lyre, and bellows.

20. ***ancestor*** He is the archetypal pastoral nomad. Abel the shepherd was not nomadic.

amidst herds This is an example of the figure of speech known as zeugma. Hebrew *yoshev,* "dwell," properly applies only to "tents," whereas it appears to govern "herds" as well.

herds Hebrew ***mikneh*** is more comprehensive than *ts'on,* "sheep," of verse 2. It includes all types of livestock, as Exodus 9:3 makes clear. The notice indicates an awareness that the rise of animal husbandry was a major step forward in human history.

21. ***who play*** Hebrew *tofes,* literally "hold, handle," also came to mean "to be skilled in," and it would thus suggest specialization and professionalism.[21]

lyre . . . pipe The two, again coupled in Job 21:12 and 30:31, represent stringed and wind instruments, respectively. The item testifies to the important role of music in ancient Israelite culture.

the lyre Hebrew ***kinnor*** is the only stringed instrument mentioned in the Torah. It is one of the earliest documented musical instruments in the Near East, with a history traceable to ca. 3000 B.C.E. The outline of a lyre scratched into a stone pavement in Megiddo dates to about that time. Actual remains of lyres from ca. 2500 B.C.E. were found in royal tombs of Ur, a city in ancient Sumer in lower Mesopotamia. The lyre is first depicted in Egypt on the wall painting at Beni Hasan referred to above. In Israel, it was the favorite instrument of David (1 Sam. 16:23) and enjoyed pride of place among the instruments used by the Levites in the Temple worship. The ***kinnor*** seems to have been a Canaanite invention. The word appears in a variety of Semitic languages and was borrowed by the Egyptians and the Greeks. Cinyras appears in Cyprus as the god of the lyre.

the pipe Hebrew *'ugav* is of uncertain derivation. The word seems to be a generic term for wind instruments of various kinds.

forged all implements of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.
23And Lamech said to his wives,
"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
I have slain a man for wounding me,
And a lad for bruising me.

תֻּבַל קַיִן לֹטֵשׁ כָּל־חֹרֵשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וּבַרְזֶל וַאֲחוֹת
תֻּבַל־קַיִן נַעֲמָה: 23 וַיֹּאמֶר לֶמֶךְ לְנָשָׁיו
עָדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעַן קוֹלִי
נְשֵׁי לֶמֶךְ הַאְזֵנָּה אִמְרָתִי
כִּי אִישׁ הָרַגְתִּי לְפִצְעִי
וְיֶלֶד לְחַבֻּרָתִי:

22. Tubal-cain The compound name is most unusual. Tubal alone is mentioned again in 10:2 as the name of a people, in association with Meshech and Javan, among the Japhethites. Ezekiel frequently couples Tubal with the former, and Isaiah 66:19 connects it with Javan, which is Ionia. This places Tubal in Asia Minor. Assyrian sources record two countries, Tabal or Tabura and Musku or Mushku, which are undoubtedly the Tubal and Meshech of the Bible. They are the same as the Tibarenoi and Moschoi referred to by Herodotus in his Histories. These places were known for their precious metal vessels. Ezekiel 27:13 also refers to their trafficking in bronze vessels. Archaeology has confirmed them as centers of metallurgy. It is now known that Tubal and its variants—***tabura, tabira*** in Akkadian, ***tibira*** and ***dibira*** in Sumerian—mean "metalworker." It has already been noted above that in several Semitic languages ***kayn*** means a "smith." Accordingly, the two elements of the name given to the son of Zillah both mean the same thing, and both designate his profession. The second element really explains the first, the meaning of which was probably lost to the Israelite audience.

who forged The Hebrew text is difficult. Its literal rendering is, "Tubal-cain was one who forged every artificer of copper and iron."[22] Ibn Janaḥ noted that Hebrew *'avi,* "the ancestor of," which is present with each of the preceding designations, is here lacking and is required for the sense, which is: "Tubal-cain was one who forged; he was the ancestor of . . ." Indeed, the Targums supply the word.

copper . . . iron There is no memory of a Stone Age, but the narrative recognizes the discovery of the use of metals to constitute a revolutionary advance in the progress of civilization, allowing the development of new and more efficient tools and weapons. The order in which the principal metals are mentioned in the Torah—gold (2:11), copper, and iron—correctly reflects the history of metallurgy.

"Copper," Hebrew *neḥoshet,* is actually "bronze," which is an alloy of copper and tin. This metal was already worked extensively in southern Mesopotamia and in Sinai as early as the third millennium B.C.E.

Iron of the meteoric variety was worked even by preliterate peoples and was sporadically used in the course of the Bronze Age. It is recognized as a constituent of ancient artifacts through its high nickel content. Known as "the ore of heaven" or "the black iron of the sky," it is mentioned in a fourteenth-century B.C.E. Hittite text. Evidence for the working of terrestrial iron as early as 2500 B.C.E. comes from northwest Turkey. However, it took another twelve hundred years until the Hittites first realized and exploited its industrial potentialities. Thereafter, terrestrial iron became more and more widespread. The true Iron Age does not begin in the Near East until ca. 1200 B.C.E. There is no way of telling to which variety of iron Hebrew ***barzel*** in this verse refers. Incidentally, the Beni Hasan paintings portray two pairs of skin bellows, essential for the fusing of molten iron.

Naamah This surprising note, with no further information about her, implies some once well-known personage. The stem *n-ʿ-m* means "good, lovely," and the name may express either her beauty or her character. The same stem also means "to sing." Targum Jonathan makes her a professional singer.[23]

THE SONG OF LAMECH (vv. 23–24)

This is the first true example of biblical Hebrew poetic style. It possesses neither meter nor rhyme in the present sense of these terms, but it does have an undeniable rhythmic quality. Its essential formal

[24]If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."
[25]Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning, "God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel," for Cain had killed

24 כִּי שִׁבְעָתַיִם יֻקַּם־קָיִן
וְלֶמֶךְ שִׁבְעִים וְשִׁבְעָה׃
25 וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא
אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שָׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים זֶרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת

characteristic is "parallelism," that is, the featuring of a couplet in which the second line may restate the thought of the first in different words, as here, may supplement it, may be antithetical to it, or may be climactic. The parallelism of the Song of Lamech is illustrated as follows:

Clause a	*Clause b*
Adah and Zillah	wives of Lamech
hear	give ear
my voice	my speech
a man	a lad
for wounding me	for bruising me
Cain	Lamech
sevenfold	seventy-sevenfold

The Song of Lamech probably originally belonged to a larger poetic composition about the exploits of this hero, and the inclusion of this here serves several purposes. First, it forms an envelope structure that enables the genealogy to end as it begins, with mention of Cain, thus linking the genealogy to the preceding episode. Moreover, the lust for revenge exhibited by Lamech is a lamentable commentary on the moral state of *homo faber.*

Because of the brevity of the poem and the loss of its original context, the interpretation of the verses is uncertain. An attractive suggestion is that they constitute Lamech's taunts, threats, and boastings, which are of the kind customarily uttered in ancient times by those about to engage in combat. The story of David and Goliath, as told in 1 Samuel 17, especially verses 10, 36, and 43–46, is an excellent biblical example of this genre. Alternatively, Lamech may be describing some incident that has already taken place in which he actually shed blood to avenge a previously inflicted wound. The translation of the tenses of the verbs in verse 23 will, of course, be affected by the interpretation adopted.

*23. **a man . . . a lad*** Such a pair in parallelism is unique. If the two are synonymous here, then Hebrew *yeled,* usually a "child,"[24] is to be understood as derogatory: "This man, my antagonist, is but a mere child in combat!" The two nouns could also express degree, as in verse 24. Lamech boasts of recognizing no restraints in exacting revenge.

for wounding me In this and its parallel term the Hebrew suffix could be either objective, as here rendered, or subjective, in the sense of, "My mere wounding/bruising of my combatant is fatal."

*24. **sevenfold*** Compare verse 15.

SETH AND ENOSH (vv. 25–26)

The line of Cain passes into oblivion. Despite the air of gloom that pervades the chapter, it concludes on a hopeful note. Humankind is regenerated through another son of Adam and Eve.

*25. **Seth*** The name is here connected with the stem *sh-y-t,* "to place, put, set." The birth of Seth compensates for the loss of Abel. Since the noun *shat* means "foundation," as in Isaiah 19:10 and Psalm 11:3, there may lie behind the name the notion that, as Numbers Rabba 14:20 has it, "With him the world was founded [anew]." It is probably no coincidence that Seth, in turn, named his son Enosh, which, like Adam, means "man" but which puts the emphasis on the basic frailty of man because the stem *'-n-sh* means "to be weak."

meaning Hebrew *ki,* literally "because." The phrase "she said," supplied by the Septuagint and the Targums, is understood. A similar unintroduced quotation is found in 32:21 and 41:51.

him. 26And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the LORD by name.

הֶבֶל כִּי הָרָגוֹ קָיִן׃ 26 וּלְשֵׁת גַּם־הוּא יֻלַּד־בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אֱנוֹשׁ אָז הוּחַל לִקְרֹא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה׃ פ ששי

26. men began to invoke the LORD by name Prayer, as noted above, is seen as a development independent of sacrifice. It is the consciousness of human frailty, symbolized by the name Enosh, that heightens man's awareness of utter dependence upon God, a situation that intuitively evokes prayer. The coupling of prayer with the divine proper name YHVH is understandable because this name, the simplest interpretation of which is "He Who Causes To Be," expresses God's personality, His relationship to human beings, and His immanence in the world.

This text takes monotheism to be the original religion of the human race, and the knowledge of the name YHVH to be pre-Abrahamic. In conformity with this notion, YHVH is freely used throughout the patriarchal narratives. On the other hand, it is significant that of all the proper names listed in the Torah, none is constructed of the divine element based on this name, whether prefixed *yeho/yo* or suffixed *yahu/yah,* until the birth of Moses. *Yokheved,* the Hebrew name of Moses' mother, is the first such. This accords with the tradition of Exodus 3:13–16 and 6:3, which clearly implies that the divine name YHVH only came to prominence as the characteristic personal name of the God of Israel in the time of Moses. It was only then that the people as a whole experienced the essential character of God as it revealed itself through His direct intervention in history.

CHAPTER 5

The Book of Genealogies (5:1–6:8)

Having disposed of the line of Cain, the narrative now takes up the idea of a fresh start for humanity, as implied in the preceding verses. Commencing with Adam, it presents a vertical genealogy that covers ten generations spanning the period between the creation of the world of man and the advent of Noah, who witnessed its destruction.

Parallel to the traditions in the present chapter is the list of Sumerian kings who reigned before the flood, as recorded by Berossus, a Babylonian priest of the third century B.C.E. who wrote a history of Babylonia in Greek. He too details ten antediluvians, the last also being the hero of a flood. There is reason to believe that the ten-generation pattern for genealogies was favored by Western Semites in general and that the convention left its mark on the historiography of Israel. We meet this phenomenon again in the genealogy of David from Perez, as set forth in Ruth 4:18–22 and 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9–15.

In the Bible this pattern is utilized for theological purposes. It so happens that, following the Flood, ten more generations separate Noah from Abraham, whose birth is projected as being another climactic turning point in human history. The genealogical chain that registers this development in 11:10–26 follows almost the identical literary pattern as that of the present chapter. The conclusion is unmistakable: we have here a deliberate, symmetrical schematization of history, featuring neatly balanced, significant segments of time as a way of expressing the fundamental biblical teaching that history is meaningful. It is not a series of haphazard incidents but the unfolding of a divinely ordained, meaningful design, the corollary being that human activity lies under the perpetual scrutiny of God.

The present chapter also serves other functions in ways that are more specific to its immediate context. The biblical Narrator does not seek to present a comprehensive history. Rather, his is a highly selective and episodic presentation in conformity with larger theological purposes. Hence, the genealogy enables him to bring together otherwise disconnected occurrences and smooths the transition from Adam to Noah. At the same time, it demonstrates how the divine blessing of 1:28, "Be fertile and increase," is being fulfilled. Finally, it again emphasizes the great teaching of the first two chapters that the entire human race is traceable to common ancestry and thus constitutes a unity.

The present genealogy appears to share several items in common with the Cainite list of chapter 4. The names Enoch and Lamech occur in both; Cain and Kenan are almost identical in Hebrew; and

5 This is the record of Adam's line.—When God created man, He made him in the likeness of God; 2male and

ה זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדֹת אָדָם בְּיוֹם בְּרֹא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם
בִּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ׃ 2 זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בְּרָאָם

Irad sounds like Jered, as does Methusael like Methuselah. Also, the last entry in each list is segmented so that three sons are mentioned in each case. These similarities have led some scholars to regard the two lists as doublets, either one being a reworking of the other or both deriving from a common source. Supporting this claim is said to be the additional fact that the Mesopotamian lists of early kings exist in several recensions that vary in number from seven to eight to ten generations. Yet it should be pointed out that in all the latter, the flood is the epochal dividing line, whereas the Cainite genealogy of chapter 4 is not so oriented. Moreover, only two names are really identical, while the similarity in other names is more superficial than real. It is also difficult to understand why an editor should arbitrarily have rearranged the order of the generations.

There is a stereotyped pattern in the genealogy. For each personality, the age at which he first became the father of a son is noted, then the number of his remaining years, then the fact that he fathered sons and daughters, and, finally, the age when he died. The formula is varied in the case of the first and the last on the list, Adam and Noah, so that these constitute a literary framework for the entire list. The seventh, Enoch, is also singled out for special attention, meriting four verses instead of the three uniformly assigned to each of the other personalities.

The remarkably long lives enjoyed by the patriarchs before the Flood accord with the widespread folkloristic notion that associates ancient heroes with extraordinary longevity. Compared, however, with Mesopotamian ideas, the biblical figures give the appearance of moderation. The combined total of the years reigned by the ten antediluvian kings in the list of Berossus comes to 432,000; that of the Sumerian King List adds up to 241,200. By way of contrast, in Genesis the years from Adam to the Flood number 1,656. What the specific figures represent individually and collectively, whether they are invested with symbolic meaning or are the constituents of some comprehensive schematization, is presently unknown. If any such exists, it has not yet yielded its secret. The matter is further complicated by the variations in the numbers found in the Samaritan recension and in the Septuagint version of the Torah.

1–2. These verses are introductory and recapitulate 1:26–28.[1]

This is the record of Adam's line This is most likely the title of an ancient genealogical work that served as the source for the data provided in the present chapter, in 11:10–27, and possibly in other genealogical lists as well. Hebrew *sefer,* here rendered "record," specifically denotes a written document, not an oral composition.

Adam The Sifra to Leviticus, Kedoshim 4:12, reports on a discussion between Rabbi Akiba and Ben Azzai (mid 2nd cent. C.E.). Akiba declared Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself," to be a cardinal principle of the Torah. Ben Azzai proclaimed the present opening phrase, "This is the record of the line of man *('adam),*" to express a superior rule. By tracing all humanity back to a common parentage, this phrase conveys the idea that the "Golden Rule" is logically indefensible without the presupposition of the absolute unity and equality of the human race as created by God.

in the likeness of God This phrase refers to 1:26. The use of *demut* alone, without *tselem,* "image," is probably conditioned by consideration of assonance: *'adam, 'adam, demut.* Compare Comment to 9:6.

He blessed them A knowledge of 1:27–28 is presumed. Since the theme of the chapter is the replication of the human race, one is reminded that sexuality is a divine blessing and procreation a God-given duty.

and called them Man As explained in the Comment to 2:19, the act of naming, in the biblical concept, is the exercise of authority and mastery. That God Himself gave the human race its name is not mentioned in chapter 1, but it is implied there in verse 26. It is made explicit here because inherent in the genealogical concept is human replication of divine creativity. Each act of procreation is an imitation of God's original creation of man. Hence, there is need to assert man's creatureliness, that is, his absolute subordination to God.

female He created them. And when they were created, He blessed them and called them Man.—[3]When Adam had lived 130 years, he begot a son in his likeness after his image, and he named him Seth. [4]After the birth of Seth, Adam lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. [5]All the days that Adam lived came to 930 years; then he died.

[6]When Seth had lived 105 years, he begot Enosh. [7]After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and begot sons and daughters. [8]All the days of Seth came to 912 years; then he died.

[9]When Enosh had lived 90 years, he begot Kenan.[10]After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and begot sons and daughters. [11]All the days of Enosh came to 905 years; then he died.

[12]When Kenan had lived 70 years, he begot Mahalalel. [13]After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and begot sons and daughters. [14]All the days of Kenan came to 910 years; then he died.

[15]When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he begot Jared. [16]After the birth of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and begot sons and daughters. [17]All the days of Mahalalel came to 895 years; then he died.

[18]When Jared had lived 162 years, he begot Enoch. [19]After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and begot sons and daughters. [20]All the days of Jared came to 962 years; then he died.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָם אָדָם בְּיוֹם הִבָּרְאָם׃
ס 3 וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד
בִּדְמוּתוֹ כְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת׃ 4 וַיִּהְיוּ
יְמֵי־אָדָם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שֵׁת שְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת
שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ 5 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי אָדָם
אֲשֶׁר־חַי תְּשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃
ס 6 וַיְחִי־שֵׁת חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־אֱנוֹשׁ׃ 7 וַיְחִי־שֵׁת אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־
אֱנוֹשׁ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ 8 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי־שֵׁת שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ ס 9 וַיְחִי אֱנוֹשׁ
תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־קֵינָן׃ 10 וַיְחִי אֱנוֹשׁ
אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־קֵינָן חָמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ 11 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי
אֱנוֹשׁ חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃
ס 12 וַיְחִי קֵינָן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־
מַהֲלַלְאֵל׃ 13 וַיְחִי קֵינָן אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־
מַהֲלַלְאֵל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ 14 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי קֵינָן עֶשֶׂר
שָׁנִים וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ ס 15 וַיְחִי
מַהֲלַלְאֵל חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־
יָרֶד׃ 16 וַיְחִי מַהֲלַלְאֵל אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־יָרֶד
שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ 17 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי מַהֲלַלְאֵל חָמֵשׁ וְתִשְׁעִים
שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנֶה מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ ס 18 וַיְחִי־
יֶרֶד שְׁתַּיִם וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־
חֲנוֹךְ׃ 19 וַיְחִי־יֶרֶד אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־חֲנוֹךְ שְׁמֹנֶה
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ 20 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי־
יֶרֶד שְׁתַּיִם וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה

ADAM (vv. 3–5)

a son in his likeness after his image What constituted "the image of God" in the first two human beings was transmitted through procreation to all future generations.

he named him This formula appears again in the present unit only in verse 29, in respect of Noah, to form a literary framework. In 4:25 it was the woman who named Seth. The masculine is used here because only the fathers are featured in the genealogy.

Seth Cain and Abel are ignored, not because this list represents another tradition that had Seth as the first-born, but because the sole concern of the document is to trace a linear genealogical chain from Adam to Noah. For an analogy, see the line of Aaron as given in 1 Chronicles 6:35ff., which ignores the two older sons Nadab and Abihu, whose deaths are reported in Leviticus 10:1–2.[2]

After the birth of Seth The continuity of the line is in jeopardy until the birth of the first son, who becomes, for that reason, a child of destiny. Hence, this event marks a meaningful point of demarcation in the measurement of a human lifetime.

[21]When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. [22]After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. [23]All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. [24]Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

[25]When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he begot Lamech. [26]After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and begot sons and daughters. [27]All the days of Methuselah came to 969 years; then he died.

וַיָּמֹת׃ פ 21 וַיְחִי חֲנוֹךְ חָמֵשׁ וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־מְתוּשָׁלַח׃ 22 וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־
הָאֱלֹהִים אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־מְתוּשֶׁלַח שְׁלֹשׁ
מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ 23 וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי
חֲנוֹךְ חָמֵשׁ וְשִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה׃
24 וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֵינֶנּוּ כִּי־לָקַח
אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים׃ פ שביעי 25 וַיְחִי מְתוּשֶׁלַח
שֶׁבַע וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־לָמֶךְ׃
26 וַיְחִי מְתוּשֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־לֶמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם
וּשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ 27 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי מְתוּשֶׁלַח תֵּשַׁע וְשִׁשִּׁים
שָׁנָה וּתְשַׁע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ פ 28 וַיְחִי־

ENOCH (vv. 21–24)

The seventh on the list, Enoch is singled out for special mention. The allusive brevity of this biographical note suggests the one-time existence of some well-known story connected with his life and death. In postbiblical Jewish literature he became the focus of legends connecting him with a knowledge of the secrets of heaven, with the invention of mathematics and astronomy, and especially with the devising of a solar-based calendar. Curiously, in the Sumerian King List, the seventh, Enme(n)duranna, enjoyed an intimate relationship with the sun god, according to Mesopotamian legend, and was initiated into the arts of divination, astrology, and mathematics.

walked with God The regular formula, "he lived," is replaced by a description of how he lived. The idiom is used again only of Noah in 6:9 and, in a slightly varied form, of the ideal priest in Malachi 2:6. It is expressive of a life spent in full accord with God's will and in closest intimacy with Him.

23. ***365 years*** Whether this figure is actually inspired by the solar year and reflects the legend about Enoch's calendar, or whether it became the source of that legend, cannot be determined. If there is a connection with the Mesopotamian tradition in which the sun god is featured, then the number 365 would be significant. What is important is that our biblical text is wholly devoid of pagan elements. It is not caprice that determines Enoch's relationship to God but the quality of his chosen lifestyle.

24. ***Enoch walked with God*** This is repeated, as Bekhor Shor noted, so that the brevity of Enoch's life not be misinterpreted as a punishment for sin.

then he was no more The regular formula, "then he died," is replaced by a description of how he died. The term is most frequently used of sudden, unexpected, and unexplained disappearance.[3]

for God took him A euphemism for death, as is clear from such passages as Ezekiel 24:16,18 and Jonah 4:3.[4] It is most likely used here, as Rashi noted, with the sense of premature death. It was the narrative about Elijah's transference to heaven without dying, as told in 2 Kings 2, that gave rise to the popular legend that Enoch too underwent this experience of apotheosis.

METHUSELAH (vv. 25–27)

The one who lived the longest life span is fathered by the individual who had the shortest. His death coincides with the onset of the Flood, according to the present chronological scheme. His name has variously been interpreted to mean "the man of the weapon" or "the man of the infernal river."[5]

[28]When Lamech had lived 182 years, he begot a son. [29]And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the LORD placed under a curse." [30]After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived 595 years and begot sons and daughters. [31]All the days of Lamech came to 777 years; then he died.

[32]When Noah had lived 500 years, Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

לֶמֶךְ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בֵּן׃
29 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יְנַחֲמֵנוּ
מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמֵעִצְּבוֹן יָדֵינוּ מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אֵרְרָהּ
יְהוָה׃ 30 וַיְחִי־לֶמֶךְ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נֹחַ חָמֵשׁ
וְתִשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וַחֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ 31 וַיְהִי כָּל־יְמֵי־לֶמֶךְ שֶׁבַע וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה
וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ ס 32 וַיְהִי־נֹחַ בֶּן־
חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם
וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃

LAMECH (vv. 28–31)

On the name, see Comment to 4:18.

28. he begot a son The arrival of the tenth generation marks a critical turning point in human history and so brings the list to completion. The formulaic style is therefore varied. The text is expanded to focus upon the one who is to become the illustrious hero of the age.

29. Noah The name as such is unparalleled in biblical and extrabiblical sources. It would appear to derive from the stem *n-w-ḥ,* "to rest," and there are records of Akkadian and Amorite personal names compounded of this element. The explanation given in the narrative rests on similarity of sound, not on etymology, since Noah cannot derive from *n-ḥ-m,* "to comfort, give relief." The incongruity is noted in Genesis Rabba 25:2. In the Hurrian version of the Gilgamesh Epic, one hero of the flood is Naḫmasulel, and a dim recollection of this may have influenced the word play in our text. At any rate, the two stems, *n-w-ḥ* and *n-ḥ-m,* are subtly integrated into the language of the narrative. The first stem appears in 6:8 and 8:4,9,21; the second provides an ironic touch, for this same stem is used in 6:6,7. As Rashbam observes, since Noah was the first to be born after the death of Adam, his arrival signified some easing of the curse laid on the soil through Adam's sin. The father looked to "relief" *(yenaḥamenu)* from "toil" *('itsavon),* but instead came God's decision to wipe out civilization. God "regretted" *(va-yinnaḥem - niḥamti)* and was "saddened" *(va-yit'atsev).*

relief The reference is probably to a tradition about Noah as a culture hero. According to Tanḥuma Genesis 11, he invented the plow; that is to say, he was the initiator of true agriculture as opposed to hoe agriculture or horticulture. The invention of the plow inaugurated a revolution in the production of food and effected an enormous saving of time and energy. Such a tradition may underlie 9:20, which describes Noah as "a tiller of the soil." Another possibility is the report in that same text that Noah initiated viticulture. He was the first to discover the soothing, consoling, and enlivening effects of wine.[6]

NOAH (v. 32)

The extraordinarily advanced age at which he begets a child, as compared with his forebears, is required by the fact that, according to 7:11, he is 600 at the time of the Flood, and there are no grandchildren in the ark. Noah is also the only personage in the list who has no daughters. This must be connected with 6:1–2, which tells how fallen angels consort with the daughters of men. The idea is that his immediate family remained uncorrupted. See Comment to 9:24 in regard to the order of the three names.

Shem Its meaning is "name, fame, renown," and it is probably abbreviated from *shemuel* or the like.

Ham Its origin is obscure, despite attempts to connect it with Hebrew *ḥam,* "a wife's father," *ḥam,* "hot, dark-skinned," and Egyptian *ḥm,* "servant." Ham is synonymous with Egypt in Psalms 78:51; 105:23,27; and 106:32.

6 When men began to increase on earth and daughters were born to them, 2the divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them.—3The LORD said, "My breath shall

וַיְהִי כִּי־הֵחֵל הָאָדָם לָרֹב עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה
וּבָנוֹת יֻלְּדוּ לָהֶם: 2 וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנוֹת
הָאָדָם כִּי טֹבֹת הֵנָּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מִכֹּל
אֲשֶׁר בָּחָרוּ: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לֹא־יָדוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם

Japheth The name may be the same as that of Iapetus, which appears in Greek mythology but has no Greek etymology. Its meaning is unknown.

CHAPTER 6 CELESTIAL-TERRESTRIAL INTERMARRIAGE (vv. 1–4)

At the beginning of history, humans strove to rise to the level of divine beings, and God intervened. Humankind cannot be immortal. Here divine beings lower themselves to the level of humans, and God intervenes. A severe limitation on human longevity results.

The account given in these few verses is surely the strangest of all the Genesis narratives. It is so full of difficulties as to defy certainty of interpretation. The perplexities arise from the theme of the story, from its apparent intrusiveness within the larger narrative, from its extreme terseness, and from some of its vocabulary and syntax. The passage cannot be other than a fragment of what was once a well-known and fuller story, now etched in the barest outline.

Legends about intercourse between gods and mortal women and between goddesses and men, resulting in the generation of demigods, are widespread and familiar ingredients of pagan mythology. The present theme of celestial beings arriving on earth and intermarrying with humans seems at first glance to belong to the same genre, echoes of which are found in other biblical passages. Thus, behind the exclamation of Isaiah 14:12—"How are you fallen from heaven, / O Shining One, son of Dawn!/ How are you felled to earth"—is the notion of angels in rebellion against God and thereby forfeiting their angelic dignity. Job 4:18–19 similarly expresses the theme of the corruptibility of angels: "If He cannot trust His own servants, / And casts reproach on His angels, / How much less those who dwell in houses of clay."

In light of these and other biblical references, such as Ezekiel 32:27, it is quite likely that the main function of the present highly condensed version of the original story is to combat polytheistic mythology. The picture here presented of celestial beings intermarrying with women on earth may partake of the mythical, but it does not overstep the bounds of monotheism; there is only one God who passes judgment and makes decisions. The offspring of such unnatural union may have possessed heroic stature, but they have no divine qualities; they are flesh and blood like all humans. They are not only mortal, but their life span is severely limited as compared with the personages listed in chapter 5. The one God is recognized as holding sole title to the breath of life, which He controls as He wills.

This literary segment has three points of connection with the preceding passage: the opening reference to human fecundity in verse 1 takes up the theme implicit in the genealogy; mention of daughters links up with the oft-repeated formula there regarding the begetting of sons and daughters; and the specific restriction of human longevity presupposes knowledge of the extraordinary ages recorded in chapter 5. At the same time, the story is immediately followed by God's verdict on human wickedness, and the impression is created, even if not made explicit, that it illustrates the magnitude and the universality of evil in the world. Even the celestial host is corrupted. True, mankind is not condemned here for the acts of angels, but the effect is that the world order has been disturbed.

1. ***men*** Hebrew *ha-'adam* is here a collective, the human race.[1]

2. ***the divine beings*** The definite article points to a familiar and well-understood term.[2] The context in Job 1:6; 2:1; and 38:7 unmistakably proves the reference to be to the angelic host, the celestial entourage of God. This is a poetic image drawn from the analogy of human kings surrounded by their assemblage of courtiers. Occasionally, as in 1 Kings 22:19, "the host of heaven" is used to the same effect.

saw how beautiful The implication is that they were driven by lust, so that external beauty, and not character, was their sole criterion in the selection of mates.

not abide in man forever, since he too is flesh; let the days allowed him be one hundred and twenty years."—[4]It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth—when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring. They were the heroes of old, the men of renown.

[5]The LORD saw how great was man's wickedness on earth, and how every plan devised by his mind was nothing but evil all the time. [6]And the LORD regretted that He had made

לְעֹלָם בְּשַׁגַּם הוּא בָשָׂר וְהָיוּ יָמָיו מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים
שָׁנָה׃ 4 הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וְגַם
אַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־בְּנוֹת
הָאָדָם וְיָלְדוּ לָהֶם הַמָּה הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם
אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם׃ פ מפטיר 5 וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי
רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וְכָל־יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבֹת לִבּוֹ
רַק רַע כָּל־הַיּוֹם׃ 6 וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־

took wives Hebrew *l-k-ḥ 'ishah* is the regular term for the marriage relationship. There is no suggestion here of violent possession or any condemnation of the women involved.

3. ***The LORD said*** See Comment to 3:22.

My breath The life force that issues from God, corresponding to "the breath of life" in 2:7.[3] Its presence or withdrawal determines life and death.

shall not abide This rendering of the otherwise unexampled Hebrew *yadon* best suits the context and follows the Septuagint, the Vulgate, Saadia, and Ramban. However, Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, and Ibn Ezra connect the word with the stem *d-y-n,* "to judge." The meaning here would then be something like, "I shall go on suspending judgment."

in man Taken together with the next clause, the reference would be specifically to the offspring of these unnatural unions, but all humankind is included within the scope of the verdict because disorder has been introduced into God's creation.

flesh They are not divine despite their nonhuman paternity.[4] "Flesh" connotes human frailty. Psalms 56:5 and Isaiah 31:3 are good examples of this usage.

one hundred and twenty years The duration of human life is drastically shortened, the diminution being emblematic of moral and spiritual degeneration.[5] Early exegesis of this verse prefers to see here a reference to the interval of time remaining before the Flood. The figure would then represent three conventional generations of forty years each.[6]

4. This verse is obscure, probably deliberately so, in order to downgrade the mythic tone. The etymology of Nephilim is uncertain.[7] The obvious association with *n-f-l* yields the rendering "fallen ones," that is, fallen angels. But it is not clear from the text that the Nephilim are identical with the "divine beings." Rather, they appear to be the offspring of the misalliances, who continued to generate Nephilim in the course of their married lives. Because Numbers 13:33 implies that these were people of extraordinary physical stature, the term was understood to mean "giants" or "heroes." While it is not certain from the text whether or not the Nephilim themselves procreated, it is contrary to the understanding of the biblical narrative that they should have survived the Flood. Hence, the reference in Numbers is not to the supposedly continued existence of Nephilim into Israelite times; rather, it is used simply for oratorical effect, much as "Huns" was used to designate Germans during the two world wars.

cohabited Significantly, the verb *y-d-'* is not used, as in 4:1,17, and 25, but a coarser term, as befits the circumstances.

heroes of old, the men of renown Their heroic exploits were the subject of many a popular tale. On the analogy of 11:4, it is possible that they were guilty of some vainglorious outrages.

THE PROLOGUE TO THE FLOOD (vv. 5–8)

The few notices interspersed with the genealogies of chapters 4 and 5 suggest a situation of generational regression from a moral point of view. Endowed with free will, man has used God's gift to

man on earth, and His heart was saddened. 7The Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret that I made them." 8But Noah found favor with the LORD.

הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ׃ 7 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֶמְחֶה אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי
הָאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף
הַשָּׁמָיִם כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עֲשִׂיתִם׃ 8 וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן
בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה׃ פ

mischievous ends. The limit of divine tolerance in the face of increasing evil has been reached.

These verses are by way of theodicy; that is, the Narrator is careful to stress that the universal cataclysm into which the world is about to be plunged is not the result of blind fate or the workings of divine caprice but the considered judgment of God made inevitable by human evil.

5. The LORD saw This phrase has juridical overtones, implying both investigation of the facts and readiness for action.[8]

how great The use of the same Hebrew stem here as in verse 1 suggests that the measure of evil grows in proportion to the growth in population.

every plan devised by his mind Literally, "every product of the thoughts of his heart." In biblical psychology, mental phenomena fall within the sphere of the heart, which is the organ of thought, understanding, and volition, not of feeling. In later Hebrew, *yetser,* "the thing devised, the product," is the term for the innate impulses or drives in human beings that dispose them to good *(yetser tov)* or evil *(yetser ra')* and that can be controlled and directed by the exercise of the will. God's observation is a judgment on the moral state of man at that specific time.

6. regretted . . . saddened See Comment to 5:29. This is an anthropopathism, or the ascription to God of human emotions, a frequent feature of the biblical narrative. The need for such usage arises from the inherent tension between God's transcendence and His immanence. On the one hand, He is conceived to be wholly outside of nature, omniscient and omnipotent, sovereign over time and space, and not subject to change. On the other hand, He is also immanent in the world, not withdrawn from it, a personal God who is actively involved in the lives of His creatures, approachable by them, and responsive to their needs. God's transcendence requires formulation in abstract, philosophical language that poses the danger of depriving Him of personality and relevance. God's immanence must unavoidably be expressed in concrete, imaginative terms that entail the risk of compromising His invariability. The biblical writers frequently took that risk for the sake of emphasizing God's vital presence and personality; otherwise, the God idea would have lost all meaning for them. Statements like that in Numbers 23:19, "God is not man to be capricious, / Or mortal to change His mind," and 1 Samuel 15:29, "He is not human that He should change His mind," serve as a corrective to the misunderstanding that may arise from a passage such as this one. In both instances, the Hebrew uses the same verb, here rendered "regretted."

saddened God's decision is made in sorrow not in anger.

7. The LORD said Compare verse 3.

8. Noah Mention of him without further detail presupposes knowledge of 5:28–29.

Noah . . . favor The reason for this is given in verse 9 and in 7:1. The two words in Hebrew constitute an anagram: *nḥ–ḥn.*

Noah and the Flood (6:9–9:17)

Noaḥ

By the tenth generation after Adam, human evil has reached the ultimate depths. The moral pollution is so great that the limits of divine tolerance have been breached. The world must be purged of its corruption.

The Flood is a cosmic catastrophe that is actually the undoing of creation. But God's chastisement and grace operate simultaneously, so that out of the disaster comes renewal. One righteous man, Noah, together with his family and representative animals and birds are to be saved in order to regenerate the world.

The action progresses in four stages. Noah receives detailed instructions from God as to how to ensure his survival and carries these out to the letter (6:9–22). Then the Flood is unloosed with all its intended devastation (chap. 7). Third, the Flood comes to its appointed end (8:1–14). Finally, the harmony between God and humanity is restored and the reordering of the world is decreed (8:15–9:17).

The Mesopotamian Background. The very notion of a deluge of cataclysmic proportions raises the question as to the origin and historic setting of the narrative.

It is unlikely that the topography of the Land of Israel, a hilly country with a dry climate, could have served as the source of inspiration. No accumulation of clay deposits, the telltale evidence of extensive flooding, has been uncovered in excavations there. None, for instance, is present in Jericho, a town that dates back 9,000 years. Indeed, rabbinic lore has it that the Land of Israel was exempt from the Flood.

Mesopotamia, on the other hand, supplies a natural locale for a flood tradition. Both cuneiform documents and archaeological research provide abundant testimony to periodic inundation of the flat alluvial valley between the Tigris and Euphrates. Torrential rains coupled with seasonal cyclones, and the early melting of the snows in the mountains of Anatolia, have from time to time combined to cause the rivers to burst their banks and turn the land into hundreds of miles of lake. It is not surprising that it is Mesopotamian civilization that produced the popular flood stories of the ancient Near East, stories that have come down to us in several versions and recensions.

The fullest extant narrative is that found in the eleventh tablet of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. However, the flood episode in that version is a late addition to the story. Its parent version was the Atraḫasis Epic, a history of the human race from creation to the flood and its aftermath. There also exists a Sumerian counterpart to the flood narrative. The Mesopotamian story even survived into Hellenistic times. The Babylonian priest Berossus (3rd century B.C.E.) included it in his history of Babylon.

The name of the hero differs from version to version. In Gilgamesh it is Utnapishtim, which means "He found [everlasting] life"; Atraḫasis means "exceedingly wise"; Ziusudra of the Sumerian epic, Grecized by Berossus as Xisuthros, denotes "life of long days." The different accounts also vary in other details. Nevertheless, the literary structure and wealth of descriptive material common to them all warrant the conclusion that they are interdependent.

There is also good reason to believe that a single historic event inspired the original composition. It is precisely from present-day Fara, the site of ancient Shuruppak, where Utnapishtim lived, that we have archaeological evidence of a devastating deluge. Similar fluvial deposits from the same date, about 2900 B.C.E., have turned up in the excavations at Kish. Moreover, it can now be independently established that the mythical hero Gilgamesh was actually a historical figure, a king of Uruk, as was Ubartutu, a king of Shuruppak and father of Utnapishtim. Similarly, Ziusudra was a king of the same town.

Genesis and the Mesopotamian Accounts. It is safe to conclude that the parallels between the biblical account of the Flood and the Mesopotamian stories, being so numerous and detailed, are much more than the result of mere coincidence. Yet it cannot be claimed that any version presently known is the direct source of the biblical narrative, for the latter has points of contact with each version while it also contains items independent of them all. The many parallels and contrasts are given at their appropriate place within the commentary. A few significant items of broader interest are mentioned here as introductory material.

In the Bible, the Flood is a climactic turning point in a larger history of humankind that begins with the history of the world. The identical situation is present in the Sumerian, Atraḫasis, and Berossus stories, and it is reflected in the Sumerian King List. A crucial point of departure by the Bible from all these versions is the deliberate divine decision to save the hero, which is communicated to him directly. In the Mesopotamian tales, humanity was supposed to have been completely wiped out;

the rescue of the hero occurred inadvertently, by dint of the perfidy and subterfuge of one of the gods acting against the intent of the others. The motivation of the deities in causing a flood is not recorded in Gilgamesh or Berossus, while in the Atraḫasis story the flood is the gods' solution to the tumult of mankind, which increasingly disturbs them. This is apparently another way of describing the problem of overpopulation. In Genesis, the Flood is God's response to the pollution of the earth by the moral corruption of the human race, and there is not the slightest doubt that it is Noah's integrity that determines his fate. In Atraḫasis and Berossus, the hero also appears to be famed for his piety and integrity, but there is no explanation for the favor shown to Utnapishtim. Both Noah and Xisuthros belong to the tenth generation of antediluvians; in the Sumerian King List there are eight such, and the other versions are silent on the place of the hero in the chronological scheme. While the biblical Noah is an ordinary person, the heroes of the parallel versions are of royal blood.

The duration of the deluge is not uniform in the various accounts. Atraḫasis and the Sumerian version have seven days and seven nights followed by the shining sun. In Gilgamesh there seem to be six days of inundation. Berossus gives no information on the subject, nor do the Mesopotamian accounts report on the time it took for the earth to dry up. By contrast, Genesis has a precise chronology for the various stages of the Flood.

Perhaps the most significant of all the distinctive features of the Torah account is that only Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives enter the ark, whereas in the other accounts the builders of the vessel, the boatman, relatives, and friends are passengers with the hero and his family. This means that only in Genesis is the concept of a single family of man possible; indeed, it is a major theme.

From all the foregoing, coupled with the detailed observations made in the commentary, it is clear that our biblical account constitutes an independent Israelite version that is nevertheless closely related to the Mesopotamian traditions. It is likely that underlying the present prose narrative was an earlier poetic composition, the substratum of which may still be discernible. This would account for the occurrence of so many unique or rare words, such as ***gofer, kinnim, tsohar, mabbul, yekum,*** and ***keshet.*** It would also explain poetic sentences such as 7:11 and 8:22, as well as the sevenfold repetition of so many key words. When Isaiah 54:9 refers to "the waters of Noah" rather than to "the Flood," for instance, there may be a citation from some ancient popular source not otherwise preserved. There is every reason to believe that in ancient Israel, as in Mesopotamia, more than one version of the great flood story once circulated, each distinguished by characteristic vocabulary and emphasis on certain details. As a matter of fact, many modern scholars claim that it is still possible to isolate the various pre-Pentateuchal strands of Israelite tradition utilized by the Narrator in producing the present, definitive Torah edition of the Flood story. The evidence for this is taken to be the existence of doublets, the differences in the divine names—sometimes YHVH, sometimes ***'elohim***—and stylistic variants for the same thing. Examples of the latter are "male and female" in 6:19 and 7:16 but "males and their mates" (lit. "man and his wife") in 7:2; the use of ***m-ḥ-h,*** "to blot out," in 6:7 and 7:4,23, as opposed to ***sh-ḥ-t,*** "destroy," in 6:13–17; ***m-v-t,*** "to die," in 7:22 but ***g-v-ʿ,*** "to perish," in 6:17 and 7:21; ***kol ha-yekum***, "all existence," in 7:4,23 but ***kol basar***, "all flesh," in 6:13,17, and 7:21. There are also said to be internal differences in matters of chronology and in the number of animals to be brought into the ark, though these items can be otherwise explained. See Excursus 2.

Whatever be its literary history, the Flood story of the Torah stands out as an authentic, original expression of the religious genius of Israel. Conceptually, spiritually, and morally, it stands in striking contrast to all the other versions.

The Flood and Creation. The uncompromisingly moral tenor and didactic purpose of the Genesis Flood story have influenced its literary artistry. Because humanly wrought evil is perceived to be the undoing of God's creativity, numerous elements in the story are artful echoes of the Creation narrative. Thus the divine decision to wipe out the human race employs the same two verbs that are used in the original Creation, but transposed in order to symbolize the reversal of the process (6:7; cf. 1:26–27). The Deluge itself is brought about by the release and virtual reuniting of the two halves of the primordial waters that had been separated in the beginning (7:11; cf. 1:1,6–7). The classification of animal life in 6:20 and 7:14 corresponds to that in 1:11–12,21,24–25. The provisioning of food in 6:21 depends upon 1:29–30. Noah is the first man to be born after the death of Adam, according to the chronology of 5:28–29, and he becomes a second Adam, the second father of humanity. Both

NOAḤ

[9]This is the line of Noah.—Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.—
[10]Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

[11]The earth became corrupt before God; the earth was filled with lawlessness. [12]When God saw how corrupt the

נח

9 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה
בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֶּךְ־נֹחַ׃ 10 וַיּוֹלֶד נֹחַ
שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים אֶת־שֵׁם אֶת־חָם וְאֶת־יָפֶת׃
11 וַתִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ
חָמָס׃ 12 וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה

personages beget three sons, one of whom turns out to be degenerate. Noah's ark is the matrix of a new creation, and, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, he lives in harmony with the animals. The role of the wind in sweeping back the flood waters recalls the wind from God in 1:2. The rhythm of nature established in 1:14 is suspended during the Flood and resumed thereafter, in 8:22. Finally, the wording of the divine blessing in 9:7 repeats that in 1:28, just as the genealogical lists of the Table of Nations in chapter 10 parallel those of 4:17–26 and 5:1–32 that follow the Creation story. In both cases the lineage of the human race is traced back to a common ancestry.

THE INDICTMENT (vv. 9–13)

9. The story of Noah and the Flood opens with an amplification of the preceding verse (6:8). It makes clear that the election of Noah by God is not a capricious act but the result of the man's intrinsic moral worthiness.

This is the line of Noah The present rendering regards the characterization of Noah as parenthetical, with this phrase being completed by verse 10. It is preferable to translate "This is the story of Noah" and to take the phrase as the caption to the entire narrative in which Noah plays a central role.[9] On the *'elleh toledot* formula, see Comment to 2:4.

righteous . . . blameless These cardinal terms of biblical Hebrew, *tsaddik* and *tamim,* are used here for the first time without definition, thus presupposing a clearly recognizable quality of virtue favored by God.[10] As Ramban indicates, *tsaddik* has its origin in legal terminology and implies one who is adjudged to be "in the right," which is its meaning in such texts as Exodus 23:7, Deuteronomy 25:1, and Proverbs 17:15. Accordingly, the term *tsaddik* describes one whose conduct is found to be beyond reproach by the divine Judge. The term *tamim,* which is mostly found in ritual contexts, describes a sacrificial animal that is without blemish, as in Exodus 12:5 and Leviticus 1:3,10. Only such an animal is acceptable to God, says Leviticus 22:17–25. As applied to human beings, *tamim* acquired a moral dimension connoting "unblemished" by moral fault—hence, a person of unimpeachable integrity. Such an individual enjoys God's fellowship, according to Psalms 15 and 101:6.

in his age In the face of universal corruption, he maintained civilized standards of behavior. The prophet Ezekiel (14:14,20) refers to Noah as one of the outstandingly righteous men of antiquity. Nevertheless, as Sanhedrin 108a reports, some rabbinic sages read into the phrase "in his age" a hint of some qualification of his reputation: had he lived in the age of Abraham, he would have been overshadowed by the patriarch's superior character. By use of midrash, further support for this view is read into the use of the accusative *'et,* here "with," before "God," in contrast to *lifnei,* literally "ahead of," with the same verb as applied to Abraham in Genesis 17:1. Noah is regarded as needing a divine prop to sustain his integrity, whereas Abraham has moral autonomy. There is indeed a measure of justification in this unfavorable comparison, for, unlike Abraham's response to the case of Sodom and Gomorrah in 18:23–52, Noah does not plead for mercy for his contemporaries. Sensitive to this moral issue, rabbinic lore supplements the text by having Noah warn his fellow men of impending disaster and call them to repentance.

walked with God See Comment to 5:22. The exceptional inversion of the Hebrew word order gives God pride of place in the sentence, thus accentuating the fact that the standards by which Noah's righteousness is judged are divine, not human.

earth was, for all flesh had corrupted its ways on earth,
13God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to all
flesh, for the earth is filled with lawlessness because of
them: I am about to destroy them with the earth. 14Make

כִּי־הִשְׁחִית כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֶת־דַּרְכּוֹ עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃
ס 13 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְנֹחַ קֵץ כָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּא
לְפָנַי כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ חָמָס מִפְּנֵיהֶם וְהִנְנִי
מַשְׁחִיתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃ 14 עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תֵּבַת עֲצֵי־

10. The data given in 5:32 are repeated in order to draw attention to the destiny of Noah and his sons as the common ancestors of a renewed humanity.[11]

11. ***The earth*** The use of such all-inclusive terms as "the earth," "man's wickedness," and "all flesh" in the indictment of humanity serves to justify God's actions. The totality of the evil in which the world has engulfed itself makes the totality of the catastrophe inevitable.

corrupt The key Hebrew stem *sh-ḥ-t* occurs seven times in the narrative.

corrupt . . . lawlessness The universal corruption is further defined as *ḥamas*. This term parallels "no justice" in Job 19:7 and is elsewhere the synonym of "falsehood," "deceit," or "bloodshed." It means, in general, the flagrant subversion of the ordered processes of law.[12] From the divine enactments for the regulation of society after the Flood, detailed in chapter 9, it may be deduced that *ḥamas* here refers predominantly to the arrogant disregard for the sanctity and inviolability of human life.

before God In the judgment of the One who is the ultimate arbiter of human conduct. No higher authority than willful self-interest had determined human conduct generally.

12. ***When God saw*** See Comment to 6:5.

all flesh It is not clear whether this refers only to all humankind or whether it includes the animal kingdom as well, as in verses 17 and 19. Sanhedrin 108a has the idea that even the beasts had corrupted themselves through the intermating of species. From the regulation in 9:5, it would appear that the animals had become carnivorous, contrary to the implications of God's decree in 1:20. The utopian visions of Isaiah 11:6–7 and 62:25, which see the animal kingdom as ideally herbivorous, support such a view.

13. ***God said to Noah*** God speaks to him directly seven times in this narrative. In the Mesopotamian tales, the decision of the gods was to have been kept secret from man.

No date is given for the initial communication with Noah. From 7:11 and 4, however, it is clear that Noah received the order to board the ark on the tenth day of the second month, that is, forty days after the New Year. Because forty is a symbolic number in the Bible, and especially so in this story, it is reasonable to conclude that God was thought to have first communicated to Noah his decision about the impending fate of the world on New Year's day.

an end Hebrew *kets* is overwhelmingly used in biblical Hebrew in a temporal context, meaning "a set term," the completion of a fixed period of time, as in Habakkuk 2:3, Psalms 39:5, and Job 6:11. Hence it can connote "doom," as in Amos 8:2 and Lamentations 4:18. *Kets* later became a key term in the vocabulary of Jewish eschatology, the doctrine of a violent and radical change in the direction of history that brings an end to one era and signals the regeneration of humanity. In this context, the *kets* stems from the unbridgeable gap between man's willful course and God's revealed will.

because of them They brought it on themselves. The impending catastrophe is not the product of divine caprice or nature's blind fury.

to destroy them The Hebrew employs the same stem as for the word "corrupt." The idea is that humankind cannot undermine the moral basis of society without endangering the very existence of its civilization. In fact, through its corruption, society sets in motion the process of inevitable self-destruction.

with the earth This is how *'et ha-'arets* was understood by the ancient versions.[13] Genesis Rabba 31:7 interprets that the topsoil of the earth is to be removed. This reflects the biblical idea that moral corruption physically contaminates the earth, which must be purged of its pollution.

yourself an ark of gopher wood; make it an ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16Make an opening for daylight in the ark, and terminate it within a cubit of the top. Put the entrance to the ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

17"For My part, I am about to bring the Flood—waters upon the earth—to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. 18But

גֹּפֶר קִנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ מִבַּיִת
וּמִחוּץ בַּכֹּפֶר: 15 וְזֶה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ שְׁלֹשׁ
מֵאוֹת אַמָּה אֹרֶךְ הַתֵּבָה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה רָחְבָּהּ
וּשְׁלֹשִׁים אַמָּה קוֹמָתָהּ: 16 צֹהַר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֵּבָה
וְאֶל־אַמָּה תְכַלֶּנָּה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפֶתַח הַתֵּבָה בְּצִדָּהּ
תָּשִׂים תַּחְתִּיִּם שְׁנִיִּם וּשְׁלִשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂהָ: 17 וַאֲנִי
הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל מַיִם עַל־הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁחֵת
כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם כֹּל
אֲשֶׁר־בָּאָרֶץ יִגְוָע: 18 וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ

INSTRUCTIONS FOR BUILDING THE ARK (vv. 14–16)

While nothing is left to Noah's initiative, he himself must fashion the instrument of his own salvation. The stem *ʿ-s-h,* "to make," is featured here seven times to stress this point.

14. ark The vessel, significantly, is called *tevah.* This key word recurs seven times here in the instructions for building the ark and seven times again in connection with the subsidence of the waters in 8:1–14. Yet *tevah,* in the sense of an ark, appears again in the Bible only in connection with the salvation of the baby Moses, in Exodus 2:3–5. The term suggests a boxlike craft made to float on the water but without rudder or sail or any other navigational aid. It does not use the services of a crew. The use of *tevah* is intended to emphasize that the fate of the occupants is to be determined solely by the will of God and not to be attributed to the skill of man. By contrast, the hero of the Mesopotamian stories builds a regular ship and employs boatmen to navigate it.

gopher wood This otherwise unknown type almost certainly refers to a coniferous tree of great durability. Sanhedrin 108a and the Targums, as well as Radak, identify it with the cedar. Many modern scholars prefer the cypress both because of a similarity in sound to the Hebrew and because it was widely used in shipbuilding in ancient times, due to its resistance to rot.

compartments This is the traditional understanding of the unique Hebrew *kinnim.* Since the singular *ken* means "a nest," the plural is used here in the sense of "cubicles" for the animals.

pitch The unique Hebrew *kofer* in this sense is identical with Akkadian *kupru,* which was used by Utnapishtim and Atraḫasis to caulk their respective ships. The usual word for "pitch" is *ḥemar,* as in 11:3; 14:10; and Exodus 2:3.

15. cubits Hebrew *ʾammah* literally means "forearm," the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger of an average-sized man (cf. Deut. 3:11). The standard biblical cubit is about 18 inches (45 cm.). This would yield dimensions of about 450 feet (157 m.) in length, 75 feet (23 m.) in width, and 45 feet (14 m.) in height, giving a displacement of about 43,000 tons. Utnapishtim's vessel is an exact cube of 120 cubits on each side, with a tonnage three or four times that of Noah's.

16. an opening for daylight Hebrew *tsohar* is another unique word.[14] It is either the "window" of 8:6, or it means "a roof." Depending on which meaning is adopted, the unclear directive to "terminate it within a cubit of the top" (lit. "from above") could variously mean that a space of one cubit is to be left between the top of the window and the roof, that the window itself is to be a cubit in height, or that the slanting roof should project one cubit beyond the side of the ark.

decks The Gilgamesh Epic reports on seven stories, each subdivided into nine sections, giving sixty-three compartments in all. The vessel of Atraḫasis seems to have had only two decks.

THE PURPOSE OF THE ARK (vv. 17–22)

17. For My part The sense is, "When you, Noah, have built the ark, I, God, will act."

I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. 19And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take two of each into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to you to stay alive. 21For your part, take of everything that is eaten and store it away, to serve as food for you and for them." 22Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did.

וְבָאתָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ אִתָּךְ׃ 19 וּמִכָּל־הָחַי מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם מִכֹּל תָּבִיא אֶל־הַתֵּבָה לְהַחֲיֹת אִתָּךְ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה יִהְיוּ׃ 20 מֵהָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ מִכֹּל רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ שְׁנַיִם מִכֹּל יָבֹאוּ אֵלֶיךָ לְהַחֲיוֹת׃ 21 וְאַתָּה קַח־לְךָ מִכָּל־מַאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל וְאָסַפְתָּ אֵלֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ וְלָהֶם לְאָכְלָה׃ 22 וַיַּעַשׂ נֹחַ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים כֵּן עָשָׂה׃

ס שני

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous

7 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לְנֹחַ בֹּא־אַתָּה וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה כִּי־אֹתְךָ רָאִיתִי צַדִּיק לְפָנַי בַּדּוֹר הַזֶּה׃

the Flood The extraordinary term ***mabbul*** indicates the unparalleled cataclysmic nature of the event.[15] The definite article implies some well-known entity. The closer definition here and in 7:6, "waters upon the earth," points to a celestial origin. This suggests that ***mabbul*** was a technical term denoting the heavenly or upper part of the original cosmic ocean that is now allowed to fall upon the earth.

18. ***My covenant*** This is the first biblical use of the Hebrew term ***berit,*** one of the cardinal and pervasive concepts of biblical theology. It is employed for the relationship between God and man and, especially, between God and Israel. In the present passage it is uncertain whether the governing verb means to fashion a covenant anew or to fulfill one already made. Outside the Flood narrative, all biblical usages of the phrase favor the latter interpretation. The meaning would then be that the divine blessing made to Adam in 1:28 would be fulfilled through Noah and his line, an assurance that he and his family would survive and regenerate the world. However, because "covenant" is not used in connection with the blessing of Adam, the phrase could imply that a new, unconditional guarantee of salvation is now being given to Noah. Still another possibility is to take the term here as anticipating the covenant made after the Flood, as recorded in 9:8–17.

you shall enter the ark, with . . . The human occupants are to be restricted to eight persons in all, a single family from which a renewed family of man will spring.

your sons The males are listed first, then the females. See Comment to 8:16.

19–22. The ark is to be the matrix of a regenerated world.

21. ***of everything that is eaten*** Meaning the vegetarian diet prescribed in 1:29–30.

22. Noah's unquestioning obedience and unfaltering trust in God are stressed.[16] According to Rashi, this verse refers to the actual construction of the ark. If the calculation made in the Comment to verse 13 is correct, the ark would have taken forty days to complete.

CHAPTER 7 The construction of the ark is completed. Noah is told to enter it together with those destined to be saved. The Flood is unleashed.

THE EMBARKATION (vv. 1–9)

1. ***Go into the ark*** The key verb *b-w-'* appears seven times in this chapter.

Your household The term was defined in 6:18 and is again explained in verse 7. The purpose is to contrast it with the Mesopotamian stories in which, in addition to the hero and his immediate family, his relations, craftsmen, and boatmen also enter the vessel.

before Me in this generation. 2Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs, males and their mates, and of every animal that is not clean, two, a male and its mate; 3of the birds of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth. 4For in seven days' time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created." 5And Noah did just as the LORD commanded him.

6Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. 7Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. 8Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, 9two of each, male and female, came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10And on the

2 מִכֹּל֙ הַבְּהֵמָ֣ה הַטְּהוֹרָ֔ה תִּקַּ֥ח לְךָ֖ שִׁבְעָ֣ה שִׁבְעָ֑ה
אִ֥ישׁ וְאִשְׁתּ֖וֹ וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָ֣ה אֲשֶׁר־לֹ֣א טְהֹרָ֔ה הִ֖וא
שְׁנַ֥יִם אִ֖ישׁ וְאִשְׁתּֽוֹ׃ 3 גַּ֚ם מֵעֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם שִׁבְעָ֥ה
שִׁבְעָ֖ה זָכָ֣ר וּנְקֵבָ֑ה לְחַיּ֥וֹת זֶ֖רַע עַל־פְּנֵ֥י כָל־
הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 4 כִּ֣י לְיָמִ֗ים עֹ֚וד שִׁבְעָ֣ה אָנֹכִ֔י מַמְטִ֖יר
עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ אַרְבָּעִ֥ים יֹ֛ום וְאַרְבָּעִ֥ים לָ֖יְלָה וּמָחִ֣יתִי
אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם֮ אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשִׂ֒יתִי֒ מֵעַ֖ל פְּנֵ֥י הָאֲדָמָֽה׃
5 וַיַּ֖עַשׂ נֹ֑חַ כְּכֹ֕ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר־צִוָּ֖הוּ יְהוָֽה׃ 6 וְנֹ֗חַ בֶּן־שֵׁ֤שׁ
מֵאֹות֙ שָׁנָ֔ה וְהַמַּבּ֖וּל הָיָ֣ה מַ֔יִם עַל־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 7 וַיָּבֹ֣א
נֹ֗חַ וּבָנָיו֙ וְאִשְׁתּ֣וֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָ֔יו אִתּ֖וֹ אֶל־הַתֵּבָ֑ה מִפְּנֵ֥י
מֵ֖י הַמַּבּֽוּל׃ 8 מִן־הַבְּהֵמָ֣ה הַטְּהוֹרָ֔ה וּמִן־הַבְּהֵמָ֖ה
אֲשֶׁ֣ר אֵינֶ֑נָּה טְהֹרָ֔ה וּמִן־הָעֹ֖וף וְכֹ֣ל אֲשֶׁר־רֹמֵ֔שׂ
עַל־הָאֲדָמָֽה׃ 9 שְׁנַ֤יִם שְׁנַ֨יִם֙ בָּ֣אוּ אֶל־נֹ֔חַ אֶל־
הַתֵּבָ֖ה זָכָ֣ר וּנְקֵבָ֑ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֛ר צִוָּ֥ה אֱלֹהִ֖ים אֶת־נֹֽחַ׃

for you alone It is not clear whether Noah's family is saved solely through his merit or whether they were individually righteous as well. The thesis of Ezekiel 14:14,20 and 18:20 about strict individual responsibility is not helpful in deciding the point because it reflects the problems and emphases of another age.

2. clean . . . not clean This division cannot be referring to criteria of human consumption after the Flood, when man was permitted to eat flesh, for no such distinctions are made in 9:2–3. The categories refer only to suitability for sacrifice. Although only animals are mentioned here, 8:20 shows that the birds too were so classified.[1]

seven pairs The discrepancy between the instructions of 6:19–20, which speak of one pair of each species, and the requirements of the present verse is explained as follows by those who reject the idea of assigning the two passages to two different strands of tradition: 6:19–20 refers to the minimum number needed for the regeneration of the species, whereas 7:2–3 includes the additional clean animals to meet the needs of sacrifices after the Flood. As Bekhor Shor notes, one would not require an equal number of males and females merely for breeding purposes.

4. in seven days' time Presumably, this is the period of time needed for the future occupants of the ark to get aboard and be properly accommodated. Seven-day periods are characteristic of this story (cf. v. 10 and 8:10,12).

Two systems of recording time are employed in the Flood narrative; the one registers the interval in days between one development and another, while the other designates exact dates (see Excursus 2).

I will make it rain The phrase exemplifies the absolute, transcendent character of the one God, who is sovereign over all of nature. He predetermines the extent of the Flood's duration.

forty days So verses 12 and 17. Forty, a symbolic number in the Bible, is often connected with purification and the purging of sin.[2] It undoubtedly has that significance here.

5. This refers to the boarding of the ark (cf. 6:22).

6. six hundred years old See Comment to 5:32. Six hundred constituted a basic unit of time in the Mesopotamian tradition.

9. two of each Better, "by pairs," irrespective of the total numbers of each category, be they seven or one of each gender. The text is silent about any personal possessions taken into the ark; it concentrates on living beings. Utnapishtim is careful to take aboard silver and gold, and Atrahasis similarly loads his chattels.

seventh day 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 deep burst apart,

And the floodgates of the sky broke open.

(12The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.) 13That same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, went into the ark, with Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons—14they and all beasts of every kind, all cattle of every kind, all creatures of every kind that creep on the earth, and all birds of every kind, every bird, every winged thing. 15They came to Noah into the ark, two each of all flesh in which there was breath of life. 16Thus they that entered comprised male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.

17The Flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and raised the ark so that it rose above the earth. 18The waters swelled and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark drifted upon the waters. 19When the

י וַיְהִי לִשְׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וּמֵי הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ עַל־
הָאָרֶץ׃ יא בִּשְׁנַת שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְחַיֵּי־נֹחַ
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה
נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעְיְנוֹת תְּהוֹם רַבָּה וַאֲרֻבֹּת הַשָּׁמָיִם
נִפְתָּחוּ׃ יב וַיְהִי הַגֶּשֶׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם
וְאַרְבָּעִים לָיְלָה׃ יג בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּא נֹחַ
וְשֵׁם־וְחָם וְיֶפֶת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וְאֵשֶׁת נֹחַ וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת נְשֵׁי־
בָנָיו אִתָּם אֶל־הַתֵּבָה׃ יד הֵמָּה וְכָל־הַחַיָּה לְמִינָהּ
וְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ וְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־
הָאָרֶץ לְמִינֵהוּ וְכָל־הָעוֹף לְמִינֵהוּ כֹּל צִפּוֹר כָּל־
כָּנָף׃ טו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־נֹחַ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה שְׁנַיִם שְׁנַיִם
מִכָּל־הַבָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים׃ טז וְהַבָּאִים זָכָר
וּנְקֵבָה מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּאוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים
וַיִּסְגֹּר יְהוָה בַּעֲדוֹ׃ יז וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּרְבּוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־
הַתֵּבָה וַתָּרָם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ׃ יח וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּרְבּוּ
מְאֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתֵּבָה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם׃

THE CATACLYSM (vv. 11–24)

11. The seven-day period mentioned in verse 4 terminated on the seventeenth day of the second month. Whether the New Year fell in the fall or the spring is a matter of dispute in Rosh Ha-Shanah 10b–11b. According to R. Eliezer, whose view coincides with that of Josephus[3] and Targum Jonathan, the rains fell in October and November, the season of heavy precipitation in both Israel and Mesopotamia. The calendar of 8:22, which commences with seed time, also suggests an autumnal New Year. R. Joshua would have the Flood start in the spring, which happens to be the time when the Euphrates experiences its highest swelling and flooding, caused more by the melting of the snows in Anatolia than by the rains. In the Berossus version, the only Mesopotamian one with a precise date, the deluge began in the second month, in the spring.

fountains . . . floodgates This sentence is couched in classic poetic phraseology and parallelistic structure (see Comment to 4:23–24). The description of the cataclysm is incisively brief, in striking contrast to the elaborate detail given in the Gilgamesh Epic.

The "great deep" is the cosmic abyssal water discussed in the Comment to 1:2.[4] The "floodgates of the sky" are openings in the expanse of the heavens through which water from the celestial part of the cosmic ocean can escape onto the earth. In other words, creation is being undone, and the world returned to chaos.

According to R. Yohanan in Sanhedrin 108a, the use of the adjective ***rabbah,*** "great," both here and in the description of human evil in 6:5, suggests the notion of retributive justice. To put it another way, human wickedness inevitably undermines the very foundations of society, so that the pillars upon which rest the permanence of all earthly relationships totter and collapse, bringing ruin and disaster to humankind.

15. ***two each*** See Comment to verse 9.

16. ***the Lord shut him in*** Atraḥasis and Utnapishtim shut the hatch themselves. Here the text is careful to note that the salvation of Noah is solely due to divine will, not to any independent measures of his own.

18. ***drifted*** Literally, "it went"; that is, the vessel, having no steering gear, was entirely at the mercy of the floodwaters.

waters had swelled much more upon the earth, all the highest mountains everywhere under the sky were covered. [20]Fifteen cubits higher did the waters swell, as the mountains were covered. [21]And all flesh that stirred on earth perished—birds, cattle, beasts, and all the things that swarmed upon the earth, and all mankind. [22]All in whose nostrils was the merest breath of life, all that was on dry land, died. [23]All existence on earth was blotted out—man, cattle, creeping things, and birds of the sky; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

8 [24]And when the waters had swelled on the earth one hundred and fifty days, [1]God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and God caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided. [2]The fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the sky were stopped up, and the rain from the sky was held back; [3]the waters then receded steadily from

19 וְהַמַּ֗יִם גָּבְרוּ֙ מְאֹ֣ד מְאֹ֔ד עַל־הָאָ֖רֶץ וַיְכֻסּ֗וּ כָּל־
הֶהָרִ֛ים הַגְּבֹהִ֖ים אֲשֶׁר־תַּ֥חַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמָֽיִם׃ 20 חֲמֵ֣שׁ
עֶשְׂרֵ֤ה אַמָּה֙ מִלְמַ֔עְלָה גָּבְר֖וּ הַמָּ֑יִם וַיְכֻסּ֖וּ הֶהָרִֽים׃
21 וַיִּגְוַ֞ע כָּל־בָּשָׂ֣ר׀ הָרֹמֵ֣שׂ עַל־הָאָ֗רֶץ בָּע֛וֹף
וּבַבְּהֵמָ֥ה וּבַחַיָּ֖ה וּבְכָל־הַשֶּׁ֣רֶץ הַשֹּׁרֵ֣ץ עַל־הָאָ֑רֶץ
וְכֹ֖ל הָאָדָֽם׃ 22 כֹּ֛ל אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁמַת־ר֥וּחַ חַיִּ֖ים בְּאַפָּ֑יו
מִכֹּ֛ל אֲשֶׁ֥ר בֶּחָרָבָ֖ה מֵֽתוּ׃ 23 וַיִּמַּ֞ח אֶת־כָּל־הַיְקוּם֙׀
אֲשֶׁ֣ר עַל־פְּנֵ֣י הָאֲדָמָ֔ה מֵאָדָ֛ם עַד־בְּהֵמָ֥ה עַד־
רֶ֖מֶשׂ וְעַד־עֹ֣וף הַשָּׁמַ֑יִם וַיִּמָּחוּ֙ מִן־הָאָ֔רֶץ וַיִּשָּׁ֥אֶר
אַ֖ךְ־נֹ֥חַ וַאֲשֶׁ֖ר אִתּ֑וֹ בַּתֵּבָֽה׃ 24 וַיִּגְבְּר֥וּ הַמַּ֖יִם עַל־
הָאָ֥רֶץ חֲמִשִּׁ֖ים וּמְאַ֥ת יֽוֹם׃

ח וַיִּזְכֹּ֣ר אֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־נֹ֙חַ֙ וְאֵ֣ת כָּל־הַחַיָּ֔ה וְאֶת־
כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר אִתּ֑וֹ בַּתֵּבָ֗ה וַיַּעֲבֵ֤ר אֱלֹהִים֙ רוּחַ֙
עַל־הָאָ֔רֶץ וַיָּשֹׁ֖כּוּ הַמָּֽיִם׃ 2 וַיִּסָּכְר֣וּ מַעְיְנֹ֣ת תְּה֗וֹם
וַֽאֲרֻבֹּ֣ת הַשָּׁמַ֔יִם וַיִּכָּלֵ֥א הַגֶּ֖שֶׁם מִן־הַשָּׁמָֽיִם׃

*20. **higher*** The waters crested at just about fifteen cubits above the highest peak, so that the ark was half-submerged in water just above the highest mountain.

*22. **All . . . of life*** The combination of phrases, a blend of 2:18 with 6:17, is unique and emphasizes the total nature of the catastrophe.

dry land Marine life was exempted.

23. The divine intention proclaimed in verse 4 has been wholly carried out.

was left The Hebrew stem *sh-'-r* connotes survival by design, not accident.[5]

24. This verse may introduce the next chapter or close the preceding. In the latter case it would be rendered, "The waters swelled on the earth . . ."

one hundred and fifty days That is, exactly five months of thirty days each. The waters drained away so slowly and imperceptibly that they appeared to remain at their maximum height for this length of time. Tectonic subsidence would cause such a condition.

CHAPTER 8 THE FLOOD COMES TO AN END (vv. 1–14)

*1. **God remembered*** In the Bible, "remembering," particularly on the part of God, is not the retention or recollection of a mental image, but a focusing upon the object of memory that results in action.[1]

Noah He is here the representative human being, like Adam, and therefore he alone is mentioned.

caused a wind to blow As the waters are the symbol of chaos, the undoing of Creation, so the movement of the wind, Hebrew *ruaḥ,* heralds the reimposition of order. See Comment to 1:2.

2. The phenomena described in 7:11 are abruptly terminated, thus underscoring that everything issues from God's sovereign will and is under His undisputed control. This is in sharp contrast to the limitations imposed upon the gods by a mythological, polytheistic system. The subservience of the gods to nature and their singular lack of freedom are vividly demonstrated in Utnapishtim's account. Once the flood started, the gods were terror-struck at the forces they themselves had unleashed. They were appalled at the consequences of their own actions over which they no longer

the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters diminished, 4so that in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5The waters went on diminishing until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.

6At the end of forty days, Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made 7and sent out the raven; it went to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. 8Then he sent out the dove to see whether the waters had decreased from the surface of the ground. 9But the dove could

3 וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הָלוֹךְ וָשׁוֹב וַיַּחְסְרוּ
הַמַּיִם מִקְצֵה חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַת יוֹם: 4 וַתָּנַח הַתֵּבָה
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּשִׁבְעָה־עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ עַל
הָרֵי אֲרָרָט: 5 וְהַמַּיִם הָיוֹ הָלוֹךְ וְחָסוֹר עַד הַחֹדֶשׁ
הָעֲשִׂירִי בָּעֲשִׂירִי בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ נִרְאוּ רָאשֵׁי
הֶהָרִים: 6 וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַיִּפְתַּח נֹחַ אֶת־
חַלּוֹן הַתֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: 7 וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעֹרֵב
וַיֵּצֵא יָצוֹא וָשׁוֹב עַד־יְבֹשֶׁת הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
8 וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מֵאִתּוֹ לִרְאוֹת הַקְלּוּ הַמַּיִם
מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: 9 וְלֹא־מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מָנוֹחַ

had control. They were "frightened by the deluge" and they "cowered like dogs crouched against the outer wall; Ishtar cried out like a woman in travail."

3–4. According to 7:20, when the Flood crested the ark was just above the highest peak. Hence, a slight receding of the waters would cause it to ground.

*4. **came to rest*** Hebrew *va-tanaḥ* is another play on the name *noaḥ*.[2]

on the mountains of Ararat Not on Mount Ararat but on the highest peak in Ararat, which is a lofty tableland mentioned in 2 Kings 19:27, Isaiah 37:38, and Jeremiah 51:27. It is known as Urartu in Assyrian inscriptions. That kingdom occupied a large portion of present-day Armenia between the River Araxes and Lake Van. The sources of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers lie in this region. Today there is a mountain called Ararat near the conjunction of the Turkish, Armenian, and Iranian borders. Rising nearly 17,000 feet (5,185 m.) above sea level, its peak is perpetually covered with snow.

In the Mesopotamian tales the vessel also ran aground on a mountain. Utnapishtim's boat settles on Mount Nisir, apparently the modern Pir-Omar-Gudru in southern Kurdistan. In the Berossus edition the landing place lies in southwestern Armenia.

5. The tops of other mountains in the area became visible seventy-three days after the ark grounded.

THE RELEASE OF THE BIRDS (vv. 6–12)

Forty days later Noah releases a raven and a dove, and the latter twice more, at seven-day intervals. In ancient times mariners would take birds aboard and use them in order to determine their proximity to land. Utnapishtim waits seven days after grounding before releasing a dove, then a swallow, and then a raven. Berossus, too, tells of three separate dispatches of birds, but there are no details about them. It is not known whether the same practice was part of the Atrahasis story.

*6. **At the end of*** Hebrew *kets* establishes a kind of verbal symmetry between the pronunciation of humanity's doom in 6:13 and its fulfillment, just as the forty-day interval here corresponds to the forty days of rain.

*7. **sent out*** Rather, "let out." The Piel form of this verb usually carries this nuance.[3]

the raven The representative of the class of ravens. No reason for doing this is given. The Septuagint version adds here, like the Hebrew in verse 8, "to see whether the waters had abated," but this is probably an explanatory addition on its part. The raven is a wild bird that is not discriminating in its diet. It feeds on carrion as well as vegetation and could thus obtain its food from among the floating carcasses. That is why it made repeated forays from the ark. Noah could observe its movements over several days.

*8. **the dove*** From the opening words in verse 10 it may reasonably be assumed that seven days intervened between the two experiments. The dove is a gentle, timid bird. When it returned, Noah took it in his hand to see if there was clay on its feet.

not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water over all the earth. So putting out his hand, he took it into the ark with him. [10]He waited another seven days, and again sent out the dove from the ark. [11]The dove came back to him toward evening, and there in its bill was a plucked-off olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the waters had decreased on the earth. [12]He waited still another seven days and sent the dove forth; and it did not return to him any more.

[13]In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first of the month, the waters began to dry from the earth; and when Noah removed the covering of the ark, he saw that the surface of the ground was drying. [14]And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

[15]God spoke to Noah, saying, [16]"Come out of the ark, together with your wife, your sons, and your sons' wives. [17]Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds, animals, and everything that creeps on earth; and let them swarm on the earth and be fertile and

לְכַף־רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה כִּי־מַיִם עַל־
פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקָּחֶהָ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ
אֵלָיו אֶל־הַתֵּבָה: 10 וַיָּחֶל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
אֲחֵרִים וַיֹּסֶף שַׁלַּח אֶת־הַיּוֹנָה מִן־הַתֵּבָה:
11 וַתָּבֹא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב וְהִנֵּה עֲלֵה־זַיִת
טָרָף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי־קַלּוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:
12 וַיִּיָּחֶל עוֹד שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אֲחֵרִים וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־
הַיּוֹנָה וְלֹא־יָסְפָה שׁוּב־אֵלָיו עוֹד: 13 וַיְהִי בְּאַחַת
וְשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה בָּרִאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ חָרְבוּ
הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ וַיָּסַר נֹחַ אֶת־מִכְסֵה הַתֵּבָה
וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה חָרְבוּ פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: 14 וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי
בְּשִׁבְעָה וְעֶשְׂרִים יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יָבְשָׁה הָאָרֶץ:
ס רביעי 15 וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ לֵאמֹר:
16 צֵא מִן־הַתֵּבָה אַתָּה וְאִשְׁתְּךָ וּבָנֶיךָ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנֶיךָ
אִתָּךְ: 17 כָּל־הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר־אִתְּךָ מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר בָּעוֹף
וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הוֹצֵא
אִתָּךְ וְשָׁרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ וּפָרוּ וְרָבוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

v. 17. הֹיצֵא ק׳

*11. **toward evening*** That is, when birds customarily return to their nests. The note implies that the dove had been out all day, signifying the availability of resting places.

plucked-off The rare noun *taraf* connotes that it was freshly removed from the tree and was not flotsam, a sure sign that plant life had begun to renew itself.[4]

olive leaf The olive tree, one of the earliest to be cultivated in the Near East, is an evergreen. It is extraordinarily sturdy and may thrive for up to a thousand years. Thus it became symbolic of God's blessings of regeneration, abundance, and strength, which is most likely the function it serves here.[5] In the present context the olive branch is invested with the idea of peace and reconciliation, and for this reason it was incorporated into the official emblem of the State of Israel.

THE GROUND DRIES OUT (vv. 13–14)

13–14. On New Year's day, exactly one year after God first communicated with Noah, the ground was dry,[6] meaning that no water was visible on the surface. It took another fifty-six days for the earth to be in the state that it was on the third day of Creation.

THE DISEMBARKATION (vv. 15–19)

15–16. The divine order to disembark corresponds to that for embarkation in 7:1. In the Mesopotamian stories the disembarkation is at the initiative of the hero.

*16. **together with your wife*** The variation in the order of persons from 6:18 and 7:7, where husbands and wives are not listed together, led midrashic sources to infer that sexual relationships were forbidden in the ark and were permitted to be resumed only after disembarkation.[7]

increase on earth." 18So Noah came out, together with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives. 19Every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that stirs on earth came out of the ark by families.

20Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21The LORD smelled the pleasing odor, and the LORD said to Himself: "Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done.

18 וַיֵּצֵא־נֹחַ וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּנְשֵׁי־בָנָיו אִתּוֹ׃ 19 כָּל־
הַחַיָּה כָּל־הָרֶמֶשׂ וְכָל־הָעוֹף כֹּל רוֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתֵיהֶם יָצְאוּ מִן־הַתֵּבָה׃ 20 וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ
לַיהוָה וַיִּקַּח מִכֹּל ׀ הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכֹּל ׀ הָעוֹף
הַטָּהֹר וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ׃ 21 וַיָּרַח יְהוָה אֶת־רֵיחַ
הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־לִבּוֹ לֹא־אֹסִף לְקַלֵּל
עוֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה בַּעֲבוּר הָאָדָם ׀ כִּי יֵצֶר לֵב
הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעָרָיו וְלֹא־אֹסִף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־
כָּל־חַי כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי׃

17. The regeneration of animal, insect, and bird life is signaled by the repetition of the divine blessing of 1:22.

19. ***by families*** That is, species by species.

NOAH'S SACRIFICE AND GOD'S RESPONSE (vv. 20-22)

Noah now builds an altar and brings burnt offerings on his own initiative. His act of worship not only expresses gratitude for the safe deliverance of the ark with its living cargo, but also probably has an expiatory function. Now that the earth has been purged of its evil, sacrifice symbolizes the restoration of harmony between God and humanity.

20–21. ***burnt offerings*** Hebrew *ʿolah* is literally "that which ascends," or that which is entirely consumed by fire on the altar. This is in contradistinction to *zevaḥim,* of which both priest and worshipper partake (cf. Deut. 12:27).

Significantly, Noah does not offer a libation, in contrast to Utnapishtim. The omission points up the fact that sacrifice is not food for God. This is important because in the Gilgamesh Epic, the destruction of mankind deprived the gods of the food and drink offerings on which they depended to sustain their immortal existence. According to that text, when "the gods smelled the sweet savor," they "crowded like flies around the sacrificer." The omission of libation in the case of Noah throws light on the statement that "the Lord smelled the pleasing odor."[8] The phrase is frequently employed in ritual texts in a specific technical sense, divested of its literal meaning. It simply connotes God's acceptance of the sacrifice, as is clear from Leviticus 26:31. In other words, it affirms that the worshipper's encounter with God is sincere and wholehearted.

21. ***pleasing*** Hebrew *niḥoaḥ* is one more play on the name *noaḥ.*

the LORD said to Himself This statement of divine resolve is a foil to that of 6:7; there it was for destruction, here for salvation. Similarly, the present observation on the nature of man verbally echoes that of 6:5. The whole makes for an inclusion, or envelopelike structure, with the chiastic reversal of the order signifying the antithesis to the antediluvian situation.

the devisings of man's mind As compared with 6:5, the language is considerably modified and is no longer all-inclusive. The statement is not a judgment but an observation that a proclivity for evil is woven into the fabric of human nature. The key phrase is "from his youth," not from birth or conception, implying that the tendency to evil may be curbed and redirected through the discipline of laws. Hence, the next section deals with the imposition of laws upon postdiluvian humanity.

Never again will I The repetition of the promise, just as in 9:11, accords it the force of a solemn oath.[9] Such is the understanding of Isaiah 54:9: "I swore that the waters of Noah / Nevermore would flood the earth."

22 עֹ֚ד כָּל־יְמֵ֣י הָאָ֔רֶץ
זֶ֥רַע וְקָצִ֖יר
וְקֹ֣ר וָחֹ֑ם
וְקַ֥יִץ וָחֹ֖רֶף
וְיוֹם֙ וָלַ֔יְלָה
לֹ֥א יִשְׁבֹּֽתוּ׃

22So long as the earth endures,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night
Shall not cease."

ט וַיְבָ֣רֶךְ אֱלֹהִ֗ים אֶת־נֹ֙חַ֙ וְאֶת־בָּנָ֔יו וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לָהֶ֖ם
פְּר֣וּ וּרְב֑וּ וּמִלְא֖וּ אֶת־הָאָֽרֶץ׃ 2 וּמוֹרַאֲכֶ֤ם וְחִתְּכֶם֙
יִהְיֶ֣ה עַל֩ כָּל־חַיַּ֨ת הָאָ֜רֶץ וְעַ֣ל כָּל־עוֹף֮ הַשָּׁמַ֒יִם֒
בְּכֹל֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר תִּרְמֹ֣שׂ הָאֲדָמָ֔ה וּבְכָל־דְּגֵ֥י הַיָּ֖ם
בְּיֶדְכֶ֥ם נִתָּֽנוּ׃ 3 כָּל־רֶ֙מֶשׂ֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר הוּא־חַ֔י לָכֶ֥ם יִהְיֶ֖ה
לְאָכְלָ֑ה כִּיֶּ֥רֶק עֵ֙שֶׂב֙ נָתַ֣תִּי לָכֶ֔ם אֶת־כֹּֽל׃ 4 אַךְ־

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth. 2The fear and the dread of you shall be upon all the beasts of the earth and upon all the birds of the sky—everything with which the earth is astir—and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hand. 3Every creature that lives shall be yours to eat; as with the green grasses, I give you all these. 4You must not, however, eat flesh with its life-blood in it.

22. The ordered processes of nature will never again be interrupted. The rhythm of life, reflected in the rhythmic quality of the language, is here presented through four pairs of merisms—the expression of totality by means of opposites. These describe three environmental phenomena: agricultural, climatic, and temporal.

CHAPTER 9

Epilogue: The Regeneration and Reordering of Society (vv. 1–17)

The destruction of the old world calls for the repopulation of the earth and the remedying of the ills that brought on the Flood. Society must henceforth rest on more secure moral foundations. New norms of human behavior must be instituted. At the same time, the haunting specter of a repetition of the cataclysm must be laid to rest, lest it have a paralyzing effect on human activity and impede all progress. The epilogue to the Flood narrative attends to these considerations. It divides clearly into two complementary parts, logically interconnected. Verses 1–7 deal with the renewal of the world, verses 8–17 with divine assurances. A key phrase frames each part: the first, "Be fertile and increase" (vv. 1,7); the second, "I establish a covenant" (vv. 9,17).

THE NEW ORDER (vv. 1–7)

1. The climax to the biblical Flood story affords an illuminating contrast to its Mesopotamian counterpart. The heroes of both are recipients of divine blessings, but whereas Utnapishtim and his wife are granted immortality and are removed from human society, God's blessing to Noah and his family is socially oriented. They are not to withdraw from the world but to be fertile and to utilize the resources of nature for humanity's benefit.

Be fertile See Comment to 1:28. This injunction is in sharp conflict with the Atraḫasis Epic, where the problem that precipitated the flood was overpopulation. The gods, therefore, inflict stillbirth, sterility, and spinsterhood on humanity to ensure that the problem does not recur.

2–4. Man's power over the animal kingdom is confirmed and enhanced. Animal flesh is henceforth permitted for food, though the privilege is not unrestricted. This concession to human weakness is not a license for savagery.

4. ***with its life-blood in it*** Partaking of the flesh of a living animal is prohibited. It must first be slaughtered. This prohibition is known in rabbinic parlance as *'ever min he-ḥai,* "a limb [cut

[5]But for your own life-blood I will require a reckoning: I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man!

[6]Whoever sheds the blood of man,
By man shall his blood be shed;
For in His image
Did God make man.

בָּשָׂר בְּנַפְשׁוֹ דָמוֹ לֹא תֹאכֵלוּ׃ 5 וְאַךְ אֶת־דִּמְכֶם
לְנַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם אֶדְרֹשׁ מִיַּד כָּל־חַיָּה אֶדְרְשֶׁנּוּ וּמִיַּד
הָאָדָם מִיַּד אִישׁ אָחִיו אֶדְרֹשׁ אֶת־נֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם׃
6 שֹׁפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם
בָּאָדָם דָּמוֹ יִשָּׁפֵךְ
כִּי בְצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים
עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם׃

off] from a living animal." Also implicit in the formulation is the additional prohibition on partaking of the blood that oozes out of the animal's dying body. This means that the flesh may not be eaten unless the life-blood has first been drained. These laws are here made incumbent on all humanity. In rabbinic theology they, together with those of the succeeding verses, form part of what are known as the "Noachide Laws." On this subject see Excursus 3.

It might be thought that the eating of blood would be so naturally repulsive as not to require legal proscription, but the history of the subject discredits such a notion. The frequency with which the prohibition is repeated in the Torah legislation testifies to the attractiveness of the practice in ancient times.[1] Its appeal lay in the premise, explicated in Leviticus 17:11,14 and Deuteronomy 12:23, that the blood constituted the life-essence. Consequently, popular thought had it that one could renew or reinforce one's vitality through its absorption of blood. For this reason, blood played an important role in the cults of the dead in the ancient world. In the Torah, however, precisely because blood is the symbol of life, it belongs to God alone, as does life itself. The legislation contained in the present verse has no known analogy in the ancient Near East. It, together with Leviticus 17:13 and Deuteronomy 12:24, forms the basis of the Jewish dietary laws governing the koshering of meat, the purpose of which is to ensure the maximum extraction of blood from the flesh before cooking.

5–6. The slaughter of animals, now sanctioned, might easily become a dehumanizing experience. Also, the mass annihilation of human beings in the Flood might have tended to cheapen life in the eyes of the survivors. Accordingly, the reaffirmation of the sanctity of human life and the inviolability of the human person is singularly appropriate here.

I will require a reckoning Murder cannot be perpetrated with impunity. God Himself calls the criminal to account. Hebrew *d-r-sh,* with God as the subject, twice repeated for emphasis, is a powerful evocative expression connoting relentless pursuit until punishment is meted out.

of every beast The killing of a human being by a beast is a disturbance of the divinely ordered structure of relationships laid down in verse 2. The act itself, like murder, constitutes the destruction of the image of God. The creature must therefore be put to death. The principles here enunciated find concrete expression in the legislation of Exodus 21:28, "When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten."

of his fellow man Literally, "his brother." This reiterates the teaching of 4:10 that homicide is fratricide.

6. The first half of this verse has a poetic ring. The initial three Hebrew words, which describe the crime, are placed in exactly the reverse order to proclaim the penalty—poetic justice! In this way, the chiastic literary form gives expression to the underlying legal principle of talion, or measure for measure. Capital punishment is here divinely sanctioned; murder cannot be recompensed by monetary restitution, as was often the case in the ancient world. As Numbers 35:31 lays down, "You may not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of a capital crime; he must be put to death." In practice, however, the imposition of capital punishment is strongly questioned in rabbinic sources. Mishnah Makkot 1:10 states: "A Sanhedrin that executes the death penalty once in seven years is branded 'destructive.' R. Eleazar b. Azariah says, 'once in seventy years.' R. Tarfon and R. Akiba say, 'had we been members of the Sanhedrin, no one would ever have been put to death.' [However,] Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says, 'They would also have multiplied murderers in Israel.'" The rabbis explored and took advantage of every mitigating factor in the laws of evidence in order to avoid a death sentence.

7 וְאַתֶּם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ שִׁרְצוּ בָאָרֶץ וּרְבוּ־בָהּ׃
ס חמישי 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ וְאֶל־
בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ לֵאמֹר׃ 9 וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי
אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם׃ 10 וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ
הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם בָּעוֹף בַּבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־חַיַּת
הָאָרֶץ אִתְּכֶם מִכֹּל יֹצְאֵי הַתֵּבָה לְכֹל חַיַּת
הָאָרֶץ׃ 11 וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת
כָּל־בָּשָׂר עוֹד מִמֵּי הַמַּבּוּל וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל
לְשַׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ׃ 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים זֹאת אוֹת־
הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ
חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר אִתְּכֶם לְדֹרֹת עוֹלָם׃ 13 אֶת־קַשְׁתִּי
נָתַתִּי בֶּעָנָן וְהָיְתָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ׃

7 Be fertile, then, and increase; abound on the earth and increase on it."

8 And God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "I now establish My covenant with you and your offspring to come, 10 and with every living thing that is with you—birds, cattle, and every wild beast as well—all that have come out of the ark, every living thing on earth. 11 I will maintain My covenant with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 God further said, "This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come. 13 I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between

By man It is a human responsibility. The particle *bet* in Hebrew *ba-'adam* is here taken to indicate the instrument of punishment.[2] Human institutions, a judiciary, must be established for the purpose. This requirement seeks to correct the condition of "lawlessness" that existed prior to the Flood (6:11). The blood feud is eliminated, and murder is no longer a private affair between the killer and the family of the victim; it is a crime against society.

shall his blood be shed This biblical phrase is never used for divine action and can only mean capital punishment humanly administered.

For in His image . . . Murder is the supreme and capital crime because the dignity, sanctity, and inviolability of human life all derive from the fact that every human being bears the stamp of the divine Maker. The murderer may be put to death because his unspeakable act effaces the divine image in his victim and within himself as well, so that his own life forfeits its claim to inviolability. It should be noted that, unlike the law collections of the ancient Near East, the Bible never imposes the death penalty for crimes against the property of one's fellow.

image The other term used of the creation of man in 1:26 and 5:3—"likeness," Hebrew *demut*—is here omitted, most likely because the cluster of similar sounding words—*dam,* "blood"; *'adam,* "man"; and *demut*—might appear to echo the objectionable Babylonian notion that man was created from clay mixed with divine blood.

THE COVENANT AND THE RAINBOW (vv. 8–17)

The key term in this section is "covenant," Hebrew *berit,* which is repeated seven times. There are two divine proclamations. In verses 8–11, God's decision, referred to in 8:21, is communicated to the world and is sealed for all eternity by a solemn, unilateral, covenantal pledge that a universal, cataclysmic flood would never recur. In verses 12–17, the world is provided with a visible token of that divine commitment.

9. I now Hebrew *va-'ani hinneni* is the same phrase used in 6:17 to introduce the original pronouncement of doom. The identity draws attention to the reassuring fact that the same Supreme Authority who executed the judgment stands behind the message of hope.

12. the sign Hebrew *'ot* is here a distinctive, visible object that immediately calls to mind a particular message.[3]

13. My bow As Ramban points out, the rainbow is an already existing natural phenomenon that is henceforth invested with new symbolic significance as an eternal and universal testimony

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 among all flesh, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures, all flesh that is on earth. 17That," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth."

14 וְהָיָה בְּעַנְנִי עָנָן עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְנִרְאֲתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת
בֶּעָנָן: 15 וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם
וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד
הַמַּיִם לְמַבּוּל לְשַׁחֵת כָּל־בָּשָׂר: 16 וְהָיְתָה הַקֶּשֶׁת
בֶּעָנָן וּרְאִיתִיהָ לִזְכֹּר בְּרִית עוֹלָם בֵּין אֱלֹהִים
וּבֵין כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה בְּכָל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:
17 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ זֹאת אוֹת־הַבְּרִית אֲשֶׁר
הֲקִמֹתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵין כָּל־בָּשָׂר אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

to God's constancy and mercy. This conception has no parallel in biblical literature; no other celestial body is similarly endowed. Of course, being associated with rain, the rainbow naturally lends itself to the purpose, but there is more to it than this.

Apart from the present passage and Ezekiel 1:28, where the rainbow is emblematic of the radiance of the Divine Presence, Hebrew *keshet* invariably means "a bow." This weapon is frequently featured in ancient Near Eastern mythology. In the Mesopotamian creation epic *Enuma Elish* (6.82–90), Marduk suspended in the sky and set as a constellation the victorious bow with which he had defeated Tiamat. In Babylonian astronomy, a group of stars in the shape of a bow was mythologically identified with the accoutrements of the war goddess. In the Ugaritic myth dealing with the relationship of Aqhat and the bellicose goddess Anath, a bow plays a prominent role. In the Bible itself, numerous poetic texts figuratively refer to God's bow and arrows and are probably echoes of some now lost ancient Hebrew epic.[4] Against this background, the rainbow in our narrative takes on added significance as a departure from Near Eastern notions. The symbol of divine bellicosity and hostility has been transformed into a token of reconciliation between God and man.

*15. **I will remember My covenant*** A superficial but instructive parallel exists with passages in Gilgamesh and Atraḫasis[5] that relate how, when the gods partook of Utnapishtim's sacrifice, the goddess Ishtar raised her jeweled necklace and swore that she would ever be mindful of the days of the flood and never forget them. However, this oath is not accompanied by any promise or assurance about mankind's future, and it issues from the lips of that member of the Mesopotamian pantheon most notorious for perfidy.

The Depravity of Canaan (vv. 18–29)

This episode is quite independent of the Flood narrative and has no counterpart in the traditions of Mesopotamia. The vine was little cultivated there, and, in any case, the heroes of Mesopotamian epics, unlike Noah, were removed from the world of men and therefore could not be associated with agriculture on earth. Furthermore, mention of Japheth and Canaan takes us out of the Mesopotamian world and into the eastern Mediterranean ambience.

The narrative is also separated from the account of the Flood by a time lapse equivalent to the years it takes for a newly planted vine to yield its grape harvest. This span of time is clearly indicated by the fact that Noah by now has a grown grandson. Nevertheless, a sense of continuity with the foregoing is conveyed by the connectives of verses 18–19, as by the unstated but pertinent historical fact that the vine and viticulture were highly developed in the region of Armenia, where the ark grounded.

The section deals with Noah as a culture hero who introduced viticulture and who fell victim to his progeny's depravity. Because the original incidents, in all their detail, were well known to the biblical audience and for reasons of delicate sensibility, only the barest outline of his downfall is reported here. The fuller account, now lost, has been truncated and condensed, resulting in the many

difficulties we now find in the narrative. For instance, we are not certain if Ham is guilty solely of voyeurism or if the description of his offense in verse 22 is a euphemism for some act of gross indecency; we are not told why Noah curses Canaan rather than Ham. Japheth's alliance with Shem and the threefold emphasis on Ham's paternity of Canaan and on the curse of servitude imposed on his son are obviously elements of critical importance to the Narrator that require clarification.

The section closes with the death of Noah. This event opens a second ten-generation epoch in the Bible's scheme of human history, in the course of which nations come into existence. The second era concludes with the birth of Abraham, the founding father of a new nation that is to have a special relationship with God and whose fortunes and destiny are henceforth to constitute the major theme of biblical literature. The ensuing narrative gives a preparatory intimation of the direction in which the Book of Genesis is moving. The focus of interest gradually narrows from the universal to the particular, until the birth of Abraham. God makes promises to Abraham that one day his descendants will dispossess the Canaanites and inherit their land. Abraham belongs to the line of Shem, while the Canaanites derive from Ham. The present episode illustrates the virtue and piety of the original ancestor, Shem, values that are to serve as the paradigm for his descendants, the Israelites. By the same token, the typically degenerate state of the Canaanites provides the reason and moral justification for their displacement.

The portrayal of political relationships in terms of genealogies, a phenomenon that will be more fully examined in the Comments to chapter 10, is a well recognized and recurring feature of the Book of Genesis. The filial relationship of Canaan to Ham in our story must be considered against this background. In 10:6, both Egypt and Canaan are among the sons of Ham. In Psalms 78:51, Egypt is termed "the tents of Ham," and in Psalms 105:23,27 and 106:22, Egypt is again identified with Ham. In other words, Ham in this chapter is most likely symbolic of Egypt, and Canaan, as Ham's "son," would be figurative for Egyptian suzerainty over the land of Canaan. This relationship was a historical reality in the Late Bronze Age in the course of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Egyptian Dynasties (ca. 1552–ca. 1200 B.C.E.). The association of Canaan with Egypt finds expression elsewhere in the Bible on a different level. Leviticus 18:3 reads, "You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you." Then follows an inventory of sexual abominations, because of which, the chapter concludes, the Canaanites are expelled from their land. The same sentiment is repeated in Leviticus 20:23 after another list of the depraved practices of the Canaanites. The identical theme underlies several episodes in Genesis: Pharaoh's kidnapping of Sarai in Egypt (12:10–20); Abimelech's dealings with her and with Rebekah in Canaan (20; 26:7–11); the sexual perversions of the Sodomites (19:5–8); Dinah's experience in Shechem (chap. 34); the offenses of Er and Onan, sons of Judah's Canaanite wife (chap. 38); and, finally, the attempted seduction of Joseph in Egypt by Potiphar's wife (chap. 39). There can be no doubt that a major function of our present narrative is to introduce the theme of the depravity of the Canaanites.

The role of Japheth, who acts in concert with Shem, and to whom the Canaanites too are to be subjugated, also points to the political-historical level of the narrative. According to the genealogy of Japheth in 10:2–4, he becomes the ancestor of tribes and peoples associated with Anatolia and the Aegean. This suggests that behind the text is some historical situation that resulted in the Canaanites becoming subjected both to the Japhethites and to the descendants of Shem. The most plausible theory links the present narrative with the events connected with the invasions by the sea peoples of the east Mediterranean littoral. These peoples first attacked Egypt ca. 1220 B.C.E., during the reign of Merneptah, and then again in 1175 B.C.E., during the reign of Ramses III. It was as a result of these invasions that the Philistines and others from the Aegean area arrived and settled on the coast of Canaan. This happened about the same time that the Israelites were invading Canaan from the east. The Canaanites found themselves assailed from east and west, and their civilization, in the region that was to become the Land of Israel, totally collapsed.

Such, most likely, are the historical circumstances to which the narrative points. However, there is also a didactic level on which it must be understood. Central to the events described are the fundamental biblical teachings that human history is under the continual direction of God and that the fate of peoples is inseparably bound up with their moral state.

[18]The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth—Ham being the father of Canaan. [19]These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole world branched out.

[20]Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. [21]He drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. [22]Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. [23]But Shem and Japheth took a cloth,

פ ששי 18 וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־נֹחַ הַיֹּצְאִים מִן־
הַתֵּבָה שֵׁם וְחָם וְיֶפֶת וְחָם הוּא אֲבִי כְנָעַן:
19 שְׁלֹשָׁה אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־נֹחַ וּמֵאֵלֶּה נָפְצָה כָל־הָאָרֶץ:
20 וַיָּחֶל נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּטַּע כָּרֶם: 21 וַיֵּשְׁתְּ
מִן־הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכָּר וַיִּתְגַּל בְּתוֹךְ אָהֳלֹה: 22 וַיַּרְא חָם
אֲבִי כְנַעַן אֵת עֶרְוַת אָבִיו וַיַּגֶּד לִשְׁנֵי־אֶחָיו
בַּחוּץ: 23 וַיִּקַּח שֵׁם וָיֶפֶת אֶת־הַשִּׂמְלָה וַיָּשִׂימוּ

REPEOPLING THE EARTH (vv. 18–19)

*18. **Ham being the father of Canaan*** Rashbam observes that this note is an example of a frequently used literary technique of introducing information seemingly irrelevant to the immediate context yet crucial to the understanding of subsequent developments.[6] Without it, we would be ignorant of the identity of the object of Noah's curse.

*19. **from these the whole world branched out*** The divine blessing and command of 9:1 are fulfilled. The next chapter will give the precise details and will conclude with a reiteration of the fact that after the Flood the nations of the world branched out from the three sons of Noah. Behind this emphasis is the natural, nonmagical approach of the Bible to the issue of repeopling the world. By way of contrast, the Atraḫasis Epic ascribes that development to practical magic on the part of the gods, who fashion human beings from clay. In Greek legend, Deucalion and Pyrrha, the survivors of the flood, were both told to cast behind them the bones of their mother, which they understood to mean stones from the earth. These miraculously turned into male and female humans.

NOAH'S INEBRIATION (vv. 20–21)

*20. **the tiller of the soil*** This phrase, a designation of Noah, implies something well known about him, which links up with 5:29 (see Comment).

was the first to plant a vineyard He is the initiator of orchard husbandry. The next verse implies that Noah was involved not just in viticulture, the science and art of grape-growing, but also in viniculture, the specific cultivation of grapes for wine-making. Here again, as in 4:17–22, advances in the arts of civilization are purely human achievements, not the work of gods or demigods as they generally are in the ancient world. Thus, the Egyptians ascribed the original cultivation of the vine to Osiris; the Greeks, to Dionysus. The present story also constitutes another departure from Near Eastern tradition in assigning the origin of wine to postdiluvian times. Utnapishtim is said to have given the beverage to the builders of his vessel before the flood.

21. No blame attaches to Noah since he was oblivious to the intoxicating effects of his discovery.

he uncovered himself Habakkuk 2:15 and Lamentations 4:21 also mention exposure of nakedness by the inebriated. The act is associated with shame and with loss of human dignity, as Genesis 3:7,21 make clear.

within his tent In the privacy of his dwelling, not in public. This makes Ham's behavior all the more contemptible. Although the cultivation of the vine implies a settled, nonnomadic community, Noah and his sons still reside in tents. The transition from nomadism to sedentary life is indicated.

placed it against both their backs and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that 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."

עַל־שִׁכְמָם שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ אֲחֹרַנִּית וַיְכַסּוּ אֵת עֶרְוַת
אֲבִיהֶם וּפְנֵיהֶם אֲחֹרַנִּית וְעֶרְוַת אֲבִיהֶם לֹא רָאוּ:
24 וַיִּיקַץ נֹחַ מִיֵּינוֹ וַיֵּדַע אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה־לוֹ בְּנוֹ
הַקָּטֹן: 25 וַיֹּאמֶר
אָרוּר כְּנָעַן
עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים
יִהְיֶה לְאֶחָיו:

THE BEHAVIOR OF THE SONS (vv. 22–23)

22. The earliest postbiblical traditions take this verse literally,[7] and the final clause of verse 23 would seem to support it. Ham compounded his lack of modesty and filial respect by leaving his father uncovered and by shamelessly bruiting about what he had seen. On the other hand, the verbs of verse 24 and the severity of Noah's reaction suggest that the Torah has suppressed the sordid details of some repugnant act. Rabbinic sources are divided on whether Ham castrated his father or committed sodomy. The former interpretation might be supported by the fact that Noah has no children after the Flood.

*23. **so that they did not see their father's nakedness*** The Hebrew word order is the reverse of that which tells of Ham's behavior in verse 22. The chiasm points up the contrast between their conduct and his.

a cloth Hebrew *simlah* is a kind of common cloak, more or less square, that also served as a covering at night. This is clear from Exodus 22:25–26 and Deuteronomy 24:13.

NOAH'S CURSE AND BLESSING (vv. 24–27)

The following is the first example of the genre of parental blessing and cursing, featured again in 27:4,27–29,39–40 and especially in chapter 49. As verse 27 shows, the word that issues from Noah's mouth is itself neither the active agent nor automatically effective; rather, the curse and blessing are actually the invoking of God's power in judgment of the conduct of the respective parties, to punish the one and to bestow divine favor on the other.

*24. **woke up from his wine*** That is, when he had sobered up.[8]

learned what . . . had done to him Shem and Japheth must have reported the facts, whatever they were, to their father.

his youngest son This description implies a tradition that makes Ham the youngest despite the five-times repeated sequence: Shem, Ham, Japheth.[9] Ramban points to Genesis 25:9 and Joshua 24:4 as proof that the order of listing need not always reflect the order of birth. In 10:21, the text explicitly states that Shem is the elder brother of Japheth.

*25. **Canaan*** The text is silent as to why Canaan, not Ham, is cursed. Saadia and Ibn Janaḥ construe it to mean "Cursed be [the father of] Canaan," a phrase that has already appeared twice in this brief narrative. A reasonable assumption would be that in the fuller story Canaan, son of Ham, was a participant in the offense against Noah, a detail omitted here on grounds of delicacy and on the assumption that the original story was well known to the reader.

The lowest of slaves Literally, "a slave of slaves."[10] This construction expresses the extreme degree. Bekhor Shor notes that implicit in the pronouncement of the subjugation of Canaan, repeated three times for emphasis, is a word play on the name, connecting it with the stem *k-n-ʿ*, "to be humbled, to humiliate oneself."

shall he be Rather, "Let him be."

[26]And he said,
"Blessed be the LORD,
The God of Shem;
Let Canaan be a slave to them.
[27]May God enlarge Japheth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be a slave to them."
[28]Noah lived after the Flood 350 years. [29]And all the days of Noah came to 950 years; then he died.

26 וַיֹּאמֶר
בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם
וְיִהִי כְנַעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ׃
27 יַפְתְּ אֱלֹהִים לְיֶפֶת
וְיִשְׁכֹּן בְּאָהֳלֵי־שֵׁם
וְיִהִי כְנַעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ׃
28 וַיְחִי־נֹחַ אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה׃ 29 וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל־יְמֵי־נֹחַ תְּשַׁע מֵאוֹת
שָׁנָה וַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וַיָּמֹת׃ פ

his brothers If taken literally, this would refer to 10:6, but more likely the phrase belongs to the conventional language of curses and blessings. Used of Ishmael in 16:12 and of Jacob in 27:29,37, it expresses comprehensiveness.

26. Blessed be the LORD In place of the expected blessing on Shem, which would contrast with the curse on Canaan, we find Noah blessing the Lord. Shem's disinterested, virtuous behavior earns no other reward than that men are inspired thereby to bless the Lord, whose norms of conduct he upholds. The phrasing of the blessing corresponds to that used by Abraham's servant in Genesis 24:27 and conforms to the later, standard liturgical formula "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel," which may be a spontaneous outpouring of religious feeling or an expression of thanksgiving.[11]

the Lord, The God of Shem Here, too, Bekhor Shor points to word play, for Shem means "name," and the word frequently evokes the divine name YHVH or the Divine Presence.[12]

27. The blessing for Japheth likewise contains a word play, this one explicit, but the rendering, "enlarge" for Hebrew *yaft,* although traditional, is uncertain.[13] The stem *p-t-h* means "to be open," and nowhere else does it have the sense of enlargement of territorial boundaries. The phrase may simply be figurative of prosperity. The meaning of the second clause is also problematical. The subject of the verb is Japheth, but elsewhere the idiom means "to displace," which is hardly appropriate to the present context. The intention must be to convey some unusual, specialized connotation, such as "to live in amity" or "to be allied with." A subtle point is the use here of the general term *'elohim,* "God," with Japheth, in contrast to the sacred name YHVH, which is exclusive to Shem and later to Israel, his descendants.

THE DEATH OF NOAH (vv. 28–29)

These two verses conclude the story of Noah. They belong to the pattern of the listings in chapter 5 and complement verse 32 there.

CHAPTER 10

The Table of Nations (vv. 1–32)

The preceding chapter noted that after the Flood "the whole world branched out" from the three sons of Noah. The text now amplifies this statement in elaborate detail through an intricate series of genealogies. Hitherto, all such accounts in Genesis have related to individuals. Now we are given a genealogy of nations.

The Table of Nations, as it has come to be known, is framed by introductory and concluding formulas of summarization. In addition, each of three major groupings has its own caption as well as a generalized closing recapitulation that draws attention to the territorial, linguistic, familial, and national divisions that characterize the human race.

The geographic horizon of this roster of peoples roughly encompasses the vast territory that stretches from the Caucasus in the north to Arabia in the south, from the Iranian plateau in the east to the island of Crete, and perhaps beyond, in the west—all from the perspective of one centered in Canaan, the future Land of Israel, which is where three geographic arcs intersect. The arc of Japhethites covers approximately the areas to the north and west of the land, including Asia Minor, the Greek mainland, and the islands of the eastern Mediterranean. That of the Hamites, by far the most extensive, comprises the great river civilizations of the Nile and the Euphrates, as well as the areas both west and east of the Nile Delta and also some parts of Arabia in the south. The Shemite arc embraces the area stretching from the Iranian mountains into northern Mesopotamia and Syria and down into the Arabian Peninsula.

The Nature of the Table. On the surface, the use of verbs expressing birth and of terms like "son," "father," "first-born" suggest straightforward genealogies of the kind already encountered in previous chapters. In actual fact, these recapitulations disclose that the terminology is not meant to be taken literally but, rather, in the same figurative way that one speaks of a "metropolis" in the sense of "mother city," of "daughter colonies," or of "fatherland" and "mother country." Many of the personal names listed here are otherwise known to be those of places or peoples. Ten names have plural endings, nine others take the gentilic adjectival suffix *-i,* which indicates ethnic affiliation, and they also have the definite article, which is inadmissible with personal names in Hebrew.

In the ancient world, kinship terms were often employed to describe treaty relationships. Thus, where the contracting parties were on equal terms, they would describe themselves as "brothers," but a vassal would refer to the suzerain as "father," and the suzerain would speak of his dependent as "son" or as having "borne" him. The same kind of familial terminology is used in connection with the phenomenon of the "eponymous ancestor"—the explanation of the name of a city or a people deriving from a personage of antiquity who is said to have been its progenitor. The ancient Greeks, who were known as Hellenes, provide an excellent illustration of this process. Hellen was said to have been the son of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the survivors of the flood. His three sons were Dorus, Aeolus, and Xuthus. The first two were supposed to have been, respectively, the ancestors of two of the four major subdivisions of the Hellenes, the Dorians and Aeolians; the third fathered Ion and Achaeus, from whom sprang the Ionians and Achaeans. Similar familial ethnographic usage is attested at Ugarit, where, for instance, the "sons of Ugarit" conduct an international transaction with the "sons of Canaan."

In the Bible, too, a pedigree is often the literary form through which ethnic origins and political and other relationships are described. The genealogical register provides a convenient way of schematizing these relationships. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the merging of the individual with the group. For example, in Genesis 17:20 Ishmael is prenatally destined to become the "father" of twelve chieftains; however, when the names are listed in 25:16 "in the order of their birth" it is clear that one is dealing with the constituents of a confederation of Arab tribes. In the present chapter, the summarizing formulas in verses 5,20, and 31 show the same literary process at work and indicate the diverse and composite nature of the materials included.

Apart from the genealogical data, the Table of Nations, like chapter 4, is sprinkled with various tidbits of information, such as fragmentary biographical details about a certain Nimrod, a list of cities in Mesopotamia, the boundaries of the Canaanite territory, the area of Joktanite settlement, and a reference to some major event that occurred in the days of Peleg.

Its Problems. The Table itself is riddled with difficulties, many of which remain insoluble in the present state of knowledge. It defies the consistent application of any single criterion of selectivity or of principles of classification, apart from the very general and rudimentary distribution according to the three broad groupings. Racial characteristics, physical types, or the color of skin play no role in the categorizing. Nor is language a guideline since Canaan, recognized in Isaiah 19:18 to have the same tongue as Israel, is affiliated with Egypt among the Hamites, while the Elamites, who spoke a decidedly non-Semitic language, are classified under Shem. A special problem is the listing of Sheba and Havilah under both Ham and Shem and the subsuming of Mesopotamian, Ethiopian, and Arabian entities all under Cush, a Hamite.

Clearly, geographic proximity, ethnic affiliations, sociopolitical and economic relationships, as well as historical and even literary considerations, were the varied factors that controlled inclusion in

the Table and that determined its internal divisions and subdivisions. In many instances, one or more of these factors are evident; in some, future discovery may provide illumination.

The Seventy Peoples. The peoples listed amount precisely to seventy, excluding Nimrod, who is an individual. There are fourteen Japhethites, thirty Hamites, and twenty-six Shemites. The figure seventy, even if not explicitly given, can hardly be fortuitous. The mere recognition in verse 5 of the existence of additional, unnamed "maritime nations" lends added significance to the enumeration as being deliberately chosen. In the biblical world the number seventy is "typological"; that is, it is used for rhetorical effect to evoke the idea of totality, of comprehensiveness on a large scale, as opposed to the use of seven on a smaller scale. Thus, according to Genesis 46:27, the entire household of Jacob that went down to Egypt comprised seventy souls. The representative body of the entire community of Israel in the wilderness consisted of seventy elders, as recorded in Exodus 24:9 and Numbers 11:24; and the prophet Ezekiel, in 8:11, uses the same figure at the end of the period of the monarchy. In the mythology of Canaan, as expressed in Ugaritic literature, the pantheon comprised seventy members, who are said to have been the sons of the supreme god Il and the mother goddess Ashirat.[1]

In light of this convention, one may safely assume that making the offspring of Noah's sons total seventy is a literary device to convey the notion of the totality of the human race. The same device is employed in rabbinic literature, where the phrases "seventy peoples" or "seventy languages" express humanity in its entirety.[2] This device affords an insight into a major function of the Table, a document thus far unparalleled in the ancient world. This strangely perplexing miscellany of peoples, tribes, and places is no mere academic or scholastic exercise. It affirms, first of all, the common origin and absolute unity of humankind after the Flood; then it tacitly, but effectively, asserts that the varied instrumentalities of human divisiveness are all secondary to the essential unity of the international community, which truly constitutes a family of man.

This conviction, incidentally, is strikingly inconsistent with the particularistic fancies of the ancient Egyptians, who exclusively reserved for themselves the designation "men," while regarding all other peoples as descended from the enemies of the gods. Of course, the universalistic approach of the Table of Nations proceeds naturally from the monotheistic Creation narratives of Genesis. God's sovereignty extends to every nation; His providence governs them all.

The Prominence of the Shemites. While the preceding episode about Noah, Ham, and Canaan contains an intimation of future developments, the present chapter carries forward this foreshadowing in several subtle ways. The genealogies pointedly reverse the order of Noah's sons, even though the sequence Shem-Ham-Japheth has already appeared in 5:32, 6:10, 9:18, and here in 10:1. This inversion serves to dispose of those branches of humanity whose religious history becomes static and sterile from the monotheistic standpoint of the Narrator. This strategy enables the text to direct attention climactically to the line of descent that eventually leads to the spiritually dynamic Abraham. The Narrator used the identical technique in shifting the focus from the spiritually sterile line of Cain in 4:17–25, to the divinely favored Seth in chapter 5. In the same way, 25:12–18 will detail the line of Ishmael in order to make way for the story of Isaac, and chapter 36 will dispose of Esau's genealogies so that the biography of Jacob and his progeny may resume without interruption.

Another pointer to a major function of the Table is the use of exceptional, double prefatory formulas in verses 21–22 to introduce Shem's line, a sure indication of his importance to the Narrator and another proof that the entire document is deliberately structured so as to project Shem and one line of his offspring into prominence. Moreover, while the genealogies of Japheth and Ham continue for only three generations each, that of Shem extends to the sixth generation. Here again, Aram is disposed of first, then one line is selected in chapter 11, and it continues for a total of ten generations that reach to Abraham.

Israel and the Nations. This brings us back to the number seventy, which is not only emblematic of the totality of the human race but may also function to intensify the general prefiguring thrust of the Table. The number seventy resonates with the composition of the offspring of Jacob who went down to Egypt. The special significance this assumes is demonstrated not only by its emphasis in Genesis 46:27 but also by its reiteration twice more, in Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22. It is as though the totality of the nations and the totality of the Israelites who migrate to Egypt are intertwined.[3] The fundamental biblical theme of Israel and the international community is delicately

10 These are the lines of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah: sons were born to them after the Flood.

[2]The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. [3]The descendants of

י וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וָיֶפֶת וַיִּוָּלְדוּ
לָהֶם בָּנִים אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל: ב בְּנֵי יֶפֶת גֹּמֶר וּמָגוֹג
וּמָדַי וְיָוָן וְתֻבַל וּמֶשֶׁךְ וְתִירָס: ג וּבְנֵי גֹמֶר אַשְׁכְּנַז

insinuated into the text. It is not coincidental that God's first communication to the patriarch Abraham immediately places his offspring in a worldwide context: "All the families of the earth / shall bless themselves by you." This same universal frame of reference recurs in subsequent reiterations of the divine blessing to Abraham as well as to Isaac and Jacob.[4] It finds its first expression, albeit by artful insinuation, in the present chapter.

1. Following the digression about Noah's drunkenness, the text resumes the theme of 9:18–19.

after the Flood This same phrase functions in Mesopotamian texts as a designation for historical time.

THE JAPHETHITES (vv. 2–5)

These are the most northerly group, comprising seven "sons" and seven "grandsons."

2. ***Gomer*** The *Gimmiraya* of cuneiform sources, *Kimmerioi* in Greek, and Cimmerians in English. This people came from beyond the Caucasus Mountains in the region of the Black Sea to invade and terrorize Asia Minor in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.

Magog This name has become famous through the combination "Gog and Magog," based on Ezekiel 38 and 39, which came to be used figuratively for the final war that is to prelude the messianic age. The name "Magog," however, has not yet turned up in extrabiblical sources. From the passages in Ezekiel, it is clear that the land of Magog was thought to be in the furthermost reaches of the north, which may possibly mean southern Russia or Asia.

Madai Derived from Old Persian *Mada,* it refers to the land and people of the Medes in the mountainous country east of Mesopotamia, west of the Caspian Sea, and south of the Zagros Mountains, now northwestern Iran. In biblical texts, such as Isaiah 13:17 and 21:2 and Jeremiah 51:11,28, Madai includes the Persians as well. They are frequently mentioned by Assyrian kings from the ninth century B.C.E. on.

Javan The Ionians, a branch of the Greek people, who colonized the west coast of Asia Minor. They are similarly listed together with Tubal and Meshech in Ezekiel 27:13, where they are described as traffickers in slaves and traders in bronze vessels.

Tubal, Meshech See Comment to 4:22.

Tiras This may be identical with the Tursha, one of the sea peoples defeated by Pharaoh Merneptah, ca. 1220 B.C.E.; or perhaps it is the same as the Tyrsenoi, the Greek name for the Etruscans, a people who migrated from Asia Minor to Italy and competed with the Romans for control of the central part of that country.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF GOMER (v. 3)

Ashkenaz Doubtless identical with the Ashkuzai or Ishkuza of Assyrian texts. They were an Indo-European nomadic people, expert in cavalry and archery, who inhabited the area between the Black and Caspian seas. The Greeks called them "Scythians." Jeremiah 51:24 mentions them in association with Ararat and with Minni, who are the Mannai of Assyrian texts, both of which peoples are located in Armenia. Since the Middle Ages, "Ashkenaz" has been used by Jews as a designation for Germany.

Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. [4]The descendants of Javan: Elishah and Tarshish, the Kittim and the Dodanim. [5]From these the maritime nations branched out. [These are the descendants of Japheth] by their lands—each with its language—their clans and their nations.

וְרִיפַ֥ת וְתֹגַרְמָֽה׃ 4 וּבְנֵ֥י יָוָ֖ן אֱלִישָׁ֣ה וְתַרְשִׁ֑ישׁ
כִּתִּ֖ים וְדֹדָנִֽים׃ 5 מֵאֵ֔לֶּה נִפְרְד֖וּ אִיֵּ֣י הַגּוֹיִ֑ם
בְּאַרְצֹתָ֔ם אִ֚ישׁ לִלְשֹׁנ֔וֹ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם בְּגוֹיֵהֶֽם׃

Riphath The corresponding list of 1 Chronicles 1:6 reads Diphath, as do many biblical manuscripts and printed editions here. Neither name is identifiable.

Togarmah In Ezekiel 27:14 and 38:6 the names associated with Beth-togarmah place it in Asia Minor. Cuneiform texts from the nineteenth century B.C.E. on frequently mentioned the city and district of Tegarama, which lay north of Carchemish and Haran along an important trade route that led from Assyria to Cappadocia in Asia Minor.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF JAVAN (v. 4)

These are listed in two pairs, the first being place-names, the second ethnic designations. All four are located west of the preceding group, beyond the mainland of Asia Minor.

Elishah Ezekiel 27:7 refers to "the coasts of Elishah" as a source for the export of blue and purple cloth to the city of Tyre in Phoenicia. Doubtless, Elishah is Alashiya, frequently mentioned in Egyptian, Hittite, and Akkadian texts of the second millennium B.C.E. in reference to Cyprus or to part of that island, perhaps to Enkomi and the area under its control on the east coast of the island.

Tarshish This is one of the most enigmatic place-names in the Bible. With the exception of a Phoenician inscription from Nora, Sardinia, it is not found in extrabiblical sources. Jonah 1:3 shows that it must be accessible via the Mediterranean Sea. Ezekiel 27:12 indicates that it was a place from which silver, iron, tin, and lead were exported. Three Mediterranean coastal cities bear names that resemble Tarshish: Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor; Tartessus, on the Iberian Peninsula west of the Straits of Gibraltar; and Tharros, in the western part of the isle of Sardinia. Only in the last two were all the aforementioned metals mined. The oft-mentioned "ships of Tarshish"[5] would be oceangoing vessels that sailed to far-off Tarshish. But in 1 Kings 22:49 these ships are at Ezion-geber on the Red Sea; clearly, the term had lost its original meaning. According to one view, *tarshish* is simply a Semitic term for a metal refinery, deriving from Akkadian *rashashu,* "to melt, smelt." A "*tarshish* ship" would then be a vessel capable of transporting metals, that is, one able to sail the open sea. Another view derives the name from Greek *taros,* "an oar," or complex of oars, that is, a great oceangoing ship propelled by sets of oars. A third suggestion connects the term with Hebrew *tirosh,* "wine," a poetic description of the sea as "wine dark," as used in the Homeric epics, with the secondary meaning of oceangoing vessel.

the Kittim The inhabitants of Kition, present-day Larnaca on the southeast coast of Cyprus. The Phoenicians called it *kitt* or *kitti.* The name was gradually extended to designate the entire island. Before the Phoenicians colonized it in the ninth century B.C.E., it had been inhabited first by Minoans, then by Mycenaeans in the second half of the second millennium B.C.E. By the twelfth century most parts of the island had been settled by Greeks, a situation reflected in the present genealogy.

the Dodanim The associated names require that this refers to a people in the area of the Aegean islands, but no such is presently known there. The Targums Jonathan and Yerushalmi render *"dardenaya,"* which suggests the inhabitants of the town of Dardania in Asia Minor in the region of classical Troy. The parallel text in 1 Chronicles 1:7 reads "Rodanim," which is also the text of the Greek Septuagint translation, the Samaritan recension, and many Hebrew manuscripts.[6] This would refer to the Isle of Rhodes, which certainly fits the context. Genesis Rabba 37:1 makes note of these variant readings, which may be attributed to the graphic similarity of the Hebrew letters *resh* and *dalet.*

5. ***From these . . . branched out*** Several maritime peoples separated themselves from the

[6]The descendants of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. [7]The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

6 וּבְנֵי חָם כּוּשׁ וּמִצְרַיִם וּפוּט וּכְנָעַן׃ 7 וּבְנֵי כוּשׁ
סְבָא וַחֲוִילָה וְסַבְתָּה וְרַעְמָה וְסַבְתְּכָא וּבְנֵי
רַעְמָה שְׁבָא וּדְדָן׃ 8 וְכוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרֹד הוּא

parent body of Japhethites in order to populate the isles and coastlands of the Mediterranean and form distinct political entities.

These are the descendants of Japheth This phrase is not in the Hebrew text but is supplied here in conformity with the summary notations that close the lists of Ham and Shem in verses 20 and 31.

THE HAMITES (vv. 6–20)

These comprise four primary subgroupings, listed from south to north. The first three are situated in Africa, while the last constitutes the land bridge between Africa and Asia. The principal Hamitic components formed the Egyptian Empire during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties (ca. 1552–ca. 1200 B.C.E.). The list contains seven Cushite peoples, seven peoples connected with Mizraim, seven Mesopotamian cities, five peoples associated with Canaan, and six Phoenician-Syrian cities.

6. ***Cush*** See the Comment to 2:13. Here the term is restricted to the region known as *Kash* or *Kesh* in Egyptian, roughly covering Nubia or northern Sudan, south of Egypt.

Mizraim This is the usual Hebrew word for Egypt, but here, in light of verse 14, it specifically refers to Lower Egypt, from the Mediterranean Sea to Memphis, as also in Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 44:1.

Put This originally must have been the name of a Libyan tribe or district, then used for the entire land of Libya, west of Egypt. Elsewhere in the Bible, the Greek Septuagint renders *Put* by "Libya."

Canaan As in the previous chapter, Canaan is the "son" of Ham, meaning that it is closely affiliated with Egypt. This was especially the case in the period of the Egyptian Empire, when it was designated "the Province of Canaan" and when the petty kingdoms or city-states within the country were vassals of Pharaoh. The geographic boundaries of Canaan are given in verse 19. The term "Canaanite" is already found in an eighteenth century B.C.E. document found at Mari.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF CUSH (vv. 7–12)

Three groups ethnically and geographically distinct—African, Arabian, and Mesopotamian—are all subsumed under the Hamites because they all happen to bear similar sounding names. In addition, historical considerations seem to have entered into the classification. It is known that from very early times, the African and Asian shores of the Red Sea, particularly at its southern part, engaged in active and reciprocal sea commerce. South Arabians crossed the Bab el-Mandeb as traders and colonists and greatly influenced the culture on the western side. The connection with Mesopotamia is discussed below.

7. ***Seba*** This name is associated with Egypt and Cush also in Isaiah 43:3 and 45:14, but the location is unknown. In Psalms 72:10 it is paired with Sheba, which also appears in the present list. It is possible that the two forms, Seba and Sheba, are dialectic variants of the same name and refer to one tribe that split up. Seba would designate the African branch.

Havilah See Comment to 2:11–12.

Sabtah This may refer to Shabwat, the ancient capital of Hadramaut in southern Arabia, but that region is listed in verse 26 as Shemitic.

[8]Cush also begot Nimrod, who was the first man of might on earth. [9]He was a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD; hence the saying, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter by the grace of the LORD." [10]The mainstays of his kingdom

הַחֵל לִהְיוֹת גִּבֹּר בָּאָרֶץ׃ 9 הוּא־הָיָה גִבֹּר־צַיִד
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן יֵאָמַר כְּנִמְרֹד גִּבּוֹר צַיִד לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה׃ 10 וַתְּהִי רֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכְתּוֹ בָּבֶל וְאֶרֶךְ

Raamah Also mentioned together with Sheba in Ezekiel 27:22 as a trading people whose merchandise happens to be characteristic of Arabia, but it is otherwise unknown.

Sabteca No such locality is known, but a Nubian prince named Shebteko (ca. 700 B.C.E.) is recorded, whose name may reflect a place-name.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF RAAMAH (v. 7)

Sheba Ezekiel 38:13 also connects Sheba with Dedan. Since the latter can be located in northern Arabia, it is reasonable to suppose that the Sheba mentioned with it is situated in the same area and that the reference here is not to the kingdom of that name in southern Arabia with which Solomon had commercial connections. That Sheba is listed in verse 28.

Dedan The Dedanites are caravaneers and traders, according to Isaiah 21:13 and Ezekiel 27:15,20. Cuneiform texts mention them as early as the Old Babylonian and Ur III periods (2113–2006 B.C.E.), and Dedan can now be identified with the present-day oasis of Al-'Ula in northern Arabia. This was a major center of the spice trade and an important station along the international trade route.

NIMROD (vv. 8–12)

This section is a digression that shifts the focus of interest to Mesopotamia. How this region came to be associated here with Cush, son of Ham, can be accounted for on the principle of homonym referred to above. Two possible explanations exist. One is that behind the present Cush is the royal city of Kish, where, according to Mesopotamian tradition, kingship initially resumed after the flood. These early postdiluvian rulers inaugurated the first fully historical period in Mesopotamian history, called by scholars the Early Dynastic Period (2800–2500 B.C.E.). The royal city of Kish long enjoyed preeminence and imposed a measure of unity on Lower Mesopotamia. The title "King of Kish" acquired such prestige that, even after that city was no longer a royal capital, later kings of Mesopotamia retained the epithet in order to signify hegemony over Sumer and Akkad and as a symbol of imperial rule. Another possibility is that Cush is a reflex of the dynasty of Kassites, a Caucasian people who came down from the Zagros Mountains and ruled Babylonia for about four centuries from 1595 B.C.E. on. Their chief god was named Kashshu, which is written Kushshu in the Nuzi texts.

*8. **Nimrod*** This outstanding personality, whose exploits obviously left their mark on the historical memory of Israel, has not been positively identified with any known individual in the ancient world. Micah 5:5 echoes the traditions behind these verses. The site of the ancient city of Calah, mentioned in verse 11, is presently known locally as Birs Nimrud. Attempts have been made to associate him with Naram-Sin, grandson of Sargon I of Akkad, who dominated a great portion of the Near East for about fifty years during the last quarter of the third millennium B.C.E. He was the first to use the title "King of the Four Quarters of the World," and another of his titles was "Strong Male," which recalls the "man of might" here in verse 8. His achievements were widely commemorated on steles, buildings, and votive inscriptions, and he was the subject of numerous tales and legends. One persistent tradition holds that he came to a grievous end for defying the gods. In this connection, the Hebrew name Nimrod may be a play on the name Naram-Sin in that it evokes the verb ***m-r-d,*** "to rebel." This interpretation of the name as "rebel" is found in Eruvin 53a.

Another suggestion identifies the hero with Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca. 1234–1197 B.C.E.), the famed Assyrian monarch who first conquered Babylon and whose enthusiasm for hunting big game is well documented. His exploits, too, were the subjects of epic poems. It is not easy, however, to connect the name Nimrod with Tukulti-Ninurta.

were Babylon, Erech, Accad, and Calneh in the land of Shinar. [11]From that land Asshur went forth and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, [12]and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, that is the great city.

וְאַכַּד וְכַלְנֵה בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר׃ [11] מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא
יָצָא אַשּׁוּר וַיִּבֶן אֶת־נִינְוֵה וְאֶת־רְחֹבֹת עִיר וְאֶת־
כָּלַח׃ [12] וְאֶת־רֶסֶן בֵּין נִינְוֵה וּבֵין כָּלַח הִוא הָעִיר

*10. **The mainstays of his kingdom*** Rather, in light of verse 11, "His kingdom began with. . . ." These cities constituted the power base from which he proceeded to expand into Assyria.

Babylon The famous city on the River Euphrates, about 50 miles (80 km.) south of modern Baghdad, Iraq. The oldest Sumerian name for the city was ***ka-dingir-ra,*** which was understood to mean "the gate of God." It was translated into Akkadian as ***bab-il.*** According to ***Enuma Elish,*** the Mesopotamian creation epic, the gods themselves built the temple there for the god Marduk at the beginning of time. The choice of Babylon to head the list of cities here is most likely determined by the next episode, in chapter 11.

Erech The Sumerian city-state Uruk, now Warka on the east side of the Euphrates, about 40 miles (64 km.) up the river from Ur in southern Iraq. The Sumerian King List gives this city as the seat of the second dynasty of kings after the flood, the third monarch of which was Gilgamesh.

Accad The Sumerian King List reports that Uruk was defeated, and its kingship carried off to Akkad. This city, called ***agade*** in Sumerian, became the center of the kingdom of Akkad founded by the famous Sargon (ca. 2300 B.C.E.), who established a dynasty that lasted about 150 years. The site of this city, somewhere on the Euphrates, has not been located. Eventually its name came to embrace the whole of northern Babylonia as opposed to Sumer in the south. "Akkadian" now signifies the Semitic Assyrian and Babylonian languages.

Calneh The only name in this list that never appears in Akkadian inscriptions. It cannot refer to the city mentioned in Amos 6:2 and called Calno in Isaiah 10:9 because that is situated in northern Syria, not in Mesopotamia. A widely accepted suggestion is to read ***ve-khullanah,*** "all of them being . . . ," which is also an ancient Samaritan tradition. The advantage of this interpretation is that verses 10–12 list exactly seven Mesopotamian cities, another example of the heptad pattern in the Table of Nations.

Shinar The land of Babylonia, embracing Sumer and Akkad and bounded on the north by Assyria, modern southern Iraq.[7] This name was not used in Mesopotamia itself but is frequently found in one form or another in Egyptian, Hittite, Mitannian, and Amarna texts to designate the Kassite kingdom of Babylon (ca. 1595–1160 B.C.E.).

11. Either Asshur or Nimrod could be the subject of the Hebrew verb ***yatsa',*** "went forth."[8] The latter is preferable, and the text would thus be rendered, "From that land, he (i.e., Nimrod) went forth to Asshur." This reading is supported by Micah 5:5, which terms Assyria "the land of Nimrod," and it is also how Targum Jonathan and Bekhor Shor understand the text. "Asshur" is then a geographical name, parallel to "Shinar," the two referring respectively to Upper and Lower Mesopotamia. The passage reflects the verifiable historical fact that, in its early period, Assyria was long under the domination and religious, linguistic, and cultural influence of Sumer and Akkad, a debt it freely acknowledged.

Asshur The entire region of the Upper Mesopotamian plain. The city of Asshur, situated on the right bank of the Tigris, gave its name to this region. The other principal cities of Assyria were Nineveh and Calah, both mentioned here. All three sites have been thoroughly excavated. See Comment to 2:14.

Nineveh Situated on the left bank of the Tigris, about 250 miles (400 km.) northwest of Babylon, presently the mounds of Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunus ("the prophet Jonah") opposite Mosul. The kings of Akkad, including Sargon, built at Nineveh. The name suggests a Sumerian origin.

Rehoboth-ir Literally, "broad places of the city." No such city is known from Assyrian sources, but the reference is probably to a well-known suburb of Nineveh there called ***rebit Ninua,*** "greater Nineveh."

[13]And Mizraim begot the Ludim, the Anamim, the Lehabim, the Naphtuhim, [14]the Pathrusim, the Casluhim, and the Caphtorim, whence the Philistines came forth.

[15]Canaan begot Sidon, his first-born, and Heth; [16]and the

הַגִּדְלָה: 13 וּמִצְרַיִם יָלַד אֶת־לוּדִים וְאֶת־עֲנָמִים
וְאֶת־לְהָבִים וְאֶת־נַפְתֻּחִים: 14 וְאֶת־פַּתְרֻסִים
וְאֶת־כַּסְלֻחִים אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מִשָּׁם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וְאֶת־
כַּפְתֹרִים: ס 15 וּכְנַעַן יָלַד אֶת־צִידֹן בְּכֹרוֹ

Calah This is the famous Assyrian city Kalah, the site of which is presently known as Nimrud, located on the left bank of the Tigris near where that river is joined by the Great Zab. Shalmaneser I (ca. 1265–1235 B.C.E.) rebuilt Kalah and made it his capital after abandoning Asshur.

12. Resen An unknown site, possibly standing for Akkadian *reš-eni,* meaning "spring-head," equivalent to Hebrew *Rosh Ha'ayin,* which is the name of a modern Israeli urban settlement.

that is the great city The ambiguity here is noted in Yoma 10a, where the parallel with Jonah 1:2 and 3:1,3 is taken as indicating decisively that the reference is to Nineveh.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF MIZRAIM (vv. 13–14)

All seven names are in the plural form, which indicates inhabitants of a region or designates members of a tribe.

13. Ludim Both Jeremiah 46:9 and Ezekiel 30:5 mention this people in association with Cush and Put in prophecies concerning Egypt. The contexts there, as here, exclude identification with the Lydians of Asia Minor. They may be some as yet unknown African people.

Anamim An unknown name, possibly in Cyrenaica, west of the Libyan plateau.

Lehabim Possibly Libyans, though they are usually called Lubim in the Bible.[9]

Naphtuhim This otherwise unknown name has been connected uncertainly with an Egyptian phrase signifying the "northland," that is, Lower Egypt or the Delta region, in contrast to the next name.

14. Pathru·im This undoubtedly refers to the inhabitants of Pathros, which is Egyptian for the "southland," that is, Upper Egypt, a meaning it also has in Isaiah 11:11. King Esarhaddon of Assyria called himself "King of Musur (=*mizraim*), Paturisi (=*pathros*), and Cush."

Casluhim The place is otherwise unknown.

Caphtorim This corresponds to *kaptaru* in Akkadian texts, *kptr* in Ugaritic, and probably also to *keftiu* in Egyptian, all generally identified with the isle of Crete and its environs in the eastern Mediterranean. Deuteronomy 2:23 tells that the Caphtorim settled in Gaza, which became a major stronghold of the Philistines in the times of the Judges. Both Amos 9:7 and Jeremiah 47:4 report that this people came from Caphtor. Hence, the phrase "whence the Philistines came forth" more likely applies to the Caphtorim than to the unknown Casluhim.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF CANAAN (vv. 15–19)

This section is a composite. Only the first two of the eleven names listed are without the *-i* ending that indicates a gentilic form, and they are to be understood as the names of individuals who are the eponymous, or name-giving, ancestors of the Sidonians and the Hittites. The next four names appear in the numerous biblical registers of the original, pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan. It is not clear why specifically these were selected here. Further, the order of presentation is unique and appears to be independent of the other similar registers. The Jebusites, named first here, otherwise almost invariably close the lists. Also, the list includes the rarely mentioned Girgashites. The last five names are those of cities in Phoenicia and Syria.

15. Sidon The famous Phoenician port city. The designation "first-born" and the omission of Tyre point to a period when Sidon held undisputed sway over the other cities of southern

Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, [17]the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, [18]the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the clans of the Canaanites spread out. ([19]The [original] Canaanite territory extended from

וְאֶת־חֵֽת׃ 16 וְאֶת־הַיְבוּסִ֥י וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִ֖י וְאֶת־
הַגִּרְגָּשִֽׁי׃ 17 וְאֶת־הַחִוִּ֖י וְאֶת־הָעַרְקִ֑י וְאֶת־הַסִּינִֽי׃
18 וְאֶת־הָאַרְוָדִ֖י וְאֶת־הַצְּמָרִ֑י וְאֶת־הַחֲמָתִ֖י וְאַחַ֣ר
נָפֹ֔צוּ מִשְׁפְּחֹ֖ות הַֽכְּנַעֲנִֽי׃ 19 וַיְהִ֥י גְבוּל־הַֽכְּנַעֲנִ֖י

Phoenicia, so that the name became synonymous with the whole of Phoenicia, as in Deuteronomy 3:9 and Joshua 3:4,6. This biblical usage conforms with information available from other sources. Thus the Egyptian inscriptions that record the campaigns of Thutmose III (ca. 1490–1436 B.C.E.) in Canaan and Syria also mention Sidon, but not Tyre. The latter is similarly ignored in the Homeric epics, which deal with events in the twelfth century B.C.E. and which refer to Sidon and its inhabitants. The same is true of the annals of Tiglath-pileser I (1109–1088 B.C.E.), who conducted military expeditions to Syria and Phoenicia. By the tenth century, however, Tyre had eclipsed Sidon in importance.

Heth Undoubtedly, Heth is taken here to be a personal name, that of the ancestor of the Hittites. This term, like "Canaan/Canaanite," is noticeably imprecise. Around 1800 B.C.E., an Indo-European people who had settled in Asia Minor and had taken over the name of the earlier inhabitants, the Ḫatti, founded an empire. The name "Hittite" was gradually extended to the entire region and the peoples incorporated within it. After the Hittite empire collapsed ca. 1200 B.C.E. and the city-states of Syria became independent, they continued to call themselves Hittite for several centuries. Assyrian and Babylonian records regularly used "Ḫatti-land" to refer to the whole of Syria and Palestine. In the present context, Heth probably refers to the Neo-Hittite states of Syria.

16. ***Jebusites*** Nothing is known about the origins or history of this people. At the time of the Exodus they lived in the hill country, according to Numbers 13:29. In the period of Joshua's wars of conquest, and until David's time, they were located more specifically in Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem itself was called Jebus, and it was from Araunah the Jebusite that David bought the plot of land on which the Temple was later built.[10]

Amorites They appear as a distinct ethnic group in all the lists of the pre-Israelite peoples of the land. In the course of time, the term lost all ethnic significance in the Bible and, like "Canaanite," came to be employed as a general designation for them all, as for instance in 15:16. The Amurru, as they were called in Akkadian, were a West Semitic people who first appeared in Babylonia in significant numbers about 2000 B.C.E., having migrated from the fringes of the Syrian desert. In subsequent centuries, successive waves of Amorites infiltrated the entire Fertile Crescent. In the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E., cuneiform texts refer to a state north of Canaan called Amurru.

Girgashites Nothing is known of them.[11] They may have been an offshoot of the "land of Karkisha" in Asia Minor, mentioned among the allies of the Hittites in the inscriptions of Ramses II about the battle of Kadesh. The personal names *grgsh* and *bn grgsh* appear in Ugaritic texts.

17. ***Hivites*** Despite more than a score of scriptural references, nothing is known about this people from any external source.

17–18. ***Arkites . . . Hamathites*** All these refer to the inhabitants of five Syrian cities, four on the coast and one inland. Arka, about 13 miles (20 km.) northeast of Tripoli, Lebanon, is mentioned in Egyptian execration texts as early as the twentieth century B.C.E. Sin, in cuneiform *siannu*, bordered on the territory of Ugarit. Arvad was the most northerly of the important Phoenician cities. The site is presently Ruad, built on a rocky island about 50 miles (80.5 km.) north of Byblos. It is frequently mentioned in Assyrian records. Zemar, lying about midway between Arvad to its north and Tripoli to its south, is mentioned in Egyptian, Amarna, and Assyrian texts. Hamath, now Hamah, lies inland on the middle Orontes River alongside one of the major trade routes, about 50 miles (80.5 km.) east-northeast of Arvad.

Afterward . . . This note corresponds to that in verse 5. Here the text gives recognition to the fact that Phoenicia proper and Palestine constituted a cultural continuum.

Sidon as far as Gerar, near Gaza, and as far as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, near Lasha.) 20These are the descendants of Ham, according to their clans and languages, by their lands and nations.

21Sons were also born to Shem, ancestor of all the descendants of Eber and older brother of Japheth. 22The descen-

מִצְרַיִם בָּאָה גְרָרָה עַד־עַזָּה בֹּאֲכָה סְדֹמָה
וַעֲמֹרָה וְאַדְמָה וּצְבֹיִם עַד־לָשַׁע׃ 20 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־חָם
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לִלְשֹׁנֹתָם בְּאַרְצֹתָם בְּגוֹיֵהֶם׃ ס
21 וּלְשֵׁם יֻלַּד גַּם־הוּא אֲבִי כָל־בְּנֵי־עֵבֶר אֲחִי
יֶפֶת הַגָּדוֹל׃ 22 בְּנֵי שֵׁם עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁד

19. Here "Canaan" is not a person but a people. The Table of Nations displays this exceptional interest in the territorial boundaries of Canaan because it is leading up to the progenitors of Abraham, whose descendants are to inherit the land. Significantly, the city-states north of Sidon, detailed in verses 17–18, are excluded, and only the region west of the Jordan is included. Sidon constitutes the extreme northern limit; Gaza represents the southwestern extremity, and then the border extends westward across the low hill country to the Dead Sea region.

These boundaries do not correspond either to those delineated elsewhere in the Bible, particularly in Genesis 15:18 and Numbers 34:2–12, or to any known historical reality in Israelite times. The Israelite conquest never reached Sidon. The description of Canaan given here corresponds to that of the Egyptian province of Canaan as it emerged following the peace treaty between the Egyptian king Ramses II and the Hittite king Hattusilis III (ca. 1280 B.C.E.), which defined the spheres of interest of the respective empires. Following this, the Egyptians gave up all efforts to control northern Syria, which belonged to the Hittites, while southern Syria and Palestine remained under Egyptian tutelage.

Gerar This city is not mentioned in either Egyptian or Assyrian sources, which means that it was not situated along the Via Maris or main north-south highway parallel to the coast, the road used by imperial armies. The patriarchal narratives in chapters 20 and 26 show Gerar to have been an important royal city in the western Negeb and to have been situated west or northwest of Beer-sheba in a region sufficiently well watered to provide pasturing facilities for shepherds. All the signs point to its being identified with the impressive mound of Tell Haror (Tell Abu Hureireh), which lies on one of the major wadis, Wadi esh-Shari'ah, about 15 miles (24 km.) northwest of Beer-sheba. Archaeological surveys in this area have revealed strong Egyptian influence on the material culture between 1550 and 1200 B.C.E.

Gaza Inscriptions of the Egyptian king Seti I from around 1300 B.C.E. refer to this city as "The Canaan." It was the regional capital of the Egyptian province of Canaan. Gaza, the most southerly of the coastal cities, was strategically situated along the main highway and trade route that linked Mesopotamia and Egypt. Later it became a major Philistine city.

Sodom . . . Zeboiim These are the so-called "cities of the Plain," mentioned again in 14:2 and Deuteronomy 29:22, that were destroyed because of their wickedness. The first two form the theme of chapter 19, while the last two appear in Hosea 11:8. Since the order of the cities is always uniform, it most likely derives from some ancient topographical list, many examples of which have been found in Mesopotamia and Egypt. It should be noted that, unlike 13:10, the present passage contains no reference to the destruction of the cities. They have not been identified. Their most likely location appears to be in the area now covered by the southern extension of the Dead Sea below the Lisan.

Lasha Otherwise unknown; Targum Jonathan and rabbinic sources identified it with Callirrhoe, a site of hot springs near the eastern shore of the Dead Sea.

THE SHEMITES (vv. 21–31)

The introduction to this chapter makes note of the special nature of this section. As to the order of listing, the guiding principle seems to be from the more remote to the closer kinship with Israel. The Shemites comprise two groups of thirteen entities each.

dants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram.
[23]The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

וְלוּד וַאֲרָם׃ 23 וּבְנֵי אֲרָם עוּץ וְחוּל וְגֶתֶר וָמָשׁ׃
24 וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁד יָלַד אֶת־שֶׁלַח וְשֶׁלַח יָלַד אֶת־

*21. **all the descendants of Eber*** Although he is the fourth generation from Shem, he receives special mention here because he is the ancestor both of Israel and of a variety of peoples with whom Israelite history is closely intertwined. According to later genealogies in Genesis, these include Arameans, Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites, the Ishmaelite tribes, and Edomites.[12] One would expect these descendants of Eber to be called "Hebrews" (Heb. *'ivrim*). Nevertheless, it is strange that of all the above-mentioned peoples, only the line of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob is so designated. Probably for these reasons, Rashi and Ramban take *'ever* here not as the name of the individual mentioned in verse 24, whose line is taken up again in 11:16–29, but as meaning "the region beyond," a denotation *'ever* has in 50:10 and Numbers 21:13. *Benei 'ever* would then be "the inhabitants of the region beyond [the Euphrates]." In fact, in Akkadian, the land west of this river is called *eber nari,* a phrase often used as a geographical term referring to Upper Syria, which is what *'ever ha-nahar* means in Joshua 24:2.

older brother of Japheth Because an adjective does not usually modify a proper name in biblical Hebrew, this is the natural meaning required by the syntax. However, the Septuagint, Genesis Rabba 27:6, and most medieval exegetes render "brother of Japheth who is the oldest."

*22. **Elam*** The ancient name for modern Khuzistan in southwestern Iran in the Iranian Plateau east of Babylon and northeast of the Persian Gulf. Its capital was Susa, the biblical Shushan of Esther 1:2–5. Elam is the most easterly country in the Table.

Asshur See Comment to verse 11. The city of Asshur on the Tigris in Upper Mesopotamia gave its name to the surrounding territory, which became known as Assyria. Asshur-uballit I (ca. 1356–1321 B.C.E.) was the first monarch to be called "king of the land of Assyria."

Arpachshad This name is a puzzle. A tradition from Second Temple times connects the last three Hebrew consonants with Chesed of 22:22, the eponymous ancestor of the Chaldeans (Heb. *kasdim,* Akk. *kashdu*).[13] This was the name of a seminomadic Aramean tribe that inhabited the desert regions between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf. As a geographical term, it was first applied to the southern part of Mesopotamia but was eventually used for the whole of Babylonia. The first element of the name—Arpa—might be Arip, which is frequently found in Hurrian proper names.

Lud This cannot be the same people as the Ludim of verse 13. It may refer to Lydia, a region on the west coast of Asia Minor, but its known history does not begin until the middle of the seventh century B.C.E., and it would be expected to be classified under the Japhethites. Neither Isaiah 66:19 nor Ezekiel 27:10 shed light on its identity.

Aram It is unclear whether this term applies here to a specific tribe or to the wider confederation of Aramean tribes that were Western Semites. The patriarchs of Israel maintained close family connections with Arameans in Aram-naharaim and Paddan-aram. This is clear from 25:20; 28:5; and 31:18, 20–24. In fact, according to Deuteronomy 26:5, the Israelite farmer annually declared at the festival of first fruits, "My father was a fugitive Aramean."

A variant tradition in Genesis 22:21 has Aram as the grandson of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The different genealogies may well reflect tribal relationships at different periods of history. Amos 9:7 says that the Arameans migrated from Kir, which in Isaiah 22:6 is parallel to Elam and which would place them in the northeastern part of the Fertile Crescent. That would be consonant with the tradition of the present Table.

23. Of the four subdivisions of Aram, only Uz is otherwise known. In 1 Chronicles 1:17 he and the other three are sons of Shem and brothers of Aram. In Genesis 22:21, Uz is Aram's uncle. The present Table, which makes him a son, reflects the historic reality of a later time, when Aram had overwhelmed the Uzzites and incorporated them into the Aramean tribal league. Two regions named Uz are mentioned, one northeast of Canaan near Har(r)an and another between Edom and northern Arabia, referred to in 36:29, apparently the homeland of Job (1:2). Josephus locates Hul in Armenia.

[24]Arpachshad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber. [25]Two sons were born to Eber: the name of the first was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and the name of his brother was Joktan. [26]Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, [27]Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, [28]Obal, Abimael, Sheba, [29]Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan. [30]Their settlements

עֵבֶר׃ 25 וּלְעֵבֶר יֻלַּד שְׁנֵי בָנִים שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פֶּלֶג
כִּי בְיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה הָאָרֶץ וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יָקְטָן׃ 26 וְיָקְטָן
יָלַד אֶת־אַלְמוֹדָד וְאֶת־שֶׁלֶף וְאֶת־חֲצַרְמָוֶת
וְאֶת־יָרַח׃ 27 וְאֶת־הֲדוֹרָם וְאֶת־אוּזָל וְאֶת־דִּקְלָה׃
28 וְאֶת־עוֹבָל וְאֶת־אֲבִימָאֵל וְאֶת־שְׁבָא׃ 29 וְאֶת־
אוֹפִר וְאֶת־חֲוִילָה וְאֶת־יוֹבָב כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יָקְטָן׃

Mash may be the mountains of Lebanon and the Ante-Lebanon; they are called Mashu in the Gilgamesh Epic.[14]

*24. **Shelah*** See Comment to 5:25.

*25. **Peleg*** His descendants are listed in 11:18–28. The name can mean "water channel" (Akk. *palgu*) and so may refer to an area of land watered by irrigation canals.[15] A geographic lexicon from the city of Ebla in Syria, deriving from ca. 2500 B.C.E., includes a place named Palag.

the earth was divided Hebrew *niflegah* is a play on *peleg*. Traditionally, this has been taken as a reference to the confusion of languages and the dispersal of mankind described in the next chapter. Hence, the rabbinic term *dor ha-pallagah,* "the generation of the dispersal/confusion of speech," an interpretation perhaps supported by Psalms 55:10. However, the verb *p-l-g* is used neither in 11:7–9 nor here in verse 32. Accordingly, "the dividing of the earth" more likely has some other reference, possibly the development of agriculture by irrigation canals, or some historic split-up of tribes, or even an earthquake. Bekhor Shor observes that from Peleg on the life spans of the patriarchs listed in 11:11–32 are all in the two-hundred-year range and less, whereas his predecessors lived at least four hundred years. He therefore interprets the phrase to mean that the human life span was halved.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF JOKTAN (vv. 26–30)

This list is extraordinary, both for its unparalleled extent and because the Joktanites are here said to be descended from the same stock as the Israelites, which is itself remarkable since their settlements, where identifiable, are located in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, most of the names are not the same as the Arab tribes mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions from the ninth century B.C.E. on. All these peculiarities suggest that behind this list is some lost history of relationships, probably of a commercial nature in connection with the spice trade, between Israel and the Arabian tribes. Incidentally, the name Joktan (Heb. *yoktan*) can mean "diminution" and may hide some now forgotten word play corresponding to that on the name of his brother Peleg. It is noteworthy that the names of several areas in Arabia are formed from the stem *k-t-n,* such as Qatna.

*26. **Almodad*** The element *modad* means "beloved one," the same as in Medad of Numbers 11:26. It occurs as a divine epithet in Ugaritic. The first syllable may either represent *'el,* "god," or Arabic *'al,* "family."

Sheleph Possibly the same as a Yemenite tribe Shalph or the Arabic place-name Salph between Yemen and Hadramaut.

Hazarmaveth This well-known kingdom mentioned in South Arabic inscriptions is the present-day Hadramaut on the southern coast east of Yemen.

Jerah Omitted in the list of 1 Chronicles 1:20–24, which has twelve Joktanite tribes in all. This may be the region of Yemen known as Waraḥ. In Hebrew and in South Arabic inscriptions, *yrḥ* means "month."

*27. **Hadoram*** The first element is an epithet of the god Baal, the name meaning "[the god] Had is exalted." A modern place-name Dauraum near San'a, capital of Yemen, is known.

Uzal A late Arab tradition of doubtful validity identifies Uzal as the old name for San'a.

Diklah Probably derived from *dekel,* "a palm tree," and the name of some oasis in Yemen.

extended from Mesha as far as Sephar, the hill country to the east. 31These are the descendants of Shem according to their clans and languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

32These are the groupings of Noah's descendants, according to their origins, by their nations; and from these the nations branched out over the earth after the Flood.

ל וַיְהִי מוֹשָׁבָם מִמֵּשָׁא בְּאֲכָה סְפָרָה הַר הַקֶּדֶם׃
לא אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־שֵׁם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לִלְשֹׁנֹתָם בְּאַרְצֹתָם
לְגוֹיֵהֶם׃ לב אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפְּחֹת בְּנֵי־נֹחַ לְתוֹלְדֹתָם
בְּגוֹיֵהֶם וּמֵאֵלֶּה נִפְרְדוּ הַגּוֹיִם בָּאָרֶץ אַחַר הַמַּבּוּל׃
פ שביעי

28. ***Obal*** Omitted in the Septuagint, which has a twelve-tribe list. 'Abil is a common place-name in Yemen.

Abimael An unknown name that means "My Father is indeed God."

Sheba See Comment to verse 7. This is the kingdom in southern Arabia, frequently mentioned in Assyrian royal inscriptions, with which King Solomon formed relationships.

29. ***Ophir*** A "brother" of Havilah, which is a source of gold according to 2:11–12. Ophir is consistently cited in the Bible for its gold.[16] An ostracon found at Tell Qasileh on the River Yarkon northeast of Tel Aviv reads, "Gold from Ophir for Beth Horon 30 Shekels." Since the biblical sources indicate that Ophir was accessible by ship, it was most likely located somewhere on the shores of the Red Sea.

Havilah See Comment to 2:11–12.

Jobab No satisfactory identification for the name has been found.

30. The extent of the settlements of the Joktanites is paralleled in the Table only by the boundaries of the Canaanites, again testifying to the special importance of this tribal league at some still unknown period of Israelite history.

Mesha This may be the same as Massa of 25:14, but that appears to be in northern Arabia, and a southerly location, otherwise unknown, is indicated here.

Sephar The word means "border" in postbiblical Hebrew. The reference may be to Ẓafar, a port city and center of the spice trade in Hadramaut, or to a place southwest of San'a.[17]

32. Taken with verse 1, this summarizing conclusion forms a literary frame to the Table of Nations and forges the transition to the next episode.

CHAPTER 11

The Tower of Babel (vv. 1–9)

The preceding Table of Nations repeatedly called attention to the distinguishing forms of human variation—ethnic, linguistic, and territorial. The first is probably taken to be a natural outgrowth of the ramified lines of descent from Noah's three sons. The last is easily explained as a normal development of the geographic dispersal imposed by God on man. But the biblical Narrator is disturbed by the vast diversity of languages that characterizes the human race. Given the Bible's presupposition that all mankind constitutes one great family traceable to a common ancestry, it becomes necessary to account for the rise of a polyglot humanity. The present narrative deals with this development. Conscious of the misunderstandings, discord, and strife that result from the disruption of communication between human beings, it looks upon the lack of a common language as a calamity that humankind has brought upon itself in consequence of its overweening pride and deliberate defiance of God's will.

Though the story of the Tower of Babel has no parallel or prototype in Mesopotamian literature, it does display an intimate acquaintance with Babylonian construction techniques, a familiarity with

11 Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. 2And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

יא וַיְהִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ שָׂפָה אֶחָת וּדְבָרִים
אֲחָדִים: 2 וַיְהִי בְּנָסְעָם מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּמְצְאוּ בִקְעָה
בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם: 3 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־

some characteristic formulas of cuneiform royal building inscriptions, and a knowledge of certain Mesopotamian traditions. As a matter of fact, it seems to be a deliberate expression of ideas that are in antipodal opposition to some cherished notions of ancient Mesopotamia.

This episode does not contain the names of individuals. A key expression, repeated five times, is "all the earth," for the entire human race is presumed to be sinful. The postdiluvian generations, having learned nothing from history, have proved themselves to be disappointingly out of harmony with God. God must start again, as it were, in a fresh attempt to have His purposes on earth fulfilled. That is the reason why the present narrative, which closes the second universal epoch in human history, is immediately followed by a genealogy that issues in Abraham, the founder of a new nation that is to have a special relationship with God and is to become the divinely wrought instrument for the mediation of His demands to a wayward humanity.

The narrative is almost equally divided between the doings of man (vv. 1–4) and the countermeasures of God (vv. 5–9). God's sudden intervention, in precisely the middle verse, signals impending radical change in the situation. Pronouncements about the state of affairs on earth frame the entire episode, with the last verse describing the reversal of the situation portrayed in the first. This turnaround is reinforced by the inversion in verse 9 of the order of the key expressions "all the earth" and "language" used in verse 1. The symmetrical structure imparts added emphasis to the metamorphosis caused by God's reactions in that the second part reiterates the phraseology of the first part, often with ironical force. Finally, the Hebrew vocabulary exhibits an unusually large number of assonantal features or verbal correspondences.

THE MAKING OF BABEL (vv. 1–4)

1. ***Everyone on earth*** The reiterated emphasis on the involvement of the totality of humankind in the offense is crucial to the understanding of the episode as the climactic event in the universal history of the Book of Genesis.

the same language See Comment to 2:20. Hebrew *safah,* "language," is also repeated five times. Belief in an original universal human language seems to have also been current in ancient Sumer. A fragment of a myth, "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta," relates that the speech of mankind was confounded as a result of strife and jealousy between two gods. Our biblical story views the disruption of communication between human beings as the consequence of man's placing himself in disharmony with God.

2. ***migrated*** Humankind is envisaged as having been initially nomadic after the Flood. The Hebrew stem *n-s-ʿ,* "to travel," originally meant "to pull up stakes," as it does in Judges 16:14 and Isaiah 33:20.

from the east That is, from the vantage point of Canaan. The survivors would actually have migrated from Ararat in a southeasterly direction.

a valley Rather, "a plain," referring to that flat alluvial land in southern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Shinar See Comment to 10:10. A similar tradition is preserved by Berossus, whose story of the Mesopotamian flood also has the survivors first going to Babylon.

there Hebrew *sham,* repeated five times, directs our attention to the central importance of the particular site chosen; at the same time, its sound evokes an association with ***shamayim,*** "heavens," with which the site is supposed to be physically connected, as well as with ***shem,*** "a name," in verse 4.

[3]They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them hard."—Brick served them as stone, and bitumen served them as mortar.—[4]And they said, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all

רַעֵהוּ הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה לְבֵנִים וְנִשְׂרְפָה לִשְׂרֵפָה וַתְּהִי
לָהֶם הַלְּבֵנָה לְאָבֶן וְהַחֵמָר הָיָה לָהֶם לַחֹמֶר׃
4 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָבָה נִבְנֶה־לָּנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֹאשׁוֹ
בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה־לָּנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן־נָפוּץ עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־

3. The Narrator, clearly writing from the perspective of a foreign observer, displays an accurate and detailed knowledge of Mesopotamian construction techniques. The rarity of stone in the plain of Lower Mesopotamia necessitated the use of molded, sun-dried clay as the common building material, an invention that ushered in the epoch of monumental temple architecture. The discovery of the technique of firing the brick in a kiln enhanced its solidity and durability and made possible the erection of multistoried buildings. The use of bitumen for mortar further added to the strength, cohesion, and impermeability of the brick.

Bitumen is early attested in Mesopotamia. It was found in abundance at Hit on the Euphrates, about 140 miles (225 km.) upstream from Babylon. By contrast, stone was plentiful in Canaan and was widely used for monumental architecture, though sun-dried brick was the norm for common construction. Kiln-fired brick was not used in that region before Roman times; nor was bitumen used as mortar, despite its abundant presence in the Dead Sea.

Come, let us Hebrew ***havah*** expresses both intention and a call to action.

make bricks The preparation of building materials should follow, not precede, the decision to build. The inversion of the logical sequence reflects the important role of the brick in Mesopotamian architecture, repeatedly encountered in Akkadian texts. One version of their creation story describes primeval chaos as a time when "no brick was laid, no brick-mold was formed." The *Enuma Elish* version that refers specifically to the founding of Babylon tells that "for one whole year they [the gods] molded bricks" (6.60).[1] This scene also appears on a cylinder seal that portrays the gods mixing clay, climbing ladders, carrying mortar, and passing bricks to those at the top of the temple. Akkadian building inscriptions, which hail the achievements of the great kings, repeatedly emphasize the making of bricks. Indeed, the molding of the first brick was regarded as an important rite and was accompanied by elaborate ceremonies.

Brick . . . mortar This is an editorial aside expressing wonderment at construction techniques so different from those familiar to the Narrator. The phrase "with bitumen and burnt-brick" *(ina kupri u agurri)* is a standard formula in Babylonian building inscriptions.

4. ***a tower*** The reference is certainly to the ziggurat (Akk. ***ziqquratu***), the lofty, massive, solid brick, multistaged temple tower that was the outstanding feature of most Mesopotamian cities and dominated their landscapes. The term is derived from the Akkadian verb ***zaqāru,*** meaning "to build high." This type of architecture seems first to have developed in Babylonia in the third millennium B.C.E. in the dynasty of Akkad (ca. 2360–2180 B.C.E.). Its function, it is generally agreed, was to symbolize a mountain. The sacred mountain played an important role in most religions in ancient times. Rooted in the earth, with its head lost in the clouds, it was taken to be the meeting point of heaven and earth and, as such, the natural arena of divine activity. On its heights the gods were imagined to have their abode. Constituting the obvious channel of communication between the celestial and terrestrial spheres, the sacred mountain was looked upon as the center of the universe, the "navel of the earth."

Many of the ziggurat names reveal an association with the mountain motif. The ziggurat of Nippur was called "The House of the Mountain." At Asshur, there was "The House of the Mountain of the Universe." "The House of the Link between Heaven and Earth" was situated at Larsa. The most famous ziggurat of all, the one at Babylon, is the focus of the present narrative. It was known as the *e-temen-an-ki,* "The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." In the flat, alluvial plain of Lower Mesopotamia, the ziggurat constituted a man-made sacred mountain in miniature, the physical means by which man and god might enter into direct contact with one another.

with its top in the sky This expression is actually a cliché in Mesopotamian building inscrip-

over the world." 5The LORD came down to look at the city and tower that man had built, 6and the LORD said, "If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have

הָאָרֶץ׃ 5 וַיֵּרֶד יְהוָה לִרְאֹת אֶת־הָעִיר וְאֶת־ הַמִּגְדָּל אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הֵן

tions, particularly with reference to ziggurats. The Sumerian king, Gudea (ca. 2140 B.C.E.), says of the temple Eninnu that "it lies in heaven." A text from Nippur addresses a tower "whose peak reaches the sky." Hammurabi (ca. 1728–1686 B.C.E.) gives himself the epithet "raiser of the top of Eanna," and it is related of him that he built a temple tower "whose top is sky high." Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) says that he "raised to heaven the head" of the temple of Asshur and that he "made high its top up to heaven." The phrase is most persistently used in respect of the temple of Marduk in Babylon, which was known as the *esagila,* meaning "the House of the Lifting Up of the Head." It is this phrase, "with its top in the sky,"[2] that led to the widespread but unlikely interpretation that the aim of the tower builders was to be able to storm heaven. Generally, the Bible regarded tall towers as symbols of human arrogance, as, for example, in Isaiah 2:12–15, 30:25, and Ezekiel 26:4,9.

to make a name for ourselves "Name" here probably connotes "monument," as in Isaiah 56:5. This meaning developed from the fact that the names of most of the important kings of Mesopotamia were associated with great building projects designed to assure the monarch's eternal fame. The royal name and titles were inscribed on bricks and cylinder seals that were deposited in the foundations of the ziggurats. Thus, a temple inscription of Gudea of Lagash records that, "on account of the great name that he made for himself, he was received among the gods into their assembly." Nebuchadnezzar, who restored the ziggurat at Babylon, records in a commemorative inscription: "The fortifications of Esagila and Babylon I strengthened, and made an everlasting name for my reign."

else we shall be scattered A prime motivation of the builders is said to have been the consolidation of group unity, and that certainly would have been a major result of their labors. Construction carried out on such a colossal scale and involving large masses of people necessitated a centralized authority and a high degree of organization. The resultant monumental edifice would have been a great source of civic pride and would have fostered a spirit of unity. However, in the present context, the stated purpose of the builders, "that we be not scattered all over the world," constitutes a direct challenge to the intent of God as expressed in the blessing to postdiluvial humanity: "Fill the earth." Man did not perceive this to be a blessing and so devised means to thwart its fulfillment.

GOD'S COUNTERMEASURES (vv. 5–9)

5. ***The LORD came down*** God does not react capriciously; he investigates man's doings. The identical anthropomorphism, or depicting of God in human terms, appears again in 18:21 in connection with the divine scrutiny of the situation at Sodom and Gomorrah. This figurative usage implies no limitation on God's omnipotence, for the divine "descent" presupposes prior knowledge of human affairs from on high, and God's subsequent counteraction unqualifiedly exhibits His absolute sovereignty. Rather, there is subtle irony here. Man builds a tower "with its top in the sky," where God is popularly thought to dwell. Scripture emphasizes God's infinite transcendence and incomparable supereminence by having God "go down" in order to scrutinize the scene.

man A satirical note is now introduced by the use of Hebrew ***benei ha-'adam,*** a phrase heavily charged with the consciousness of man's earthly origin, his mortality and frailty. In Mesopotamian tradition, the gods erected the temple at Babylon for the greater glory of Marduk, who actually gave the order for its construction. Furthermore, the myth has Babel and its temple being built in primeval times, at the very creation of the world. The biblical Narrator lays stress on the strictly human nature of the enterprise in both its initiative and execution; the emphasis on its postdiluvian origin tacitly nullifies Mesopotamian beliefs.

had built Thus far. Verse 8 shows that the project remained uncompleted.

begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be out of their reach. 7Let us, then, go down and confound their speech there, so that they shall not understand one another's speech." 8Thus the LORD scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. 9That is why it was called Babel, because there the LORD confounded the speech of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

עַם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחִלָּם לַעֲשׂוֹת
וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יָזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת׃
7 הָבָה נֵרְדָה וְנָבְלָה שָּׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ׃ 8 וַיָּפֶץ יְהוָה אֹתָם
מִשָּׁם עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ וַיַּחְדְּלוּ לִבְנֹת הָעִיר׃
9 עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ בָּבֶל כִּי־שָׁם בָּלַל יְהוָה
שְׂפַת כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וּמִשָּׁם הֱפִיצָם יְהוָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־

6. Humankind has abused the benefactions of kinship and ready communication for unworthy, vainglorious ends in defiance of God's will that the entire earth be populated. Unless preventive measures are taken, there will be no limit to man's arrogant schemes.

*7. **Let us, then*** Hebrew ***havah,*** the term employed by men to introduce their project, is now ironically echoed by God in pronouncing its doom. For the plural use of the verb, see Comment to 1:26.

confound It can hardly be coincidental that ***navlah,*** a unique form of the Hebrew stem *b-l-l,* "to confuse," is a disarrangement of ***levenah,*** "brick," the order of the first three consonants being reversed. The device underlines the teaching that a human enterprise that runs counter to the will of God is inherently perverse and doomed to self-defeat.

*8. **Thus the LORD scattered them*** The pathetic futility of man's rebellious resolve, expressed in verse 4, is laid bare.

they stopped building The present saga must have been inspired by the spectacle of Babylon and its ziggurat lying in ruins. Such was the case, for instance, after the Hittite raid on the city ca. 1600 B.C.E.

the city An example of synecdoche, the mention of the part for the whole.[3]

*9. **it was called*** Literally, "one called its name," an ironic echo of verse 4. They aspired to "make a name" for themselves, but succeeded only in attaching the name "confusion" to their handiwork.

Babel See Comment to 10:10. The word play ***babel-balal,*** approximating "Babel-babble," in English, hides a subtle satirizing of Mesopotamian notions. Not the "gate of god" as the inhabitants of Babylon interpreted the name, not the navel of the earth, as they conceived their city to be, but a site of meaningless gibberish, the center from which human divisiveness radiated, and the cause of disastrous alienation from God.

speech . . . scattered The episode appropriately concludes with a summary testifying to God's nullification of human efforts to resist His will. The transformation in the situation of humankind is symbolized by the reversal of the sequence of the two key terms of verse 1.

From Shem to Abraham: Transition to the Patriarchs (vv. 10–32)

In the foregoing episode the human race again became estranged from God. In the Table of Nations the genealogy of Shem received special attention, an intimation of future developments. These two elements now come together. The focus of the biblical narration decisively narrows to concentrate upon one particular line of descent within the family tree of Shem. This line issues in Abraham, who is the tenth generation from Shem, just as Noah was the tenth generation from Adam. From the scriptural point of view, the birth of Abraham constitutes a turning point in human history.

[10]This is the line of Shem. Shem was 100 years old when he begot Arpachshad, two years after the Flood. [11]After the birth of Arpachshad, Shem lived 500 years and begot sons and daughters.

[12]When Arpachshad had lived 35 years, he begot Shelah. [13]After the birth of Shelah, Arpachshad lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

[14]When Shelah had lived 30 years, he begot Eber.[15]After the birth of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and begot sons and daughters.

[16]When Eber had lived 34 years, he begot Peleg.[17]After the birth of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and begot sons and daughters.

[18]When Peleg had lived 30 years, he begot Reu. [19]After the birth of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and begot sons and daughters.

[20]When Reu had lived 32 years, he begot Serug. [21]After the birth of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and begot sons and daughters.

הָאָרֶץ׃ פ 10 אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת שֵׁם שֵׁם בֶּן־
מְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־אַרְפַּכְשָׁד שְׁנָתַיִם אַחַר
הַמַּבּוּל׃ 11 וַיְחִי־שֵׁם אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־אַרְפַּכְשָׁד
חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס
12 וְאַרְפַּכְשַׁד חַי חֲמֵשׁ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־
שָׁלַח׃ 13 וַיְחִי אַרְפַּכְשַׁד אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־שָׁלַח
שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 14 וְשֶׁלַח חַי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד
אֶת־עֵבֶר׃ 15 וַיְחִי־שֶׁלַח אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־עֵבֶר
שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 16 וַיְחִי־עֵבֶר אַרְבַּע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים
שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־פָּלֶג׃ 17 וַיְחִי־עֵבֶר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ
אֶת־פֶּלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד
בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 18 וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־רְעוּ׃ 19 וַיְחִי־פֶלֶג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־
רְעוּ תֵּשַׁע שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים
וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 20 וַיְחִי רְעוּ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה
וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־שְׂרוּג׃ 21 וַיְחִי רְעוּ אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־
שְׂרוּג שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים

The present genealogy is closely related to that of chapter 5, which recounts the generations from Adam to Noah. Both genealogies give the age of the father at the birth of his first-born son, the number of years the father lived thereafter, and a formulaic statement that he begat sons and daughters. Also, both lists close with a notable who had three sons. Unlike chapter 5, this chapter omits the summary total of the respective life spans as well as the note about each one's death. The pervasive, if unarticulated, air of pessimism about the seemingly incorrigible nature of man that rises from the preceding narratives is now relieved by the emphasis on life, on a new birth, on the orderly sequence of the generations, on the possibility of a fresh start for humanity. At the same time, there is a considerable diminution in the human life span as compared with the antediluvians, and procreation now begins at a much younger age than before. For the sake of completeness, the list of the initial five generations from Shem to Peleg is repeated from 10:21–25. Thereafter, a further drastic reduction in the duration of life occurs.

The advent of Terah is a climactic event that is set off by the *'elleh toledot* formula, which also serves to establish the transition from universal to patriarchal history. The text mentions Terah's three sons because the posterity of each is to be connected with the fortunes of Abraham and his offspring. One intriguing aspect of the genealogy is that some of its names are those of places in the northwestern part of Upper Mesopotamia, the region with which the patriarchs of Israel continued to maintain associations long after Abraham's migration to Canaan.

10. ***This is the line*** See Comment to 2:4.

100 This figure is approximate since Shem would now have been 102 according to the data of 5:32 and 7:6.

Arpachshad Inexplicably, in 10:22 he is the third son of Shem, whereas here he seems to be the first-born.

18. ***Reu*** Probably a shortened form of Reuel, meaning "friend of God," a name known from the nineteenth-century B.C.E. archives of Mari, and one held by several biblical figures.

20. ***Serug*** The well-known city of Sarugi, not far north of Haran in the Balikh Valley, is the site of the modern village of Suruc on one of the important Near Eastern trade routes.

וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 22 וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד
אֶת־נָחוֹר׃ 23 וַיְחִי שְׂרוּג אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־נָחוֹר
מָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃ ס 24 וַיְחִי
נָחוֹר תֵּשַׁע וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־תָּרַח׃
25 וַיְחִי נָחוֹר אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ אֶת־תָּרַח תְּשַׁע־
עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת׃
ס 26 וַיְחִי־תֶרַח שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד אֶת־
אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן׃ 27 וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת
תֶּרַח תֶּרַח הוֹלִיד אֶת־אַבְרָם אֶת־נָחוֹר וְאֶת־הָרָן
וְהָרָן הוֹלִיד אֶת־לוֹט׃ 28 וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל־פְּנֵי תֶּרַח
אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים׃ מפטיר
29 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אֵשֶׁת־
אַבְרָם שָׂרָי וְשֵׁם אֵשֶׁת־נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַּת־הָרָן
אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וַאֲבִי יִסְכָּה׃ 30 וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין
לָהּ וָלָד׃ 31 וַיִּקַּח תֶּרַח אֶת־אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־לוֹט
בֶּן־הָרָן בֶּן־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כַּלָּתוֹ אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ
וַיֵּצְאוּ אִתָּם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן
וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם׃ 32 וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי־תֶרַח
חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֶּרַח בְּחָרָן׃
ס

[22]When Serug had lived 30 years, he begot Nahor.[23]After the birth of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and begot sons and daughters.

[24]When Nahor had lived 29 years, he begot Terah.[25]After the birth of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and begot sons and daughters.

[26]When Terah had lived 70 years, he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. [27]Now this is the line of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. [28]Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. [29]Abram and Nahor took to themselves wives, the name of Abram's wife being Sarai and that of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. [30]Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.

[31]Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and they set out together from Ur of the Chaldeans for the land of Canaan; but when they had come as far as Haran, they settled there. [32]The days of Terah came to 205 years; and Terah died in Haran.

22. ***Nahor*** Cuneiform documents record both the personal name *Naḥarum* and a city *Naḥur*. The latter is frequently mentioned and was an important site in the upper Balikh Valley, which had a West Semitic population.

24. ***Terah*** Assyrian sources mention a place-name *Til (ša) Turaḥi* situated on the Balikh River not far from Haran and Nahor. The name may well be connected with *yareaḥ,* "moon." Several members of Terah's family, as well as some of the sites connected with him, bear names that are associated with moon worship. Joshua 24:2 explicitly designates Terah as having been an idolater.

26. ***70 years*** Terah begets posterity at an age at least twice that of all his forebears in the line of Shem. This fact insinuates into the text the motif of prolonged childlessness, a condition that is to be characteristic of his descendants, the patriarchs of Israel.

Abram This form of the name is consistently used until it is expanded to "Abraham" in 17:5, after which it appears again only in Nehemiah 9:7 and 1 Chronicles 1:26 as required by their respective contexts. No certain, precise parallel to the name Abram has been found so far in Near Eastern sources. It could mean "exalted father" or "the father is exalted," which would then make it a variant of Abiram, Abarama, found in Akkadian texts of the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries B.C.E.[4]

Nahor He is apparently named after his grandfather.

Haran This name seems to be derived from the element ***har,*** "a mountain," used in the sense of "mountain-god" in some West Semitic personal names found in Egypt, such as ***shem-har, ya'akob-har, anat-har.***

THE FAMILY OF TERAH (vv. 27–32)

This section has its own prefatory formula, which gives recognition to the culmination of a historic process of continuous divine selection that began with Adam's sons. An epochal juncture in the

history of humankind has been reached. The formula is an introduction to the biography of Abraham. All the names now mentioned—with one enigmatic exception, Iscah—play a role in the patriarchal narratives.

27. ***Lot*** The origin of this name is unknown.

28. ***Haran died*** This fact is essential for understanding 12:4–5.

Ur of the Chaldeans These were a Semitic people related to, but distinct from, the Arameans. The Hebrew form ***kasdim*** is original. The English is based on the Greek rendering, which, in turn, reflects a variant form, ***kaldu,*** that arose in the dialects of the Akkadian language as the ***-sd*** sound came to be pronounced ***-ld.*** The name of the city, as given here and repeated in 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7, poses a problem. The great city-state of Ur in Lower Mesopotamia has been well excavated. Situated at modern Tell el-Miqayyar near the northern part of the ancient coastline of the Persian Gulf in southern Iraq, its history goes back to the fourth millennium B.C.E. In the course of the third millennium it was one of the dominant city-states in the area and a foremost center of culture, reaching its zenith under the kings of the third dynasty, about 2060–1950 B.C.E. However, the rich documentation records nothing about Chaldeans in southern Babylonia before about the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., and this people did not become the ruling caste until the seventh-sixth centuries B.C.E. Therefore, if "Ur of the Chaldeans" refers to this city, the characterization would seem to be an anachronism in our text. Some scholars have noted that the text may refer to one of the sites named Ur in Upper Mesopotamia. These were possibly founded by citizens of the famous city in the south and named after it. An Upper Mesopotamian Ur would have been much closer to Haran, which is central to the patriarchal narratives.[5]

29. ***Sarai*** The name, changed to Sarah in 17:15, means "princess" in Hebrew but "queen" if based on Akkadian ***sharratu,*** a term used for the female consort of the moon-god Sin, the principal god of Ur.

Though the parentage of Nahor's wife is given, that of Sarai is not. This omission is so extraordinary that it must be intentional. The Narrator withholds information so as not to ruin the suspense in chapter 20 when Abraham, in order to extricate himself from an embarrassing predicament, reveals that Sarai is his half sister.

Milcah The name, as vocalized, is a variant form of Malcah, "queen." Akkadian ***malkatu*** is a title of the goddess Ishtar, who was known as "Queen of Heaven," daughter of the moon-god Sin.

Nahor married his niece, the orphaned daughter of his departed brother Haran. The granddaughter of this marriage was Rebekah, who became the wife of Abraham's son Isaac, as told in 24:24,27. This is another example of the narrative technique of introducing information into the text with an eye to later developments.

Iscah The name may derive from the stem ***s-k-h,*** "to see," and be a shortened form of a sentence name, "May God see (that is, with favor) the child." There is no information about her. She may have been the central figure of some traditions that are now lost. Ancient lore makes her identical with Sarai,[6] but this would contradict the data of 20:12 since she would then be Abraham's niece, not his half sister.

30. Sarai is said to be barren, but Milcah is not so described even though she too has no children. Undoubtedly, this note is preparatory to chapter 12. It points up the striking contrast between the impending divine promises to Abraham of abundant posterity and the harsh reality that tries his faith. A deliberate act of divine Providence terminates the prolonged state of childlessness. The resulting offspring is predestined to be the instrument of God's purposes. This theme recurs in connection with the matriarchs Rebekah and Rachel and, later, with the mothers of Samson and Samuel.

barren Hebrew ***'akarah*** simply means "childless" but not necessarily infertile.

31. Haran is situated some 550 miles (885 km.) northwest of Ur, about 10 miles (16 km.) north of the present-day Syrian-Turkish border on the left bank of the Balikh River. The name means "route, journey, caravan," and it doubtless derives from the city's location as an important station along the main international trade routes from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean Sea. From the Mari archives it is clear that in the eighteenth century B.C.E. Haran was a center of seminomadic Amorite tribes. Like Ur, it was also a center of the moon-god cult. The journey from the southern city

LEKH LEKHA

12 The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

לך לך

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ
וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ׃

of Ur to Canaan would not normally take one as far north as Haran. Before the effective domestication of the camel, a journey across the Syrian desert would be ruled out, and the most likely route would take the traveler up the Euphrates to Mari and then on to Aleppo, where the road turned south to Damascus and led on to Hazor in Canaan. The reason for Terah's detour to Haran is not given, but it may have had to do with Haran as a focus of the international donkey caravan trade and with the fact that both it and Ur were centers of the moon-god cult. Of course, the problem disappears if a northern Ur is intended. We are not told why the family migrated from Ur in the first place. If Ur was the southern city, the migration could have been prompted by the gradual decline of the city and the increasingly harsh economic conditions, along with overpopulation, known to have been its lot in the course of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2100–1600 B.C.E.).

they set out Nahor is not mentioned as being included in the company, yet a series of texts shows him to be closely associated with Haran.[7] In fact, the place is called "the city of Nahor" in 24:10. Perhaps, for some reason, he migrated at a later time.

32. ***Terah died*** A calculation based on the data of verse 26 and 12:4 shows him to have been 145 years of age when Abraham left Haran for Canaan; thus Terah lived on in Haran for another sixty years after Abraham's departure.[8]

CHAPTER 12

God's Election of Abraham (12:1–13:18)

Lekh Lekha

The story of Abraham opens without an identifying formula or preliminary observation of the type that introduces the Noah narrative. The patriarch bursts upon the scene of history with astounding suddenness. The first seventy-five years of his life are passed over in total silence. God's call comes in an instant, without forewarning or preparation. It is brief and compelling in its demands, and Abram's immediate response marks the true beginning of his life. The momentous events unfold with startling rapidity, and any introductory embellishment could only have a diminishing effect.

THE DIVINE CALL AND THE PROMISES (vv. 1–3)

1. ***the LORD said to Abram*** The divine silence that persisted for ten generations is shattered. The voice that first set Creation in motion and that, when last heard by man, brought a message of hope and blessing to the human race (9:8–17) resounds once more. This time it is at Haran, where, for some unexplained reason, the intended migration of Terah and family from Ur to Canaan had come to a halt.

Go forth Hebrew *lekh lekha.* The preposition *l* gives the verb *h-l-k,* "to walk, go," the sense of "separating, taking leave of."[1]

your native land Rather, "the land of your kinsmen."[2] The reference is not to Ur, as in 11:28, but to Haran, precisely as in 24:4.

The enormity of God's demand and the agonizing nature of the decision to be made are effectively conveyed through the cluster of terms arranged in ascending order according to the severity of the sacrifice involved: country, extended family, nuclear family.

your father's house Terah lived on another sixty years after Abram departed from Haran, as is clear from 11:26,32 and 12:4.

to the land It is unclear whether Abram knew from the outset the identity of the promised land. It is possible that he continued the westward migration that his father had interrupted (11:31)

[2]I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you shall be a blessing.
[3]I will bless those who bless you
And curse him that curses you;
And all the families of the earth
Shall bless themselves by you."

[2] וְאֶעֶשְׂךָ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
וַאֲבָרֶכְךָ וַאֲגַדְּלָה שְׁמֶךָ
וֶהְיֵה בְּרָכָה׃
[3] וַאֲבָרְכָה מְבָרְכֶיךָ
וּמְקַלֶּלְךָ אָאֹר
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה׃

and arrived in Canaan unaware that he had reached his goal until so informed by God (12:7). Alternatively, God may have revealed the destination as soon as Abram accepted the call. One way or the other, God's word transformed the trek into a wholly new venture, now under divine guidance and purpose, completely disengaged from the earlier undertaking. The original segment of the journey from Ur to Haran could henceforth be viewed from a different perspective and also be seen as part of God's scheme of history, so that it is possible to speak of God having brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans, as in Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7, even though the call came in Haran.

2. God's call is accompanied by a comprehensive set of promises that contain seven elements. These are:

(i) I will make of you a great nation That is, great in number and significance.[3] The nature of the promise—that it could not be realized in the lifetime of the recipient because of Sarai's childlessness and the couple's advanced age—should all have combined to strain credulity to the breaking point. The magnitude of Abram's act of faith in accepting the divine word is thus implicit in the narrative. Over a thousand years later, it is invoked in a prophetic oration as a challenge to an Israel then plunged into despair and disbelief: "Look back to Abraham your father / And to Sarah who brought you forth. / For he was only one when I called him, / But I blessed him and made him many" (Isa. 51:2).

(ii) I will bless you You will enjoy material prosperity.[4]

(iii) I will make your name great In the ancient Near East, the name was not merely a convenient designation but an expression of the very essence of being. Hence, this promise means not only that Abraham will acquire fame but also that he will be highly esteemed as a man of superior character.

(iv) you shall be a blessing As a consequence, you will serve as the standard by which a blessing is invoked.[5]

3. ***(v) I will bless those who bless you*** Those[6] who wish you well and who demonstrate solidarity with you will enjoy God's blessing of well-being.

(vi) And curse him that curses you He who mistreats you will inevitably incur misfortune. The English translation obscures the distinction between the two different Hebrew verbs employed here. The verb *k-l-l,* referring to the offender's action, means "to disparage, abuse, cause harm"; *'-r-r,* referring to God's response, has the much stronger connotation of "to place under a ban, to deprive of the benefits of divine providence," and it is the only term employed in curse formulas. Its power can be gauged by its use in the great covenant-affirming ceremony enjoined in Deuteronomy 27. In other words, because the patriarch will be an unprotected stranger in an alien land, he will have particular need of God's providential care, and whoever maltreats him will be punished with exceptional severity.

It should be noted that the Hebrew has a contrast in number between "those who bless" and "he that curses." Radak and others explain this to mean that Abram's detractors will be few.

(vii) And all the families of the earth / Shall bless themselves by you This rendering understands Hebrew *ve-nivrekhu* as reflexive. People will take your own good fortune as the desired measure when invoking a blessing on themselves. A more likely translation[7] of the verb is as a passive: "shall be blessed through—because of—you."[8] God's promises to Abram would then proceed in three stages from the particular to the universal: a blessing on Abram personally, a blessing (or curse) on those with whom he interacts, a blessing on the entire human race.

[4]Abram went forth as the LORD had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. [5]Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth that they had amassed, and the persons that they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan, [6]Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, at the terebinth of Moreh. The Canaanites were then in the land.

4 וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ אִתּוֹ
לוֹט וְאַבְרָם בֶּן־חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה
בְּצֵאתוֹ מֵחָרָן׃ 5 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ
וְאֶת־לוֹט בֶּן־אָחִיו וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ
וְאֶת־הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה
כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן׃ 6 וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בָּאָרֶץ
עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרֶה וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי אָז
בָּאָרֶץ׃ 7 וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ

These promises to Abram, given in Haran, make no mention of a gift of land, perhaps so as not to detract from the pure, disinterested act of faith involved in heeding the simple command, "Go forth!"

ABRAM'S RESPONSE (vv. 4–5)

In silent, unwavering obedience to the divine will, "as the LORD had commanded him," the patriarch picks himself up and goes forth, accepting his new destiny in perfect faith.

*4. **Lot went with him*** He agreed to go. The mention of Lot prepares the reader for a subsequent episode (chap. 13).

seventy-five years old Recording the age of the patriarch at crucial moments of his life is a characteristic feature of the narrative.[9]

*5. **his brother's son Lot*** The kinship description explains his presence in Abram's entourage. The oldest uncle assumed the guardianship of the child of his dead brother, which is clear in 14:12.

wealth . . . persons These are mentioned in anticipation of the ensuing narrative (v. 16). Abram's affluence does not derive from Pharaoh's gift.

*5. **they set out . . . they arrived*** The verse duplicates the phraseology and structure of 11:31. They make a fresh start, and this time they arrive in Canaan. Although the text does not report the precise details of the route from Haran to Shechem, all available possibilities would have taken them through or near some of the great urban centers of the day. Since Haran lay on the banks of the Balikh River, a tributary of the Euphrates, they most likely traveled southward along the Balikh Valley in order to reach the great east-west arterial road that led from Ur, Babylon, and Accad to Mari, where it branched into two. They then could either have taken the upper branch, leading west to Aleppo, and then veered south past Qatna and Damascus, or they could have continued southward to the oasis of Tadmor (Palmyra) on the lower branch and then turned southwestward along the road to Damascus. Either way, they could have continued on to Hazor, a major commercial and military center, strategically placed in Upper Galilee at the junction of ancient and important roads leading to some of the main cities of Canaan. The narrative is silent concerning the route and the incidents on the journey in order to avoid diverting attention from the primary theme, which is the entry into the land and the first theophany, or divine revelation, that the patriarch experiences.

ABRAM IN THE LAND (vv. 6–9)

Abram does not stop at Hazor but continues his wanderings until he arrives at Shechem, the true physical center of the country and one of the important cities in the north central mountain region (see Excursus 26). From here he could follow the water-parting route that led through the hill country to Shiloh, Bethel, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Beer-sheba.

Abram and the other patriarchs, in their pastoral migrations, generally avoided the well-

inhabited areas in the northern part of Canaan and the coastal plain. They likewise kept away from the Plain of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley. By sticking to the central mountain range and the Negeb, they could enjoy a region that was suited to pastoral economy but was sparsely populated. They could wander with their herds without encroaching on the rights of others. At the same time, they were generally on the fringes of urban centers where they could obtain supplies, if need be, and also dispose of their own products.

6. the site of Shechem Hebrew *mekom Shechem.* This combination of *makom* with the name of a city is unique.[10] It is very likely that the term here has the special meaning of "sacred site," like the Arabic *maqām.* Sacred sites were always desirable stopping places for travelers and pastoral nomads because of their proximity to springs and wells. Nothing in the narrative suggests that Shechem had any prior sanctity for Abram. Only after receiving a divine revelation does he build an altar there; he does not make use of an existing one.

the terebinth of Moreh Hebrew *'elon moreh,* undoubtedly some mighty tree with sacred associations. *Moreh* must mean "teacher, oracle giver." This tree (or a cluster of such trees) was so conspicuous and so famous that it served as a landmark to identify other sites in the area. The phenomenon of a sacred tree, particularly one associated with a sacred site, is well known in a variety of cultures. A distinguished tree, especially one of great antiquity, might be looked upon as the "tree of life" or as being "cosmic," its stump symbolizing the "navel of the earth" and its top representing heaven. In this sense, it is a bridge between the human and the divine spheres, and it becomes an arena of divine-human encounter, an ideal medium of oracles and revelation. Fertility cults flourished in connection with such trees, and this form of paganism proved attractive to many Israelites.[11] For this reason, the official religion of Israel forbade the planting of trees within the precincts of the altar, as stated in Deuteronomy 16:21.

It is to be noted that Shechem seems to have been particularly rich in traditions about trees of special significance. Jacob hid idolatrous appurtenances "under the terebinth *('elah)* that was near Shechem" (Gen. 35:4); Joshua "took a great stone and set it up at the foot of the oak *('allah)* in the sacred precinct of the LORD" in Shechem (Josh. 24:26); Abimelech was proclaimed king of that city "at the terebinth *('elon)* of the pillar" (Judg. 9:6); and there was also "the terebinth of the soothsayers" in the vicinity (Judg. 9:37). All these may refer to one and the same tree, although it is not certain that *'elon* is identical with the other similarly named trees (cf. Hos. 4:12)—the *'elah,* which is the *Pistacia terebinthus* and the *'allon,* which is the *quercus.* These latter two are used generically, whereas *'elon* always appears in a specific usage in combination with another term.

The Canaanites were then in the land "Canaanite" here, as often, is used generically for all the pre-Israelite inhabitants. God promised the land to Abram (v. 7), even though it was then occupied by others.

The particle "then" has long vexed commentators because of the implication that at the time of the Narrator the Canaanites no longer existed, a situation that did not become a reality until long after Joshua's conquest. Rashi takes the phrase to mean that the Canaanites were then in the process of conquering the land from its earlier inhabitants, but this is not historically feasible. Ibn Ezra cryptically remarks: "Possibly the Canaanite was at that time taking the land from others, but if this not be the case, then I have a secret explanation, and the man of discretion will keep silent" *(yesh li sod ve-ha-maskil yiddom).* The supercommentary on this passage by Joseph b. Eliezer Bonfils *(Tsafenat Pa'neaḥ,* second half of the fourteenth century C.E.) explains Ibn Ezra's comment as follows: "Moses could not possibly have employed the word 'then' *('az),* for reason demands that the word would have been written at a time when the Canaanite was no longer in the land, and we know that the Canaanite departed only after the death of Moses when Joshua conquered it. Consequently, it would appear that Moses did not write this word here *(lefi zeh nir'eh shelo' katav mosheh z'ot ha-millah bekha'n),* but only Joshua or one of the other prophets wrote it. . . . Now since we have to believe in the words of tradition and in the words of prophecy, what difference does it make whether Moses or some other prophet wrote it since the words of all of them are truth and were received by prophecy?" As R. Hezekiah ben Manoah (known as "Ḥizkuni," 13th cent. C.E.) noted, the phrase "is written from the perspective of the future" *('al shem he-'atid nikhtav).*

7. The LORD appeared This is the first theophany, or divine revelation, introduced by Hebrew *va-yera',* as distinct from divine speech to an individual introduced by *va-yo'mer* (cf. v. 1).

[7]The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I will assign this land to your offspring." And he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. [8]From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the LORD and invoked the LORD by name. [9]Then Abram journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.

אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה
הַנִּרְאֶה אֵלָיו: 8 וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם הָהָרָה מִקֶּדֶם
לְבֵית־אֵל וַיֵּט אָהֳלָה בֵּית־אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעַי מִקֶּדֶם
וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה: 9 וַיִּסַּע
אַבְרָם הָלוֹךְ וְנָסוֹעַ הַנֶּגְבָּה: פ 10 וַיְהִי רָעָב

This term, which is characteristic of the Genesis patriarchal narratives, is used three times with Abraham (also 17:1; 18:1), twice with Isaac (26:2,24), and once with Jacob (35:9). The stem *r-'-h,* "to see," belongs to the formal vocabulary of prophecy. An early name for a prophet in Israel was *ro'eh,* "seer" (1 Sam. 9:9), and in the Nifal form the verb is a technical term for divine self-disclosure. It is quite clear, however, that such a usage need not imply any visual accompaniment to the oral communication. Thus, the experience of the boy Samuel in the temple at Shiloh is purely auditory (1 Sam. 3:11–14), yet it is described as a vision (Heb. *mar'eh,* 1 Sam. 3:15). Likewise, the superscriptions to several prophetical books employ the synonymous verb *ḥazah,* "to see, behold," although what follows is speech alone (cf. Isa. 1:2; Amos 1:1f.; Mic. 1:1f.).

I will assign this land . . . This refers back to verse 1, "the land that I will show you." Its identity is now established. More than this, the original promises of nationhood and blessings are now supplemented by the grant of national territory through which those promises may be consummated. This divine declaration, oft repeated, is one of the seminal texts of the Torah. Henceforth, the history and destiny of the Jewish people are inextricably bound up with the promised land.

He built an altar there In gratitude for the promise of land. Among the patriarchs, acts of worship are always individual, never public. The patriarchs do not take part in any existing cult, and they always build new altars or reuse the one they themselves have previously erected. Significantly, we have no record of an act of worship by them outside the boundaries of the Land of Israel, and Abram refrains from putting up an altar inside the land before it has been divinely identified as the land of promise. It is strange that there is no mention made of a sacrifice being offered.

8. Legal ownership of the land is not the same thing as actual possession. The nation does not exist, and the patriarchs remain wanderers, ever on the move. Abram journeys on through the central hill country in a southerly direction. His next station is at a point between Bethel and Ai, about 21 miles (33.7 km.) south of Shechem.

Ai Hebrew *ha-'ai.* The definite article shows that the place derives its name from a common noun meaning "the ruin." The site is generally identified with a conspicuous mound known as et-Tell, about 1 mile (1.6 km.) southeast of Bethel. Excavations have shown that it had been a flourishing town in the Early Bronze Age during the third millennium B.C.E. The place figures prominently in the conquests of Joshua (Josh. 7:2–8:28), who is said to have "burned down Ai, and turned it into a mound of ruins for all time" (8:28).

he built there an altar . . . invoked the LORD by name Scripture offers no explanation for the attraction of the particular spot or for the reason for building the altar, but it is important enough for Abram to return there on his way back from Egypt (Gen. 13:2–4). Bethel is identified with modern Beitin, which lies about 10.5 miles (17 km.) north of Jerusalem at the junction of the north-south highway with an east-west road. It was the site of an important Canaanite sanctuary to the god El, head of the pantheon, but, as in the case of Shechem, Abram ignores the prior pagan sanctity of the place and builds an altar to his own God YHVH, thus endowing the site with a new religious history. For the history of Bethel, see Excursus 22.

9. toward the Negeb That is, to southern and southeastern Judah around Beer-sheba, below the central hill country and the Shephelah. The name derives from a root meaning "dry, parched," indicative of the precarious rainfall in the area and the arid terrain. By now, Abram has covered the entire length of the country from north to south.

[10]There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. [11]As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife

בָּאָרֶץ וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרַיְמָה לָגוּר שָׁם כִּי־כָבֵד
הָרָעָב בָּאָרֶץ׃ יא וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לָבוֹא
מִצְרָיְמָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה־נָא יָדַעְתִּי

ABRAM IN EGYPT (vv. 10–21)

No sooner does Abram receive the divine blessings than the contrasting reality of the present asserts itself. The promises of nationhood and territory seem to be in danger of miscarrying. Famine drives him from the land, and physical peril threatens him and his wife. But God's purposes cannot be frustrated by human powers. The hand of Providence is ever ready to deliver those whom He has chosen. The theme of peril and reaffirmation of promises is a recurring one throughout the Book of Genesis.

10. There was a famine in the land Although famine might sometimes result from plagues of insects, as indicated in Deuteronomy 28:38 and Joel 1–2, or from enemy action, as described in 2 Kings 6:25 and 25:3, its primary cause in Canaan would have been prolonged failure of the seasonal rains. The effects of famine there would have been aggravated by the normal inability to produce surpluses and the lack of long-term storage facilities, as well as by the unequal distribution of existing stocks both for social reasons and because of limited means of transportation in a country of such varied topography. Egypt, on the other hand, relied for its rich fertility on the more dependable and predictable rise of the Nile (see Comment to 41:53).

In reality, true famine due to natural causes, as distinct from the threat of famine, is not so common in the Bible.[12] The fact, therefore, that each of the patriarchs experiences famine in the land (26:1, 42:1, 43:1) has special significance. In the Book of Genesis, the promised land is not "flowing with milk and honey," and the divine promises are not intended to bring quiet and repose to their recipients. The realities of nature and of the human landscape are harsh. Living in the land is difficult, sometimes precarious. All this continually impinged upon the religious consciousness of Israel. It generated a heightened sense of dependence on God's protection and a more intense awareness of His mysterious workings.

Abram went down The standard phrase for travel from hilly Canaan to low-lying Egypt, just as one "goes up" in the reverse direction.[13]

Egypt The first mention of Egypt as a factor in Israelite history. The narrative prefigures the ambiguity of future relationships—on the one hand as a place of shelter and succor in time of distress, on the other hand as a place of mortal danger. Interestingly, there is no hatred of Egypt in the Bible, despite the slavery and the Exodus. To the contrary, Israel is enjoined: "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land" (Deut. 23:8). Notwithstanding repeated prophetic denunciations of Egypt for its duplicity and fickleness in its international relations, Isaiah can envisage a future partnership of Israel and Egypt, and he has God saying: "Blessed be My people Egypt" (Isa. 19:25).

to sojourn there An excellent parallel to the present story is provided by a report of an Egyptian frontier official from the age of Ramses II. Sent to his superior, the "Scribe of the Treasury," it concerns Edomite shepherds to whom permission was given to cross into Egypt for seasonal pasturing of their flocks in the Delta. It reads: "We have finished letting the Bedouin tribes of Edom pass the fortress . . . to keep them alive and to keep their cattle alive" (ANET, p. 259). The Hebrew stem *g-w-r*, "to sojourn," indicates temporary residence. One of the key words in Genesis, it appears in one form or another fifteen times in relation to the wanderings and status of the patriarchs and their descendants, both in the promised land and in Egypt. Everywhere in the Near East the resident alien (Heb. *ger*) was without legal rights and protection and was wholly dependent upon the good will of the local community. In biblical texts the *ger* is usually classified along with the deprived and underprivileged of society, such as the orphan and the widow, whom it is forbidden to oppress and to whose needs one must be particularly sensitive.[14]

for the famine was severe Only *force majeur* would have led Abram to leave the land.

Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his wife,' they will kill me and let you live. 13Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you."

כִּי אִשָּׁה יְפַת־מַרְאֶה אָתְּ׃ 12 וְהָיָה כִּי־יִרְאוּ אֹתָךְ
הַמִּצְרִים וְאָמְרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי וְאֹתָךְ
יְחַיּוּ׃ 13 אִמְרִי־נָא אֲחֹתִי אָתְּ לְמַעַן יִיטַב־לִי
בַּעֲבוּרֵךְ וְחָיְתָה נַפְשִׁי בִּגְלָלֵךְ׃ שני 14 וַיְהִי כְּבוֹא

THE KIDNAPPING OF SARAI (vv. 11–20)

As Abram approaches the Egyptian border, he fears that Sarai's great beauty might tempt some malevolent person to murder him and take her. In order to save his life, he asks his wife to pass herself off as his sister. Sure enough, his fears prove to be well founded. Sarai is spotted by Pharaoh's officials, who carry her off to the royal palace. Only divine intervention protects her honor, and she returns to her husband unviolated.

The text repeats this incident twice more: in 20:1–18 in relation to Abimelech king of Gerar and in 26:1,6–11 in connection with Isaac and Rebekah at the same place and with a king of the same name.[15] Modern critical scholarship assumes that the triplet resulted from varying treatments of a single original incident by different sources. It should be noted, however, that the biblical Narrator makes clear that Abram anticipated danger of the sort described in this chapter as a recurring factor in the course of his wanderings from the day he left Haran: "So when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother'" (Gen. 20:13). According to the literary concepts and the norms of the ancient world, reiteration is a desirable and characteristic feature of the epic tradition. To the biblical Narrator, repetition of the experience serves to emphasize and reinforce his didactic purposes.

There can be no doubt that very ancient traditions lie behind the present narratives. In the first place, no late writer could have invented the idea that Abraham had married his half sister (Gen. 20:12). Such a note could not have originated as a late apologetic in mitigation of Abraham's misrepresentation about his relationship to Sarai. To assume otherwise is to believe that, in the consciousness of the biblical Narrator, incest was less offensive than a lie told in self-defense! Another point is that both Canaanite and Greek epics provide parallels to the motif of the abduction of the hero's beautiful wife. From Ugarit comes the story of King Keret who lost his lovely spouse Hurrai (or Hurriya), through whom he was supposed to be destined to carry on his line, and had to mount a military campaign to recover her. From the Greek sphere, there is of course the legend of Helen of Troy, who was twice kidnapped, once in her youth by Theseus and again after she married Menelaus. Her abduction to Troy by Paris was the cause of the Trojan War. It is reasonable to assume that similar sagas circulated about the matriarchs of Israel. These were collected and incorporated into the patriarchal narratives, but with an entirely different perspective and for purposes totally at variance with their Canaanite-Greek analogues.

As to the purposes that motivated the biblical Narrator, it may be presumed that the uncommon beauty of the progenitrix of the people of Israel was a matter of national pride, as were also the comings and goings of the patriarchs at the courts of kings. Another factor may have been the sensuality and immorality of the pagan nations. Finally, and of major concern, is the emphasis on God's direct, protective intervention—just at the moment when all human resources have failed and it appears that the divine promises are to be aborted. The matriarch is recovered by the action of God, not as a result of warfare waged by the outraged husband.

11. ***a beautiful woman*** Sarai is sixty-five at the time, ten years younger than her husband. Her surpassing beauty is a theme that fascinated Jews of antiquity and has received attention in many sources.[16]

12. ***and let you live*** Though in shame and dishonor.

13. ***Please say*** This is not an order but a respectful plea.

you are my sister The biblical heroes are not portrayed as demigods or perfect human beings. They are mortals of flesh and blood, subject to the same temptations and possessed of the same frailties as are all other human beings. Abram, the man of implicit faith in God's word, is fearful

[14]When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the woman was. [15]Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. [16]And because of her, it went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels.

אַבְרָם מִצְרַיְמָה וַיִּרְאוּ הַמִּצְרִים אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה כִּי־
יָפָה הִוא מְאֹד: 15 וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שָׂרֵי פַרְעֹה
וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַתֻּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית
פַּרְעֹה: 16 וּלְאַבְרָם הֵיטִיב בַּעֲבוּרָהּ וַיְהִי־לוֹ צֹאן־
וּבָקָר וַחֲמֹרִים וַעֲבָדִים וּשְׁפָחֹת וַאֲתֹנֹת וּגְמַלִּים:

of the evil of which people are capable. In order to save his own life, he appears to place his wife's honor in jeopardy through misrepresentation of their relationship. Sarai's collusion may be looked upon as an act of self-sacrifice on behalf of her husband—but how is Abram's conduct to be judged? Ramban comments as follows: "Know that our father Abraham inadvertently committed a great sin by placing his virtuous wife in a compromising situation because of his fear of being killed. He should have trusted in God to save him, his wife and all he had, for God has the power to help and to save. . . ."

As opposed to this critical view, there is the analysis of Radak that Abram is confronted with a moral dilemma, forced to make a choice between two evils. If he discloses the truth he will be killed, and his wife, beautiful and unprotected in an alien society of low morality, will assuredly be condemned to a life of shame and abuse. If, however, he resorts to subterfuge, she may be violated by some Egyptian, but at least husband and wife would both survive. It would have been improper, then, to have relied on a miracle as an excuse for inaction.

Whatever may be the shortcomings of Radak's interpretation, the moral problem that faced the patriarch was very real. His decision involved a conflict between human life and human dignity within a hierarchy of values. The condescending view of some modern commentators that it is unfair to judge Abram's behavior by the (supposedly) superior moral standards of today is based on a confusion of chivalry with morality.

sister In using this term, Abram actually resorts to equivocation rather than to outright falsehood because in Hebrew parlance "sister" is ambiguous. Apart from its primary denotation of sibling—which, in fact, Sarai was to him (Gen. 20:12)—it is also an expression of love.[17] In Egyptian, too, "sister" was used of both sweetheart and wife. But there may well be much more to it than this. In the ancient Near East there was a well-known sociolegal institution of "fratriarchy" that existed over a long period of time. Where there is no father, the brother assumes legal guardianship of his sister, particularly with respect to obligations and responsibilities in arranging marriage on her behalf. Therefore, whoever wished to take Sarai to wife would have to negotiate with her "brother." In this way, Abram could gain time to plan escape. Of course, this went awry when the Egyptian turned out to be Pharaoh himself.

go well with me . . . remain alive An example of hendiadys, for the two clauses express a single thought, not two separate ideas. This is proven by the contextually unambiguous parallel in Jeremiah 38:20: "that it may go well with you and your life be spared."

14. the Egyptians saw . . . Clearly, Sarai did not generally veil her face (see Comments to 24:65 and 38:14f.).

15. This incident is illuminated by the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers" (see Excursus 29), in which Bata's beautiful second wife miraculously comes to the attention of Pharaoh, who has her hunted down and brought to his palace. There he makes love to her, even though he knows she is married.

Pharaoh The first biblical appearance of this title. His name is not given, nor is that of any other pharaoh, in Genesis or Exodus. The omissions complicate the problem of fixing the chronology of the patriarchal period. The title itself derives from the Egyptian *per-o,* "the great house," already a designation of the royal palace as early as ca. 2500 B.C.E. In New Kingdom times (from the sixteenth century B.C.E. on), it came to be used, by metonymy, for the king, in the same way as "The White House" can designate the American president or "The Crown," the British monarch.

16. it went well with Abram A double entendre. The phrase cannot be separated from its use in verse 13, while it derives its definition from the following clause. Abram was not killed; in fact,

17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram.

17 וַיְנַגַּע יְהוָה אֶת־פַּרְעֹה נְגָעִים גְּדֹלִים וְאֶת־
בֵּיתוֹ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם׃ 18 וַיִּקְרָא

he acquired much wealth, the source of which is not explained. Perhaps Abram was compensated by Pharaoh for the indignity and breach of etiquette on the part of his courtiers in resorting to force rather than negotiation, as custom demanded (cf. 20:14,16). Mention of Abram's wealth and possessions also provides the background for the next incident in his life.

sheep Hebrew *tso'n* includes goats.[18] The two species usually were herded together.

oxen Hebrew *bakar* is a generic term for domesticated bovines, and it usually appears as a collective.

asses Hebrew *ḥamor*[19] is the domesticated descendant of the *Equus asinus*. Here it indicates only the male variety. The ass played a vital role in the Israelite economy as a riding and draft animal, and it was also used for agriculture (cf. Deut. 22:10). Its importance may be gauged from the fact that it is the only unclean animal whose firstling requires redemption.

she-asses, and camels The riding animals are placed last. The separation of female from male asses reflects the experience of ass-herders. The male has a very powerful sex drive that asserts itself when he scents the presence of a female of the species, even from afar. He then becomes almost uncontrollable. For this reason, the female affords superior convenience and greater ease of handling as a riding animal.[20] Possession of many she-asses was a sign of much wealth, as may be seen, for example, in Job 1:3 and 42:12.

camels The presence of the camel in this and other lists raises a complex problem. The camel appears elsewhere in the patriarchal narratives, but it is not the regular mode of transportation. Its use seems to be restricted to women.[21] Abraham sets out for Mount Moriah on an ass; Simeon and Levi find asses, but not camels, among the loot of Shechem; Joseph's brothers mount asses to go down to Egypt to buy food; Joseph does not send camels to transport his father from Canaan, and there is no reference to camels among the animals sold to Joseph by the hard-pressed Egyptians in return for food. The camel does not figure in Egyptian texts and art until the Persian period. It is conspicuously absent from the published Mari texts from Mesopotamia, which are replete with information about pastoral nomadic groups and their way of life. Thousands of commercial and administrative texts from the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 1950–1530 B.C.E.) maintain complete silence on the existence of this animal. All available evidence points to the conclusion that the effective domestication of the camel as a widely used beast of burden did not take place before the twelfth century B.C.E., which is a long time after the patriarchal period.

It cannot be denied, however, that mention of the camel in the Abrahamic and Jacob narrative cycles is integral to the stories, at least in chapters 24 and 31, and cannot be the work of a late glossator. On the other hand, to regard these narratives as anachronistically late productions from a time when the camel was already widely known is to leave unexplained why that beast, which figures so infrequently in biblical historiography, should have been put into the patriarchal stories, while the horse, which figures far more frequently, is totally absent.

A solution to the problem may perhaps be sought along other lines. Certain bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian lexical texts from Mesopotamia equate a domesticated animal called "a donkey-of-the-sea-land" with a dromedary, thus proving a knowledge of the latter in southern Mesopotamia in Old Babylonian times (ca. 2000–1700 B.C.E.). Moreover, the scribes knew to differentiate between the dromedary and the Bactrian camel, and a Sumerian text from that period mentions the drinking of camel's milk. The original habitat of the camel seems to have been Arabia. It is likely that the domesticated camel at first spread very slowly and long remained a rarity. A wealthy man might acquire a few as a prestige symbol for ornamental rather than utilitarian purposes. This would explain their presence in Abraham's entourage, their nonuse as beasts of burden, and their special mention in situations where wealth and honor need to be displayed, as, for instance, in Genesis 24.

17. ***afflicted . . . mighty plagues*** Their nature is not explained, but they must have been of the kind that would somehow suggest a connection with Pharaoh's passion for Sarai, as Ramban suggests. Temporary sexual impotence induced by some severe inflammation or acute infection of the genital area suggests itself (cf. Gen. 20:17f.). Incidentally, there seems to be a word play behind the

[18]Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? [19]Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife; take her and begone!" [20]And Pharaoh put men in charge of him, and they sent him off with his wife and all that he possessed.

פַּרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה
לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא: 19 לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ
אֲחֹתִי הִוא וָאֶקַּח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה
אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וָלֵךְ: 20 וַיְצַו עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים
וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ:

13 From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot. [2]Now Abram was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. [3]And he proceeded by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been formerly, between Bethel and Ai, [4]the site of the altar that he had built there at first; and there Abram invoked the LORD by name.

יג״ג וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־
אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ הַנֶּגְבָּה: 2 וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד
בַּמִּקְנֶה בַּכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב: 3 וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמַסָּעָיו מִנֶּגֶב
וְעַד־בֵּית־אֵל עַד־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה שָׁם אָהֳלֹה
בַּתְּחִלָּה בֵּין בֵּית־אֵל וּבֵין הָעָי: 4 אֶל־מְקוֹם
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה שָׁם בָּרִאשֹׁנָה וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם

Hebrew expression, for the stem *n-g-ʿ* can mean "to afflict, plague," as well as "to come into physical contact with, to harass sexually"[22] (cf. Gen. 20:6; 26:11; Prov. 6:29; Ruth 2:9).

18–19 His suspicions aroused by the affliction, Pharaoh must have interrogated Sarai, who admitted to her true status. In his scolding of Abram there is a tone of righteous indignation that arouses the sympathy of the reader. Abram does not justify his conduct. His silence may have been dictated by embarrassment; yet it is also possible that the king's reputation was such as to allow for misgivings that his display of moral rectitude was more the product of his current torments than of deep-rooted conviction.

20. The text is vague, perhaps deliberately so, as to whether Pharaoh provided guards to accompany the patriarchal clan across the border for its protection and as a sign of honor, as Ibn Ezra suggests, or in order to enforce its expulsion from his territory, as Saadiah maintains.

CHAPTER 13 RETURN TO THE LAND (vv. 1–4)

1. ***went up*** See Comment to 12:10. A similar term is found in the journal of an Egyptian frontier official from the time of Merneptah (end of 13th cent. B.C.E.), designating a journey from Egypt to Asia.[1]

into the Negeb The term is here used as a geographic designation, not as a compass direction.

Lot Having played no role in the events in Egypt, Lot was not mentioned in that connection. His appearance here is due to the ensuing episode. By placing him last in the list, after Abram's possessions, the text hints at a degree of estrangement.

2. Fulfillment of the divine blessing of 12:2f. now begins. Abram enjoys great affluence, though how he acquired it is not stated. The possession of metals by pastoralists was particularly important in Canaan. In time of famine, silver and gold, being media of exchange, afforded a measure of security and protection. Although herding and animal husbandry would be their primary occupation, pastoral nomads would often supplement their resources by engaging in subsidiary gainful activities, including commerce. Silver or gold are later mentioned in connection with the purchase of servants and a burial site and with the gifts sent to Isaac's future bride.[2]

3–4. Abram renews his spiritual connection with the land by returning to worship at the altar he had previously built (12:8).

by stages Compare 12:9. He moved from one watering place to another.

[5]Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, [6]so that the land could not support them staying together; for their possessions were so great that they could not remain together. [7]And there was quarreling between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and those of Lot's cattle.—The Canaanites and Perizzites were then dwelling in the land.—[8]Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, between my herdsmen and yours, for we are kinsmen. [9]Is not the whole land before you? Let us separate: if you go north, I will go south; and if you go south, I will go north." [10]Lot looked about him and saw how well

אַבְרָם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה׃ שלישי 5 וְגַם־לְלוֹט הַהֹלֵךְ
אֶת־אַבְרָם הָיָה צֹאן־וּבָקָר וְאֹהָלִים׃ 6 וְלֹא־נָשָׂא
אֹתָם הָאָרֶץ לָשֶׁבֶת יַחְדָּו כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לָשֶׁבֶת יַחְדָּו׃ 7 וַיְהִי־רִיב בֵּין רֹעֵי
מִקְנֵה־אַבְרָם וּבֵין רֹעֵי מִקְנֵה־לוֹט וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי
וְהַפְּרִזִּי אָז יֹשֵׁב בָּאָרֶץ׃ 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־לוֹט
אַל־נָא תְהִי מְרִיבָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ וּבֵין רֹעַי וּבֵין
רֹעֶיךָ כִּי־אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנָחְנוּ׃ 9 הֲלֹא כָל־הָאָרֶץ
לְפָנֶיךָ הִפָּרֶד נָא מֵעָלָי אִם־הַשְּׂמֹאל וְאֵימְנָה
וְאִם־הַיָּמִין וְאַשְׂמְאִילָה׃ 10 וַיִּשָּׂא־לוֹט אֶת־עֵינָיו

THE SEPARATION OF LOT (vv. 5–13)

No sooner does Abram return than fresh trouble develops. This time it is affluence that poses a threat to family harmony and cohesion.

5. ***Lot . . . also had . . .*** He constitutes an independent unit, a subgroup within the clan. His wealth is restricted to cattle and camp.

6. Ecological conditions place a limit on the size of herd and camp. When the latter become too large, there is increasing friction over available pasturage and water.[3]

7. ***between the herdsmen*** Abram takes action while the discord is still in its initial stage at the lower level and before it can sour relationships between the principals.

The Canaanites and Perizzites . . . This parenthetic note sheds further light on the background of the discord.[4] It would seem that the natural resources must have sufficed to sustain two small clans, but there was an additional factor that exacerbated the situation: the area already had a settled population. Strife between pastoral nomadic groups endangers their symbiotic relationship with the indigenous agricultural-urban communities. That explains why both Abram and Lot have to leave the region.

Perizzites This name is also paired with the Canaanites in 34:30 and in Judges 1:4–5. Because Hebrew *perazi* here means "a hamlet dweller," as opposed to the inhabitant of a walled city, as in Deuteronomy 3:5, "Canaanites and Perizzites" in these passages may refer, respectively, to those who dwell in walled cities and in open country. However, the Perizzites are otherwise always featured in ethnic lists as the name of a minor pre-Israelite population group. Nothing is known of them from extrabiblical sources.

8. Abram displays great nobility of character. Although the older man, the uncle, and apparently the erstwhile guardian, he does not insist on seniority or priority of rights. Peace-loving and magnanimous, he selflessly offers his nephew first choice of grazing land and watering places.

strife Hebrew *merivah,* as distinct from Hebrew *riv* (v. 7), is rendered "quarrel." It cannot be fortuitous that all other usages of *merivah* in biblical Hebrew refer exclusively to the controversies and grumblings of the people against their leader and against God over the lack of water during the wilderness wanderings.[5] Hence, there may well be a verbal subtlety here that not only explicates the prime cause of the quarrels (cf. v. 10) but also contains the submerged judgment of base ingratitude on the part of Lot.

9. ***north . . . south*** Literally, "left . . . right," that is, from the viewpoint of one facing the rising sun.

10. ***looked about him*** Bethel is situated on a hill 2,886 feet (880 m.) above sea level. Less than 1 mile (1 km.) to the southeast is the Burj-Beitin, an elevation that affords a magnificent view of the Jordan Valley.

watered was the whole plain of the Jordan, all of it—this was before the LORD had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah —all the way to Zoar, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. [11]So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they parted from each other; [12]Abram remained in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom. [13]Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

[14]And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had parted from him, "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, [15]for I give all the

וַיַּרְא אֶת־כָּל־כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן כִּי כֻלָּהּ מַשְׁקֶה לִפְנֵי
שַׁחֵת יְהוָה אֶת־סְדֹם וְאֶת־עֲמֹרָה כְּגַן־יְהוָה כְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בֹּאֲכָה צֹעַר׃ 11 וַיִּבְחַר־לוֹ לוֹט אֵת כָּל־
כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסַּע לוֹט מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּפָּרְדוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל
אָחִיו׃ 12 אַבְרָם יָשַׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן וְלוֹט יָשַׁב
בְּעָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיֶּאֱהַל עַד־סְדֹם׃ 13 וְאַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם
רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַיהוָה מְאֹד׃ 14 וַיהוָה אָמַר אֶל־
אַבְרָם אַחֲרֵי הִפָּרֶד־לוֹט מֵעִמּוֹ שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ
וּרְאֵה מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה שָׁם צָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה
וָקֵדְמָה וָיָמָּה׃ 15 כִּי אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה

well watered That is, fed by streams and brooks and therefore independent of seasonal rainfall for its fertility.

plain of the Jordan Hebrew *kikkar* seems to mean "round or oval-shaped" and is used also of bread and weights.[6] It is uncertain which part of the Jordan Valley is the *kikkar*.

this was before . . . A parenthetic note to explain the obvious contrast between the later harsh reality and this lush description. There is also hidden irony here, for Lot's presumptuous cupidity turns out to be ruinous for him in the long run.

all the way to Zoar This refers back to the first clause. From 19:20–22 it appears that Zoar marked the southern limit of the "plain" *(kikkar)*. On the southeast shore of the Dead Sea lies a city of that name with a continuously recorded history of occupation throughout the First and Second Temple periods, the talmudic and Byzantine epochs, and down to the Crusades.

like the garden of the LORD A veritable Eden,[7] perennially watered.[8]

11. ***So Lot chose for himself*** He does not defer to Abram, but selfishly selects the most attractive prospect.

eastward Hebrew *mi-kedem,* literally "from the east,"[9] is here elliptic for "from east of Bethel," where Abram was then encamped, as noted in 12:8 and 13:3.

Thus they parted Abram's quick action ensures that the quarrel is settled amicably and without rancor.

12. ***in the land of Canaan*** This indicates a tradition that the "cities of the Plain" lay outside the borders of Canaan (see Comment to 10:19). To what period this applies is unknown, but verses 14–15 below revise this situation.

near Sodom Hebrew *'ad* often has the meaning "nearby, in the vicinity of," as in Deuteronomy 2:33 and Judges 4:11.

13. ***very wicked sinners*** Another parenthetic note that prepares the reader for the events of chapter 19. Here it offers the reason for the forthcoming destruction, referred to in verse 10, and carries with it a judgment on Lot's character. Dazzled by the surface appearance of prosperity, he pays no heed to the moral depravity of his future neighbors.

THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE BLESSINGS (vv. 14–17)

The earlier promise of national territory in 12:7, in accordance with historic reality, restricted the gift of land to Abram's posterity. Now the divine promise is reaffirmed and is set forth in language that reflects the fixed legal formulas of land conveyance and donation current in the ancient Near East and widely attested throughout the region from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. In addition,

land that you see to you and your offspring forever. 16I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring too can be counted. 17Up, walk about the land, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you." 18And Abram moved

רְאֵה לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֲךָ עַד־עוֹלָם: 16 וְשַׂמְתִּי
אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִם־יוּכַל אִישׁ
לִמְנוֹת אֶת־עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ גַּם־זַרְעֲךָ יִמָּנֶה: 17 קוּם
הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה:

God bids Abram to perform certain symbolic acts that give legal validation to the title to the land. At the same time, the promise of nationhood is reiterated and given added emphasis through the use of picturesque language.

14. after Lot had parted The preposition "after" (Heb. *'aḥarei)* has a causal as well as temporal function here. There is a direct connection between Lot's departure and the blessings: Abram's last link with his father's house is now severed, and a fresh stage in his life begins. The blessings are exclusively invested in the patriarch and his direct lineal descendants; the future national territory will include the area in which Lot settles. The wickedness of the Sodomites typifies the general unworthiness of the prior inhabitants and provides the moral rationalization for God's actions in depriving them of the land. This situation is hinted at in 15:16.

Raise your eyes The same Hebrew expression is behind Lot's action in verse 10. Lot "raised his eyes" but saw only the region of Sodom; Abram "raised his eyes" and viewed the entire land.

look out from where you are See Comment to verse 10. The Genesis Apocryphon 21.8–10 has Abram moving to Ramath-Hazor, which is almost certainly Gebel-el-'Aṣur, 5 miles (8 km.) northeast of Bethel, the highest spot in central Israel (3,291 ft., 1,003 m.). The Mediterranean, the hills of Hebron, and even Transjordan can be seen from there.

It is possible that Abram's surveying of the land has quasi-legal implications. Ancient Roman legal thought recognized a mode of acquisition of property rights "by sight and intention." Transfer of ownership could be effected by a ceremony in which one party pointed out the boundaries of the land and the other party saw them. It is uncertain, though, whether such an institution also existed in the ancient Near East.

15. to you and your offspring Abram is included this time, even though it is seemingly inappropriate since he, personally, cannot take possession.[10] The language simply follows the legal formulas used in Near Eastern royal land grant documents.

forever The land is given by God to Israel unconditionally and in perpetuity. As Radak says, "Even though Israel will go into exile, it is destined to return." Henceforth there exists an inextricable bond between Israel and the land, a bond powerful enough to defy thousands of years of exile.

16. as the dust of the earth A figure of extraordinary multiplication and diffusion. Parallel texts use the similes of the stars and the sand of the sea to the same effect,[11] but "dust" is more suited to the context of the four directions, as also in 28:14.

17. walk about the land Compare Joshua 24:3. Early Jewish exegesis (Targ. Jon.) understood this traversing of the length and breadth of the land to be a symbolic act constituting a mode of legal acquisition termed *ḥazakah* in rabbinic Hebrew.[12] The validity of the formality is discussed in tannaitic sources in connection with this passage. The existence of this practice, in one form or another, is attested over a wide area of the ancient world. In both the Egyptian and Hittite spheres, the king had to undertake a periodic ceremonial walk around a field or a tour of his realm in order to symbolize the renewal of his sovereignty over the land. In Nuzi, in order to enhance the validity of property transfer, the former owner would "lift up his own foot from his property" and place the foot of the new owner on it. A reflex of this practice appears to lie behind the ceremony recounted in Ruth 4:7–9 and behind the phrasing of some biblical passages relating to Israel's acquisition of its land, such as Deuteronomy 11:24 and Joshua 1:3f. The same symbol of acquiring land by walking through it is also known from ancient Roman law.

his tent, and came to dwell at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron; and he built an altar there to the LORD.

18 וַיְאָהֶל אַבְרָם וַיָּבֹא וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא אֲשֶׁר
בְּחֶבְרוֹן וַיִּבֶן־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה׃ פ רביעי

ABRAM'S DEPARTURE FOR HEBRON (v. 18)

Abram moved his tent The narrative does not report Abram's response. The Genesis Apocryphon 21.15–19 has Abram touring the entire land before settling finally at Hebron.

the terebinths See Comment to 12:6. According to Josephus, a very ancient tree[13] just northwest of Hebron was famous in Second Temple times (Wars 4.533, Ant. 1.186), and throughout the Middle Ages the "Oak of Abraham" was held in great veneration and was the subject of popular legend.

Mamre The origin of this name is unknown. It seems to be non-Semitic and does not appear outside Genesis. According to Genesis 14:13,24, Mamre was a distinguished personage allied to Abram. In 23:19, Mamre is another name for the city of Hebron. Apparently, one of the ancient families there and owner of a wood outside the city, Mamre gave his name to the city or at least to one of its important quarters.

Hebron A strategically placed city in the Judean heartland, lying alongside the north-south water-parting route about midway between Jerusalem to the north and Beer-sheba to the south. Situated about 3,050 feet (930 m.) above sea level, it is surrounded by an extremely fertile countryside, mentioned in Numbers 13:23. According to Numbers 13:22, the city was founded seven years before Tanis in the Nile Delta. This would give a date of ca. 1737 B.C.E. since there is a stela from ca. 1330 B.C.E. commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of Tanis. The biblical reference must be to the establishment of Hebron as a fortified administrative center, for there is evidence of a settlement on the site as early as the third millennium B.C.E.

The origin of the name is in dispute. It has been connected with the Hebrew stem *ḥ-b-r,* "to unite," signifying a confederacy of four separate settlements; hence its other name, Kiriath-arba, "city of four," in Genesis 23:2 and 35:27. Another theory derives it from a Semitic word, *ḫbr,* meaning "a storehouse, granary."

The modern Arabic name for the city is *al-Ḫalil,* which is short for *al-Ḫalil er-Raḥmān,* "friend of the Merciful One." This is a reference to Abraham, who has the title "friend of God" in Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:7 as well as in early Jewish sources such as Jubilees 19:9 and 30:20 (cf. Targ. Yer. Gen. 18:17). The Arabic name may result from word play, popularly connecting *Ḥebron* with *ḥaver,* "friend."

Hebron has occupied a place of extraordinary importance in Jewish tradition as one of the four holy cities along with Jerusalem, Safed, and Tiberias. It was the first city in which the patriarch Abraham settled, the first in which he bought land, and the burial site of the three patriarchs and their wives, in the Cave of Machpelah. For seven years it was the first capital of Judah and Israel under King David, as told in 2 Samuel 2:1–4 and 5:1–5.[14]

he built an altar there The third erected by Abram.

CHAPTER 14

Abram's Rescue of Lot (vv. 1–23)

Once again the divine promises to Abram seem to be on the verge of miscarrying, this time by the actions of the patriarch himself, who risks his life in battle. A confederacy of four eastern monarchs undertakes a punitive expedition in order to suppress a revolt of vassals in the west. In the course of the action Lot, by virtue of his association with Sodom, is taken captive and his possessions are plundered. On learning the news, Abram, with the help of three allies, immediately musters an armed force and mounts a military campaign to rescue his nephew. He puts the attackers to flight, accomplishes his purpose, and comes into possession of much booty. On his way back he is greeted and

blessed by Melchizedek, priest-king of Salem. Abram, for his part, gives him a tithe of the spoils but disdainfully rejects the idea of keeping anything for himself.

This story does not, at first glance, seem to be organically related either to the preceding or following events in the life of the patriarch. In fact, however, the literary connectives are present. Lot is still at Sodom (14:12; 13:12), and Abram still resides by the terebinths of Mamre (14:13; 13:18). There also is the irony inherent in the situation depicted in chapter 13: Lot has greedily picked the best part of the country, but now his choice turns out to have been disastrous, and his very life depends on the selflessness and loyalty of the uncle he has alienated. The next chapter opens with a clear reference to the events of this one, and it, too, has some verbal correspondences with chapter 14.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that this chapter constitutes a unique document within the Book of Genesis, and even critical scholars are unable to establish an association with any of the usual hypothetical Pentateuchal sources.

The fact is that Genesis 14 exhibits an unparalleled concentration of unique or rare features of all kinds. It contains the first biblical report of warfare. It projects a remarkable image of Abram as a military chief and hero, not again attested in the patriarch's biography. It is the only incident in his life that connects him with great historic events that bring him out onto the international stage. He is singularly given the epithet "the Hebrew" (v. 13). He comes into contact with a Canaanite priest, receives his homage, and, in turn, pays homage to him (vv. 18–20). Two uncommon divine titles are used here: "God Most High" and "Creator of heaven and earth." The latter never reappears in the Bible, while the former occurs no fewer than four times here (vv. 18–20,22) but is otherwise excessively rare and found only in poetic texts. More than anything else, the unusual spectrum of literary and stylistic peculiarities stamp the chapter as a distinct document within the book. The style is analytic and formal. Its general tone is secular until its final transformation into a religious record. It is replete with detailed information of a historic, geographic, and ethnic nature and contains a succession of double place-names, some hyphenated, some alternating. The contrast between the anonymity of the pharaoh of chapter 13 and the list of royal names here is striking. The four eastern kings are initially introduced in strict alphabetical order (v. 1), even though Chedorlaomer is clearly head of the coalition (vv. 4f.,9,17), while the names of the four Canaanite kings are arranged in two alliterative pairs, Bera-Birsha, Shinab-Shemeber (v. 2). The name "Abram" occurs precisely seven times, and each of Melchizedek's two blessings contains seven words. Finally, excluding names, 4.5 percent of the vocabulary of the chapter never recurs in the Bible, while 6.5 percent is rare usage; that is to say, a remarkable 11 percent of the narrative text comprises rare or unique words or phrases.

Indubitably, this story is recorded solely on account of the patriarch's rescue of Lot. Yet the first eleven verses have nothing to do with Abram and his family, and the detailed information preserved therein adds nothing to our understanding of Abram's motivations and actions that could not have been otherwise conveyed in the usual austere style of Genesis. Accordingly, the only convincing explanation for such an unparalleled accumulation of eccentric features within the compass of a single short narrative is that the biblical Narrator made use of existing independent sources—perhaps some chronicle or epic—and incorporated selections intact into his own composition about Abram. This conclusion also accounts for the several instances of ambiguity and lack of clarity in its present form (e.g., vv. 2,11), and it solves the riddle of the paired toponyms. In each case, the first place-name is the archaic one, which must have come from the original source, and the second is the later Israelite designation inserted by the biblical writer. Examples of this kind of name change appear in Numbers 32:41f. and Joshua 15:15. Conversely, the absence of a name for the king of Bela (v. 2), in contrast to the other four local monarchs, reinforces the conjecture that behind the biblical account is an independent source, which must no longer have preserved the information. Scripture faithfully adhered to that source; otherwise, the Narrator would surely not have been at a loss to invent a name for him.

This leads to the question of the antiquity and historicity of the core of the narrative. The phenomenon of the double place-names referred to above undoubtedly favors an early date for the original story. The unique title "Abram the Hebrew" (v. 13), never again employed in later texts, points in the same direction. The puzzling epithet, which has no apparent relevance to the course of events, must simply have been transferred from the source used. The same impression emerges from the report of Abram's three Amorite allies (v. 13). If the term "Amorite" elsewhere stands for the native inhabitants of Canaan in general (Gen. 15:16) or for one of the native peoples who are to be dispossessed by the Israelites (15:21) and whom the latter bitterly fought,[1] then a late invention of such a story becomes a very unlikely possibility, particularly since it violates the spirit of legislation in

14 Now, when King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim [2]made war on King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of

יד וַיְהִי בִּימֵי אַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ־שִׁנְעָר אַרְיוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ
אֶלָּסָר כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר מֶלֶךְ עֵילָם וְתִדְעָל מֶלֶךְ גּוֹיִם:
[2] עָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה אֶת־בֶּרַע מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם וְאֶת־בִּרְשַׁע

Deuteronomy 7:1ff. and 20:17, forbidding social intercourse and alliances with the native peoples.

So far, however, no external sources have been uncovered that can fit the events depicted in this chapter into the framework of history. True, the names of the eastern monarchs have about them an air of verisimilitude, but they cannot be identified with known historical personages who were contemporaneous with one another. Nor is the identification of all the place-names associated with them assured. The nature of the subjugation of the Canaanite kings to a distant monarch and the exact form that their rebellion took is not stated. Equally uncertain is the objective of the expedition from the east, whether it was solely to suppress a revolt or part of a larger enterprise.

What are the purposes of Scripture in featuring this story? Undoubtedly, its primary motive is to bring into prominence new facets of Abram's character. The one who displayed fear and evasiveness in Egypt now shows himself to be decisive and courageous in the promised land. The man of peace knows how to exhibit skill and heroism in battle. He who experienced his nephew's estrangement unhesitatingly demonstrates self-sacrificing loyalty to him in his hour of need. Abram is a military hero, but he is not glorified as such. He does not initiate the war—others do—and he is drawn into it, acquitting himself magnificently against enormous odds. Notwithstanding the wealth of detail recorded in the chapter, there is little about the war itself—nothing about the size of the opposing foreign armies, the weapons deployed, the mode of transportation, the number of casualties, or the content of the booty—none of the items that are the staple ingredients of ancient Near Eastern war chronicles. Instead, the story serves to emphasize the virtues of loyalty to family, the redeeming of captives, the disdain of material reward, and faith in the power of the few against the many.

THE INVASION FROM THE EAST (vv. 1–11)

1. ***Now when . . .*** Hebrew *va-yehi bi-yemei,* literally "and it was in the days of . . . ," is usually a date indicator,[2] but this translation would leave verse 2 without a subject. The present rendering equates the Hebrew phrase with Akkadian *inumi,* literally "in the days of" or "when." This makes sense if our Hebrew text is translated from an Akkadian chronicle, as it may well be.

Amraphel No acceptable alternative to the now abandoned identification with Hammurabi is available.

Shinar See Comment to 10:10. The Genesis Apocryphon 21.23 and Targum Onkelos both read "Babylon."

Arioch Compare Daniel 2:14f. This name corresponds to Arriyuk/Arriwuk mentioned in the Mari archives (18th cent. B.C.E.) or to Ariukki of the Nuzi documents (15th cent. B.C.E.).

Ellasar The most likely identification is Assur, the city that gave its name to the land of Assyria. The Hebrew form would correspond to the Akkadian *al assur,* in which the *al* indicates that the second element is the name of a "city." Another possibility is a place called *ilâ(n)ṣûrâ,* mentioned in the Mari texts. Genesis Apocryphon 21.23 reads *kptwk* which is probably Cappadocia, that is, central Anatolia (Turkey). Whether an authentic tradition lies behind this last identification is not known.

Chedorlaomer This name does not appear among the lists of about forty known Elamite kings, but the first element corresponds to *kudur* in Akkadian, which corresponds to *kutir* in Elamite, meaning "a servant," and it appears as a component of several Elamite royal names. The identification of the second element, *laʿomer,* with the divine name *Lakamar* is possible, but by no means certain.

Elam See Comment to 10:22.

Tidal This is universally recognized to be a Northwest Semitic transcription of the Hittite royal name Tudḫaliaš borne by four kings, the first of whom lived in the seventeenth century B.C.E.

Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar, [3]all the latter joined forces at the Valley of Siddim, now the Dead Sea. [4]Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled. [5]In the fourteenth year Chedor-

מֶלֶךְ עֲמֹרָה שִׁנְאָב מֶלֶךְ אַדְמָה וְשֶׁמְאֵבֶר מֶלֶךְ
צְבוֹיִם וּמֶלֶךְ בֶּלַע הִיא־צֹעַר׃ 3 כָּל־אֵלֶּה חָבְרוּ
אֶל־עֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים הִוא יָם הַמֶּלַח׃ 4 שְׁתֵּים עֶשְׂרֵה
שָׁנָה עָבְדוּ אֶת־כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר וּשְׁלֹשׁ־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
מָרָדוּ׃ 5 וּבְאַרְבַּע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בָּא כְדָרְלָעֹמֶר

צְבוֹיִם ק׳ v. 2.

Goiim A "king of Goiim" is mentioned in Joshua 12:23, but the place-name is otherwise unknown.[3] The word may simply be the usual Hebrew word for "nations," indicating that the name of the hometown of Tidal was lost or that he headed a confederacy of peoples. The ancient versions render simply "king of peoples," which may be a reference to the motley hordes of northern peoples known in cuneiform texts as the ***umman-manda*** from at least ca. 1700 B.C.E. onward.

2. Sodom . . . Zeboiim See Comment to 10:19.

Zoar See Comment to 13:10. Each of the five cities has its own king. This is the classic Canaanite city-state system that prevailed in Canaan before the Israelite conquest (cf. Josh. 12). The names of the kings were recognized early in Jewish exegesis as lending themselves to midrashic elaboration, each being taken as a reflection of the character or reputation of the possessor.[4] Thus, Bera = "in evil" *(be-ra')*; Birsha = "with wickedness" *(be-resha')*; Shinab = "who hated his father" *(sone' 'av)*; and Shemeber = "the voluptuary" *(sam 'ever)*.

Shemeber Genesis Apocryphon 21.25 reads *shmy'bd*, "my name is lost" (cf. Sam. *shm'bd*), due to a confusion of the Hebrew *resh* (ר) with *dalet* (ד); compare Comment to 10:4.

Bela This seems to be the earlier or alternative name of Zoar. In 36:32 Bela is the name of a king.

3. joined forces Hebrew *ḥabru*, a unique usage apparently meaning "to unite, make an alliance" (cf. a suggested origin of the name Hebron, 13:18). In the face of the common threat, the rebellious cities formed a pentapolis, or five-city confederacy.

the Valley of Siddim Mentioned again in verse 10 and nowhere else. The definite article with Siddim shows the word to be a noun, not a proper name, but the etymology is obscure. There may be some underlying word play on Sodom, as in Deuteronomy 32:32.

now the Dead Sea This remark implies that the valley no longer existed at the time of the Narrator. It cannot mean that the Dead Sea had not yet been formed since the body of water is at least 12,000 years old. The only explanation is that the valley lay below the southern bank of the Dead Sea. As a matter of fact, the great disproportion between the 1,300-foot (400-m.) water depth in the north end and the mere 20-foot (6-m.) average in the far south proves that the basin below the Lisan, that tongue-shaped peninsula that protrudes into the sea, is of far more recent formation than the upper part. The Vale of Siddim was what existed before the area was submerged by the encroaching waters of the Dead Sea in historical times.

Dead Sea The Hebrew name means "salt sea," and the waters register the highest salt content of any body of water in the world, an average of 32 percent as opposed to the 3 percent average salinity of the oceans.

4. served . . . rebelled The root *'-b-d*, like its semantic equivalents, occurs widely in Northwest Semitic languages in reference to the condition of vassalage, as in 2 Kings 18:7 and 24:1. "Rebellion" usually began with nonpayment of the annual tribute stipulated in the suzerain-vassal treaty.

in the thirteenth year Hebrew omits the preposition, as in Genesis 15:16, 27:45, and Exodus 20:11, thus allowing the number to be treated as an ordinal or cardinal. The present rendering is the most natural. Some exegetes understood the rebellion to have lasted thirteen years.[5]

Verses 5–7 detail the invasion route followed by the kings from the east. It shows that they

laomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim at Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim at Ham, the Emim at Shaveh-kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran, which is by the wilderness. 7On their way back they came to En-mishpat, which is Kadesh, and subdued all the territory of the Amalekites,

וְהַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וַיַּכּוּ אֶת־רְפָאִים בְּעַשְׁתְּרֹת קַרְנַיִם וְאֶת־הַזּוּזִים בְּהָם וְאֵת הָאֵימִים בְּשָׁוֵה קִרְיָתָיִם: 6 וְאֶת־הַחֹרִי בְּהַרְרָם שֵׂעִיר עַד אֵיל פָּארָן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמִּדְבָּר: 7 וַיָּשֻׁבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־עֵין מִשְׁפָּט הִוא קָדֵשׁ וַיַּכּוּ אֶת־כָּל־שְׂדֵה הָעֲמָלֵקִי

traversed the entire length of the "king's highway" (Num. 21:22) that ran practically in a continuous straight line through the hill country east of the Jordan from north to south. When they reached El-paran they turned west (or northwest?), crossing the Negeb until they arrived at Kadesh-barnea. Here they made another abrupt turn, this time to the northeast, finally reaching the Valley of Siddim. All along the way they struck at various peoples and their settlements. Apparently, before attacking the pentapolis itself, the invaders sought to secure their flanks, protect their supply lines, and ensure their retreat route by neutralizing the hostile forces in the area.

The register of place-names seems to be derived from an ancient geographic list, for it bears close affinity with the Mesopotamian genre of itineraries attested as early as Old Babylonian times (ca. 1830 B.C.E. on).

*5. **the Rephaim*** This people, listed among the early pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land in Genesis 15:20, had all but disappeared by the time of the Exodus, as Deuteronomy 2:20 and 3:11 attest. Popular imagination endowed them with the attributes of aboriginal giants.[6] Their habitat was the region of Bashan, the northernmost part of the area east of the Jordan (Deut. 3:13). Elsewhere, the term *refa'im* refers to the shades of the dead, a meaning that it also has in Phoenician and Punic. The word appears in Ugaritic texts in the singular as the name of a god and in the plural as denizens of the underworld. The connection, if any, between the different meanings of the root is unclear.

Ashteroth-karnaim Two originally distinct but closely neighboring cities. The first was the ancient capital of Bashan, mentioned in Deuteronomy 1:4 and Joshua 9:10, in the Egyptian execration texts (19th–18th cents. B.C.E.), in the topographical list of Thutmose III (ca. 1468 B.C.E.), and in the El-Amarna tablets. The city derived its name from the Canaanite fertility goddess Ashtoreth, referred to in 1 Kings 11:5,33. Karnaim (lit. "twin horns/peaks") lies about 2 miles (3 km.) north of Tell 'Ashtarah, the site of ancient Ashtaroth. When the fortunes of the latter city declined, Karnaim took its place as the capital of Bashan. It gave its name to the Assyrian administrative district of Qarnini after Tiglath-pileser III destroyed Ashtaroth in 732 B.C.E.

the Zuzim This people, mentioned nowhere else, is called Zamzummim in the Genesis Apocryphon 21.29. If the two indeed be identical, as Rashi states, the coincidence of *zamzummim* and *refa'im* in Deuteronomy 2:20 is called into question, unless the former were an offshoot of the latter.

Ham This may be the city of Huma mentioned in the list of Thutmose III and identifiable with Tell Ham, about 4 miles (6.5 km.) south of Irbid and about 19 miles (30 km.) east of Beth-Shean. The present text of Numbers 32:41 may conceal another reference to the city.[7]

Emim According to Deuteronomy 2:10f., they were a race of giants like the Rephaim and received their name, which might mean "frightful," from the Moabites who dispossessed them.

Shaveh-kiriathaim The first element, which only appears again in verse 17, "the Valley of Shaveh," may mean "level, plane." It might also be a proper name, perhaps of Hurrian origin (cf. 2 Sam. 20:25), after whom a settlement near Kiriathaim was called. The latter is a well-known city in the Moabite tableland.[8] Although part of the territory of the Reubenites, it came under Moabite rule and is to be identified with Khirbet el-Qureiye, about 6 miles (10 km.) due west of Medeba.

*6. **The Horites*** This name is usually identified with the Hurrians, a non-Semitic people who emerged into the light of history toward the end of the third millennium B.C.E. in Upper Mesopotamia. They gradually spread throughout the Near East and had a powerful cultural impact on the area, especially on the Hittites. Their presence can be documented among the Hyksos invaders of Egypt in the seventeenth century B.C.E., and a century later there were important Hurrian enclaves

and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazazon-tamar. [8]Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar, went forth and engaged them in battle in the Valley of Siddim: [9]King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar—four kings against those five.

[10]Now the Valley of Siddim was dotted with bitumen pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, in their flight,

וְגַם אֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּחַצְצֹן תָּמָר׃ 8 וַיֵּצֵא
מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם וּמֶלֶךְ עֲמֹרָה וּמֶלֶךְ אַדְמָה וּמֶלֶךְ
צביים וּמֶלֶךְ בֶּלַע הִוא־צֹעַר וַיַּעַרְכוּ אִתָּם
מִלְחָמָה בְּעֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים׃ 9 אֶת כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר מֶלֶךְ
עֵילָם וְתִדְעָל מֶלֶךְ גּוֹיִם וְאַמְרָפֶל מֶלֶךְ שִׁנְעָר
וְאַרְיוֹךְ מֶלֶךְ אֶלָסָר אַרְבָּעָה מְלָכִים אֶת־
הַחֲמִשָּׁה׃ 10 וְעֵמֶק הַשִּׂדִּים בְּאֵרֹת בְּאֵרֹת חֵמָר

צְבוֹיִם ק׳ v. 8.

in Syria-Canaan. A common designation of Canaan in Egyptian texts of the New Kingdom is "the land of Hurru."

It is not easy, however, to make the equation between the Hurrians and the biblical Horites. The latter never appear in the lists of pre-Israelite peoples in Canaan, and they are never located west of the Jordan. According to Deuteronomy 2:12,22, they were the original inhabitants of the region of Mount Seir, southeast of the Dead Sea, and they were dispossessed and exterminated by the Edomites. The other biblical references (Gen. 36:20ff.; Deut. 2:12,22) connect them with this area, and the names of many of their chiefs and clans in Genesis 36:20–30 are Semitic.

The problem of the identification of the Horites is further complicated by the frequent references to another people called Hivites in the lists of pre-Israelite peoples west of the Jordan. Nothing is known of them from extrabiblical sources, but they appear in places known to have had Hurrian elements in the population. In Genesis 36:2, Zibeon is a "Hivite," but in verse 20 he is dubbed a "Horite." In Genesis 34:2 and Joshua 9:7, some Septuagint manuscripts read "Horites," whereas the Masoretic text reads "Hivites." It is possible that "Hivite" was simply a local designation for "Horite," but there is nothing to prove this, and, moreover, it would not solve the problem of the consistent biblical tradition that places the origin of the Horites in the area southeast of the Dead Sea. Until further evidence becomes available, it is best to separate Horites from Hurrians.

Seir The name means "hairy, shaggy," that is, covered with brush or forest. The hill country stretches southeast of the Dead Sea alongside the Arabah.[9]

El-paran Paran appears to be a general name for the wilderness of the eastern Sinai Peninsula in which Kadesh is located, but the identity of El-paran is uncertain. It may be another name for Elath, on the Gulf of Akaba, or a place west of Kadesh.[10]

7. ***En-mishpat, which is Kadesh*** The full name of Kadesh is Kadesh-barnea, a most important oasis on the southern border of Canaan, which served the Israelites as a leading base during the wilderness wanderings.[11] It is to be identified with a group of springs 46 miles (75 km.) south of Beer-sheba and 15 miles (25 km.) south of Nizzanah. The site must have been a cynosure for the pastoral nomads of the Negeb and the Sinai Peninsula. As the name Kadesh indicates, the site was a cult center. En-mishpat means "the spring of judgment," a name not otherwise attested, but one that clearly points to its role as a place where the pastoralists would assemble for the adjudication of disputes.

Amalekites A warlike nomadic tribe associated with the Edomites in Genesis 36:12. In later times it became the hereditary enemy of Israel.[12]

Amorites See Comment to 10:16.

Hazazon-tamar If Hazazon be the earlier name of Tamar or a nearby settlement, then the most likely spot would be the strategically important site, fortified by Solomon, on the southern border of the Land of Israel.[13] It is best identified with Ain Husb, about 20 miles (32 km.) southwest of the Dead Sea, the most important highway junction in the northern Arabah.

8–9. Having disposed of any possible threat from the neighboring peoples, the invaders now engage the rebellious center, the pentapolis, which is the main target of the campaign.

threw themselves into them, while the rest escaped to the hill country. 11[The invaders] seized all the wealth of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their provisions, and went their way. 12They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, and his possessions, and departed; for he had settled in Sodom.

13A fugitive brought the news to Abram the Hebrew, who was dwelling at the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite, kinsman of Eshkol and Aner, these being Abram's allies. 14When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pur-

וַיִּנָּסוּ מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ־שָׁמָּה וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים
הָרָה נָסוּ: 11 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁ סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה
וְאֶת־כָּל־אָכְלָם וַיֵּלֵכוּ: 12 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־לוֹט וְאֶת־
רְכֻשׁוֹ בֶּן־אֲחִי אַבְרָם וַיֵּלֵכוּ וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בִּסְדֹם:
13 וַיָּבֹא הַפָּלִיט וַיַּגֶּד לְאַבְרָם הָעִבְרִי וְהוּא שֹׁכֵן
בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא הָאֱמֹרִי אֲחִי אֶשְׁכֹּל וַאֲחִי עָנֵר וְהֵם
בַּעֲלֵי בְרִית־אַבְרָם: 14 וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם כִּי נִשְׁבָּה
אָחִיו וַיָּרֶק אֶת־חֲנִיכָיו יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ שְׁמֹנָה עָשָׂר
וּשְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת וַיִּרְדֹּף עַד־דָּן: 15 וַיֵּחָלֵק עֲלֵיהֶם

10. The terse description omits an explicit report of victory but leaves no room for doubt that the defenders were totally routed.

bitumen pits The phrase is unparalleled. Bitumen and asphalt are native to the Dead Sea, which Josephus actually calls the Asphalt Sea.[14] Asphalt is found in heavy liquid form in the southern part of the sea.

threw themselves Hebrew root *n-f-l* often has this meaning.[15]

ABRAM THE WARRIOR (vv. 12–16)

The city of Hebron, where Abram resided, lay outside the path of hostilities, and the patriarch had no reason to intervene. Then the capture of his nephew Lot transformed the situation and moved him to the center of the stage, thereby rescuing the account of the invasion from oblivion. The older tradition is now recast; the annalistic form gives way to the narrative style, and a secular record is turned into a religious document.

13. ***Abram the Hebrew*** The origin and meaning of the term *'ivri* is unknown, and its use here is a riddle. Three suggestions are to be found in Genesis Rabba 42:13. One connects it with Eber, grandson of Noah, who is mentioned in 10:24 and 11:14; another derives it from Hebrew *'ever,* "beyond," that is, "the one from beyond [the river Euphrates]"; the third is homiletical and alludes to Abram's religious nonconformism: "All the world was on one side *('ever)* and he on the other side." For a more detailed discussion of the term, see Excursus 4.

Mamre, Eshkol and Aner The first mentioned is also a place-name connected with Hebron in 13:18; *eshkol* means "a cluster of grapes" and is the name of a wadi near Hebron;[16] the meaning of Aner is unknown.[17] The three persons were apparently the heads of aristocratic families in Hebron.

allies Hebrew *ba'alei berit* means "those bound by treaty," a term not attested elsewhere. Treaties regulating human relationships were a common feature of the ancient Near East. That between Abram and the three Amorites would seem to have been of the parity type, that is, a treaty between equals rather than between superior and inferior. It appears to have involved mutual military obligations.

Amorite Since his own kinsmen had been attacked, Mamre would have had added incentive for supporting Abram.

14. Although Lot separated himself from his uncle, the ties of kinship remained intact. Abram performs what in rabbinic parlance is termed the duty of *pidyon shevuyim,* "redeeming those taken captive." For more on this, see Excursus 5.

suit as far as Dan. 15At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16He brought back all the possessions; he also brought back his kinsman Lot and his possessions, and the women and the rest of the people.

לַיְלָה הוּא וַעֲבָדָיו וַיַּכֵּם וַיִּרְדְּפֵם עַד־חוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר
מִשְּׂמֹאל לְדַמָּשֶׂק׃ 16 וַיָּשֶׁב אֵת כָּל־הָרְכֻשׁ וְגַם
אֶת־לוֹט אָחִיו וּרְכֻשׁוֹ הֵשִׁיב וְגַם אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים
וְאֶת־הָעָם׃ 17 וַיֵּצֵא מֶלֶךְ־סְדֹם לִקְרָאתוֹ אַחֲרֵי

mustered Hebrew *va-yarek* usually means "emptied out," especially the sword from its sheath. The usage here is unique and may be elliptical, meaning "he armed them" (as in Targ. Jon.), or it may be another military term otherwise unattested.[18]

his retainers Hebrew *ḥanikh* is another unique term in the Bible. It occurs as *ḥnk* in the Egyptian execration texts of the nineteenth-eighteenth centuries B.C.E. in reference to armed retainers of Canaanite chieftains, and as *ḥanâku,* armed retainers of a local chief, in a fifteenth-century B.C.E. cuneiform text from Taanach, Israel.

born into his household That is, a slave born of a slave. Such were regarded as being more reliable than purchased slaves.

three hundred and eighteen The fact that this figure is unparalleled in biblical literature and does not conform to any of the usual schematized or symbolic number patterns has been taken as proof of its literal authenticity. However, attention has been drawn to two extrabiblical examples of the number 318, which may suggest its use as a literary device to indicate a large group: a scarab of Amenhotep III (14th cent. B.C.E.) records the arrival of his bride, Princess Giluḫepa of Mitanni, together with 317 harem women, making a company of 318 in all; the grand total of all persons who suffered violent death in the course of the four days' fighting reported in the Iliad comes to 318. It has been noted that 318 is the sum of the twelve prime numbers from 7 to 47, which may explain its use symbolically. It remains to be proved that these two examples are not meant to be precise and that the concept of the prime number was recognized in early times.

Dan This city represents the northern extremity of the Land of Israel, as such texts as Judges 20:1 and 1 Samuel 3:20 show. It is to be identified with Tell Dan (Tell el-Qadi), about 4 miles (6.4 km.) west of Banias, lying at the foot of Mount Hermon on the international trade route. Excavations have shown that it was founded in the third millennium B.C.E. and was a prosperous and important settlement in the eighteenth century B.C.E. The original name of the site was Laish, which is attested in Egyptian texts of ca. 1850–1825 B.C.E. In accordance with the pattern of this chapter, one would expect to read "Laish, which is Dan." If this latter name dates only from the Israelite conquest in the times of the judges, as Judges 18:27–29 claims, then it would here be anachronistic.[19]

15. The large armies fielded by the coalition of kings had just completed a long and exhausting campaign. They did not expect to have to fight again and were unprepared for an attack. They encamped for the night, since armies did not generally march after sunset in the ancient world. For his part, Abram had all the advantages of using fresh troops and of a night engagement against an unwary, battle-weary, depleted enemy. By dividing his strike forces and simultaneously attacking from two sides, he was able to achieve complete surprise and so neutralize the effectiveness of the great numerical superiority enjoyed by the coalition of kings.

deployed against them Hebrew *va-yeḥalek ʿaleihem,* literally "he divided himself against them," is a unique phrase, probably a military term. For the tactic, compare Judges 7:16–22 and 1 Samuel 11:11, 13:17.

Hobah The place has not been located. Genesis Apocryphon 22.10 reads *hlbwn,* that is, Helbon, which is mentioned in Ezekiel 27:18. It is the modern village of Khalbun, 15.5 miles (25 km.) north of Damascus.

17. It must have taken several weeks for Abram's troops to have reached Damascus and beyond and then returned. In the meantime, the king of Sodom has regained his kingdom and now

[17]When he returned from defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh, which is the Valley of the King. [18]And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High. [19]He blessed him, saying,

שׁוּבוֹ מֵהַכּוֹת אֶת־כְּדָרְלָעֹמֶר וְאֶת־הַמְּלָכִים
אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ אֶל־עֵמֶק שָׁוֵה הִוא עֵמֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ׃
18 וּמַלְכִּי־צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם וְיָיִן וְהוּא
כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן׃ 19 וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמַר

comes out to meet the victorious patriarch. This king alone is mentioned because the rescue of Lot, who lived in Sodom, is the focal point of the narrative; because Sodom was the leader of the pentapolis, always listed first (v. 2; 10:19); and because the people of the city have earlier been characterized as "very wicked sinners" (13:12). The Narrator deliberately uses the expression "came out to meet him" because of its inherent ambiguity. Hebrew *yatsa' likr'at* is a neutral phrase deriving its coloration from the context. It may mean "to greet," as in Exodus 4:14, 1 Samuel 18:6, and Proverbs 7:15, or, much more frequently, "to confront," as in Numbers 20:20, 31:13, and Joshua 8:5. The king of Sodom brings no gifts and offers no blessing. As the beneficiary of Abram's heroism, will he express a word of gratitude, or, true to the reputation of his city, will he practice some deceit? We do not know, and, to heighten the suspense, the narrative breaks off temporarily.

the Valley of Shaveh Further defined as "the Valley of the King," a site mentioned once again only in 2 Samuel 18:18 but with no clue to its location in either text. The relatively broad, level valley formed by the junction of the Valley of Ben-hinnom, west and south of Jerusalem, with the Kidron Valley on the east side, best fits the picture. An ancient tradition found in the Targums takes *shaveh* in the sense of "level ground" used as the royal sports arena.

THE MELCHIZEDEK EPISODE (vv. 18–20)

It is perfectly natural that a returning hero, whose victory has also benefited the entire region, should be officially greeted by a distinguished personage. But the intrusive nature of the report here, interrupting the smooth sequence of verses 17 and 21, is obvious, and was noted by Rashi, Abravanel, and Ḥizkuni. Its position, which is original and not a later insertion, heightens the tension produced by the sudden appearance of the king of Sodom, whose very name is redolent of evil. It also transforms into a spiritual experience what was up to now a secular incident. Victory in war is not attributed to Abram's skill and valor but to the will of God, who is the ultimate arbiter of human destiny. It is inconceivable that the biblical Narrator would not have introduced such a note into the story. The artfulness with which the Melchizedek episode is integrated into the narrative is proven by the priest-king's mention of Abram's victory and by reference to the "Valley of the King" (v. 17), which smooths the way for the appearance of the "king of Salem," the first element of whose name—Melchizedek—also means "king." There is a subtle contrast in the uses of the verb *y-ts-'*, "to go out." The king of Sodom "came out" empty-handed to meet his benefactor, and the first word he uttered was "give!" The king of Salem "brought out" bread and wine and offered a blessing, even though he may have come to collect his tithe. The name of Melchizedek's city—Salem (Heb. *shalem*)—is suggestive of *shalom,* the peace that Abram's intervention brought to the region. Finally, the extraordinary title of God used by Abram in his colloquy with the king of Sodom is the name just used twice by Melchizedek.

Melchizedek Nothing is known of this priest-king who suddenly emerges from the shadows and as suddenly retreats into oblivion, as far as the biblical tradition is concerned. He is patently regarded as monotheist, one of the few select non-Israelite individuals who, in the scriptural view, preserved the original monotheism of the human race in the face of otherwise universal degeneration into paganism. See Excursus 6.

Salem Hebrew *shalem,* a place-name attested once again in parallelism with Zion in Psalms 76:3 as the location of the Temple. There is no doubt of its reference there to Jerusalem, and the same

"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.
20And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your foes into your hand."
And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything.

בָּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן
קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃
20 וּבָרוּךְ אֵל עֶלְיוֹן
אֲשֶׁר־מִגֵּן צָרֶיךָ בְּיָדֶךָ
וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ מַעֲשֵׂר מִכֹּל׃ חמישי 21 וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ־

identification is generally assumed for this passage too. This is the tradition of the Genesis Apocryphon 23.13, Josephus, Antiquities 1.181, and the Targums. There is no evidence that Salem was the earlier name of Jerusalem. The city is already mentioned in the Egyptian execration texts of the nineteenth-eighteenth centuries B.C.E. as Urushalimu, and in the El-Amarna texts of the fifteenth-fourteenth centuries as Urusalim. The full name originally meant "the foundation of (the god) Shalim."

The reference to Salem in Psalms 76:3 is followed by a statement about the destruction of the weapons of war. This suggests that the shortened name of the city is a poeticism to produce the effect of *shalom,* "peace." "Jerusalem" has been reinterpreted to mean "city of peace," a symbol that later found expression in prophecy in such texts as Isaiah 2:1–5 and Micah 4:1–4.[20] It can hardly be coincidence that King David, who first conquered Jerusalem and converted it into the political and religious center of Israel, named one of his sons Absalom (Heb. *'abshalom*) and another Solomon (Heb. *shelomoh*).

bread and wine Compare 2 Samuel 17:27–29.

priest It is not known whether the fusion of the royal and priestly offices was characteristic of the Canaanite city-states or was peculiar to Salem. In Assyria and among the Hittites, the king was also high priest, but such was not the case in Babylon. The Ugaritic texts do not support the identity of the two offices for that city, but in the Phoenician sphere, at least in the Persian era, the king of Sidon styles himself "priest of Astarte." In Israel, the two institutions were conceived as being separated from the beginning (cf. 1 Sam. 2:35). Kingship is part of the divine promises to the patriarchs in Genesis 17:7,16 and 35:11, but nothing is said of priesthood. The hereditary priesthood long anteceded the establishment of the monarchy, and the priests stoutly resisted royal encroachment upon their prerogatives, as the story in 2 Chronicles 26:16–21 shows.

God Most High Hebrew *'el 'elyon,* the first biblical usage of either term. *'El* is of uncertain etymology, perhaps deriving from a Semitic root meaning "to be strong." *'El* is common to practically all Semitic languages as a general term for "god." The feminine form is also current, except in biblical Hebrew, which possesses no word for "goddess." From earliest times *'el* is used outside Israel as the proper name of the deity. In the Bible, *'el* either simply refers to the one God or is used as a variant for the divine name YHVH.

'Elyon, from the root *'-l-h,* "to ascend," expresses the absolute transcendence of God. See Excursus 7 for further comment.

19. He blessed him He invoked God's blessing upon the patriarch, an act that recalls 12:1–3.

Blessed be Abram The Hebrew could also mean "Blessed is Abram," an acknowledgment or affirmation of a reality exemplified by the victory.[21]

Creator of heaven and earth This universalistic formula, echoed by Abram in verse 22, well fits the international background of the events. It acknowledges that the processes of human history are under divine guidance.[22] See Excursus 8.

20. gave him a tenth Abram gives Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoils of war. This is a one-time payment analogous to that described in Numbers 31:25–41. A tithe payable to the king is known from Ugarit and is listed among the prerogatives of Near Eastern kingship in 1 Samuel 8:15,17. It has nothing to do with the later annual tithing system of Israel.

[21]Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the possessions for yourself." [22]But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I swear to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth: [23]I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, 'It is I who made Abram rich.' [24]For me, nothing but what my servants have used up; as for the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre—let them take their share."

סְדֹם אֶל־אַבְרָם תֶּן־לִי הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְהָרְכֻשׁ קַח־לָךְ׃
22 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־מֶלֶךְ סְדֹם הֲרִימֹתִי יָדִי אֶל־
יְהוָה אֵל עֶלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃ 23 אִם־מִחוּט
וְעַד שְׂרוֹךְ־נַעַל וְאִם־אֶקַּח מִכָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ וְלֹא
תֹאמַר אֲנִי הֶעֱשַׁרְתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָם׃ 24 בִּלְעָדַי רַק
אֲשֶׁר אָכְלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וְחֵלֶק הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ
אִתִּי עָנֵר אֶשְׁכֹּל וּמַמְרֵא הֵם יִקְחוּ חֶלְקָם׃
ס

ABRAM AND THE KING OF SODOM (vv. 21–24)

Having discharged his duty to his kinsman and paid his dues to the priest-king, the patriarch wishes to have nothing more to do with Sodom. He disdainfully rejects any idea of profiting personally from the operation.

*22. **I swear*** Literally, "I lift up my hand," a gesture accompanying oath-taking to this day.[23]

*23. **a thread or a sandal strap*** That is, a thin or thick cord. The figure is a merism, using contrasting items to express a totality. This particular phrase occurs nowhere else, but analogous expressions are Akkadian *ḫamu lu ḫuṣabu,* "be it a stalk of straw or a twig," and Aramaic ***min ḥam ʿad ḥuṭ,*** "straw or string," both used in treaty contexts.[24]

It is I who made Abram rich Abram did not want it to seem that he had acted out of mercenary considerations. Since part of the spoil had originally come from Sodom (v. 11), he did not want to benefit from tainted possessions (cf. Deut. 23:19). There may be a word play between *he-ʿesharti* (root *ʿ-sh-r*), "made rich," and *maʿaser* (root *ʿ-s-r*), "tithe" (v. 20).[25]

*24. **my servants*** Hebrew *neʿarim,* literally "youths," probably here means "warriors." The word is found in Egyptian as *neʿarin,* a borrowing from Canaanite in the specialized sense of "elite corps."

CHAPTER 15

The Covenant Between the Pieces (vv. 1–21)

Throughout Hebrew literature the central narrative of this chapter is known by the name *ha-berit bein ha-betarim,* meaning "the covenant between the pieces." This name derives from the description of the covenant ceremony (Heb. *berit*), the climactic point of which is the passing between the pieces of flesh described in verse 17. Although the Hebrew term used in the text is actually *gezarim,* the triple use of the stem *b-t-r* in verse 10 and the terminology of the analogous passage in Jeremiah 34:18f. have influenced popular usage in favor of *betarim.*

The chapter falls clearly into two parts. The theme of verses 1–5 is the promise of posterity; that of verses 7–21, the gift of land. The first scene occurs at night (v. 5); the second, at sundown (vv. 12,17). The first promise is given in "a vision" (v. 1); the second, in "a deep sleep" (v. 12). While it is not clear whether the two pronouncements form one long theophany, as Radak believes, or issue from two distinct and successive experiences, as Ibn Ezra thinks, there is no doubt they form an indissoluble unity. The twin promises are logically interconnected and inseparable, and they appear together repeatedly in the rest of the book.[1] Furthermore, the two parts have parallel structures, each comprising three elements: a divine promise (vv. 1,7), an expression of apprehension by Abram (vv. 2f.,8), and a divine reassurance by verbal and by symbolic action (vv. 4f.,9–21). In both sections God introduces His speech with the formula "I am" (vv. 1,7), and the patriarch's response begins with the

15 Some time later, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said,

"Fear not, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great."

2But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer!" 3Abram said further,

ט״ו אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־
אַבְרָם בַּמַּחֲזֶה לֵאמֹר
אַל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם
אָנֹכִי מָגֵן לָךְ
שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד׃
ב וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי וְאָנֹכִי
הוֹלֵךְ עֲרִירִי וּבֶן־מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק אֱלִיעֶזֶר׃

invocation, "O Lord God" (vv. 2,8) which is an exceedingly rare expression in the Torah. Finally, it is clear that Nehemiah 9:7f. understands the covenant to be the response to Abram's act of faith in his initial encounter with God, so that verse 6 forms the connecting link between the two parts.

Chapter 15 exhibits numerous points of contact and verbal correspondences with the preceding one, a phenomenon that extends throughout the entire narrative and cannot be coincidental. Thus, the charge "fear not" (v. 1) answers to the dangers arising out of the combat in chapter 14; God's self-description "I am a shield" (Heb. ***magen,*** v. 1) recalls the God "who has delivered" (Heb. ***miggen***) Abram's foes into his hands (14:20); the promised reward (v. 1) is in place of the spurned booty (14:23f.); God makes a covenant (Heb. ***berit***) with Abram, who had relied for security on his human allies (***ba'alei berit,*** 14:13); the Amorite is to be displaced (vv. 6,21), and the Amorite had been Abram's ally (14:13); "Dammesek" (v. 2) recalls "Damascus" (14:15), just as the judgment (Heb. ***dan,*** v. 14) brings to mind Dan (14:14), and the promise of "peace" (***shalom,*** v. 15) suggests Salem (***shalem,*** 14:18); ***bayit*** (lit. "house") appears in verses 2–3 and in 14:14; the stem ***y-ts-'*** is used twice in each chapter (vv. 5,7; 14:17f.); ***ʿ-v-d*** in verse 13 recalls 14:4,15; ***rekhush*** ("wealth, possessions") in verse 14 is the same as in 14:11,12,16,21; and the verb ***ʿ-v-r*** in verse 17 connects with "Hebrew" ***('ivri)*** of 14:13.

THE FIRST DIALOGUE WITH GOD: THE PROMISE OF OFFSPRING (vv. 1–6)

1. ***Some time later*** Hebrew ***'aḥar ha-devarim ha-'elleh,*** literally "after these things," implies a sequence that is not necessarily immediate.[2] Here, however, the close connection with the preceding events is unmistakable.

The pattern of the reaffirmation of the promises following moments of trial and danger, as in 13:14ff., is continued. On the present occasion language is employed that is elsewhere reserved for prophetic pronouncements, such as the formula, unique in the Torah, "The word of the LORD came to. . . ."[3] Similarly, the word for "vision" (Heb. ***maḥazeh***) derives from the stem ***ḥ-z-ḥ,*** "to see," which is largely used in connection with the prophetic experience.[4]

Fear not The patriarch fears the possibility of revenge by the defeated kings. The phrase "fear not" occurs numerous times throughout the Bible, mainly spoken by God. It is also found in extrabiblical literature in a genre known as "oracles of assurance." These oracles were given to a king before battle. Thus, King Zakir of Hamath and Lu'ath (early 8th cent. B.C.E.) reports receiving an oracle from the god Be'elshamayn: "Do not fear (Aram. ***'al tiẓḥal***), for I have made you king, and I shall stand by you and deliver you from all [these kings who] set up a siege against you." In like manner, Esarhaddon of Assyria (680–669 B.C.E.) receives an oracle: "King of Assyria, fear not (Akk. ***lā tapallaḫ***): The enemy . . . I deliver to slaughter."[5]

I am a shield Poetic simile of divine protection, used especially in the Book of Psalms.[6]

Your reward This assurance is clearly associated with Abram's refusal to have any part of the spoils of war,[7] mentioned in 14:22ff. The material reward, so disdainfully spurned, is to be vastly exceeded by a recompense of a different kind, even though the prospects were as yet only on the distant horizon.

2. For the first time Abram speaks to God. In unquestioning obedience to the divine command, he had broken his ties with his family and become a wanderer in a strange land. His life

"Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward will be my heir." 4The word of the LORD came to him in reply, "That one shall not be your heir; none but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5He took him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He added, "So shall your offspring be." 6And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit.

3 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם הֵן לִי לֹא נָתַתָּה זָרַע וְהִנֵּה בֶן־
בֵּיתִי יוֹרֵשׁ אֹתִי: 4 וְהִנֵּה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר
לֹא יִירָשְׁךָ זֶה כִּי־אִם אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִמֵּעֶיךָ הוּא
יִירָשֶׁךָ: 5 וַיּוֹצֵא אֹתוֹ הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבֶּט־נָא
הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זַרְעֶךָ: 6 וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה
וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה: ששי 7 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי

had been repeatedly in danger. The years had rolled by and the promises of progeny had not materialized. Through it all Abram maintained his silence. Now the measure of recurring disappointment and prolonged frustration has reached its limit. The bonds of restraint are broken, and the patriarch bares the bitterness of his soul in a brief, poignant outburst bordering on utter despair.

O Lord God This Hebrew divine title, rarely used in the Torah,[8] appears here for the first time. It is used in a context of complaint, prayer, and request. Here the word for "Lord" is *'adonai,* "my Lord," not the divine name YHVH, and its use suggests a master-servant relationship. Abram does not permit his vexation to compromise his attitude of respect and reverence before God.

what can You give me? No material reward can equal the blessing of having children.

I shall die A poetic usage of Hebrew *h-l-k,* "to walk, go," which sees life as a journey to be undertaken.[9]

the one in charge of my household Hebrew *ben meshek beiti* is a unique phrase, the meaning of which is uncertain. See Excursus 9.

Eliezer Strangely, the name Eliezer is never again mentioned in passages referring to Abraham's servant (cf. Gen. 24:2ff.).

3. ***granted me no offspring*** Hebrew *li,* "to me," is placed in an emphatic position before the verb, so that it carries the sense of "no offspring of my own."

will be my heir This statement reflects a society in which a servant can become heir to a childless couple. Numerous ancient Near Eastern documents provide for the adoption of a stranger who inherits the estate in return for the performance of filial duties. These include paying the adoptive parents the proper respect, maintaining the household, taking care of their physical needs and comforts in their old age, and performing the funerary rites at their death. In such cases, the adopted son cannot be deprived of a share of the inheritance even if there are subsequently natural-born sons. Thus, God's emphatic and unambiguous reply in verse 4 can only mean that the patriarch, despairing of having children, had decided to resort to the adoption of his servant but has not yet acted. God assures him that this will not be necessary.

5. The oral promise is reinforced by a visual experience. It is not clear whether this is real or part of a dream theophany.

6. ***he put his trust in the LORD*** The scene that opens with fear and depression closes with a firm statement that Abram remains steadfast in his faith in God. The promises must be realized, even in the face of a seemingly recalcitrant reality.

He reckoned it to his merit God is the subject of the verb.[10] Hebrew *tsedakah,* usually "righteousness," sometimes bears the sense of "merit." The idea is that Abram's act of faith made him worthy of God's reward, which is secured through a covenant. This interpretation is supported by Nehemiah 9:7–8 and by the similar phraseology in Psalms 106:30f., which refers to the narrative of Numbers 25:6–13. The latter tells of the intervention of Phinehas at the affair of Baal-peor, as a result of which he was granted God's "pact of friendship"—"for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time." The alternative possibility that Abram regarded "it,"—that is, the promise of posterity—as an expression of God's righteousness and grace seems less likely.[11]

7Then He said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession." 8And he said, "O Lord God, how shall I know that I am to possess it?" 9He answered, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird." 10He brought Him all

יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָתֶת לְךָ
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ׃ 8 וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי יֱהוִה
בַּמָּה אֵדַע כִּי אִירָשֶׁנָּה׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו קְחָה לִי
עֶגְלָה מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְעֵז מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְאַיִל מְשֻׁלָּשׁ וְתֹר
וְגוֹזָל׃ 10 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ אֶת־כָּל־אֵלֶּה וַיְבַתֵּר אֹתָם

THE SECOND DIALOGUE WITH GOD: THE PROMISE OF NATIONAL TERRITORY (vv. 7–21)

*7. **I am the LORD*** This is the first use of this solemn, introductory, self-identifying formula.[12] It is not the disclosure of a hitherto unknown name, but an emphasis on the unimpeachable authority behind the accompanying declaration. The style "I am So-and-so" is known from Hittite treaties and Canaanite-Phoenician royal proclamations.

who brought you out See Comment to 12:1. The entire sentence is suggestive, probably deliberately so, of the opening words of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:2. Biblical usage of the verb "to bring out" is predominantly in reference to the Exodus context. The two pivotal, formative events in the history of the Jewish people are Abram's exodus from his homeland and the Exodus from Egypt. The relationships between God and Abram and between God and Israel are in each case conditioned and regulated by these divine acts.

Ur of the Chaldeans See Comment to 11:28,31.

to assign this land The divine order to Abram in 12:1–3 said nothing of a gift of land, but such had been the original intention of God, unrevealed at the time.

*8. **how shall I know*** The question has to be understood in light of God's reply in verse 13: "Know well . . ." The affirmation of Abram's trust in God in verse 6 referred to the pledge of offspring, which must obviously materialize in his lifetime. The present query relates to the reiterated promise of national territory (cf. 13:15,17). Abram is here speaking not as an individual but as the future nation personified. What is to be the process by which that nation will take physical possession of its promised land?

9–17. In response, God contracts a solemn covenant with the patriarch, who becomes the passive beneficiary of His unilateral obligation, unconditionally assumed. It would seem that the form of this covenant is modeled after the royal land-grant treaty common in the ancient Near East. By this instrument a king bestows a gift of land on an individual or vassal as a reward for loyal service.

The text does not explain the elaborate ritual that is followed. Clearly no sacrifice is involved, for there is no altar, no mention of the sprinkling of blood as in Exodus 24:8, and no suggestion that the animals are either eaten or burnt. The meaning of the ceremonials is to be sought elsewhere. The Hebrew term for covenant-making is *k-r-t berit,* literally "to cut a covenant" (v. 18). The corresponding phrase is very widely used in one form or another in the ancient world. The exact Aramaic equivalents are *g-z-r 'dy',* found in the Sfire treaty from Syria, and *'lt k-r-t,* which appears in a magical text from the Arslan Tash in Turkey. The Greek *horkia temnein* and Latin *foedus ferire/ictum* express the same practice. In the Mari texts "to kill a donkey foal" *(ḫayarum/ayarum qatālum/šuqtulum)* is to conclude a covenant. At Alalakh they "cut the neck of a sheep" *(kišad/immerum iṭbuḫ)* for the same purpose. All these analogues demonstrate that the cutting up of the animal was a crucial element in the treaty-making procedure. Its retributive meaning is suggested by the only other biblical parallel. When, in the days of Jeremiah, the nobility of Jerusalem proclaimed a wholesale emancipation of slaves during the Babylonian siege, only to reverse themselves later, the prophet thundered: "Lo! I proclaim your release—declares the LORD—to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine; and I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. I will make the men who violated My covenant . . . which they made before Me, [like] the calf which they cut in two so as to pass between the halves . . . they shall be handed over to their enemies, to those who seek to kill them. Their carcasses shall become food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth . . ." (Jer. 34:17–20). The cutting of the animals is thus a form of self-imprecation in which the potential violator invokes their fate upon

these and cut them in two, placing each half opposite the other; but he did not cut up the bird. [11]Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. [12]As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a great dark dread descended upon him. [13]And He said to Abram, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years; [14]but I will execute judgment

בַּתָּוֶךְ וַיִּתֵּן אִישׁ־בִּתְרוֹ לִקְרַאת רֵעֵהוּ וְאֶת־הַצִּפֹּר
לֹא בָתָר: 11 וַיֵּרֶד הָעַיִט עַל־הַפְּגָרִים וַיַּשֵּׁב אֹתָם
אַבְרָם: 12 וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לָבוֹא וְתַרְדֵּמָה נָפְלָה עַל־
אַבְרָם וְהִנֵּה אֵימָה חֲשֵׁכָה גְדֹלָה נֹפֶלֶת עָלָיו:
13 וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדֹעַ תֵּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זַרְעֲךָ
בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וַעֲבָדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת
שָׁנָה: 14 וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דָּן אָנֹכִי

himself. This is confirmed by the above-cited Sfire treaty, which includes the following clause: "As this calf is cut up, thus Matti'el and his nobles shall be cut up" (I:40). A similar clause occurs in a treaty between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Matti'ilu of Arpad. The fate of the animal is explicitly projected upon the violator. In the case of the land-grant covenants, the curse would be directed against anyone who interferes with the realization of the suzerain's promise.[13]

The ceremony described here in Genesis 15 utilizes contemporary legal forms and procedures but has undergone subtle transformation in the context of the narrative. In contrast to the rest of the patriarchal biography, the event lacks any notice of its locale and of the age of Abram at the time. For the first time in the history of religions, God becomes the contracting party, promising a national territory to a people yet unborn. This pledge constitutes the main historic title of the Jewish people to its land, a title that is unconditional and irrevocable, secured by a divine covenant whose validity transcends space and time.

*9. **a three-year-old*** This is the most likely meaning of the unique Hebrew ***meshullash*** (fem. ***meshulleshet***).[14] A beast of three years was considered to be full grown and was broken for service. A less likely translation is "threefold," meaning three of each species.

a young bird Hebrew *gozal* appears again only in Deuteronomy 32:11 as the young of an eagle. Here it probably is a pigeon since this bird is usually paired with the turtledove.[15]

*10. **cut them in two*** The list of beasts and birds must have suggested at once a covenant ceremony, for Abram knows to slice and arrange the items without being so told. The Hebrew stem *b-t-r,* "to sever," contains the same consonants as ***berit,*** "covenant," and is otherwise used only in the similar context of Jeremiah 34:18f.

the bird Hebrew *tsippor* is here a collective.[16] The two birds were probably placed face to face. The exceptional nonseverance of the birds may be solely due to their small size (cf. Lev. 1:17), but there may also be some lost symbolism relating to fertility.

11. The otherwise terse and austere style of the narrative makes it certain that the incident here recorded has special significance. Hebrew *'ayit,* here taken as a collective "birds of prey," is most likely the carrion-eating falcon (cf. Isa. 18:6; Ezek. 39:4). In Egyptian art this bird represents the important god Horus with whom the living king was identified. It is possible, therefore, that the sudden appearance of the birds of prey, and of Abram successfully warding them off, symbolically portends the sharp and menacing change that is to take place in the fortunes of the Israelites at the hands of the Egyptians while it also prefigures their rescue through the merit of the patriarch.

*12. **a deep sleep*** See Comment to 2:21. Here, as in Job 4:13ff. and 33:15f., the abnormally deep sleep is associated with the dread inspired by the awareness of the Divine Presence (cf. Dan. 8:18; 10:9).

13–16. The future as unfolded here holds three successive stages of suffering: alienage, enslavement, and oppression, to be followed by three successive stages of redemption: judgment on the oppressor, the Exodus, and settlement in the promised land. It is obvious that the biblical conception of the origins and growth of the people of Israel—the idea of nationhood resulting from a process of natural proliferation rather than through the amalgamation or confederacy of existing tribes—means that the realization of the divine promises can be envisaged as taking place only after the passage of many years. The nebulous future of the previous promises is now translated into historical time.

*13. **Know well*** The response to the query of verse 8.

on the nation they shall serve, and in the end they shall go free with great wealth. 15As for you,
You shall go to your fathers in peace;
You shall be buried at a ripe old age.
16And they shall return here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בִּרְכֻשׁ גָּדוֹל׃ 15 וְאַתָּה
תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם
תִּקָּבֵר בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה׃
16 וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יָשֻׁובוּ הֵנָּה כִּי לֹא־שָׁלֵם עֲוֹן
הָאֱמֹרִי עַד־הֵנָּה׃ 17 וַיְהִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בָּאָה וַעֲלָטָה

strangers See Comment to 12:10.

a land not theirs That is, a foreign land, other than the Land of Israel (cf. Jer. 5:19).

be enslaved Hebrew *ve-'avadum* means literally "they shall serve them," the subject being "your offspring," and the object understood to be the rulers of the foreign land.

four hundred years This figure presents an unresolved riddle. No indication is given as to the year from which the reckoning begins. Moreover, it does not seem to accord with the mere "four generations" of verse 16, and it is not identical with the 430-year figure given in Exodus 12:40 as the entire period of time spent in Egypt. Another complication is the absence of any biblical tradition specifying the time that elapsed between the death of Joseph and the commencement of the slavery. Rabbinic exegesis generally understands the 400 years to begin with the birth of Isaac and the 430 years from the day of the covenant.[17] According to this interpretation, the 400 years apply to the entire period of alienage. Since 190 years elapsed between the birth of Isaac and the descent of Jacob to Egypt, as can be computed from Genesis 25:26 and 47:9, this leaves 210 years for the entire Egyptian experience. This is not compatible, however, with the plain meaning of Exodus 12:40, which clearly belongs to another strand of tradition. It should be noted, though, that according to the Septuagint, Samaritan, and Syro-Palestinian versions of Exodus 12:40, the figure of 430 includes the years spent in Canaan.

14. I will execute judgment The reference, of course, is to the plagues, which are so referred to in Exodus 6:6, 7:4, and 12:12.

great wealth Either in restitution for the years of slave labor or in accordance with the law in Deuteronomy 15:13f. that an emancipated slave must be liberally provisioned by the master.[18]

15. A parenthetic reassurance to Abram that the foreordained misfortunes would not occur in his lifetime.

You shall go to your fathers A unique term for dying. Elsewhere the expression is to "lie down with one's fathers," as in Genesis 47:30, or to be "gathered to one's kin," as in 2 Kings 25:8,17. In whatever form, the phrase certainly originates from a belief in an afterlife in which one is reunited with one's ancestors irrespective of where they are buried. The biblical sources are perplexingly vague and sparse on the issue of afterlife (see Comment to 37:35).

16. the fourth generation If "generation" (Heb. *dor*) is the span of time between the birth of children and the birth of their parents—an average period of approximately 20–25 years—then the phrasing implies at most 100 years, only one quarter of the period prescribed in verse 13. Yet, unless one posits the preposterous notion of a mindless narrator or editor, the two figures must be reconcilable. A study of the Hebrew word *dor* and its Semitic cognates indicates a very fluid and indeterminate use of the word. Thus, Job lived 140 years after being rehabilitated, a period said to cover "four generations" (Job 42:10); the "generation" that came out of Egypt took 40 years to come to an end (Num. 32:13; Pss. 95:10); two succeeding "generations" may exhibit absolute discontinuity (Judg. 2:10; cf. Exod. 1:6ff.); the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I reports that seven "generations" (Akk. *dāru*) elapsed between the end of the kingdom of Akkad and his own reign, which gives 60–70 years to a "generation." In light of all this, it is best to take *dor* as a "cycle of time" or "life span," just like *daur* in classical Arabic. There is no fixed biblical calculation for the human life cycle. In Genesis 6:3 it is 120 years, in Isaiah 65:20 it is 100 years, in Psalms 90:10 it varies between 70–80 years. In ancient Egypt the ideal life span was 110 years (see Comment to 50:22). The "four generations" in the present passage may thus be understood as the sum of four life spans, a figure in no way incompatible with the 400 years of the pre-Exodus period.

[17]When the sun set and it was very dark, there appeared a smoking oven, and a flaming torch which passed between those pieces. [18]On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: [19]the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, [20]the Hit-

הָיָה וְהִנֵּה תַנּוּר עָשָׁן וְלַפִּיד אֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָבַר בֵּין
הַגְּזָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: 18 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כָּרַת יְהוָה אֶת־
אַבְרָם בְּרִית לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת מִנְּהַר מִצְרַיִם עַד־הַנָּהָר הַגָּדֹל נְהַר־פְּרָת:
19 אֶת־הַקֵּינִי וְאֶת־הַקְּנִזִּי וְאֶת הַקַּדְמֹנִי: 20 וְאֶת־

the iniquity of the Amorites The fate and destiny of the future people of Israel is to be intertwined with that of other peoples. The history of all mankind is under the moral governance of God. The displacement of the native population of Canaan by Israel is not to be accounted for on grounds of divine favoritism or innate superiority (cf. Deut. 9:4–6). The local peoples, here generically called "Amorites" (see Comment to 10:16), have violated God's charge. The universally binding moral law has been flouted and the inhabitants of Canaan have been doomed by their own corruption, as texts like Leviticus 18:24f. and 20:23f. explicitly aver. Yet God's justice is absolute. The limit of His tolerance of evil—four generations—has not yet been reached, and Israel must wait until God's time is ripe.[19] Divine justice is not to be strained—even for the elect of God, and even though its application relates to pagans.

CONSUMMATION OF THE COVENANT (vv. 18–21)

The principal party, here God, passes between the pieces. He is represented by the smoke and the fire,[20] which are frequent symbols of the Divine Presence. As in a legal document, the nature of the instrument of transfer is defined, its promissory clause is specified as concerning a grant of land, and the extent of the territory involved is delineated in geographic and ethnographic terms.

18. ***a covenant*** See Comment to 6:18.

the river of Egypt The southwestern boundary of Canaan is generally depicted as the "Wadi (Heb. *naḥal*) of Egypt,"[21] which is to be identified with Wadi el-'Arish. This marks the boundary between the settled land and the Sinai desert. The unique "river of Egypt" here is not the Nile, which is called *ye'or* in the Bible, as in Genesis 41:1f., Exodus 2:3,5, and elsewhere, but must be its most easterly arm, which then emptied into Lake Sirbonis near Pelusium, not far from Port Said. It is probably the same as Shihor mentioned in Joshua 13:3, Jeremiah 2:18, and other biblical texts.

the great river See Comment to 10:15–19.[22] The geographic boundaries given here represent a generalized ideal that cannot be reconciled with any historic reality of the past. They include Tyre-Sidon, Lebanon, and Byblos, which the Davidic-Solomonic empire, even at its height, never encompassed, as 1 Kings 5:1,4 and 8:65 show. Moreover, the conquests of David aimed at asserting political and economic control beyond the borders of Israelite settlement, but there was no attempt to dispossess the local population and to settle Israelites in their stead.

19–21. This list constitutes a register of ten pre-Israelite peoples who presently inhabit the promised land. This is the most comprehensive of the seventeen such lists scattered among the historical books. Some of these feature seven ethnic groups, others six or five, and one only three.[23] The origins of these lists are obscure, as is the reason for their diversity in number, order, and content. The fact that the Jebusites invariably appear in the final position may betoken David's capture of Jerusalem, which was the culmination of his conquests.

The present register features some peculiarities. The Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim appear in no other list, while the Hivites, featured in all the others, are here inexplicably excluded.

The extraordinarily complex ethnic situation that these lists reflect is matched by the no less than thirty-one city-states that Joshua encountered in this tiny country, as listed in Joshua 12. The explanation for this remarkable political phenomenon lies in the almost irresistible centrifugal forces produced by accidents of topography and climate. Within the narrow belt between the sea and the desert, about 100 miles (ca. 161 km.) in width and 160 miles (ca. 258 km.) in length from Dan to Beer-

tites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, [21]the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־הַפְּרִזִּי וְאֶת־הָרְפָאִים: 21 וְאֶת־הָאֱמֹרִי
וְאֶת־הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְאֶת־הַגִּרְגָּשִׁי וְאֶת־הַיְבוּסִי: ס

16 Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. [2]And

ט״ז וְשָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלָהּ
שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וּשְׁמָהּ הָגָר: 2 וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל־

sheba, are to be found no less than four parallel longitudinal zones, each of which undergoes considerable internal modification. The coastal plain gives way to the central mountain region, which, in turn, yields abruptly to the Jordan Valley, only to be succeeded by the Transjordan plateau. The extremes of altitude are astonishing. The mountains of Lebanon rise to a height of 8,300 feet (2,531.5 m.) above sea level, and the deepest point of the Dead Sea lies about 2,500 feet (762.5 m.) below the surface of the Mediterranean. This topographic complexity has its counterpart in climatic diversity. The intensity and direction of the winds and air movements, the seasonal rainfalls, the deposits of dew, the daily variations in temperature—all are subject to wide-ranging regional fluctuations.

In light of all this, it is not surprising that, in the long history of the country, its fate was never tied to the fortunes of one people, and never has any people succeeded in imposing unity upon it from within—never, that is, with the solitary exception of the people of Israel during the biblical period, during the Second Jewish Commonwealth, and today, a truly extraordinary phenomenon.

19. ***Kenites*** See Comments to 4:1,22. They were a seminomadic tribe of metal workers, wandering in the southern part of the land and connected both with the Midianites and the Amalekites.[24] They gave their name to part of the Negeb (1 Sam. 27:10).

Kenizzites The name indicates a Hurrian origin, but this people had close ties with the Edomites, as is clear from Genesis 36:4,11,15,42. They were later absorbed into the tribe of Judah or at least some of their most important clans were, and they provided one of the minor judges of Israel.[25]

Kadmonites These are mentioned in no other biblical ethnographic source. They may well be identical with "Kedemites" (Heb. ***benei kedem***), "easterners," a general term for the tribes that roamed the Syro-Palestinian desert from Aram in the north down to the Red Sea.[26] In the south of Canaan, the Kedemites were associated with Amalekites and Midianites. They were also famous for their wisdom.

20. ***Hittites*** See Comment to 10:15.

Perizzites See Comment to 13:7.

Rephaim See Comment to 14:5.

21. ***Amorites*** See Comment to 10:16.

Canaanites See Comment to 9:18.

Girgashites . . . Jebusites See Comment to 10:16.

CHAPTER 16

Sarah, Hagar, and the Birth of Ishmael (vv. 1–16)

CONCUBINAGE (vv. 1–6)

Ten years have elapsed since Abram parted from his father (v. 3). Throughout this decade of frustrated hopes his wife has suffered in silence. Now the impatience of the infertile Sarai has reached a critical point. Since the divine promises in chapter 15 did not specify that she herself was to be the mother of Abram's offspring, in her desperation she takes the initiative and resorts to the device of concubinage.

1. The opening verse furnishes the basic information essential to the understanding of the

Sarai said to Abram, "Look, the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with my maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her." And Abram heeded Sarai's request. 3So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her maid, Hagar the Egyptian—after Abram had dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as concubine. 4He cohabited with Hagar and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lowered in her esteem. 5And Sarai said to Abram, "The wrong done me is

אַבְרָם הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצָרַנִי יְהוָה מִלֶּדֶת בֹּא־נָא אֶל־
שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אִבָּנֶה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל
שָׂרָי׃ 3 וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אֵשֶׁת־אַבְרָם אֶת־הָגָר
הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֵּץ עֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים לְשֶׁבֶת
אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִישָׁהּ לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה׃ 4 וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָגָר וַתַּהַר וַתֵּרֶא כִּי הָרָתָה
וַתֵּקַל גְּבִרְתָּהּ בְּעֵינֶיהָ׃ 5 וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל־אַבְרָם

drama. The issue is Sarai's infertility; the dramatis personae, Sarai and Hagar; their respective social status, wife and maidservant.

had borne him no children Previously, in 11:30, she had been described as "barren." The subtle change in phraseology insinuates a note of submerged expectation that derives from the foreknowledge of the writer.

She had Hebrew *ve-lah* emphasizes Sarai's proprietary rights. The maid attended primarily to the personal needs of her mistress and apparently was not the common property of husband and wife.[1]

Egyptian maidservant The stress on her origin[2] may have ironic significance in light of the prediction in the "covenant between the pieces" that the descendants of Abram were to be enslaved and oppressed in Egypt. The very name Hagar suggests a word play on Hebrew *ger,* "stranger," and the same Hebrew stem *ʿ-n-h,* used here of "harsh treatment" in verses 6,9, and 11, is employed in the prediction of 15:13 as well.

Hagar The name suggests a connection with Arabic *hajara,* "to flee," and may mean "fugitive."[3] A people named "Hagrites," mentioned in Psalms 83:7 and 1 Chronicles 5:10,19ff., appears to have been pastoralists and to have roamed the Syro-Arabian desert. Classical Greek writers mention the Agraioi or Agreis, whose domicile was northern Arabia, and there may be a connection between Hagar and these people.

2. kept me from bearing In ancient times barrenness was imputed to the woman, not the man, although God was seen to be its ultimate cause.

perhaps I shall have a son Hebrew *'ibbaneh* contains a double entendre, suggesting both the stem *b-n-h,* "to build," and *ben,* "a son." Akkadian *banû* similarly may mean "to build" and "to engender." Here, as in many cultures, family and posterity are depicted in terms of a house.[4]

through her The custom of an infertile wife providing her husband with a concubine in order to bear children is well documented in the ancient Near East. The laws of Lipit-Ishtar (early 19th cent. B.C.E.) deal with the case of a harlot who produces children for the husband of a barren wife; these become his heirs. An Old Assyrian marriage contract (19th cent. B.C.E.) stipulates that if the wife does not provide him with offspring within two years she must purchase a slave woman for the purpose. The provision of a concubine slave for bearing children is taken for granted in the laws of Hammurabi in the specific case of a wife who is a priestess and is thus barred from giving birth.[5] In Sarai's case, it is unclear whether she had fully despaired of ever having children of her own or whether her action reflects the widespread popular belief that a woman who is unable to conceive may become fertile by adopting a child.

Abram heeded As Ramban points out, Abram took Hagar solely in response to his wife's urging, not out of lust. Hebrew *va-yishmaʿ* contains a hint of *yishmaʿ-'el* (vv. 11,15).

4. her mistress was lowered in her esteem This is a natural consequence of a situation in which barrenness is regarded as a disgrace. Ancient law codes reflect the diminished social position of the barren wife. Ur-Nammu (2112–2095 B.C.E.) mentions the case of a slave woman who, "comparing herself to her mistress, speaks insolently to her" or strikes her, and Hammurabi's laws deal with the situation of the female slave-concubine who "has claimed equality with her mistress because she bore children."[6] See Comment to verse 6.

your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me!" 6Abram said to Sarai, "Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right." Then Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from her.

7An angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the road to Shur, 8and said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai."

9And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Go back to your mistress, and submit to her harsh treatment." 10And the angel of the LORD said to her,

"I will greatly increase your offspring,
And they shall be too many to count."

חָמָסִי עָלֶיךָ אָנֹכִי נָתַתִּי שִׁפְחָתִי בְּחֵיקֶךָ וַתֵּרֶא כִּי הָרָתָה וָאֵקַל בְּעֵינֶיהָ יִשְׁפֹּט יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיךָ׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל־שָׂרַי הִנֵּה שִׁפְחָתֵךְ בְּיָדֵךְ עֲשִׂי־לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינָיִךְ וַתְּעַנֶּהָ שָׂרַי וַתִּבְרַח מִפָּנֶיהָ׃ 7 וַיִּמְצָאָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה עַל־עֵין הַמַּיִם בַּמִּדְבָּר עַל־הָעַיִן בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר׃ 8 וַיֹּאמַר הָגָר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי־מִזֶּה בָאת וְאָנָה תֵלֵכִי וַתֹּאמֶר מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבִרְתִּי אָנֹכִי בֹרַחַת׃ 9 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה שׁוּבִי אֶל־גְּבִרְתֵּךְ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַּחַת יָדֶיהָ׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה

הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֵךְ
וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב׃

נקוד על י׳ בתראה v. 5.

5. ***The wrong done me*** On Hebrew *ḥamas,* see Comment to 6:11.

is your fault By giving Hagar to Abram, Sarai has relinquished her exclusive authority over her, and it is Abram's responsibility to control her behavior.

6. ***Sarai treated her harshly*** The laws of Ur-Nammu prescribe that the insolent concubine-slave have "her mouth scoured with one quart of salt," while Hammurabi prescribes that she be reduced to slave status and again bear the slave mark. The Hebrew verb used here implies that Sarai subjected Hagar to physical and psychological abuse. It carries with it the nuance of critical judgment of her actions. According to Ramban, "the matriarch sinned by such maltreatment, and Abraham too by permitting it."

HAGAR AND THE ANGEL (vv. 7–14)

As between Sarai and Hagar, there is no doubt as to where the sympathies of the Narrator lie. God, the guardian of the weak and the suffering, reveals Himself to the lowly Egyptian maidservant, bringing her a message of hope and comfort.

7. ***An angel of the LORD*** This is the first appearance of an angel in biblical literature. See Excursus 10.

on the road to Shur Hagar fled in the direction of her native land, for Shur is elsewhere described as being "close to Egypt." Since *shur* (Aram. *shura*) means a wall, the reference is most probably to the wall of fortifications built in the eastern Delta along the line of the present-day Isthmus of Suez in order to protect Egypt from the incursions of Asiatics. The "Prophecy of Neferrohu (Neferti)," purporting to derive from ca. 2650 B.C.E., already mentions the "Wall of the Ruler" to be built so that "the Asiatics will not be permitted to come down into Egypt." The Story of Sinuhe (20th cent. B.C.E.) likewise speaks of the "Wall of the Ruler made to oppose the Asiatics and to crush the Sand-Crossers."

In the Hebrew, the "spring on the road to Shur" contains a play on words: *'ayin* may mean "an eye" as well as "a spring," and *shur* can mean "to see" and also "a wall." The verb *sh-u-r* is used together with *'ayin* in poetic texts. The place where Hagar takes refuge thus suggests "a seeing eye." She calls God *El-roi,* "God of seeing," and the well after the "Living One Who sees me" (v. 13).[7]

8. The angel knows who she is. His encounter with Hagar is not fortuitous but deliberate and purposeful.

10–12. This is the first of several such instances of an announcement by a divine messenger

[11]The angel of the LORD said to her further,
"Behold, you are with child
And shall bear a son;
You shall call him Ishmael,
For the LORD has paid heed to your suffering.
[12]He shall be a wild ass of a man;
His hand against everyone,
And everyone's hand against him;
He shall dwell alongside of all his kinsmen."
[13]And she called the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi," by which she meant, "Have I not gone on seeing after He saw me!" [14]Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi;

יא וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה
הִנָּךְ הָרָה וְיֹלַדְתְּ בֵּן
וְקָרָאת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁמָעֵאל
כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה אֶל־עָנְיֵךְ׃
יב וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פֶּרֶא אָדָם
יָדוֹ בַכֹּל
וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ
וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן׃
יג וַתִּקְרָא שֵׁם־יְהוָה הַדֹּבֵר אֵלֶיהָ אַתָּה אֵל רֳאִי
כִּי אָמְרָה הֲגַם הֲלֹם רָאִיתִי אַחֲרֵי רֹאִי׃ יד עַל־כֵּן

predicting the birth and destiny of one who is given a special role in God's scheme of history.[8] This event anticipates the divine promise to the patriarch in 17:3–6 that he will be the father of many nations.

*10. **increase your offspring*** Ishmael is to become the father of twelve tribes and of a great nation.[9] The fulfillment of the promise is later recorded in 25:12–18.

*11. **Ishmael*** The name means "God hears." It originated as an indication of a divine response to the prayer of the parents for a son or as a prayer name expressing the hope that God may heed the infant's cry for help. It has turned up in the Mari texts. Here the name is given a special twist and is interpreted as "God has paid heed to your suffering." This constitutes a unique phrase in the Hebrew, it being an amalgam of two distinct idioms. Generally, God "sees *(r-'-h)* suffering," as in Genesis 29:32 and Exodus 4:31, and "heeded *(sh-m-')* their outcry," as in Exodus 3:7 and Deuteronomy 26:7.

*12. **a wild ass of a man*** Like the wild ass among the beasts, so are the Ishmaelites among men. In their nature and destiny they call to mind the sturdy, fearless, and fleet-footed Syrian onager (Heb. *pere'*), who inhabits the wilderness and is almost impossible to domesticate. Jeremiah describes the wild ass of the desert: "snuffing the wind in her eagerness, whose passion none can restrain."[10] Hagar, the abused slave woman subjected to the harsh discipline of her mistress, will produce a people free and undisciplined.

His hand against everyone This prediction reflects the unceasing tension that exists between the sedentary and nomadic populations in the Near East.

alongside of all his kinsmen The idea seems to be that the Ishmaelites and related tribes will live in close proximity to each other. Hebrew *'al penei* may also express defiance and hostility, and the phrase could as well be translated "at odds with all his kinsmen."[11]

13. Hagar the slave is spiritually stirred by her revelatory experience. She has become conscious of God's concern for the downtrodden.

she called the LORD Literally, "she called the name of YHVH." The name is inextricably bound up with existence and with the nature and character of the Being who bears it (see Comment to 1:5). Hagar gives expression to her personal discovery by designating God after the particular aspect of His providence that she has experienced.

El-roi The vocalization of the second element occasions a marvelous ambiguity that permits the following translations of the name: "God of seeing," that is, the all-seeing God; "God of my seeing," that is, whom I have seen; "God who sees me." Most likely, the several meanings are intended to be apprehended simultaneously.[12] When God "sees," it is, of course, that He shows His concern and extends His protection; when Hagar "sees," she experiences God's self-manifestation.

"Have I not . . ." The difficulties in the Hebrew text are formidable, but the statement combines the "seeing" on the part of both Hagar and God in both senses of the word.

it is between Kadesh and Bered.—[15]Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael. [16]Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

בָּרֶד: 15 וַתֵּלֶד הָגָר לְאַבְרָם בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם
שֵׁם־בְּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה הָגָר יִשְׁמָעֵאל: 16 וְאַבְרָם
בֶּן־שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים בְּלֶדֶת־הָגָר אֶת־
יִשְׁמָעֵאל לְאַבְרָם: ס

14. ***Beer-lahai-roi*** This is either a newly coined name or the reinterpretation of an old one. In the latter case, the original meaning was probably "the well belonging to the clan of Roi." Arabic *ḥayy* means "a clan,"[13] and Roi could be a proper name. The well is mentioned again only in connection with Isaac, in Genesis 24:62 and 25:11.

Verse 7 calls it a "spring of water" instead of "a well," and the same interchange of terms is found in 24:11,13. Strictly, a spring (Heb. *'ayin*) is a subsurface water source that discharges with a perceptible current at ground level through a natural opening. A well (Heb. *be'er*) is an excavated hole that permits underground water to be brought to the surface by a pitcher or a bucket. Since wells may be dug for greater convenience in the vicinity of springs, the two terms could be used interchangeably. It is also possible that Hebrew *be'er* could have had a wider connotation than what is understood by the modern English term "well." As a matter of fact, Anglo-Saxon *wylla* or *wella* means a spring and also a well.

15. The narrative is very terse. It takes for granted that Hagar returned to Sarai, as bidden. Significantly, it is Abram who named the child, not Hagar, thus implying that he legitimated him (cf. 21:11; 25:9). It is noteworthy that the image of Ishmael in the Bible, as distinct from later Jewish literature, is by and large not a negative one. He is not an inveterate enemy of Israel. In fact, there seems to have been some intermingling between the tribe of Simeon and the Ishmaelites, for the clans of Mibsam and Mishma are associated with both, as proved by Genesis 25:13 and 1 Chronicles 4:25. The Ishmaelites do not appear among the victims of David's raids into the south lands, even though these incursions encroach upon their habitat, as is clear from 1 Samuel 27:8 and Genesis 25:18. David's sister married "Jether the Ishmaelite," according to 1 Chronicles 2:17, and among the administrators of crown property under David were "Obil the Ishmaelite" and "Jaziz the Hagrite," according to 1 Chronicles 27:30f.

16. ***Hagar bore Ishmael*** Psalms 83:7 and 1 Chronicles 27:30f. suggest some association between the Hagrites and Ishmaelites, and Genesis 25:15 and 1 Chronicles 5:19 record Jetur and Naphish among the clan lists of both peoples.

CHAPTER 17

The Covenant in the Flesh (vv. 1–27)

Sarai's desperate stratagem has failed. Thirteen more years pass, and God's promises still remain unfulfilled. We learn nothing of Abram's activities during the intervening period. The biblical Narrator focuses solely on those events that bear upon the destiny of the nation yet to be born. Suddenly Abram receives a series of divine communications that not only reaffirm the assurances of posterity and national territory but also broaden their scope and add a note of specificity. In addition, Abram and Sarai both receive new names. The high point of the chapter comes with the introduction of the law of circumcision, "the covenant in the flesh."

The section divides into four parts, artistically set forth in a carefully designed arrangement as follows:

(1) Verses 1–8
Abram is to be the progenitor of numerous nations and of kings.
His name is changed.

(2) Verses 9–14
The law of circumcision is set forth.

(3) Verses 15–22
Sarai is to be the progenitrix of numerous nations and of kings.
Her name is changed.

(4) Verses 23–27
The law of circumcision is carried out.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. 2I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous."

3Abram threw himself on his face; and God spoke to him

יז וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים שָׁנָה וְתֵשַׁע שָׁנִים
וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי
הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנַי וֶהְיֵה תָמִים: 2 וְאֶתְּנָה בְרִיתִי בֵּינִי
וּבֵינֶךָ וְאַרְבֶּה אוֹתְךָ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד: 3 וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָם
עַל־פָּנָיו וַיְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר: 4 אֲנִי הִנֵּה

The "covenant in the flesh" has much in common with the "covenant between the pieces" of chapter 15, presupposing and supplementing it in various ways. The covenant ceremony there described is the basis for the key term *berit,* "covenant," which the Narrator employs more than a dozen times in this chapter. Here, moreover, this covenant is thrice redefined as an "everlasting covenant" (vv. 7,13,19). In the earlier passage Abram is a passive recipient of God's unilateral obligation. Now God summons him to be an active partner in the covenant. In both sections the revelation opens with the divine, self-introductory formula, "I am . . ." (15:7; 17:1). Both promise a son, but here, for the first time, the matriarch is specifically designated as the future mother (15:4; 17:16,19,21). Both chapters promise numerous progeny (15:4f.; 17:4ff.) and national territory, but here the latter is to be "an everlasting possession" (15:18; 17:8). Finally, both sections record the patriarch's emotional reaction to God's announcement (15:3,8; 17:17).

The connection between chapters 15 and 17, which was recognized early, is reflected in a later biblical prayer that interweaves citations from both: "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram, who brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and changed his name to Abraham. Finding his heart true to You, You made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, and Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite—to give it to his descendants" (Neh. 9:7f.).

THE CHANGE OF ABRAM'S NAME (vv. 1–8)

1. ***the LORD*** Since this is the sole appearance of the name YHVH in this chapter, as opposed to nine usages of *'elohim,* the exception must be purposeful. The idea is to leave no doubt that the name "El Shaddai" is to be identified with YHVH. This accords exactly with Exodus 6:2f., "I am the LORD (YHVH). I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai. . . ." Use of the name YHVH forges an immediate link with the covenant of chapter 15 made by God under that name.

I am . . . For this introductory, self-identifying formula, see Comment to 15:7.

El Shaddai Although this divine name is usually translated in the English versions as "God Almighty," there are no convincing traditions as to its meaning and little etymological justification for this particular rendering. See Excursus 11.

Walk in My ways Literally, "Walk before Me" (cf. 6:9). As the corresponding Akkadian phrase *ina maḫriya ittallak* indicates, this expression seems originally to have been a technical term for absolute loyalty to a king. It appears in Assyrian land-grant documents in which the monarch rewards his subject with a grant of land in perpetuity. In the Bible, to "walk before God" takes on an added dimension. Allegiance to Him means to condition the entire range of human experience by the awareness of His presence and in response to His demands.

and be blameless The phrase is a near synonym of the preceding clause. Because Hebrew *tamim* is often used in ritual texts in the sense of "without blemish," as for instance in Leviticus 1:3,10, rabbinic tradition, in Genesis Rabba 46:1, connects the term to the following law of circumcision. In this view, circumcision removes the "blemish" from the male person by making him a whole being, so to speak, in his relationship to God.[1]

3. ***threw himself on his face*** An expression of awe and submission in the presence of the Lord.[2]

further, 4"As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations. 6I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. 7I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. 8I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God."

בְּרִיתִי אִתָּךְ וְהָיִיתָ לְאַב הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם: 5 וְלֹא־יִקָּרֵא
עוֹד אֶת־שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שִׁמְךָ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אַב־
הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם נְתַתִּיךָ: 6 וְהִפְרֵתִי אֹתְךָ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד
וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְגוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים מִמְּךָ יֵצֵאוּ: שביעי
7 וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ
אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם לִהְיוֹת לְךָ
לֵאלֹהִים וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ: 8 וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ וּלְזַרְעֲךָ
אַחֲרֶיךָ אֵת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן
לַאֲחֻזַּת עוֹלָם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר

*4. **father of a multitude of nations*** In the narrow sense, the reference may be to the Ishmaelites, Edomites, Midianites, and several other peoples descended from Abraham, according to the genealogical lists of Genesis 25 and 36. However, the phrase has a more universal application in that a larger segment of humanity looks upon Abraham as its spiritual father.

5. The expansion of his name from "Abram" to "Abraham" is in harmony with the patriarch's extended role. In light of the great importance with which the Bible invests name-giving generally, a change of name is of major significance and symbolizes the transformation of character and destiny.[3] In the psychology of the ancient Near Eastern world, a name was not merely a convenient means of identification but was intimately bound up with the very essence of being and inextricably intertwined with personality (see Comment to 1:5). The inauguration of a new era or a new state policy would frequently be marked by the assumption of a new name on the part of the king. A classic example is the case of Amen-hotep IV of Egypt, whose change of name to Akh-en-aten testified to the revolutionary new theology that he imposed on his people. The Bible records several examples of name changes for leading personalities.

Abram . . . Abraham See Comment to 11:26 and Note. Henceforth the patriarch is referred to invariably by the expanded form of his name, which carries with it an intimation of his God-given destiny. The meaning imposed upon the name Abraham—"the father of a multitude of nations"—is not etymological but is obtained by giving a literalistic twist to the initial divine promise in Genesis 12:2, "I will make your name great," that is, your name Abram will be enlarged by the addition of a syllable. The anomalous grammatical formulation supports the midrashic nature of the interpretation. It is possible that, by means of word play, the consonants *ABRHM* were interpreted as shorthand (called *notarikon* in postbiblical Hebrew) for *ABiR* ("mighty one") and *Hamon* ("multitude") + *goyiM* ("nations"), as Ibn Ezra suggests.[4]

*6. **kings*** The same promise recurs in verse 16; 35:11. In the context of the times, kingship is the consummation of the process of national development. The Davidic dynasty is the fulfillment of this promise.

*7. **to be God to you*** So again in verse 8. This phrase belongs to the formal language of the covenant and recurs frequently in the Bible. God elects Israel to be His special people; He demands exclusive allegiance in return.[5]

to you and to your offspring to come This expression occurs six times in this chapter (vv. 7[2],8,9,10,20) and also appears in 35:12 and 48:4 in connection with the covenantal promises. It too is legal terminology, as shown by the Aramaic legal papyri from the Jewish military colony at Elephantine (Aswan), Egypt (6th–5th cents. B.C.E.). The inclusion of the phrase in documents relating to the devolution of property upon the death of the owner assured that the real estate automatically passed on from generation to generation without restriction.

*8. **an everlasting holding*** A phrase used again in 48:4. National ownership of the land is to be eternal, like the covenant itself. As Radak remarks, "Even though the people might be exiled from it for a while, yet it remains their inalienable possession, and they will return to it."

אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִּשְׁמֹר
אַתָּה וְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ לְדֹרֹתָם: 10 זֹאת בְּרִיתִי
אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ
הִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר: 11 וּנְמַלְתֶּם אֵת בְּשַׂר
עָרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם:
12 וּבֶן־שְׁמֹנַת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם
יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנַת־כֶּסֶף מִכֹּל בֶּן־נֵכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא
מִזַּרְעֲךָ הוּא: 13 הִמּוֹל יִמּוֹל יְלִיד בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנַת
כַּסְפֶּךָ וְהָיְתָה בְרִיתִי בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם לִבְרִית עוֹלָם:
14 וְעָרֵל זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמּוֹל אֶת־בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ

[9]God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. [10]Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. [11]You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. [12]And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, [13]they must be circumcised, homeborn and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact. [14]And if any male who is uncircumcised

I will be their God Compare verse 7. The association of the Jewish people, the Land of Israel, and God is indissoluble and constitutes the rock on which Jewish civilization is built.

THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION (vv. 9–14)

God's promises demand an active response from their recipients. Circumcision is both a token of God's covenant and a symbol of the Jew's consecration and commitment to a life lived in the consciousness of that covenant (see Excursus 12). The law of circumcision that now follows is the first *mitsvah* in the Torah that is specifically directed to Abraham and his descendants.

The section comprising verses 10–14 appears to derive from a collection of laws. The introductory phrase, "Such . . ." (Heb. *zo't,* "This is . . .") is characteristic of scores of laws in ritual texts (cf., e.g., Exod. 12:43; Lev. 6:2,18), while the formulation in the second person plural shows that the section originally belonged in a legal setting, addressed to an entire community and not to an individual. As a matter of fact, the entire passage can be read as a coherent unit independent of those phrases formulated in the singular. This proves that the latter were added to the original when the legal extract was incorporated intact into our narrative.

9. ***As for you*** This is the counterpart of "As for Me" in verse 4.

10. ***every male*** This restriction intentionally excludes the practice of clitoridectomy, or female circumcision, found in many parts of the world.

11. ***the sign*** An outward, physical reminder of the existence of the covenant, like the rainbow after the Flood. See Comment to 9:12–17.

12. ***eight days*** The radical reinterpretation of the common practice of circumcision from a pubertal or nuptial rite to a covenantal rite is reinforced by the unique shift of the operation to the eighth day after birth. The incidental result, noted in a midrash, is that the rite becomes more humane because it avoids the physical and psychological effects attendant upon the performance of circumcision at a more mature age.[6] The eighth day is particularly significant because the newborn has completed a seven-day unit of time corresponding to the process of Creation. In like manner, Exodus 22:29 stipulates that the first-born of an animal is dedicated only on the eighth day after birth, and Leviticus 22:27 lays down that an animal is not fit for sacrifice before that day.

who is not of your offspring This explanatory note is unique among the numerous passages that mention the "outsider" (Heb. *ben nekhar*). It is occasioned by the recurring reference to "your offspring" in this chapter.

13. ***marked in your flesh*** "Flesh" is here most likely a euphemism for "penis," as in Leviticus 15:2ff. and Ezekiel 16:26 and 23:20. The ineradicable nature of circumcision symbolized the enduring, irrevocable nature of the covenant.

fails to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his kin; he has broken My covenant."

15And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. 16I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her." 17Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" 18And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!" 19God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah

וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַמֶּיהָ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי הֵפַר׃
ס 15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שָׂרַי
אִשְׁתְּךָ לֹא־תִקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ שָׂרַי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ׃
16 וּבֵרַכְתִּי אֹתָהּ וְגַם נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְךָ בֵּן
וּבֵרַכְתִּיהָ וְהָיְתָה לְגוֹיִם מַלְכֵי עַמִּים מִמֶּנָּה יִהְיוּ׃
17 וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל־פָּנָיו וַיִּצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ
הַלְבֶן מֵאָה־שָׁנָה יִוָּלֵד וְאִם־שָׂרָה הֲבַת־תִּשְׁעִים
שָׁנָה תֵּלֵד׃ 18 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים לוּ
יִשְׁמָעֵאל יִחְיֶה לְפָנֶיךָ׃ 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֲבָל

14. his foreskin That is, his own foreskin. Where the father fails to fulfill his duty, the responsibility falls upon the individual himself when he reaches maturity.

shall be cut off There are thirty-six instances of this formula in the Torah, all of them listed in Mishnah Keritot 1:1. The punishment, known as *[hik]karet* in rabbinic parlance, is peculiar to ritual texts and is largely confined to offenses of a cultic and sexual nature. The Torah gives no definition of *karet,* and no analogy exists in Near Eastern sources. In most texts the impersonal, passive form of the verb is used, as here, so that not only the type of punishment but also the executive authority is uncertain. In Leviticus 20:1–6 the active first person is used with God as the subject of the verb: "I will set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people." This reasonably leads to the assumption that *karet* is not a punishment enforced in the courts, but a penalty left to divine execution. Such is the understanding of the term in rabbinic literature, where it means specifically premature death (Sifra Emor 14:4; MK 28a; TJ Bik. 2:1 [64c]) and, according to some, also childlessness (cf. Lev. 20:18–20). Certainly, the general idea is that one who deliberately excludes himself from the religious community cannot be a beneficiary of the covenantal blessings and thereby dooms himself and his line to extinction.

THE CHANGE OF SARAI'S NAME (vv. 15–22)

Abram's name change is connected with the law of circumcision. That of Sarai must therefore be separately recorded.

15. Sarai . . . Sarah No interpretation of the matriarch's name is given, but the succeeding blessing about "kings/rulers" who will issue from her suggests an implicit midrash based on word play, for Hebrew *sar,* "prince, ruler," is often paired with *melekh,* "king." Further, there may well be an oblique reference to Sarah as the progenitrix of the future *Israel,* for in Genesis 32:29 that name is said to derive from Jacob's having "striven with beings divine and human." The Hebrew verb stem used there is *s-r-h.*

In fact, the revised form *sarah* is simply a modernizing of the archaic *sarai,* the second syllable being an old Semitic female ending.[7]

17. threw himself on his face Compare verse 3.

and laughed The laughter foretokens the name of the son of destiny that Sarah will bear him (v. 19). Is it the laughter of joy, surprise, doubt—or perhaps a little of each?

Can . . . or can . . . ? The double question essentially describes two conditions that in combination produce a state of affairs that is manifestly inimical to the notion of Abraham and Sarah producing a child.

18. by Your favor Hebrew *lifnei* seems to have this meaning in other texts (cf. Gen. 10:9; 27:7; Hos. 6:2). Abraham fears for the life of Ishmael because God's words appear wholly to exclude the boy from the benefits of the covenant.

your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come. [20]As for Ishmael, I have heeded you. I hereby bless him. I will make him fertile and exceedingly numerous. He shall be the father of twelve chieftains, and I will make of him a great nation. [21]But My covenant I will maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." [22]And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham.

[23]Then Abraham took his son Ishmael, and all his home-born slaves and all those he had bought, every male in Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins on that very day, as God had spoken to him. [24]Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin, [25]and his son Ishmael was thirteen

שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ יֹלֶדֶת לְךָ בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ
יִצְחָק וַהֲקִמֹתִי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לִבְרִית עוֹלָם
לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו: 20 וּלְיִשְׁמָעֵאל שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ הִנֵּה
בֵּרַכְתִּי אֹתוֹ וְהִפְרֵיתִי אֹתוֹ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֹתוֹ בִּמְאֹד
מְאֹד שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר נְשִׂיאִם יוֹלִיד וּנְתַתִּיו לְגוֹי
גָּדוֹל: 21 וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי אָקִים אֶת־יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר
תֵּלֶד לְךָ שָׂרָה לַמּוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בַּשָּׁנָה הָאַחֶרֶת:
22 וַיְכַל לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ וַיַּעַל אֱלֹהִים מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם:
23 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־
יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־מְקֻנַת כַּסְפּוֹ כָּל־זָכָר בְּאַנְשֵׁי
בֵּית אַבְרָהָם וַיָּמָל אֶת־בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתָם בְּעֶצֶם
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ אֱלֹהִים: מפטיר
24 וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־תִּשְׁעִים וְתֵשַׁע שָׁנָה בְּהִמֹּלוֹ בְּשַׂר
עָרְלָתוֹ: 25 וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה

19–21. God reassures Abraham, point by point.

19. ***Isaac*** Hebrew *yitsḥak* is a verbal form meaning "He laughs." It is almost certainly an abbreviation ("hypocoristicon") of an original, fuller theophoric form *yitsḥak-'el,* "El laughs," after the pattern of *yishma'-'el.* The full form is never found in the Bible, nor is any other proper name ever compounded with this stem. Nevertheless, all three biblical traditions relating to the birth of Isaac (cf. 17:19; 18:12[1]; 21:6) emphatically connect the name with human laughter. The explanation for all this is twofold. On the one hand, there is a deliberate dissociation from the pagan, mythological origin of *yitsḥak-'el,* which reflects the laughter and merriment of the gods, something entirely devoid of moral and historical significance. On the other hand, the laughter of God in the Bible, by contrast, invariably expresses His reaction to the ludicrous attempts of men to act independently of His will and in defiance of it (Pss. 2:4; 37:13; 59:9). The repeated laughter of humans in connection with the birth of Isaac is, in a sense, the inverse of God's laughter, for it is a questioning of divine sovereignty (cf. 18:14). The person of Isaac, therefore, represents the triumph of the power of God over the limitations of nature. No wonder he receives his name from God Himself.[8]

20. ***Ishmael . . . heeded*** See Comments to 16:3,11. Although Ishmael is not to be Abraham's spiritual heir, he too receives God's blessing and has his own destiny to pursue.

twelve chieftains Corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. They are listed in 25:12–16.

21. ***at this season next year*** Compare 18:10,14; 2 Kings 4:16.

22. ***God was gone*** Literally, "went up," implying that God had "come down"[9] to speak with Abraham. The latter verb frequently occurs in a context of divine self-manifestation, so that its antonym, "to go up," means the termination of divine communication.

THE LAW OF CIRCUMCISION CARRIED OUT (vv. 23–27)

Without delay, "on that very day," Abraham fulfills the divine command and circumcises the entire male population of his household. The concept of kinship here is that of the residential unit, whether interrelated familially or not. Abraham's household constitutes an inclusive community henceforth united by the common symbol of circumcision as a newly adopted rite, deriving from a divine command and not from tradition. However, it is clear from verse 21 that heirship to the covenant promises is to be based on an exclusive matrilineal principle.

years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. [26]Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day; [27]and all his household, his homeborn slaves and those that had been bought from outsiders, were circumcised with him.

בְּהִמֹּלוֹ אֵת בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ׃ 26 בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
נִמּוֹל אַבְרָהָם וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ׃ 27 וְכָל־אַנְשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ
יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנַת־כֶּסֶף מֵאֵת בֶּן־נֵכָר נִמֹּלוּ אִתּוֹ׃
פ

VA-YERA'

18 The LORD appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre; he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot. [2]Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of

וירא
י״ח וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְרֵא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב
פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם׃ 2 וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה
שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיַּרְא וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתָם

CHAPTER 18

The Character of Abraham; The Nature of God (vv. 1–33)

Va-Yera'

The chapter divides into two distinct parts. Verses 1–15 tell of the appearance of angelic visitors to Abraham, while verses 17–33 deal with the intended divine visitation upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 16 effects the transition between the sections. Although the two topics appear to be discrete, they are closely interconnected. The first carries a message of life and posterity, the second of death and everlasting destruction. Both reveal the nobility of Abraham's character; both disclose the workings of divine Providence.

Not only is the chapter a unity, it also has several points of contact with the preceding narrative and is, in fact, dependent upon it. Abraham, whose name does not appear until verse 6, is repeatedly referred to as "he" and "him"; his identity is clear only from chapter 17. Sarah's childlessness is assumed to be a known fact and is not mentioned, although her advanced age is emphasized. The statement of 17:9f. that the covenant in the flesh is to be continued and reaffirmed generation after generation has its counterpart here in verse 19 in the moral legacy that Abraham is to bequeath to his offspring. Finally, there is much similarity between the incredulous laughter of Abraham in 17:16–21 and that of Sarah in verses 10–14 of the present chapter.

HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS (vv. 1–8)

1. ***The LORD appeared to him*** This is the only example of this formula being used without some verbal declaration immediately following. Here, it seems to be a general statement followed by a detailed description of theophany or divine self-revelation, mediated in this instance through angelic messengers.[1] Unlike the previous theophanies, this one is not accompanied by an act of worship or the building of an altar; in actual fact, hospitality to strangers itself becomes an act of worship. As the Talmud puts it, "Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than welcoming the Divine Presence" (Shab. 127a).

the terebinths of Mamre That is, in the area of Hebron. These have been discussed in the Comment to 13:18.

as the day grew hot Toward noontime. The Bible does not know of the atomizing of time into separate units and contains no precise vocabulary for its division into hours, minutes, and seconds. A particular time of the day is designated by a subjective experience such as a cooling breeze, the degree of the sun's heat, or the dawning of light.[2]

2. ***Looking up, he saw*** The wayfarers appear with startling suddenness at a time of the day when people would not normally be out.

the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, [3]he said, "My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. [4]Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. [5]And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant's way." They replied, "Do as you have said."

Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Quick, three *seahs* of choice flour! Knead and make cakes!" [7]Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it. [8]He took curds and milk and the calf that had

מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אָרְצָה: 3 וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי
אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל
עַבְדֶּךָ: 4 יֻקַּח־נָא מְעַט־מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם
וְהִשָּׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ: 5 וְאֶקְחָה פַת־לֶחֶם וְסַעֲדוּ
לִבְּכֶם אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ כִּי־עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל־
עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַּעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:
6 וַיְמַהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֱלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מַהֲרִי
שְׁלֹשׁ סְאִים קֶמַח סֹלֶת לוּשִׁי וַעֲשִׂי עֻגוֹת:
7 וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רָץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בֶּן־בָּקָר רַךְ וָטוֹב
וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנַּעַר וַיְמַהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: 8 וַיִּקַּח
חֶמְאָה וְחָלָב וּבֶן־הַבָּקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לִפְנֵיהֶם

three men There seems to be nothing superhuman about their appearance. Abraham perceives them to be human, as do the people of Sodom (19:5). They are repeatedly designated "men," although they are also called "angels."[3] Their arrival as a group of three is without analogy in the Bible. Chapter 19:1 mentions "the two angels," which suggests that the third was manifestly different. Indeed, Abraham speaks to, and is in turn addressed by, one of them directly (vv. 4,10). Perhaps the other two are his attendants.

he ran Abraham does not wait for them to approach but takes the initiative in offering hospitality.

bowing to the ground A gesture of honor and respect reinforced by the reference to himself as "your servant."[4]

3. The English translation obscures some difficulties in the Hebrew text. The verbs in verse 3 are in the singular, indicating that only one of the three strangers is spoken to, whereas those in verses 4–5 are in the plural. Genesis Rabba 48:9, Rashi, and Ramban explain that Abraham addresses himself to the leader but that his invitation applies to all three. Another problem is the opening vocative, which is in the plural, *'adonai,* with a final long vowel, the use of which is otherwise reserved for God. Rabbinic opinion in Shevu'ot 35b is divided as to whether *'adonai* is in this instance secular or sacred. Rashi and Ibn Ezra understand it to mean "My lords"; Maimonides renders it "My Lord."[5] Since it is clear that the patriarch at this point is unaware of the true identity of the strangers, the present vocalization serves as an indication to the reader that the three "men" are no ordinary wayfarers.

4–8. Abraham's openhearted, liberal hospitality to the total strangers knows no bounds. He has water brought for them to bathe their feet, a much appreciated comfort to the traveler with his sandal-like footwear and the pervasive dust of the roads (cf. Judg. 19:21). He invites them to rest under "the tree," probably one of the famous local terebinths. He promises to fetch "a morsel of bread" but prepares a lavish feast. The Talmud remarks, "Such is the way of the righteous; they promise little but perform much" (BM 87a). In asking Sarah to bake cakes, Abraham specifies the use of "choice flour," that is, the finest and choicest of wheat flour, the type from which meal offerings were later brought to the sanctuary.[6] He himself selects the calf for the main dish, a rare delicacy and a sign of princely hospitality among pastoralists. He provides curds and milk, the basic products of a pastoral economy. Curds are the coagulated state of the fatty part of the milk, corresponding to the modern *leben* or yogurt. Milk was highly esteemed in the ancient Near East and was offered to the gods. It was regarded as a source of vitality and possessor of curative powers. Abraham personally serves the strangers this rich fare and stands close by, ready to attend to their needs.

as they ate Early exegesis, as represented by Josephus (Ant. 1.197), Targum Jonathan, and the Talmud, would not accept the notion of angels partaking of food and understood the phrase to mean that they only gave the appearance of eating (BM 86b).[7]

been prepared and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate.

9They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he replied, "There, in the tent." 10Then one said, "I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!" Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, which was behind him. 11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years; Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. 12And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?" 13Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?' 14Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." 15Sarah lied,

וְהוּא־עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃ 9 וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלָיו אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֹהֶל׃
10 וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וְהִנֵּה־בֵן
לְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְהוּא
אַחֲרָיו׃ 11 וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זְקֵנִים בָּאִים בַּיָּמִים
חָדַל לִהְיוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים׃ 12 וַתִּצְחַק
שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר אַחֲרֵי בְלֹתִי הָיְתָה־לִּי עֶדְנָה
וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן׃ 13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לָמָּה זֶּה
צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הַאַף אָמְנָם אֵלֵד וַאֲנִי זָקַנְתִּי׃
14 הֲיִפָּלֵא מֵיְהוָה דָּבָר לַמּוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת
חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵּן׃ 15 וַתְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר

v. 9. נקוד על איו

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT SARAH (vv. 9–15)

*9. **Where is your wife Sarah?*** As noted by Rashbam, the question is merely a rhetorical device for the purpose of politely opening a conversation about Sarah. See Comment to 3:9.[8]

10. The divine promise has been unfolding in stages. First, in 15:4, Abraham was assured that his heir would be a natural-born son; then, in 17:16–21, he was assured that Sarah would bear this child; now a time limit is set for the fulfillment of the promise.

Then one said The translation "one" is justified by the singular Hebrew verb, following the plural of verse 9.

I will return The supernatural character of the visitors now asserts itself. The statement is not meant to be literal. It simply means, as Ramban noted, that by this time next year the prediction will have been fulfilled.

next year Compare 17:21. The phrase *ka-'et ḥayyah* recurs only in 2 Kings 4:16f. and in a similar context. Its exact meaning is uncertain. The first element is "at the/this time." The second is taken by Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, and Radak to be the postbiblical *ḥay(y)ah,* "a pregnant woman." The phrase would then refer to the nine months of pregnancy. Alternately, *ḥayyah* could also simply mean "life," as in Ezekiel 7:13 and Job 33:18,20.

11. The verse gives the background to Sarah's reaction.

the periods of women Literally, "the way of women." The phrase refers to the menstrual cycle, just as it clearly does in 31:35. Mention of this fact is intended to indicate that the emergence of the people of Israel is an extraordinary event. Its life and destiny are under God's special guidance and are not subject to what seem to be the ordinary norms of history.

*12. **Sarah laughed*** See Comment to 17:17,19.

enjoyment Hebrew *'ednah* is now known to mean "abundant moisture" and is an exact antonym of "withered."

*13. **Then the LORD said*** As explained in Excursus 10, God and His angels often speak interchangeably.

to Abraham The patriarch maintains a discreet silence.

old as I am The reference to Abraham's advanced age is tactfully omitted.[9]

*15. **Sarah lied*** The Bible does not gloss over the human failings of national heroes. See Comment to 12:13.

saying, "I did not laugh," for she was frightened. But He replied, "You did laugh."

16The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off. 17Now the LORD had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? 19For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right, in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him." 20Then the LORD said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! 21I will go

לֹא צָחַקְתִּי כִּי יָרֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִּי צָחָקְתְּ׃
16 וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם
וְאַבְרָהָם הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם׃ 17 וַיהוָה אָמָר
הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה׃
18 וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוֹ יִהְיֶה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעָצוּם וְנִבְרְכוּ בּוֹ
כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ׃ 19 כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְצַוֶּה
אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה
לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל־
אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו׃ 20 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה
מְאֹד׃ 21 אֵרְדָה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה

she was frightened No wonder, for she had laughed not out loud but to herself, and her innermost thoughts had been read!

16. This statement deftly and smoothly forges the link between the first scene and the next, firmly closing the one and delicately intimating the other.

looked down toward Sodom They must have been standing at some vantage point within walking distance from Hebron from which the Dead Sea region was visible.[10]

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT SODOM (vv. 17–22)

God now makes Abraham privy to one of His historic decisions. Ten generations earlier He had disclosed His secret purposes to Noah (6:12f.), but only in order to save the man's life. Here foreknowledge permits Abraham to plead disinterestedly for other people's lives. One is reminded of the words of Amos in 3:7, "Indeed, My Lord GOD does nothing / Without having revealed His purpose / To His servants the prophets." Jeremiah, in 23:18, expresses the same notion when he refers to the one "who has stood in the council of the LORD, / And seen and heard His word." In the case of the prophets, the divine foretelling is an expression of God's love for humanity, meant to warn of impending calamity in the hope of bringing about repentance and the enhancement of the human condition. Such was the case, for instance, in the Book of Jonah. In this prior revelation to Abraham of God's intentions toward Sodom, both the patriarch's humanity and God's morality are put to the test.

Abraham is granted this singular privilege because he symbolizes the future Jewish nation, which is destined to become a source of blessing to other nations. As such, he cannot avoid direct involvement in the fortunes of humanity at large. At the same time, he is the repository of those eternal values of righteousness and justice that constitute "the way of the Lord." God relies upon him to transmit this heritage to his posterity, which is the indispensable precondition for the fulfillment of the divine promises. The lessons of Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment of God, and the actions of Abraham exemplify the principles of justice and righteousness, divine and human.

19. singled him out He enjoys a special degree of intimacy with God. For this nuance of Hebrew *y-d-ʿ*, see Comment to 4:1.

instruct In the Bible the education of the young is the responsibility of parents. The Hebrew phrase, not usually used in this context, literally means "he will enjoin . . . after him." Used here, it implies a charge made in anticipation of death and indicates that the inculcation of moral values constitutes the richest and most enduring of legacies.[11]

20–22. The sin and cataclysmic punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah have converted the names of those two cities into a permanent metaphor of human wickedness and divine retribution.

The first hint of the immorality of their inhabitants was the bare observation in 13:13 that they

down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note."

[22]The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. [23]Abraham came

אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כְּלָה וְאִם־לֹא אֵדָעָה׃ 22 וַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם
הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה׃ 23 וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה צַדִּיק

were "very wicked sinners against the LORD." The narrative now speaks of "outrage" and "outcry" (so also 19:13). These two terms are identical; the Hebrew stems *z-ʿ-k* and *ts-ʿ-k* are simply dialectical variants of each other. They connote the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the victim for help in the face of some great injustice. In the Bible these terms are suffused with poignancy and pathos, with moral outrage and soul-stirring passion. God heeded the "outcry" (Heb. *tseʿakah*) of His people against the harsh slavery of Egypt in Exodus 3:7; His "anger blazes forth" when He hears the "outcry" of the ill-treated widow and orphan in Exodus 22:21–23; and to the prophet Isaiah, in 5:7, an "outcry" is the absolute negation of justice and righteousness: "And He hoped for justice, / But behold, injustice; / For righteousness, / but behold, an outcry." *Tseʿakah* is especially used in connection with the suffering of the poor and the impoverished victims of avaricious exploitation.[12]

The sin of Sodom, then, is heinous moral and social corruption, an arrogant disregard of basic human rights, a cynical insensitivity to the sufferings of others. The prophet Jeremiah identified Sodom with adultery, false dealing, and the encouragement of evildoers—all without any feelings of contrition (23:14)—while Ezekiel sums up the situation as follows in 16:49: "Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them. . . ." The indictment of Sodom lies entirely in the moral realm; there is no hint of cultic offense, no whisper of idolatry. As with the Flood story, the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative assumes the existence of a universal moral law that God expects all humankind to follow. The idea that there is an inextricable connection between the social and moral behavior of a people and its ultimate fate is one of the pillars upon which the entire biblical interpretation of history stands.

21. I will go down to see See Comment to 11:5. This stated intention is an element in the motif of theodicy, or the vindication of divine justice, that is essential to the Sodom narrative. As the wickedness of the city appears to reach intolerable proportions, God personally investigates the situation. The fate of the inhabitants of Sodom is not yet sealed. At this point, the humanity of Abraham is put to the test.

22. This seemingly intrusive note is really connected with verse 16. Here it makes for a slight pause in the narrative, as though to insinuate the idea of Abraham briefly struggling with himself as to whether he should plead the cause of Sodom or, like Noah before him, remain indifferent to the fate of his fellow beings.

EXPOSTULATION WITH GOD (vv. 22–33)

Until now Abraham has spoken with God three times (Gen. 15:2,8; 17:17). On each occasion his personal welfare has been the sole subject of discourse. Now a change takes place. The next dialogue with God involves a concern for the welfare of others, total strangers. Abraham displays an awareness of suffering and an ability to respond beyond his immediate personal interests. He shows himself to be a moral man, a compassionate person. His behavior at this moment makes him the paradigm of "the just and the right," qualities that are to characterize his descendants (v. 18). As the Talmud in Betsah 32b observes: "Whoever is merciful to his fellow beings is without doubt of the children of our father Abraham; whoever is unmerciful to his fellow beings certainly cannot be of the children of Abraham our father."

Abraham now stands before God to plead for the lives of depraved pagans. He senses kinship with the people of Sodom and feels himself involved in their fate. The ensuing dialogue assumes that the man of faith is not expected to accept morally absurd behavior with silent resignation. God rules

forward and said, "Will You sweep away the innocent along with the guilty? 24What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will You then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of the innocent fifty who are in it? 25Far be it from You to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" 26And the LORD answered, "If I find within the city of Sodom fifty innocent ones, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." 27Abraham spoke

עִם־רָשָׁע: 24 אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ
הָעִיר הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם לְמַעַן
חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ: 25 חָלִלָה לְךָ
מֵעֲשֹׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְהָמִית צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְהָיָה
כַצַּדִּיק כָּרָשָׁע חָלִלָה לָּךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא
יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט: 26 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אִם־אֶמְצָא בִסְדֹם
חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וְנָשָׂאתִי לְכָל־
הַמָּקוֹם בַּעֲבוּרָם: 27 וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה־נָא

the pagans, judges their deeds, decides their fate, and executes His decisions. His universality finds expression, above all, in His punishment of pagans for moral corruption because He is the architect of a societal pattern that is universal in scope. Because God is universal and omnipotent, humankind needs assurance that His almighty power is not indiscriminately applied and that He is not capricious like the pagan gods. A Mesopotamian composition known as the "Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," dating from about the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., presents the complaint of a pious man whose world has crashed about him, despite his punctilious attention to the cultic demands of his gods. This man deplores the fact that the gods do not operate according to any intelligible norms: "What is good in one's sight is evil for a god. / What is bad in one's own mind is good for his god. / Who can understand the counsel of the gods in the midst of heaven? / The plan of a god is deep waters, who can comprehend it? / Where has befuddled mankind ever learned what a god's conduct is?" (ANET, p. 435). By contrast, Abraham's struggle to apprehend the nature of God's purposes assumes that God must act according to a principle that man can try to understand. That principle is the passion for righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all earth deal justly?" he protests. It is this faith in God's justice that gives rise to the argument with God, whose intent to destroy Sodom appears to raise serious conflict with the patriarch's conviction about His moral governance of the world.

The patriarch's contention that the innocent not be made to suffer along with the guilty is clear enough. More complicated is his second request that the entire city be spared for the sake of an innocent minority. This is no longer a simple appeal to the attribute of justice but a call for divine mercy. It carries with it two implications: Indirectly it asserts that there is a greater infraction of justice in the death of an innocent few than in allowing a guilty majority to escape retribution; it assumes that the merit of a minority is powerful enough to overcome the wickedness of the majority. These are major themes in later biblical literature because divine mercy can also be divine tolerance of evil, a problem of serious dimensions to prophet and sage alike.[13] The second issue, the question of individual versus communal responsibility, has a long history of controversy.

Absent from the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, as well as from the Flood story, is the theme of repentance. Just as Noah did not call upon his contemporaries to repair their ways, neither Abraham nor the messengers warn the people of Sodom of the impending disaster in the hope of arousing them to atonement. This is in sharp contrast to the story of Jonah, in which the reluctant prophet gives the sinful city of Nineveh forty days' notice of the punishment about to descend upon it, and the penitent response of the contrite citizens succeeds in averting the evil decree.

The theme of repentance plays a major and indispensable role in the theological outlook and religious teachings of the great literary prophets. They pound away at it incessantly, lamenting the inability of the people to understand and accept it. Repentance becomes part of the great prophetic vision about "the end of days." But it is not to be found in the Noah and Sodom narratives. These belong to the earliest traditions of Israel and derive from a time before the doctrine of repentance had been developed.

23. came forward That is, to present his case. The Hebrew *n-g-sh* is often used in this courtroom sense.[14]

24. within the city The narrative concentrates on Sodom because, being the metropolis, it was representative of all five cities of the Plain.[15]

up, saying, "Here I venture to speak to my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes: 28What if the fifty innocent should lack five? Will You destroy the whole city for want of the five?" And He answered, "I will not destroy if I find forty-five there." 29But he spoke to Him again, and said, "What if forty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it, for the sake of the forty." 30And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I go on: What if thirty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." 31And he said, "I venture again to speak to my Lord: What if twenty should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty." 32And he said, "Let not my Lord be angry if I speak but this last time: What if ten should be found there?" And He answered, "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten." 33When the LORD had finished speaking to Abraham, He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.

הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר׃
28 אוּלַי יַחְסְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה
הֲתַשְׁחֵית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אַשְׁחִית אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה׃
29 וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן
שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר
הָאַרְבָּעִים׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי
וַאֲדַבֵּרָה אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם־אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים׃ 31 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־
נָא הוֹאַלְתִּי לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם
עֶשְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְׂרִים׃
32 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי וַאֲדַבְּרָה אַךְ־
הַפַּעַם אוּלַי יִמָּצְאוּן שָׁם עֲשָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא
אַשְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֲשָׂרָה׃ 33 וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר
כִּלָּה לְדַבֵּר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְקֹמוֹ׃
שלישי

19 The two angels arrived in Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to greet them and, bowing low with his face to the

י״ט וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט
יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדֹם וַיַּרְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאתָם

27. ***but dust and ashes*** Abraham approaches God with profound deference and humility, displaying unsurpassed human greatness.

32. ***ten*** Abraham has reached the limit of the ability of a righteous individual to outweigh the cumulative evil of the community. Ten is a round and complete number that symbolizes totality. Ten persons thus constitute the minimum effective social entity.[16]

33. ***returned to his place*** That is, to Hebron.

CHAPTER 19

The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 1–35)

Events now move rapidly toward a horrifying but retributive climax. The drama unfolds through quickly paced scenes that are presented in three parts: the demonstration by the Sodomites of their irredeemable evil; the deliverance of Lot; the devastation of the region. In an epilogue we are told of the incestuous act of the daughters of Lot.

The scenes form an integral unit, for the acts of incest would be unintelligible without the preceding events. The desperate deed of Lot's daughters is a direct result of both the cataclysm and the death of their mother. The beginning and the end form an *inclusion,* or envelope-like pattern.

ARRIVAL OF THE ANGELS AT SODOM (vv. 1–5)

1. ***sitting in the gate*** The gate of a large city usually comprised towers and guardrooms and a large area where people could sit. An example is the city gate uncovered at Tell Dan, which has a stone bench 15 feet (4.6 m.) long around the wall of one of its towers. The gate area in an ancient Near

ground, [2]he said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house to spend the night, and bathe your feet; then you may be on your way early." But they said, "No, we will spend the night in the square." [3]But he urged them strongly, so they turned his way and entered his house. He prepared a feast for them and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

[4]They had not yet lain down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom, young and old—all the people to the last man—gathered about the house. [5]And they shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them." [6]So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut

וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה׃ 2 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּה נָא־אֲדֹנַי
סוּרוּ נָא אֶל־בֵּית עַבְדְּכֶם וְלִינוּ וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם
וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וַהֲלַכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא כִּי
בָרְחוֹב נָלִין׃ 3 וַיִּפְצַר־בָּם מְאֹד וַיָּסֻרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמַצּוֹת אָפָה
וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃ 4 טֶרֶם יִשְׁכָּבוּ וְאַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם
נָסַבּוּ עַל־הַבַּיִת מִנַּעַר וְעַד־זָקֵן כָּל־הָעָם מִקָּצֶה׃
5 וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אַיֵּה הָאֲנָשִׁים
אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלָּיְלָה הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדָעָה
אֹתָם׃ 6 וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתְחָה וְהַדֶּלֶת סָגַר

Eastern city served as a civic center where the affairs of the community would be conducted in full view of, and with full participation of, the citizens.[1] Here gossip would be exchanged and disseminated, business transacted, and justice dispensed. Many of the legal documents from Nuzi close with the formula, "The tablet was written after the proclamation in the entrance of the gate."

*2. **house*** Lot lived formerly in a tent "near Sodom" (13:12). Now he has become a townsman and resides in a house inside the city (cf. vv. 4,10f.). Although he has changed his style of life, he still preserves the virtue of hospitality that is characteristic of a pastoral society generally, and particularly of a member of Abraham's family.

be on your way early The strangers are urged to get out of town before the people of Sodom become aware of their presence.[2]

No These messengers are unafraid. Moreover, they must test the inhabitants to learn whether or not their evil reputation is in fact deserved (cf. 18:21). Normally, it would be unthinkable for a stranger to have to lodge in the open for want of hospitality.[3]

the square Biblical Hebrew *reḥov* is not a street but a broad open square or plaza.[4]

*3. **a feast*** Hebrew *mishteh* denotes wine drinking.

unleavened bread Hebrew *matsah* is a flat cake baked before the dough has had time to rise. It can be very quickly prepared for unexpected guests.[5]

*4. **the men of Sodom*** The phrase is a descriptive note. The townsfolk live up to their unsavory reputation; they are true men of Sodom as described in 13:13 and 18:20f.[6]

young . . . to the last man The choice of words is very deliberate. Not a single decent individual can be found (cf. 18:24–32).

*5. **be intimate*** That is, commit homosexual rape upon them (cf. Judg. 19:22). From such texts as Leviticus 18:22,24 and 20:13,23, it is clear that homosexuality is regarded as one of the abhorrent perversions of the Canaanites. In this instance, the sin is compounded by aggression. A rabbinic interpretation, found in Tosefta Sotah 3:11f. and elsewhere, suggests that the affluent people of Sodom selfishly adopted a deliberate policy of maltreating strangers in order to discourage visitors to the city and thus not to have to share their prosperity with others.

LOT'S MORAL RESISTANCE (vv. 6–11)

Lot is true to his code of honor. Hospitality was a sacred duty, according the guest the right of asylum. Lot is faced with a moral dilemma, for his own morals infringe upon the standards of Sodom. Tacitly, though unequivocally, the narrative declares that all socially approved actions and all societal values must be subordinated to the higher obligations of the divinely ordained moral order.

the door behind him, 7and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. 8Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to these men, since they have come under the shelter of my roof." 9But they said, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." And they pressed hard against the person of Lot, and moved forward to break the door. 10But the men stretched out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11And the people who were at the entrance of the house, young and old, were struck with blinding light, so that they were helpless to find the entrance.

12Then the men said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, or anyone else that you have in the city—bring them out of the place. 13For we

אַחֵרָיו: 7 וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא אַחַי תָּרֵעוּ: 8 הִנֵּה־נָא לִי
שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא
אֶתְהֶן אֲלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק
לָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל אַל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ
בְּצֵל קֹרָתִי: 9 וַיֹּאמְרוּ גֶּשׁ־הָלְאָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד
בָּא־לָגוּר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שָׁפוֹט עַתָּה נָרַע לְךָ מֵהֶם
וַיִּפְצְרוּ בָאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְּשׁוּ לִשְׁבֹּר הַדָּלֶת:
10 וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־לוֹט
אֲלֵיהֶם הַבָּיְתָה וְאֶת־הַדֶּלֶת סָגָרוּ: 11 וְאֶת־
הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת הִכּוּ בַּסַּנְוֵרִים מִקָּטֹן
וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ לִמְצֹא הַפָּתַח: 12 וַיֹּאמְרוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־לוֹט עֹד מִי־לְךָ פֹּה חָתָן וּבָנֶיךָ
וּבְנֹתֶיךָ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ בָּעִיר הוֹצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם:
13 כִּי־מַשְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־גָדְלָה

8. This was an age in which a patriarch possessed absolute power (*patria potestas*) over the members of his clan, and daughters were held in low esteem. Lot's desperate stratagem reflects this system of values. By the standards of a later age, the nobility of his intentions is dulled by his willingness to surrender his daughters to the fury and lust of the mob (cf. vv. 16,29).

who have not known a man Lot is not appealing to the passions of the men of Sodom but is underscoring the seriousness with which he treats the value of hospitality. Verse 14 shows that the two girls were betrothed but not yet married. The Mesopotamian law codes make it clear that betrothal was as sacrosanct as a consummated marriage. The Akkadian phrase corresponding to our Hebrew is *ša zikaram la idū,* "who has not known a male." It is similarly used in legal formulation to describe a woman engaged to be married and still living in her father's house. Her violator incurs the death penalty.[7]

9. ***The fellow*** Literally, "the one," a contemptuous epithet. Lot is reminded of his isolation and his alien status. Being a *ger,* he is without legal rights and protection and is entirely dependent on the goodwill of the local community (see Comment to 12:10). There is a touch of irony in this, for Lot had, by stages, integrated himself into Sodom's society. First he merely "pitched his tents near Sodom" (13:12). Then "he had settled in Sodom" (14:12). It was solely on his account that the city had earlier been saved by Abraham (14:14). Now he lives in a house there and "sits in the gate" where the city elders gather. His daughters are about to intermarry with local men. Yet, despite his best efforts, he cannot fully assimilate into Sodom's society, and when it comes to the test, he finds he is an outsider after all.

11. ***blinding light*** Hebrew *sanverim* occurs again only in 2 Kings 6:18 in a similar context. The Aramaic Targums understand it to mean a dazzling brightness.[8] The people of Sodom did not suffer the usual kind of sightlessness *(ivvaron)* but a sudden, immobilizing, blazing flash of light.

helpless The stem *l-'-h,* essentially means "not to be able."[9]

THE DELIVERANCE OF LOT AND HIS FAMILY (vv. 12–16)

12. ***Sons-in-law . . .*** This is simply a list of possible relatives, not of Lot's actual family. The mention of sons-in-law before sons is strange.

are about to destroy this place; because the outcry against them before the LORD has become so great that the LORD has sent us to destroy it." 14So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Up, get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests.

15As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city." 16Still he delayed. So the men seized his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters—in the LORD's mercy on him—and brought him out and left him outside the city. 17When they had brought them outside, one said, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away." 18But Lot said to them, "Oh no, my lord! 19You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. 20Look, that town there is near enough to flee to; it is such a little place! Let me flee there—it is such a little place—and let my life be saved." 21He replied, "Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken. 22Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there." Hence the town came to be called Zoar.

צַעֲקָתָם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלָחֵנוּ יְהוָה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ׃
14 וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר | אֶל־חֲתָנָיו | לֹקְחֵי בְנֹתָיו
וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־מַשְׁחִית
יְהוָה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְהִי כִמְצַחֵק בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו׃
15 וּכְמוֹ הַשַּׁחַר עָלָה וַיָּאִיצוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים בְּלוֹט
לֵאמֹר קוּם קַח אֶת־אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתֶיךָ
הַנִּמְצָאֹת פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה בַּעֲוֹן הָעִיר׃ 16 וַיִּתְמַהְמָהּ |
וַיַּחֲזִקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בְּיָדוֹ וּבְיַד־אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְיַד שְׁתֵּי
בְנֹתָיו בְּחֶמְלַת יְהוָה עָלָיו וַיֹּצִאֻהוּ וַיַּנִּחֻהוּ מִחוּץ
לָעִיר׃ 17 וַיְהִי כְּהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר
הִמָּלֵט עַל־נַפְשֶׁךָ אַל־תַּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַל־תַּעֲמֹד
בְּכָל־הַכִּכָּר הָהָרָה הִמָּלֵט פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה׃ 18 וַיֹּאמֶר
לוֹט אֲלֵהֶם אַל־נָא אֲדֹנָי׃ 19 הִנֵּה־נָא מָצָא עַבְדְּךָ
חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּגְדֶּל חַסְדְּךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי
לְהַחֲיוֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי וְאָנֹכִי לֹא אוּכַל לְהִמָּלֵט
הָהָרָה פֶּן־תִּדְבָּקַנִי הָרָעָה וָמַתִּי׃ 20 הִנֵּה־נָא הָעִיר
הַזֹּאת קְרֹבָה לָנוּס שָׁמָּה וְהִיא מִצְעָר אִמָּלְטָה נָּא
שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא מִצְעָר הִוא וּתְחִי נַפְשִׁי׃ רביעי
21 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה נָשָׂאתִי פָנֶיךָ גַּם לַדָּבָר הַזֶּה
לְבִלְתִּי הָפְכִּי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ׃ 22 מַהֵר
הִמָּלֵט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאֲךָ
שָׁמָּה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר׃ 23 הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

*13. **the outcry*** In 18:20f. the guilt of the city is still to be proved. Now its guilt is established beyond all doubt. Its punishment is inevitable.

*14. **went out*** That is, to where his intended sons-in-law lived.

who had married This rendering, which is that of the Septuagint, assumes that Lot had two married daughters in the city. The Hebrew, however, does not use a defined verb, which leaves open the possibility that the reference is to his prospective sons-in-law.

as one who jests Their fault lies not in their disbelief but in their lack of seriousness, which reveals their insensitivity to the enormity of the moral evil about them.

*15. **remaining daughters*** Or, "your two daughters who are here."[10]

16. Lot's deliverance is an act of divine grace undeserved by any merit on his part, as verse 29 indicates. Perhaps his hospitality to strangers was a contributory factor.

*17. **Flee*** The stem *m-lt* is repeated five times (vv. 17–21) in a word play on the name Lot.

Do not look behind you That is, do not linger.

the hills That is, to the highlands of Moab.

*18. **my lord*** Hebrew *'adonai* is here treated by many commentators as nonsacred. Others understand it as a direct plea to God.

*20–22. **a little place*** Hebrew *mits'ar* is a play on *tso'ar* (Zoar) in verse 22. It is intended to explain, by popular etymology, the change in place-name from the original Bela (14:2). For the locale of the city, see Excursus 13.

[23]As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar, [24]the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven. [25]He annihilated those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground. [26]Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא צֹעַרָה׃ 24 וַיהוָה הִמְטִיר
עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל־עֲמֹרָה גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה מִן־
הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ 25 וַיַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת כָּל־
הַכִּכָּר וְאֵת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים וְצֶמַח הָאֲדָמָה׃
26 וַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח׃

THE CATACLYSM (vv. 23–39)

Here, and in all subsequent references to Sodom and Gomorrah, the biblical narrative focuses upon the moral significance of the events. For this reason, the description of the catastrophe is terse to the point of obscurity. This brevity, and the absence of external sources from the biblical period, renders any reliable reconstruction of the details all but impossible. Greek and Latin authors who mention the subject are extremely late and may have drawn their information from Jewish sources; they are not necessarily witnesses to independent traditions. Moreover, even the location of the cities cannot be pinpointed (see Excursus 13). No archaeological remains exist or can be identified to provide material for scientific investigation. The ruined cities have vanished without leaving a trace.

Geologists have ruled out the possibility of volcanic eruption in this region. The most obvious explanation of the cataclysm is an earthquake. Nowhere in the text is this clearly mentioned, not even in the many passages that use the stem *h-f-kh* (vv. 21,25,29[2]). Nor are we helped by the fact that every biblical mention of the noun form ***mahpekhah,*** "overthrow," is in a context that refers to Sodom. The Hebrew *h-f-kh,* which simply means to "transform completely," is a general term for destruction without specifying the means. Still, the earthquake theory is the most plausible. The entire Jordan Valley is part of the Syrian-African Rift, a gigantic fracture in the crust of the earth caused by a series of geological spasms. It stretches from Syria in the north, down the Arabah to the Gulf of Akaba, through the Red Sea to the Upper Nile Valley and on to Lake Nyasa in East Africa. In this Sodom story we may well be dealing with a description of one of the last earthquakes that shaped the lower Jordan Valley area in historical times.

It is well known that fissures formed by quakes often allow heat and gases to escape from the earth. Lightning, frequently present during earthquakes, would have ignited the sulfur and bitumen existing in the area (14:10). A catastrophic conflagration would result (cf. Deut. 29:22). This would explain the utter ruination of the cities, the extinction of their inhabitants, and the obliteration of all vegetation in the region (v. 24), as well as the smoke that Abraham saw rising from the land (v. 28).

24. the LORD . . . the LORD The repetition, like the phrase "out of heaven," dramatizes the conviction that what occurred was not a meaningless accident of nature but a purposeful event, the expression of God's direct intervention in human affairs in order to redress the balance of justice.

sulfurous fire Sulfur is Latin for "burning stone," or "brimstone" in Old English.[11] The fire here, like the water in Noah's day, may have a symbolically purgative function as it does in the narrative of Numbers 16:35 and in the law of Numbers 31:23. It may also be a metaphor of divine anger, as in Deuteronomy 32:22 and Isaiah 65:5.

26. looked back She lingered in flight and was overwhelmed by the spreading devastation.

a pillar of salt The tradition, preserved in Deuteronomy 29:22, describes ruination of the soil by sulfur and salt (cf. Zeph. 2:9). Radak notes that Lot's wife would thus have suffered the same fate as the other inhabitants. "She wholly disappeared in a blanket of salt; yet popular notion has her body turning into salt and still recognizable," writes Bekhor Shor. This idea must have been suggested by some grotesque salt-rock formation in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. The pre-Christian book, The Wisdom of Solomon (10:4), says, "A pillar of salt stands as a memorial to an unbelieving soul"; and Josephus (Ant. 1.203) claims to have seen it in his day. The origin of the salt tradition must lie in the presence of Mount Sodom (Jebel Usdum), the base of which is a ridge of rock salt that extends for about five miles (8 km.). The salt, too, may have a symbolic function; in the ancient Near East, a site was strewn with salt as a mark of eternal desolation in punishment for disloyalty and a breach of a treaty (e.g., Judg. 9:45).[12]

27 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד
שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה: 28 וַיַּשְׁקֵף עַל־פְּנֵי סְדֹם
וַעֲמֹרָה וְעַל־כָּל־פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכִּכָּר וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עָלָה
קִיטֹר הָאָרֶץ כְּקִיטֹר הַכִּבְשָׁן: 29 וַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת
אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְרָהָם
וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְ הַהֲפֵכָה בְּהַהְפֵּךְ אֶת־
הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בָּהֶן לוֹט: 30 וַיַּעַל לוֹט
מִצֹּעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהָר וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו עִמּוֹ כִּי יָרֵא
לָשֶׁבֶת בְּצֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמְּעָרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו:

27Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the Lord, 28and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln.

29Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was mindful of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

30Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; and he and his two daughters lived in a cave. 31And the

27–29. The previous narrative about Abraham, interrupted by the events at Sodom, now resumes. His dialogue with God having ended on an uncertain note, Abraham now hastens to his vantage point (18:16) to learn the outcome of his intercession. Alas, Sodom could not boast of ten righteous souls.

THE BIRTH OF MOAB AND AMMON (vv. 30–38)

The concluding section of the chapter describes the origin of the peoples of Moab and Ammon. Behind this strange narrative lie some authentic historical memories.

Since throughout most of their common history relations between Israel and these peoples were generally unfriendly, it is unlikely that a tradition about their kinship to Israel would be invented. By the same token, their connection with the clan of Lot, Abraham's nephew, must be genuine and is independently confirmed by their appellation "sons of Lot" in Deuteronomy 2:9,19 and Psalms 83:9. The portrayal of Ammon and Moab as brothers, as in Deuteronomy 23:3, must reflect either an original common descent or a period when the two peoples were united by treaty obligations. Such a condition is often referred to in the Near East by the term *aḫḫūtu,* "brotherhood."

Moabite and Ammonite inscriptions confirm that they both spoke kindred Semitic languages that were much closer to Hebrew than to Aramaic. According to our narrative, the two peoples appear on the scene of history rather late, as indicated by their absence from the Table of Nations in chapter 10. Archaeological surveys have determined that around 1900 B.C.E. Transjordanian civilization was extinguished. Sedentary life in the area did not resume on a firm basis until about the end of the fourteenth century B.C.E. A century later, when Israelites were just settling in Canaan, Moab and Ammon were already organized as monarchies in Transjordan. This is in harmony with the inference from our story that Israel is younger than these two.

It is difficult to understand the point of this episode since neither people plays any role in the patriarchal narrative. A theory that it expresses Israelite contempt for its traditional enemies is hardly likely to be correct. If this were the motivation, then surely a scandalous origin for Esau-Edom, the inveterate and implacable national enemy, would also have been invented, rather than have him be the son of Isaac and Rebekah. Nothing in our story suggests hostility. The daughters do not act out of lust. Lot, who is entirely unaware of what is happening, receives no blame. The later hostility to Moab and Ammon finds expression in the law prohibiting Israelite intermarriage with them, but the proscription in Deuteronomy 23:4f. is conditioned on Israel's wilderness experience and is not based on the incestuous origin of these peoples. Indeed, their right to live peaceably in their respective homelands is acknowledged as God-given in Deuteronomy 2:9,19. It should also be remembered that King David is descended from a Moabite woman, a fact clearly attested in Ruth 4:17–22.

30–31 We do not know why Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar. Perhaps earth tremors continued to be felt there. Later Jewish sources have preserved a tradition that all five cities—including Zoar—were destroyed.[13] This would explain why Lot's daughters believed the catastrophe to be universal.

31 וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ
אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: 32 לְכָה
נַשְׁקֶה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יַיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ
זָרַע: 33 וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא
וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדַע
בְּשִׁכְבָהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ: 34 וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַתֹּאמֶר
הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה הֵן־שָׁכַבְתִּי אֶמֶשׁ אֶת־אָבִי
נַשְׁקֶנּוּ יַיִן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שִׁכְבִי עִמּוֹ וּנְחַיֶּה
מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע: 35 וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ גַּם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־
אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן וַתָּקָם הַצְּעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ וְלֹא־יָדַע
בְּשִׁכְבָהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ: 36 וַתַּהֲרֶיןָ שְׁתֵּי בְנוֹת־לוֹט
מֵאֲבִיהֶן: 37 וַתֵּלֶד הַבְּכִירָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
מוֹאָב הוּא אֲבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם: 38 וְהַצְּעִירָה גַּם־
הִוא יָלְדָה בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־עַמִּי הוּא אֲבִי בְנֵי־
עַמּוֹן עַד־הַיּוֹם: ס

נקוד על ו׳ v. 33.

older one said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. 32Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." 33That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. 34The next day the older one said to the younger, "See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." 35That night also they made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.

36Thus the two daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father. 37The older one bore a son and named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. 38And the younger also bore a son, and she called him Ben-ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

32. ***drink wine*** The implication is that Lot would never have been a conscious partner to such an act.

maintain life There is no way of knowing if their intent was the renewal of the entire human race, as Genesis Rabba 57:10 sees it, or just the perpetuation of their father's name, as Radak believes. There is no explicit condemnation of the actions of the two girls; but their anonymity implies censure.

37. ***Moab*** A popular etymology based on Hebrew *me-'avi,* "from [my] father."[14]

38. ***Ben-ammi*** Literally, "son of my [paternal] kinsman." The name reflects the fact that the Ammonites are generally called in the Bible *benei-'ammon,* a form that also appears in the first complete Ammonite inscription that has turned up.[15]

The two sons are born, and nothing more is heard of Lot. His story ends on an inglorious and ironic note. At the beginning of the chapter he was willing to let the virginity of his daughters be forcibly defiled, without even informing them, in order to save lives. Now, in order to "maintain life," his daughters have lost their virginity by forcing themselves upon him without his knowledge.

CHAPTER 20

Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech (20:1–21:34)

Following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham resumes his wanderings. Once again Sarah is taken away by force, this time to the harem of Abimelech, king of Gerar, who has been misled into believing that she is the patriarch's sister. She is saved from dishonor only by divine intervention.

The story is strongly reminiscent of the couple's earlier encounter with Pharaoh in Egypt. Here it serves to complete a literary framework. The first kidnapping of Sarah occurred after receiving the initial divine promise of posterity. The second takes place after the last such promise.

The chapter as a whole is closely connected with the preceding. The opening phrase presupposes a knowledge of Abraham's residence at Mamre-Hebron; the maltreatment of the alien, characteristic of the Sodomites, is feared to prevail at Gerar as well; the willingness to trade a close female relative in a desperate bid for physical safety is a motif common to both stories; the questioning of the nature of divine justice is the theme of Abimelech's dialogue with God as it was with Abraham's. And, just as Lot was saved by the merit of Abraham, so is the king of Gerar. The patriarch plays the role of intercessor in both narratives.

20 Abraham journeyed from there to the region of the Negeb and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While he was sojourning in Gerar, [2]Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him. [3]But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "You are to die because of the woman that you have taken, for she is a married woman."

כ וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְרָהָם אַרְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־
קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגָר בִּגְרָר: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־
שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וַיִּשְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ
גְּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׂרָה: 3 וַיָּבֹא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
בַּחֲלוֹם הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנְּךָ מֵת עַל־הָאִשָּׁה
אֲשֶׁר־לָקַחְתָּ וְהִוא בְּעֻלַת בָּעַל: 4 וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ לֹא

THE KIDNAPPING OF SARAH (vv. 1–2)

Abraham journeyed from there This phrase has no immediate antecedent, but it must refer to the district of Mamre-Hebron, which has been Abraham's sole place of domicile since Lot's separation. The identical word ***mi-sham,*** "from there," occurs twice earlier with the same point of reference (18:16,22).

the region of the Negeb Compare 12:8f. The northern Negeb in the Beer-sheba Basin possesses arable soil and some cover of vegetation. Seasonal, seminomadic, pastoral occupation of the area is archaeologically attested for the period between the Early and Middle Bronze Ages (21st–19th cents. B.C.E.).

Kadesh and Shur The line between the oasis of Kadesh and the Egyptian defense wall in the eastern Delta of the Nile (see the Comments to 14:7 and 16:7). This line constituted the southernmost limits of Abraham's wanderings. He "settled," that is, made a prolonged stay, in this region.

sojourning in Gerar At some point the patriarch left the Kadesh-Shur grazing region to visit the royal city of Gerar. No reason is given for this journey. He may have wanted to trade pastoral products and purchase supplies in the city, or the rich pasturelands in the vicinity may have been an attraction.[1] (The location of Gerar has already been discussed in the Comment to 10:19.) It is to be noted that Abraham does not "settle" but only "sojourns" *(va-yagor)* here, indicating a change of status. He is an alien *(ger),* unprotected and subject to maltreatment.

2. Forewarned by his previous experience on alien soil, as described in 12:10–20f., Abraham now takes the initiative in passing off Sarah as his sister. He does not ask her for permission to do so.

Abimelech This is a fairly common ancient West Semitic personal name. It appears as *'abmlk* in the Ugaritic texts and as *abimilki,* king of Tyre, in the El-Amarna correspondence (second half 14th cent. B.C.E.). It also appears as an Israelite name that means "my father is king."[2]

had Sarah brought to him She is now nearly ninety years of age (17:17)! What interest, then, did Abimelech have in her? According to rabbinic fancy, "her flesh was rejuvenated, her wrinkles smoothed out, and her original beauty was restored" (BM 87a). Without doubt, from the Narrator's point of view, this would be consistent with the miraculous renewal of her vitality by divine grace so that she may bear a child. However, on this occasion the text is pointedly silent about Sarah's beauty. In light of the subsequent relations between Abraham and Abimelech (21:22–32), it is quite possible that the king's goal was an alliance with the patriarch for purposes of prestige and economic advantage.

GOD'S ADMONITION TO ABIMELECH (vv. 3–7)

In a dream revelation the king is charged with the forcible abduction of a married woman. Abimelech defends his innocence on two grounds: he has not had sexual relations with her; information about her married state was withheld from him by the parties concerned. The charge of abduction is neatly ignored. God counters the first argument by asserting that it was He who prevented the violation of

קָרַב אֲלֵיהָ וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי הֲגוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תַּהֲרֹג: 5 הֲלֹא הוּא אָמַר־לִי אֲחֹתִי הִוא וְהִיא־גַם־הִוא אָמְרָה אָחִי הוּא בְּתֹם־לְבָבִי וּבְנִקְיֹן כַּפַּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת: 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בַּחֲלֹם גַּם אָנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי בְתֹם־לְבָבְךָ עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת וָאֶחְשָׂךְ גַּם־ אָנֹכִי אוֹתְךָ מַחֲטוֹ־לִי עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נְתַתִּיךָ לִנְגֹּעַ אֵלֶיהָ: 7 וְעַתָּה הָשֵׁב אֵשֶׁת־הָאִישׁ כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא וְיִתְפַּלֵּל בַּעַדְךָ וֶחְיֵה וְאִם־אֵינְךָ מֵשִׁיב דַּע כִּי־ מוֹת תָּמוּת אַתָּה וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ: 8 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם

חסר א׳ v. 6.

[4]Now Abimelech had not approached her. He said, "O Lord, will You slay people even though innocent? [5]He himself said to me, 'She is my sister!' And she also said, 'He is my brother.' When I did this, my heart was blameless and my hands were clean." [6]And God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did this with a blameless heart, and so I kept you from sinning against Me. That was why I did not let you touch her. [7]Therefore, restore the man's wife—since he is a prophet, he will intercede for you—to save your life. If you fail to restore her, know that you shall die, you and all that are yours."

Sarah. As to the second, the king's integrity is put to the test. Now that he knows the truth, he must at once restore the woman to her husband.

*3. **in a dream*** Throughout the ancient world, Israel included,[3] the dream was accepted as a vehicle of divine communication. Here it has a straightforward, admonitory function, as in 31:24, and no interpreter is needed.

4. The Narrator injects himself into the movement of the argument.

approached her A euphemism for sexual relations. In accordance with the narrative technique, the reason for Abimelech's abstention is withheld here and revealed only later (v. 6).

O Lord *'Adonai* is used, and not the divine YHVH, probably because the king is not of the Abrahamic faith (see Comment to 18:3).

will You slay . . . Like Abraham in the preceding story, the king appeals to God's justice.

people That is, my household (cf. vv. 7,17f.). Hebrew *goy* usually means "nation," but on rare occasions it has the more restricted sense of "people," "folk," or "group."[4] The literal rendering "nation" cannot be ruled out, however, because according to the widespread conception of the times, the monarch and his people constituted a unified entity. The king was regarded as embodying divine blessing, and the well-being of his people was directly dependent upon his personal welfare (cf. v. 9, "upon me and my kingdom").

*5. **heart . . . hands*** That is, sincerity of intention and rectitude in behavior.

6. God affirms only the unintentionality of the possible adultery, nothing else.[5]

I kept you from . . . How this happened is not disclosed until verses 17–18.

sinning against Me Israelite law regards adultery as an offense against divinely given standards of morality and not merely as a violation of the husband's proprietary rights. The latter was the general view of the ancient Near Eastern law codes (cf. 39:9).

*7. **he is a prophet*** Hebrew *navi'* is used here in the Bible for the first time. A term of uncertain origin, it is widely believed to be connected with Akkadian *nabû,* "to call." Assyrian kings were entitled "the one called," that is, called by the gods. The form *navi'* in Hebrew could either signify "one who receives the (divine) call" or "one who proclaims," a "spokesman." The last meaning is favored by such texts as Exodus 4:15f. and 7:1, and generally by the prophetic role as described in the Bible. The prophet is the spokesman for God to man; but intercession before God in favor of man is also an indispensable aspect of his function.[6] Moses frequently acts in this capacity, and so do Samuel, Amos, and Jeremiah. It is primarily in this sense that Abraham is here designated "a prophet" (cf. Pss. 105:15). He has already demonstrated his intercessory role in the case of Sodom. In addition, like the later prophets, he has been made privy to God's purposes (18:17ff.; cf. Amos 3:7).

he will intercede for you By forcibly abducting Sarah, Abimelech has made Abraham an aggrieved party. It is only fitting that the one wronged should intercede in behalf of the wrongdoer.

[8]Early next morning, Abimelech called his servants and told them all that had happened; and the men were greatly frightened. [9]Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What wrong have I done that you should bring so great a guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done to me things that ought not to be done. [10]What, then," Abimelech demanded of Abraham, "was your purpose in doing this thing?" [11]"I thought," said Abraham, "surely there is no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. [12]And besides, she is in truth my sister, my father's daughter though not my mother's; and she became my wife. [13]So

אֲבִימֶלֶךְ בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקְרָא לְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת־
כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּירְאוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
מְאֹד: 9 וַיִּקְרָא אֲבִימֶלֶךְ לְאַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֶה־
עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ וּמֶה־חָטָאתִי לָךְ כִּי־הֵבֵאתָ עָלַי וְעַל־
מַמְלַכְתִּי חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה מַעֲשִׂים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵעָשׂוּ
עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם מָה
רָאִיתָ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם כִּי אָמַרְתִּי רַק אֵין־יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה וַהֲרָגוּנִי עַל־דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי: 12 וְגַם־אָמְנָה
אֲחֹתִי בַת־אָבִי הִוא אַךְ לֹא בַת־אִמִּי וַתְּהִי־לִי
לְאִשָּׁה: 13 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעוּ אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית

Moses similarly prayed for his sister Miriam, who had defamed him (Num. 12:13), and Job beseeched God on behalf of his three friends who had misjudged him (Job 42:8).

you shall die The excuse of inadvertence will no longer be tenable.

ABRAHAM'S DEFENSE (vv. 8–13)

The dream makes such an impression on the king that he convokes his council of state, whose members are thoroughly alarmed by his report. Abraham is summoned. Confronted by Abimelech, he tries to defend himself.

9. ***so great a guilt*** Literally, "a great sin," a phrase that reflects ancient Near Eastern legal terminology found in Akkadian documents from Ugarit and in Egyptian marriage contracts. The "great sin" is adultery. All four other biblical occurrences of the term appear in reference to idolatry (Exod. 32:21,30f.; 2 Kings 17:21), for which the text often uses the metaphor of marital infidelity.

11. In a situation where no legal sanction or reward is enforceable, the ultimate restraint on evil, as well as the supreme incentive for good, is the consciousness of the existence of a higher power who demands certain standards of conduct. With the assumption that no such "fear of God" was present in Gerar, Abraham believed that the king would have him killed in order to avoid committing adultery. This would be a far graver offense to him than the murder of the husband who was an alien and so outside the protection of the law.

The phrase "fear (of) God" is used overwhelmingly in connection with situations that involve norms of moral or ethical conduct.[7] Its application is universal, transcending religious or national divisions. It is not synonymous with conscience for, by definition, the desired norms of conduct are conceived as being God-given rather than deriving from any presumed, intuitive discrimination of right and wrong.

12. ***she is in truth my sister*** This excuse undoubtedly reflects a sensitivity to resorting to falsehood, even in self-defense. Still, the statement itself must be factual as well as a tradition of great antiquity. As noted in the Comment to 12:13, it is inconceivable that a late author would invent a tale ascribing to the patriarch a practice abhorrent to the sexual morality of Israel as it found legal expression in the Torah codes (Lev. 18:9,11; 20:17; Deut. 27:22); otherwise, we are led to the preposterous assumption that an incestuous marriage was a lesser offense than falsehood in the eyes of the biblical Narrator.

my father's daughter though not my mother's While abhorrence of incest is nearly universal, the definition of prohibited kinship marriage varies widely among societies. Where descent is traced solely through one parent, mating between half-siblings is often socially acceptable and is not considered consanguineous. The story of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:13 and the fulminations of Ezekiel 22:11 show that such a practice persisted in Israel despite the law.

when God made me wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'Let this be the kindness that you shall do me: whatever place we come to, say there of me: He is my brother.'"

14Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham; and he restored his wife Sarah to him. 15And Abimelech said, "Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please." 16And to Sarah he said, "I herewith give your brother a thousand pieces of silver; this will serve you as vindication before all who are with you, and you are cleared before everyone." 17Abraham then prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his slave girls, so that they bore children; 18for the LORD had closed fast every womb of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

אָבִי וַאֲמַר לָהּ זֶה חַסְדֵּךְ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל
כָּל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נָבוֹא שָׁמָּה אִמְרִי־לִי אָחִי הוּא:
14 וַיִּקַּח אֲבִימֶלֶךְ צֹאן וּבָקָר וַעֲבָדִים וּשְׁפָחֹת
וַיִּתֵּן לְאַבְרָהָם וַיָּשֶׁב לוֹ אֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:
15 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ הִנֵּה אַרְצִי לְפָנֶיךָ בַּטּוֹב
בְּעֵינֶיךָ שֵׁב: 16 וּלְשָׂרָה אָמַר הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי אֶלֶף
כֶּסֶף לְאָחִיךְ הִנֵּה הוּא־לָךְ כְּסוּת עֵינַיִם לְכֹל
אֲשֶׁר אִתָּךְ וְאֵת כֹּל וְנֹכָחַת: 17 וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם
אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת־
אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאַמְהֹתָיו וַיֵּלֵדוּ: 18 כִּי־עָצֹר עָצַר יְהוָה
בְּעַד כָּל־רֶחֶם לְבֵית אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־דְּבַר שָׂרָה
אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָהָם: ס

13. ***made me wander*** That is, gave me the command, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house" (12:1).

whatever place The danger was seen as a recurring one. The kidnapping of women for the royal harem was feared to be widespread and customary, not an exceptional experience.[8] No special insult to Abimelech was intended.

He is my brother The absence of children would lend credence to her claim.

ABIMELECH'S RESTITUTION AND ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION (vv. 14–18)

14. Abraham, the injured party, receives reparation from the king.

took . . . gave Underlying this phrase is a technical, judicial formula known from Akkadian texts *(leqû/našû . . . nadānu)* in connection with royal transfer or conveyance of property.[9]

15. ***settle*** No longer will he be an alien in Abimelech's realm.

16. ***your brother*** The king may be using the term sarcastically or simply going along with the pretence because Sarah, presumably, knows nothing of his dreams and of his altercation with Abraham.

a thousand pieces of silver Either the worth of the gifts listed in verse 14 or a separate award to Sarah.

vindication Hebrew *kesut 'einayim,* literally "a covering of eyes," is a unique phrase of uncertain meaning. Taken literally, it could be a recommendation that in the future Sarah should not appear in public with uncovered face so that her beauty will not be a temptation to men. Interpreted figuratively, the phrase tells us that the payment is a recognition that Sarah's honor was not violated, and so the eyes of others are henceforth closed to what has occurred and she will not be an object of scorn.[10] It is quite likely that some ancient legal formula, not yet discovered, is being used here.

17–18. ***bore children . . . closed fast every womb*** These terms are euphemisms to express that Abimelech and his household enjoy restoration of sexual vigor after experiencing a period of sexual dysfunction.[11]

CHAPTER 21 This chapter consists of three separate episodes. The first, verses 1–7, deals with the birth of Isaac; the second, verses 8–21, describes the disruptive events in the patriarch's family that led to the expulsion

כ״א וַיהוָה פָּקַד אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמָר וַיַּעַשׂ
יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר: 2 וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה
לְאַבְרָהָם בֵּן לִזְקֻנָיו לַמּוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אֹתוֹ
אֱלֹהִים: 3 וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שֵׁם־בְּנוֹ הַנּוֹלַד־לוֹ
אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה־לּוֹ שָׂרָה יִצְחָק: 4 וַיָּמָל אַבְרָהָם אֶת־
יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן־שְׁמֹנַת יָמִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֹתוֹ
אֱלֹהִים: חמישי 5 וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן־מְאַת שָׁנָה

21 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. [2]Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. [3]Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac. [4]And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded him. [5]Now Abraham was a hun-

of Hagar and Ishmael; and the third, verses 22–34, tells of relationships between Abraham and the Philistine king Abimelech.

The first two episodes form a unit, the one flowing smoothly into the other even though they are separated by a span of a few years. The blend is consolidated by means of a neat stylistic device. Isaac, the focus of attention, appears six times, and the stem *ts-ḥ-k,* of which his name is compounded, is used suggestively three times (vv. 6^2,9). By contrast, Ishmael's name never occurs, an omission that betokens his fading from the scene of patriarchal history. Yet the nondescript term "the boy" (Heb. *ha-naʿar*) by which he is referred to also appears six times and the stem *sh-m-ʿ,* of which the name Ishmael (Heb. *yishmaʿel*) is compounded, is allusively employed three times (vv. 12,17^2).

The last incident, which is connected with the topic of chapter 20, presupposes a knowledge of the previous encounter between Abraham and Abimelech. It assumes that the reader knows who Abimelech is and that he has treated Abraham decently (20:15ff.; 21:33). The account of the stolen well, Abimelech's plea of blamelessness, and the restoration of the property to the patriarch parallels the monarch's kidnapping of Sarah, his protestation of innocence, and her return to Abraham (20; 21:25ff.). Abimelech made Abraham a gift of sheep and oxen, and Abraham reciprocates (20:14; 21:27); the identical formula, "took and gave," is used in both cases.

In light of the close connection between chapters 20 and 21:22–34, the first two stories would appear to be intrusive. Yet a closer look reveals that their present position is intentional and purposeful. The relief of Sarah's infertility through the birth of a son is juxtaposed with the removal of the infirmity that afflicted Abimelech's household, thereby enabling the women to give birth (20:17f.). This close association of motifs is underscored by the use of the name Sarah to close the preceding chapter and to open the present one. Finally, the action of both the second and third episodes centers around a well in the Beer-sheba area.

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC (vv. 1–7)

A full quarter of a century has passed since Abraham first heard the divine call promising him great posterity (12:4; 21:5). During the course of this period he received repeated affirmation of this pledge but experienced constant disappointment and faced periodic crises that threatened to make its fulfillment impossible. Now, at last, God's word comes to fruition.

1. ***took note*** The same idiom is used in connection with the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 2:21). In both cases the newly born infant is a child of destiny. The Hebrew stem *p-k-d* connotes the direct involvement or intervention of God in human affairs.[1] This can be of a providential nature, or it can be judgmental or redemptive. The verb is a leitmotif of the divine promises of national redemption from Egyptian slavery. The birth of Isaac thus marks a new and momentous stage in the unfolding plan of history. The multiplicity of descriptive terms for the event in verses 1–2 further emphasizes its extraordinary nature.

as He had promised The reference is to 17:16.

2. ***at the set time*** Compare 17:21 and 18:10,14.

3. ***Isaac*** The name prenatally fixed by God. This is why Isaac is the only patriarch who does not undergo a change of name. The meaning and origin of "Isaac" have been discussed in the Comment to 17:19.

4. ***eight days old*** He is the first person reported to have been so circumcised. This fact

dred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 7And she added,

"Who would have said to Abraham
That Sarah would suckle children!
Yet I have borne a son in his old age."

8The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

9Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. 10She said to Abraham, "Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." 11The matter

בְּהוֹלֶד לוֹ אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ: 6 וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרָה צְחֹק
עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כָּל־הַשֹּׁמֵעַ יִצְחַק־לִי: 7 וַתֹּאמֶר
מִי מִלֵּל לְאַבְרָהָם
הֵינִיקָה בָנִים שָׂרָה
כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי בֵן לִזְקֻנָיו:
8 וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַיִּגָּמַל וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָּדוֹל
בְּיוֹם הִגָּמֵל אֶת־יִצְחָק: 9 וַתֵּרֶא שָׂרָה אֶת־בֶּן־הָגָר
הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מְצַחֵק:
10 וַתֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָהָם גָּרֵשׁ הָאָמָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־
בְּנָהּ כִּי לֹא יִירַשׁ בֶּן־הָאָמָה הַזֹּאת עִם־בְּנִי עִם־
יִצְחָק: 11 וַיֵּרַע הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם עַל

emphasizes his role as the one true heir to the Abrahamic covenant. His spiritual destiny is thereby distinguished from that of Ishmael who was circumcised at the age of thirteen (17:25).

had commanded Referring to 17:12.

5. ***a hundred years old*** The chronological note resonates with the incredulity of Abraham expressed in 17:17.

6. The laughter is now joyous, in contrast to the earlier laugh of skepticism recorded in 17:17 and 18:12ff.

7. This utterance of Sarah has the form of a song. It consists of three short clauses of three words each. The forms of the verbs as well as the rare stem ***m-l-l*** seem to indicate that the words of Sarah had their origin in an ancient poem.

Who would have said Hebrew ***millel*** may perhaps contain a play on ***m-l-l,*** "to circumcise."

children The plural is merely indicative of species (cf. ***ḥittim,*** "wheat," ***pishtim,*** "linen").

THE EXPULSION OF HAGAR AND ISHMAEL (vv. 8–21)

Discord over inheritance rights soon mars the joy over Isaac's arrival. Sarah wishes to exclude Ishmael from any part of the paternal estate by having him and his mother driven out, but Abraham, sensitive to the moral issue, hesitates to agree to her request. He gives his consent reluctantly and only at the behest of God. Abraham's action is warranted only because of God's extraordinary intervention for his own historical purposes; otherwise, it would be immoral.

8. ***was weaned*** The age at which infants are weaned varies in different societies. In Egypt and Assyria breast-feeding often lasted three years;[2] similarly in Israel, at least in Second Temple times (2 Macc. 7:27). One rabbinic statement limits the practice to twenty-four months, while another mentions a period of four or five years (Ket. 60a). Because lactation delays the onset of menstruation, the prolongation of nursing was widely used as a contraceptive technique.

Weaning marked the completion of the first significant stage in the life cycle of the infant and was therefore a festive occasion.

9. ***playing*** He was either amusing himself or playing with Isaac. One rabbinic interpretation of Hebrew ***metsaḥek*** has Ishmael ridiculing the fuss made of Isaac and asserting his own claim to first-born status with its right to a double share of the paternal estate.[3]

10. The legal position of Ishmael is quite clear. Sarah had undertaken to recognize as her own the male offspring of the union of Abraham with Hagar, a match that she herself had initiated and imposed on her husband (16:2). Abraham, for his part, undoubtedly recognized Ishmael as his legitimate son, a fact repeatedly attested by a variety of earlier texts (16:15; 17:23,25f.) and affirmed here (v. 11) as well as later on (25:9,12). Did this status assure Ishmael automatic inheritance rights even

distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. 12But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. 13As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed."

14Early next morning Abraham took some bread and a skin of water, and gave them to Hagar. He placed them over her shoulder, together with the child, and sent her away. And she wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. 15When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes, 16and went and sat down at a distance, a bowshot away; for she thought, "Let me not look on as the child dies." And sitting thus afar, she burst into tears.

17God heard the cry of the boy, and an angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heeded the cry of the boy where he is. 18Come, lift up the boy and hold him

אוֹדֹת בְּנוֹ: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אַל־
יֵרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל־הַנַּעַר וְעַל־אֲמָתֶךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר
תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא
לְךָ זָרַע: 13 וְגַם אֶת־בֶּן־הָאָמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ כִּי
זַרְעֲךָ הוּא: 14 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח־לֶחֶם
וְחֵמַת מַיִם וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הָגָר שָׂם עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ וְאֶת־
הַיֶּלֶד וַיְשַׁלְּחֶהָ וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּתַע בְּמִדְבַּר בְּאֵר שָׁבַע:
15 וַיִּכְלוּ הַמַּיִם מִן־הַחֵמֶת וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד
תַּחַת אַחַד הַשִּׂיחִם: 16 וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנֶּגֶד
הַרְחֵק כִּמְטַחֲוִי קֶשֶׁת כִּי אָמְרָה אַל־אֶרְאֶה בְּמוֹת
הַיֶּלֶד וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנֶּגֶד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלָהּ וַתֵּבְךְּ:
17 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־קוֹל הַנַּעַר וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאַךְ
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הָגָר מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה־לָּךְ
הָגָר אַל־תִּירְאִי כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל־קוֹל הַנַּעַר
בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא־שָׁם: 18 קוּמִי שְׂאִי אֶת־הַנַּעַר

after the birth of Isaac? Sarah's formulation of her demand and the extreme length to which she was prepared to go point to an affirmative answer. The laws of Hammurabi (par. 170f.) and of the still earlier Lipit-Ishtar (par. 25) implicitly make inheritance rights a legal consequence of the father's acceptance of the infant as his legitimate son. There is no doubt that Ishmael was entitled to a share of Abraham's estate. The key to Sarah's demand lies in a clause in the laws of Lipit-Ishtar where it is stipulated that the father may grant freedom to the slave woman and the children she has borne him, in which case they forfeit their share of the paternal property (cf. Judg. 11:1–3). Sarah is asking Abraham to exercise that legal right (cf. 25:6).[4]

11. Fatherly love and moral considerations deter Abraham from giving his consent.

12–13. God prompts Abraham to agree. The Narrator feels it necessary for God to justify His actions so as to remove any suggestion of moral taint. He does so on two grounds: The line of Abraham is to be continued solely through Isaac; Hagar and her son will not be left to an uncertain fate in the wilderness, for a great future awaits Ishmael. There is a delicate shift here from Sarah's motivation to God's. Her sole interest is to safeguard her son's inheritance. God is concerned with the question of posterity and His ultimate purposes.

*12. **God said to Abraham*** Apparently in a night vision, since it is at once followed by "early next morning."

*14. **over her shoulder*** This refers only to the bread and water container. Ishmael, who is now at least sixteen years old, could hardly have been carried by his mother.[5]

child Hebrew *yeled* can be used for a youth and is interchangeable with ***na'ar,*** which can also refer both to a baby and to a grown man.

sent her away Hebrew *shillaḥ* is used for divorce as well as for the emancipation of slaves.[6]

she wandered Presumably, she set out for her native Egypt but lost her way.[7]

Beer-sheba See below, verse 31.

*15. **When the water was gone*** Had she not lost her way, her original supplies would have been adequate.[8]

*17. **God heard*** That is, heeded. The phrase is equivalent to the meaning of the name Ishmael.

by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and let the boy drink. 20God was with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman. 21He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

22At that time Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything that you do. 23Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned as loyally as I have dealt with you." 24And Abraham said, "I swear it."

וְהַחֲזִיקִי אֶת־יָדֵךְ בּוֹ כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ׃
19 וַיִּפְקַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא בְּאֵר מָיִם
וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתְּמַלֵּא אֶת־הַחֵמֶת מַיִם וַתַּשְׁקְ אֶת־הַנָּעַר׃
20 וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַנַּעַר וַיִּגְדָּל וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּמִּדְבָּר
וַיְהִי רֹבֶה קַשָּׁת׃ 21 וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּארָן וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ
אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ פ שני 22 וַיְהִי
בָּעֵת הַהִוא וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ
אֶל־אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר אֱלֹהִים עִמְּךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה
עֹשֶׂה׃ 23 וְעַתָּה הִשָּׁבְעָה לִי בֵאלֹהִים הֵנָּה אִם־
תִּשְׁקֹר לִי וְלִנִינִי וְלִנְכָדִי כַּחֶסֶד אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי
עִמְּךָ תַּעֲשֶׂה עִמָּדִי וְעִם־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־גַּרְתָּה בָּהּ׃
24 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי אִשָּׁבֵעַ׃ 25 וְהוֹכַח

called to Hagar from heaven Both sons of Abraham are saved at a critical moment by an angelic "voice from heaven" (cf. 22:11).

18. Unlike Isaac, Ishmael is promised only nationhood, not national territory.

19. ***opened her eyes*** She suddenly becomes aware of the existence of the well.

20. ***a bowman*** The tradition that the Ishmaelites were professional marksmen is preserved in Isaiah 21:17, which speaks of the bows of Kedar's warriors. Kedar is a son of Ishmael in the list of Genesis 25:13.

21. ***the wilderness of Paran*** See Comment to 14:6. Ishmael was earlier described as "a wild ass" (Heb. *pere'*, 16:12), so there may be a word play between *paran* and *pere'*.[9]

ABRAHAM'S PACT WITH ABIMELECH (vv. 22–34)

Abraham's encounter with Abimelech is reported with such an economy of detail that the background is obscure. Clearly it is told not for its own sake but for other reasons. It projects a fresh image of the patriarch. Now that his life's dream is fulfilled and his posterity assured, he possesses a new sense of confidence. No longer does he exhibit timidity and evasiveness in dealing with royalty; he negotiates as an equal. Moreover, Abraham reaches a new stage in his relationship to the promised land. He makes his first acquisition—a well at Beer-sheba—and his rights are acknowledged and guaranteed by the king. Finally, the narrative provides folk etymology for the name Beer-sheba and an explanation of its origin as a cult center in Israel.

Despite its paucity of detail, the composition of this story, like the previous two in the chapter, is artful. Each of the names of the two principal characters, Abraham and Abimelech, occurs exactly seven times; there are seven ewe lambs; both the verb "to swear" (vv. 23f.) and the name Beer-sheba contain the same Hebrew stem as the word for "seven" *(sh-v-')*.

22. ***At that time*** That is, soon after the expulsion of Ishmael (cf. 38:1).

Abimelech His royal title is deliberately omitted in order to underline that he and Abraham are equals.

Phicol The presence of the army commander suggests a military expedition.

said to Abraham The ensuing details make clear that the entire action takes place in the Beer-sheba region. Hence, Abraham must have left Gerar for this place after the episode recounted in Genesis 20.

God is with you An acknowledgment of Abraham's success and power.[10]

23. ***deal falsely*** Hebrew *tishkor*. This is the only biblical use of the verb in the Kal conjugation. The same verb occurs repeatedly in the eighth-century B.C.E. Sfire treaty with the specific

[25]Then Abraham reproached Abimelech for the well of water which the servants of Abimelech had seized. [26]But Abimelech said, "I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today." [27]Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two of them made a pact. [28]Abraham then set seven ewes of the flock by themselves, [29]and Abimelech said to Abraham, "What mean these seven ewes which you have set apart?" [30]He replied, "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well." [31]Hence that place was called Beer-sheba, for there the two of them swore an oath. [32]When they had concluded the pact at Beer-sheba, Abimelech and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned to the land of the Philistines. [33][Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beer-sheba, and invoked there the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. [34]And Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines a long time.

אַבְרָהָם אֶת־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ עַל־אֹדוֹת בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם
אֲשֶׁר גָּזְלוּ עַבְדֵי אֲבִימֶלֶךְ: 26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
לֹא יָדַעְתִּי מִי עָשָׂה אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְגַם־אַתָּה
לֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי וְגַם אָנֹכִי לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי בִלְתִּי הַיּוֹם:
27 וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם צֹאן וּבָקָר וַיִּתֵּן לַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ
וַיִּכְרְתוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּרִית: 28 וַיַּצֵּב אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שֶׁבַע
כִּבְשֹׂת הַצֹּאן לְבַדָּהֶן: 29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־
אַבְרָהָם מָה הֵנָּה שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֹׂת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר
הִצַּבְתָּ לְבַדָּנָה: 30 וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶת־שֶׁבַע כְּבָשֹׂת
תִּקַּח מִיָּדִי בַּעֲבוּר תִּהְיֶה־לִּי לְעֵדָה כִּי חָפַרְתִּי
אֶת־הַבְּאֵר הַזֹּאת: 31 עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא
בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע כִּי שָׁם נִשְׁבְּעוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: 32 וַיִּכְרְתוּ
בְרִית בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע וַיָּקָם אֲבִימֶלֶךְ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־
צְבָאוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים: 33 וַיִּטַּע אֶשֶׁל
בִּבְאֵר שָׁבַע וַיִּקְרָא־שָׁם בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֵל עוֹלָם:
34 וַיָּגָר אַבְרָהָם בְּאֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים יָמִים רַבִּים:
פ שביעי

technical sense of being guilty of a breach of contractual obligation. Accordingly, what Abimelech is suggesting is a pact of mutual nonaggression.

kith and kin The Hebrew compound phrase *nin ve-nekhed,* literally "son and grandson," simply means "posterity" or "forever."[11]

as loyally as . . . This refers back to 20:14–16.

24. ***I swear it*** The laconic reply suggests that Abraham has something on his mind.[12]

25. ***seized*** Hebrew *g-z-l,* "to rob," can be used of real estate.[13] They had prevented Abraham from enjoying free access to water for his herds.

27. If the animals given to Abimelech simply reciprocate the king's earlier gift to Abraham (20:14), then the absence of slaves is significant. The patriarch does not deal in this kind of human traffic. It is also possible that the beasts are part of the pact-making ceremony (see Comment to 15:9–17).

29–31. The seven ewes are obviously not part of the traditional ceremony but a separate transaction. By accepting them as a gift, the king publicly acknowledges Abraham's ownership of the well.

31. ***Beer-sheba*** The name can mean either "well of oath" or "well of seven." Our narrative, as does the parallel story in connection with Isaac (Gen. 26:23–33), fuses both meanings. On the place itself, see Excursus 14.

32. ***the land of the Philistines*** See Excursus 15.

33. ***Abraham*** The name does not appear in the Hebrew but is present in the ancient versions.[14]

a tamarisk A tall, shady tree that grows deep roots, requires little water, and is particularly suitable to the sandy soils of the northern Negeb area. We are not told why Abraham planted the tree. It may have served to memorialize the pact, as Bekhor Shor suggests. More likely, it is linked to the act of worship. There is no suggestion that the place has any prior sanctity. The patriarch does not make use of existing cultic objects. The phenomenon of the sacred tree has been discussed in the Comment to 12:6.

the Everlasting God Hebrew *'el 'olam* as a divine epithet is unique in the Bible. It provides an excellent illustration of the way in which a pre-Israelite liturgical term has undergone a mono-

22 Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."

כ״ב וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה
אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃

theistic transformation. El was the name of the god who was head of the Canaanite pantheon. The Ugaritic texts stress his antiquity and eternity (cf. 51.IV.24, 42f.; 68.10), and the title *'el ḏu 'olam,* "El the eternal one," has turned up in a fifteenth-century B.C.E. inscription from the hand of a Canaanite miner in Serabīt el-Khādem in the Sinai Peninsula. However, Hebrew does not allow the use of a proper name in the construct state joined to a noun. Hence, *'el* in the phrase *'el 'olam* can no longer be the proper name of a god but means simply "God." The phrase has become an attribute or epithet of YHVH, "the Everlasting God."

CHAPTER 22

The Akedah: The Binding of Isaac (vv. 1–19)

This section recounts the climactic event in the life of Abraham, the ultimate trial of faith. God asks the aged patriarch to offer up his son as a sacrifice. Abraham binds the child on the altar and poises the knife for the fatal thrust. But the deadly act is stayed by a heavenly voice.

The Akedah, as the story is popularly called—because of the Hebrew stem *'-k-d,* "to bind," in verse 9—is organically connected with the preceding chapter. Abraham has lost one son and now seems about to lose the other. In both narratives, the child is saved by divine intervention at the critical moment, the only two biblical instances of an angel calling from heaven to human beings. In both cases there is a fortuitous discovery: a well of water in the earlier story, a ram in the thicket here.

Beyond its connection with the foregoing chapter, the Akedah brings to a close Abraham's spiritual odyssey that began with God's call at Haran. The curtain rises and falls on the patriarch as he receives a divine word that demands agonizing decisions. The first time God bids him to take leave of his father and to cut himself off from his past; now, in this last theophany that he is to receive, God asks that he sacrifice his beloved, longed-for son and thereby abandon all hope of posterity. On both occasions Abraham responds with unquestioning obedience and steadfast loyalty.

This correspondence between Haran and Moriah encases the biography of Abraham within a framework of unwavering faith. For added emphasis, the two crucial events are cast in a common literary mold so that chapters 12 and 22 share many connecting links. God's first call to Abraham is introduced by the declaration, "Go forth . . . to the land that I will show you"; and His last employs almost identical language, "Go forth . . . to the land of Moriah . . . on one of the heights that I will point out to you." The Hebrew phrase *lekh lekha,* "go forth," does not occur again in the Bible, a fact that underscores the deliberate and meaningful nature of its use in these two passages. In both instances, the precise ultimate destination of the trek is withheld, and in both the tension of the drama is heightened by the cumulative effect of several Hebrew epithets, the last of which is the most potent: "your land, your homeland, your father's house"; "your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love." Both episodes culminate in promises of glorious posterity, the second one containing striking verbal echoes of the first. One blessing was received at the terebinth of Moreh, the other at the similar sounding Moriah; and at both sites, it is stated, Abraham "built an altar there." Finally, just as the account of the initial call is preceded by a genealogy that introduces the main character of the next episode, so the story of the final call from God is followed by a genealogical note having the same function.

GOD TESTS ABRAHAM (vv. 1–2)

*1. **Some time afterward*** As noted at 15:1, the phrase indicates an indefinite connection with foregoing events. Isaac was about three years old when Ishmael was expelled; he is now old enough to carry a load of firewood and to ask an intelligent question based on experience and observation.

[2]And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you." [3]So early next morning, Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He split the wood for the burnt offering, and he set out for the place of which God had told him. [4]On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place from afar.

ב וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־
אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה
וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר
אֵלֶיךָ: ג וַיַּשְׁכֵּם אַבְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּחֲבֹשׁ אֶת־חֲמֹרוֹ
וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו אִתּוֹ וְאֵת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיְבַקַּע
עֲצֵי עֹלָה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָמַר־לוֹ
הָאֱלֹהִים: ד בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־
עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם מֵרָחֹק: ה וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם

God put Abraham to the test This information is imparted to the reader, not divulged to Abraham, in order to remove any possible misunderstanding that God requires human sacrifice as such. Therefore, the purely probative nature of the divine request is emphasized. As a result, the focus of tension shifts from Isaac to Abraham. Now the reader knows that the son will not be slaughtered. But is the father's faith in God of such transcendent quality as to overcome his natural love for his heir in full consciousness that obedience to God's cruel request would mean the end of all his hopes and dreams, the nullification of the promises he had so often heard from the mouth of this self-same God?

He said As the following verse indicates, Abraham receives the divine call in a night dream or vision.[1]

Here I am Hebrew *hinneni* expresses an attitude of attentiveness and receptivity. It is the only word Abraham utters to God in the entire episode.

2. The enormity of God's request and the agonizing nature of the decision to be made are conveyed through the cumulative effect of the descriptive terms set forth in ascending order of endearment. This is the same device used in God's first call to Abraham in 12:1.

Take your son The Hebrew adds the participle *na'* to the imperative,[2] which usually softens the command to an entreaty, as noted in Sanhedrin 89b, Genesis Rabba 55:7, and Rashi's commentary. Abraham has absolute freedom of choice. Should he refuse, he would not incur any guilt.

your favored one Literally, "your only one"—here construed as a term of value.[3]

whom you love This is the first use of the key biblical stem *'-h-v*, significantly in the parent-child relationship. Its next usage (24:67) is in the husband-wife relationship.

the land of Moriah See Excursus 16 for a discussion of the problems and interpretations of the name.

that I will point out The mode of communication is not specified.

ABRAHAM MEETS THE CHALLENGE (vv. 3–10)

3. The patriarch makes no verbal response, not even *hinneni,* "Here I am!" He who was so daringly eloquent on behalf of the people of Sodom surrenders in total silence to his own bitter personal destiny. He does not question divine constancy. Early next morning, the old man rises to fulfill the divine charge. He performs a series of preparatory acts all described with an economy of words appropriate to the somber silence that pervades the scene. Remarkably, Sarah is ignored throughout the chapter. Early exegesis has Abraham concealing from his wife the true purpose of his journey lest she hinder him from doing God's bidding.[4]

two of his servants An eminent personage would be accompanied by two attendants.

He split the wood Since the exact destination is as yet unknown to him, he cannot be sure he will find fuel there.

4. ***On the third day*** In biblical consciousness, three days constitute a significant segment of time, particularly in connection with travel.[5] The long interval is crucial to the trial of faith, for

[5]Then Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you."

[6]Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac. He himself took the firestone and the knife; and the two walked off together. [7]Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he answered, "Yes, my son." And he said, "Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?" [8]And Abraham said, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

[9]They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the

אֶל־נְעָרָיו שְׁבוּ־לָכֶם פֹּה עִם־הַחֲמוֹר וַאֲנִי וְהַנַּעַר
נֵלְכָה עַד־כֹּה וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְנָשׁוּבָה אֲלֵיכֶם: 6 וַיִּקַּח
אַבְרָהָם אֶת־עֲצֵי הָעֹלָה וַיָּשֶׂם עַל־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ
וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ אֶת־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת וַיֵּלְכוּ
שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: 7 וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו
וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּנִּי בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה הָאֵשׁ
וְהָעֵצִים וְאַיֵּה הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם
אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה בְּנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם
יַחְדָּו: 9 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר־לוֹ
הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיַּעֲרֹךְ
אֶת־הָעֵצִים וַיַּעֲקֹד אֶת־יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ
עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִמַּעַל לָעֵצִים: 10 וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם

Abraham's instantaneous assent to God's request may have been impulsive and emotional and without proper consideration. The long trek enables him to regain his composure. It allows time for sober reflection; yet his resolve is not weakened. His decision to obey God is thus seen to be an undoubting act of free will.

saw the place from afar Is it an existing sacred site, or does he instinctively know the spot? The sight of it "from afar" immediately stirs consciousness of the actuality of the impending horror. According to rabbinic legend, Abraham and Isaac, but not the attendants, saw a cloud hovering over one of the hills.[6]

5. ***we will return*** Use of the plural form conceals the true purpose of the journey from Isaac.

6. ***Abraham took the wood*** That is, he took it off the beast of burden. He himself carried the dangerous articles—the firestone and the knife—so that the boy not be harmed and the sacrificial victim be unblemished at the moment of slaughter. There is a touch of bitter irony here: Isaac, unaware, cooperates in carrying some of the instruments of his own destruction. He whose name means "laughter" appears to be on the verge of becoming the personification of tragedy.[7]

firestone Since it is considered unlikely that a flame would be carried for three days, this seems a more likely rendering than "fire."[8] It could also mean a brazier.

knife The use of the rare Hebrew term ***ma'akhelet*** in Judges 19:29 in connection with the dissection of a human body and in Proverbs 30:14 in parallelism with "sword" proves that a large and heavy implement is intended, not an ordinary knife. There may be word play here: The instrument of death is ***ma'akhelet,*** and the rescuing agent is a ***mal'akh*** (v. 11).

the two walked off together There is perfect rapport between the two, encompassed as they are in mutual solitariness and enveloped in silence. The tension between the unsuspecting innocence of the son and the unuttered agony of the father does not disturb the harmony.

7–8. The oppressive silence is broken by Isaac's simple query, which is at once artless and penetrating. Is a suspicion of the awful truth beginning to dawn upon the boy? If so, the father's equivocal reply must surely sustain whatever doubts there are, especially in an age when human sacrifice is possible. The poignant tension inherent in the situation is heightened by the repetition of the words "father" and "son." The bond between the two remains unbroken. The brief dialogue over—the only such recorded between Isaac and his father—they continue their fateful trek in perfect harmony.

9–10. The detailed, laconic description of the various preparatory procedures conveys

wood. 10And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son. 11Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven: "Abraham! Abraham!" And he answered, "Here I am." 12And he said, "Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me." 13When Abraham looked up, his eye fell upon a ram, caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. 14And Abraham named that site Adonai-

אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת לִשְׁחַט אֶת־בְּנוֹ׃
יא וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר
אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃ יב וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־
תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל־הַנַּעַר וְאַל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי
עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ
אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי׃ יג וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת־
עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה־אַיִל אַחַר נֶאֱחַז בַּסְּבַךְ בְּקַרְנָיו
וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאַיִל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה
תַּחַת בְּנוֹ׃ יד וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא

something of the eternity of that terrible moment in time before the angelic voice is heard. Once again, not a word escapes the father's lips. Isaac too is speechless. The intensity of the anguish is beyond the ability of words to express.

bound The Hebrew stem *'-k-d* is found nowhere else in the ritual vocabulary of the Bible. In postbiblical texts it is a technical term for the tying together of the forefoot and the hindfoot of an animal or of the two forefeet or two hindfeet.[9]

GOD ACKNOWLEDGES ABRAHAM'S FIDELITY (vv. 11–12)

11. called to him from heaven Angels need to travel between heaven and earth, as is clear from 28:12, as well as from place to place on earth, as proved by 18:22. But the critical urgency of the moment precludes their usual personal appearance, such as made to Hagar (16:7ff.), and dictates this exceptional mode of angelic intervention, just as it did in 21:17.

Abraham! Abraham! The repetition connotes both urgency and a special relationship between the one addressed and the One who calls.[10]

12. And he said In biblical angelology, God and His angels often interchange imperceptibly, as is noted in Excursus 10.

for now I know As Ramban points out, it is not that God's foreknowledge is wanting but that, for Abraham's sake, the quality of character that now exists only potentially must be actualized.[11] In the biblical view, the genuinely righteous man must deserve that status through demonstrated action. Henceforth, Abraham is the incontestable paradigm of the truly "God-fearing" man, one who is wholehearted in his self-determined, disinterested, self-surrender to God's will. It is not important that the act was unfulfilled, for the value of the act may lie as much in the inward intention of the doer as in the final execution.

THE SUBSTITUTION OF A RAM (v. 13)

Abraham interprets the fortuitous presence of a ram to mean that a substitute animal offering is desired in place of Isaac.

a ram Hebrew *'ayil 'eḥad,* literally "one ram." This is the reading underlying many ancient versions, as well as of several medieval manuscripts. Our printed editions read *'ayil 'aḥar,* as did a few other ancient renderings.[12] This text is taken to mean "a ram behind [him]" or "a ram, later [caught]." On the graphic confusion of *resh* and *dalet,* see Comment to 10:4.

יְהוָה יִרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר הַיּוֹם בְּהַר יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה׃
15 וַיִּקְרָא מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָהָם שֵׁנִית מִן־
הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ 16 וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם־יְהוָה כִּי יַעַן
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׂכְתָּ אֶת־
בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידֶךָ׃ 17 כִּי־בָרֵךְ אֲבָרֶכְךָ וְהַרְבָּה
אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחוֹל אֲשֶׁר
עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו׃
18 וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֲךָ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר
שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקֹלִי׃ 19 וַיָּשָׁב אַבְרָהָם אֶל־נְעָרָיו וַיָּקֻמוּ
וַיֵּלְכוּ יַחְדָּו אֶל־בְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּשֶׁב אַבְרָהָם בִּבְאֵר
שָׁבַע׃ פ מפטיר 20 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים

yireh, whence the present saying, "On the mount of the LORD there is vision."

15The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16and said, "By Myself I swear, the LORD declares: Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one, 17I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes. 18All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed My command." 19Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.

THE NAMING OF THE ALTAR (v. 14)

This incident reminds Abraham of his reply to Isaac's question (v. 7f.). He had foretold better than he realized at the time. In accordance with patriarchal practice, the site of a revelation becomes sacred and receives a name somehow reminiscent of the occasion.[13]

whence the present saying A popular saying arose based on this episode. This is not part of the narrative but an editorial note.[14]

there is vision Hebrew *yera'eh,* literally "He/it shall be seen." The subject of the verb is unclear, although the apparent reference to verse 8 would favor the impersonal rendering, referring to the sheep. A different exegetical tradition is represented by the Septuagint, which renders, "On the mount the Lord appears."

REAFFIRMATION OF THE BLESSINGS (vv. 15–18)

Abraham has demonstrated his willingness to forfeit his posterity in obedience to God's will. It is fitting, therefore, that all previous promises be now reaffirmed. The formulation features several unusual elements. All previous blessings are pure acts of divine grace; now, for the first time, these are presented as a reward for Abraham's devotion to God. For the first time, too, they are introduced by a solemn oath, with God swearing by His own Being;[15] and they are prefaced by the prophetic formula, "The LORD declares" (Heb. *ne'um* YHVH). There are also two innovations in the content of the blessings: Sand is employed as a metaphor of multitude, and the patriarch's posterity is promised victory over its foes.

For additional comment on the meaning of the Akedah, see Excursuses 17 and 18.

The Offspring of Nahor (vv. 20–24)

These verses set forth the genealogy of Nahor, Abraham's brother. The two explanatory glosses—"Kemuel the father of Aram" and "Bethuel being the father of Rebekah"—suggest that the purpose of the genealogy is to forge a link between the Akedah and chapter 24. In order for the foregoing blessings to Abraham to be fulfilled, Isaac must marry and found a family. The list mentions Rebekah, Bethuel, Milcah, Nahor, and Aram as an intimation of Isaac's forthcoming marriage to Rebekah daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah of the city of Nahor in Aram-naharaim.

The structure and content of the family tree are of considerable interest for their own sakes. Like

[20]Some time later, Abraham was told, "Milcah too has borne children to your brother Nahor: [21]Uz the first-born, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram; [22]and Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel"—[23]Bethuel being the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. [24]And his concubine, whose

הָאֵלֶּה וַיֻּגַּד לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה
גַם־הִוא בָּנִים לְנָחוֹר אָחִיךָ: 21 אֶת־עוּץ בְּכֹרוֹ
וְאֶת־בּוּז אָחִיו וְאֶת־קְמוּאֵל אֲבִי אֲרָם: 22 וְאֶת־
כֶּשֶׂד וְאֶת־חֲזוֹ וְאֶת־פִּלְדָּשׁ וְאֶת־יִדְלָף וְאֶת
בְּתוּאֵל: 23 וּבְתוּאֵל יָלַד אֶת־רִבְקָה שְׁמֹנָה אֵלֶּה
יָלְדָה מִלְכָּה לְנָחוֹר אֲחִי אַבְרָהָם: 24 וּפִילַגְשׁוֹ

the other genealogies in the Book of Genesis, this too echoes historical reality. Nahor's "sons" are twelve in all. Since most of the names are otherwise known as those of tribes or localities, the list actually represents a league of tribes linked to one another by a consciousness of kinship or by confederation. Such tribal federations were common throughout the ancient Semitic world. The number twelve recalls the corresponding organization of the tribes of Ishmael, as mentioned in 17:20 and 25:12–16, and the later tribes of Israel.

Eight individuals stem from the chief wife and four from the concubine. This division of wife and concubine reflects relationships within the confederation itself. The "wife" tribes were most likely more influential and may have constituted the original core of the league. The "concubine" tribes would then have been later affiliates, subordinates who were absorbed into the confederation of tribes. It is also possible that the first group comprises tribal and geographical entities in the ancestral homeland inside Mesopotamia, while the other group consists of tribes or clans that migrated from the original center to the border regions.

The genealogical lists are of undoubted antiquity. Some names never reappear, either in the Bible or elsewhere, and apparently the tribes that bore them vanished early from history. The lowly status of Aram as a "grandson" tribe through the third-born means that, at the time of the origin of the list, this people had not yet risen to power. By contrast, the genealogy of Genesis 10 prestigiously has Aram as the son of Shem and the father (vv. 22f.), not the nephew, of Uz as here. That list reflects a later historic reality than this and derives from a time when Aram had overwhelmed the Uzzites and incorporated them into its tribal league. Furthermore, the depiction of Aram as part of the wider family of Abraham, in keeping with the consistent traditions about the close patriarchal associations with that people, must stem from before the Davidic period when Aram became the inveterate enemy of Israel and so remained for hundreds of years.

20. Milcah too has borne children The phrase is intelligible only in light of the earlier genealogy of 11:29, which mentions Milcah together with Sarah.

Nahor An important city in ancient Mesopotamia. It is mentioned in 24:10 and is known in cuneiform sources as Nakhur. It was situated in the upper Euphrates region in the Balikh Valley. The derivation of all these tribes from Nahor implies that the city was the original center of the confederation.

21–23. Of Milcah's eight sons, nothing at all is known about Kemuel, Pildash, and Jidlaph. They must have disappeared from the scene of history early in the second millennium B.C.E.

The attribution of "first-born" status to Uz means that it constituted the oldest or most powerful element within the group. The problem of its location was discussed in connection with 10:23. A similar difficulty arises regarding Buz, which, if Jeremiah 25:23 be the criterion, would be situated in northern Arabia. King Esarhaddon of Assyria claimed to have captured "the town of Bazu," which is now known to have been located near modern Bahrein on the Persian Gulf.

The name Chesed, discussed earlier in connection with 11:31, is doubtless the supposed ancestor of the Chaldeans (Heb. ***kasdim***). Hazo may be the same as the Hazu region in northern Arabia, known from the records of Esarhaddon's campaigns. Bethuel is a West Semitic personal name. In 25:20 he is called "the Aramean of Paddan-aram." No tribe or geographic entity named Bethuel is known.

Rebekah is, of course, the wife-to-be of Isaac. The name has been variously explained as deriving from a fairly widespread Semitic root meaning "to loop a cord over the head of a lamb or kid," from postbiblical ***rebkah*** (cf. Syr. ***rabaqta***), "a threshing team" (Tosef. Par. 2:3; Pes. 26a); from ***marbek,*** "a stall" (cf. 1 Sam. 28:24); or from an inverted form of ***bakar,*** "cattle," that is, "a female calf."

name was Reumah, also bore children: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

וּשְׁמָהּ רְאוּמָה וַתֵּלֶד גַּם־הִוא אֶת־טֵבַח וְאֶת־גַּחַם וְאֶת־תַּחַשׁ וְאֶת־מַעֲכָה׃ ס

24. Reuma appears to be an ancient name of a tribal or political league in the middle Syrian and northern Transjordan area. The origin of the name lies either in Ugaritic ***re'um,*** "wild ox" (Heb. *re'em*), or is derived from Akkadian ***ramu,*** "to love," which would make it an abbreviation for "beloved of El."

Tebah is most likely the Tubihi of the El-Amarna letters, referred to as *Dbh* in the list of Thutmose III. It was an important city in southern Syria and is probably the same place as Betah in 2 Samuel 8:8 and Tibbath in 1 Chronicles 18:8. Gaham is not otherwise known but has turned up as a personal name in the seventh-century B.C.E. Arad inscriptions (31:6). Tahash is almost certainly the land of Tahsi mentioned in the El-Amarna letters and in various Egyptian lists. It is to be located between Damascus and the Orontes River in Syria. Maacah is the most southerly of the four "concubine" tribes. Egyptian and biblical texts (cf., e.g., Deut. 3:14; Josh. 12:5) inform us that it was a small kingdom in northern Transjordan.

CHAPTER 23

The Cave of Machpelah (vv. 1–20)

Ḥayyei Sarah

Abraham's spiritual odyssey reached its climax with the Akedah. For all intents and purposes, his biography is complete. But two important issues remain: the concern with mortality and the preoccupation with posterity. The former finds expression in the acquisition of a hereditary burial site, the latter through the selection of a wife for Isaac so that the succession of the line may be secured. These are the topics of chapters 23 and 24, respectively.

The preceding episode closed with a genealogy that was designed to introduce the forthcoming marriage of Isaac. In a sense, therefore, chapter 23 breaks the narrative continuity. In reality, however, the death of Sarah and the purchase of Machpelah as a sepulcher are in proper chronological order. As 17:17 and 21:5 make clear, the matriarch was 90 years old when she bore Isaac. Since she was 127 at the time of her death, she died three years before Isaac's marriage at age 40 (25:20). This sequence of events is further confirmed by the statement that, in taking Rebekah to wife, Isaac "found comfort after his mother's death" (24:67).

The account of the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah is extraordinarily detailed, indicating the importance that the episode had assumed in the consciousness of Israel. There are several possible reasons for this emphasis. Not only is it the first recorded death and interment in the history of the Jewish people but it also concerns none other than Sarah, the first matriarch. Abraham's actions are indicative of the great respect for the dead and of the importance of proper burial that remain a characteristic of the Jewish faith. Machpelah is the first piece of real estate in the promised land secured by the founding father of the nation, and its acquisition presages the future possession of the entire land. Since all three patriarchs and three of the matriarchs eventually were interred in the cave, it most likely enjoyed popular veneration as a shrine and as a symbol of national and social unity. This may well have influenced David's choice of Hebron as the first capital of Israel. Finally, the narrative in a very real sense presents another mute affirmation of Abraham's faith. In the preceding chapter the divine promises were reiterated and expanded. Now Abraham faces harshly contrasting reality: to gain a mere burial plot he must receive permission from the local population and pay out a large sum of money. His insistence on acquiring the estate in perpetuity is an expression of faith that his descendants would indeed inherit the land.

The narrative itself is suffused with legal terminology and practice, an understanding of which is essential to its interpretation. First, Abraham labors under two disabilities that derive from his status as an alien. He cannot avail himself of local burial facilities without municipal permission, and he cannot acquire land. Second, even if these restrictions were to be overcome, he would still face the problem of procuring an inheritable estate to be used by future generations, for an alien could not normally own land in perpetuity (cf. Lev. 25:23). Third, apart from legal problems, there is still to be

חיי שרה

כ״ג וַיִּהְיוּ חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה
וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה: 2 וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה
בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הִוא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹא
אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכֹּתָהּ׃ 3 וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם
מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־חֵת לֵאמֹר: 4 גֵּר־

כ״ף זעירא v. 2.

ḤAYYEI SARAH

23 Sarah's lifetime—the span of Sarah's life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. 2Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her. 3Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, 4"I am a resident alien among you; sell me

encountered the reluctance of landowners to part with their property, a pervasive and deep-seated attitude throughout the ancient Near East. Naboth's rejection of Ahab's offer to buy his vineyard exemplifies this tendency: "The LORD forbid that I should give up to you what I have inherited from my fathers!" (1 Kings 21:3). At work there is a profound and complex emotional attachment to the estate, an emotion that is shaped by a powerful feeling of continuity with one's forebears and a compelling sense of responsibility toward one's family, clan, and posterity. The land is looked upon as an ancestral trust. All this is reinforced by the strong influence of communal solidarity, the consciousness that disposal of real estate to an alien may upset the local demographic balance, impair social cohesion, and weaken the community in its relationship with neighboring cities and tribes. Given these circumstances, it is small wonder that the entire community was involved in transacting a sale of land.

Abraham wishes to ensure that his purchase is final and irrevocable, his ownership absolute and incontestable. For these reasons, he refuses a gift: donations are notoriously insecure in law. They may be challenged by heirs or by other members of the family or community, or even by the donor himself should his goodwill wane. Only a payment that is manifestly accepted by the seller of his own volition ensures the unchallengeable nature of the transaction. That is why Ephron, not Abraham, must first state the price and why, once that is done, there is no further bargaining.

THE DEATH OF SARAH (vv. 1–2)

1. ***Sarah's lifetime*** The span of Sarah's life. The repetition underscores this unique biblical specification of a woman's age at death and testifies to Sarah's great importance as the first matriarch (cf. Isa. 51:2).[1]

2. ***Kiriath-arba*** The origin of this earlier name of Hebron is unclear. The first part of the name means "city." According to the tradition of Joshua 14:15 and 21:11, Arba was an important personage among the aboriginal population. Another suggestion takes *'arba'* as an abbreviation of a non-Semitic *arbi'lum,* also the name of a Mesopotamian city. Perhaps the most likely explanation is "city of four," meaning four settlements that confederated and so received the name "Hebron," which may well mean "confederation," as was explained in the Comment to 13:18.[2]

proceeded The Hebrew verb *b-w-'*, "to come," may have this sense of preparation for action when used in conjunction with another verb.[3]

to mourn . . . to bewail The specific rites and the time period involved are not given because the focus of interest is on the next scene.

THE APPEAL TO THE HITTITES (vv. 3–9)

3. ***rose*** Mourners would sit on the ground.[4]

Hittites General information about this people has been given in the Comment to 10:15. The historical problem relating to the Hittites mentioned in this episode is discussed in detail in Excursus 19.

a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial." 5And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, 6"Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead." 7Thereupon Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites, 8and he said to them, "If it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, you must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. 9Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he owns, which is at the edge of his land. Let him sell it to me, at the full price, for a burial site in your midst."

וְתוֹשָׁב אָנֹכִי עִמָּכֶם תְּנוּ לִי אֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם
וְאֶקְבְּרָה מֵתִי מִלְּפָנָי: 5 וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־חֵת אֶת־
אַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לוֹ: 6 שְׁמָעֵנוּ אֲדֹנִי נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים
אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ בְּמִבְחַר קְבָרֵינוּ קְבֹר אֶת־מֵתֶךָ
אִישׁ מִמֶּנּוּ אֶת־קִבְרוֹ לְא־יִכְלֶה מִמְּךָ מִקְּבֹר
מֵתֶךָ: 7 וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם־הָאָרֶץ לִבְנֵי־
חֵת: 8 וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר אִם־יֵשׁ אֶת־נַפְשְׁכֶם
לִקְבֹּר אֶת־מֵתִי מִלְּפָנַי שִׁמְעוּנִי וּפִגְעוּ־לִי בְּעֶפְרֹן
בֶּן־צֹחַר: 9 וְיִתֶּן־לִי אֶת־מְעָרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ
אֲשֶׁר בִּקְצֵה שָׂדֵהוּ בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי

*4. **a resident alien*** Hebrew *ger ve-toshav,* literally "alien and resident," is a case of hendiadys, the use of two terms to express a single notion. Leviticus 25:47 neatly proves that the presence or absence of the conjunction does not affect the compound meaning of the phrase. Abraham mentions his status because it is the background to the request that follows; a resident alien was unable to purchase real estate.

sell me The Hebrew verb *n-t-n* is employed seven times in the course of the negotiations. It can mean "to give, sell, pay."[5] Its many meanings permit the dialogue to be conducted in an atmosphere of delicate and dignified, if somewhat contrived, politeness.

a burial site Hebrew *'aḥuzzat kever* essentially denotes an inheritable sepulcher.[6] This is the key to the transaction since the cave is to serve future generations of the family of Abraham.

*6. **Hear us*** This appeal, employed here six times in one form or another, is characteristic of the language of law court proceedings.[7]

my lord . . . elect of God Abraham may be an alien, but the Hittites treat him with reverential respect. The title they give him is honorific and probably has no religious connotation.[8]

Bury your dead The first hurdle is overcome. Abraham receives the permission of the community to bury his dead within the municipal boundaries of Hebron. Now he must acquire a specific plot of land.

*7. **bowed low*** In gratitude. The patriarch conducts himself with dignity. He is respectful and courteous, but not ingratiating or obsequious. The Hittites call him "lord," but Abraham does not address them as superiors.

the people of the land The landowner is not approached directly. Abraham must first deal with "the people of the land." It is unclear whether this term is synonymous with "the Hittites" and with "all who entered the gate of his town" (vv. 10,18), simply connoting the general body of citizens, or whether it refers to a specific social entity, meaning the ruling oligarchy that performed certain judicial and political functions and that served as the town council. It seems that the support of this group was needed before an alien could acquire real estate and before a citizen would agree to negotiate the sale of his property.

*8. **Ephron son of Zohar*** The Bible rarely records the father's name in the case of a non-Israelite.[9] The present exception suggests that Ephron was a man of nobility.

*9. **Machpelah*** The Hebrew is a noun form and always takes the definite article, which indicates that it is not a personal name. Verse 17 seems to imply a place-name,[10] while verse 19 as well as 49:30 and 50:13 suggest that Machpelah encompasses the entire field, not just the cave. The ancient versions and rabbinic traditions, together with many medieval exegetes, understood the word to be a descriptive term meaning "twofold"—two chambers either side by side or one above the other.

According to the Genesis sources, not only Sarah but Abraham too was buried there, as were

[10]Ephron was present among the Hittites; so Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, all who entered the gate of his town, saying, [11]"No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it; I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead." [12]Then Abraham bowed low before the people of the land, [13]and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If only you would hear me out! Let me pay the price of the land; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there." [14]And Ephron replied to Abra-

בְּתוֹכָם לַאֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר: 10 וְעֶפְרוֹן יֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹךְ
בְּנֵי־חֵת וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי אֶת־אַבְרָהָם בְּאָזְנֵי
בְנֵי־חֵת לְכֹל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר־עִירוֹ לֵאמֹר: 11 לֹא־
אֲדֹנִי שְׁמָעֵנִי הַשָּׂדֶה נָתַתִּי לָךְ וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ
לְךָ נְתַתִּיהָ לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־עַמִּי נְתַתִּיהָ לָּךְ קְבֹר מֵתֶךָ:
12 וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ: 13 וַיְדַבֵּר
אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן בְּאָזְנֵי עַם־הָאָרֶץ לֵאמֹר אַךְ אִם־אַתָּה
לוּ שְׁמָעֵנִי נָתַתִּי כֶּסֶף הַשָּׂדֶה קַח מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶקְבְּרָה
אֶת־מֵתִי שָׁמָּה: 14 וַיַּעַן עֶפְרוֹן אֶת־אַבְרָהָם

Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah. Such traditions leave little doubt that Machpelah must have been a national shrine throughout the biblical period, even though the biblical sources outside Genesis are silent on the matter. After the Western Wall in Jerusalem, it has remained throughout history the most sacred monument of the Jewish people. It is traditionally identified with the site the Arabs call the *ḥaram el-khalil*, "the sacred precinct of the friend (of God)," in present-day Hebron. The magnificent surrounding wall of hewn stones goes back at least to the time of Herod. During the Byzantine period a church was built over the sepulcher, but Jews were allowed to pray within the area. After the Arab invasion and conquest of the Land of Israel in the seventh century C.E., the church was converted into a mosque. In 1267 Sultan Baybars forbade Jews and Christians to enter the cave. Thereafter, "infidels" were not allowed to ascend beyond the seventh step of the outer wall leading to the court of the mosque. This situation endured for the next 700 years until Hebron was liberated by the Israel Defense Forces in June 1967. Jews, Christians, and Muslims were then given the freedom to worship inside the cave.

at the edge of his land Legal procedure naturally requires specification of the locale of the plot. In this instance, the phrase may also serve to soften reluctance about the sale, as though to say that the cave is ideally located to obviate the need for an access path through the field and so avoid any questions of the right of way.[11]

at the full price Literally, "at full silver." Coinage was invented about the end of the eighth century B.C.E. and was not found in the Land of Israel until the end of the biblical period. The silver shekel was the most common medium of exchange in business transactions throughout the ancient Near East (cf. vv. 15f.).

The phrase "at full price" has legal force and appears in ancient Near Eastern commercial documents in one form or another in several Semitic languages over an extended period of time.[12]

THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH EPHRON (vv. 10–16)

It must be assumed that the assembly in some way indicated its assent to Abraham's request, so that the negotiations with Ephron alone may now proceed in earnest. These are carried out at the city gate, which served as a civic center (see Comment to 19:1). The transaction is given the widest possible publicity in order to avoid the likelihood of future litigation.

10. ***all who entered the gate of his town*** The phrase is repeated in verse 18. It seems to mean "all who had free access to the town," that is, the body of free citizens. It could also be an ancient term for the town council.

11. Abraham seems to have had in mind only the cave. Ephron offers it together with the field as a gift. There is no way of telling whether the offer is sincere or simply the opening gambit in anticipation of the usual oriental bargaining.

12. ***bowed low*** As a gesture of gratitude (cf. v. 7).

13. Well aware of the legal instability of gifts of land, Abraham turns down the offer.[13]

ham, saying to him, 15"My lord, do hear me! A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Go and bury your dead." 16Abraham accepted Ephron's terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites—four hundred shekels of silver at the going merchants' rate.

17So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed 18to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the

לֵאמֹר לוֹ׃ 15 אֲדֹנִי שְׁמָעֵנִי אֶרֶץ אַרְבַּע מֵאֹת
שֶׁקֶל־כֶּסֶף בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ מַה־הִוא וְאֶת־מֵתְךָ קְבֹר׃
16 וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם אֶל־עֶפְרוֹן וַיִּשְׁקֹל אַבְרָהָם
לְעֶפְרֹן אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֵי־חֵת
אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שֶׁקֶל כֶּסֶף עֹבֵר לַסֹּחֵר׃ שני
17 וַיָּקָם׀ שְׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי
מַמְרֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ וְכָל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר
בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב׃ 18 לְאַבְרָהָם
לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־חֵת בְּכֹל בָּאֵי שַׁעַר־עִירוֹ׃

*15. **four hundred shekels of silver*** The price is adroitly introduced by Ephron with an air of seeming nonchalance. In the absence of any information about contemporary land values and the size and quality of the estate, it is not possible to know if the price quoted was exorbitant.[14] It is of interest that three texts from Ugarit, written in Akkadian and dating from the fourteenth-thirteenth centuries B.C.E., record real estate transactions involving a purchase price of 400 shekels of silver.

*16. **paid out*** Literally, "weighed," regularly used of payment in commercial transactions because the metal was literally weighed each time on a pair of scales.[15]

at the going merchants' rate That is, the rate that is current among merchants, a specification necessary and important in view of the variations in the shekel weight. There was a common and royal weight (cf. 2 Sam. 14:26) and within each class also a light and heavy standard. The Hebrew technical term has its counterpart in Akkadian ***maḫirat illaku,*** "the current rate," found in the laws of the kingdom of Eshnunna (par. 41), deriving from the last quarter of the twentieth century B.C.E., and in the Old Babylonian business documents as well.

A LEGAL SUMMATION (vv. 17–20)

The final paragraph, doubtless reflecting written deeds of sale, reads like a legal document, although the contract in this instance is based on a verbal agreement. It is divided into two sections. Verses 17–18 contain the following information: the identity of the transferor, the location of the property and a description of its contents, the identity of the transferee, the mode of acquisition of property rights, and the fact of the conveyance of title executed in the presence of witnesses in a public proceeding. Verses 19–20 are not later additions but are integral to the transaction. Because the authorities have allowed the land transfer to an alien on the understanding that it be used as a burial site, it is necessary to affirm that Abraham fulfilled this precondition in good faith. It is the act of burial that legally completes the transaction, that makes the sale absolute and incontestable, and that confers the power to dispose of the property by testament or will. Hence the concluding summation in verse 20.

*17. **Mamre*** As was explained in connection with 13:18, Mamre was the designation of one of the ancient and influential families in Hebron, and it seems to have lent its name to one of the town's important quarters. The fact that all subsequent references to the Cave of Machpelah invariably locate it in relation to Mamre[16] means that the latter was an easily identifiable landmark, the name being perhaps elliptical for the famous "terebinths of Mamre" (13:18).

and all the trees The specification of the trees in land sale contracts is frequent and widespread in the ancient Near East.[17] It may have been occasioned by the potentiality of acquiring proprietary rights to the land without the trees, and vice versa.

*19. **Abraham buried his wife*** This terse statement, bereft of any descriptive detail, epitomizes the simplicity and lack of ostentation that have always characterized traditional Jewish burial rites.

gate of his town. [19]And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. [20]Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site.

יט וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן קָבַר אַבְרָהָם אֶת־שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־
מְעָרַת שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא הִוא חֶבְרוֹן
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: כ וַיָּקָם הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ
לְאַבְרָהָם לַאֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת: ס

20. ***passed*** Literally, "arose." The Hebrew stem ***k-w-m,*** used here, has legal force as a technical term in connection with property transfers and other situations.[18]

from the Hittites Since the ultimate control of land was vested in the community, mention of the Hittites in the legal summation is essential.[19]

CHAPTER 24

The Betrothal of Isaac (vv. 1–67)

Having discharged his duty to the dead, Abraham now turns his attention to the needs of the living. As long as Isaac is unmarried, the divine promise of posterity remains unfulfilled. The patriarch therefore commissions his trusted servant to set out for far-off Aram-naharaim in order to find a wife for his son from among Abraham's own kinfolk.

This narrative, the longest chapter in Genesis, is a kind of novella, though it is somewhat dependent for its background on a knowledge of previous events. Its underlying motif is the abhorrence of the local Canaanites, who are presented in the Torah sources as unregenerately corrupt and who, for that reason, have forfeited all rights to their land.

The action in the narrative unfolds in five scenes. At the outset Abraham is the dominant personality. But the movement of the story gradually shifts to Isaac, so that at its conclusion it is the son who is the center of attention and the father has faded from the scene. The repeated phrase "my master Abraham" gives way to "my master Isaac" (v. 65). The betrothal episode effects the transition from the cycle of Abrahamic stories to the Isaac narratives. This progression from the older to the successor generation is mediated by the servant, who has no other function here and is never heard of again. For this reason, his anonymity is thoroughly appropriate. The fact that his statement, "I am Abraham's servant" (v. 34), constitutes the exact middle verse of the chapter is symbolic of his role: to forge the link between the generations.

The transition to Isaac and Rebekah as the successors of Abraham and Sarah and as the heirs to the divine promises is effected through the deliberate use of several literary devices. Rebekah's departure for Canaan, recounted in verse 7, is so styled as to bring to mind Abraham's original exodus from his homeland, and the words are borrowed directly from 12:7. Key words and phrases of 12:1–3 also are repeated here, such as "native land" (vv. 4,7), "father's house" (vv. 3,7,8,41), "to the land" (vv. 5,7), "blessing" (vv. 1,35), and "becoming great" (v. 35). The divine order to Abraham, "Go forth," and his unfaltering response (12:1,4) are paralleled here by Rebekah's unquestioning willingness to go at once (v. 58). "I will go," she firmly declares in response to the query, "Will you go?" This crucial verb "to go" (Heb. ***h-l-kh***) occurs seven times in connection with Rebekah, a sure sign of its seminal importance. Finally, the divine blessing bestowed on Abraham, "Your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes" (22:17), is repeated almost verbatim in the farewell blessing to the bride in verse 60.

One other feature of the narrative deserves special mention. Although God does not intervene in a supernatural manner, the reader nevertheless is left with the absolute conviction that the guiding hand of Providence is present from first to last. The narrative conveys the clear impression that the commonplace and the natural are the arena for the realization of God's unfolding plan of history.

כ״ד וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַיהוָה בֵּרַךְ אֶת־
אַבְרָהָם בַּכֹּל: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל־עַבְדּוֹ זְקַן
בֵּיתוֹ הַמֹּשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ שִׂים־נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת
יַרְכִּי: 3 וְאַשְׁבִּיעֲךָ בַּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וֵאלֹהֵי
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי
אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ: 4 כִּי אֶל־אַרְצִי וְאֶל־
מוֹלַדְתִּי תֵּלֵךְ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי לְיִצְחָק:
5 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָעֶבֶד אוּלַי לֹא־תֹאבֶה הָאִשָּׁה

24 Abraham was now old, advanced in years, and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2And Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh 3and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, 4but will go to the land of my birth and get a wife for my son Isaac." 5And the servant said to him, "What if the woman does not consent to follow me to this land, shall I

ABRAHAM COMMISSIONS HIS SERVANT (vv. 1–9)

1. ***old, advanced in years*** Abraham's awareness of his extreme old age lends urgency to his quest for a wife for his son.[1] That is why he extracts an oath from his servant when a simple order normally would have sufficed. The servant's query in verse 5 assumes the possibility of the patriarch not being alive by the end of his mission. Significantly, the only other instance of the particular form of oath described in verse 2 occurs in a deathbed scene, 47:29.

blessed . . . in all things Abraham's wealth is to be a decisive factor in gaining consent both to the marriage and to the bride's journey to a distant land.[2]

2. ***senior servant*** Possibly he is Eliezer, who was mentioned in 15:7. The chief servant in an aristocratic household was invested with considerable power and responsibility.[3]

Put your hand under my thigh Gestures accompanying oath-taking are universal in the ancient world. Most frequently, they involve the raising of a hand, as in 14:22, and/or the holding of a ritual object. In later times, a Torah scroll, phylacteries, or a Bible might be held for such a purpose.[4]

The unusual nature of the present act leaves any explanation uncertain. Interpreters are unanimous that the "thigh" refers to the genital organ.[5] This may be a reference to circumcision: Holding the circumcised membrum, called the "sign of the covenant" in 17:11, may invoke the presence and power of God as the guarantor of the oath. But such symbolism would be valid only if it were recognized by both sides. The gesture would be meaningless to an uncircumcised servant. If he were circumcised, and this presumably was the case here, it is unclear why he did not have to touch his own membrum. Another explanation regards the "thigh" as the seat of the procreative powers. The gesture would then involve posterity in the implementation of the instructions. Verse 41 shows that a curse was invoked as part of the oath in the event of noncompliance. So the placing of the hand on the membrum may have been a gesture acknowledging that Abraham's posterity would avenge the violation. (This explanation becomes less convincing in 47:29, where Jacob adjures Joseph.) The notion that the curse has to do with sterility or loss of offspring is open to the same objection as was leveled against the first explanation.

3. The patriarch asks his servant to take an oath by "the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth," a title that is unique in biblical literature. In light of the fact that the mission involves travel to a distant land, it makes sense to invoke God's universal sovereignty. The epithet may be a monotheistic version of an ancient Near Eastern oath formula in which the gods of heaven and earth were invoked as witnesses.[6]

4. ***land of my birth*** Or "of my kinsman," as was explained in the Comment to 12:1. In his repetition of the story, the servant consistently speaks of "family," or "kindred," as in verses 38, 40, and 41.

get a wife The Hebrew verb *l-k-ḥ,* literally "to take," has legal force. It is the equivalent of Akkadian *aḥāzu,* "to seize, possess, marry." These terms define the marriage institution from the perspective of the groom. The narrative also reflects the custom of the parent initiating the marriage transaction.[7]

then take your son back to the land from which you came?" 6Abraham answered him, "On no account must you take my son back there! 7The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my native land, who promised me on oath, saying, 'I will assign this land to your offspring'—He will send His angel before you, and you will get a wife for my son from there. 8And if the woman does not consent to follow you, you shall then be clear of this oath to me; but do not take my son back there." 9So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore to him as bidden.

10Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, taking with him all the bounty of his master; and he made his way to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. 11He

לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַי אֶל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הֲהָשֵׁב אָשִׁיב
אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָצָאתָ מִשָּׁם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תָּשִׁיב אֶת־בְּנִי
שָׁמָּה׃ 7 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לְקָחַנִי מִבֵּית
אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וַאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־לִי וַאֲשֶׁר
נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לֵאמֹר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
הוּא יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי
מִשָּׁם׃ 8 וְאִם־לֹא תֹאבֶה הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרֶיךָ
וְנִקֵּיתָ מִשְּׁבֻעָתִי זֹאת רַק אֶת־בְּנִי לֹא תָשֵׁב
שָׁמָּה׃ 9 וַיָּשֶׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת־יָדוֹ תַּחַת יֶרֶךְ אַבְרָהָם
אֲדֹנָיו וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ עַל־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה׃ שלישי
10 וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גְמַלִּים מִגְּמַלֵּי אֲדֹנָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ
וְכָל־טוּב אֲדֹנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֲרַם נַהֲרַיִם

6–8. These verses contain the last words of the patriarch. Expressing his absolute faith in the workings of a benign Providence, they are in striking contrast to the first words that the text ascribes to him, an expression of doubt (15:2f.,8).

The divine promises contain two elements, posterity and national territory. Isaac, in his person and by his very presence in Canaan, symbolizes the fulfillment of both. That is why he alone of the patriarchs must never leave the land; in 26:2f. he is actually forbidden to do so, even in time of famine. He also is the only one who sowed the soil (26:12). If Isaac were to desert the land or intermarry with the local Canaanites, he would, in effect, be renouncing God's promises. His marriage is seen as part of the same divinely ordained historic process that commenced with Abraham's exodus from Ur.

*7. **the God of heaven*** The second part of the epithet of verse 3 is inappropriate because the present context is different. The emphasis is not God's sovereignty but His providence, here personified as an angel, a heavenly being.[8]

His angel For a discussion of biblical angelology, see Excursus 10.

*8. **clear of this oath*** The Hebrew stem *n-k-h* denotes, among other things, "to be free of (further) obligation."[9]

THE SERVANT'S PRAYER (vv. 10–14)

*10. **took . . . set out . . . made his way*** In conformity with the nondescriptive biblical narrative style, the details of the long journey are ignored. Only the goal and its achievement are considered worthy of description.

ten of his master's camels The historical problem of the camel in the patriarchal narratives has been discussed in the Comment to 12:16. In the present instance, the sizable convoy is indispensable to the progress of the story, for it is designed to make a powerful impression on the girl and her family, to serve as the instrument for testing her character, and to have the practical purpose of providing the means of homeward transportation for the bride and her entourage.

Aram-naharaim This rare place-name occurs nowhere else in Genesis.[10] The alternative Paddan-aram is discussed in the Comment to 25:20. The Greek translation took the second element to be a dual form, "two rivers," and so arose "Mesopotamia," the land "between the two rivers." This term was misunderstood to refer to the entire territory between the Tigris and the Euphrates, or between the Euphrates and its tributary, the River Balikh. The Targums, however, with their "Aram which is on the Euphrates," have preserved a better tradition, for the name ***naharaim*** really means "the land along the river" or "the land within the river." It is the territory bounded on three sides by

made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water. 12And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me good fortune this day, and deal graciously with my master Abraham: 13Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water; 14let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master."

15He had scarcely finished speaking, when Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, the son of Milcah the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her

אֶל־עִיר נָחוֹר׃ 11 וַיַּבְרֵךְ הַגְּמַלִּים מִחוּץ לָעִיר
אֶל־בְּאֵר הַמָּיִם לְעֵת עֶרֶב לְעֵת צֵאת הַשֹּׁאֲבֹת׃
12 וַיֹּאמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם הַקְרֶה־נָּא
לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם וַעֲשֵׂה־חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם׃ 13 הִנֵּה
אָנֹכִי נִצָּב עַל־עֵין הַמָּיִם וּבְנוֹת אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר
יֹצְאֹת לִשְׁאֹב מָיִם׃ 14 וְהָיָה הַנַּעַר אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר
אֵלָיו הַטִּי־נָא כַדֵּךְ וְאֶשְׁתֶּה וְאָמְרָה שְׁתֵה וְגַם־
גְּמַלֶּיךָ אַשְׁקֶה אֹתָהּ הֹכַחְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וּבָהּ
אֵדַע כִּי־עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם־אֲדֹנִי׃ 15 וַיְהִי־הוּא טֶרֶם
כִּלָּה לְדַבֵּר וְהִנֵּה רִבְקָה יֹצֵאת אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה
לִבְתוּאֵל בֶּן־מִלְכָּה אֵשֶׁת נָחוֹר אֲחִי אַבְרָהָם

v. 14. הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳

the Great Bend of the Euphrates, within which lay the kingdom of Mitanni. This is called *Naharain* in Egyptian texts and *Naharima* in the El-Amarna letters.

11. It was natural for a newly arrived stranger to head for the public wells. He could replenish his water supplies and at the same time cull much valuable information about the town and make useful contacts, for the well served as a meeting place for the townsfolk and shepherds. Jacob, too, gravitated at once toward the well on arriving at Haran in 29:2, and Moses did the same thing when he fled to Midian in Exodus 2:15. In each case the encounter at the well eventuated in a betrothal. The three scenes share a number of features in common.

at evening time When the chores are done, and the sun-baked day has cooled, the young women who go out to draw water can dawdle over the task and engage in leisurely conversation.

12–14. The unnamed servant of Abraham is the first person whom Scripture records as praying for personal guidance at a critical moment. The prayer is of interest because it is a "prayer of the heart," uttered spontaneously and without formality. It implies a concept of the individual as a religious unit in his own right, as distinct from the community. Individual, direct contact with God and an understanding of God as approachable are prominent motifs in the religion of Israel. They find expression for the first time in the simple, pious prayer of the servant.

12. ***grant me good fortune*** Hebrew ***hakreh,*** literally "make it occur." What appears to an observer to be the happy result of chance ***(mikreh)*** may, in reality, be a deliberate determination of God. Nothing is more characteristic of biblical man than a profound and pervasive conviction about the role of divine Providence in everyday human affairs. It should be noted that the servant does not ask for a miraculous divine intervention or for a revelation that would designate Isaac's bride-to-be. He prays, rather, that the rational criteria of suitability that he himself determines might be in accordance with God's will and be effective.

13. ***by the spring*** For the variants "spring" and "well," see Comment to 16:14.

14. The criteria that the servant establishes are aspects of nobility of character. The ideal wife must be hospitable to strangers, kind to animals, and willing to give of herself to others. The grueling nature of the prescribed test can be appreciated only if it is realized that a single camel—and here there were ten!—requires at least twenty-five gallons of water to regain the weight it loses in the course of a long journey. It takes a camel about ten minutes to drink this amount of water.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH REBEKAH (vv. 15–27)

The servant's prayer is answered at once and in full measure. He had not specified family relationship,

shoulder. 16The maiden was very beautiful, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. 17The servant ran toward her and said, "Please, let me sip a little water from your jar." 18"Drink, my lord," she said, and she quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and let him drink. 19When she had let him drink his fill, she said, "I will also draw for your camels, until they finish drinking." 20Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.

21The man, meanwhile, stood gazing at her, silently wondering whether the LORD had made his errand successful or not. 22When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two gold bands for her arms, ten shekels in weight. 23"Pray tell me," he said, "whose daughter are you? Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" 24She replied, "I

וְכַדָּהּ עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ׃ 16 וְהַנַּעֲר טֹבַת מַרְאֶה מְאֹד
בְּתוּלָה וְאִישׁ לֹא יְדָעָהּ וַתֵּרֶד הָעַיְנָה וַתְּמַלֵּא
כַדָּהּ וַתָּעַל׃ 17 וַיָּרָץ הָעֶבֶד לִקְרָאתָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר
הַגְמִיאִינִי נָא מְעַט־מַיִם מִכַּדֵּךְ׃ 18 וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵה
אֲדֹנִי וַתְּמַהֵר וַתֹּרֶד כַּדָּהּ עַל־יָדָהּ וַתַּשְׁקֵהוּ׃
19 וַתְּכַל לְהַשְׁקֹתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר גַּם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב
עַד אִם־כִּלּוּ לִשְׁתֹּת׃ 20 וַתְּמַהֵר וַתְּעַר כַּדָּהּ אֶל־
הַשֹּׁקֶת וַתָּרָץ עוֹד אֶל־הַבְּאֵר לִשְׁאֹב וַתִּשְׁאַב
לְכָל־גְּמַלָּיו׃ 21 וְהָאִישׁ מִשְׁתָּאֵה לָהּ מַחֲרִישׁ
לָדַעַת הַהִצְלִיחַ יְהוָה דַּרְכּוֹ אִם־לֹא׃ 22 וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלּוּ הַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁתֹּת וַיִּקַּח הָאִישׁ נֶזֶם
זָהָב בֶּקַע מִשְׁקָלוֹ וּשְׁנֵי צְמִידִים עַל־יָדֶיהָ עֲשָׂרָה
זָהָב מִשְׁקָלָם׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר בַּת־מִי אַתְּ הַגִּידִי נָא לִי

v. 16. וְהַנַּעֲלָה ק׳

and the girl turns out to be Abraham's kin. He had said nothing of beauty, and she is well endowed with it. Moreover, her chastity, a virtue highly esteemed, is unblemished.

15. ***born to Bethuel...*** Her full genealogy is given because, as related in 22:20–24, Nahor also had children from a concubine. The child of a chief wife enjoyed higher social prestige. The relationship to Abraham is given in order to emphasize the providential nature of what occurred.

16. ***a virgin...*** Hebrew *betulah,* like its cognates Akkadian *batultu,* Ugaritic *btlt,* Arabic *batul,* Syriac *bethultha,* does not by itself, without further definition, exclusively express virginity in the physical sense understood by the English word. Rather, the primary denotation is chronological, and the term denotes a sexually mature young girl of marriageable age, whether married or not. Thus Joel 1:8 can use the figure of a maiden *(betulah)* lamenting for the husband of her youth, and an Aramaic incantation text speaks of a *bethultha* who is pregnant. When Akkadian texts wish to stress the preservation of bodily virginal integrity, they employ the phrase *ša zikaram la idū,* "who has not known a man," which corresponds almost exactly to the additional defining clause in this verse, already discussed in the Comment to 19:8.

went down . . . filled . . . came up She went about her business briskly and conscientiously, not wasting time in idle gossip. This made a great impression on the servant.[11]

17. In order to test her, he deliberately refrains from asking for water for the animals.

19. ***until they finish*** Her offer is not a token gesture but an act of true generosity proffered in full knowledge of the great labor involved.

22. Partly in return for her self-imposed, arduous labors and partly to win her good will and to impress her family, he lavishes rich gifts upon the girl. The fact that he does so even before learning her identity has caused difficulty for the commentators. Rashi understands the servant's action to be an expression of implicit faith in God's response to his prayer. Most Jewish exegetes prefer to reverse the order of events and cite verse 47 as proof.[12]

The specification of the weight of the jewelry is due to the fact that such items were cast according to fixed standards and used as media of exchange.

half-shekel Hebrew *beka'* is a weight so defined in Exodus 38:26. The word is probably derived from a root meaning "to split, divide." Several weights inscribed in the paleo-Hebrew script with *beka'*, or its abbreviation *b*, have been found. They have an average weight of 6.019 grams (.21 oz.).

am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." 25And she went on, "There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night." 26The man bowed low in homage to the LORD 27and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by the LORD, to the house of my master's kinsmen."

28The maiden ran and told all this to her mother's household. 29Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out to the man at the spring—30when he saw the nose-ring and the bands on his sister's arms, and when he heard his sister Rebekah say, "Thus the man spoke to me." He went up to the man, who was still standing beside the camels at the spring. 31"Come in, O blessed of the LORD," he said, "why do you remain outside, when I have made ready the house and a place for the camels?" 32So the man entered the house, and the camels were unloaded. The camels were given straw and feed, and water was brought to bathe his feet and the feet of the men with him. 33But when food was set before him, he said, "I will not eat until I have told my tale." He said, "Speak, then."

34"I am Abraham's servant," he began. 35"The LORD has

הֲיֵשׁ בֵּית־אָבִיךְ מָקוֹם לָנוּ לָלִין׃ 24 וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל אָנֹכִי בֶּן־מִלְכָּה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְנָחוֹר׃
25 וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גַּם־תֶּבֶן גַּם־מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנוּ
גַּם־מָקוֹם לָלוּן׃ 26 וַיִּקֹּד הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַיהוָה׃
רביעי 27 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אַבְרָהָם
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חַסְדּוֹ וַאֲמִתּוֹ מֵעִם אֲדֹנִי אָנֹכִי
בַּדֶּרֶךְ נָחַנִי יְהוָה בֵּית אֲחֵי אֲדֹנִי׃ 28 וַתָּרָץ הַנַּעַר
וַתַּגֶּד לְבֵית אִמָּהּ כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה׃ 29 וּלְרִבְקָה
אָח וּשְׁמוֹ לָבָן וַיָּרָץ לָבָן אֶל־הָאִישׁ הַחוּצָה אֶל־
הָעָיִן׃ 30 וַיְהִי כִּרְאֹת אֶת־הַנֶּזֶם וְאֶת־הַצְּמִדִים
עַל־יְדֵי אֲחֹתוֹ וּכְשָׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דִּבְרֵי רִבְקָה אֲחֹתוֹ
לֵאמֹר כֹּה־דִבֶּר אֵלַי הָאִישׁ וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָאִישׁ וְהִנֵּה
עֹמֵד עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים עַל־הָעָיִן׃ 31 וַיֹּאמֶר בּוֹא בְּרוּךְ
יְהוָה לָמָּה תַעֲמֹד בַּחוּץ וְאָנֹכִי פִּנִּיתִי הַבַּיִת
וּמָקוֹם לַגְּמַלִּים׃ 32 וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ הַבַּיְתָה וַיְפַתַּח
הַגְּמַלִּים וַיִּתֵּן תֶּבֶן וּמִסְפּוֹא לַגְּמַלִּים וּמַיִם לִרְחֹץ
רַגְלָיו וְרַגְלֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ׃ 33 וַיּוּשֶׂם לְפָנָיו
לֶאֱכֹל וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֹכַל עַד אִם־דִּבַּרְתִּי דְּבָרָי
וַיֹּאמֶר דַּבֵּר׃ 34 וַיֹּאמֶר עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אָנֹכִי׃

v. 28. הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳ v. 33. וַיּוּשָׂם ק׳

24. In detailing her family connections, she has no reason to include her father's relationship to Abraham, as had the Narrator in verse 15.

25. To provide provender and shelter for the camels is a munificent undertaking.

27. ***kinsmen*** This is the force of Hebrew *'aḥei,* literally "brothers of." The Targums and the Septuagint have the singular construction *'aḥi,* as in verse 48.

THE BETROTHAL (vv. 28–61)

28. ***her mother's household*** In this society a girl would ordinarily refer to her home as her mother's house.[13]

29. ***Rebekah had a brother*** Not included in the genealogy of 22:23, he needs to be introduced now.[14]

Laban Hebrew *lavan,* meaning "white." The feminine form *levanah,* "the white one," is a poetic term for the moon.[15] This association is in keeping with other names in Abraham's family that have a connection with the lunar cult, such as Terah, which has been connected with *yareaḥ,* "moon"; Sarah, the Hebrew form of Akkadian *šarratu,* "queen," used of the consort of the moon-god Sin; and Milcah, from Akkadian *malkatu,* "princess," the name of Sin's daughter.

30. ***when he saw . . .*** Laban's hospitality appears to match that of his sister, except for the impression that he is motivated by greed. The narrative here is anticipating the character of Laban as revealed later in his dealings with Jacob.

Thus the man spoke to me Referring to verse 23.

greatly blessed my master, and he has become rich: He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and asses. [36]And Sarah, my master's wife, bore my master a son in her old age, and he has assigned to him everything he owns. [37]Now my master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose land I dwell; [38]but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' [39]And I said to my master, 'What if the woman does not follow me?' [40]He replied to me, 'The LORD, whose ways I have followed, will send His angel with you and make your errand successful; and you will get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house. [41]Thus only shall you be freed from my adjuration: if, when you come to my kindred, they refuse you—only then shall you be freed from my adjuration.'

[42]"I came today to the spring, and I said: O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if You would indeed grant success to the errand on which I am engaged! [43]As I stand by the spring of water, let the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I say, 'Please, let me drink a little water from your jar,' [44]and who answers, 'You may drink, and I will also draw for your camels'—let her be the wife whom the Lord has decreed for my master's son.' [45]I had scarcely finished praying in my heart, when Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew. And I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' [46]She quickly lowered her jar and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the

35 וַיהוָה בֵּרַךְ אֶת־אֲדֹנִי מְאֹד וַיִּגְדָּל וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ צֹאן
וּבָקָר וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב וַעֲבָדִם וּשְׁפָחֹת וּגְמַלִּים
וַחֲמֹרִים: 36 וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה אֵשֶׁת אֲדֹנִי בֵן לַאדֹנִי
אַחֲרֵי זִקְנָתָהּ וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ:
37 וַיַּשְׁבִּעֵנִי אֲדֹנִי לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי
מִבְּנוֹת הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי יֹשֵׁב בְּאַרְצוֹ: 38 אִם־
לֹא אֶל־בֵּית־אָבִי תֵּלֵךְ וְאֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְלָקַחְתָּ
אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי: 39 וָאֹמַר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי אֻלַי לֹא־תֵלֵךְ
הָאִשָּׁה אַחֲרָי: 40 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־
הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכוֹ אִתָּךְ וְהִצְלִיחַ
דַּרְכֶּךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי וּמִבֵּית
אָבִי: 41 אָז תִּנָּקֶה מֵאָלָתִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל־
מִשְׁפַּחְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא יִתְּנוּ לָךְ וְהָיִיתָ נָקִי מֵאָלָתִי:
42 וָאָבֹא הַיּוֹם אֶל־הָעַיִן וָאֹמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי
אַבְרָהָם אִם־יֶשְׁךָ־נָא מַצְלִיחַ דַּרְכִּי אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
הֹלֵךְ עָלֶיהָ: 43 הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נִצָּב עַל־עֲיִן הַמָּיִם וְהָיָה
הָעַלְמָה הַיֹּצֵאת לִשְׁאֹב וְאָמַרְתִּי אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׁקִינִי־
נָא מְעַט־מַיִם מִכַּדֵּךְ: 44 וְאָמְרָה אֵלַי גַּם־אַתָּה
שְׁתֵה וְגַם לִגְמַלֶּיךָ אֶשְׁאָב הִוא הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־
הֹכִיחַ יְהוָה לְבֶן־אֲדֹנִי: 45 אֲנִי טֶרֶם אֲכַלֶּה לְדַבֵּר
אֶל־לִבִּי וְהִנֵּה רִבְקָה יֹצֵאת וְכַדָּהּ עַל־שִׁכְמָהּ
וַתֵּרֶד הָעֲיְנָה וַתִּשְׁאָב וָאֹמַר אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׁקִינִי נָא:
46 וַתְּמַהֵר וַתּוֹרֶד כַּדָּהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁתֵה
וְגַם־גְּמַלֶּיךָ אַשְׁקֶה וָאֶשְׁתְּ וְגַם הַגְּמַלִּים הִשְׁקָתָה:

34–39. In a remarkably long and detailed speech, the servant recounts his entire experience. This type of repetition,[16] which doubtless has its origins in orally transmitted literature, is a standard feature of the Near Eastern epic tradition and is carried over into various kinds of biblical prose narrative. The present example is the longest such. Generally, the monotony of repetition is relieved by occasional variation of language and emphasis. Where necessary, as here, there is an artful adjustment of language to meet the exigencies of the situation. Thus, the servant's account gives prominence to his master's great wealth, which is made credible by the size of his retinue and the gifts he has brought. He recounts the story of Isaac's extraordinary birth and subtly informs his audience that the prospective groom is the sole heir to his father's fortune (cf. 25:5). Mention of the oath demonstrates the great seriousness of the matter at hand, which is a delicate form of flattery to the bride and her family. So is the reference to the rejection of a Canaanite wife, which also happens to explain why Isaac has not yet married. Tactfully, the narrative leaves unmentioned Abraham's original separation from the family and the proscription on bringing Isaac to them.

41. ***my adjuration*** Hebrew *'alah* is the curse attaching to an oath as the penalty for noncompliance, as specified in Numbers 5:21f.

45. ***Rebekah*** The girl had not revealed her name. How the servant knew it is not stated. Perhaps he had overheard her being addressed.[17]

camels. 47I inquired of her, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.' And I put the ring on her nose and the bands on her arms. 48Then I bowed low in homage to the LORD and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who led me on the right way to get the daughter of my master's brother for his son. 49And now, if you mean to treat my master with true kindness, tell me; and if not, tell me also, that I may turn right or left."

50Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The matter was decreed by the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good. 51Here is Rebekah before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son, as the LORD has spoken." 52When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed low to the ground before the LORD. 53The servant brought out objects of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; and he gave presents to her brother and her mother. 54Then he and the men with him ate and drank, and they spent the night. When they arose next morning, he said, "Give me leave to go to my master." 55But her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us some ten days; then you may go." 56He said to them,

47 וָאֶשְׁאַל אֹתָהּ וָאֹמַר בַּת־מִי אָתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר בַּת־
בְּתוּאֵל בֶּן־נָחוֹר אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ מִלְכָּה וָאָשִׂם
הַנֶּזֶם עַל־אַפָּהּ וְהַצְמִידִים עַל־יָדֶיהָ: 48 וָאֶקֹּד
וָאֲשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַיהוָה וָאֲבָרֵךְ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי
אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר הִנְחַנִי בְּדֶרֶךְ אֱמֶת לָקַחַת אֶת־
בַּת־אֲחִי אֲדֹנִי לִבְנוֹ: 49 וְעַתָּה אִם־יֶשְׁכֶם עֹשִׂים
חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת אֶת־אֲדֹנִי הַגִּידוּ לִי וְאִם־לֹא הַגִּידוּ
לִי וְאֶפְנֶה עַל־יָמִין אוֹ עַל־שְׂמֹאל: 50 וַיַּעַן לָבָן
וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵיְהוָה יָצָא הַדָּבָר לֹא נוּכַל
דַּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ רַע אוֹ־טוֹב: 51 הִנֵּה־רִבְקָה לְפָנֶיךָ קַח
וָלֵךְ וּתְהִי אִשָּׁה לְבֶן־אֲדֹנֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:
52 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת־דִּבְרֵיהֶם
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה לַיהוָה: חמישי 53 וַיּוֹצֵא הָעֶבֶד
כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן לְרִבְקָה וּמִגְדָּנֹת
נָתַן לְאָחִיהָ וּלְאִמָּהּ: 54 וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ הוּא
וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ וַיָּלִינוּ וַיָּקוּמוּ בַבֹּקֶר וַיֹּאמֶר
שַׁלְּחֵנִי לַאדֹנִי: 55 וַיֹּאמֶר אָחִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ תֵּשֶׁב
הנער אִתָּנוּ יָמִים אוֹ עָשׂוֹר אַחַר תֵּלֵךְ: 56 וַיֹּאמֶר

v. 55. הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳

47. As noted in the Comment to verse 22, the order of events is not the same as previously recorded. Had the servant not reported as he did, he would have laid himself open to the charge of contradicting his assertion that he came specifically to find a wife from among Abraham's family.[18]

48. ***my master's brother*** See Comment to verse 27. "Brother" here simply means "kinsman," as it does in 29:12,15.

50. ***Laban and Bethuel*** It is not only strange that Laban takes precedence over his father but also that the father plays no further role in the proceedings. In verse 53 he is not listed among the recipients of gifts, and in verse 55 it is Laban and his mother who carry on the negotiations. The conclusion that Laban occupies a special position in the family is inescapable and is confirmed by 25:20, where, in addition to being described as the "daughter of Bethuel," Rebekah is also listed as being "the sister of Laban." Radak suggests that the father was too enfeebled and incompetent to act, other than to indicate his assent to his son's statement of agreement in principle. Numerous ancient Near Eastern texts demonstrate that in a patriarchal society the brother had important duties and powers in regard to his sisters. There are also legal documents that detail the joint exercise of authority by mother and son in the marriage of a daughter.

bad or good That is, anything at all; we have no choice in the matter. The phrase is an example of merism, the expression of totality through the combination of opposites (see an earlier example noted in the Comment to 2:9).

53. The two types of gifts—the one to Rebekah, the other to her family—most likely correspond to the "bride-price and gifts" mentioned in 34:12. In Akkadian these are known respectively as the *terḫâtum* and the *biblum*. The first was a fixed amount paid by the groom in compensation for the loss of the bride's services and her potential offspring. These will now belong to her husband's family. This is probably what is called elsewhere in Hebrew the *mohar* (Exod. 22:16). The *biblum* consisted of ceremonial marriage gifts to the bride's family.[19]

55–58. What is at issue here is not consent to the marriage—it has already been given and its formalities completed—but agreement to quit the familial hearth at once for a distant land, foregoing the customary elaborate leave-taking ceremonies such as Laban described in 31:27.

"Do not delay me, now that the LORD has made my errand successful. Give me leave that I may go to my master." 57And they said, "Let us call the girl and ask for her reply." 58They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will." 59So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. 60And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"O sister!
May you grow
Into thousands of myriads;
May your offspring seize
The gates of their foes."

61Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

62Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb. 63And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. 64Raising her

אֱלֹהֶם אַל־תְּאַחֲרוּ אֹתִי וַיהוָה הִצְלִיחַ דַּרְכִּי
שַׁלְּחוּנִי וְאֵלְכָה לַאדֹנִי׃ 57 וַיֹּאמְרוּ נִקְרָא לנער
וְנִשְׁאֲלָה אֶת־פִּיהָ׃ 58 וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ
אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֵךְ׃
59 וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֲחֹתָם וְאֶת־מֵנִקְתָּהּ וְאֶת־
עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו׃ 60 וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ
אֲחֹתֵנוּ
אַתְּ הֲיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה
וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֵךְ אֵת שַׁעַר שֹׂנְאָיו׃
61 וַתָּקָם רִבְקָה וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ וַתִּרְכַּבְנָה עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים
וַתֵּלַכְנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד אֶת־רִבְקָה
וַיֵּלַךְ׃ 62 וְיִצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי וְהוּא
יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב׃ 63 וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה
לִפְנוֹת עֶרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה גְמַלִּים בָּאִים׃
64 וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־יִצְחָק

v. 57. לְנַעֲרָה ק׳

*55. **some ten days*** Literally, "days or ten," a phrase interpreted by the Targums to mean "a year or ten months" and by the Septuagint as "a few days, say ten."[20]

*59. **her nurse*** Hebrew *meneket* is really a wet nurse, such as employed for the baby Moses in Exodus 2:7. Rebekah could hardly have been in need of such services. In Mesopotamia the wet nurse, Akkadian *mušēniqtum,* "the one who suckles," frequently had the additional duties of *tarbitum,* bringing up the child and acting as guardian. In 35:8 Rebekah's nurse is identified as Deborah, and her death and burial are recorded. She was obviously an esteemed member of the family. Having attended and reared Rebekah from birth, she must have remained as a member of the household and now accompanies her as a chaperon. Interestingly, Targum Jonathan renders *meneket* by *padgogthah,* from Greek *paidagōgos,* "tutor," a meaning that echoes the Akkadian *tarbitum.*

60. The valediction is concerned with progeny and security. It is no coincidence that Rebekah receives the same blessing that God bestowed on Abraham following the Akedah. Her marriage to Isaac is an historic, providential event by virtue of which the divine promises are to come to fruition.[21]

O sister! A term of endearment, discussed in the Comment to 12:13.

*61. **her maids*** A mark of social status.[22] The ancient practice of a daughter receiving a maid at her wedding is widely attested.

REBEKAH AND ISAAC (vv. 62–67)

*62. **Beer-lahai-roi*** According to 16:14, this is the name of a well situated in the Negeb. It was probably part of an oasis to which sheep-breeders seasonally repaired for water and pasturage. Isaac later settled there (25:11).

*63. **walking*** The meaning of Hebrew *la-suaḥ* is obscure. The present rendering is based on Arabic *saḥa,* "to take a stroll." Another tradition has Isaac "chatting" with his friends, a translation derived from Hebrew *siaḥ,* "to talk." Still a third interpretation connects the word with Hebrew *siaḥ,* "a shrub"; he strolled among the plants or went to plant shrubs. The most popular rabbinic understanding has Isaac "praying."[23]

eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel [65]and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. [66]The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. [67]Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמָל׃ 65 וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעֶבֶד מִי־
הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר
הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקַּח הַצָּעִיף וַתִּתְכָּס׃
66 וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד לְיִצְחָק אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה׃ 67 וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח
אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ וַיִּנָּחֶם יִצְחָק
אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ׃ פ שׁשׁי

*63. **saw*** The Hebrew text employs the identical phraseology for the actions of Isaac and Rebekah, thus conveying an impression of simultaneity. Their eyes met in instant recognition; each knew instinctively who the other was.

*64. **She alighted*** Some Jewish commentators observe that this phrase properly belongs after verse 65.[24]

*65. **my master*** He merits this title because he is his father's sole heir.

her veil The incident of Sarah in Egypt, as described in 12:14, shows that Israelite women were not normally veiled. Tamar put on a veil only to disguise herself before Judah (38:14). In the Middle Assyrian law the veil is a mark of distinction and the prerogative of a free woman,[25] but this is exceptional in the Near East, where wives generally went about unveiled. There is evidence, however, that the veiling of the bride was part of the marriage ceremony. In Akkadian the bride on her wedding day is called ***kallatu kutumtu,*** "the veiled bride." ***Pussumtu,*** "the veiled one," is another term for ***kallatu,*** "bride." The Middle Assyrian laws make the raising of a concubine to the status of a wife contingent upon her being veiled in the presence of the court. In light of all this, Rebekah's veiling herself has both symbolic and socio-legal significance. It is an unspoken signal to Isaac that she is his bride.

*67. **into the tent of his mother*** By this act, Rebekah formally becomes the successor to Sarah the matriarch. The continuity of the generations is assured.

he took Rebekah On the verb *l-k-ḥ* "to take," see Comment to verse 4.

as his wife Literally, "and she became his wife." The phrase most likely means that the marriage was consummated and her status recognized by all.[26]

loved her The first reference to love in the Bible (22:2) concerned the tie between parent and child; this, the second, relates to the bond between husband and wife.

CHAPTER 25

The Genealogies of Abraham (vv. 1–18)

Following Isaac's marriage, the biblical text reports nothing more of the activities of Abraham, even though the chronological system of Genesis informs us that he lived for another thirty-five years.[1] His death and burial are now recorded, preceded and followed by genealogical lists of his descendants. Thus the entire cycle of Abrahamic traditions, which was preceded by a detailed list of Abraham's ancestors, is encased within a framework of genealogies. The closing section, which shows how God's promises to the patriarch were realized, is dependent on, and presupposes, a knowledge of those earlier promises.[2]

God promised that the patriarch would be "exceedingly numerous," "the father of a multitude of nations," "exceedingly fertile"; the genealogical lists specify how this was brought about. Abraham had been assured, "You shall go to your fathers in peace; / You shall be buried at a ripe old age." Here it is affirmed that he died "at a good ripe age, old and contented" and that "he was gathered to his

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Ketu- כ״ה וַיֹּסֶף אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה וּשְׁמָהּ קְטוּרָה׃

kin." Previously God had declared that Isaac alone was to be the true heir of the covenant; here Isaac becomes the sole beneficiary of his father's estate and, immediately following Abraham's death, receives the divine blessing. Previously Hagar had been promised that God would "greatly increase" her offspring, that her son Ishmael would be made "fertile and exceedingly numerous," "the father of twelve chieftains," "a great nation"; here the twelve chieftains are listed by name.

In summation, verses 1–18 constitute a conceptual unity. By enveloping his note on the death of Abraham in genealogical lists, the Narrator demonstrates both God's fidelity to His promises and his own personal perception of the history of the human race as the fulfillment of God's purposes.

Aside from their literary-theological function, these genealogical lists bear intrinsic interest for the historian. There are two groupings of nomadic tribes or peoples, mostly identifiable as Arab. Both are said to trace their origins back to the patriarch, the one through a certain Keturah, the other through Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar. Keturah has six sons, Ishmael twelve. Since many of the names here listed are known to us from cuneiform sources as those of peoples, it is clear that the two genealogical tables represent in reality two confederations of tribes that once enjoyed kinship, trade, or political ties with the early Israelites. In accordance with common biblical practice, these relationships are expressed in familial terms and arranged in a genealogical pattern.

The antiquity of some of the traditions that lie behind the lists is apparent from several of their features. The term "Arab" is not used, nor is there a personality of that name who is regarded as the eponym, or name-giving ancestor, of the Arabs. The reason is that the designation "Arab" does not appear in written sources before the ninth century B.C.E., when it is first used in both royal Assyrian inscriptions and in biblical literature.[3] The omission of the name "Arab" from our lists would indicate that these derive from before the period when it came into vogue.

The inclusion of the Midianites provides further evidence of antiquity. This people was hostile to Israel during the wilderness wanderings; its fertility cult proved to be a provocative and corrupting influence; it engaged in a bloody clash with Israel, and in the time of the Judges, it exerted hegemony over the Israelites, who fought a war of liberation under Gideon to rid themselves of the yoke of the hated oppressor. This victory was long remembered in Israel.[4] Given such a history of enmity between the two peoples, it is hardly likely that a narrator would have invented a record of kinship unless it rested on solid fact. Indeed, the story of Moses' flight from Pharaoh to Midian, where he found refuge and intermarried with the priestly family,[5] corroborates the inference of an earlier record of amicable relationships between Israel and Midian.

Still further testimony to the early source of some of the traditions is afforded by the Ishmaelite genealogy. The text clearly presents a twelve-tribe confederation known as "the sons of Ishmael." Interestingly, there is no biblical allusion to the Ishmaelites after the time of David, suggesting that the Ishmaelite confederation disintegrated about this time and disappeared from history. This dovetails with the fact that no such ethnic entity is mentioned in the several royal Assyrian inscriptions that deal with Arab tribes. Accordingly, our list precedes the tenth century B.C.E. Finally, the present genealogy places the Kedarites in the second position. This must reproduce an earlier state of affairs than that reflected in the Assyrian documents of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. and in Isaiah 60:7, in which the Kedarites are the leading north Arabian tribe.

THE DESCENDANTS OF KETURAH (vv. 1–6)

The "sons" of Keturah, six in number, are to be regarded as constituting the original core of the tribal confederation to which others, "grandsons" and "great-grandsons," later adhered. The name "Keturah" is obviously related to Hebrew *ketoret,* "spices." There was a universal and sustained demand in the ancient world for frankincense, myrrh, and other aromatic resins and gums. These were needed for the requirements of the cult, for the manufacture of medicines, and in the preparation and preservation of food. The prime source and producer was southern Arabia, especially the Hadramaut region, which is modern Yemen (Arabia Felix), the most fertile part of the Arabian Peninsula.

rah. [2]She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. [3]Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurim, the Letushim, and the Leummim. [4]The descendants of Midian were

2 וַתֵּלֶד לוֹ אֶת־זִמְרָן וְאֶת־יָקְשָׁן וְאֶת־מְדָן וְאֶת־
מִדְיָן וְאֶת־יִשְׁבָּק וְאֶת־שׁוּחַ׃ 3 וְיָקְשָׁן יָלַד אֶת־
שְׁבָא וְאֶת־דְּדָן וּבְנֵי דְדָן הָיוּ אַשּׁוּרִם וּלְטוּשִׁים
וּלְאֻמִּים׃ 4 וּבְנֵי מִדְיָן עֵיפָה וָעֵפֶר וַחֲנֹךְ וַאֲבִידָע

Because of her name, it is reasonable to assume that the key factor behind the organization of the Keturah tribes was the spice trade—the production, shipment, and distribution of this precious commodity. It so happens that both biblical and Assyrian sources mention many of the names here listed as those of peoples or localities involved in this particular branch of international commerce. They controlled the trade routes that led from the Arabian Peninsula to the lands of the Fertile Crescent. This accounts for the picture of such widespread geographical diffusion of the Ketureans from southern Arabia to the Middle Euphrates region and northern Syria.

1. ***Abraham took another wife*** Over forty years earlier the patriarch had judged himself to be too old to sire children;[6] it is hardly likely that he had six sons after the age of one hundred and forty. Hence, the present report does not relate to a time subsequent to Sarah's death and Isaac's marriage, but to many years before. That is why verse 6, like 1 Chronicles 1:32, refers to Keturah as a "concubine," not a wife.[7]

Keturah Neither her parentage nor her origin is given. A rabbinic tradition identifies her with Hagar, but many medieval Jewish exegetes reject this view.

2. Of the six names listed, the first three have not been identified with any degree of confidence, but they most likely refer to peoples or oases along the international trade routes. The last three are well documented.

Zimran may be the Arab tribe Zamareni mentioned by Pliny the Elder (23–79 C.E.). Jokshan is otherwise unknown. Medan may be a variant of the place-name Badana, situated south of Tema, which is mentioned in the Annals of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.E.).[8]

The Midianites were traders in frankincense according to the testimony of Isaiah 60:6. They are the best known of the entire list on account of the varied history of relationships between them and Israel, as outlined above. Their land lay along the territory east of the Gulf of Akaba in northwestern Arabia. Classical and Arabic sources still knew of a place named Madyan in this region. Biblical texts show that the Midianites were really a confederation of five tribes (v. 4) and were dispersed over a wide area, which included territory close to the borders of Egypt and the Land of Israel. Genesis 37:25,28 and Judges 8:24 indicate an affiliation with the Ishmaelites.

Ishbak is certainly the north Syrian tribe of Iasbuq mentioned in the monolith inscription of Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.). Its ruler at the time was Bur-Anate, a name that betrays Aramaic influence. The tribe is there included with the petty Hittite and Aramean kingdoms of northern Syria, southern Asia Minor, and regions of the Upper Euphrates.

Shuah (Suḫie) is found in cuneiform texts as early as the eighteenth century B.C.E. It lay on the right bank of the Middle Euphrates below the mouth of the river Habur. This very important international trade center may well have been the place of origin of Job's friend "Bildad the Shuhite" (Job 2:11).

3. The two "sons" of the otherwise unknown Jokshan are well attested. Sheba was situated in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The Annals of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.) mention "all kinds of aromatic substances" that were received from the kingdom, and the biblical prophets also refer to it as a source of frankincense and other spices.[9]

Dedan, too, was a major center of the spice trade. It is identified with the modern oasis of 'el 'Ulla in the northwestern part of the peninsula.

Both Sheba and Dedan have been discussed in detail in the Comment to Genesis 10:7.

Asshurim, Letushim, Leummim These may be obscure tribes that fell under the domination of the Dedanites or that were associated with them. The first name is the same that elsewhere in the Bible means "Assyrians," but such an interpretation is historically unlikely in the present context. Numbers 24:22,24 and Psalms 83:9 mention a people named Asshur and in neither instance is Assyria

Ephah, Epher, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah. 5Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; 6but to Abraham's sons by concubines Abraham

וְאֶלְדָּעָה כָּל־אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי קְטוּרָה׃ 5 וַיִּתֵּן אַבְרָהָם אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ לְיִצְחָק׃ 6 וְלִבְנֵי הַפִּילַגְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם נָתַן אַבְרָהָם מַתָּנֹת וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם

suited to the circumstances described. There may well have been another people named Asshur that is referred to in these texts. It is also possible that Syria is meant because the spelling of this name in some ancient languages is closer to Asshur. There is indeed evidence for the presence of a Syrian merchant colony at the oasis of Dedan.

It should be noted that the three names are, exceptionally in this list, in the plural form and that they are omitted from the parallel list of 1 Chronicles 1:32. Because of this, they may not be ethnic names at all. As a matter of fact, the Targums had no such tradition. Targum Onkelos renders "inhabitants of camps, tents, and islands," while Targum Jonathan has "merchants, traders, chiefs of peoples." Targum Yerushalmi translates *letushim* by "craftsmen." The terms may signify three main classes or professions among the Dedanites: peasants, smiths, and seminomads.

4. As stated above, this verse shows that the Midianites were really a confederation of five tribes, here called "sons." This accords with the information given elsewhere in the Bible about five "kings" or "chiefs" of this people.[10]

Ephah is identified as the Ḥaiappā, who are mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III as bearing tribute, which included spices. Isaiah 60:6 similarly refers to dromedaries from Midian and Ephah arriving from Sheba and carrying gold and frankincense. The Annals of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.) list the Ḥaiappā together with other Arab tribes whose habitat was the region of the Red Sea coast.[11] Epher is perhaps the place-name Apparu mentioned in the description of the campaigns of Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.E.) against the Arabs.[12] Enoch has not been identified; it may be the same town as that mentioned in Genesis 4:17. Neither Abida nor Eldaah is otherwise known, but the former might survive in the modern Arabic place-name Bad', an oasis in what was the ancient Midianite homeland.

5–6. The preceding list naturally raises the question as to how Isaac's status might be affected by the existence of so many brothers. We are therefore informed of three measures taken by the patriarch to remove any possible opposition to Isaac and to ensure his son's undisputed succession.

First, Isaac is formally declared to be the sole heir to all the father's effects. In this period, as opposed to the Torah legislation of a later age (see Deut. 21:15–17), the father still exercised the right of absolute discretion in designating his own successor, regardless of the order of birth of his sons.

Second, Abraham makes gifts to his other sons while he is still alive. The purpose and meaning of this are uncertain and depend upon the legal status of these offspring, which hinges upon whether or not they were legitimated. The situation may be illuminated by Hammurabi's laws, paragraph 171 of which stipulates that if the sons of concubines are not formally legitimated by the father "during his lifetime," they may not share in the paternal estate. Paragraph 46 of the Middle Assyrian laws similarly provides that if a man does not formally give his concubine the status of a wife, her sons only share in the estate if the father dies without leaving a son from the legal wife.[13] In the present case, the gifts to the other sons would either be a gesture of generosity on the part of Abraham designed to secure their good will toward Isaac or in compensation for their surrender of future claims.

Third, the purposes of the two preceding measures are finally secured by the separation of the half brothers from the clan of Abraham and their migration to another land. This development is reminiscent of the earlier separation of Lot, as described in 13:11.

concubines The plural refers to Hagar and Keturah.

the land of the East The unique Hebrew phrase *'erets kedem* may mean either "the land of Kedem," a specific territorial entity, or "the land of the East." In support of the former is the Egyptian Story of Sinuhe (20th cent. B.C.E.), which even gives the name of the ruler of this land not too far from Byblos in ancient Phoenicia. Elsewhere in the Bible the usage of *kedem* is vague and has a broad meaning covering a wide territorial expanse east of the Land of Israel from the Aramean area of the Middle Euphrates down to northern Arabia.[14]

gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East.

[7]This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. [8]And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. [9]His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, [10]the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites; there Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. [11]After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled near Beer-lahai-roi.

מַעַל יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בְּעוֹדֶנּוּ חַי קֵדְמָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ קֶדֶם׃
7 וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי־חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־חָי מְאַת שָׁנָה
וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים׃ 8 וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת אַבְרָהָם
בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה זָקֵן וְשָׂבֵעַ וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו׃
9 וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל בָּנָיו אֶל־מְעָרַת
הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֶל־שְׂדֵה עֶפְרֹן בֶּן־צֹחַר הַחִתִּי אֲשֶׁר
עַל־פְּנֵי מַמְרֵא׃ 10 הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־קָנָה אַבְרָהָם
מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת שָׁמָּה קֻבַּר אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ׃
11 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק עִם־בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי׃

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF ABRAHAM (vv. 7–11)

7. According to the chronology of Genesis, Abraham resided in the land exactly one hundred years and lived to see his grandchildren's fifteenth birthday.[15]

8. old and contented Such a summation of a life is found with no other personality in biblical literature. The phrase describes not his longevity, which is otherwise mentioned, but the quality of his earthly existence.

he was gathered to his kin This phrase, peculiar to the Torah, is also used of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Moses. An analysis of the contexts in which it is found reveals that it is to be distinguished from death itself because the action follows the demise. It is not the same as burial in an ancestral grave, because it is employed of Abraham, Aaron, and Moses, none of whom was buried with his forefathers. It is also not identical with interment in general because the report of burial follows this phrase, and the difference between the two is especially blatant in the case of Jacob, who was interred quite a while after being "gathered to his kin." It would seem, therefore, that the existence of this idiom, as of the corresponding figure "to lie down with one's fathers," testifies to a belief that, despite his mortality and perishability, man possesses an immortal element that survives the loss of life. Death is looked upon as a transition to an afterlife where one is united with one's ancestors. This interpretation contradicts the widespread, but apparently erroneous, view that such a notion is unknown in Israel until later times.[16]

9. Isaac and Ishmael In order of importance, not birth.[17]

Machpelah The reference is to the transaction described in chapter 23. The cave now becomes a family tomb.

11. After the death of... Literally, "It was after the death of..." The Hebrew expression occurs nowhere else in the Torah but is again used in Joshua 1:1, Judges 1:1, and 2 Samuel 1:1 in connection with the passing of Moses, Joshua, and Saul, respectively. In each instance it indicates that a historic turning point has been reached; an era has come to an end, but the continuity of the leadership has been assured.[18]

God blessed . . . Isaac He made him the recipient of the covenant in fulfillment of the promise of 17:21.

near Beer-lahai-roi This is mentioned in 16:14 as the site of God's promise of a son—Ishmael—to Hagar. Isaac's settling here may be a symbolic assertion of hegemony over his brother.[19]

[12]This is the line of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave, bore to Abraham. [13]These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the first-born of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, [14]Mishma, Dumah, Massa, [15]Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedmah.

ס שביעי 12 וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן־
אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחַת שָׂרָה
לְאַבְרָהָם: 13 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל
בִּשְׁמֹתָם לְתוֹלְדֹתָם בְּכֹר יִשְׁמָעֵאל נְבָיֹת וְקֵדָר
וְאַדְבְּאֵל וּמִבְשָׂם: 14 וּמִשְׁמָע וְדוּמָה וּמַשָּׂא:

THE LINE OF ISHMAEL (vv. 12–18)

Whereas the descendants of Keturah include three generations, reflecting a complicated history of tribal relationships, the line of Ishmael comprises only "sons," which suggests a very powerful primary confederation of tribes. Some of these are also mentioned in extrabiblical Near Eastern sources; others are known only from other biblical texts, while two—Hadad and Kedmah—are not otherwise identifiable.

Some of the names, which in this chapter are differentiated according to Keturah or Ishmael ancestry, are elsewhere combined within a single context. Thus, Isaiah 60:6–7 has Midian, Ephah, and Sheba—all Keturah tribes—side by side with Kedar and Nebaioth. Jeremiah 25:23 pairs Dedan with Tema, and Ezekiel 27:21f. has Kedar with Sheba. The same commingling occurs in the Annals of Tiglath-pileser III, which cite Massa, Tema, and the Idiba'ileans (=Abdeel), who are all Ishmaelites in our tables, together with Sheba and Ephah, who are descendants of Keturah. This phenomenon illustrates the fluidity of tribal confederations and the instability of allegiances, a perennial characteristic of the ancient Near East.

12–13. ***This is the line . . . These are the names of . . .*** The first formula has been discussed in the Comment to 2:4. The second occurs frequently, but the combination of the two rubrics is unusual and its significance is unclear.[20]

13. The Nebaioth are the people referred to as *Nabaiati* in the accounts of Ashurbanipal's campaigns against the Arabs. As noted above, the tradition about their preeminence in the Ishmaelite tribal league is an early one. Genesis 28:9 and 36:3 testify to a relationship with the Edomites. In the last centuries B.C.E. and the first century C.E., the former Edomite homeland in Transjordan became the kingdom of the Nabateans, an Arab people. Its main center was Petra. Whether these were the descendants of our Nebaioth cannot be determined, but the possibility certainly cannot be ruled out.[21]

Kedar is frequently mentioned in the Bible and also appears often in royal Assyrian inscriptions from the eighth century on. The Kedarites are depicted as herders of sheep and goats who pursued a seminomadic existence and were diffused over a wide area of the desert region east of the Land of Israel.

Adbeel is the tribe of Idibi'lu or Idiba'il, whom Tiglath-pileser III subjugated and then assigned to guard duty on the Egyptian frontier.

Mibsam cannot be identified, but the name clearly derives from Hebrew ***bosem,*** "spice," and may indicate an association with the spice trade. Ishmael is also said to have had a daughter Basemath (36:3), whose name also points in the same direction. Mibsam together with the following Mishma appear again as brothers in the genealogy of the tribe of Simeon, listed in 1 Chronicles 4:24f. This probably means that these two clans were later absorbed into the Israelite tribe whose territory in the south indeed bordered on the habitation and grazing zones of the Ishmaelites.

14. Mishma is not mentioned in extrabiblical sources, but a place-name Jebel Misma' in Arabia, about 160 miles (247 km.) east of Tema, may be an indication that the original habitat of the group lay in this area.

Dumah is referred to again in the Bible only in Isaiah 21:11. The site is most likely the very important strategic oasis described as "Adumati the stronghold of the Arabs" in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.). The later Arabs called it *Dūmat al-Jandal* ("Dumah of the stones"). Its modern name is al-Jawf ("the cavity"). It lies in the northern sector of the Arabian Desert due east of the Gulf of Akaba.[22]

[16]These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments: twelve chieftains of as many tribes.—[17]These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; then he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kin.—[18]They dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur; they camped alongside all their kinsmen.

15 חֲדַד וְתֵימָא יְטוּר נָפִישׁ וְקֶדְמָה׃ מפטיר
16 אֵלֶּה הֵם בְּנֵי יִשְׁמָעֵאל וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמֹתָם
בְּחַצְרֵיהֶם וּבְטִירֹתָם שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר נְשִׂיאִם לְאֻמֹּתָם׃
17 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל מְאַת שָׁנָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים
שָׁנָה וְשֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיִּגְוַע וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו׃
18 וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ מֵחֲוִילָה עַד־שׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם
בֹּאֲכָה אַשּׁוּרָה עַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו נָפָל׃ פ

Massa may well be referred to in Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1. Tiglath-pileser III mentions "the inhabitants of Mas'a" together with those of Tema and other Arabian peoples. The location of the site is uncertain, however.

15. Hadad does not appear elsewhere, but the stem is a frequent component of early Arabic personal names.

Tema is a famous oasis, northeast of Dedan, astride the caravan route that led from southern Arabia to southern Mesopotamia. It is mentioned again in both Isaiah 21:14 and Jeremiah 25:23 in association with Dedan, while Job 6:19 connects it with Sheba.

Jetur and Naphish are both described in 1 Chronicles 5:19 as being "Hagrites," that is, most probably, descendants of Hagar. They are said to have warred with the Israelite Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh. A district of Iturea in the Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon, and Mount Hermon region is mentioned in Roman classical sources as the home of a predatory Arab people, the Itureans. This name is derived from Jetur.

Nothing further is known about Naphish, but the "sons of Naphusim," mentioned in Ezra 2:50 and Nehemiah 7:52 among the returnees from the Babylonian exile, may have been survivors of this people, which had been absorbed into the Israelite tribes in the days of the monarchy.

Kedmah does not appear elsewhere as the name of a people. The word usually means "eastward."

16. All twelve Ishmaelite tribes are said to have lived in "villages," a mode of life also characteristic of the tribes of Avvim and Kedar, according to Deuteronomy 2:23 and Isaiah 42:11. The Hebrew word used in these passages, *ḥatser* (pl. *ḥatserim*), corresponds to the technical term *ḥatsārum* (pl. *ḥatsirātum*) employed in the Mari texts for the settlements of pastoral nomads. From Leviticus 25:31 and other biblical references, it is clear that the "villages" were unfortified encampments, often dependent on neighboring towns.[23]

twelve chieftains The phrase harks back to 17:20 to indicate that God's promise has been fulfilled. The "chieftain," Hebrew *nasi',* was the secular leader of the tribe. The foregoing twelve are taken to be the eponymous ancestors of the Ishmaelite confederacy, that is, the historical personalities from whom the tribes and places listed received their names.

tribes Hebrew *'ummah,* as proven by the usage of *ummatum* in the Mari texts, denotes a large nomadic tribal unit. In Numbers 25:15 it is used in connection with the Midianite confederacy.

17. From the patriarchal period on, the Bible only records the life spans of the heroes of Israel. This notice about Ishmael is exceptional and appears because of two earlier chronological notes, namely, Abraham's age at his birth and the boy's age when he was circumcised.[24]

18. The territorial boundaries of the Ishmaelite confederation, or the geographic limits of their settlement and migration patterns, are now given. The tradition derives from the period prior to the rise of the Amalekites, for by the days of Saul this people had occupied the identical area, according to 1 Samuel 15:7, and had apparently displaced the Ishmaelites.

The location of Havilah is uncertain because there was more than one site of this name, as pointed out in the Comments to 2:11 and 10:7. Shur must certainly be the line of Egyptian fortifications in the eastern Delta discussed in connection with 16:7. Asshur cannot be Assyria but, rather, some place in the northern Sinai desert—if it is not a variant of Shur.[25]

they camped . . . their kinsmen The Hebrew has the singular "he . . . his" because it harks back to the prediction of 16:12 which speaks of Ishmael, the person. The stem ***n-f-l,*** here rendered "camped," is the same as that used in Judges 7:12 of predatory tribes "spread" over the plain, deployed for incursions against Israel.

Isaac, Father of Two Nations (vv. 19–34)

Toledot

The second series of patriarchal narratives, that relating to Isaac, now begins. The data about him are exceedingly sparse. Much of what is preserved—his birth and circumcision, the Akedah, and his marriage—is integrated into the biography of Abraham, while other episodes belong to the large collection of traditions regarding Jacob. Nothing is recorded of the first twenty years of Isaac's marriage. Only a few isolated events in his life are preserved in the literature, where he is eclipsed by the towering figure of his father Abraham and overshadowed by the dynamic, forceful personality of his son Jacob.

Yet Isaac is more than a mere transition between Abraham and Jacob, and the biblical account does contain unmistakable elements of individuality. Isaac's name, uniquely bestowed by God, is not changed; his pastoral wanderings are restricted to a narrow range and largely center around Beer-sheba; unlike Abraham, he does not live at Hebron–Kiriat-arba but settles there only in his old age; he alone remains monogamous; he is the only patriarch to engage in agriculture and the only one never to leave the promised land; finally, the unique divine name ***paḥad yitsḥak*** (31:42) suggests some episode, not recorded, in which this particular name would have been meaningful. References in Amos 7:9,16 to "the shrines of Isaac" and to "the house of Isaac" as an epithet for Israel seem to indicate that a more extensive account of his life once existed.

The story of Isaac, interrupted by the genealogies of chapter 25, now resumes with the main emphasis on the birth of Esau and Jacob and the rivalry between them. These narratives present an ancient belief that the bitter hostility that marked the later relationships between the peoples of Israel and Edom had its origin in the prenatal experience of their founding fathers, who were twins.

The idea that Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom were siblings finds expression in several biblical texts. Deuteronomy 23:8 says: "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your kinsman." Numbers 20:14 reports that in the course of the wilderness wanderings Moses sent a message to the king of Edom that opened with the phrase, "Thus says your brother Israel." The prophet Obadiah, in his indictment of Edom, also refers to "your brother Jacob" (v. 10), and Malachi (1:2) assumes it to be common knowledge that "Esau is Jacob's brother." This tradition is so extraordinary, given the long and bitter history of enmity between Israel and Edom, that it must reflect authentic historical experience. The two peoples must have shared memories of an early common ancestry, blood kinship, or treaty associations.

According to Genesis 36:6–8, the clan of Esau originally lived in Canaan but later settled in "the hill country of Seir." The national territory of Edom lay east of the Jordan in the southernmost part of the country. It stretched from the Gulf of Elath northward for a distance of about 100 miles (170 km.) to Naḥal Zered (Wadi Ḥasā), which formed the natural boundary between Edom and Moab. It shared a common boundary with Judea along the rift of the Arabah, which extends from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akaba.

It was this geographic reality that engendered the hostility between the two peoples. The western side of the Edomite homeland enjoyed a strategic and climatic advantage. Its steep precipices, rising to 5,000 feet (1,525 m.) above sea level, overlook the Arabah. Their westerly exposure assures the receipt of respectable amounts of precipitation, thereby sustaining agriculture and forests. The "king's highway," one of the main arteries of communication in the ancient world, traversed the country from north to south. This gave it control over the precious caravan trade from India and southern Arabia and connected it with Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Punon, an important copper mining and smelting site, was also situated within Edom.

On the western side of the rift lay the Arabah, arid and far from the Judean centers of population. This necessitated long lines of communication and the hauling of supplies over considerable dis-

TOLEDOT

[19]This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. [20]Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. [21]Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah con-

תולדת

יט וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם
הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק: כ וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה
בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת־רִבְקָה בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי מִפַּדַּן
אֲרָם אֲחוֹת לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: כא וַיֶּעְתַּר
יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא וַיֵּעָתֶר

tances and treacherous terrain. The copper deposits of the Arabah were unexploitable without a local supply of fuel. A strategic highway led through the region from the Gulf of Akaba across the Negeb to Beer-sheba, where it split into a network of roads joining the important towns of Judea and Northern Israel. Without control of the Arabah, the nomadic tribes that roamed the Negeb were a constant menace.

Both Edom and Israel had abundant incentive to encroach upon each other's territory. It was easier for the Edomites to infiltrate westward into the Arabah than for the Judeans to penetrate Edom. The Edomites exploited their strategic advantage to the full, while the temptation to shorten communication lines, to have a supply source close by, and to have access to fuel for the copper mines as well as control over the lucrative spice trade proved irresistible to the Judean kings. It was David who defeated the Edomites, stationed permanent garrisons in their land, and made them vassals of his kingdom, as described in 2 Samuel 8:13f.

THE BIRTH OF JACOB AND ESAU (vv. 19–26)

19. This is the story of Isaac The introductory formula *'elleh toledot* has been discussed in the Comment to 2:4. Here it serves as the general title for the narrative cycle that concludes with 35:29. As such, it balances the earlier use of the formula before the listing of the line of Ishmael.[26] In like manner, *'elleh toledot* in 37:2 prefaces a cycle of stories about Jacob, thus matching its appearance in 36:1,19 with the Esau genealogies.

Abraham begot Isaac This note is hardly needed after the foregoing "Isaac son of Abraham." Moreover, such a usage is never found in the other *'elleh toledot* examples. Yet the Chronicler later followed the pattern of this verse in recording, in 1 Chronicles 1:28, that the sons of Abraham were Isaac and Ishmael, and then stating, in verse 34, that "Abraham begot Isaac." The redundancy, therefore, is not a gloss but a literary device for emphasizing Isaac's role as the sole successor to the patriarch, in fulfillment of the promise of 21:12: "It is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued."[27] Some commentators see a desire to underscore the fact that Abraham is the father of Isaac—in light of Abimelech's kidnapping of Sarah, as told in chapter 21.[28]

20. forty years old Rebekah's age is omitted because, unlike Sarah, she was not beyond the age of childbearing.[29]

Bethuel the Aramean According to 22:22, Bethuel was one of the Nahorite tribes, and Aram was his nephew. The epithet "Aramean" would have been attached to Bethuel and Laban only after the Arameans dominated the region. Their history has been discussed in connection with 10:22–23.

Paddan-aram This place-name is found only in Genesis.[30] It is either another name for Aram-naharaim, mentioned in 24:10, or a town within that region. In favor of the former is Hosea 12:13, which describes the land to which Jacob fled from Esau's wrath as "the field of Aram" (Heb. *sedeh 'aram*). The word *pdn* in Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic means "a yoke of oxen" or "a plowshare,"—hence, the stretch of land that oxen could plow in a day—in short, "a field." On the other hand, Akkadian *padānu* means "a path, track." Elsewhere, Laban's hometown is designated Haran, a name derived from Akkadian *ḫarranu,* also meaning "a road." Paddan-aram may thus be another name for Haran.

ceived. 22But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the LORD, 23and the LORD answered her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
Two separate peoples shall issue from your body;
One people shall be mightier than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger."

לוֹ יְהוָה וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: 22 וַיִּתְרֹצַצוּ הַבָּנִים
בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ
לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה: 23 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ
שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנֵךְ
וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֵּעַיִךְ יִפָּרֵדוּ
וּלְאֹם מִלְאֹם יֶאֱמָץ
וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר:

v. 23. גּוֹיִם ק׳

sister of Laban The relationship is mentioned as an intimation of the fact that the Jacob-Esau episodes are intertwined with those of Jacob-Laban.

21. Once again we encounter the motif of the barren wife of the patriarch. In the present instance, Rebekah's inability to procreate is tinged with irony, for she had gone to her marriage with her family's blessing echoing in her ears: "O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads."[31] Now twenty years have passed, and the divine pledges that Isaac would be the progenitor of a people remain unredeemed.[32] Nevertheless, unlike Sarah and Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah do not resort to concubinage. Rather, they maintain their faith in God's word and rely on the power of prayer.[33] The prolonged state of barrenness is profoundly meaningful in that it is ended by a deliberate act of divine Providence, a clear sign that the resulting offspring are predestined to be the instruments of God's purposes.

22. ***the children*** By indicating that there is to be more than one child, the Narrator takes the reader into his confidence.

struggled in her womb Rebekah experiences an unusually difficult pregnancy. Instead of the normally gentle quickening, the fetal movements are spasmodic and she has fears of miscarrying. Not only is the report of the difficult pregnancy unique in biblical literature, but the Hebrew also uses an unusual verb *(va-yitrotsetsu),* which literally means "they crushed, thrust, one another" and which foretokens the future hostile relationship between the children who are about to be born.

If so, why do I exist? The Hebrew is an incomplete sentence, which literally means "If so, why then am/do I . . .?" The sense requires something like, "Why then did I yearn and pray to become pregnant?" or "Why do I go on living?"[34] The latter is the reading of the Syriac version, and some scholars regard it as original. Compare Rebekah's complaint in 27:46, "What good will life be to me?"

She went to inquire of the LORD The idiom employed means to seek divine guidance in a moment of great perplexity and anguish.[35] Generally one would go to a specific sanctuary or to some charismatic personage of recognized authority. In this case the narrative is tantalizingly short on details. According to verse 11, the couple is living at Beer-lahai-roi at this time, the place where Hagar had received the divine announcement concerning the birth and destiny of a son, as told in 16:7–14. This may have influenced Rebekah to go to the same site. It is to be noted that the divine name YHVH is carefully employed in both inquiry and response, as though to dissociate her action from any pagan cultic rite.

23. God's response is oracular in style, poetic in form, the message being conveyed in four pithy phrases.[36] Rebekah is informed that she carries twins,[37] that each will be the progenitor of a people, that the movements in her womb result from sibling rivalry for priority of birth,[38] and that physical strength would be decisive; ultimately, however, hegemony would belong to the loser in the uterine struggle. In historic terms, the seniority of Esau is reflected in his having achieved a settled kingdom earlier than Israel, as noted in 36:31; the supremacy of Jacob found expression in David's crushing victories over Edom.

There is another aspect to the oracle. Its presence here actually suggests a moral judgment on Jacob's behavior, for it tacitly asserts that his claim to be heir to the divine promises rests solely upon God's predetermination. Thus, his election is thereby disengaged from the improper means he later employed to obtain his rights.

24 וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לָלֶדֶת וְהִנֵּה תוֹמִם* בִּבְטְנָהּ׃
25 וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אַדְמוֹנִי כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדֶּרֶת שֵׂעָר
וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו׃ 26 וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו וְיָדוֹ
אֹחֶזֶת בַּעֲקֵב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וְיִצְחָק בֶּן־
שִׁשִּׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם׃ 27 וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי
עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ צַיִד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם

* חסר ' v. 24.

[24]When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. [25]The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. [26]Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

[27]When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who

*25. **red*** Hebrew *'admoni* is also used—admiringly—of David in 1 Samuel 16:12 and 17:14. The term, therefore, is not likely to mean redheadedness, which was popularly associated with the sinister and the dangerous. More likely, a ruddy complexion is intended. This may well be connected with the convention found in Egyptian and Cretan art, as well as in the Ugaritic texts, that equates red skin with heroic stature. At any rate, there is here an undoubted implicit word play between *'admoni* and Edom, which is another name for Esau, as noted in verse 30 and other texts. It is likely that the origin of the name Edom may lie in the characteristically reddish hue of the Nubian sandstone and crystalline rocks of that country.

like a hairy mantle This detail anticipates the crucial role of Esau's hairiness later on in the narrative. Hebrew *se'ar,* "hair" (*sa'ir,* "hairy"), is also an allusion to the land of Seir, the habitat of Esau/Edom, as mentioned in 32:4 and in other texts.[39] This region probably derived its name from the shaggy nature of the terrain. The Jebel section of Edom has a relatively high annual precipitation and also benefits from snowfall on the hilltops. As a result, it was always distinguished for its woods, forests, and brush. It was not until World War I that the region became finally denuded of vegetation. The Turks cut down the forests in order to service the Hejaz Railroad.

Esau's unusual hairiness brings to mind the account of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic. His entire body is also said to have been covered with hair, a condition that was popularly taken to be a sign of boorish uncouthness.

Esau The context requires either the name Seir instead of Esau or some etymological association, fancied or real, between "Esau" and shagginess. In the absence of a satisfactory derivation from Hebrew, a connection with Arabic *gh-š-w,* "to cover, envelop," is an attractive possibility.[40] The name would then mean something like "the mantled one." A derivation from Hebrew *'-s-h,* "to make,"—that is, "the one fully developed at birth"—commonly advanced in antiquity and the Middle Ages, is less likely, although evidence of word play on Esau and *'-s-h* is to be found in 27:19,30f.

*26. **holding on to the heel*** That is, attempting to forestall the prior birth of his twin. This seems to be the idea behind Hosea 12:4: "In the womb he tried to supplant his brother."

Jacob By folk etymology, the name is here derived from Hebrew *'akev,* "heel." In reality, Hebrew *ya'akov* stems from a Semitic root *'-k-v,* "to protect." It is abbreviated from a fuller form with a divine name or epithet as its subject. *Ya'akov-'el,* "May El protect," is a name that has turned up several times in cuneiform texts over a wide area. The name Jacob is thus, in origin, a plea for divine protection of the newly born—most appropriate for the one who was to live his entire life in the shadow of danger.

THE SALE OF THE BIRTHRIGHT (vv. 27–34)

The struggle for seniority between the twins, which commenced inside the womb, continues into adulthood. Jacob now seizes an opportunity to inveigle Esau into transferring the birthright to him. His desperate endeavors to obtain this end by means fair or foul can only be understood in terms of a specific psychological situation, the elements of which were certain complex sacred realities. The first-

stayed in camp. [28]Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob. [29]Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished.

יֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים׃ 28 וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו כִּי־צַיִד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃ 29 וַיָּזֶד יַעֲקֹב נָזִיד וַיָּבֹא עֵשָׂו מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיֵף׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר

born son along with the first fruits of the soil and the male firstlings of the herd and the flock were considered to be possessed of a unique sanctity. They all belonged to God. The first male issue of the human womb had to be redeemed from his sacral state. Originally he was accorded a privileged position in the cult. At a later time the tribe of Levi displaced the first-born in Israel and appropriated his cultic prerogatives. Being the primary guarantor of the future of the family line and, hence, of the preservation of the ancestral heritage, the first-born naturally ranked second only to the head of the family, the paterfamilias, whose successor he would automatically become. Isaac's blessing in 27:29 makes this quite clear. The status of first-born was bound up with responsibilities and obligations on the one hand and with rights, privileges, and prerogatives on the other.

Two other aspects of the story of Jacob and Esau have been illuminated by ancient Near Eastern documents. We now know that a father had the right to disregard chronological considerations in determining his heirs and that an heir was able to barter away his future inheritance.

The hegemony of the older brother in the ancient world is widely attested. It is taken for granted, for example, in a Sumerian hymn to Enlil extolling the fact that in the city of Nippur "the older brother honors the younger brother, acts humanely toward him." The right of the first-born to a double share of the inheritance is documented at Mari and Nuzi, in the Middle Assyrian laws, and in biblical law (Deut. 21:17).[41]

The provisions of Deuteronomy 21:15–17 establish that at some period it had been legally and socially acceptable in Israel for the father to ignore seniority of birth. We know also that Jacob deprived Reuben of his birthright, an event that is commemorated in the poem of Genesis 49:3–4 and explained in 1 Chronicles 5:1. Further, Genesis 48:13 tells us that Jacob passed over Manasseh in favor of the younger Ephraim. Added to these examples is the documentation from Nuzi, Alalakh, and Ugarit, all confirming the same sociolegal situation. Finally, the possibility of the transfer of inheritance rights is illustrated by a Nuzi tablet that records how a man parted with his future inheritance share in return for three sheep received immediately from his brother.

27. The two lads pursued incompatible vocations and lifestyles. The description of Esau as a hunter and as "one who lives by the sword" (27:40) reflects a very early stage in the history of Edom, the time when the tribe was still engaged in hunting as an economic necessity and had not yet become a settled monarchy. This ancient period is reflected in the nature of the national Edomite god Qaus, whose name is Arabic for "bow." He was originally the god of hunting and warfare.

Hunting as a way of life was held in low esteem in Israel. The only hunter, other than Esau, mentioned by name in the Bible is Nimrod, in 10:9. Near Eastern art often portrays kings and nobles in pursuit of game, but no Israelite or Judean king or hero is ever mentioned as indulging in the sport. However, the fact that Leviticus 17:13 legislates concerning the preparation for food of an animal caught in the hunt and that Deuteronomy 14:5 includes wild animals among those permitted to be eaten proves that hunting was sometimes an economic necessity even in Israel. Nevertheless, it is highly significant that sacrifice in Israel was restricted to domesticated animals.

a mild man Jacob is a quiet man and does not carry weapons.

who stayed in camp Literally, "who dwelt in tents," the hallmark of a pastoralist, according to 4:20.[42]

28. Although this verse is not pertinent to the immediate context, it is essential to the understanding of the events described in chapter 27.

but Rebekah favored Jacob No reason is given for her preference, but it may well have been based on the oracle she had received.[43]

29. ***cooking a stew*** The nature of the dish is at first left vague and is disclosed only in stages—first as "red stuff," then as "lentil stew."

30And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished"—which is why he was named Edom. 31Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." 32And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?" 33But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.

עֵשָׂו אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הַלְעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן־הָאָדֹם הָאָדֹם
הַזֶּה כִּי עָיֵף אָנֹכִי עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ אֱדוֹם׃
31 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכְרָה כַיּוֹם אֶת־בְּכֹרָתְךָ לִי׃
32 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת וְלָמָּה־זֶּה
לִי בְּכֹרָה׃ 33 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הִשָּׁבְעָה לִי כַּיּוֹם
וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת־בְּכֹרָתוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב׃ 34 וְיַעֲקֹב
נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיֵּשְׁתְּ וַיָּקָם
וַיֵּלַךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה׃ ס

famished Hebrew *'ayef,* traditionally rendered "faint," actually means to be in dire need of food and drink.[44]

30. Give me . . . to gulp down In rabbinic Hebrew the stem *l-ʿ-t* is employed for the feeding of animals.[45] Its use here, unique in the Bible, is suggestive of Esau's boorish manners.

red stuff Hebrew *ha-'adom ha-'adom.* The repetition may indicate "deep red."[46] The description provides another etiology, this time explicit, for Esau being called Edom. At the same time, *'adom* is close in sound to *dam,* "blood." Word play involving "Edom" and *dam* occurs in several texts.[47] Blood was considered to constitute the life-essence and was widely believed to contain magical properties. It was a symbol of strength and vitality. A suggestion that Esau thought the "red stuff" to be a blood broth is most plausible. His primitive instincts were aroused by the sight. He expected his vitality to be renewed by drinking it.

31. Jacob exploits his brother's misery in order to gain what he thought an accident of birth had denied him.

sell Biblical law and terminology do not differentiate between sale and barter, using *m-kh-r* for both.

32. I am at the point of death Literally, "I am going to die." This statement either refers to the generally perilous life he led as a hunter or is an exaggerated description of his present condition.[48]

33. Swear to me first Esau's reply indicates that he agrees to the transaction. But Jacob does not trust his brother. He wants an oath. In the ancient world an oath was an unqualifiedly sacred act. The self-imprecations against the violator that all such oaths usually contained were a potent means of reinforcing a verbal commitment. It made the transaction irrevocable, even if one party was later disappointed.

34. bread and lentil stew Only now is the identity of the stew revealed. It is not blood broth, after all, but lentils!

lentil This plant was cultivated very early in the Near East. Because of its highly nutritious properties, it was an important staple in the daily diet. The color of the lentil is yellowish red or light brown. On this occasion Jacob either added something that gave the stew an exceptionally red hue, or he made use of the Egyptian variety, which is red.

he ate . . . The abrupt succession of five short Hebrew verbs effectively reproduces the chilling, sullen atmosphere in which Esau silently devours the meal.

Thus did Esau spurn the birthright Our sympathy with Esau is somewhat dissipated when the Narrator describes his inner feelings. Having finished the broth, Esau does not quarrel with Jacob but goes indifferently about his business, with no apparent regard for the sacred institution of the first-born. On the other hand, it is highly significant that the text only mentions Esau's sale of the birthright but does not state that Jacob bought it. This is contrary to the usual biblical legal style as, for instance, in the case of Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah, Jacob's acquisition of a field, and David's buying the threshing floor from Araunah.[49] The omission in the present story is another way of dissociating Jacob's eventual ascendancy from the means he adopted.

כ״ו וַיְהִי רָעָב בָּאָרֶץ מִלְּבַד הָרָעָב הָרִאשׁוֹן
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל־אֲבִימֶלֶךְ
מֶלֶךְ־פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: 2 וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר
אַל־תֵּרֵד מִצְרַיְמָה שְׁכֹן בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:
3 גּוּר בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמְּךָ וַאֲבָרְכֶךָּ כִּי־לְךָ
וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצֹת הָאֵל וַהֲקִמֹתִי
אֶת־הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ:
4 וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם וְנָתַתִּי

26 There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar. [2]The LORD had appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you. [3]Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your offspring, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. [4]I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of

CHAPTER 26

The Adventures of Isaac (vv. 1–35)

The present chapter recounts various incidents in the life of the second patriarch. Although most of them closely resemble the earlier narratives about Abraham, they present Isaac as an individual in his own right.

REAFFIRMATION OF THE COVENANT (vv. 1–5)

The sharp contrast between God's promises for the future and the threatening reality of the present is a recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives. Isaac, heir to the covenant, experiences famine. The desperate need for forage and water forces him to move outside his normal cyclical route. Like his father before him in a similar situation, Isaac sets out for Egypt. As Exodus 13:17 observes, the shortest route to that country from Canaan led through "the land of the Philistines." Along the way, Isaac makes a stopover at Gerar, a Philistine royal city that was certain to have storage facilities. The treaty that his father had contracted with the king of Gerar, as reported in 21:22–34, would be expected to work to his advantage. Here in Gerar, God reaffirms to Isaac the covenant He had made with Abraham. His initial revelation to the father bade him go to the land; this first communication to the son exhorts him not to leave it. The one demand, like the other, involves a trial of faith. For a pastoralist to stay in the land in time of famine means courting hunger and the loss of precious livestock.

*1. **Abimelech*** This can hardly be the same king whom Abraham dealt with over seventy-five years earlier. The name may have been a dynastic favorite—like Henry, Edward, or George among the British monarchs.[1] The problems raised by the king's title are discussed in Excursus 15.

*2. **appeared*** For the significance of this term, see the Comment to 12:7.

*2–3. **stay . . . Reside*** There is no redundancy here. Hebrew *sh-k-n* means "to tent," while *g-w-r,* a key word in the patriarchal narratives, means to have the status of an alien, one devoid of legal rights and wholly dependent on the goodwill of the local community.[2] It is to Isaac's alien status that the promise of protection, "I will be with you," addresses itself.

and bless you You will prosper even in time of famine.

all these lands The unusual use of the plural derives either from Hebrew *'erets* in the sense of a territory or district within Canaan, or from its reflecting the idealized boundaries of the promised land as set forth in 15:18–21 and other texts. These encompass the territories of Sidon, Tyre, Byblos, the Hermon, and Lebanon, as well as the land of the Philistines.[3]

*4. **shall bless themselves by your offspring*** The well-being of humanity at large is intertwined with the destiny and fate of Israel. This is one of the major themes of Genesis, and it is repeated to each of the patriarchs in turn.[4]

heaven, and give to your descendants all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring—[5]inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings."

[6]So Isaac stayed in Gerar. [7]When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife," thinking, "The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful." [8]When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. [9]Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, "So she is your wife! Why then did you say: 'She is my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her." [10]Abimelech said, "What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

לְזַרְעֲךָ֔ אֵ֚ת כָּל־הָאֲרָצֹ֣ת הָאֵ֔ל וְהִתְבָּרֲכ֥וּ בְזַרְעֲךָ֖
כֹּ֣ל גּוֹיֵ֣י הָאָ֑רֶץ: 5 עֵ֕קֶב אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַ֥ע אַבְרָהָ֖ם בְּקֹלִ֑י
וַיִּשְׁמֹ֙ר מִשְׁמַרְתִּ֔י מִצְוֹתַ֖י חֻקּוֹתַ֥י וְתוֹרֹתָֽי: שני
6 וַיֵּ֥שֶׁב יִצְחָ֖ק בִּגְרָֽר: 7 וַיִּשְׁאֲל֤וּ אַנְשֵׁי־הַמָּקוֹם֙
לְאִשְׁתּ֔וֹ וַיֹּ֖אמֶר אֲחֹ֣תִי הִ֑וא כִּ֣י יָרֵ֗א לֵאמֹר֙ אִשְׁתִּ֔י
פֶּן־יַהַרְגֻ֥נִי אַנְשֵׁ֖י הַמָּקוֹ֑ם עַל־רִבְקָ֕ה כִּֽי־טוֹבַ֥ת
מַרְאֶ֖ה הִֽיא: 8 וַיְהִ֕י כִּֽי־אָרְכ֥וּ לוֹ֙ שָׁ֔ם הַיָּמִ֑ים
וַיַּשְׁקֵ֞ף אֲבִימֶ֣לֶךְ מֶֽלֶךְ־פְּלִשְׁתִּ֗ים בְּעַ֤ד הַֽחַלּוֹן֙ וַיַּ֔רְא
וְהִנֵּ֥ה יִצְחָ֖ק מְצַחֵ֑ק אֵ֥ת רִבְקָ֖ה אִשְׁתּֽוֹ: 9 וַיִּקְרָ֨א
אֲבִימֶ֜לֶךְ לְיִצְחָ֗ק וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ אַ֣ךְ הִנֵּ֣ה אִשְׁתְּךָ֔ הִ֑וא
וְאֵ֣יךְ אָמַ֔רְתָּ אֲחֹ֥תִי הִ֖וא וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֵלָ֗יו יִצְחָק֙ כִּֽי
אָמַ֣רְתִּי פֶּן־אָמ֔וּת עָלֶ֖יהָ: 10 וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֲבִימֶ֔לֶךְ מַה־
זֹּ֥את עָשִׂ֖יתָ לָ֑נוּ כִּמְעַ֗ט שָׁכַ֤ב אַחַד֙ הָעָ֔ם אֶת־
אִשְׁתֶּ֖ךָ וְהֵבֵ֥אתָ עָלֵ֖ינוּ אָשָֽׁם: 11 וַיְצַ֥ו אֲבִימֶ֖לֶךְ

5. By his fidelity and constancy, Abraham represents the ideal standard of obedience to the will of God. Through this merit, he effectuates and guarantees the fulfillment of the divine promises to future generations.

My charge . . . The combination of different terms for God's precepts connotes comprehensiveness.[5]

POSSIBLE PERIL TO REBEKAH (vv. 6–11)

In response to divine bidding, Isaac stays in Gerar. However, his feeling of security is undermined when the local menfolk begin to show an interest in his beautiful wife.

This episode is reminiscent of the two earlier stories about Sarah's experiences in Egypt and Gerar. The present incident is the least complicated and the most natural: There is no real tension; Rebekah is not kidnapped; the king is in no way culpable; and Isaac does not anticipate a danger—he resorts to subterfuge only when it actually materializes. Divine intervention is unnecessary because the king discovers the truth in the normal course of events; for the same reason, no gifts are proffered.

This episode must have occurred before the birth of the twins, for they are not once mentioned; had they been around, it is hardly likely that Rebekah could have been passed off as a sister. The insertion of the incident at this point in the cycle of Isaac narratives is determined by literary, not chronological, considerations. It temporarily diverts attention from the ongoing rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

7. ***She is my sister*** The meaning of this stratagem is discussed in the Comment to 12:13.

8. ***looking out of the window*** The definite article suggests a specific window, most likely the one in the outer court of the royal palace, at which the king showed himself to the people on ceremonial occasions.[6]

fondling Hebrew *metsaḥek* is a word play on the name Isaac *(yitsḥak).*[7]

10. In reproving Isaac, the king inferentially confirms the patriarch's assessment of the low moral standards of the local inhabitants.

brought guilt upon us The word here rendered "guilt," Hebrew *'asham,* belongs to the technical vocabulary of the cult system, with particular application to the unintentional commission

אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר הַנֹּגֵעַ בָּאִישׁ הַזֶּה וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ
מוֹת יוּמָת: 12 וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בָּאָרֶץ הַהִוא וַיִּמְצָא
בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ יְהוָה:
13 וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ וַיֵּלֶךְ הָלוֹךְ וְגָדֵל עַד
כִּי־גָדַל מְאֹד: 14 וַיְהִי־לוֹ מִקְנֵה־צֹאן וּמִקְנֵה בָקָר
וַעֲבֻדָּה רַבָּה וַיְקַנְאוּ אֹתוֹ פְּלִשְׁתִּים: 15 וְכָל־
הַבְּאֵרֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ עַבְדֵי אָבִיו בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם
אָבִיו סִתְמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיְמַלְאוּם עָפָר: 16 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲבִימֶלֶךְ אֶל־יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי־עָצַמְתָּ מִמֶּנּוּ
מְאֹד: 17 וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיִּחַן בְּנַחַל־גְּרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב
שָׁם: 18 וַיָּשָׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר אֶת־בְּאֵרֹת הַמַּיִם

[11]Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death."

[12]Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold the same year. The LORD blessed him, [13]and the man grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy: [14]he acquired flocks and herds, and a large household, so that the Philistines envied him. [15]And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth. [16]And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us."

[17]So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled. [18]Isaac dug anew the wells which

of a sin.[8] It can mean both the offense and its consequences, and in the mouth of Abimelech it means, "We would have been subject to punishment." The principle involved is communal culpability, similar to that found in the two previous stories about the matriarch in peril (12:17; 20:7–9).

11. ***who molests*** Hebrew *n-g-ʿ* is used in the double sense of "causing harm" and "coming into physical contact with," or "sexually harassing." On this double entendre, see Comment to 12:16.

ISAAC'S PROSPERITY (vv. 12–16)

The next episode illustrates the speedy fulfillment of the divine blessing (v. 13). Isaac tills the soil and reaps a bountiful harvest—in time of famine! Yet his God-given prosperity paradoxically becomes a cause of distress for it provokes the envy of the local people and leads to Isaac's expulsion from Gerar.

12. The patriarch's venture into agriculture should not be viewed as a stage of transition from the nomadic to the sedentary mode of life. The pastoral nomads of Mari and elsewhere similarly engaged in small-scale agriculture from time to time. This practice is well documented. In the case of Isaac, there is no evidence that his sedentary experience was other than exceptional; it was probably occasioned by the famine and encouraged by the favorable agricultural conditions in the low-lying plains of the region of Gerar, which is situated between the settled country and the grazing land of the nomads.

The nature of the crop is not specified. Most likely it was wheat, which was a winter cereal widely cultivated in the land. It would be planted in October–November and harvested in May–June.

reaped a hundredfold The crop yield in relation to the unit of seed planted was one hundred for one.[9]

15. Prevented by the king from physically abusing Isaac, the townsfolk resort to harassment. They attempt to force him out by denying him access to water.

in the days of . . . Abraham These wells are mentioned again in verse 18. The background to the situation is provided by 21:25,30. The digging of wells or cisterns, usually in the dry beds of rivers, streams, and brooks, was essential to the pastoralist's survival. Because the winter floods would silt them up and obliterate them, the wells were frequently lined with stone, or the cisterns were actually hewn out of rock. They would have to be cleaned out after the floods subsided. The Philistines spitefully and deliberately refilled them with dirt.

16. ***Go away from us*** Given the vicious hostility of his subjects to the foreigners, the king probably feels that he can no longer guarantee the safety of his guests and so requests their departure.

had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them. 19But when Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water, 20the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. 21And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. 22He moved from there and dug yet another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, "Now at last the LORD has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

23From there he went up to Beer-sheba. 24That night the

אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בִּימֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיְסַתְּמוּם
פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שֵׁמוֹת
כַּשֵּׁמֹת אֲשֶׁר־קָרָא לָהֶן אָבִיו: 19 וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־
יִצְחָק בַּנָּחַל וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים:
20 וַיָּרִיבוּ רֹעֵי גְרָר עִם־רֹעֵי יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר לָנוּ
הַמָּיִם וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק כִּי הִתְעַשְּׂקוּ עִמּוֹ:
21 וַיַּחְפְּרוּ בְּאֵר אַחֶרֶת וַיָּרִיבוּ גַּם־עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא
שִׂטְנָה: 22 וַיַּעְתֵּק מִשָּׁם וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אַחֶרֶת
וְלֹא רָבוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ רְחֹבוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־
עַתָּה הִרְחִיב יְהוָה לָנוּ וּפָרִינוּ בָּאָרֶץ: רביעי
23 וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם בְּאֵר שָׁבַע: 24 וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה

ISAAC'S WELLS (vv. 17–22)

Isaac submits to the expulsion order without protest. He moves his family and belongings beyond the recognized urban limits of Gerar to the same region in which his father had once made a prolonged stay (21:34). Abraham's sojourn could not have been accomplished without the digging and maintenance of several wells. In order to establish clear proprietary rights, each well would be given an identifying name.[10] Since Abraham's death the Philistines had blocked them up. Isaac now restores them and revives their original names so as to make his ownership incontestable. In the course of this work his men unexpectedly uncover an old well fed by a subterranean spring. A well of this type was especially valuable; when originally excavated, it would have been lined with stone. Since a memory of its existence has not been preserved, it is ownerless and ought to belong to the finder. Nevertheless, the shepherds of Gerar lay claim to it. Significantly, they do not assert this on behalf of the king, which shows that the well was situated in a region beyond the limits of royal domain.

20. ***Esek*** Literally, "contention," a word not otherwise attested in biblical Hebrew, but its stem is employed in rabbinic legal terminology in connection with a disputed title to ownership.[11]

21. ***Sitnah*** No reason is given for the name. The term is used in Ezra 4:6 to denote a formal accusation lodged against someone. The verb derived from the stem means "to show hostility."[12]

22. To avoid strife, Isaac once again bows to pressure and removes himself from the communal grazing ground.

Rehoboth This site is generally identified with the present Ruheibeh, about 19 miles (30.5 km.) southwest of Beer-sheba. To this day, there are several large wells of great antiquity in the area and traces of very early agricultural settlements.[13]

A THEOPHANY AT BEER-SHEBA (vv. 23–25)

Isaac finally abandons the region of Gerar and returns to Beer-sheba, where he had gone to live with his father following the episode in which he had nearly been sacrificed. The place already had sacred associations for him in that Abraham had planted a terebinth there and had invoked "the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God." Now, echoing the pattern of the Abraham stories, Isaac, after exposure to trial and danger, receives assurances of divine protection and reaffirmation of the promises. He builds an altar, thereby establishing Beer-sheba as a cult site with which his name becomes closely associated. Many years later Jacob stops there on his way to Egypt and offers sacrifices "to the God of his father Isaac."[14]

LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Fear not, for I am with you, and I will bless you and increase your offspring for the sake of My servant Abraham." [25]So he built an altar there and invoked the LORD by name. Isaac pitched his tent there and his servants started digging a well. [26]And Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his councilor and Phicol chief of his troops. [27]Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?" [28]And they said, "We now

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ
אַל־תִּירָא כִּי־אִתְּךָ אָנֹכִי וּבֵרַכְתִּיךָ וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת־
זַרְעֲךָ בַּעֲבוּר אַבְרָהָם עַבְדִּי: 25 וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ
וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה וַיֵּט־שָׁם אָהֳלוֹ וַיִּכְרוּ־שָׁם
עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בְּאֵר: 26 וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְ הָלַךְ אֵלָיו מִגְּרָר
וַאֲחֻזַּת מֵרֵעֵהוּ וּפִיכֹל שַׂר־צְבָאוֹ: 27 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יִצְחָק מַדּוּעַ בָּאתֶם אֵלַי וְאַתֶּם שְׂנֵאתֶם
אֹתִי וַתְּשַׁלְּחוּנִי מֵאִתְּכֶם: 28 וַיֹּאמְרוּ רָאוֹ רָאִינוּ

24. I am This self-identifying, introductory formula has been discussed in the Comment to 15:7.

the God of your father This epithet, used here for the first time, is distinctively characteristic of the subsequent patriarchal narratives. On this topic, see Excursus 20. In the present context, the designation affirms God's role as the guarantor of the promises: He is the same One who spoke with Abraham. At the same time, it emphasizes the continuity of the succession from father to son, and it connotes a personal and intimate relationship between God and the individual.

Fear not On this formula of assurance, see the Comment to 15:1.

for the sake of My servant This title is used in the Torah only of the patriarchs, Moses, and Caleb. Very few individuals in the rest of the Bible, of whom David is the outstanding one, are called "My servant." The righteous are collectively termed "the servants of the Lord," and in Isaiah 40–66, there appears the enigmatic figure of the "servant of the Lord," whose suffering is seen to be part of the process of Israel's national redemption.[15] The significance of the title becomes clear from the description of Caleb: "He was imbued with a different spirit and remained loyal to Me" (Num. 14:24). In the face of widespread disaffection and demoralization, Caleb displayed superior moral courage, unswerving loyalty, and heroic leadership.

for the sake of . . . Abraham Here, for the first time, we encounter the notion that the righteousness of ancestors creates a fund of spiritual credit that may sustain their descendants. Known in rabbinic Hebrew as *zekhut 'avot,* "the merit of the fathers," the idea is often invoked in the Jewish liturgy.

25. built an altar See Comment to 12:7.

started digging a well The Hebrew verb *k-r-h* denotes the process, not its completion, which is reported in verse 32.

ISAAC'S PACT WITH ABIMELECH (vv. 26–33)

Abimelech is apparently uneasy over the presence of a powerful and prosperous clan of pastoralists on the fringes of his kingdom.. The clashes over the wells do nothing to allay his anxiety. In seeking to regulate his relationships with Isaac, the king now acts as representative of his people. That is why he employs "we" and "us" in his speech, in contrast to the earlier negotiations between Abimelech and Abraham, recorded in 21:22–32. There the pact is between two individuals. Incidentally, Isaac is now the stronger party. It is the king who initiates the pact.

26. his councilor Hebrew *mere'ehu,* literally "his friend." The title "king's friend" belonged to one of the highest offices in the royal administration.[16] It is devoid of emotional connotation and signifies that its bearer was counselor to the king in matters of state.[17] The king thus brought along his chief civilian and military officers.

see plainly that the LORD has been with you, and we thought: Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us. Let us make a pact with you
29 that you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!"
30 Then he made for them a feast, and they ate and drank.

31 Early in the morning, they exchanged oaths. Isaac then bade them farewell, and they departed from him in peace.
32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water!" 33 He named it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

כִּי־הָיָה יְהוָה עִמָּךְ וַנֹּאמֶר תְּהִי נָא אָלָה בֵּינוֹתֵינוּ
בֵּינֵינוּ וּבֵינֶךָ וְנִכְרְתָה בְרִית עִמָּךְ: 29 אִם־תַּעֲשֶׂה
עִמָּנוּ רָעָה כַּאֲשֶׁר לֹא נְגַעֲנוּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂינוּ
עִמְּךָ רַק־טוֹב וַנְּשַׁלְּחֲךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם אַתָּה עַתָּה בְּרוּךְ
יְהוָה: חמישי 30 וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וַיֹּאכְלוּ
וַיִּשְׁתּוּ: 31 וַיַּשְׁכִּימוּ בַבֹּקֶר וַיִּשָּׁבְעוּ אִישׁ לְאָחִיו
וַיְשַׁלְּחֵם יִצְחָק וַיֵּלְכוּ מֵאִתּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם: 32 וַיְהִי
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיָּבֹאוּ עַבְדֵי יִצְחָק וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ עַל־
אֹדוֹת הַבְּאֵר אֲשֶׁר חָפָרוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ מָצָאנוּ מָיִם:
33 וַיִּקְרָא אֹתָהּ שִׁבְעָה עַל־כֵּן שֵׁם־הָעִיר בְּאֵר
שָׁבַע עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: ס 34 וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו בֶּן־

28. the LORD has been with you He refers to Isaac's success in agriculture and the exploration for water and to his increasing affluence.

a sworn treaty Hebrew *'alah,* strictly speaking, is the curse or imprecation that accompanies a treaty sealed by an oath. It thus constitutes its sanction and is meant to assure fidelity to the treaty's terms.[18]

29. The king cites the incident described in verses 7–11 and boasts that no harm had befallen Isaac.

"be you blessed of the LORD!" A final greeting of goodwill, intended to mitigate the bitterness produced by the previous expulsion order.

30. In the ancient world, treaty-making often was accompanied by a ceremonial meal,[19] the purpose of which was to create an auspicious atmosphere of harmony and fellowship for the pact to go into effect.

31. they exchanged oaths The pact is consummated by oaths that most likely also embodied the imprecation mentioned in verse 28.

in peace Hebrew *shalom* in this instance probably has a technical-legal flavor to it because a "covenant of friendship" (Heb. *berit shalom*) is a frequently attested institution.[20]

32–33. That same day The coincidence is highly significant. It indicates a causal relationship between the name Beer-sheba and the oath-taking ceremony just completed. One would expect, then, that the well would be called *shevu'ah,* which is the Hebrew term for oath, rather than *sheva'* (Shibah),[21] which means "seven." The anomaly proves that the present story presupposes a knowledge of the earlier one involving Abraham and Abimelech, as recounted in 21:22–34. There the number seven predominates. Moreover, the names Abraham and Abimelech occur in the present chapter precisely seven times each, just as they do in the first story. Accordingly, our narrative about Isaac entails implicit word play on *shiv'ah* and *shevu'ah* that is intelligible only in the context of the earlier narrative. This leads to the conclusion that verse 33 is not intended to suggest that Isaac first coined and applied the name Beer-sheba but, rather, that he endowed the name previously given by Abraham with new, contemporary meaning and that he gave it currency. As verse 18 notes, Isaac made a practice of giving the wells "the same names that his father had given them."

therefore the name of the city . . . No city of Beer-sheba is ever mentioned in connection with patriarchal activities because, as archaeological research has shown, no such city existed at that time. The present note is not intrinsic to the story but is an editorial remark indicating that the famous city derived its name from the well of patriarchal fame (see Excursus 14).

[34]When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; [35]and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה אֶת־יְהוּדִית בַּת־בְּאֵרִי
הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־בָּשְׂמַת בַּת־אֵילֹן הַחִתִּי׃ 35 וַתִּהְיֶיןָ
מֹרַת רוּחַ לְיִצְחָק וּלְרִבְקָה׃ ס

ESAU'S HITTITE WIVES (vv. 34–35)

An addendum about Esau's Hittite wives, wholly unrelated to the foregoing, is here appended to the collection of incidents in the life of Isaac. At first sight, its presence is all the more strange in that nothing about Esau's family situation previously appears in the chapter. However, like the genealogies of 11:10–32 and 22:20–24, the intrusive material is here a literary device to supply essential data that is preparatory to developments in a subsequent narrative. The information given here lends intelligibility to Rebekah's stratagem for saving Jacob from Esau's anger, as told in 27:42–46. At the same time, the passage reinforces the idea of Esau's unworthiness to be Isaac's heir, for he commits a threefold offense: breaking with social convention by contracting the marriage himself rather than leaving the initiative to his parents; abandoning the established practice of endogamy by marrying outside the kinship group; and violating the honor of his clan by intermarrying with the native women.[22]

Esau was forty years old On the basis of 25:20,26, Isaac is now one hundred years old. This provides the context for the statement in 27:1 that the patriarch was old and blind.

Judith She is not mentioned in the second list of Esau's wives found in 36:2–3, and no offspring of hers is recorded.

Basemath The variant data about her in 36:3 are discussed in the Comment to that passage.

35. they were a source of bitterness The reason why is not stated, but the fact is important for the development of the narrative (27:46f.). There may be ironic word play here, for the name Judith is connected with the verb "to praise" and Basemath has to do with "fragrance."

CHAPTER 27

Jacob Purloins the Blessing (27:1–28:9)

In an earlier narrative we were told that Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew. After satisfying his hunger, he not only showed no regret but also displayed a careless indifference to the sacred institution. The statement at the end of chapter 26 regarding Esau's intermarriage with Hittite women served to reinforce the impression of Esau's unworthiness to be the father of the future chosen people. Now Esau is about to be deprived of the final paternal blessing, sacred words intended to seal the destiny of their recipient. His mother conspires with Jacob, her favorite son, to bring this about.

The action in its entirety covers 27:1–28:5 and unfolds in seven scenes. All four members of the family participate, but only in pairs. Neither Jacob and Esau nor Rebekah and Esau appear together; they dare not confront each other. Each pair moves to the center of the stage twice, save mother and father who meet but once, and that briefly. The strong-willed, artful Rebekah prefers to hover inconspicuously in the background, manipulating the situation. She approaches her husband only when matters threaten to get out of hand.

All the action and the dialogue is directed toward the dominant, recurring theme of the entire episode: the father's final blessing. The Hebrew noun ***berakhah*** occurs seven times and its verbal form exactly twenty-one times. The birthright is not an issue here, and its relationship to the blessing is unclear. Apparently, they were separate institutions. Nothing is said about the disposition of property, and it is striking that Esau expected to receive the blessing even though he admitted to having lost the birthright.

On the moral implications of Jacob's behavior, see Excursus 21.

כ״ז וַיְהִי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶיָן עֵינָיו מֵרְאֹת
וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּנִי: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא זָקַנְתִּי לֹא
יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי: 3 וְעַתָּה שָׂא־נָא כֵלֶיךָ תֶּלְיְךָ
וְקַשְׁתֶּךָ וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְצוּדָה לִי צֵידָה: 4 וַעֲשֵׂה־לִי
מַטְעַמִּים כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתִּי וְהָבִיאָה לִי וְאֹכֵלָה
בַּעֲבוּר תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי בְּטֶרֶם אָמוּת: 5 וְרִבְקָה
שֹׁמַעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו
הַשָּׂדֶה לָצוּד צַיִד לְהָבִיא: 6 וְרִבְקָה אָמְרָה אֶל־
יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־אָבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר
אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ לֵאמֹר: 7 הָבִיאָה לִי צַיִד וַעֲשֵׂה־
לִי מַטְעַמִּים וְאֹכֵלָה וַאֲבָרֶכְכָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לִפְנֵי
מוֹתִי: 8 וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי לַאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." 2And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. 3Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. 4Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."

5Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, 6Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, 7'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the LORD's approval, before I die.' 8Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. 9Go to the

v. 3. צַיִד ק׳

ISAAC AND ESAU (vv. 1–4)

1. ***When Isaac was old*** The ensuing dialogue creates the impression of impending death, yet Isaac lives on for many years.[1] His total blindness, or perhaps some illness, prompts him to decide on his successor.

his eyes were too dim The loss of vision is central to the narrative, for Jacob could not otherwise have impersonated his brother. The statement may also have a figurative significance: Isaac's perception of reality about Esau's worthiness to receive the blessing appears to have been clouded.[2]

his older son The Narrator studiously avoids calling Esau the "first-born" because the term carries with it social and legal implications that he wishes to avoid since Esau had sold his birthright.[3]

3. ***gear*** This general term is more closely defined as the "quiver and the bow." The weapon of the hunter was the bow and arrow as Isaiah 7:24 shows. The arrow was kept in a lightweight container, a "quiver" that hung over the hunter's shoulder.[4]

4. The repeated emphasis given to the meal[5] suggests not just a means of inducing physical well-being and the proper mood for the occasion, but also a ritual of ceremonial function closely connected with the act of blessing.

my innermost blessing Literally, "that my being (Heb. *nefesh*) may bless you." This formulation, which appears again three times,[6] is clearly of great importance to the understanding of the blessing. We see from verse 28 that the source and sanction of the blessing is not man but God. Isaac summons from the very depths of his own soul all the vitality and energy at his command in order to invoke God's blessing upon his son. He communicates the blessing to his offspring by virtue of his own special relationship with God and by dint of his power and authority as patriarch.

REBEKAH AND JACOB (vv. 5–17)

5. Alert to the interests of her favorite son, Rebekah makes it her business to know what is going on when Isaac summons Esau.[7]

7. ***with the LORD's approval*** Literally, "in the presence of the Lord." Rebekah adds this phrase to Isaac's words in order to impress upon Jacob the importance and solemnity of the occasion.[8]

flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father, such as he likes. [10]Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." [11]Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. [12]If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." [13]But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."

[14]He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his father liked. [15]Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on; [16]and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids. [17]Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

[18]He went to his father and said, "Father." And he said, "Yes, which of my sons are you?" [19]Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing." [20]Isaac said to his son, "How did you succeed so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the

אֹתָֽךְ׃ 9 לֶךְ־נָא֙ אֶל־הַצֹּ֔אן וְקַח־לִ֥י מִשָּׁ֖ם שְׁנֵ֣י גְדָיֵ֣י
עִזִּ֑ים טֹבִ֔ים וְאֶֽעֱשֶׂ֨ה אֹתָ֜ם מַטְעַמִּ֣ים לְאָבִ֗יךָ
כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר אָהֵֽב׃ 10 וְהֵבֵאתָ֖ לְאָבִ֣יךָ וְאָכָ֑ל בַּעֲבֻ֗ר
אֲשֶׁ֤ר יְבָרֶכְךָ֙ לִפְנֵ֣י מוֹתֽוֹ׃ 11 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יַעֲקֹב֙ אֶל־
רִבְקָ֣ה אִמּ֔וֹ הֵ֚ן עֵשָׂ֣ו אָחִ֔י אִ֥ישׂ שָׂעִ֖ר וְאָנֹכִ֥י אִ֖ישׁ
חָלָֽק׃ 12 אוּלַ֤י יְמֻשֵּׁנִי֙ אָבִ֔י וְהָיִ֥יתִי בְעֵינָ֖יו
כִּמְתַעְתֵּ֑עַ וְהֵבֵאתִ֤י עָלַי֙ קְלָלָ֔ה וְלֹ֥א בְרָכָֽה׃
13 וַתֹּ֥אמֶר לוֹ֙ אִמּ֔וֹ עָלַ֥י קִלְלָתְךָ֖ בְּנִ֑י אַ֚ךְ שְׁמַ֣ע
בְּקֹלִ֔י וְלֵ֖ךְ קַח־לִֽי׃ 14 וַיֵּ֣לֶךְ וַיִּקַּ֔ח וַיָּבֵ֖א לְאִמּ֑וֹ
וַתַּ֣עַשׂ אִמּ֔וֹ מַטְעַמִּ֖ים כַּאֲשֶׁ֥ר אָהֵ֖ב אָבִֽיו׃
15 וַתִּקַּ֣ח רִבְקָ֗ה אֶת־בִּגְדֵ֤י עֵשָׂו֙ בְּנָ֣הּ הַגָּדֹ֔ל
הַחֲמֻדֹ֖ת אֲשֶׁ֣ר אִתָּ֑הּ בַּבָּ֔יִת וַתַּלְבֵּ֕שׁ אֶת־יַעֲקֹ֖ב
בְּנָ֥הּ הַקָּטָֽן׃ 16 וְאֵת֙ עֹרֹ֣ת גְּדָיֵ֔י הָעִזִּ֖ים הִלְבִּ֑ישָׁה
עַל־יָדָ֖יו וְעַ֥ל חֶלְקַ֖ת צַוָּארָֽיו׃ 17 וַתִּתֵּ֗ן אֶת־
הַמַּטְעַמִּ֛ים וְאֶת־הַלֶּ֖חֶם אֲשֶׁ֣ר עָשָׂ֑תָה בְּיַ֖ד יַעֲקֹ֥ב
בְּנָֽהּ׃ 18 וַיָּבֹ֖א אֶל־אָבִ֑יו וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אָבִ֔י וַיֹּ֕אמֶר הִנֻּ֖נִי
מִ֥י אַתָּ֖ה בְּנִֽי׃ 19 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יַעֲקֹב֙ אֶל־אָבִ֔יו אָנֹכִ֕י
עָשִׂ֥יתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר֙ דִּבַּ֣רְתָּ אֵלַ֔י קוּם־נָ֥א
שְׁבָ֖ה וְאָכְלָ֣ה מִצֵּידִ֑י בַּעֲב֗וּר תְּבָרֲכַ֥נִי נַפְשֶֽׁךָ׃

9. ***two choice kids*** The skin of a kid is tougher than that of a lamb.[9]

11. ***hairy . . . smooth-skinned*** Hebrew *sa'ir . . . ḥalak.* Jacob indulges in clever word play.[10] The terms evoke Mount Seir and Mount Halak, mentioned together in Joshua 11:17 and 12:7. The second mount marked the southern limit of Joshua's conquest of Canaan, bordering on Esau's habitat, which was Mount Seir. Jacob hesitates to encroach upon Esau's prerogative.

12. ***a trickster*** At the present stage of his character development, Jacob seems to be more concerned with the consequences of detection than with the morality of the act.

13. Rebekah confidently brushes aside Jacob's fears because she remembers the oracle she received that the older son was destined to serve the younger.[11]

14. ***He got them and brought them*** The Hebrew has a staccato succession of three short verbs: "He went, he took, he brought." The effect is a picture of Jacob performing the unpleasant deed with nervous haste.

15. ***the best clothes*** These were probably reserved for festal or ceremonial occasions.

ISAAC AND JACOB (vv. 18–20)

18. ***"Father"*** In obvious trepidation, Jacob can only utter a single word. The contrast with Esau's bold and ample statement in verse 31 is blatant.

"which of my sons are you?" Jacob's attempt at mimicking Esau is not quite successful.

19. For a moment, one is in suspense as to whether the impersonator can carry through his act or will crumble, but then Jacob rallies and rises to the challenge.

20. Jacob actually invokes God's name in an outright lie! There may be an underlying idea that he really spoke better than he knew, for the hand of Providence was indeed at work.

LORD your God granted me good fortune." 21Isaac said to Jacob, "Come closer that I may feel you, my son—whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and wondered. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau." 23He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; and so he blessed him.

24He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And when he said, "I am," 25he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank. 26Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close and kiss me, my son"; 27and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the Lord has blessed.

28"May God give you
Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,
Abundance of new grain and wine.

כ וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־בְּנוֹ מַה־זֶּה מִהַרְתָּ לִמְצֹא
בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי הִקְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנָי:
כא וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל־יַעֲקֹב גְּשָׁה־נָּא וַאֲמֻשְׁךָ בְּנִי
הַאַתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו אִם־לֹא: כב וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל־
יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיְמֻשֵּׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב
וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו: כג וְלֹא הִכִּירוֹ כִּי־הָיוּ יָדָיו כִּידֵי
עֵשָׂו אָחִיו שְׂעִרֹת וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ: כד וַיֹּאמֶר אַתָּה זֶה
בְּנִי עֵשָׂו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי: כה וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּשָׁה לִי וְאֹכְלָה
מְצִיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי וַיַּגֶּשׁ־לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל
וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּשְׁתְּ: כו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו
גְּשָׁה־נָּא וּשְׁקָה־לִּי בְנִי: כז וַיִּגַּשׁ וַיִּשַּׁק־לוֹ וַיָּרַח
אֶת־רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר רְאֵה רֵיחַ בְּנִי
כְּרֵיחַ שָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרְכוֹ יְהוָה: ששי
כח וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ הָאֱלֹהִים
מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ
וְרֹב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ:
כט יַעַבְדוּךָ עַמִּים

21–27. Deprived of his eyesight, Isaac summons to his aid the remaining senses of hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

22–23. The distinctive quality and inflection of Jacob's voice puts his impersonation of Esau in jeopardy, but the skin disguise is effective and saves the day. Isaac makes up his mind to bless his son, but at the last moment he is once again seized by a vague disquiet and renews his probing.

*24. **"I am"*** Again at the moment of crisis, Jacob can only utter a single word.

25. In demanding the meal at this particular point, Isaac imposes the test of taste. The thrice-repeated emphasis on the meat being prepared in accordance with his special preference[12] suggests a particular recipe, distinctive of Esau's singular culinary skill. It was this that endeared him to his father in the first place.

27. The clothes of the shepherd reek of the flock and the herd, whereas the hunter's emit the odor of the fields, which Isaac relished more.

Now fully convinced that Esau stands before him, Isaac proceeds to communicate the decisive blessing, which really relates to national destiny rather than to the fate of an individual. It is composed of three parts[13] and contains assurances of fertility of the soil, of political and military preeminence, and of God's consummate protection. This blessing is unique in the patriarchal narratives thus far in that it contains no promises of progeny or land.

*28. **the dew of heaven*** Dew in the Bible is a metaphor of abundance and reinvigoration, a symbol of God's beneficence. Throughout most of the rainless summer months, dew provides a major source of irrigation for crops in many places in the Land of Israel. The westerly and northwesterly winds that blow in from the Mediterranean Sea carry moisture overland. When the air is saturated with water vapor, the cool night temperatures cause the vapor to condense into a heavy mist. This is particularly true of the western Negeb, the central coastal plain, the western slopes of the hills of Judea and Samaria, on Mount Carmel, and in Gilead. Several regions of the country receive negligible amounts of dew or none at all, while there is no dewfall whatsoever on many of the lands neighboring Israel. Further, in many places what appears to be dew is simply the evaporation and precipitation of moisture already present in the soil, so that this adds nothing to the overall water balance and does not contribute to the growth of vegetation.

The significance of dew as a factor in the hydrology of the Land of Israel gives special meaning to

וישתחו לך לאמים
והוה גביר לאחיך
וישתחוו לך בני אמך
ארריך ארור
ומברכיך ברוך׃

[29]Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow to you;
Be master over your brothers,
And let your mother's sons bow to you.
Cursed be they who curse you,
Blessed they who bless you."

30 ויהי כאשר כלה יצחק לברך את־יעקב ויהי
אך יצא יצא יעקב מאת פני יצחק אביו ועשו
אחיו בא מצידו׃ 31 ויעש גם־הוא מטעמים ויבא
לאביו ויאמר לאביו יקם אבי ויאכל מציד בנו
בעבור תברכני נפשך׃ 32 ויאמר לו יצחק אביו
מי־אתה ויאמר אני בנך בכרך עשו׃ 33 ויחרד
יצחק חרדה גדלה עד־מאד ויאמר מי־אפוא
הוא הצד־ציד ויבא לי ואכל מכל בטרם תבוא
ואברכהו גם־ברוך יהיה׃ 34 כשמע עשו את־

[30]No sooner had Jacob left the presence of his father Isaac—after Isaac had finished blessing Jacob—than his brother Esau came back from his hunt. [31]He too prepared a dish and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may give me your innermost blessing." [32]His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, Esau, your first-born!" [33]Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. "Who was it then," he demanded, "that hunted game and brought it to me? Moreover, I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now he must remain blessed!"

v. 29. ויִשְׁתַּחֲווּ ק׳

this aspect of the blessing. It continued to be reflected in the Jewish liturgy throughout the ages. Rabbinic sources report that in the days of the Second Temple, when the High Priest emerged safely from performing the sacred service in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he uttered a short prayer for the welfare of Israel during the coming year. Among other things, he asked for an abundance of dew. To the present time, the end of the rainy season and the commencement of the rainless summer is marked in the Jewish liturgy by a prayer for dew *(tefillat tal/tikkun tal),* which forms part of the Musaf, or Additional Service, on the first day of Passover during the reader's repetition of the Amidah. Even during the winter season, the ninth benediction of the daily Amidah couples a petition for dew with that for rain.[14]

*28. **the fat of the earth*** The finest fruits of the soil.

29. Israel's military might and political power will give it preeminence over its hostile neighbors.

brothers/mother's sons This parallel pair of words, like "peoples/nations," is a poetic convention both in the Bible and in Ugaritic literature.[15] The plural, as in verse 37, simply emphasizes the comprehensive and absolute nature of Jacob's predominance.

Cursed In the ancient Near East, the curse was thought to be a powerful weapon against an enemy.

ISAAC AND ESAU (vv. 30–41)

The Narrator's skill is seen here at its best. No sooner does the tension relax and Jacob withdraw from the stage, than it reaches a new pitch of intensity with Esau's reappearance on the scene. There is no doubt where the author's sympathy lies. Esau is the innocent victim of a cruel ruse. This rough fellow, the hardy hunter, is utterly crushed when he discovers what happened. He sobs convulsively.

*32. **"Who are you?"*** This time Isaac does not call the speaker "my son" because he cannot conceive of the possibility of having been deceived by his own offspring.

*33. **"Now he must remain blessed"*** Isaac is overwhelmed with consternation but then realizes that, irrespective of the circumstances, the blessing he has uttered is beyond recall. According to the conception of the times, it now has a potency and dynamism all its own, and the destiny that

34When Esau heard his father's words, he burst into wild and bitter sobbing, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!" 35But he answered, "Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing." 36[Esau] said, "Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!" And he added, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" 37Isaac answered, saying to Esau, "But I have made him master over you: I have given him all his brothers for servants, and sustained him with grain and wine. What, then, can I still do for you, my son?" 38And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau wept aloud. 39And his father Isaac answered, saying to him,

"See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth
And the dew of heaven above.
40Yet by your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother;
But when you grow restive,
You shall break his yoke from your neck."

41Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of

הִבְרֵי אָבִיו וַיִּצְעַק צְעָקָה גְּדֹלָה וּמָרָה עַד־מְאֹד
וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו בָּרְכֵנִי גַם־אָנִי אָבִי: 35 וַיֹּאמֶר בָּא
אָחִיךָ בְּמִרְמָה וַיִּקַּח בִּרְכָתֶךָ: 36 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא
שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי זֶה פַּעֲמַיִם אֶת־בְּכֹרָתִי לָקָח
וְהִנֵּה עַתָּה לָקַח בִּרְכָתִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא־אָצַלְתָּ לִי
בְּרָכָה: 37 וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר לְעֵשָׂו הֵן גְּבִיר
שַׂמְתִּיו לָךְ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו נָתַתִּי לוֹ לַעֲבָדִים וְדָגָן
וְתִירֹשׁ סְמַכְתִּיו וּלְכָה אֵפוֹא מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּנִי:
38 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל־אָבִיו הֲבְרָכָה אַחַת הִוא־לְךָ
אָבִי בָּרְכֵנִי גַם־אָנִי אָבִי וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קֹלוֹ וַיֵּבְךְּ:
39 וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

הִנֵּה מִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מוֹשָׁבֶךָ
וּמִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעָל:
40 וְעַל־חַרְבְּךָ תִּחְיֶה
וְאֶת־אָחִיךָ תַּעֲבֹד
וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר תָּרִיד
וּפָרַקְתָּ עֻלּוֹ מֵעַל צַוָּארֶךָ:

41 וַיִּשְׂטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת־יַעֲקֹב עַל־הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר

חצי הספר בפסוקים v. 40.

has been solemnly conferred upon his younger son is irreversible (v. 37). For this reason, Esau does not ask his father to rescind the blessing, only to bless him as well.

36. In his misery, Esau resorts to bitter sarcasm that expresses itself in word plays. He reinterprets the name Jacob *(ya'akov)* as deriving from the stem *'-k-v,* meaning "to supplant," and he puns on *bekhorah,* "birthright," and *berakhah,* "blessing." In echoing his father's use of "took away," Esau may also be engaging in double entendre, because the Hebrew stem *l-k-ḥ* can mean both "to take away" and "to purchase."[16] In his anguish, he blurts out the fact of his foolish sale of his birthright, something apparently unknown to Isaac.

39. Ostensibly, the wording of the pronouncement is identical with that uttered to Jacob, yet it is strangely enigmatic and ambiguous. The preposition *min* before the two key words may be partitive: Esau will share in the richness of the earth. In favor of this interpretation is the fact that the western side of Mount Seir, Esau's habitat according to 36:8, receives plenty of wind and rain and is relatively well off in springs and vegetation. On the other hand, the preposition *min* can also be understood to express deprivation,[17] and the passage may be translated: "Your abode shall be far from the fat of the earth, / Far from the dew of heaven above." The land of Edom as a whole was never very fruitful and the nature of its topography deprives it of all but a negligible dewfall. To compound the ambiguity, the order of the parallel pair of words "dew/fat" has been reversed as though, perhaps, to insinuate a reversal of the blessing given to Jacob.

40. Edom shall subsist, not from pastoral or agricultural pursuits but from violence and pillage, raiding its neighbors and plundering the caravans that pass through its land. For a long time it is destined to be a vassal of Israel. However, it will eventually free itself of domination.

Historically, it was King David who first made vassals of the Edomites. The first sign of their restiveness occurred during Solomon's reign, but in the time of Jehoshaphat (873–849 B.C.E.) it was still a province of Judah. However, Edom successfully revolted in the days of Jehoram (Joram, 849–842 B.C.E.). Amaziah (800–783 B.C.E.) had to war against Edom, and by the time of Ahaz (735–715 B.C.E.) Judah was forced to yield the port of Elath to the Edomites who settled the town.[18]

41. ***Esau said to himself*** The Hebrew simply means that his mind was made up, not that he kept his thoughts to himself.[19]

the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, "Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob." 42When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. 43Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban. 44Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides—45until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!"

46Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?" 28 1So Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him. He instructed him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women.

בִּרְכוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ יִקְרְבוּ יְמֵי אֵבֶל אָבִי וְאַהַרְגָה אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אָחִי: 42 וַיֻּגַּד לְרִבְקָה אֵת אֶת־דִּבְרֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנָהּ הַגָּדֹל וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ הַקָּטֹן וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לְךָ לְהָרְגֶךָ: 43 וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וְקוּם בְּרַח־לְךָ אֶל־לָבָן אָחִי חָרָנָה: 44 וְיָשַׁבְתָּ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אֲחָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר־תָּשׁוּב חֲמַת אָחִיךָ: 45 עַד־שׁוּב אַף־אָחִיךָ מִמְּךָ וְשָׁכַח אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָ לּוֹ וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וּלְקַחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם לָמָּה אֶשְׁכַּל גַּם־שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד: 46 וַתֹּאמֶר רִבְקָה אֶל־יִצְחָק קַצְתִּי* בְחַיַּי מִפְּנֵי בְּנוֹת חֵת אִם־לֹקֵחַ יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת־חֵת כָּאֵלֶּה מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לָמָּה לִי חַיִּים:

כ״ח וַיִּקְרָא יִצְחָק אֶל־יַעֲקֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַוֵּהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן:

ק׳ זעירא v. 46.

the mourning period Out of filial respect, Esau employs a euphemism[20] for death.

REBEKAH AND JACOB (vv. 42–45)

Rebekah seems to have misjudged the depth of Esau's outrage and the intensity of his vindictive reaction. She is now clearly alarmed.

she sent for Jacob may well have been in hiding.[21]

45. Let me not lose you both If Esau carries out his threat, Jacob would be killed when Isaac dies. Alternately, "both" may refer to the two sons, for Esau would either be judicially condemned to death for murder or struck down in an act of private revenge.[22]

REBEKAH AND ISAAC (v. 46)

Rebekah realizes that, for his own safety, Jacob must be sent away at once. But how can this be achieved? She needs her husband's agreement, yet she dare not divulge the true reason—both because she wishes to spare him further anguish and because she fears that her own involvement in the deception might thereby be exposed. She hits upon the pretext of his need to get married.

I am disgusted The persuasiveness of her argument is decisive because, as 26:34–35 has already informed us, Esau's union with the local women has become an intolerable torment to his parents. Implicit in Rebekah's words seems to be a subtle rebuke to Isaac for his unmerited favoritism of Esau, a rebuke that is also calculated to allay any lingering uneasiness about his unwitting blessing of Jacob.

CHAPTER 28 ISAAC AND JACOB (vv. 1–5)

1. and blessed him By this act, Isaac confirms Jacob's title to the birthright independently of the deception. Jacob is recognized to be the true heir to the Abrahamic covenant, which is why he must not marry outside of the family.

[2]Up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take a wife there from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. [3]May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly of peoples. [4]May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham."

[5]Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.

[6]When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, charging him, as he blessed him, "You shall not take a wife from

ב קוּם לֵךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם בֵּיתָה בְתוּאֵל אֲבִי אִמֶּךָ
וְקַח־לְךָ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת לָבָן אֲחִי אִמֶּךָ׃
ג וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֵךְ אֹתְךָ וְיַפְרְךָ וְיַרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ
לִקְהַל עַמִּים׃ ד וְיִתֶּן־לְךָ אֶת־בִּרְכַת אַבְרָהָם לְךָ
וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אִתָּךְ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מְגֻרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר־
נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם׃ שביעי ה וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק
אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל
הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו׃ ו וַיַּרְא עֵשָׂו
כִּי־בֵרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְשִׁלַּח אֹתוֹ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם
לָקַחַת־לוֹ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה בְּבָרְכוֹ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַו עָלָיו
לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן׃ מפטיר

*2. **Up, go*** Isaac knows nothing of the real reason for Jacob's journey. That is why he uses "go" in contrast to Rebekah's "flee" in 27:43.

Paddan-aram See Comment to 25:20.

take a wife there It is the patriarch's prerogative to decide whom the members of his clan shall marry.

3–4. This blessing complements the earlier one in that it adds the dimensions of nationhood and national territory. It cites the divine promises to Abraham as given in chapter 17, even to the extent of using the divine name El Shaddai with which that section begins.

El Shaddai On the name itself, see Excursus 11.

an assembly of peoples The future league of the tribes of Israel.[1]

you are sojourning See Comment to 12:10.

*5. **mother of Jacob and Esau*** Jacob is given precedence, but Esau is also mentioned in order to smooth the connection with the following item.[2]

ESAU'S ISHMAELITE WIFE (vv. 6–9)

The account of Jacob's flight from home suddenly breaks off, and a note about Esau's marriage follows. This note acts as a literary device that slows the pace of the narrative. It also has another function. In the same way that mention of Esau's Hittite wives preceded the story of Jacob's purloining the paternal blessing, so the report of Esau's further marriage, this time to a daughter of Ishmael, concludes it. The entire episode is thus provided with a literary framework.

*6–8. **When Esau saw*** Realizing that his marriages outside the kinship group and his alliances with the native women had contributed to his loss of the blessing, Esau now tries to repair the situation. He takes to wife the daughter of his father's brother, an act that corresponds to Jacob's move, soon to be made, to wed the daughter of his mother's brother.

In historical terms, this report indicates some kind of affiliation between the Edomites and the Ishmaelites. This would most likely have taken place in connection with the international spice trade, a topic discussed in the Comments to 25:1–6,13. Psalms 83:6 mentions "an alliance" against Israel by "the clans of Edom and the Ishmaelites."

among the Canaanite women," [7]and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and gone to Paddan-aram, [8]Esau realized that the Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac. [9]So Esau went to Ishmael and took to wife, in addition to the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, sister of Nebaioth.

7 וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אָבִיו וְאֶל־אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה
אֲרָם: 8 וַיַּרְא עֵשָׂו כִּי רָעוֹת בְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן בְּעֵינֵי
יִצְחָק אָבִיו: 9 וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו אֶל־יִשְׁמָעֵאל וַיִּקַּח אֶת־
מָחֲלַת בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם אֲחוֹת נְבָיוֹת
עַל־נָשָׁיו לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: ס

VA-YETSE'

[10]Jacob left Beer-sheba, and set out for Haran. [11]He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. [12]He had a

ויצא

10 וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה: 11 וַיִּפְגַּע
בַּמָּקוֹם וַיָּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי
הַמָּקוֹם וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

*9. **Ishmael*** The man, himself, was no longer alive at this time.[3]

Mahalath She is not mentioned among Esau's wives listed in 36:2–3. There it is Basemath who is said to be the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Traditional Jewish exegesis assumed that the two names belonged to the same person.[4]

sister of Nebaioth According to Megillah 17a, Nebaioth gave his sister away in marriage because their father was dead.

Nebaioth He was the first-born of Ishmael, and the clan bearing that name was pre-eminent in the Ishmaelite tribal league. Its identification with the Nabaiti of Assyrian sources, possibly the ancestors of the later Nabateans, is discussed in the Comment to 25:13.

Jacob's Encounter with God (vv. 10–22)

Va-Yetse'

The biography of Jacob as an independent personality, a patriarch in his own right, now begins. The home-loving favorite of an overprotective mother is now an exile, utterly alone and friendless, embarking on a long perilous journey that is to take him from Beer-sheba in southern Canaan to Haran in northern Mesopotamia. His character is to be tested and refined, his personality molded and transformed by the experience.

In typically nondescriptive biblical style, the narrative provides no details about the adventures or the trials and tribulations of Jacob in the course of his trek, only the bare facts that he set out and that he arrived. This follows the pattern of the accounts of Abraham's three-day journey to Moriah and of his servant's mission to Aram-naharaim. In the present instance, however, the silence on detail is broken by the highlighting of a single, momentous encounter on the way, an encounter not with man but with God. This event draws the curtain on the cycle of Jacob–Esau stories and prepares the reader for a new phase in the life of Jacob.

THE DREAM-REVELATION (vv. 11–15)

*11. **He came upon a certain place*** The impossibility of travel after sunset is the only reason for Jacob's stopping at the nameless "place." The use of this designation is suggestive because Hebrew ***makom*** frequently has the connotation of "a sacred site," as noted in the Comment to 12:6. To Jacob, however, it is a profane place with no prior tradition of holiness, and he treats it with indifference.

dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. 13And the LORD was standing beside him and He said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. 14Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. 15Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

יב וַיַּחֲלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֻלָּם מֻצָּב אַרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מַגִּיעַ
הַשָּׁמָיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ׃
יג וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה נִצָּב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמַר אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ וֵאלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה
שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֶךָ׃ יד וְהָיָה זַרְעֲךָ
כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ וּפָרַצְתָּ יָמָּה וָקֵדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה
וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל־מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה וּבְזַרְעֶךָ׃
טו וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וּשְׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ
וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֶזָבְךָ עַד
אֲשֶׁר אִם־עָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ׃ טז וַיִּיקַץ

12. While Jacob sleeps unsuspectingly in this "place," he receives a dream-revelation. Superficially, the episode recalls the phenomenon of incubation. It was customary throughout the ancient world, both Near Eastern and classical, for a devotee to sleep in the sacred precincts of a temple in order to induce the deity to reveal its will. However, the present narrative emphatically dissociates Jacob's experience from this pagan practice by stressing the wholly unplanned nature of his stopover, the complete anonymity of "the place," and the total unexpectedness of the theophany. Here it is God who freely takes the initiative in revealing Himself to an amazed Jacob.

Visual imagery and an auditory sensation are the manifest content of the dream. The Hebrew term *sullam,* here rendered "stairway," is unique in the Bible; its etymology is uncertain. It may derive from the stem *s-l-l,* "to cast up a mound," or may be connected with Akkadian *simmiltu,* "steps." *Sullam* could therefore be a ladder or a stairway ramp. The inspirational stimulus for the image seems to be the ladder of ascent to heaven known from Egyptian and Hittite sources, in which both divinities and the souls of the dead are provided with ladders to enable them to ascend from the netherworld to the abodes of men and the gods. Another explanation of the representational reality lies in the Babylonian ziggurat, the temple tower familiar from the Tower of Babel story in chapter 11. This edifice was equipped with an external stairway or ramp linking each stage of the tower with the next until "its top reached the sky." It should be noted, though, that in Jacob's dream, the *sullam,* whatever it be, does not function as a channel of communication between man and God.

angels of God They play no role in the dream. Their presence may reflect the notion of angelic beings who patrol the earth and report back to God.[5] It is also possible that the angelic activity may symbolize Jacob's personal hopes and fears, his prayers for protection, which rise to heaven and receive a response. See Excursus 10.

13. ***beside him*** Or "it."[6]

I am the LORD For this introductory, self-identifying formula, see the Comment to 15:7. In the present context the use of the divine name YHVH has special importance because the revelation is thereby disengaged from any possible connection with El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, whose name is a component of Bethel, the name soon to be given to the place.

Abraham . . . Isaac The theophany confirms Jacob as the heir to the divine promises to his forebears.[7] The continuity of the generations is assured. Jacob thus becomes the third patriarch.

the ground on which you are lying . . . Just as he is about to be exiled from the land, his title to it is affirmed. It is quite possible that Jacob's simple recumbency, occasioned by the sunset, is here transformed by God into a symbolic, formal act that constitutes a mode of legal acquisition. This would correspond to Abraham's walking about the land, discussed in the Comment to 13:17.

14. The wording of the divine promises shows clear dependency on the promise made to Abraham in 13:14–17.

15. The unconditional national promises that project into the distant future conclude on a personal note directed specifically to Jacob in his present predicament.

[16]Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it!" [17]Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." [18]Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. [19]He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

יַעֲקֹב מִשְּׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְהוָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי: 17 וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמַר מַה־נּוֹרָא
הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹהִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר
הַשָּׁמָיִם: 18 וַיַּשְׁכֵּם יַעֲקֹב בַּבֹּקֶר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֶבֶן
אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ מַצֵּבָה וַיִּצֹק
שֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ: 19 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שֵׁם־הַמָּקוֹם
הַהוּא בֵּית־אֵל וְאוּלָם לוּז שֵׁם־הָעִיר לָרִאשֹׁנָה:

BETHEL (vv. 16–19)

The next morning Jacob memorializes the events of the night, gives a name to the site, and makes a vow to God. The selection of the name Bethel and its attribution to Jacob are of particular interest because of the paramount importance that the sanctuary at Bethel later assumed in the religious history of Israel and because the undoubted prior Canaanite associations of Bethel are wholly ignored. Both issues are treated at length in Excursus 22. The theophany to Jacob provides the sole basis for the sanctity of Bethel, and there is a deliberate dissociation from any sacred antecedents.

*16. **Surely the LORD is present in this place*** This reaction of amazement is unprecedented in the patriarchal stories. Neither Abraham nor Isaac exhibit any surprise at their initial experience of God's sudden self-revelation. Jacob's exceptional emotional response requires explanation. Undoubtedly it lies, at least partially, in his realization of the baseness of his behavior toward his father and brother. He must have been beset with feelings of complete and deserved abandonment by God and man. Having fallen prey to guilt and solitary despair, he is surprised that God is still concerned for him. At the same time, "the place" he has stumbled upon possesses no intrinsic value for Jacob. It is merely a convenient spot where he may lodge for the night.

I did not know it Had he known that YHVH would reveal Himself there, he would not have treated the place as profane.[8]

*17. **Shaken*** Jacob is profoundly affected by the unique, overwhelming mystery of the encounter with God.[9]

abode of God That is, the site where He has manifested His presence. The building or consecration of a sanctuary is not mentioned. When Jacob returns from Haran he erects only an altar (35:7).

the gateway to heaven That is, the place where the angels ascend to and descend from heaven. The notion that such "gateways" existed was widespread. One of the titles of the high priest of Thebes in Egypt was "The Opener of the Gates of Heavens," while the city of Babylon was understood by the Semites to have derived its name from *bab-ilim*, "gate of the god." The phraseology has persisted to this day in the Jewish liturgy.

*18. **a pillar*** Hebrew ***matsevah*** derives from the stem ***n-ts-v***, "to stand." It denotes a single, upright slab of stone.[10] Believed to be the repository of a divinity or spirit, it was often used as a cultic object. For this reason, ***matsevot*** are strictly proscribed in the Torah as being idolatrous. There is also the legitimate ***matsevah***, such as, for instance, one that simply memorializes the dead. In 35:20 Jacob erects one for Rachel, and in 2 Samuel 18:18 Absalom sets one up for himself because he had no children. The lawful type is also attested in Genesis 31:45–54, where it serves as a mute witness to a treaty between Jacob and Laban. A large stone was similarly used to commemorate the covenant between God and Israel made at Shechem. The wording used in Joshua 24:27 is highly instructive: "See, this very stone shall be a witness against us, for it heard all the words that the LORD spoke to us." This text provides the key to Jacob's action. Because the stone is under his head while he sleeps, it not only marks the spot but functions, as it were, as a witness to the dream and the accompanying divine promises. The Comment to verse 22 gives further support for this interpretation.

[20]Jacob then made a vow, saying, "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, [21]and if I return safe to my father's house—the LORD shall be my God. [22]And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall

כ וַיִּדַּר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר לֵאמֹר אִם־יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים
עִמָּדִי וּשְׁמָרַנִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ
וְנָתַן־לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבֶגֶד לִלְבֹּשׁ: כא וְשַׁבְתִּי
בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל־בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה יְהוָה לִי לֵאלֹהִים:
כב וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר־שַׂמְתִּי מַצֵּבָה יִהְיֶה בֵּית

and poured oil on the top of it This ritual must have held great significance for it is recalled in 31:13, where the stem *m-sh-ḥ* is used to describe the action. This is the regular Hebrew term for the sacred ceremony of anointing. Jacob once again pours oil over a *matsevah* at Bethel on his return from Haran (35:14). The meaning of the anointing is uncertain. It might be a means of consecration in much the same way that the wilderness Tabernacle and its appurtenances were thereby dedicated and sanctified.[11] Far more plausible in the present instance is the suggestion that the anointing of the witness stone with oil was a symbolic act establishing a contractual bond between Jacob and God. There is widespread evidence from the ancient Near East for the use of oil in international treaty relationships and in effectuating business contracts. It seems to have been a token of peace, friendship, and assumed obligation. In Jacob's case, the anointing is connected with the making of a vow that binds him to a certain commitment. The special connection between the pouring of oil and the vow is explicit in 31:13.

19. ***Luz*** The name may mean "an almond tree," as in 30:37. In fact, the region is ideal fruit and nut country. An alternative possibility is to derive it from Arabic *laudh,* "a place of refuge," a name highly appropriate to the present circumstances.[12] The change of place-name is an exception to the usual instances, which are occasioned by the conquest of a city by new settlers. It should be noted that the text carefully differentiates between the "site (Heb. *makom*) of Bethel" and "the city of Luz," even though it implies that the name Bethel displaced an earlier name Luz. This conforms to Joshua 16:2, which clearly treats Bethel and Luz as two distinct and coexisting entities, the latter being situated west of the former. On the other hand, the identity of the two localities is again asserted in Genesis 35:6, Joshua 18:13, and Judges 1:23. The most likely explanation for the discrepancy is that Bethel was originally applied solely to the cultic area outside the town of Luz. As Bethel grew in fame and importance, the name was gradually extended to the urban area as well. Eventually it eclipsed Luz, which fell into disuse.

THE VOW (vv. 20–22)

At this critical moment, while still under the impact of his extraordinary dream experience, Jacob takes upon himself certain obligations. The structure and style of his vow is in accord with a pattern known also from the story of Jephthah in Judges 11:30–31, of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:11, and of Absalom in 2 Samuel 15:8. In each case the desire of the speaker is formulated as a condition whose fulfillment is wholly dependent upon God's providence; the suppliant solemnly undertakes to discharge some special obligation when this materializes. Jacob's vow is unique in that all the desired conditions have already been unqualifiedly promised by God (v. 15).

This peculiarity is noted in Genesis Rabba 70:4, where two possible explanations are given.[13] One is that the true sequence of events has been transposed in the narrative so that, in reality, the theophany becomes a response to Jacob's vow, which actually preceded it. The other is that verses 20–22 are not so much conditional as temporal. Jacob pledges himself to a certain course of action as an expression of gratitude to God after the promises will be fulfilled. According to the natural order presupposed by our story, Jacob's vow cannot be understood as a bargaining with God since all that he asks for has already been promised.

21. ***the LORD shall be my God*** This phrase appears to be the resolution of the vow. It implies a commitment on the part of Jacob to exclusive allegiance to YHVH, which expresses itself through the imposition of a self-discipline that demonstrates that loyalty.[14]

22. ***And this stone . . . shall be God's abode*** The stone shall function as a witness to Jacob's

be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You."

אֱלֹהִים וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּן־לִי עַשֵּׂר אֲעַשְּׂרֶנּוּ לָךְ׃
שני

29 Jacob resumed his journey and came to the land of the Easterners. [2]There before his eyes was a well in the open. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for the flocks were watered from that well. The stone on the mouth of the well was large. [3]When all the flocks were gathered

כ״ט וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וַיֵּלֶךְ אַרְצָה בְּנֵי־קֶדֶם׃
[2] וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה בְאֵר בַּשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה
עֲדְרֵי־צֹאן רֹבְצִים עָלֶיהָ כִּי מִן־הַבְּאֵר הַהִוא
יַשְׁקוּ הָעֲדָרִים וְהָאֶבֶן גְּדֹלָה עַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר׃

vow. An eighth-century B.C.E. Aramaic treaty inscription from Sfire, in Syria, terms each upright stone on which the treaty is inscribed a *ntsb'*. This is the Aramaic cognate of Hebrew ***matsevah,*** both words being derived from the same stem *n-ts-v*. That text also designates these identical stones "abode of the gods" *(bty 'lhy')* when they serve as witnesses to the treaty. It is clear that ***matsevah*** is the generic term for an upright stone slab irrespective of its function; ***beit 'elohim,*** "God's abode," is a specific subcategory of the ***matsevah***. It is so called because it symbolizes the divine presence that monitors the fulfillment or infraction of the terms of a treaty or vow.

That the expression ***beit 'elohim/'el*** in this special, technical sense once had a far wider currency is proved by the fact that it found its way into Greek usage. Hellenistic writers mention "bethels" *(baituloi)* as certain sacred stones supposedly possessed of divine or demonic powers. In addition, as shown in Excursus 22, there is plenty of evidence for a pagan god named "Bethel," who would either have been the deified sacred stone or the watchful divinity thought to reside in the stone of testimony. Of course, in the mouth of Jacob the term ***beit 'elohim*** means that the stone is a testimony to the Divine Presence.

a tithe The institution of tithe-giving to temples and the royal court is well attested throughout the ancient Near East. Abraham had earlier paid a tithe of the spoils of war to Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (14:20). Jacob, now empty-handed, vows to pay a tithe to God of all his future possessions on his return. This tithe appears to be a one-time votive offering from the flocks and the products of the soil, not an annual obligation. The text is intriguingly silent on who is to receive the tithe and what is to be done with it. Normally one offers the tithe only to a king or to a sanctuary with an established clergy.

CHAPTER 29

Jacob's Marriages (vv. 1–30)

Buoyed by his experience at Bethel, Jacob makes his way to Haran with a lighter step. The scene depicting his arrival at the well and the ensuing events is reminiscent of what occurred many years earlier, in chapter 26, when Abraham's servant came to this same place intent on finding a wife for Isaac. But what a glaring contrast between the well-laden camel train of the grandfather and the lonely, empty-handed Jacob who arrives on foot! Yet Providence is at work in etching the fortunes of the one as surely as in the case of the other.

As will be seen, the language of this section resounds with verbal echoes of preceding incidents, thereby suggesting causal relationships.

1. resumed his journey Literally, "lifted up his feet," a phrase found nowhere else. It has variously been interpreted to mean that (i) the going was now easier; (ii) he directed his feet, that is, he went with resolve and confidence; (iii) he had to force himself to leave the site of the theophany.[1]

the Easterners Hebrew ***benei kedem.*** As noted in the Comment to 25:6, ***kedem*** is a generalized designation of territory to the east of the Land of Israel. In 25:20 and 28:7, Laban's domicile is specified as Paddan-aram. Hosea 12:13 reads: "Then Jacob had to flee to the land of Aram."[2]

there, the stone would be rolled from the mouth of the well and the sheep watered; then the stone would be put back in its place on the mouth of the well.

[4]Jacob said to them, "My friends, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." [5]He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "Yes, we do." [6]He continued, "Is he well?" They answered, "Yes, he is; and there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock." [7]He said, "It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals; water the flock and take them to pasture." [8]But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are rounded up; then the stone is rolled off the mouth of the well and we water the sheep."

[9]While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's flock; for she was a shepherdess. [10]And when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban, and the flock of his uncle Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of his uncle Laban. [11]Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and broke into tears.

3 וְנֶאֶסְפוּ־שָׁמָּה כָּל־הָעֲדָרִים וְגָלְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן
מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וְהִשְׁקוּ אֶת־הַצֹּאן וְהֵשִׁיבוּ אֶת־
הָאֶבֶן עַל־פִּי הַבְּאֵר לִמְקֹמָהּ׃ 4 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
יַעֲקֹב אַחַי מֵאַיִן אַתֶּם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵחָרָן אֲנָחְנוּ׃
5 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הֲיְדַעְתֶּם אֶת־לָבָן בֶּן־נָחוֹר וַיֹּאמְרוּ
יָדָעְנוּ׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הֲשָׁלוֹם לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁלוֹם
וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ בָּאָה עִם־הַצֹּאן׃ 7 וַיֹּאמֶר הֵן עוֹד
הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל לֹא־עֵת הֵאָסֵף הַמִּקְנֶה הַשְׁקוּ הַצֹּאן
וּלְכוּ רְעוּ׃ 8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נוּכַל עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵאָסְפוּ
כָּל־הָעֲדָרִים וְגָלְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר
וְהִשְׁקִינוּ הַצֹּאן׃ 9 עוֹדֶנּוּ מְדַבֵּר עִמָּם וְרָחֵל בָּאָה
עִם־הַצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ כִּי רֹעָה הִוא׃ 10 וַיְהִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל בַּת־לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ
וְאֶת־צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי אִמּוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב וַיָּגֶל אֶת־
הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיַּשְׁקְ אֶת־צֹאן לָבָן אֲחִי

2–3. The stone restricted the use of the well to a closed group, and outsiders were required to pay for water. At the same time, the cover would serve as a protection against dust and filth and as a guard against accidental fall by man or beast. The prominence given to "the stone" in this episode (vv. 2,3[2],10) provides a link with the important stone of Bethel (28:11,18,22), a reminder that the God who there promised Jacob protection now endows the weary fugitive with superhuman strength.

4. Jacob does not realize that he has already arrived at his destination.

5. ***Laban the son of Nahor*** Bethuel, Laban's actual father, is ignored here as he practically is in chapter 24. Nahor, the grandfather, was the head of the clan and the most notable figure.[3]

6. ***Rachel . . . with the flock*** Perhaps word play, for her name means "a ewe lamb."[4]

7–8. Quite likely, Jacob wants the shepherds out of the way so that he can greet Rachel and converse with her alone. The laconic shepherds suddenly become talkative, for Jacob touches a raw nerve when he insinuates that they are shirking their duties.

The dialogue is reported in unwonted detail. This unusual literary device allows time for Rachel to arrive at the well.

9. ***for she was a shepherdess*** The gloss is probably occasioned by the rarity of women in this occupation in Israel. Such was not the case among the bedouin of Sinai, as shown by the story of Jethro's daughters in Exodus 2:16.

10–11. ***rolled the stone*** This act Jacob performed singlehandedly, experiencing a sudden surge of strength at the sight of Rachel and in the knowledge that he is meeting with his own kith and kin at last.

uncle Literally, "his mother's brother." The threefold repetition of this phrase links the incident to the instructions of his parents (27:43; 28:2) and contains a hint that this girl is to become his wife.

watered the flock Rachel must have been dumbfounded to receive preferential treatment at the well (cf. Exod. 2:16–19) and at the hand of a total stranger! This act at once establishes a singular bond between the two.

went up . . . kissed Since Jacob already knows her to be his cousin, his kiss, even before he discloses his identity, becomes a natural and innocent act. The association between his watering of

[12]Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father. [13]On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Laban all that had happened, [14]and Laban said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh."

When he had stayed with him a month's time, [15]Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" [16]Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. [17]Leah

אִמּוֹ: יא וַיִּשַּׁק יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלוֹ וַיֵּבְךְּ:
יב וַיַּגֶּד יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל כִּי אֲחִי אָבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן־
רִבְקָה הוּא וַתָּרָץ וַתַּגֶּד לְאָבִיהָ: יג וַיְהִי כִּשְׁמֹעַ
לָבָן אֶת־שֵׁמַע יַעֲקֹב בֶּן־אֲחֹתוֹ וַיָּרָץ לִקְרָאתוֹ
וַיְחַבֵּק־לוֹ וַיְנַשֵּׁק־לוֹ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיְסַפֵּר
לְלָבָן אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה: יד וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָבָן
אַךְ עַצְמִי וּבְשָׂרִי אָתָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים:
טו וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב הֲכִי־אָחִי אַתָּה וַעֲבַדְתַּנִי
חִנָּם הַגִּידָה לִּי מַה־מַּשְׂכֻּרְתֶּךָ: טז וּלְלָבָן שְׁתֵּי
בָנוֹת שֵׁם הַגְּדֹלָה לֵאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטַנָּה רָחֵל:

her flock and his show of affection is subtly expressed through the assonance of the two verbs *va-yashk* and *va-yishak*. This is the only instance in a biblical narrative of a man kissing a woman who is neither his mother nor his wife. The two verbs are identical with those employed in 27:26–27 in the fateful scene that precipitated Jacob's flight, which now ends with the encounter with Rachel. Their use here acts to draw the curtain on that phase in his life while simultaneously intimating that the next scene is retributive justice for his offence in the previous one, for Laban too will use the kiss as a greeting.

broke into tears Men of the East are less inhibited than Westerners in giving expression to their emotions.

12. ***and told her father*** Either because her mother was dead or because it was the duty of the father to welcome strangers.[5]

13. ***the news*** Of Jacob's arrival.

embraced . . . kissed Future developments show Laban's effusive greeting to have been self-serving.

all that had happened It is hardly credible that Jacob reported that he had cheated his own brother and father. More likely, he told how his parents had sent him to find a wife from among his kinfolk and that his misadventures on the journey had brought him empty-handed.

14. ***You are truly my bone and flesh*** Recognition of kinship involved formal obligations of solidarity and determined social behavior. It meant acceptance of Jacob as a member of Laban's household.

15. ***Just because you are a kinsman*** According to this traditional rendering, Laban pretends to be concerned for Jacob's welfare. He is either telling him that henceforth he must earn his keep, or he is trying to retain his services, having observed him to be a skilled and faithful shepherd. There is another possibility, however. The initial Hebrew *hakhi* is usually interrogative, and the sentence could be rendered, "Are you my kinsman that you should serve me for nothing?" A member of the household does not receive payment for his services. The question would thus be a repudiation by Laban of the formal recognition of the ties of kinship; henceforth, Jacob would have the status of a hireling. See further Comment on verse 18.

serve This is a key word, occurring seven times in the narrative.[6] What bitter irony! This is precisely the term that conveyed the essence of the blessing that Jacob fought so desperately to obtain. The original oracle to the pregnant Rebekah forecast that "the older shall *serve* the younger"; the purloined blessing contained the phrase, "Let peoples *serve* you," which Isaac confirmed, saying to Esau, "I have given him all his brothers for *servants,*" "You shall *serve* your brother." Now it is Jacob who must do the serving.

16. Jacob's response is delayed in order to provide the background information essential to the full understanding of subsequent developments.

Leah The name may mean "cow" or "strong woman," or "mistress."[7]

had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. 18Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." 20So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

21Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." 22And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. 23When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her.—24Laban

יז וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת־תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה: יח וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה: יט וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן טוֹב תִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לָךְ מִתִּתִּי אֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ אַחֵר שְׁבָה עִמָּדִי: כ וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ: כא וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־לָבָן הָבָה אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי כִּי מָלְאוּ יָמָי וְאָבוֹאָה אֵלֶיהָ: כב וַיֶּאֱסֹף לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה: כג וַיְהִי בָעֶרֶב וַיִּקַּח אֶת־לֵאָה בִתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹא

Rachel She is mentioned again only because it was necessary to introduce Leah and to explain the order of birth, an item of vital importance to the plot.

17. ***weak eyes*** Not poor vision, but lacking in luster.[8]

18. The seven years' service is to be in lieu of the usual "bride-price," known as ***mohar*** in Hebrew and ***terḫatum*** in Akkadian, an institution discussed in the Comment to 24:53.

The nature of the legal relationship between Jacob and Laban has been a matter of scholarly dispute. It is now apparent that the data does not support the theory of an adoption arrangement or of an ***erēbu*** marriage, whereby the husband is incorporated into the wife's clan and her offspring belong to her father's family. The entire drift of the story is opposed to the idea that Jacob has any intention or desire to stay permanently in Laban's household. Texts such as 30:25 and 31:13,18 show that after twenty years, Isaac is still Jacob's father and Canaan is still his real home. This narrative contains none of the usual terminology of the adoption formulas. Adoption usually takes place when there are no natural-born sons, but 31:1 indicates that Laban has mature sons only fourteen years after Jacob's marriages. Jacob's altercation with Laban in 30:25–34 proves that the father-in-law recognizes Jacob's independent right to own property and to return to his ancestral homeland. Moreover, 30:30 makes clear that Jacob has his own household distinct from Laban's, while 31:1 shows that he works for his own gain. Finally, the patriarch's bitter complaint in 31:38–42 leaves no doubt that he has all along had the status of a laborer under contract. The Mari texts document the practice of pastoral nomads hiring themselves out on contract as shepherds to villagers. An Assyrian tablet records the case of a certain Šamaš-amranni, who voluntarily undertook to "dwell ten years"—that is, to perform service—in the house of his employer in return for a wife, food, and clothing. On completion of his service, he may take his wife and depart. Jacob has the status of an indentured laborer working to pay off the bride-price.[9]

19. Laban's reply is a piece of consummate ambiguity naively taken by Jacob to be a binding commitment.

Better that I give her to you Marriage between relatives was regarded as highly desirable in that it safeguarded "purity of blood," tribal property, and the welfare of the daughter.

20. ***but a few days*** Without doubt, the phrase is a verbal echo of 27:44. His mother sent her son to Laban "for a short while" (lit. "a few days") on the pretext of finding a wife. Now grim reality mocks her careless words and the ostensible becomes the actual. Yet the harshness of seven years' arduous toil is mitigated by the ardor of his love for Rachel, which ultimately makes the sacrifice worthwhile.

21. ***my wife*** A betrothed woman has the status of a wife in the laws of Hammurabi (pars. 130,161) as well as in Deuteronomy 20:7 and 22:23–24.

23. The episode is intelligible only on the presumption that Leah wore a veil. As noted in the Comment to 24:65, there is evidence that in the Near East the bride was indeed veiled when presented to her husband.

had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.—[25]When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" [26]Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. [27]Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." [28]Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.—[29]Laban had given his maid-

אֵלֶיהָ: 24 וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן לָהּ אֶת־זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לְלֵאָה
בִתּוֹ שִׁפְחָה: 25 וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה־הִוא לֵאָה
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־לָבָן מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל
עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי: 26 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא־
יֵעָשֶׂה כֵן בִּמְקוֹמֵנוּ לָתֵת הַצָּעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה:
27 מַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת וְנִתְּנָה לְךָ גַּם־אֶת־זֹאת
בַּעֲבֹדָה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים
אֲחֵרוֹת: 28 וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיְמַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת
וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: 29 וַיִּתֵּן לָבָן

When evening came It is uncertain whether prevailing custom for the time of the wedding happened to facilitate the deception or whether Laban deliberately chose this time of the day.

24. The custom of a father presenting his daughter with a maid on her marriage is widely attested in Mesopotamia over a long period of time. Its mention at this point is intrusive and acts as a retardation device to increase the tension concerning Jacob's reaction. At the same time, in accordance with biblical narrative style, the information is anticipatory to future developments. This literary feature is discussed in the Comment to 9:18.

Zilpah The name has been connected with Arabic *zulfah,* "dignity," or with *dhulifa,* "to be small."

25. ***there was Leah*** Observe Nemesis at work. Jacob's masquerading as his brother meets its appropriate counterstroke in the substitution of Leah for her sister. But retributive justice is not the only motif. Just as Jacob's succession to the birthright was divinely ordained, irrespective of human machinations (25:23), so Jacob's unintended marriage to Leah is seen as the working of Providence, for from this unplanned union issued Levi and Judah, whose offspring shared spiritual and temporal hegemony in Israel through the two great institutions of the biblical period, the priesthood and the Davidic monarchy.

Why did you deceive me? The stem *r-m-h* is the same used by Isaac in 27:35 to define Jacob's own act of deception. Apart from this consonance, there may also be an implied play on the oft-repeated designation "Laban the Aramean."[10] Compare Hebrew *'arammi* and *rammai.*

26. ***It is not the practice*** All other biblical usages of this formula involve reactions to acts of great moral turpitude.[11] Laban feigns outrage as though Jacob were the guilty one! In self-righteous justification of his dishonorable conduct, he hypocritically has recourse to the importance of tradition.

younger . . . older This is an instance of dramatic irony, as in a Greek drama. The contrasting term "our place" and the substitution of the terms used in verses 16 and 18 for "younger, older" by *tse'irah, bekhirah*[12] deftly evoke the Jacob-Esau rivalry, an underlying meaning that must have been perceived by Jacob and the audience but not comprehended by Laban, the speaker, who is not privy to the previous history. Jacob is stunned into silence and does not even reprove Laban for not having informed him about the local custom in the first place.

27. ***the bridal week*** Literally, "the week of this one," that is, the seven days of feasting in celebration of a marriage, also mentioned in Judges 14:12,17 in connection with Samson's wedding. This practice retained its popularity into Second Temple times (Tob. 11:18) and beyond (Mish. Neg. 3:2) and has continued in practice among Jews down to the present. It is popularly known as *sheva' berakhot* because seven benedictions are recited each day over a cup of wine at the grace after the festive meal when a fresh guest is present among a *minyan* (quorum of ten).

28. The antiquity of the narrative is attested by the fact that Jacob's action is contrary to the prohibition of Leviticus 18:18 against a man marrying a sister of his wife during her lifetime. No attempt was made to rewrite tradition in conformity with the morality and law of a later age.

servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.—[30]And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years.

[31]The LORD saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. [32]Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, "It means: 'The LORD has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband will love me.'" [33]She conceived again and bore a

לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ אֶת־בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתוֹ לָהּ לְשִׁפְחָה׃
30 וַיָּבֹא גַּם אֶל־רָחֵל וַיֶּאֱהַב גַּם־אֶת־רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה
וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שֶׁבַע־שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת׃ 31 וַיַּרְא
יְהוָה כִּי־שְׂנוּאָה לֵאָה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ וְרָחֵל
עֲקָרָה׃ 32 וַתַּהַר לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעָנְיִי כִּי עַתָּה

29. ***Bilhah*** The name has been explained by reference to Arabic *baliha,* "stupid, unconcerned," or the Horite clan Bilhan mentioned in 36:27.

The Birth of Jacob's Children (29:31–30:43)

This section records the birth of Jacob's children in Haran, eleven sons and one daughter. The account of the births is arranged according to maternal origin. The narrative divides into three parts, with four sons born in each: Leah's four sons in 29:31–35; the handmaids' four sons in 30:1–13; and the four sons of Leah and Rachel in 30:14–24. Each son, as it turns out later, becomes the eponymous, or name-giving, ancestor of a tribe of Israel, a subject that is discussed at length in Excursus 23. The present story contains not the slightest hint of this. Where the personalities of the sons are delineated, they are remarkably individualized and real. There is no inkling of tribal development, and the folk etymologies and word plays on the names possess no underlying meaning that could be construed as reflecting tribal history, as is the case with Genesis 49.

LEAH'S FOUR SONS (vv. 29:31–35)

The first motif that runs through the narrative is the unhappiness of Leah. Jacob's greater love of Rachel is psychologically understandable in the context of his experience with Laban; but that makes the lesser-loved Leah the innocent victim of her father's duplicity. For this reason she is the beneficiary of God's compassion and is blessed with many children. In fact, she herself bears more than all three other women combined.

31. ***unloved*** Hebrew *senu'ah* is paired with *'ahuvah* in Deuteronomy 21:15 in a similar context of the relationship of a husband to his co-wives. The term has sociolegal implications in addition to its emotional dimension. It expresses not "hated" as opposed to "beloved" so much as a relative degree of preference.[13]

he opened her womb This suggests that she had been childless for a while.[14]

Rachel was barren The note prepares the reader for the next episode.[15]

32. ***Reuben*** The true origin of the name is disputed. The simplest explanation makes it a compound of *re'u ben,* "See, a son!" a joyous exclamation by parents at the time of birth. Another suggestion connects it with South Arabic *ra'bān,* "a chief," a name befitting a first-born. The present story gives a folk etymology, rooted in the subjective circumstances, that by assonantal word play echoes *ra'ah be-'onyi,* "He (God) has seen my affliction." This special providential use of *ra'ah,* "to see," has been noted in the Comment to 16:13.

it also means Such is the force of the particle *ki* in this context. The double midrash on the name is a recurring feature in the birth narratives.

will love me The last two syllables of Hebrew *ye'ehavani* are resonant of the final syllable of *re'uven.* This midrash expresses Leah's aspiration to become the *'ahuvah,* the preferred wife.

son, and declared, "This is because the LORD heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon. 34Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi. 35She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

יֶאֱהָבַנִי אִישִׁי: 33 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי־שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי־שְׂנוּאָה אָנֹכִי וַיִּתֶּן־לִי גַּם־אֶת־זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן: 34 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר עַתָּה הַפַּעַם יִלָּוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי: 35 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אוֹדֶה אֶת־יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן קָרְאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֹד מִלֶּדֶת:

30 When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." 2Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" 3She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my

ל וַתֵּרֶא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתְּקַנֵּא רָחֵל בַּאֲחֹתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הָבָה־לִּי בָנִים וְאִם־אַיִן מֵתָה אָנֹכִי: 2 וַיִּחַר־אַף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר־מָנַע מִמֵּךְ פְּרִי־בָטֶן: 3 וַתֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲמָתִי בִלְהָה בֹּא אֵלֶיהָ וְתֵלֵד עַל־

*33. **Simeon*** This name may originally have derived from Arabic *sim'*, the hybrid offspring of the hyena and female wolf. The midrash here connects it with the stem *sh-m-'*, "to hear." The name Ishmael was similarly derived in 16:11. The names of Leah's first two sons replicate a pair of verbs that expresses God's providential concern and care for the unfortunate.[16]

*34. **Levi*** The true origin of this name is obscure. A similar word in Akkadian and in Minaean inscriptions from northern Arabia designates a special class of temple servitors, but the present midrash, unlike that of Numbers 18:2,4, contains no hint of any future sacral role. The name is given a purely secular twist, for it articulates the mother's yearning for her husband's companionship.

he was named Hebrew *kara' shemo,* literally "he named him," cannot refer to Jacob. The impersonal subject has the force of a passive.[17]

*35. **Judah*** Hebrew *yehudah* is explained as stemming from *'ahodeh,* the original full form that was later contracted to *'odeh.*[18]

she stopped bearing No reason is given, but the episode that opens with 30:14 suggests that Jacob ceased to perform his conjugal duty by her.

CHAPTER 30 THE FOUR SONS OF THE HANDMAIDS (vv. 1–13)

The second motif that informs the birth narratives is Rachel's desperate unhappiness at being childless, with the consequent shame and ignominy that society attached to that misfortune. Envy of her sister's fertility is a natural sequel.

*1. **or I shall die*** Life without children would not be worth living.[1]

*2. **Can I take the place of God*** He is the ultimate and sole arbiter of human destiny.

3. Rachel, like Sarah before her, now resorts to the device of concubinage, an institution that has been discussed in the Comment to 16:1–3.

that she may bear on my knees The key to this phrase lies in a symbolic gesture, widely attested in Near Eastern sources, especially Hittite, as well as in the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. The placing or reception of a child on or by the knees of another signifies legitimation, whether in acknowledgment of physical parenthood or by adoption. This practice is again referred to in the Bible in Genesis 48:12 and 50:23 and in Job 3:12. Its origin is in the idea of the knee as the seat of

knees and that through her I too may have children." 4So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her. 5Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, He has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. 7Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8And Rachel said, "A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali.

9When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. 10And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, 11Leah said, "What luck!" So she named him Gad. 12When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, 13Leah declared, "What fortune!" meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate." So she named him Asher.

בִּרְכַּי וְאִבָּנֶה גַּם־אָנֹכִי מִמֶּנָּה׃ 4 וַתִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־
בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחָתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ יַעֲקֹב׃
5 וַתַּהַר בִּלְהָה וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֵּן׃ 6 וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל
דָּנַנִי אֱלֹהִים וְגַם שָׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וַיִּתֶּן־לִי בֵּן עַל־כֵּן
קָרְאָה שְׁמוֹ דָּן׃ 7 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בִּלְהָה שִׁפְחַת
רָחֵל בֵּן שֵׁנִי לְיַעֲקֹב׃ 8 וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל נַפְתּוּלֵי
אֱלֹהִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי עִם־אֲחֹתִי גַּם־יָכֹלְתִּי וַתִּקְרָא
שְׁמוֹ נַפְתָּלִי׃ 9 וַתֵּרֶא לֵאָה כִּי עָמְדָה מִלֶּדֶת
וַתִּקַּח אֶת־זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחָתָהּ וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב
לְאִשָּׁה׃ 10 וַתֵּלֶד זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה לְיַעֲקֹב בֵּן׃
11 וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה בָּגָד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גָּד׃
12 וַתֵּלֶד זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה בֵּן שֵׁנִי לְיַעֲקֹב׃
13 וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה בְּאָשְׁרִי כִּי אִשְּׁרוּנִי בָנוֹת

v. 11. בָּא גָּד ק׳

generative power. Akkadian *birku,* "knee," is in fact used as a euphemism for the sexual parts. An impotent man is *ša la išû·birki,* literally "one who has no knees." Sennacherib speaks of his oldest son as "the offspring of my knees." In the present text, because Bilhah is to act as a surrogate mother for Rachel, her offspring have to be accepted and legitimated. The appropriate symbolic gesture on Rachel's part is thus called for.

4. as concubine The text reads literally "as a wife," but in 35:22 Bilhah is called "a concubine" (Heb. *pilegesh*). Zilpah is designated "wife" in verse 9. In 37:2 both women are termed "wives." The basic difference between a concubine and a wife is that no *mohar,* or bride-price, is paid for the former. The interchange of terminology shows that in the course of time the distinction in social status between the two often tended to be effaced.

5. Jacob Hebrew *le-ya'akov,* "to Jacob," is placed in an emphatic position in the word order. It has not appeared in the account of the birth of the previous sons but is included here because the paternity of a child born to a maidservant may be uncertain.

6. Dan The name is derived from the stem *d-y-n,* "to judge, vindicate."[2] It also appears together with a divine element in compound names like Daniel and Abidan. The second part of the verse explicates "vindication." The statement may well reflect a liturgical formula, such as found in Psalms 54:3b–4a: "By Your power vindicate me *(tedineni).* / O God, hear my prayer."

8. Naphtali The name is explained by a unique noun *naftulim,* itself unclear but usually understood to mean "contest." The rendering "fateful contest" is based on the occasional use of *'elohim,* "God," as an intensifying or superlative element.[3] The phrase could also mean "a contest for God," that is, for divine favor.

9. she had stopped bearing This links with 29:35. Leah's resort to concubinage is unexplained. From verse 18 it is clear that she regarded this as something particularly meritorious. Perhaps she sensed that Jacob wanted more children. Being convinced that Rachel could not provide them, and facing the fact that her husband did not find her desirable, she was prepared to sacrifice her pride, and she gave her maid for the purpose.

11. Gad This appears as the name of the god of fortune and good luck in several Near Eastern cultures.[4] It corresponds to the Greek Tyche and the Latin Fortuna. This pagan divinity is mentioned in Isaiah 65:11, where it is paired with "Destiny" (Heb. *meni*). The name is also a component of the Canaanite town names Baal-gad in Joshua 11:7 and Migdal-gad in Joshua 15:37. It also appears as an element in personal names. In the mouth of Leah it is simply an abstract noun, "luck," just as one would refer to "Lady Luck" in English.

[14]Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." [15]But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." [16]When Jacob came home from the field in the

וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אָשֵׁר׃ רביעי 14 וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן
בִּימֵי קְצִיר־חִטִּים וַיִּמְצָא דוּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא
אֹתָם אֶל־לֵאָה אִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל אֶל־לֵאָה תְּנִי־
נָא לִי מִדּוּדָאֵי בְנֵךְ׃ 15 וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמְעַט קַחְתֵּךְ
אֶת־אִישִׁי וְלָקַחַת גַּם אֶת־דּוּדָאֵי בְנִי וַתֹּאמֶר
רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דּוּדָאֵי בְנֵךְ׃
16 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה בָּעֶרֶב וַתֵּצֵא לֵאָה

*13. **Asher*** Both interpretations of the name derive from the stem *'-sh-r,* "happy."[5] A feminine form of the name has turned up in an eighteenth-century B.C.E. list of Semitic slaves in Egypt.

THE FOUR SONS OF RACHEL AND LEAH (vv. 14–24)

THE MANDRAKES (vv. 14–16)

The chronicle of births is briefly interrupted by the introduction of a minor episode that acts as a delaying device to avoid tedium and to sustain audience attention and interest. The motifs that characterized the previous two parts here merge and interact.

*14. **at the time of the wheat harvest*** Around May. The dating of events by agricultural seasons is quite common.[6] Time in the Bible is often designated by its content rather than by atomized units. This is particularly so in connection with a pastoralist society. As noted in the Comment to 26:12, the Mari archives provide abundant evidence for the involvement of pastoralist nomads in seasonal agricultural activity in the fields near their grazing grounds.

mandrakes Hebrew *duda'im* has long been identified with the *Mandragora officinarum,* which grows wild in the fields. Its small, yellow, tomatolike fruit ripens during March and April. Chemical analysis shows it to contain emetic, purgative, and narcotic substances, which explains its widespread medicinal use in ancient times. Because the fruit exudes a distinctive and heady fragrance, and its sturdy, forked or intertwined root has torsolike features, the mandrake appears as a widely diffused folkloristic motif associated with aphrodisiac powers. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, and sex, was given the epithet *"hē mandragoriti,"* "Lady of the Mandrake." The Hebrew term *duda'im* is close in sound to *dodim,* "love."[7] Indeed, the two are associated in The Song of Songs: "There I will give my love *(dodai)* to you. / The mandrakes *(duda'im)* yield their fragrance . . . my beloved *(dodi)*" (7:13–14).

While the text is silent on the reason for the intense interest in the mandrakes on the part of both sisters, the underlying folkloristic associations are undoubtedly present. It is significant that the subsequent narrative tacitly, but effectively, neutralizes this aspect, dismissing the notion that such superstitions may have any validity. Leah, who gives up the mandrakes, bears three children; Rachel, who possesses them, remains barren for apparently three more years. Further, both sisters, as well as the Narrator, repeatedly emphasize that all events are by the will of God and under His control. It can hardly be coincidental that God is mentioned seven times in all.

*15. **my husband . . . mandrakes*** The pairing of the two intimates that the fruit was to be used to induce Jacob to resume his conjugal duty.

I promise For this use of Hebrew *lakhen,* see Comment to 4:15.

he shall lie with you The pathetic nature of this barter arrangement is underlined by the striking fact that the verb *sh-k-v,* when employed in Genesis with a sexual nuance, never connotes a relationship of marital love but is invariably used in unsavory circumstances.[8]

evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. 17God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. 18And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. 19When Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son, 20Leah said, "God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. 21Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah.

22Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. 23She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." 24So she named him Joseph, which is to say, "May the LORD add another son for me."

לִקְרָאתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלַי תָּבוֹא כִּי שָׂכֹר שְׂכַרְתִּיךָ
בְּדוּדָאֵי בְנִי וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא׃ 17 וַיִּשְׁמַע
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לֵאָה וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֵּן חֲמִישִׁי׃
18 וַתֹּאמֶר לֵאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי
שִׁפְחָתִי לְאִישִׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשָּׂשכָר׃ 19 וַתַּהַר
עוֹד לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן־שִׁשִּׁי לְיַעֲקֹב׃ 20 וַתֹּאמֶר
לֵאָה זְבָדַנִי אֱלֹהִים אֹתִי זֶבֶד טוֹב הַפַּעַם יִזְבְּלֵנִי
אִישִׁי כִּי־יָלַדְתִּי לוֹ שִׁשָּׁה בָנִים וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ
זְבֻלוּן׃ 21 וְאַחַר יָלְדָה בַּת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמָהּ
דִּינָה׃ 22 וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־רָחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ
אֱלֹהִים וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת־רַחְמָהּ׃ 23 וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן
וַתֹּאמֶר אָסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חֶרְפָּתִי׃ 24 וַתִּקְרָא
אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יֹסֵף יְהוָה לִי בֵּן אַחֵר׃

16. I have hired you Hebrew *s-k-r* points to a folk etymology for Issachar, who is to issue from this rendezvous.

18. Issachar This second explanation connects it with the action of verse 9 and suggests *yesh sakhar,* "There is a reward," a phrase found in Jeremiah 31:16(15) and 2 Chronicles 15:7. It is an affirmation of belief in divine Providence. In Genesis 49:14 a third midrash on the name takes it as *'ish sakhar,* "a hireling." Actually, personal names formed from the verb *s-k-r* are found in the list of Semitic slaves referred to above as well as in several ancient Arabic dialects. The different Hebrew consonantal spelling seems to go back to an archaic causative verbal form *yashaskir,* "May He (God) grant favor/reward."[9]

20. Zebulun A double folk etymology is given for this name. The first is based on similarity of sound with the two initial consonants of the stem *z-v-d,* "to give, grant," which appears as a verb only here in the Bible but is known from other Semitic languages and is a component of several proper names.[10] The second explanation more closely connects the name with the stem *z-v-l,* which ancient versions and Jewish commentators took to mean "to dwell," namely, "my husband will dwell with me." This etymology, however, is doubtful. The stem *z-v-l* is now known to signify "to raise up."[11]

this time . . . Leah's yearning for her husband's attention and esteem following the birth of her sixth son echoes her plea after the arrival of the third son (29:34).

21. Dinah The announcement of her birth is offhanded and without explanation for her name. It is mentioned only because it anticipates and is necessary for the understanding of the episode to be recounted in chapter 34.[12]

22. God remembered For the significance of this phrase, see the Comment to 8:1.

23–24. Joseph The two Hebrew verbs *'asaf* and *yosef,* "taken away" and "add," provide a double etymology for the name, the first looking back to the past years of shame and anguish, the second looking forward to an even greater measure of joy.

With the announcement about Joseph, the birth narrative is completed. It opens and closes with the use of the divine name YHVH (29:31; 30:24).

[25]After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Give me leave to go back to my own homeland. [26]Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, that I may go; for well you know what services I have rendered you." [27]But Laban said to him, "If you will indulge me, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me on your account." [28]And he continued, "Name the wages due from me, and I will pay you." [29]But he said, "You know well how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me. [30]For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. And now, when shall I make provision for my own household?" [31]He said, "What shall I pay you?" And Jacob said, "Pay me nothing! If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flocks: [32]let me

25 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה רָחֵל אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
אֶל־לָבָן שַׁלְּחֵנִי וְאֵלְכָה אֶל־מְקוֹמִי וּלְאַרְצִי:
26 תְּנָה אֶת־נָשַׁי וְאֶת־יְלָדַי אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתִּי אֹתְךָ
בָּהֵן וְאֵלֵכָה כִּי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת־עֲבֹדָתִי אֲשֶׁר
עֲבַדְתִּיךָ: 27 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָבָן אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן
בְּעֵינֶיךָ נִחַשְׁתִּי וַיְבָרְכֵנִי יְהוָה בִּגְלָלֶךָ: חמישי
28 וַיֹּאמֶר נָקְבָה שְׂכָרְךָ עָלַי וְאֶתֵּנָה: 29 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־
הָיָה מִקְנְךָ אִתִּי: 30 כִּי מְעַט אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְךָ לְפָנַי
וַיִּפְרֹץ לָרֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֹתְךָ לְרַגְלִי וְעַתָּה מָתַי
אֶעֱשֶׂה גַּם־אָנֹכִי לְבֵיתִי: 31 וַיֹּאמֶר מָה אֶתֶּן־לָךְ
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לֹא־תִתֶּן־לִי מְאוּמָה אִם־תַּעֲשֶׂה־לִי
הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אָשׁוּבָה אֶרְעֶה צֹאנְךָ אֶשְׁמֹר:

JACOB AND LABAN: A NEW CONTRACT (vv. 25–43)

Jacob has now conscientiously discharged all his obligations to Laban. This coincides with the extraordinary birth of Joseph to his beloved Rachel. God's promise of numerous offspring has been abundantly fulfilled, and another turning point in Jacob's life has been reached. In accordance with the divine blessing at Bethel (28:15), the patriarch must now prepare to return home.

25–27. Jacob formally asks leave of Laban to take his wives and children and to return to his native land. The petition is couched in conventional, formulaic language, as a comparison with 1 Kings 11:21 shows. Laban's inquiry about payment seems surprising in view of Jacob's silence on the matter. Actually, Laban well understood his son-in-law's repeated use of the stem *ʿ-ḇ-d,* "to serve" (v. 26). It puts the phrase "Give me leave," Hebrew *shalleḥeni,* in far less innocent light, for the verb *shillaḥ* is a technical term for the manumission of one in service to another.[13] By the terms of the original contract with Laban, as explained in the Comment to 29:18, Jacob's status was that of an indentured servant paying off a debt, in this case the bride-price for his employer's two daughters. Hence, Jacob is entitled to the philanthropy accorded one who leaves his master's house on completion of his term of service. This rule, which saves a man from renewed penury, is formulated as follows in Deuteronomy 15:13–14: "When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: Furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat . . ." Later on, in his altercation with Laban reported in 31:38–42, Jacob uses the identical formula, saying: "You would have sent me away empty-handed."

*26. **and my children*** Strictly speaking, mention of the children is inappropriate since Jacob did not "serve" for them. What Jacob is saying is that he is not an ordinary slave to whom his master gives a wife. In such a case, she and her offspring would belong to the master and remain in his household on the manumission of the slave, as specified in Exodus 21:2–4.

*27. **I have learned by divination*** This is the traditional rendering of Hebrew *niḥashti.* However, to use divination to discover the secret of success would be very anomalous. Some translate, "I have learned by experience," but this is etymologically and semantically insupportable. Hence, a connection with Akkadian *naḥāšu,* "to prosper," is very plausible.[14] Laban would then be saying, "I have become prosperous, seeing that God has blessed me on your account."

28–30. Laban is reluctant to lose the skilled services of Jacob, so he ignores the request to depart and pretends to understand Jacob's remarks as the opening bid in a haggle over the price of future service. He is deferential to the point of being obsequious. Jacob, for his part, disregards Laban's question and astutely drives home the point about his own decisive role in Laban's success.

pass through your whole flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted animal—every dark-colored sheep and every spotted and speckled goat. Such shall be my wages. [33]In the future when you go over my wages, let my honesty toward you testify for me: if there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft." [34]And Laban said, "Very well, let it be as you say."

[35]But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats—every one that had white on it—and all the dark-colored sheep, and left them in the charge of his sons. [36]And he put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.

[37]Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar, and of almond and plane, and peeled white stripes in them, laying bare the white of the shoots. [38]The rods that he had peeled he set up in front of the goats in the troughs, the water receptacles, that the goats came to drink from. Their mating occurred when they came to drink, [39]and since the goats mated by the rods, the goats brought forth streaked, speckled, and

32 אֶעֱבֹר בְּכָל־צֹאנְךָ הַיּוֹם הָסֵר מִשָּׁם כָּל־שֶׂה
נָקֹד וְטָלוּא וְכָל־שֶׂה־חוּם בַּכְּשָׂבִים וְטָלוּא וְנָקֹד
בָּעִזִּים וְהָיָה שְׂכָרִי: 33 וְעָנְתָה־בִּי צִדְקָתִי בְּיוֹם
מָחָר כִּי־תָבוֹא עַל־שְׂכָרִי לְפָנֶיךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־אֵינֶנּוּ
נָקֹד וְטָלוּא בָּעִזִּים וְחוּם בַּכְּשָׂבִים גָּנוּב הוּא אִתִּי:
34 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן הֵן לוּ יְהִי כִדְבָרֶךָ: 35 וַיָּסַר בַּיּוֹם
הַהוּא אֶת־הַתְּיָשִׁים הָעֲקֻדִּים וְהַטְלֲאִים וְאֵת כָּל־
הָעִזִּים הַנְּקֻדּוֹת וְהַטְלָאֹת כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־לָבָן בּוֹ וְכָל־
חוּם בַּכְּשָׂבִים וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־בָּנָיו: 36 וַיָּשֶׂם דֶּרֶךְ
שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין יַעֲקֹב וְיַעֲקֹב רֹעֶה אֶת־
צֹאן לָבָן הַנּוֹתָרֹת: 37 וַיִּקַּח־לוֹ יַעֲקֹב מַקַּל לִבְנֶה
לַח וְלוּז וְעַרְמוֹן וַיְפַצֵּל בָּהֶן פְּצָלוֹת לְבָנוֹת
מַחְשֹׂף הַלָּבָן אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַמַּקְלוֹת: 38 וַיַּצֵּג אֶת־
הַמַּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פִּצֵּל בָּרָהָטִים בְּשִׁקְתוֹת הַמַּיִם
אֲשֶׁר תָּבֹאן הַצֹּאן לִשְׁתּוֹת לְנֹכַח הַצֹּאן וַיֵּחַמְנָה
בְּבֹאָן לִשְׁתּוֹת: 39 וַיֶּחֱמוּ הַצֹּאן אֶל־הַמַּקְלוֹת
וַתֵּלַדְןָ הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים נְקֻדִּים וּטְלֻאִים:

32–36. In the Near East, sheep are generally white and goats are dark brown or black.[15] A minority of sheep may have dark patches, and goats white markings. It is these uncommon types to be born in the future that Jacob demands as wages for his unpaid services. Laban readily agrees, believing that he is getting a bargain on account of their rarity. He promptly withdraws all the livestock that already possess the specified characteristics and moves them a considerable distance away to avoid contact with the rest of the flocks that remain in Jacob's care. However, Jacob succeeds in outwitting Laban in the course of the next six years (31:41). How does he do it?

One account has it that he first segregates the feebler animals. Then he subjects the sturdier ones to visual impressions at mating time, in this way influencing the character of the progeny. Of course, this interpretation rests on folkloristic beliefs and fallaciously assumes the inheritability of acquired characteristics.

Another explanation is given in 31:8–12. Here the preferred characteristics are obtained through controlled propagation and transmitted from parent to progeny. Scientifically, the required results could be achieved by the successive interbreeding of the monochrome heterozygotes, or the single-colored animals that carried recessive genes for spottedness. Such animals are detectable by the characteristic known as heterosis, or hybrid vigor.

It should be noted that Jacob claims to have received the idea in a dream. The entire action is thus attributed to divine intervention, not to Jacob's ingenuity. This process made it necessary for Jacob to find a way to advance the mating season so that the rare types would be induced to engage in reproductive activity before they were segregated, which they were when the normal mating time approached. If this is the true explanation, then the varied accounts need not be contradictory. The first would describe the elaborate display put on by Jacob in order to mask his secret technique. It is also possible that the three plants placed in the watering troughs, each known to contain toxic substances and used in the ancient world for medicinal purposes, could have had the effect of hastening the onset of the estrous cycle in the animals and so heightened their readiness to copulate.

35. ***that had white on it*** Hebrew *laban* is a play on the name Laban, which recurs in verse 37. It conveys the idea of Jacob beating Laban at his own game.

36. ***three days' journey*** See Comment to 22:4.

spotted young. 40But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep; he made these animals face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals in Laban's flock. And so he produced special flocks for himself, which he did not put with Laban's flocks. 41Moreover, when the sturdier animals were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the troughs, in full view of the animals, so that they mated by the rods; 42but with the feebler animals he would not place them there. Thus the feeble ones went to Laban and the sturdy to Jacob. 43So the man grew exceedingly prosperous, and came to own large flocks, maidservants and menservants, camels and asses.

40 וְהַכְּשָׂבִים֙ הִפְרִ֣יד יַעֲקֹ֔ב וַיִּתֵּ֥ן פְּנֵ֖י הַצֹּ֑אן אֶל־
עָקֹ֣ד וְכָל־חוּם֮ בְּצֹאן֒ לָבָן֒ וַיָּ֣שֶׁת־לוֹ֮ עֲדָרִים֒ לְבַדּוֹ֔
וְלֹ֥א שָׁתָ֖ם עַל־צֹ֥אן לָבָֽן׃ 41 וְהָיָ֗ה בְּכָל־יַחֵם֙ הַצֹּ֣אן
הַמְקֻשָּׁר֔וֹת וְשָׂ֥ם יַעֲקֹ֛ב אֶת־הַמַּקְלוֹ֖ת לְעֵינֵ֣י הַצֹּ֑אן
בָּרֳהָטִ֖ים לְיַחֲמֵ֥נָּה בַּמַּקְלֽוֹת׃ 42 וּבְהַעֲטִ֣יף* הַצֹּ֔אן
לֹ֥א יָשִׂ֖ים וְהָיָ֣ה הָעֲטֻפִ֑ים לְלָבָ֙ן֙ וְהַקְּשָׁרִ֣ים לְיַעֲקֹ֔ב׃
43 וַיִּפְרֹ֥ץ הָאִ֛ישׁ מְאֹ֖ד מְאֹ֑ד וַיְהִי־לוֹ֙ צֹ֣אן רַבּ֔וֹת
וּשְׁפָח֥וֹת וַעֲבָדִ֖ים וּגְמַלִּ֥ים וַחֲמֹרִֽים׃

31 Now he heard the things that Laban's sons were saying: "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from that which was our father's he has built up all this wealth." 2Jacob also saw that Laban's manner toward him was not as it had been in the past. 3Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you." 4Jacob had Rachel and Leah called

ל״א וַיִּשְׁמַ֗ע אֶת־דִּבְרֵי֙ בְּנֵי־לָבָ֣ן לֵאמֹ֔ר לָקַ֥ח
יַעֲקֹ֛ב אֵ֥ת כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֖ר לְאָבִ֑ינוּ וּמֵאֲשֶׁ֣ר לְאָבִ֔ינוּ
עָשָׂ֖ה אֵ֥ת כָּל־הַכָּבֹ֖ד הַזֶּֽה׃ 2 וַיַּ֥רְא יַעֲקֹ֖ב אֶת־פְּנֵ֣י
לָבָ֑ן וְהִנֵּ֥ה אֵינֶ֖נּוּ עִמּ֥וֹ כִּתְמ֖וֹל שִׁלְשֹֽׁום׃ 3 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר
יְהוָ֖ה אֶל־יַעֲקֹ֑ב שׁ֣וּב אֶל־אֶ֔רֶץ אֲבוֹתֶ֖יךָ
וּלְמוֹלַדְתֶּ֑ךָ וְאֶֽהְיֶ֖ה עִמָּֽךְ׃ 4 וַיִּשְׁלַ֤ח יַעֲקֹב֙ וַיִּקְרָ֣א

ף רבתי בנ״א הף׳ לא רבתי v. 42.

*43. **grew exceedingly prosperous*** Hebrew *p-r-ts* is a verbal echo of 28:14. God's promise has been fulfilled.

and came to own . . . Jacob was able to barter the rare sheep and goats for flocks, servants, camels, and asses.

CHAPTER 31

Jacob and Laban: The Finale (31:1–32:3)

The final act in the drama of complicated relationships between Jacob and Laban is about to unfold. The patriarch's hard-earned affluence and independence have made the situation intolerable all round. Jacob decides to return home and slips away when the opportunity presents itself.

The action divides into six distinct scenes. In the first two Jacob is the main character (vv. 1–16, 17–21). In the next two it is Laban who occupies the center of the stage (vv. 22–24, 25–35). Then it is Jacob who plays the dominant role (vv. 36–43), leading to the climactic resolution: the pact between two equal partners (vv. 44–56).

JACOB CONSULTS WITH HIS WIVES (vv. 1–16)

1–2. The signs of impending trouble are unmistakably clear to the ear and the eye. Jacob hears what is said about him and observes Laban's changed demeanor.

3. Any lingering doubts as to his proper course of action are soon dispelled by God's command and His reassurance of protection.

the land of your fathers Jacob is the first patriarch to whom the land can be so described.

I will be with you The wording evokes the revelation at Bethel, "Remember, I am with you" (28:15).

to the field, where his flock was, [5]and said to them, "I see that your father's manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father has been with me. [6]As you know, I have served your father with all my might; [7]but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. God, however, would not let him do me harm. [8]If he said thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop speckled young; and if he said thus, 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop streaked young. [9]God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me.

[10]"Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I saw that the he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and mottled. [11]And in the dream an angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' 'Here,' I answered. [12]And he said, 'Note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled, and mottled; for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. [13]I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land.'"

לְרָחֵל וְלֵאָה הַשָּׂדֶה אֶל־צֹאנוֹ: 5 וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן
רֹאֶה אָנֹכִי אֶת־פְּנֵי אֲבִיכֶן כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ אֵלַי כִּתְמֹל
שִׁלְשֹׁם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי הָיָה עִמָּדִי: 6 וְאַתֶּנָּה יְדַעְתֶּן
כִּי בְּכָל־כֹּחִי עָבַדְתִּי אֶת־אֲבִיכֶן: 7 וַאֲבִיכֶן הֵתֶל
בִּי וְהֶחֱלֵף אֶת־מַשְׂכֻּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מֹנִים וְלֹא־נְתָנוֹ
אֱלֹהִים לְהָרַע עִמָּדִי: 8 אִם־כֹּה יֹאמַר נְקֻדִּים יִהְיֶה
שְׂכָרֶךָ וְיָלְדוּ כָל־הַצֹּאן נְקֻדִּים וְאִם־כֹּה יֹאמַר
עֲקֻדִּים יִהְיֶה שְׂכָרֶךָ וְיָלְדוּ כָל־הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים:
9 וַיַּצֵּל אֱלֹהִים אֶת־מִקְנֵה אֲבִיכֶם וַיִּתֶּן־לִי:
10 וַיְהִי בְּעֵת יַחֵם הַצֹּאן וָאֶשָּׂא עֵינַי וָאֵרֶא
בַּחֲלוֹם וְהִנֵּה הָעַתֻּדִים הָעֹלִים עַל־הַצֹּאן עֲקֻדִּים
נְקֻדִּים וּבְרֻדִּים: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי מַלְאַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים
בַּחֲלוֹם יַעֲקֹב וָאֹמַר הִנֵּנִי: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂא־נָא
עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל־הָעַתֻּדִים הָעֹלִים עַל־הַצֹּאן
עֲקֻדִּים נְקֻדִּים וּבְרֻדִּים כִּי רָאִיתִי אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
לָבָן עֹשֶׂה לָךְ: 13 אָנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל אֲשֶׁר
מָשַׁחְתָּ שָּׁם מַצֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִי שָׁם נֶדֶר עַתָּה
קוּם צֵא מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ

4–13. Jacob promptly consults with his wives, for he cannot leave without their consent. By so doing, he exposes the falseness of Laban's accusation in verse 26. While shepherding his flock in the open field, he can summon his wives without arousing suspicion. At the same time, the locale affords protection from eavesdroppers. The concubines are excluded because their presence at a discussion of Laban's lack of scruple would be inappropriate, and lower social status makes it unnecessary for Jacob to seek their agreement to his plan.

In the course of his address to his wives, Jacob takes great pains to prove his own integrity as opposed to Laban's repeated perfidy. He also exhibits sensitivity to the feelings of his wives when he attributes his prosperity to God and not to his being more clever than their father. Finally, he relates a dream revelation in which God orders him to return to his native land.

7. ***time and again*** Hebrew *'aseret monim,* literally "ten times." The number is used solely for rhetorical effect in the sense of "repeatedly."[1] Although the context leaves no doubt as to the meaning, the unique Hebrew *monim* here and in verse 41, instead of the usual *pe'amim,* may be a subtle echo of the stem *y-n-h,* "to oppose, maltreat."[2]

9. ***has taken away . . . and given*** This is a legal formula for the conveyance and transfer of property. The first term, *hitsil,* is unique in Hebrew in such a context but is attested in Aramaic legal documents.[3] Jacob's use of an Aramaism, echoed by his wives in verse 16, is congruous with the narrative background that deals as it does with "Laban the Aramean," who himself uses Aramaic in verse 47.

10. ***I had a dream*** Jacob credits his successful sheep-breeding strategy to the inspiration of a dream-vision.

12. ***for I have noted*** Literally, "saw." This term frequently is used to express God's compassionate response to a suffering victim.[4]

13. The logical sequence and stylistic connection of the verse with the preceding discourse is very tenuous, and the difficulty is aggravated by the sudden self-identifying formula in the middle of a divine address. It is best, therefore, to assume that Jacob is recounting two separate dream experiences—the first relating to the past, the second to the present and immediate future.

14Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? 15Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. 16Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you."

17Thereupon Jacob put his children and wives on camels; 18and he drove off all his livestock and all the wealth that he had amassed, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

מוֹלַדְתֵּךְ׃ 14 וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וַתֹּאמַרְנָה לוֹ הַעוֹד
לָנוּ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ׃ 15 הֲלוֹא נָכְרִיּוֹת
נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ לוֹ כִּי מְכָרָנוּ וַיֹּאכַל גַּם־אָכוֹל אֶת־
כַּסְפֵּנוּ׃ 16 כִּי כָל־הָעֹשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים
מֵאָבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר
אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה׃ שׁשׁי 17 וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב וַיִּשָּׂא
אֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־נָשָׁיו עַל־הַגְּמַלִּים׃ 18 וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־
כָּל־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־רְכֻשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁ מִקְנֵה
קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם לָבוֹא אֶל־יִצְחָק

I am the God of Bethel The succeeding double use of "where" (Heb. *sham*) shows that "Bethel" here is a place-name, not a divine name. The title is intended not to limit the living God to a specific locale but to call to mind the original theophany, specifically the promise of constant protection and safe return.[5] In like manner, the emphasis on the vow is a reminder to the patriarch that his self-imposed obligation assumed at Bethel has yet to be discharged. As noted in the Comment to 28:22, the term Bethel possesses a technical meaning suggesting the divine witnessing and monitoring of a compact.

14–16. The two wives are of one mind in identifying with Jacob, and they voice three major grievances that relate, in sequence, to the future, the present, and the past. Rachel precedes Leah because she had been the special object of her father's trickery and was particularly bitter.

14. Have we still a share . . . ? The question is rhetorical. From the way the idiom is used in 2 Samuel 30:1 and 1 Kings 12:16, it is clear that the declaration carries with it both a repudiation of another's claim on one's loyalty and a renunciation of allegiance.

15. as outsiders That is, as though we were no longer members of the clan. Being deprived of protection and with no legal redress, an "outsider" or alien would be a ready object of exploitation.

he has sold us The reference is probably to the discreditable manner in which Laban married them off, as described in 29:15–28.

and has used up our purchase price Literally, "and has eaten up our money." This unique Hebrew idiom appears in Akkadian in the sense of pocketing the purchase or bridal price. Normally the groom deposited with the bride's father or guardian a sum of money to be settled on the bride. In the present case, the impecunious Jacob gave fourteen years of service instead. The wives accuse their father either of the improvident disposition of the monetary equivalent of this service or of outright larceny.

16. The wives fully concur with Jacob's claim of good title to his wealth, thereby refuting by anticipation Laban's counterclaim in verse 43.

THE ESCAPE (vv. 17–21)

Jacob loses no time. Taking advantage of Laban's absence due to sheep-shearing activities, he makes his escape.

17. on camels This detail explains the presence of the "camel cushion," which plays a crucial role in the next episode (v. 34).

18. that he had amassed . . . in his possession that he had acquired The unusual cluster of phrases underscores Jacob's claim to absolute and rightful ownership of all his possessions, thus again refuting in advance Laban's assertion in verse 43.

[19]Meanwhile Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household idols. [20]Jacob kept Laban the Aramean in the dark, not telling him that he was fleeing, [21]and fled with all that he had. Soon he was across the Euphrates and heading toward the hill country of Gilead.

אָבִיו אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן׃ 19 וְלָבָן הָלַךְ לִגְזֹז אֶת־צֹאנוֹ
וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ׃ 20 וַיִּגְנֹב
יַעֲקֹב אֶת־לֵב לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי עַל־בְּלִי הַגִּיד לוֹ כִּי
בֹרֵחַ הוּא׃ 21 וַיִּבְרַח הוּא וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּקָם
וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־הַנָּהָר וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־פָּנָיו הַר הַגִּלְעָד׃

19. Sheep-shearing in Mesopotamia was carried out in the spring. It entailed much hard work on the part of a large number of men who often had to labor at a considerable distance from their homes for extended periods of time. Mesopotamian documents from the eighteenth century B.C.E. refer to severe labor shortages on such occasions. In one case a gang of 1,000 men was said to be insufficient. One letter from the Mari archives records the need for 300–400 men for a period of three days, while another states that the shearing would have to take as long as a week and a half due to rains and an inadequate labor force. The completion of the arduous work would be marked by festivities.[6]

All this explains why the sheep-shearing season would be an ideal time for Jacob to make his departure. Laban, his sons, and his menfolk would all be far away and busily preoccupied.

Rachel stole The text unequivocally describes her action as thievery. Even her father's shabby treatment of her did not justify her illegal act.

household idols The nature and function of these objects remain largely obscure, as does Rachel's motivation. Called *"terafim"* in Hebrew, they are translated "idols" by ancient versions of the text such as the Aramaic Targums and the Greek Septuagint. Laban refers to them as "my gods" (v. 30), and Jacob correspondingly speaks of "your gods" (v. 32). The Narrator, however, dubs them *"terafim,"* suggesting that the term may be a contemptuous substitution word such as is frequently used in the Bible in connection with idolatry. Thus, pagan gods may be variously characterized as *'elilim,* "worthless things"; *boshet,* "shame"; *gillulim,* "pellets of dung"; *havalim,* "futilities"; and *shikkutsim,* "detestable things." In 2 Kings 23:24 *terafim* appear together with *gillulim* and *shikkutsim* in a list of idolatrous abominations outlawed by King Josiah of Judah. In line with this substitution-word practice, the term may be derived from a stem *r-f-h,* "to be limp, without energy," hence meaning "inert things." Another, perhaps more likely, origin is *t-r-f,* "to decay, become foul," known from Aramaic and postbiblical Hebrew. A derivation from Hittite *tarpi,* "spirit, demon," then an object symbolizing the same, also cannot be ruled out.

As to the size and shape of these objects, it is apparent from verse 34 that they are small enough to be hidden beneath a camel cushion. On the other hand, the story in 1 Samuel 19:13,16 shows them to be large and anthropoid. They were clearly not of uniform size.

What was their function? They have been widely understood as corresponding to the *ilani,* the family gods of the Nuzi household, and to the Roman *penates,* the household gods who were thought to protect the food supply and assure the general well-being of the family. That possession of the household gods was connected to birthright or clan leadership is to be inferred from an adoption contract from Nuzi, which stipulates: "If Nashwi has a son of his own, he shall divide [the estate] equally with Wullu, but the son of Nashwi shall take the gods of Nashwi. However, if Nashwi does not have a son of his own, then Wullu shall take the gods of Nashwi." In the case of Jacob, however, the *terafim* could not have assured inheritance rights since the patriarch claims nothing from Laban and, in any case, is leaving Mesopotamia for good.

Several biblical texts leave no doubt of the cultic role that the *terafim* played, and more specifically of their use in divination. Perhaps Rachel, by appropriating them, hoped to deprive her father of the ability to detect Jacob's escape.[7]

20. kept Laban the Aramean in the dark Literally, "stole the heart (Heb. *lev*) of. . . ." The Hebrew contains a double word play. *Lev* echoes Laban (Heb. *lavan*), while *'arami* evokes the stem *r-m-h,* "to cheat." Laban the heartless cheat has been beaten at his own game!

the Aramean The emphasis on Laban's ethnic affiliation, here and again in verse 24, artfully alerts the audience to an awareness that Laban and Jacob are now totally alienated from each other and represent two distinct peoples. It presages the pact that is soon to be concluded.

22 וַיֻּגַּד לְלָבָן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בָרַח יַעֲקֹב:
23 וַיִּקַּח אֶת־אֶחָיו עִמּוֹ וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרָיו דֶּרֶךְ
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וַיַּדְבֵּק אֹתוֹ בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד: 24 וַיָּבֹא
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי בַּחֲלֹם הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן־תְּדַבֵּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע:
25 וַיַּשֵּׂג לָבָן אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וְיַעֲקֹב תָּקַע אֶת־אָהֳלוֹ
בָּהָר וְלָבָן תָּקַע אֶת־אֶחָיו בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד:
26 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב מֶה עָשִׂיתָ וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת־
לִבָּבִי וַתְּנַהֵג אֶת־בְּנֹתַי כִּשְׁבֻיוֹת חָרֶב: 27 לָמָּה

22On the third day, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23So he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days, catching up with him in the hill country of Gilead. 24But God appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad."

25Laban overtook Jacob. Jacob had pitched his tent on the Height, and Laban with his kinsmen encamped in the hill country of Gilead. 26And Laban said to Jacob, "What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword? 27Why did you flee in

21. Events have come full cycle. As Jacob fled from his father's home to the safety of Laban's, so he now flees from Laban back to his native land. The entire episode is brought to a conclusion by employing the same two verbs used at the outset. It began with Rebekah's directive of 27:43, "flee at once to Haran," which in the Hebrew really reads "arise, flee!" It closes here with, "He fled . . . and arose. . . ." The reversal of the word order symbolizes the reversal of direction.

the hill country of Gilead This designation is very general and apparently covers the entire high plateau east of the Jordan between the Yarmuk, which flows into the river just below the Sea of Galilee, and the northern shore of the Dead Sea.

LABAN IN HOT PURSUIT (vv. 22–35)

When Laban receives news of Jacob's flight, he sets out at once in hot pursuit. No sooner does he catch up with his son-in-law, than he is forbidden by God to resort to force. He then embarks on an emotional and self-righteous harangue, portraying himself as the aggrieved party.

22–23. ***third day . . . seven days*** These are symbolic numbers indicative of significant segments of time.[8] A literal understanding would mean that Jacob covered the approximately 400-mile (640 km.) distance between Haran and Gilead in ten days, thus sustaining an average rate of travel of about forty miles (64 km.) a day, despite the encumbrance of vast flocks and a considerable entourage, which included women and children. Comparative evidence from the ancient Near East suggests that daily progress of about 6 miles (9.65 km.) would be realistic in these circumstances.

24. ***in a dream by night*** A similar device is employed to warn Abimelech and Balaam.[9]

attempting anything Literally, "speaking from good until bad." On the merism, see Comment to 24:50. Once he has Jacob in sight, Laban encamps for the night without making contact. He then experiences the admonition dream. The next morning he overtakes his son-in-law and confronts him with formal allegations of misconduct that include deception, humiliation of the wives, neglect of the appropriate ceremonies of leave-taking, and the theft of his gods.

25. ***pitched . . . encamped*** The Hebrew uses the same stem *t-k-ʿ* in both clauses, instead of the usual *n-t-h* for pitching a tent. The verb *t-k-ʿ*, "to thrust, drive in (pegs)," is found elsewhere only in Jeremiah 6:3 in a war context, suggesting that the choice of this unusual verb here is intended to convey something of the hostile atmosphere that pervades the scene.

on the Height . . . in the hill country Despite the generalized language, the contrast suggests two separate and adjacent sites that face one another. On the basis of verse 49 and Judges 10:17, Mizpah and Mount Gilead come to mind.

26–27. Laban's indictment is laced with irony. He opens with the question, "What did you mean?"—literally "What have you done?"—a phrase that invariably introduces an accusation of

secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre. 28You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! It was a foolish thing for you to do. 29I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.' 30Very well, you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?"

31Jacob answered Laban, saying, "I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. 32But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it." Jacob, of course, did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

33So Laban went into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. 34Rachel,

נַחְבֵּאתָ לִבְרֹחַ וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי וְלֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי
וָאֲשַׁלַּחֲךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׁרִים בְּתֹף וּבְכִנּוֹר׃ 28 וְלֹא
נְטַשְׁתַּנִי לְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנַי וְלִבְנֹתָי עַתָּה הִסְכַּלְתָּ עָשׂוּ׃
29 יֶשׁ־לְאֵל יָדִי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם רָע וֵאלֹהֵי
אֲבִיכֶם אֶמֶשׁ אָמַר אֵלַי לֵאמֹר הִשָּׁמֶר לְךָ מִדַּבֵּר
עִם־יַעֲקֹב מִטּוֹב עַד־רָע׃ 30 וְעַתָּה הָלֹךְ הָלַכְתָּ
כִּי־נִכְסֹף נִכְסַפְתָּה לְבֵית אָבִיךָ לָמָּה גָנַבְתָּ אֶת־
אֱלֹהָי׃ 31 וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן כִּי יָרֵאתִי כִּי
אָמַרְתִּי פֶּן־תִּגְזֹל אֶת־בְּנוֹתֶיךָ מֵעִמִּי׃ 32 עִם אֲשֶׁר
תִּמְצָא אֶת־אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יִחְיֶה נֶגֶד אַחֵינוּ הַכֶּר־לְךָ
מָה עִמָּדִי וְקַח־לָךְ וְלֹא־יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל
גְּנָבָתַם׃ 33 וַיָּבֹא לָבָן בְּאֹהֶל יַעֲקֹב וּבְאֹהֶל לֵאָה
וּבְאֹהֶל שְׁתֵּי הָאֲמָהֹת וְלֹא מָצָא וַיֵּצֵא מֵאֹהֶל
לֵאָה וַיָּבֹא בְּאֹהֶל רָחֵל׃ 34 וְרָחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת־

wrongdoing.[10] These are the very words that Jacob spoke to Laban the morning after his wedding (29:25). Laban professes to believe that his daughters were coerced into leaving, while we already know the contrary to be the case (vv. 14–16). He charges his son-in-law with treating him as an enemy and his daughters as prizes of war—yet the two had earlier denounced their father for treating them as aliens. With an air of injured innocence, the man who repeatedly defrauded Jacob from the very beginning of their relationship unabashedly complains of having been misled!

with festive music Laban refers either to a farewell of a social nature or to some formal, ceremonious leave-taking procedure.

28–29. Laban apparently considers Jacob to be a member of his clan who deserves punishment for violating its rules and mores. However, in deference to the divine admonition, retribution will not be exacted.

30. For devastating psychological effect, Laban cynically reinforces his feigned magnanimity with a beguiling show of empathy. Having thus emotionally disarmed his opponent by lulling him into a false sense of relief, he then proceeds to deliver the *coup de grace* in the form of the most serious charge of all: theft of his gods.

31. Although thrown on the defensive, Jacob manages to get in a few barbs. His clandestine flight was justified, he says, by the fear that Laban might have robbed him of his wives by force. He implies that this was a more realistic prospect than the joyous send-off. Laban, it should be noted, used the verb *g-n-v,* "to steal," three times. Jacob's riposte employs the much harsher *g-z-l,* "to remove by force, to kidnap."

32. Outright rejection of the final charge takes the form of a fearful imprecation. As an earnest of his sincerity, Jacob issues an invitation to search his effects.

shall not remain alive It is uncertain whether the phrase has here judicial or rhetorical force. It appears once more in 44:9, also in connection with an allegation of theft of a sacred object. Sacrilege was severely dealt with in the ancient Near East, but it did not always incur the death penalty. See Comment to 44:9.

point out Hebrew ***hakker*** is the same word as used in 37:32f. and 38:25f., each time in connection with something that constitutes presumptive evidence. It is most likely a legal term.

33. Laban makes no reply but immediately proceeds with the search. Does the silence imply acceptance of Jacob's position or does it portend further mischief? The interest of the audience

meanwhile, had taken the idols and placed them in the camel cushion and sat on them; and Laban rummaged through the tent without finding them. 35For she said to her father, "Let not my lord take it amiss that I cannot rise before you, for the period of women is upon me." Thus he searched, but could not find the household idols.

36Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Laban. Jacob spoke up and said to Laban, "What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? 37You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two.

הַתְּרָפִים וַתְּשִׂמֵם בְּכַר הַגָּמָל וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם
וַיְמַשֵּׁשׁ לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־הָאֹהֶל וְלֹא מָצָא: 35 וַתֹּאמֶר
אֶל־אָבִיהָ אַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי כִּי לוֹא׳ אוּכַל
לָקוּם מִפָּנֶיךָ כִּי־דֶרֶךְ נָשִׁים לִי וַיְחַפֵּשׂ וְלֹא מָצָא
אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים: 36 וַיִּחַר לְיַעֲקֹב וַיָּרֶב בְּלָבָן וַיַּעַן
יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר לְלָבָן מַה־פִּשְׁעִי מַה חַטָּאתִי כִּי
דָלַקְתָּ אַחֲרָי: 37 כִּי־מִשַּׁשְׁתָּ אֶת־כָּל־כֵּלַי מַה־
מָּצָאתָ מִכֹּל כְּלֵי־בֵיתֶךָ שִׂים כֹּה נֶגֶד אַחַי וְאַחֶיךָ
וְיוֹכִיחוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵינוּ: 38 זֶה׀ עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ

מלא וא״ו v. 35.

is heightened by the uncertainty, while the tension is sustained by commencement of the search with the least likely culprit, thereby increasing the nervousness of the defendant. Joseph adopts the same device in searching his brothers' effects in 44:12, and the analogy suggests that the actual sequence was: Jacob, Leah, maidservants, Rachel. In order to slow up the climax and to amplify the excitement the Narrator inserts a sort of interim report—("but he did not find them")—and appends a telescoped summary of the order of search. Here only Leah and Rachel are mentioned because the next development contains resonances of what happened at the first Laban-Jacob confrontation.

34–35. At the climactic moment, Laban is outmaneuvered by his own daughter. It is a final act of retribution for the fraud he had perpetrated on her and Jacob on what was to have been their wedding day.

the camel cushion This is illuminated by a relief uncovered at Tell Halaf in northern Syria, dating from about 900 B.C.E. It depicts a camel driver with a stick in hand seated on a boxlike object that simultaneously serves as a riding saddle and a pack saddle and is secured to the camel by straps.[11]

I cannot rise before you Rachel apologizes that her indisposition prevents her from paying her father proper filial respect.

the period of women It is this condition that decisively deters Laban from searching the camel cushion. He cannot approach Rachel, and he cannot possibly imagine that she would sit on his "gods" in a state of menstrual impurity. The ancients widely regarded menstrual flow as a potently contaminating substance, and the menstruant was thought to be possessed by evil spirits, thus requiring her separation from other persons. In light of Israelite notions of purity and impurity, as set forth in Leviticus 15:19–24, the description of Rachel's act constitutes the culminating absurdity in the religious situation. It implies an attitude of willful defilement and contemptuous rejection of the idea that Laban's cult objects had any religious worth.

JACOB'S COUNTERCHARGES (vv. 36–43)

According to ancient law, the futility of Laban's search for his property constitutes presumptive proof of Jacob's innocence. Twenty years' suppressed anger at abuse and mistreatment now find expression in an impassioned outpouring of righteous indignation, giving us a glimpse of the hard life and the trials and tribulations that Jacob endured.

36. ***became incensed*** By searching Jacob's tent, Laban had shown that he really believed him to be guilty of theft. Moreover, the man maintains his silence and does not apologize for his false accusation.

took up his grievance The Hebrew stem *r-y-v,* as a verb and a noun, belongs to the terminology of jurisprudence.[12] It is Jacob who now becomes the aggrieved party, the plaintiff, and Laban the accused, the defendant.

רְחֵלֶיךָ וְעִזֶּיךָ לֹא שִׁכֵּלוּ וְאֵילֵי צֹאנְךָ לֹא אָכָלְתִּי׃
39 טְרֵפָה לֹא־הֵבֵאתִי אֵלֶיךָ אָנֹכִי אֲחַטֶּנָּה מִיָּדִי
תְּבַקְשֶׁנָּה גְּנֻבְתִּי יוֹם וּגְנֻבְתִּי לָיְלָה׃ 40 הָיִיתִי
בַיּוֹם אֲכָלַנִי חֹרֶב וְקֶרַח בַּלָּיְלָה וַתִּדַּד שְׁנָתִי
מֵעֵינָי׃ 41 זֶה־לִּי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בְּבֵיתֶךָ עֲבַדְתִּיךָ
אַרְבַּע־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה בִּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתֶיךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים
בְּצֹאנֶךָ וַתַּחֲלֵף אֶת־מַשְׂכֻּרְתִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת מֹנִים׃
42 לוּלֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וּפַחַד יִצְחָק
הָיָה לִי כִּי עַתָּה רֵיקָם שִׁלַּחְתָּנִי אֶת־עָנְיִי וְאֶת־
יְגִיעַ כַּפַּי רָאָה אֱלֹהִים וַיּוֹכַח אָמֶשׁ׃ שביעי
43 וַיַּעַן לָבָן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יַעֲקֹב הַבָּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי
וְהַבָּנִים בָּנַי וְהַצֹּאן צֹאנִי וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה רֹאֶה
לִי־הוּא וְלִבְנֹתַי מָה־אֶעֱשֶׂה לָאֵלֶּה הַיּוֹם אוֹ
לִבְנֵיהֶן אֲשֶׁר יָלָדוּ׃ 44 וְעַתָּה לְכָה נִכְרְתָה בְרִית

[38]"These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. [39]That which was torn by beasts I never brought to you; I myself made good the loss; you exacted it of me, whether snatched by day or snatched by night. [40]Often, scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes. [41]Of the twenty years that I spent in your household, I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks; and you changed my wages time and again. [42]Had not the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God took notice of my plight and the toil of my hands, and He gave judgment last night."

[43]Then Laban spoke up and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine. Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne? [44]Come, then, let us make a pact, you and I, that

37. ***What have you found?*** Jacob believes that Laban used the issue of the *terafim* as a pretext and that he really suspected his son-in-law of stealing much more from him.[13]

let them decide Hebrew *y-kh-ḥ,* like *r-y-v,* also has a forensic context. Jacob calls upon the kinsmen of each side to form a tribunal and to decide which of the rivals is the real thief.[14]

38. ***never miscarried*** This is another way of saying, "I was never negligent but always exercised tender care and diligence with the flock."

39. Jacob is not taking credit for virtuous conduct beyond what the law demanded. Rather, he is accusing Laban of unscrupulous behavior in violation of Near Eastern law and custom, which absolved a shepherd of personal responsibility in a case of *force majeur,* provided he could supply corroborating evidence. Both the laws of Hammurabi[15] and Exodus 22:12 make clear that a shepherd under contract had the status of a paid bailee and was liable only for lost or stolen sheep.[16]

by day . . . by night The significance of this addition is unclear since it is not otherwise known that the time of the day had any bearing on the shepherd's responsibility or exculpation.

42. Jacob winds up his bitter response with a sarcastic sally against Laban's pretense of generosity in verse 27. To the contrary, he says, if it had been left to you, I would have completed my service still destitute.

the God of my father On this divine title, see Comment to 26:24 and Excursus 20.

the Fear of Isaac Hebrew *paḥad yitsḥak* is a unique divine title embedded also in verse 53. It conveys a double meaning: "The One Whom Isaac Reveres" and "The One of Isaac Who Caused Terror." This latter nuance is a reference to the admonitory dream, the source of which Laban recognized to be the God of Jacob's father (v. 29).[17]

sent me away empty-handed See Comment to 30:25–27.

43. Now publicly exposed as a scoundrel, Laban lamely tries to cover his loss of face with empty rhetoric that has no legal force behind it, only emotion. It is as though he is saying, "All the same, were it not for me, you would still be a nobody possessing nothing. Besides, how could you think I might harm my own offspring?"

there may be a witness between you and me." [45]Thereupon Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. [46]And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a mound; and they partook of a meal there by the mound. [47]Laban named it Yegar-sahadutha, but Jacob named it Gal-ed. And Laban declared, "This mound is a witness between you and me this day." That is why it was named Gal-ed; [49]And [it was called] Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of sight of each other. [50]If you ill-treat my daughters

אֲנִי וְאָתָּה וְהָיֶה לְעֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ: 45 וַיִּקַּח יַעֲקֹב
אֶבֶן וַיְרִימֵהָ מַצֵּבָה: 46 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְאֶחָיו לִקְטוּ
אֲבָנִים וַיִּקְחוּ אֲבָנִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־גָל וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׁם עַל־
הַגָּל: 47 וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ לָבָן יְגַר שָׂהֲדוּתָא וְיַעֲקֹב קָרָא
לוֹ גַּלְעֵד: 48 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן הַגַּל הַזֶּה עֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ
הַיּוֹם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ גַּלְעֵד: 49 וְהַמִּצְפָּה אֲשֶׁר
אָמַר יִצֶף יְהוָה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ כִּי נִסָּתֵר אִישׁ
מֵרֵעֵהוּ: 50 אִם־תְּעַנֶּה אֶת־בְּנֹתַי וְאִם־תִּקַּח נָשִׁים

THE PACT BETWEEN LABAN AND JACOB (vv. 44–54)

To show good faith, Laban now proposes that he and Jacob conclude a pact of mutual non-aggression. By so doing, he capitulates to reality. In legal terms, it means that he tacitly acknowledges Jacob as constituting a separate, independent social entity of equal status. This is reflected in the narrative in several ways: there are two stone markers, two meals, two place-names; the deity is twice invoked, and by two separate names. Moreover, the pact contains two provisions—one dealing with family matters, the other of a political nature. The first seeks to protect the interests of Laban's two daughters in a foreign land, the second delineates the boundary between two ethnic groups.

The form and structure of the pact, as well as its contents, have analogies in ancient Near Eastern documents. The antiquity of the episode is proved both by the covenant meal, which is characteristic of second-millennium B.C.E. treaties, and by the pact of peaceful coexistence between Israel and Aram. In postsettlement times the relationships between the two were implacably hostile. A late author would hardly have concocted such a story.

44. that there may be a witness Rather, "It shall constitute. . . ." The existence of the pact itself constitutes testimony to the state of relationships between the parties. Another possibility, and one consonant with the several Aramaisms in this chapter, is to take Hebrew *'ed,* not as "witness" but from an original *'d,* "treaty, agreement," especially one secured by an oath. This term appears repeatedly in the eighth-century B.C.E. Aramaic treaty inscriptions from Sfire, as well as in Akkadian *adu.* In Hebrew, the two originally distinct words *'ed,* "witness," and *'d,* "treaty," merged; but the fact that the "Ark of the Pact" can be either *'aron ha-berit* or *'aron ha-'edut,* and the "Tablets of the Covenant" either *luḥot ha-berit* or *luḥot ha-'edut,* shows that *'d* in the sense of "treaty" remained vestigially in Hebrew.[18]

45. pillar Hebrew *matsevah* is discussed in the Comment to 28:18. Jacob's pillar may well have symbolized for him the presence of "the God of Bethel," who had promised him protection and, in fact, who mentioned the "pillar" when ordering him to return to his native land (v. 13).

46. his kinsmen As in verse 54, the term apparently embraces all present on both sides. Hebrew *'aḥ,* "brother, kinsman," is a standard term for participants in treaties.

they partook of a meal See Comment to 26:30. Probably only the principals, Laban and Jacob, ate at this time.

47. Each party uses his native language, indicating the broader interethnic implications, an accommodation between the Hebrews and the Arameans.

48. And Laban declared Having initiated the pact, he speaks first.

This mound is a witness See Comment to 28:18.

Gal-eid Clearly, we have here a folk etymology for the regional name Gilead, the site of the treaty-making as recorded in verses 21, 23, and 25. The true origin of the name probably lies in Arabic *jal'ad,* "hard, rough," referring to the local hard dolomitic limestone.

or take other wives besides my daughters—though no one else be about, remember, God Himself will be witness between you and me."

[51]And Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this mound and here the pillar which I have set up between you and me: [52]this mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness that I am not to cross to you past this mound, and that you are not to cross to me past this mound and this pillar, with hostile intent. [53]May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor"—their ancestral deities—"judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. [54]Jacob then offered up a sacrifice on the Height, and invited his kinsmen to partake of the meal. After the meal, they spent the night on the Height.

עַל־בְּנֹתַי אֵין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רְאֵה אֱלֹהִים עֵד בֵּינִי
וּבֵינֶךָ׃ 51 וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב הִנֵּה הַגַּל הַזֶּה
וְהִנֵּה הַמַּצֵּבָה אֲשֶׁר יָרִיתִי בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ׃ 52 עֵד
הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְעֵדָה הַמַּצֵּבָה אִם־אָנִי לֹא־אֶעֱבָר אֵלֶיךָ
אֶת־הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְאִם־אַתָּה לֹא־תַעֲבֹר אֵלַי אֶת־
הַגַּל הַזֶּה וְאֶת־הַמַּצֵּבָה הַזֹּאת לְרָעָה׃ 53 אֱלֹהֵי
אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי נָחוֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵינֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיהֶם
וַיִּשָּׁבַע יַעֲקֹב בְּפַחַד אָבִיו יִצְחָק׃ 54 וַיִּזְבַּח יַעֲקֹב
זֶבַח בָּהָר וַיִּקְרָא לְאֶחָיו לֶאֱכָל־לֶחֶם וַיֹּאכְלוּ
לֶחֶם וַיָּלִינוּ בָּהָר׃ מפטיר

*49. **Mizpah*** See Comment to verse 25. The two sites are mentioned together in Judges 10:17 and 11:11. A place named "Mizpeh of Gilead" appears in Judges 11:29.

May the LORD watch Because no supranational organization for the arbitration of conflicts existed, the deity or deities were invariably appealed to as a high authority for monitoring the making and enforcement of treaties in the ancient Near East. Thus, the aforementioned Sfire treaty lists the various gods in whose presence it is enacted and declares: "All [you] gods are witnesses *(šhdn)*. Open your eyes to see the treaty. . . ."

*50. **ill-treat*** The term is undefined. A rabbinic tradition takes it to mean the withholding of conjugal rights.[19]

or take other wives The restrictions imposed by Laban to safeguard the status of his daughters are unknown elsewhere in the Bible but parallel a variety of Near Eastern texts. A contract from Nuzi between Nashwi and Wullu provides that "if Wullu takes another wife, he shall forfeit the lands and houses of Nashwi [his father-in-law]." A marriage contract stipulates plainly that "Zilikkushu shall not take another wife in addition to Naluya."

51–52. The solemn statement about the purpose of the stone monuments is repeated because they are to fulfill a second function, that of boundary markers. They stand as silent witnesses to the mutually agreed frontier between Aram and Israel. From 1 Kings 22:3 and 2 Kings 9:14 it is apparent that the highland of Gilead was an area of dispute between the two peoples in monarchy times. The frontier population mix is doubtlessly reflected in the tradition of 1 Chronicles 7:14 that the family of Machir father of Gilead is traced to an Aramean concubine.

*53. **May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor judge*** Everywhere in the Near East the national god was regarded as the protector of the boundary. The plural verb here indicates that Laban is invoking two separate deities. In the Sfire treaty the diversity of gods similarly corresponds to the ethnic diversity of the parties involved. According to 22:20–23, Nahor is the ancestor of the Arameans.

their ancestral deities The phrase is here taken to be the Narrator's explanatory comment. Literally, the Hebrew means "the deities of their father," perhaps referring to Terah. According to Joshua 24:2, "Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor . . . worshiped other gods." It is highly significant that in response Jacob ignores Laban's formula and invokes only the "Fear of his father Isaac."

54. The entire treaty-making process is sealed by a sacrificial meal of which all present partake.[20]

32 Early in the morning, Laban kissed his sons and daughters and bade them good-by; then Laban left on his journey homeward. 2Jacob went on his way, and angels of God encountered him. 3When he saw them, Jacob said, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

ל״ב וַיַּשְׁכֵּם לָבָן בַּבֹּקֶר וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנָיו וְלִבְנוֹתָיו
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ: 2 וְיַעֲקֹב
הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ־בוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹהִים זֶה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־
הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא מַחֲנָיִם: פ

VA-YISHLAḤ

4Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 5and instructed them as

וישלח

4 וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיו
אַרְצָה שֵׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם: 5 וַיְצַו אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה

CHAPTER 32 ANGELS AT MAHANAIM (vv. 1–3)

The next morning Jacob and Laban part forever. The patriarchal connection with Mesopotamia is finally severed. A new era in the life of Jacob and in the development of the people of Israel is about to open.

Just as Jacob's outward journey was marked by the appearance of angels (28:12), so is his return to his native land. In neither case are the angels assigned any role in the narrative, and in this instance there is not even an accompanying divine revelation. Perhaps their mere presence is intended to insinuate the notion of divine protection such as is formulated in Psalms 91:9–11: "Because you took the LORD—my refuge, / the Most High—as your haven, / no harm will befall you, / no disease touch your tent. / For He will order His angels / to guard you wherever you go."

A fuller story about Jacob and Mahanaim may have existed in popular tradition. At any rate, in their present form, the angelic appearances provide a literary framework for the Jacob and Laban cycle of stories, which constitutes a distinct unit within the larger biography of the patriarch.

1. ***his sons*** That is, his grandsons, as in 31:28,43.

3. ***God's camp*** In 1 Chronicles 12:22 this phrase connotes a vast throng.

Mahanaim The form is not necessarily dual, but the "two camps" of verses 8–9 and 11 seem to be a play on the word. The site of Mahanaim has not been identified. It later played a significant role in Israelite history.[1] It was one of the Levitical cities of refuge; Ishboshet, son of Saul, was crowned king there; David fled thither during the revolt of Absalom; and in Solomon's day, it became a district capital. Mahanaim may well have housed a sacred shrine, the founding of which popular legend associated with Jacob.

Jacob and Esau Once Again (32:4–33:31)

Va-Yishlaḥ Freed from anxiety about Laban, Jacob resumes his homeward journey. But his relief is short-lived. Long-suppressed memories from his ignoble past intrude upon his consciousness. The specter of a vengeful Esau looms before him.

The action divides itself into two main parts: 32:4–22 describe Jacob's preparations for his encounter with Esau; 33:1–17 relate the story of the actual meeting of the two brothers. In between is the strange narrative of the struggle between Jacob and a powerful assailant (32:23–33).

JACOB'S PREPARATIONS (vv. 4–22)

Jacob, ever a man of action, takes precautionary measures. First he gathers intelligence, then he

follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now; 6I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor.'" 7The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." 8Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he

תֹּאמְרוּן לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם־
לָבָן גַּרְתִּי וָאֵחַר עַד־עָתָּה: 6 וַיְהִי־לִי שׁוֹר וַחֲמוֹר
צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וָאֶשְׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לַאדֹנִי
לִמְצֹא־חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ: 7 וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב
לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֶל־אָחִיךָ אֶל־עֵשָׂו וְגַם הֹלֵךְ
לִקְרָאתְךָ וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ: 8 וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב
מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ וַיַּחַץ אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ וְאֶת־

prepares a stratagem of escape in the event of battle. This is followed by a prayer and, finally, by the dispatch of a handsome gift.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING (vv. 4–7)

4. ***Seir*** This presupposes that Esau-Edom had by this time migrated east of the Jordan and had either dispossessed the Horites from Seir or was in the process of so doing.[2]

Seir, the country of Edom The three Hebrew words *se'ir, sadeh,* and *'edom* are deliberately used to evoke memories of the hostile relations with Esau, the one covered with hair *(se'ar),* a man of the outdoors *(sadeh),* of ruddy complexion *('admoni),* who came in from the field *(sadeh)* and begged for the red stuff *('adom),* and whose hairiness *(sa'ir)* played a crucial role in the deception that precipitated Jacob's flight to Laban.[3]

5. ***'To my lord Esau'*** This "prescriptio," or introductory prepositional phrase identifying the recipient, is part of the message.[4] It conforms to the standard epistolary style of the ancient Near East.

lord . . . servant This mode of address, normally formal and deferential, becomes ingratiating in the mouth of Jacob, who repeatedly refers to Esau as "my lord" and to himself as Esau's "servant." This language, used by a vassal to his lord, is motivated by fear and intended to be conciliatory. Rabbinic sources are divided in criticism or in defense of Jacob's servility.[5]

I stayed with Laban Here the Hebrew verb *g-w-r* connotes both temporary residence and deprivation of protection, as explained in the Comment to 12:10. Jacob is tactfully silent on his reasons for going to Laban in the first place.

and remained until now This explains why he had not contacted Esau previously.[6]

6. ***I have acquired*** Jacob obliquely hints that he has the wherewithal to pay off his brother, if need be.[7] He cleverly lists each item in the singular, which functions as a collective. He omits mention of the camels, the most valuable of all his livestock, even though they are listed in verse 8 and part of the gift in verse 16. His purpose is to understate his possessions so that the present will be all that much more of a delightful and spectacular surprise to Esau.

7. The messengers report back that Esau—his "brother," not his "lord"—seems to have obtained independent intelligence about Jacob's movements. He is "coming to meet" him, a phrase that can convey either amity or enmity[8] and so underlines the inability to decipher Esau's intentions.

four hundred men To judge from such passages as 1 Samuel 22:2, 25:13, and 30:10,17, this seems to have been the standard size of a militia. The number is therefore ominous.

DEFENSIVE MEASURES (vv. 8–9)

Jacob's troubled conscience and the memory of Esau's terrible resolve (27:41) lead him to imagine the worst. His fear is intensified by his awareness that retreat would violate his pact with Laban. Flight is impractical because he is encumbered with small children and much livestock. In the event of an attack, the most he can do is to minimize his losses.

divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, [9]thinking, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape."

[10]Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you'! [11]I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. [12]Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. [13]Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.'"

[14]After spending the night there, he selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esau: [15]200 she-

הַצֹּאן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת׃
9 וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־יָבוֹא עֵשָׂו אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאַחַת
וְהִכָּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלֵיטָה׃ 10 וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וֵאלֹהֵי אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה
הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ וּלְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה
עִמָּךְ׃ 11 קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הָאֱמֶת
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־
הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת׃ 12 הַצִּילֵנִי
נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי־יָרֵא אָנֹכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־
יָבוֹא וְהִכַּנִי אֵם עַל־בָּנִים׃ 13 וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב
אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא־יִסָּפֵר מֵרֹב׃ שני 14 וַיָּלֶן שָׁם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא
וַיִּקַּח מִן־הַבָּא בְיָדוֹ מִנְחָה לְעֵשָׂו אָחִיו׃ 15 עִזִּים
מָאתַיִם וּתְיָשִׁים עֶשְׂרִים רְחֵלִים מָאתַיִם וְאֵילִים

two camps See Comment to verse 3.

PRAYER (vv. 10–13)

The prayer, an expression of absolute faith in a living God, comprises an invocation, a confession, a supplication, and a recollection.

10. The invocation skillfully combines quotations from 28:13–15 and 31:3, the divine declarations at Bethel and Haran, which mark the beginning and end of Jacob's twenty-year exile.

I will deal bountifully with you This phrase has no parallel in the divine promises. It is clearly an interpretation of 31:3, "I will be with you."

11. The confession acknowledges God's bounteous fidelity in the past and humbly asserts the personal unworthiness and undeserving nature of the recipient.

this Jordan Standing on the banks of the Jabbok, he can point to the Jordan clearly visible in the distance.

12. The supplication lays bare the overwhelming terror that seizes Jacob at this moment, a terror doubtless exacerbated by his tormented conscience.

13. The prayer ends with a recollection of divine promises still to be redeemed. The desperate appeal is thereby grounded in God's steadfast fealty, not in the petitioner's merit. At the moment of crisis it is a concern with posterity that is uppermost in Jacob's mind.

THE GIFT (vv. 14–22)

A diplomatic initiative aimed at softening Esau's anticipated hostility is the final tactic. A munificent gift that bears the stamp of paying tribute is so arranged that the manner of presentation, a series of increasingly agreeable surprises, achieves the greatest psychological impact through its incremental effect. Esau is bound to be overwhelmed by it all.

14. ***spending the night there*** At Mahanaim.

presents Hebrew *minḥah* may mean a gift in expression of friendship and respect and also a tribute in recognition of the donor's subordinate status.[9] The ambiguity in its repeated use here is intentional. Esau is free to interpret it as he wishes.

goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; [16]30 milch camels with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls; 20 she-asses and 10 he-asses. [17]These he put in the charge of his servants, drove by drove, and he told his servants, "Go on ahead, and keep a distance between droves." [18]He instructed the one in front as follows, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, 'Whose man are you? Where are you going? And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?' [19]you shall answer, 'Your servant Jacob's; they are a gift sent to my lord Esau; and [Jacob] himself is right behind us.'" [20]He gave similar instructions to the second one, and the third, and all the others who followed the droves, namely, "Thus and so shall you say to Esau when you reach him. [21]And you shall add, 'And your servant Jacob himself is right behind us.'" For he reasoned, "If I propitiate him with presents in advance, and then face him, perhaps he will show me favor." [22]And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night.

[23]That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. [24]After taking them across the stream,

עֶשְׂרִים: 16 גְּמַלִּים מֵינִיקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשִׁים
פָּרוֹת אַרְבָּעִים וּפָרִים עֲשָׂרָה אֲתֹנֹת עֶשְׂרִים
וַעְיָרִם עֲשָׂרָה: 17 וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־עֲבָדָיו עֵדֶר עֵדֶר
לְבַדּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדָיו עִבְרוּ לְפָנַי וְרֶוַח תָּשִׂימוּ
בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר: 18 וַיְצַו אֶת־הָרִאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר
כִּי יִפְגָּשְׁךָ עֵשָׂו אָחִי וּשְׁאָלְךָ לֵאמֹר לְמִי־אַתָּה
וְאָנָה תֵלֵךְ וּלְמִי אֵלֶּה לְפָנֶיךָ: 19 וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ
לְיַעֲקֹב מִנְחָה הִוא שְׁלוּחָה לַאדֹנִי לְעֵשָׂו וְהִנֵּה
גַם־הוּא אַחֲרֵינוּ: 20 וַיְצַו גַּם אֶת־הַשֵּׁנִי גַּם אֶת־
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי גַּם אֶת־כָּל־הַהֹלְכִים אַחֲרֵי הָעֲדָרִים
לֵאמֹר כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה תְּדַבְּרוּן אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּמֹצַאֲכֶם
אֹתוֹ: 21 וַאֲמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ
כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה הַהֹלֶכֶת לְפָנָי
וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֶרְאֶה פָּנָיו אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָנָי: 22 וַתַּעֲבֹר
הַמִּנְחָה עַל־פָּנָיו וְהוּא לָן בַּלַּיְלָה־הַהוּא בַּמַּחֲנֶה:
23 וַיָּקָם בַּלַּיְלָה הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־
שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אַחַד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֵת

15–16. There are 550 beasts in all, an extraordinarily lavish presentation.

*17. **drove by drove*** Esau just has time to scrutinize and admire the animals and to interrogate the men when the next drove arrives, and so forth.

21–22. The repeated use of Hebrew *panim,* obscured in the translation, and the mention of the night effect the transition to the next scene: the night encounter at Peniel.

THE MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANT (vv. 23–33)

The story of Jacob's encounter with Esau is suddenly interrupted. The restless Jacob gets up during the night and promptly decides to transfer his entire camp to the other side of the Jabbok. Left utterly alone, he is attacked by a mysterious assailant who wrestles with him until daybreak when, in desperation, he wrenches Jacob's hip. The patriarch, however, stubbornly holds on to extract a blessing, whereupon the stranger changes Jacob's name to Israel. Refusing to reveal his own name, he vanishes as the sun's rays shed their first light on a limping Jacob. In commemoration of the night's events, the site of the encounter is named Peniel, and a dietary restriction is instituted.

For an interpretation of the narrative see Excursus 24.

*23. **his eleven children*** Only the principal actors in the evolution of the nation are specified because Jacob is about to become Israel, the personification of the tribal confederation. That is why Dinah and the rest of his household are not mentioned.

the ford of the Jabbok This river, called by the Arabs Nahr ez-Zarqa ("blue river"), is one of the most important east of the Jordan. Flowing through a deep ravine on a meandering course, it joins the Jordan River at right angles about 20 miles (32 km.) north of the Dead Sea. Before the construction of bridges, flat stepping-stones or timber would be laid across the shallowest and narrowest part to afford passage. To cross at night with a vast entourage is a difficult and dangerous operation, to be undertaken only by moonlight and only as a matter of great urgency. By moving from the northern to the southern side of the river, Jacob is placing himself all the more quickly in the

he sent across all his possessions. 25Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 26When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. 27Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 28Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." 29Said he,

מַעֲבַר יַבֹּק: 24 וַיִּקָּחֵם וַיְעַבְרֵם אֶת־הַנָּחַל וַיַּעֲבֵר
אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: 25 וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ
עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר: 26 וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ
וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף־יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ
עִמּוֹ: 27 וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְּחֵנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר
לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ כִּי אִם־בֵּרַכְתָּנִי: 28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
מַה־שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב: 29 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב

path of Esau, who is advancing from Seir in the south. His tactic, apparently, is to reduce the interval between Esau's encountering the gifts and his own arrival heralded by his messengers, each in turn. He can thereby better exploit the immediate psychological advantage gained from the mollifying effect of the tribute and at the same time enhance his claim actually to be on his way to meet his brother. He does not want to convey the impression that he is trying to avoid or delay a face-to-face meeting.

25. Jacob was left alone He made repeated crossings of the river until all persons and goods had been safely transported. Now utterly alone in the dead of night, with no one to come to his aid, he must rely solely on his own resources.

a man In verses 29 and 31 the person is described as "a divine being" *('elohim)*. In Hosea's account he is identified as an angel (Hos. 12:4). The interchangeability of these terms is frequent in passages dealing with angels. See Excursus 10.

wrestled The Hebrew stem *'-v-k,* which is peculiar to this story, creates a word play with the names Jabbok and Jacob. There may have existed a popular etymology connecting the name of the river with this incident.[10]

26. As the dawn approaches, the assailant becomes desperate to disengage himself. Unable to overcome Jacob by sheer force, he delivers a sudden, powerful blow to the "hollow of Jacob's hip," that is, to the acetabulum, the cup-shaped socket in the hipbone that receives the head of the thighbone. But Jacob still refuses to let go.

was strained Not dislocated, for then Jacob would have been unable even to limp (v. 32).

27. for dawn is breaking Only now does Jacob realize the supernatural nature of his opponent.

28–29. What is your name? A rhetorical question that affords opportunity for "Jacob" and "Israel" to be counterposed, thus bringing to mind the contrasting connotation of the names. Since names in the Bible are inextricably intertwined with personality and destiny, the change here signifies a final purging of the unsavory character traits with which *ya'akov* has come to be associated.

Israel It is the bestowal of the new name that constitutes the essence of the blessing and the climax of the entire episode. Jacob had feared for his posterity; now he is tacitly assured that he will become the patriarch of a nation named Israel.

The meaning of the name Israel is discussed in Excursus 25.

with beings divine and human The humans would have been Esau and Laban, or the term may refer to incidents in the patriarch's life that have not been preserved but once had popular currency. Judges 9:13 suggests that, alternatively, the phrase may be a fossilized expression, a merism meaning "all and sundry."[11]

and have prevailed The innovation of the name "Israel" in the Bible is associated with struggle and triumph in the face of overwhelming odds. Curiously and instructively, the earliest extrabiblical document to mention Israel, the victory hymn of King Merneptah of Egypt (ca. 1207 B.C.E.), reports that "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not," while the second, the victory inscription of King Mesha of Moab (ca. 830 B.C.E.), declares "Israel has perished forever."

"Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." [30]Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. [31]So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." [32]The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip. [33]That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.

יַעֲקֹב עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־
אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל: 30 וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָּא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה תִּשְׁאַל
לִשְׁמִי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם: שלישי 31 וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב
שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־
פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי: 32 וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר
עָבַר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל־יְרֵכוֹ: 33 עַל־כֵּן
לֹא־יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל־
כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף־יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב
בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה:

30. In the preexilic period all angels remain anonymous. The story in Judges 13:17–18 again illustrates how any attempt to discover the identity of a divine being is turned aside.

31. ***Peniel*** Literally, "Face of God." The name may already have belonged to the site due to some grotesque rock formation. A promontory on the Phoenician coast that contained the profile of a monstrous face was called "God's Face." Whatever the origin of the name, in our text it is invested with new meaning derived from Jacob's experience.

Peniel is most plausibly identified with Tulul adh-Dhahab, which stands on the Jabbok a few miles from where it flows into the Jordan. It was a place of strategic importance.

meaning Hebrew *ki.* See Comment to 4:25.

a divine being Hebrew *'elohim.* In Judges 13 the one repeatedly called "an angel" is also referred to as *'elohim* (v. 22).

I have seen . . . face to face Two idioms are combined here, both inherently ambiguous. To "see the face" may describe an experience of either cordiality or hostility. "Face to face," used only of divine-human encounters, may be an adversary confrontation or an experience of extraordinary intimacy. The deliberate ambiguity simultaneously portrays the perilous and the auspicious nature of the furious struggle.

yet my life has been preserved The idea behind this statement forms a recurring theme in the biblical narratives. At the burning bush Moses hides his face, "for he was afraid to look at God." Gideon and Manoah both fear death after experiencing God's self-manifestation. God explicitly tells Moses, "Man may not see Me and live!" This is the biblical way of expressing the intensity of the experience of the individual encounter with the Divine Presence—the utterly overwhelming nature of the mysterious contact with the awesome majesty of the transcendent yet immanent God.

32. ***The sun rose*** Jacob's ignominious flight from home was appropriately marked by the setting of the sun; fittingly, the radiance of the sunrise greets the patriarch as he crosses back into his native land. In light of Malachi 3:20, the rising sun may also betoken the healing of Jacob's injury.

33. Appended to the narrative is a historical note tracing the origin of an Israelite dietary abstention to the previously described episode.

the children of Israel This is the first biblical usage of this phrase, which here refers to the entire people, not to Jacob's sons.[12]

to this day This is written from the perspective of a later age.

the thigh muscle Venerable Jewish tradition identifies this unique and cryptic term *gid hanasheh* with the sciatic nerve *(nervus ischiadicus).*

33 Looking up, Jacob saw Esau coming, accompanied by four hundred men. He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids, [2]putting the maids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. [3]He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother. [4]Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept. [5]Looking about, he saw the

ל״ג וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֵשָׂו בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיַּחַץ אֶת־הַיְלָדִים עַל־לֵאָה וְעַל־רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשְּׁפָחוֹת: 2 וַיָּשֶׂם אֶת־הַשְּׁפָחוֹת וְאֶת־יַלְדֵיהֶן רִאשֹׁנָה וְאֶת־לֵאָה וְיַלְדֶיהָ אַחֲרֹנִים וְאֶת־רָחֵל וְאֶת־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֹנִים: 3 וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד־גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד־אָחִיו: 4 וַיָּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיְחַבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוָּארָו וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ* וַיִּבְכּוּ: 5 וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־

v. 4. צַוָּארָיו ק׳ נקוד על וישקהו

CHAPTER 33

Reunion and Return (vv. 1–20)

The final act of the drama now unfolds. It comprises two parts: Verses 1–11 cover the actual reconciliation of the brothers; verses 12–17 depict the process of disengagement. Verses 18–20 constitute a sort of epilogue that also forges a connection with chapter 34.

RECONCILIATION (vv. 1–11)

No sooner does the patriarch emerge from the night's ordeal than he sees Esau approaching with his troop. His immediate fears are soon dissipated as Esau takes the initiative in effecting a reconciliation.

1–2. The "four hundred men" are a reminder of possible aggressive intentions. What was earlier merely a report is now stark reality. Yet this time there is no mention of fear on Jacob's part.

He divided The earlier division of his personnel and effects, mentioned in 32:8, was a tactical precaution in case of flight. Nothing is said there of the members of Jacob's immediate family. The present act is solely a matter of arranging mothers with their respective children for formal presentation to Esau.

3. ***bowed low . . . seven times*** The Hebrew verb denotes the full-length proneness of the body as a symbol of submission to a superior authority. The practice is illustrated by the royal correspondence from Tell el-Amarna, in which the conventional formula of the vassal writing to Pharaoh is, "Seven times and seven times I fall at the feet of the king, my lord"—that is, in both prone and supine position. Occasionally, as here, a single sevenfold prostration is mentioned.[1]

There is a measure of irony in the situation, for it is the exact reversal of the blessing that Jacob extracted from his father and that led to his flight from Esau's wrath: "Be master over your brothers,/ And let your mother's sons bow to you" (27:29).

4. Esau apparently is genuinely moved by Jacob's extravagant gesture, and the dramatic denouement swiftly follows. Just as the account of the initial breach between the two brothers was characterized by an unparalleled succession of five short Hebrew verbs (25:34), so the story of their final reconciliation is correspondingly described through a unique concentration of five amplified verbs.[2]

he kissed him Esau's kiss, undoubtedly sincere, appropriately signals the final resolution of the chain of tragic events precipitated by that other kiss, Jacob's deceitful kiss, that played a crucial role in the original blessing scene (27:26).[3]

and they wept Jacob wept too. His tears are a release from the emotional tension, even though his anxieties are not wholly relieved.

women and the children. "Who," he asked, "are these with you?" He answered, "The children with whom God has favored your servant." [6]Then the maids, with their children, came forward and bowed low; [7]next Leah, with her children, came forward and bowed low; and last, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed low; [8]And he asked, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" He answered, "To gain my lord's favor." [9]Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours." [10]But Jacob said, "No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. [11]Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty." And when he urged him, he accepted.

[12]And [Esau] said, "Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace." [13]But he said to him, "My lord

עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַיְלָדִים וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־
אֵלֶּה לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־
עַבְדֶּךָ: רביעי 6 וַתִּגַּשְׁן הַשְּׁפָחוֹת הֵנָּה וְיַלְדֵיהֶן
וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֻיָן: 7 וַתִּגַּשׁ גַּם־לֵאָה וילדיה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ
וְאַחַר נִגַּשׁ יוֹסֵף וְרָחֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לְךָ
כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגָשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לִמְצֹא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יֶשׁ־לִי רָב אָחִי יְהִי
לְךָ אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אַל־נָא אִם־נָא
מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנְחָתִי מִיָּדִי כִּי עַל־
כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כִּרְאֹת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְצֵנִי:
11 קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּרְכָתִי אֲשֶׁר הֻבָאת לָךְ כִּי־חַנַּנִי
אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֶשׁ־לִי־כֹל וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ וַיִּקָּח: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר
נִסְעָה וְנֵלֵכָה וְאֵלְכָה לְנֶגְדֶּךָ: 13 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו

*5. **your servant*** Jacob continues to address his brother in terms of an inferior in the presence of a superior.[4]

6–7. The wives are presented in ascending order of social status and affection.

*8. **all this company*** The servants and droves who had gone on ahead.

9. The etiquette of the East requires Esau to make a show of refusing the gift and Jacob to press it on him. To all outward appearances, the recipient accepts it reluctantly.

my brother In contrast to Jacob's mode of address.

let what you have remain yours Beneath the surface meaning lies, perhaps, Esau's final concession of the birthright.[5]

*10. **gift*** See Comment to 32:19.

like seeing the face of God This rhetorical extravagance yields, perhaps intentionally, several possible meanings: encountering you, Esau, is like a pilgrimage to a shrine, which one does not make empty-handed; I have been admitted to your august presence; you have been graciously indulgent of me; my encounter with you is like that with a divine being. This last would be an artfully astute reference to 32:31.[6]

*11. **accept my present*** By a change of terminology from Hebrew ***minḥah,*** previously used five times, to ***berakhah,*** "blessing, gift," Jacob signals to Esau that the present is in a way a reparation for the purloining of the paternal blessing twenty years earlier.[7] On that occasion both Isaac and Esau had used the identical Hebrew phrase now employed by Jacob (27:35,36), but in the other sense of taking away the blessing.

he accepted Esau does not reciprocate, thereby intimating that what takes place is the settlement of an old score, not an exchange of civilities.

DISENGAGEMENT (vv. 12–17)

The verbal exchange that now ensues betrays Jacob's lingering misgivings, as though he is uncertain about the durability of Esau's amiable mood. He therefore delicately disengages himself from Esau's presence, and the two brothers part in peace, each going his separate way.

knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. 14Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15Then Esau said, "Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me." But he said, "Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!" 16So Esau started back that day on his way to Seir. 17But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth.

18Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan—having come thus from Paddan-aram—and he encamped before the city. 19The parcel of land

אֲדֹנִי יֹדֵעַ כִּי־הַיְלָדִים רַכִּים וְהַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר עָלוֹת
עָלָי וּדְפָקוּם יוֹם אֶחָד וָמֵתוּ כָּל־הַצֹּאן: 14 יַעֲבָר־
נָא אֲדֹנִי לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ וַאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאִטִּי לְרֶגֶל
הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר־לְפָנַי וּלְרֶגֶל הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר־
אָבֹא אֶל־אֲדֹנִי שֵׂעִירָה: 15 וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשֶׂו אַצִּיגָה־
נָּא עִמְּךָ מִן־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה
אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי: 16 וַיָּשָׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֵשָׂו
לְדַרְכּוֹ שֵׂעִירָה: 17 וְיַעֲקֹב נָסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיִּבֶן לוֹ
בָּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֻכֹּת עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־
הַמָּקוֹם סֻכּוֹת: ס 18 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר
שְׁכֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן בְּבֹאוֹ מִפַּדַּן אֲרָם וַיִּחַן
אֶת־פְּנֵי הָעִיר: 19 וַיִּקֶן אֶת־חֶלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר

12. Esau assumes that Jacob had been on his way to pay him a visit, so he suggests that they travel together.

at your pace Literally, "corresponding to you."

14. ***while I travel*** The Hebrew verb *n-h-l* probably means to travel from one watering place to another[8] with the cattle.[9]

Seir Jacob encourages Esau to think that his destination is Seir so as to get him to return home as soon as possible. On Seir, see the Comments to 14:6, 25:25, and 32:4.

16. ***So Esau started back*** He now fades from the scene of recorded history, reappearing briefly for Isaac's funeral (35:29). Esau's genealogies are given in chapter 36.

17. ***Succoth*** No sooner has Esau departed southward for Seir than Jacob turns northward, recrossing the Jabbok. Judges 8:5,8 show that Succoth was quite near Penuel, but much closer to the Jordan. Jacob obviously wishes to position himself on the east-west road that connected Canaan with the major north-south artery that led from Damascus.

A large tell, Deir 'Allah, situated in the center of the fertile Jordan Valley, is now identified with Succoth. This location is supported by a tradition in the Palestinian Talmud (Shev. 9:2 [38d]) associating Succoth with *Tr'lh,* that is Deir 'Allah, as well as the impressive size of the mound. Only a large city would have lent its name to the entire valley, the "Valley of Succoth" mentioned in Psalms 60:8 and 108:8.

a house . . . stalls This act signifies an intentionally prolonged stay at this place before crossing the Jordan into Canaan. Jewish tradition fixes the period at eighteen months.[10] Jacob's purpose may have been to utilize the natural resources of this fertile valley in order to recoup what he gave away to Esau.

JACOB'S RETURN TO CANAAN (vv. 18–20)

After a stay at Succoth, Jacob finally returns to his native land. This momentous event is recorded with a minimum of detail, but the names mentioned effect the transition to the next episode.

18. ***arrived*** Hebrew *va-yavo'* is the appropriate verb with which to conclude the account of Jacob's odyssey that commenced with its antonym *va-yetse',* "he departed" (28:10).

Without doubt, the patriarch crossed the Jordan by the ford near the biblical city Adam of Joshua 3:16, the modern Tell ed-Damieh, situated about 16 miles (27.75 km.) up the river from Jericho, from which a road leads to Shechem.

where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred kesitahs. [20]He set up an altar there, and called it El-elohe-yisrael.

נָטָה־שָׁם אָהֳלֹו׃ מִיַּד בְּנֵי־חֲמֹור אֲבִי שְׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה
קְשִׂיטָה׃ [20] וַיַּצֵּב־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא־לֹו אֵל אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ס חמישי

safe Hebrew *shalem* has generated varying interpretations. It may mean "safe and sound" and would thus resonate with 28:21, "If I return safe *(be-shalom)*. . . ."[11] It could also denote "in friendship" toward the inhabitants, a rendering echoed in 34:21 and illustrated by the next verse. The ancient versions and some medieval exegetes take *shalem* to be a place-name referring to the village of Salim, about 4 miles (6.5 km.) east of Shechem.

the city of Shechem The next verse and chapter 34 make clear that Shechem is here a personal name. Abraham similarly made this city of Shechem his first goal when he entered the land. There he built the first altar, and there he received the first divine promise that his offspring would inherit the land (12:7). The city and its history are discussed in Excursus 26.[12]

encamped before the city This conforms to the practice of the patriarchs in generally sticking to the fringes of the cities, entering them only rarely.

19. Also, like Abraham before him, Jacob, now Israel, purchases a plot of ground, his first acquisition in the future Land of Israel. This is an expression of faith in God's promises that his descendants would inherit the land. Ibn Ezra comments: "This text informs us that the Land of Israel possesses a singular excellence and that whoever owns a portion therein has, as it were, a portion in the Hereafter."

Jacob's objective is not stated. It can hardly have been for the purpose of building an altar, for none of the other patriarchal altars required purchase of the ground on which it stood. More likely, he intended settling here permanently, a plan thwarted by the development related in the next chapter. Like Abraham, he may have had in mind establishing a family burial ground. This suggestion is supported by Joshua 24:32, which records that Joseph was eventually buried on this plot.

the children of Hamor Since the sale involves the permanent alienation of their ancestral estate, the entire clan needs to be involved in the transaction. (See the Introduction to chap. 23.)

Shechem's father This note, like the seemingly intrusive "Ham, the father of Canaan" in 9:22, anticipates the next episode.

a hundred kesitahs The exact price is given, as in the case of the purchase of Machpelah in chapter 23, because the real estate is to be acquired in perpetuity and the sale must be final and incontestable.

The *kesitah,* mentioned again only in Job 42:11, is an unknown unit of weight. It is not a coin, for coinage does not appear in the Bible until after the period of the monarchy. According to a widespread tradition, *kesitah* means "a lamb." The extensive use of cattle as a medium of commercial exchange in ancient times survives in the word "pecuniary" from Latin *pecus,* "cattle." Another tradition takes the *kesitah* as a piece of jewelry of fixed weight.[13]

20. He set up an altar Unlike the other patriarchal altars, this one neither responds to a theophany nor is used for worship. Rather, it constitutes a pillar celebrating the safe arrival home after a prolonged absence filled with ever-present peril and recurring crises and commemorating the change of name from Jacob to Israel. The Hebrew verb *va-yatsev* is connected with *matsevah,* "a pillar," and is never used of the erection of altar for sacrifice.[14] Altars with purely commemorative or testimonial functions were also built by Moses after the war with the Amalekites and by the Transjordanian tribes in Gilead, as described in Exodus 17:15 and Joshua 22:10, 26:28.

El-elohe-yisrael Literally, "El/God, God of Israel." Although it may seem strange to give such a name to an altar, the several similar examples show this to have been unexceptional.[15] The use of Israel in this name refers to the patriarch.

34 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daughters of the land. 2Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. 3Being

ל״ד וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בַּת־לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב
לִרְאוֹת בִּבְנוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃ 2 וַיַּרְא אֹתָהּ שְׁכֶם בֶּן־
חֲמוֹר הַחִוִּי נְשִׂיא הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֹתָהּ

CHAPTER 34

The Ravishing of Dinah (vv. 1–31)

The aged patriarch has returned to his native land after a prolonged absence filled with trials and tribulations, no doubt looking forward to spending his remaining years in calm and comfort. But his serenity is shattered by a fresh series of misfortunes, the first of which is the ravishing of his only daughter Dinah by the infatuated prince of the neighboring city-state of Shechem. In retaliation, the city is assaulted by Jacob's sons. The attack threatens the survival of the patriarch's clan.

This narrative exemplifies, once again, a major theme of the patriarchal stories: the sexual depravity of the inhabitants of the land. This has been illustrated by the accounts of Lot and the men of Sodom and by the repeated threats to the matriarchs Sarah and Rebekah. The "Helen of Troy" motif, discussed in the Comment to 12:11, is here vividly represented.

The juxtaposition of the present narrative with the previous one creates an impression of rapid chronological sequence, although the text gives no time indication. However, it is clear that Jacob must have spent several years in the neighborhood of Shechem prior to this incident; otherwise, Dinah and her two brothers would have been far too young to have played the roles here assigned to them.[1]

THE ASSAULT (vv. 1–7)

1. ***Dinah*** The information about her parentage, already known from 30:21, is repeated here to clarify the singular role of Simeon and Levi (v. 25): They were her full brothers.[2]

went out Girls of marriageable age would not normally leave a rural encampment to go unchaperoned into an alien city. The text casts a critical eye upon Dinah's unconventional behavior through use of the verbal stem *y-ts-'*, "to go out." Like its Akkadian and Aramaic equivalents, the verb can connote coquettish or promiscuous conduct.[3]

the daughters of the land This phrase too carries undertones of disapproval, as is clear from 24:3,37, among other passages.[4]

2. ***Shechem son of Hamor*** Both 33:19 and Joshua 24:32 refer to "the children of Hamor." Judges 9:28 indicates that in the period of the judges the Hamorites were regarded as pure-blooded aristocrats, the remnant of the ancient Shechemite nobility. The term *ḥamor* means "ass." As was noted in the Comment to 15:9, "to kill a donkey foal" means "to conclude a covenant" in the Mari texts. Hence, "sons of Hamor" may be a term for "those bound together by treaty" or "sons of a confederacy." The city-state of Shechem appears to have had a mixed population. It may well have originated through a confederacy of various clans.

the Hivite See Comment to 10:17.

chief of the country Not "the city," because the city-state of Shechem in pre-Israelite times extended its control over a vast area that at one time included the central hill country as far as the borders of Jerusalem and Gezer to the south and Megiddo to the north, a domain of about 1,000 square miles. Egyptian and Akkadian texts reflect this situation. Thus the inscription of Khu-Sebek about the Asiatic campaign of Sen-Usert III (Sesostris III, ca. 1880–1840 B.C.E.) reports: "His majesty reached a foreign country of which the name was Shechem (Sekmem)." An El-Amarna letter similarly refers to "the Land of Shechem."[5]

Hamor is called "chief" *(nasi')*, whereas the head of a Canaanite city-state is generally termed

strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. 4So Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as a wife."

5Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. 6Then Shechem's father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. 7Meanwhile Jacob's sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter—a thing not to be done.

וַיְעַנֶּהָ׃ 3 וַתִּדְבַּק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בַּת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֶּאֱהַב
אֶת־הַנַּעַר וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לֵב הַנָּעַר׃ 4 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֶם
אֶל־חֲמוֹר אָבִיו לֵאמֹר קַח־לִי אֶת־הַיַּלְדָּה הַזֹּאת
לְאִשָּׁה׃ 5 וְיַעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טִמֵּא אֶת־דִּינָה בִּתּוֹ
וּבָנָיו הָיוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה וְהֶחֱרִשׁ יַעֲקֹב עַד־
בֹּאָם׃ 6 וַיֵּצֵא חֲמוֹר אֲבִי־שְׁכֶם אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לְדַבֵּר
אִתּוֹ׃ 7 וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה כְּשָׁמְעָם
וַיִּתְעַצְּבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּחַר לָהֶם מְאֹד כִּי־נְבָלָה
עָשָׂה בְיִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁכַּב אֶת־בַּת־יַעֲקֹב וְכֵן לֹא

v. 3. הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳ הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳

"king." Hamor's unusual title reflects political and historical reality. The ruler of Shechem has dominion over rural—that is, tribal—territory as well as the urban center, in this case a confederacy of various ethnic elements. Such a complex situation does not permit absolute power. Indeed, Hamor does not act like a king. He has to call a town meeting in order to present his plans before the citizens, and he obtains approval by means of persuasive argument rather than by coercion or fiat.

took . . . lay . . . force Three Hebrew verbs of increasing severity underscore the brutality of Shechem's assault on Dinah.[6]

3. drawn . . . love . . . spoke Three expressions of affection correspondingly describe his feelings after the deed. Unlike the case of Amnon, whose spent passion quickly turns into intense hatred of his victim (2 Sam. 13:15), Shechem is hopelessly enamored of Dinah.

4. to his father Marriage arrangements were customarily negotiated by a parent on behalf of the son.[7]

"Get me" Literally, "take for me." The same Hebrew stem, *l-k-ḥ,* is used in verse 2 for the abduction. This "taking" is to make amends for the other.[8]

5. that he had defiled The subject is Shechem of verse 4. The dastardly act is now defined in religio-moral terms, a judgment reiterated in verses 13 and 27.

Even more terrible than the offense against the person and dignity of the girl and the assault upon the honor of the family is the pollution of the moral environment. The entire community becomes infected by such wanton deeds.

Jacob kept silent The need to exercise restraint, pending the arrival of his sons, is understandable, but his passivity throughout the entire incident is remarkable.

6. Apparently, Hamor arrives before the brothers and is left cooling his heels until they come home. Shechem has accompanied his father but judiciously remains in the background until it is opportune for him to enter the picture.

came out The same verbal stem used for Dinah's action in verse 1, this second "going out" is intended to ameliorate the disastrous consequences of the first.

to speak to him To enter into negotiations leading up to marriage.[9]

7. having heard the news It seems that Jacob urgently summoned his sons.[10]

an outrage Hebrew *nevalah* is a powerful term describing offenses of such profound abhorrence that they threaten to tear apart the fabric of Israelite society.[11] For society's own self-protection, such atrocities can never be tolerated or left unpunished.

Israel This is an anachronism. The idea is that those sacred, inviolable norms that constituted the moral underpinnings of the later people of Israel were already operative at this time.

a thing not to be done Not in Israel, not in any civilized society.[12]

[8]And Hamor spoke with them, saying, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. [9]Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: [10]You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it." [11]Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, "Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. [12]Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife."

[13]Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor —speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah—[14]and said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to

יַעֲשֶׂה׃ 8 וַיְדַבֵּר חֲמוֹר אִתָּם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנִי
חָשְׁקָה נַפְשׁוֹ בְּבִתְּכֶם תְּנוּ נָא אֹתָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃
9 וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אֹתָנוּ בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֶת־
בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִּקְחוּ לָכֶם׃ 10 וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשֵׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ
תִּהְיֶה לִפְנֵיכֶם שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּהָ וְהֵאָחֲזוּ בָהּ׃
11 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֶם אֶל־אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אַחֶיהָ אֶמְצָא־חֵן
בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וַאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֵּן׃ 12 הַרְבּוּ עָלַי
מְאֹד מֹהַר וּמַתָּן וְאֶתְּנָה כַּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָי
וּתְנוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנַּעַר לְאִשָּׁה׃ 13 וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב
אֶת־שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר אָבִיו בְּמִרְמָה וַיְדַבֵּרוּ אֲשֶׁר
טִמֵּא אֵת דִּינָה אֲחֹתָם׃ 14 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיהֶם לֹא

v. 12. הַנַּעֲרָה ק׳

THE SPEECHES OF HAMOR AND SHECHEM (vv. 8–12)

The legal situation is unclear, and the ancient Near Eastern law collections offer little help. Only the Middle Assyrian laws (A, par. 55) deal with the rape of an unbetrothed virgin. The offender must compensate her father a fixed amount in silver over and above the bride-price for virgins, and the father can decide whether or not to let his daughter marry her violator. This is practically identical with the law of Exodus 22:15–16, which prescribes that the ravisher must take his unbetrothed victim to wife unless her father decides otherwise. Either way, he must pay the bride-price for virgins. In the present instance, the question arises whether Jacob, an alien seminomad, could claim redress against the ruler of the city. Hamor deals with the family only on account of his son's amorous and matrimonial interests. He omits any mention of the crime; it is as though nothing has happened! Actually, the terms offered by Hamor are unrelated to the immediate and stated purposes of his visit; they are clearly a cunning appeal to avarice as a means of placating Jacob and his sons, purchasing their docility, and inducing them to let the incident be forgotten. The effectiveness of the strategy is reinforced by the grim fact that Dinah is still being held in Hamor's house within the city (vv. 17,26). When Hamor is through, the aggrieved family is considered to be sufficiently mollified for Shechem to present himself. He too ignores his crime and offers neither apology nor regrets. He does, however, intimate a willingness to pay generous compensation.

10. ***move about*** This seems to be the basic meaning of the stem *s-ḥ-r*. It would imply unlimited grazing rights. But the term could just as well be used in its developed sense of "to trade, barter," which is how the ancient versions render it.[13]

acquire holdings This last is the most valuable of the privileges offered, even as it is also a subtle and pointed reminder to Jacob of his present alien and disadvantaged position.

12. ***bride-price . . . gifts*** Hebrew *mohar, mattan.* From Exodus 22:16 and 1 Samuel 18:25, it is clear that *mohar* can only be a technical term for the payment made by the prospective husband in return for the bride. It would correspond to the Akkadian *tirḫatum,* discussed in the Comment to 24:53. The amount is usually fixed by custom. Shechem's indicated readiness to pay far beyond that constitutes a tacit recognition of the need to make reparations. The second term would appear to correspond to the Akkadian *biblum,* the ceremonial gifts made to the bride's family, called *migdanot* in 24:53. Thus an Akkadian marriage document from Alalakh records: "In accordance with the custom of the city of Aleppo, he [the groom] brought him [the bride's father] a betrothal gift *(nidnu)*." Hebrew *mattan* is the cognate of *nidnu* and probably here refers to the same thing.

THE BROTHERS' RESPONSE (vv. 13–17)

Although outwardly polite, Hamor, in effect, has besmirched the characters of Jacob and his sons. By inference, he has attributed to them a sordid, mercenary concern that outweighs all other consid-

give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. 15Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised. 16Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. 17But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go."

18Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. 19And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father's house. 20So Hamor and his son

נוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לָתֵת אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ
לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עָרְלָה כִּי־חֶרְפָּה הִוא לָנוּ׃ 15 אַךְ־
בְּזֹאת נֵאוֹת לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כָמֹנוּ לְהִמּוֹל לָכֶם
כָּל־זָכָר׃ 16 וְנָתַנּוּ אֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיכֶם
נִקַּח־לָנוּ וְיָשַׁבְנוּ אִתְּכֶם וְהָיִינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד׃
17 וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהִמּוֹל וְלָקַחְנוּ אֶת־
בִּתֵּנוּ וְהָלָכְנוּ׃ 18 וַיִּיטְבוּ דִבְרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חֲמוֹר
וּבְעֵינֵי שְׁכֶם בֶּן־חֲמוֹר׃ 19 וְלֹא־אֵחַר הַנַּעַר
לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בְּבַת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נִכְבָּד
מִכֹּל בֵּית אָבִיו׃ 20 וַיָּבֹא חֲמוֹר וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־

erations, thus adding insult to injury. Accordingly, in their reply, the brothers first address themselves to the business at hand: Shechem's desire to marry Dinah. They make clear that the prerequisite of circumcision is more important to them than all material allurements.

13–14. The brothers' response is introduced by three expressions of speech as counterpoint to the three terms used for Shechem's assault on Dinah and the three terms of affection (vv. 2–3).

with guile The Narrator informs us at once that the brothers' seeming acceptance of intermarriage with the Shechemites is merely a ruse. No moral judgment is intended and would, in fact, be gratuitous. The victim of the assault is still being held by the perpetrator (vv. 17,26), who has not even admitted to a crime, let alone expressed regret. There is no way that Dinah can be liberated by a tiny minority in the face of overwhelming odds—except by the exercise of cunning.

he had defiled This reminder of the enormity of the offense places the "guile" in proper perspective.

their sister So again in verse 27, in contrast to verses 1 and 5, which describe Dinah as Jacob's daughter. The phrase functions both to dissociate Jacob from their plans and to stress the special obligation that devolves upon brothers in this type of society.

14. ***uncircumcised*** Although the institution of circumcision is here used as a device by which to immobilize the males, there can be no doubt that the stipulation reflects normative practice among the tribes of Israel. Genesis 17:9–14 makes circumcision the indispensable precondition for admittance into the community of Israel, and Exodus 12:43–49 logically forbids an uncircumcised male to participate in the passover sacrifice. It should be noted that the speech of the brothers is heavy with irony: The part of the body used by Shechem in his violent passion will itself become the source of his own punishment!

17. ***we will take our daughter*** Once again the stem is *l-k-ḥ,* as in verses 2 and 6. Its use here has an ominous ring.[14]

RESPONSE OF THE SHECHEMITES (vv. 18–24)

For his son's personal gratification, Hamor has unilaterally agreed to conditions that make grueling demands upon his fellow citizens. He must therefore win their approval, which he does by insisting that his proposals are only meant to advance the material well-being of the city. Of course, Hamor and Shechem do not disclose their private, selfish interest in the matter.

19. ***lost no time*** The text is anticipating developments in order to indicate Shechem's furious ardor. He could hardly have appeared at the public assembly had he just been circumcised.

the most respected He served as a role model for the others, who were soon influenced by his initiative.

Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, 21"These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. 22But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. 23Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so that they will settle among us." 24All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

25On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the

שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אַנְשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר׃
21 הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלֵמִים הֵם אִתָּנוּ וְיֵשְׁבוּ
בָאָרֶץ וְיִסְחֲרוּ אֹתָהּ וְהָאָרֶץ הִנֵּה רַחַבַת־יָדַיִם
לִפְנֵיהֶם אֶת־בְּנֹתָם נִקַּח־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ
נִתֵּן לָהֶם׃ 22 אַךְ־בְּזֹאת יֵאֹתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
לָשֶׁבֶת אִתָּנוּ לִהְיוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד בְּהִמּוֹל לָנוּ כָּל־
זָכָר כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נִמֹּלִים׃ 23 מִקְנֵהֶם וְקִנְיָנָם וְכָל־
בְּהֶמְתָּם הֲלוֹא לָנוּ הֵם אַךְ נֵאוֹתָה לָהֶם וְיֵשְׁבוּ
אִתָּנוּ׃ 24 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חֲמוֹר וְאֶל־שְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ כָּל־
יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמֹלוּ כָּל־זָכָר כָּל־יֹצְאֵי שַׁעַר
עִירוֹ׃ 25 וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בִּהְיוֹתָם כֹּאֲבִים
וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי־בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחֵי דִינָה אִישׁ
חַרְבּוֹ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בֶּטַח וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל־זָכָר׃

20. ***public place*** Literally, "the gate," which served as the civic center. See the Comments to 19:1 and 23:10.

their fellow townsmen Literally, "the men of their city," the popular assembly of free citizens who must rule on major items of public business such as the granting of special privileges to an alien group. Similar urban political institutions with the same name are well documented in the El-Amarna texts for several city-states in the Syro-Canaanite area.

21. ***our friends*** The reference may well be to some existing treaty arrangement between the city of Shechem and the clan of Jacob. City-states that dominated a wide area usually regulated their relationships with the nomadic groups within their domain by means of formal treaties.

23. Hamor has conveniently omitted the promise of landed property rights for the newcomers and has perfidiously inserted the assurance of dispossessing them of their belongings. As the occasion is a formal, public ratification of the agreement, Hamor is clearly guilty of double dealing.

24. The citizens who comply with the terms are described as "all who went out of the gate of his town." In the case of Abraham's negotiations with the Hebronites, reported in 23:10,18, the involved citizenry is designated as "all who entered the gate of his town." The distinction, if any, is unclear. Each phrase may be an ellipsis for "all who go out and enter . . . ," that is, all free citizens. Another, more probable, suggestion is that "go out" is short for "go out to war." The verb *y-ts-'* is used in such a context in 2 Kings 5:2 and Amos 5:3. This would encompass the males of military age, the group available for intermarriage with Jacob's clan. Support for this interpretation may be found in verses 25 and 29, which show that only adult males were slain. Incidentally, the use of *y-ts-'* forms an associative link with verses 1 and 6, extending the chain of events that issued from Dinah's original "going out."

THE PUNITIVE ACTION (vv. 25–29)

The ruse works. The able-bodied males are incapacitated. Two of Dinah's brothers slaughter them and rescue their sister. The other brothers plunder the city.

25. ***On the third day*** By now all the males have been circumcised.[15]

Simeon and Levi These were Dinah's full brothers, who would feel her molestation and humiliation all the more keenly.

took each his sword To avenge the violence of Shechem, who "took" Dinah (v. 2).

males. [26]They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. [27]The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled. [28]They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; [29]all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

[30]Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed." [31]But they answered, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

26 וְאֶת־חֲמוֹר וְאֶת־שְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרְגוּ לְפִי־חָרֶב
וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָה מִבֵּית שְׁכֶם וַיֵּצֵאוּ: 27 בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב
בָּאוּ עַל־הַחֲלָלִים וַיָּבְזוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טִמְּאוּ
אֲחוֹתָם: 28 אֶת־צֹאנָם וְאֶת־בְּקָרָם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־בָּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקָחוּ:
29 וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם וְאֶת־כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם
שָׁבוּ וַיָּבֹזּוּ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבָּיִת: 30 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
אֶל־שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל־לֵוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישֵׁנִי
בְּיֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ בַּכְּנַעֲנִי וּבַפְּרִזִּי וַאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר
וְנֶאֶסְפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי:
31 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכְזוֹנָה* יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחוֹתֵנוּ: פ

זין רבתי v. 31.

unmolested Hebrew *betaḥ* may connect with the verb, with the sense of "meeting no resistance" or "confidently"; or it may refer to the state of the city, with the sense of "unsuspecting, caught off guard."[16]

26. ***took Dinah . . . went away*** The entire affair began with Dinah "going out" and being "taken" (vv. 1,2). It concludes with the same two verbs, but in reverse order. As far as Simeon and Levi are concerned, the account is settled. These two take no part in the plunder of the city.

27. The other brothers had desisted from carnage but now seize the opportunity to pillage. The city itself is not destroyed.

because The Narrator is at pains to stress that the brothers were stirred to action because of the defilement of their sister, not simply for the love of booty.

28–29. The passage balances verse 23. Instead of the Hivites appropriating the possessions of the sons of Jacob, their possessions pass into the hands of their intended victims.

JACOB'S REACTION (vv. 30–31)

Jacob now intervenes for the first time and berates Simeon and Levi for recklessly jeopardizing by their actions the very survival of the entire clan. There is no indication as to how Jacob relates to the larger moral issue that innocent people are punished for the crimes of a few. On his deathbed Jacob strongly censures Simeon and Levi for acts of violence and cruelty: "Simeon and Levi are a pair; / Their weapons are tools of lawlessness. / Let not my person be included in their council, / Let not my being be counted in their assembly. / For when angry they slay men, / And when pleased they maim oxen. / Cursed be their anger so fierce, / And their wrath so relentless. / I will divide them in Jacob, / Scatter them in Israel." (Gen. 49:5–7) It seems probable that the text is referring to the assault on the city of Shechem, as well as to excesses on the part of the two brothers that are not recorded in the present narrative.

30. ***brought trouble*** The Hebrew phrase, literally an ellipsis for "muddy the waters," is figuratively used for "disturb the peace, cause trouble."[17]

making me odious Ellipsis for "making my breath to stink."[18]

the Perizzites See Comment to 13:7. According to Joshua 11:3 and 17:15, this people occupied the central hill country, that is, the region of Shechem.

31. The two brothers have the last word. As with the Book of Jonah, the closing rhetorical question provides an irresistible argument. The women of Israel are not to be regarded as objects of abuse. They cannot be dishonored with impunity.

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." 2So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst, purify yourselves, and change your clothes. 3Come, let us go up to

ל״ה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵית־
אֵל וְשֶׁב־שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה
אֵלֶיךָ בְּבָרְחֲךָ מִפְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ הָסִרוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי
הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם וְהִטַּהֲרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ

CHAPTER 35

The Bethel Tradition (vv. 1–15)

This chapter completes the cycle of independent traditions about Jacob, the subsequent recorded episodes of his life all being intertwined with the biography of Joseph. The events recounted here are unusually varied, and some extremely fragmentary. We appear to have an assortment of isolated data about the patriarch and his family. Generally, however, the literary components of the chapter enjoy an inner cohesiveness.

The connection with the previous chapter can be established in several ways. Jacob's departure from Shechem is conditioned by the fears he expresses in 34:30; verse 5 of the present chapter is in direct response to them. The idols mentioned in verses 2 and 4 most likely derive largely from the looting of Shechem. The theme of sexual offense is shared by both chapters, and in both cases Jacob maintains his silence, which is expressed by means of the Hebrew verb *sh-m-ʿ*, "to hear." In both instances, as is clear from 49:3–7, sons of Jacob forfeit their place in the line of leadership succession. Chapter 34 is dominated by the theme of defilement; this chapter opens with the subject of purification. Finally, both narratives exhibit a consciousness of Israelite distinctiveness. This is expressed through sexual purity and the rite of circumcision in the preceding story and through the renunciation of idolatry in the present one.

THE PILGRIMAGE TO BETHEL (vv. 1–7)

Jacob is seized with panic after his sons' massacre of the Shechemites, and he fears reprisals from the neighboring peoples, who may well have been bound to Shechem by treaty obligations. God's intervention transforms ignominious flight into a dignified pilgrimage to Bethel.

1. ***Arise, go up*** The phrasing indicates both the character of the trek—a pilgrimage[1]—and the nature of the locale—about 1,000 feet (300 m.) higher than Shechem.

remain there Jacob, in fact, continues his journeying southward and does not stay at Bethel. The directive has added meaning if taken as a reminder of his flight from Esau, for it echoes 27:43–44: "*Flee* at once to Haran, to my brother Laban; *stay* with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides. . . ." Jacob is reminded of the reversal of his fortunes; now he no longer needs to flee, and he may remain at Bethel, without fear, as long as he chooses.

build an altar The building of altars by the patriarchs is in each case an act of homage and loyalty to God. It is of special significance when performed at a site known to be sacred to pagans, meaning that the patriarch deliberately disdains the existing cultic appurtenances and dissociates the sanctity of the site from its pagan antecedents. As explained in the Comment to 12:8, Bethel had a long Canaanite prehistory.

the God Hebrew *'el,* and not the regular *'elohim,* is purposefully used here because it evokes Bethel, as in 31:13. Jacob is reminded that he has not yet fulfilled the vow made at Bethel (28:20–22).

2. Jacob vowed at Bethel that if he returned from his exile safe and sound, "the LORD shall be my God." Hence, before embarking on the pilgrimage to that city, he makes formal renunciation of "alien gods." For the first time in the Bible, there now appears a recognition of tension between the religion of Israel and that of its neighbors.

Bethel, and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." [4]They gave to Jacob all the alien gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that was near Shechem. [5]As they set out, a terror from God fell on the cities round about, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

[6]Thus Jacob came to Luz—that is, Bethel—in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. [7]There he built an altar and named the site El-bethel, for it was there that God had revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

שְׁמִלֹתֵיכֶם: 3 וְנָקוּמָה וְנַעֲלֶה בֵּית־אֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה־
שָּׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לָאֵל הָעֹנֶה אֹתִי בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי וַיְהִי
עִמָּדִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָלָכְתִּי: 4 וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶל־יַעֲקֹב
אֵת כָּל־אֱלֹהֵי הַנֵּכָר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם וְאֶת־הַנְּזָמִים
אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּטְמֹן אֹתָם יַעֲקֹב תַּחַת הָאֵלָה
אֲשֶׁר עִם־שְׁכֶם: 5 וַיִּסָּעוּ וַיְהִי חִתַּת אֱלֹהִים עַל־
הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתֵיהֶם וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְּנֵי
יַעֲקֹב: 6 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב לוּזָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן הִוא
בֵּית־אֵל הוּא וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ: 7 וַיִּבֶן שָׁם
מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי שָׁם נִגְלוּ
אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אָחִיו: 8 וַתָּמָת דְּבֹרָה

all who were with him Including the captives taken at Shechem.

Rid yourselves The use of this formula is usually connected with some specific public ritual symbolizing rededication to the God of Israel.[2]

alien gods Hebrew *nekhar,* "foreignness," invariably connotes non-Israelite. The idols are probably household gods found among the spoils of Shechem or carried by the captives. The phrase may also include the *terafim* that Rachel stole, as mentioned in 31:19.[3]

purify yourselves It is not clear whether this act, together with the clothes-changing, belongs to the rite of renunciation of idols and reflects the widespread biblical notion of the polluting effect of contact with them.[4] The purpose could as well be to expel the bodily impurity acquired through contact with corpses at Shechem. It is also possible that the two rites are attendant upon the impending pilgrimage to Bethel, in which case purification, certainly by means of immersion in water, would effectuate the passage from profane to sacred space. Or the purification might be in preparation for an experience with God, as required at Sinai (Exod. 19:10) and also before the crossing of the Jordan under Joshua (Josh. 3:5).

change your clothes Laundering is the usual precondition of purification. This is a stricter requirement, signifying a transition from one state to another.[5]

3. ***who answered me when I was in distress*** In addressing his entourage, Jacob omits the unlovely specifics of verse 1 and generalizes. The language is poetic, in fact liturgical, as befits the occasion—a grateful acknowledgment of God's beneficence. Compare Psalms 20:1: "May the LORD answer you in time of trouble, / the name of Jacob's God keep you safe."

4. ***the rings*** These are no ordinary pieces of jewelry but talismans adorned with pagan symbols.[6]

buried them This procedure is unparalleled in the laws and narratives relating to the disposal of pagan cultic images.[7] The method prescribed in Deuteronomy 7:5,25 is utter destruction, especially incineration. That is how Moses handled the golden calf. Behind Jacob's extraordinary interment of the idols intact under the tree may be an intention to neutralize veneration of the terebinth. This cultic object, discussed in the Comment to 12:6, could not henceforth be used by a monotheist.

5. Jacob's fears proved groundless. The surrounding city-states are themselves petrified.

6. ***Luz*** The earlier name of the city, according to 28:19.

7. ***the site*** Hebrew ***makom,*** as often, means "sacred site." See Comment to 12:6.

El-bethel Literally, "the God of Bethel," that is, the One whose associations with Jacob were repeatedly bound up with Bethel.[8] For the naming of an altar after God, see Comment to 33:20.

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

[9]God appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. [10]God said to him,

מֵינֶקֶת רִבְקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת
הָאַלּוֹן וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ אַלּוֹן בָּכוּת: פ 9 וַיֵּרָא
אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב עוֹד בְּבֹאוֹ מִפַּדַּן אֲרָם וַיְבָרֶךְ
אֹתוֹ: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים

God had revealed Himself Atypically, the Hebrew has the verb in the plural suggesting that, as in 3:5, *'elohim* means here "divine beings" and refers to Jacob's dream of angels ascending and descending.[9] The unresolved difficulty is that these angels did not "reveal" themselves, that is, address him, unless the present text represents some tradition not told in 28:12.

THE DEATH OF DEBORAH (v. 8)

Three deaths are recorded in this chapter. The account of the passing of Deborah is puzzling since the demise of a woman is reported only in exceptional cases in the Torah; even the deaths of the matriarchs Rebekah and Leah are passed over in silence. Why, then, should Deborah warrant special mention, particularly since nothing of her life is told other than the brief note in 24:59, and she has no known connection with Jacob?

Jewish exegetes tried to solve the riddle by reference to 27:45.[10] Since Rebekah had promised to send for Jacob when Esau's anger subsided, they surmise that she had recently sent Deborah to Jacob in fulfillment of this pledge. However, at age 130, Deborah would have been an unlikely candidate for such a mission. Clearly, the present notice is not in its proper chronological sequence, which makes the intrusive nature of verse 8 all the more perplexing.

The presumption seems unavoidable that traditions about Deborah, which would make the context of the present notice intelligible, were widely known to reader and Narrator alike in biblical times, but they were not included in the Torah. One such must have related to her association with a site south of Bethel where there was a prominent tree known as Allon-bacuth. This name was popularly interpreted to mean "the oak of weeping," and folklore connected it with Deborah's death because she was buried close by. Since Jacob arrived at the spot, and due to the similarity of fact and phrase—the burials "under the oak" (Heb. *taḥat ha-'allon*) and "under the terebinth" (Heb. *taḥat ha-'elah*)—the notice is inserted here. There may be a deeper purpose as well. With the purging of idolatry and the arrival at Bethel, the contacts with Mesopotamia, maintained by each of the patriarchs, are finally and decisively severed. The mention of the death of Deborah thus becomes appropriate here for she was a living symbol of that connection.

THE THEOPHANY AT BETHEL (vv. 9–15)

Jacob has executed the divine charge given in verse 1. God, for His part, now fulfills the prayer offered by Isaac in 28:3–4, as Jacob departs for Haran. That invocation reads: "May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly of peoples. May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham."

The reference is to the divine promises recorded in 17:1–8. It is not merely by coincidence that Jacob follows Abraham's initial itinerary, first stopping at Shechem and then proceeding to the Bethel area, building altars at both sites. The journey, in fact, has symbolic meaning. The wording and content of God's blessings to Jacob are directly dependent on the Abrahamic prototype. Other links with chapter 17 are the change of name, the blessings, and the law of circumcision. The first two elements appear here too, while the institution of circumcision was central to the preceding narrative.

9–10. Jacob's name is changed to Israel for the second time. In 32:28–29 it was not God personally but an angelic being, most likely the celestial patron of Esau, who made the pronounce-

"You whose name is Jacob,
You shall be called Jacob no more,
But Israel shall be your name."
Thus He named him Israel.
[11]And God said to him,
"I am El Shaddai.
Be fertile and increase;
A nation, yea an assembly of nations,
Shall descend from you.
Kings shall issue from your loins.
[12]The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac
I assign to you;
And to your offspring to come
Will I assign the land."
[13]God parted from him at the spot where He had spoken to him; [14]and Jacob set up a pillar at the site where He had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it. [15]Jacob gave the site, where God

שִׁמְךָ יַעֲקֹב
לֹא־יִקָּרֵא שִׁמְךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב
כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ
וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים
אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדָּי
פְּרֵה וּרְבֵה
גּוֹי וּקְהַל גּוֹיִם יִהְיֶה מִמֶּךָּ
וּמְלָכִים מֵחֲלָצֶיךָ יֵצֵאוּ׃ שׁשׁי
12 וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם וְלִיצְחָק
לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה
וּלְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃
13 וַיַּעַל מֵעָלָיו אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר
אִתּוֹ׃ [ששי לספרדים] 14 וַיַּצֵּב יַעֲקֹב מַצֵּבָה
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ מַצֶּבֶת אֶבֶן וַיַּסֵּךְ עָלֶיהָ
נֶסֶךְ וַיִּצֹק עָלֶיהָ שָׁמֶן׃ 15 וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שֵׁם

ment. Moreover, it was made on the other side of the Jordan. Therefore, the new name "Israel" needs to be confirmed and validated by God Himself in the promised land. The fact that God is said to appear "again" and that, remarkably, no rationale for the new name is given here, shows a dependency on the earlier narrative.

The significance of the new name emerges from the succeeding blessing, which is national in scope and consists of the promise of fertility, nationhood, kingship, and territory. Jacob, by becoming also Israel, is the true heir to the Abrahamic promises, the one through whom the nation of Israel is to come into being.

*11. **I am El Shaddai*** The same as in 17:1.

Be fertile and increase Compare 17:2,6: "I will make you exceedingly numerous . . . I will make you exceedingly fertile."

A nation, yea an assembly of nations Compare 17:4,5,6: "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations. . . ."

Kings shall issue from your loins Compare 17:6: "Kings shall come forth from you."

*12. **The land . . .*** Compare 17:8: "I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come. . . ."

*13. **God parted from him*** Literally, "God ascended from upon him," that is, the theophany came to an end. This phrase also is influenced by chapter 17, in which verse 22 reads, literally: "And when He was done speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham."

14. To commemorate the experience, Jacob sets up a stone pillar, just as he had on the earlier occasion. The object and its anointing are discussed in the Comment to 28:18–19. The text does not clarify whether this is the rededication of the original pillar of 28:18 or the erection of a new one. On this occasion, unlike the earlier, Jacob pours upon it a libation. Hebrew ***nesekh*** usually means a wine offering and is nowhere else found in Genesis. Moreover, it is here poured on the pillar, not on the altar. This combination of anomalies indicates that the ceremony Jacob here performs is not simply a duplication of the earlier one but has an added dimension. He is rehabilitating the original stela, which is now invested with new meaning. An interesting parallel may perhaps be drawn from an inscription by Sennacherib, king of Assyria and Babylonia (704–681 B.C.E.): "When that palace shall have become old and ruined, may some future prince restore its ruins, look upon the stele with my name inscribed [on it], anoint it with oil, pour out a libation upon it, and return it to its place."[11]

had spoken to him, the name of Bethel.

16They set out from Bethel; but when they were still some distance short of Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. 17When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Have no fear, for it is another boy for you." 18But as she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem. 20Over her grave Jacob set up a

הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אִתּוֹ שָׁם אֱלֹהִים בֵּית־אֵל׃
16 וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל וַיְהִי־עוֹד כִּבְרַת־הָאָרֶץ לָבוֹא
אֶפְרָתָה וַתֵּלֶד רָחֵל וַתְּקַשׁ בְּלִדְתָּהּ׃ 17 וַיְהִי
בְּהַקְשֹׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמְיַלֶּדֶת אַל־
תִּירְאִי כִּי־גַם־זֶה לָךְ בֵּן׃ 18 וַיְהִי בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי
מֵתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן־אוֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא־לוֹ בִנְיָמִין׃
19 וַתָּמָת רָחֵל וַתִּקָּבֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָתָה הִוא בֵּית
לָחֶם׃ 20 וַיַּצֵּב יַעֲקֹב מַצֵּבָה עַל־קְבֻרָתָהּ הִוא

*15. **Bethel*** No interpretation of the name is given. As was explained in the Comment to 28:17–19, a *bethel* was a specific type of stone pillar, one that commemorated the Divine Presence in the capacity of monitor and witness.

Family Affairs (vv. 16–29)

THE DEATH OF RACHEL; THE BIRTH OF BENJAMIN (vv. 16–20)

Jacob moves south from Bethel. For the second time since his homecoming, tragedy strikes: His beloved Rachel dies in childbirth. He first set eyes on her when he arrived at Haran after the theophany at Bethel. Just as, at the beginning of their relationship, he had been separated from her by a cruel ruse of Laban, so at the end a cruel ruse of fate separates her from him in the grave.

In 48:3–7, when Jacob is on his deathbed, he repeats in the same order the events here recorded: the blessing at Bethel and the demise of Rachel while giving birth to Benjamin. The juxtaposition reflects a reality apart from the time sequence. The blessing contained a promise of kingship, which first found fulfillment in the person of King Saul, a Benjaminite.

*16. **some distance*** Hebrew *kivrat ha-'arets* is of uncertain derivation and meaning. Other than 48:7, which is a citation from this passage, it appears again only in 2 Kings 5:19, where it must designate a distance short enough for a runner to catch up with a chariot on the move.[12]

Ephrath The problem of locating the site is discussed in Excursus 27.

*17. **Have no fear*** Rachel is comforted in her death agony by the knowledge that God answered the prayer she had uttered after the birth of Joseph: "May the Lord add another son for me."[13]

*18. **Ben-oni*** The name has been almost universally understood to mean "son of my sorrow." It could also be "son of my vigor," a euphemism for "son of my debility"—that is, "his birth drained my strength."[14]

Benjamin Jacob either reinterprets *ben-'oni* or replaces it by a more auspicious name. The meaning could be, "son of my right hand," the right being a symbol of dexterity, power, protection.[15] Another rendering is "son of the south," that is, "the one born in the south." Such a meaning, suggested by Rashi, finds analogy in the Mari texts, which refer to tribal confederations of *DUMU Meš-yamina,* "sons of the south, Southerners," as opposed to *DUMU Meš-sim'al,* "sons of the north, Northerners." A third possibility, put forward by Rashbam, takes *yamin* for *yamim,* "days," so that Benjamin would mean "son of my old age." In 44:20 he is called "a child of his old age." This is the interpretation given in the Testament of Benjamin 1:16 of Second Temple times. In the Samaritan Pentateuch the name is regularly written "Minyamin."

Benjamin is the only son born in Canaan. In terms of tribal history, this means that it was the last to become part of the Israelite tribal league. The traditions represented by the account of Benjamin's birth must be very ancient and not retrojections from later history for the simple reason that here

pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel's grave to this day. 21Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder.

מַצֶּבֶת קְבֻרַת־רָחֵל עַד־הַיּוֹם: 21 וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל
וַיֵּט אָהֳלָה מֵהָלְאָה לְמִגְדַּל־עֵדֶר: 22 וַיְהִי בִּשְׁכֹּן

Joseph and Benjamin are brothers, "Rachel tribes," whereas after the settlement period Benjamin was adjacent to, and its fortunes politically bound up with, Judah, rather than with his fraternal Joseph tribes.

THE TOMB OF RACHEL (vv. 19–20)

The text tells of the death and burial of Rachel and of a stone memorial marker set up over her grave. It is clear from 1 Samuel 10:2 that in the time of Samuel, about 1020 B.C.E., "the tomb of Rachel" was a famous landmark. The traditional site, presently so-called, lies about 4 miles (6.5 km.) south of Jerusalem and 1 mile (1.6 km.) north of Bethlehem. It is repeatedly described in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim sources since the fourth century C.E. Through the ages it has served as a place of pilgrimage for Jews on New Moons, during the month of Elul, and on the fourteenth of Marheshvan, the traditional anniversary of Rachel's death. The present small, square-shaped, domed structure, which was featured on the pictorial stamp issued for Palestine by the British government between 1927 and 1948, is relatively modern. In 1841 the tomb was renovated through the generosity of Sir Moses Montefiore. In 1948 it was taken over by Jordanian invaders, Jews were excluded from it, and the area was converted into a Muslim cemetery. It was liberated by Israel in 1967.

REUBEN'S WANTON CHALLENGE (vv. 21–22a)

Jacob continues his journey. At one encampment his first-born son Reuben cohabits with Bilhah. She was Rachel's maid, whom she had given to her husband as a co-wife and who had borne him Dan and Naphtali. The account of Reuben's incest is succinct to the point of obscurity.

This incident is directly linked to the foregoing because it is Rachel's demise that presents the occasion for Reuben's act. By violating Bilhah, Reuben makes sure that she cannot supplant or even rival his mother's position of chief wife now that Rachel is dead. As a statement in Shabbat 55b expresses it, "He resented his mother's humiliation. He said, 'If my mother's sister was a rival to my mother, must the maid of my mother's sister be a rival to my mother?'" In this connection, it is interesting that Reuben had earlier been involved in the attempt to get his father to restore the conjugal rights of his mother (30:14–16). As a result of Reuben's cohabitation with Bilhah, she would thereby acquire the tragic status of "living widowhood," as happened to David's concubines whom he left behind when he fled Jerusalem and who were possessed by his son Absalom, as recounted in 2 Samuel 15:16, 16:22, and 20:3.

Why did Reuben choose to accomplish his purpose by the particular means reported? The Torah legislation of Leviticus 18:8 and 20:11, reinforced by the curse of Deuteronomy 27:20, forbids a sexual relationship between a son and the wife of his father. The proscription probably reacts against the widespread practice of the eldest son inheriting the wives of his father along with the estate. Such was customary among pre-Islamic Arabs until outlawed by the Koran (4:19), and the practice may have existed in contemporary Canaanite society in Jacob's time. As the first-born son, Reuben, in effect, prematurely lays claim to an inheritance that he would have expected to be his eventually.

This leads to a third consideration that is crucial to the understanding of the Reuben-Bilhah episode. It is apparent from several biblical stories and from ancient Near Eastern texts that in matters of leadership, possession of the concubine(s) of one's father or of one's vanquished enemy on the part of the aspirant or usurper bestowed legitimacy on the assumption of heirship and validated the succession. That is why Ish-bosheth, son of Saul, was so alarmed when Abner lay with his father's concubine and why the accused had to defend his loyalty (2 Sam. 3:7–8). This same principle explains why Nathan's censure of David when he took Bathsheba included this sentence: "Thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: 'It was I who anointed you king over Israel and it was I who rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and possession of your master's wives . . .'" (2 Sam. 12:7–8). The same explains Absalom's actions in the passages cited above, and that is why King Solo-

22While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel found out.

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

יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָרֶץ הַהִוא וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־
בִּלְהָה פִּילֶגֶשׁ אָבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ פ וַיִּהְיוּ
בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר׃ 23 בְּנֵי לֵאָה בְּכֹור יַעֲקֹב
רְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי וִיהוּדָה וְיִשָּׂשכָר וּזְבוּלֻן׃
24 בְּנֵי רָחֵל יוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן׃ 25 וּבְנֵי בִלְהָה שִׁפְחַת
רָחֵל דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי׃ 26 וּבְנֵי זִלְפָּה שִׁפְחַת לֵאָה גָּד
וְאָשֵׁר אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ בְּפַדַּן אֲרָם׃

פסקא באמצע פסוק v. 22.

mon, in 1 Kings 2:13–25, could interpret the request of Adonijah for Abishag as proof of treasonable intentions.

All this leads to the conclusion that Reuben's bid to promote his mother's rights is at the same time a calculated challenge to his father's authority. His move is more political than lustful. The summary account in this verse hides an attempt to usurp the leadership of the Israelite tribes. Its failure is reflected in Jacob's rebuke of 49:3–4, in which he removes Reuben from hegemony over the tribes. In 1 Chronicles 5:1 the text explicitly relates that Reuben was "the first-born of Israel, but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph." It is not unlikely that the involvement of Reubenites in the wilderness rebellion against Moses, recorded in Numbers 16, also is in some way connected with that tribe's loss of status.

For further information on the history of the Reubenites, see Comment to 49:3–4.

*21. **Migdal-eder*** The name means "herd-tower" and designates a structure built to provide protection against raiders of the flocks.[16] On its location, see Excursus 27.

*22. **Reuben went*** The verb suggests a calculated act.

concubine Only here is Bilhah so called. The term has sociolegal implications within the context of the situation described above.

Israel found out Literally, "heard." The same phrase occurs in Numbers 12:2 in connection with the slandering of Moses: "The Lord heard it." It suggests impending reaction to the offense, but none occurs here. Instead, the received Hebrew text has a *piska' be-'emtsa' pasuk*, "a paragraph [that ends] with the middle of a verse." The exact significance of this device is unclear. It may here draw attention to the anomaly. At any rate, there is certainly much more to the story than is here revealed. This kind of sensitivity to the unlovely details is reflected in the rule in Mishnah Megillah 4:10: "The story of Reuben is read [in public in the synagogue] but not rendered [into Aramaic]."

THE LIST OF JACOB'S SONS (vv. 22b–26)

With the birth of Benjamin, the family of Jacob is complete, and it is appropriate to list it in full, particularly since the next chapter is to feature the genealogies of Esau. The roster also indicates that, despite Reuben's misdeed, the unity of the family remained intact. The listing also specifies through whom the blessing of verse 11, "Be fertile and increase," is to be realized and through whom the people of Israel come into being. Each son listed is the eponymous ancestor, or founding father, of a tribe. In short, the list constitutes a fitting conclusion to the cycle of independent Jacob narratives.

The sequence of names follows a pattern. There are four lists of names divided according to matriarchal origin, each beginning with a formula. First mentioned are the two wives in order of seniority, then come the two handmaids in reverse order to form a chiasm:

v. 23 Leah — v. 25 Bilhah
v. 24 Rachel — v. 26 Zilpah

The entire list is encased in a general formula.

in Paddan-aram The reader is expected tacitly to exclude Benjamin, who was not born there.

27 וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יִצְחָק אָבִיו מַמְרֵא קִרְיַת
הָאַרְבַּע הִוא חֶבְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר־גָּר־שָׁם אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק:
28 וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי יִצְחָק מְאַת שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה:
29 וַיִּגְוַע יִצְחָק וַיָּמָת וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו זָקֵן וּשְׂבַע
יָמִים וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב בָּנָיו: פ

ל״ו וְאֵלֶּה תֹּלְדוֹת עֵשָׂו הוּא אֱדוֹם: 2 עֵשָׂו
לָקַח אֶת־נָשָׁיו מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן אֶת־עָדָה בַּת־אֵילוֹן
הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־אָהֳלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֲנָה בַּת־צִבְעוֹן הַחִוִּי:

27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. 28 Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old 29 when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

36 This is the line of Esau—that is, Edom.
2 Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women —Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah

THE DEATH OF ISAAC (vv. 27–29)

This report of Isaac's death does not appear in chronological order.[17] It is placed here because it gives the opportunity to reintroduce Esau, thus providing a connective with the next chapter.

27. ***Hebron*** The family moved here from Beer-sheba (28:10).

29. For the formula used here, see Comment to 25:8. The place of interment is not mentioned, but 49:29–32 make clear that it was the Cave of Machpelah, where Rebekah had been buried.

Esau and Jacob The names are in order of seniority. However, in the account of Abraham's burial, given in 25:9, the order is reversed because Ishmael was the son of a handmaid.[18]

CHAPTER 36

The Line of Esau (vv. 1–43)

In the preceding chapter, the list of Jacob's offspring marks the completion of the series of independent narratives about Jacob; in the present chapter all mention of Esau in the Book of Genesis is brought to a conclusion with the listing of Esau's descendants. The notice of Abraham's death in 25:7–10 was followed by the detailing of the line of his elder son; the report of Isaac's demise conforms to the same pattern. In both cases the genealogy functions as a connective that links two series of narratives in which one generation gives way to the next. The architectonic unity is cemented by the double formula, "This is the line of . . . These are the names of . . .," in both 25:12–13 and verses 9–10 of this chapter, a stylistic device that occurs nowhere else in the book.

The genealogical tables here also serve a theological purpose. Esau was the subject of a divine oracle and the recipient of a patriarchal blessing (25:23; 27:39–40), and the data now given show how these were fulfilled in history. The rise and development of the Edomite tribes, like the fortunes of Israel, are determined by the workings of God's Providence and are part of His grand design of history.

Finally, the close connection with the previous chapter is reinforced by the list of Edomite kings given in verses 31–39. "Kings shall issue from your loins," God promised Jacob, and a major theme of chapter 35 is the birth of Benjamin, whose tribe supplied the first king of Israel. The present chapter appropriately details "the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites."

The chapter divides into seven units. It is reasonable to assume that the information they contain was originally derived from Edomite literary traditions or archival materials.

ESAU'S WIVES AND SONS IN CANAAN (vv. 1–5)

The text provides a detailed list of Esau's three wives and the five sons they bore him in Canaan, indicating a confederation of three basic tribal groupings (see the chart of Esau's wives and descendants, below). On the surface, the raw data are presented objectively. In actuality, the epithet "Canaanite women" is undoubtedly derogatory, as a glance at 26:3,37, 27:46, and 28:1,6,8 shows. Esau's marriages violated the conventions of his family and flouted their values, a verdict discussed in the Comment to 26:34–35. This explains why the order of wives in verses 2–3 differs from that in all subsequent lists in this chapter. Adah and Oholibamah are here grouped together in order to emphasize their Canaanite—and hence unacceptable—origins. A daughter of Ishmael cannot be so described, as 28:8–9 makes clear. Historically, of course, the marriage notices reflect ethnic interrelationships and register the absorption of Canaanite clans into the Edomite sphere.

A. ESAU'S WIVES

1. (Gen. 36:1–3)

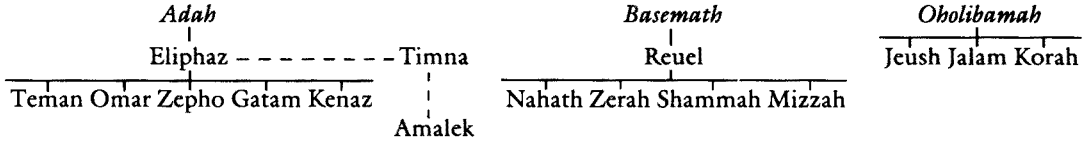
Adah	*Oholibamah*	*Basemath*
daughter of Elon the Hittite	daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite	daughter of Ishmael sister of Nebaioth

2. (Gen. 26:34; 28:9)

Judith	*Basemath*	*Mahalath*
daughter of Beeri the Hittite	daughter of Elon the Hittite	Daughter of Ishmael sister of Nebaioth

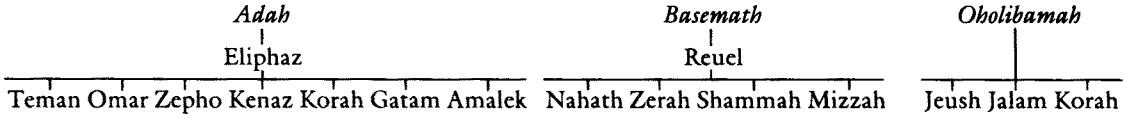
B. THE DESCENDANTS OF ESAU

Gen. 36:9–14



C. THE 'ALLUFIM

(Gen. 36:15–19)



D. THE EDOMITES

(Gen. 36:40–43)

Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, Iram

daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite—[3]and also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. [4]Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; [5]and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. Those were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

[6]Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land because of his brother Jacob. [7]For their possessions were too many for them to dwell together, and the land where they sojourned could

3 וְאֶת־בָּשְׂמַת בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל אֲחוֹת נְבָיוֹת׃
4 וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה לְעֵשָׂו אֶת־אֱלִיפָז וּבָשְׂמַת יָלְדָה
אֶת־רְעוּאֵל׃ 5 וְאָהֳלִיבָמָה יָלְדָה אֶת־יעוּשׁ וְאֶת־
יַעְלָם וְאֶת־קֹרַח אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אֲשֶׁר יֻלַּד־לוֹ
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ 6 וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת־נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־בָּנָיו
וְאֶת־בְּנֹתָיו וְאֵת כָּל־נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ
וְאֶת־כָּל־בְּהֶמְתּוֹ וְאֵת כָּל־קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אָחִיו׃
7 כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רָב מִשֶּׁבֶת יַחְדָּו וְלֹא יָכְלָה
אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לָשֵׂאת אֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מִקְנֵיהֶם׃

יְעוּשׁ ק׳ v. 5.

A glance at the earlier information about Esau's marriages, given in 26:34 and 28:9, indicates at once that two separate traditions have been preserved (see chart, section A.2). The only name common to both is Basemath, but her parentage and ethnic identification differ in each source. Traditional commentators attempted to resolve the difficulties by postulating double names for each person or by assigning Esau five or six wives in all.

1. ***This is the line of*** . . . For the *'elleh toledot* formula, see Comment to 2:4.

Edom The name is repeated another ten times in this chapter, variously functioning as a personal name, as the name of a people, and as the designation for its national territory. On Edom, see the Introduction to chapter 25 and Comment to 25:25,30.

2. ***Adah*** This is also the name of Lamech's first wife (4:19–20).

Elon the Hittite According to 26:34, he had a daughter Basemath.

Oholibamah The first element of her name signifies a "tent, tent-shrine"; the second, a "shrine, cult place." The compounding of names from the element *'hl* is widespread in the regions of southern Arabia and Phoenicia.[1]

Anah The element *'n* appears in several Near Eastern personal names and seems to belong to a god.[2]

daughter of Zibeon Here and in verse 14, the Samaritan, Septuagint, and Syriac versions read "son of."

the Hivite The problem of the Hivites is discussed in the Comments to 10:17 and 14:6.

3. ***Basemath*** The name, like that of Ishmael's son Mibsam and of Abraham's second wife Keturah, means "spice," and, like them, suggests an involvement of the clan in the spice trade of the ancient Near East, as explained in the Comment to 25:1,13.

sister of Nebaioth In 28:9 the daughter of Ishmael whom Esau married, and who has this same description, is named Mahalath. In Aramaic, the stem *ḥ-l-'* means "sweetness," which is more appropriate than "sickness," the usual understanding derived from the Hebrew.

5. ***born to him in the land of Canaan*** The formula corresponds to that used of Jacob in 35:26.

THE MIGRATION TO SEIR (vv. 6–8)

We are now told that, for social and economic reasons, Esau pulls up stakes and transfers his entire household and all his livestock out of Canaan and into the hill country of Seir. This territory, which lay southeast of the Dead Sea alongside the Arabah, is described in the Comment to 25:25. Seir

not support them because of their livestock. 8So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir—Esau being Edom.

9This, then, is the line of Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir.

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

8 וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שֵׂעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֱדוֹם׃
9 וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת עֵשָׂו אֲבִי אֱדוֹם בְּהַר שֵׂעִיר׃
10 אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־עֵשָׂו אֱלִיפַז בֶּן־עָדָה אֵשֶׁת
עֵשָׂו רְעוּאֵל בֶּן־בָּשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו׃ 11 וַיִּהְיוּ בְּנֵי
אֱלִיפַז תֵּימָן אוֹמָר צְפוֹ וְגַעְתָּם וּקְנַז׃ 12 וְתִמְנַע
הָיְתָה פִילֶגֶשׁ לֶאֱלִיפַז בֶּן־עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לֶאֱלִיפַז

henceforth becomes the national territory of Esau/Edom. Deuteronomy 2:5, and later Joshua 24:4, have God declaring, "I give Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession."

The migration to Seir is noted in other texts. Deuteronomy 2:12,22 record the dispossession and extermination of the Horites by "the descendants of Esau" prior to the Israelite conquest of Canaan. In Abraham's day only Horites were in this region, as is apparent from Genesis 14:6. The one source that connects Esau's migration with Jacob is the present verse. The difficulty is that the narrative presupposes the presence of Esau in Seir already earlier, independently of Jacob's return from his exile. This is abundantly clear from the incidents mentioned in 32:4 and 33:14,16. On the other hand, Esau is present in Hebron for Isaac's burial and is not said to have come there especially for the occasion.

Jewish exegetes, such as Bekhor Shor and Ramban, envisaged Esau as a nomad wandering over an area that covered both Canaan and Seir, until his permanent settlement in Seir after Jacob's return.

6. ***went to another land*** The word "another" is not in the Hebrew text but is supplied by the Aramaic Targums.[3] The Syriac renders, "to the land of Seir."

because of his brother Jacob Esau recognizes Jacob's right to Cisjordan; otherwise, he could have insisted that Jacob be the one to leave.

7. Esau's migration is determined by social and economic factors—overcrowding and the insufficiency of natural resources. This recalls the separation of Lot from Abraham, as told in 13:7–8.

ESAU'S DESCENDANTS IN SEIR (vv. 9–14)

This second genealogy of Esau repeats the data of the preceding one but continues the line to the third generation for Adah and Basemath (see chart, p. 247, section B). As for Oholibamah, only her sons are listed, and they are placed on a par with the grandsons of the other wives. This suggests that her group endured a lower social status than the others. Further, only in this list is Amalek noted to be the son of a concubine and, as such, of inferior station. These facts raise the possibility that this genealogy functions to express status relationships.

The sequence of wives is given according to the number of their respective offspring in descending order of magnitude—five, four, and three. Excluding the inferior Amalek, there are twelve legitimate descendants in all, intimating the existence of a twelve-tribe confederation, just like that of the Nahorites (22:20–24), the Ishmaelites (17:20; 25:13–16), and, of course, the Israelites, as recounted in 35:22–26.

11. Of the five names associated with Eliphaz, only Teman and Kenaz are otherwise familiar. The first is also a place-name, one of the most important in Edom.[4] It sometimes designates the country as a whole. It has been identified with Tawilan, northeast of the Arab village of Elji on the eastern outskirts of Petra. A considerable amount of Edomite pottery has been found there, reaching back to the Early Iron Age. Another view locates it in Shobak, northeast of Petra. The identity of a personal and geographical name indicates a close connection between the tribe and a particular territory. Verse 34 makes reference to "the land of the Temanites," leading to the possibility that Teman was a designation for southern Edom. The name has nothing to do with Hebrew ***teiman*** for Yemen.

she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Adah. [13]And these were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. [14]And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

[15]These are the clans of the children of Esau. The descendants of Esau's first-born Eliphaz: the clans Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, [16]Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the clans of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. Those are the descendants of Adah. [17]And these are the descendants of Esau's son Reuel: the clans Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the clans of Reuel in the land of Edom. Those are the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. [18]And these are the descendants of Esau's wife Oholibamah: the clans Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the clans of Esau's

אֶת־עֲמָלֵק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עָדָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו: 13 וְאֵלֶּה
בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל נַחַת וְזֶרַח שַׁמָּה וּמִזָּה אֵלֶּה הָיוּ בְּנֵי
בָּשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו: 14 וְאֵלֶּה הָיוּ בְּנֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה
בַּת־עֲנָה בַּת־צִבְעוֹן אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְעֵשָׂו אֶת־
יעיש וְאֶת־יַעְלָם וְאֶת־קֹרַח: 15 אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי בְּנֵי־
עֵשָׂו בְּנֵי אֱלִיפַז בְּכוֹר עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף תֵּימָן אַלּוּף
אוֹמָר אַלּוּף צְפוֹ אַלּוּף קְנַז: 16 אַלּוּף קֹרַח אַלּוּף
גַּעְתָּם אַלּוּף עֲמָלֵק אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי אֱלִיפַז בְּאֶרֶץ
אֱדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עָדָה: 17 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל בֶּן־
עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף נַחַת אַלּוּף זֶרַח אַלּוּף שַׁמָּה אַלּוּף
מִזָּה אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי רְעוּאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי
בָּשְׂמַת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו: 18 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה
אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו אַלּוּף יְעוּשׁ אַלּוּף יַעְלָם אַלּוּף קֹרַח
אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי אָהֳלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֲנָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו:

יְעוּשׁ ק׳ v. 14.

Kenaz appears in the gentillic form "the Kenizzites" in the register of pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan in Abraham's day. They are discussed in the Comment to 15:19.

12. ***Timna . . . Amalek*** Behind this parenthetical note lies social and political history. According to verse 22, Timna was "the sister of Lotan," an indigenous Horite. This means that the Edomites who migrated to Seir began to intermarry with the natives but that such alliances were not socially acceptable, which explains Timna's inferior status here as a concubine rather than as a wife. It also means that, at some period, the Amalekites joined the Edomite tribal confederation and attached themselves to the Eliphaz clans in a subordinate relationship.

The obviously intrusive character of this item, which breaks the connection between the preceding data and the following clause, suggests that its purpose is to draw attention to the Amalekites not being genuine Edomites. This is important because Deuteronomy 23:8–9 forbids an Israelite to "abhor an Edomite," "a kinsman" of Israel. His progeny of the third generation may be admitted to the fellowship of Israel. Not so the Amalekites. They are to be punished for their treacherous, unprovoked aggression against a defenseless Israel at the moment of its national liberation, as described in Exodus 17:8–16 and Deuteronomy 25:17–19.

THE *'ALLUFIM* OF ESAU (vv. 15–19)

This is the third genealogy of Esau (see chart, section C). This time each name is designated an *'alluf.* The word recurs in Exodus 15:15, also in association with Edom.[5] It is undoubtedly connected with Hebrew *'elef,* which signifies a social unit, a subdivision of a tribe, most likely a clan. The term was very meaningful in the premonarchic period before the breakdown of the tribal organization. It is not certain whether *'alluf* is a variant of *'elef* or means the "chief" of a clan. In verses 19, 40, and 43, "clan" seems to fit the context better.

The names of the *'allufim* are identical with those of the previous list except that there are now two Korahs, one a grandson who appears as part of the lineage of Eliphaz, and the other a son as before. Also, Amalek is no longer in limbo but is on a par with the other sons of Eliphaz, albeit in last place. The most likely explanation for the differences is that the present list reflects a political development in Edomite tribal history, deriving from a time when a section of the Korahites split off from the Oholibamah group and attached itself to the Eliphaz confederation, into which Amalek too was incorporated.

wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. [19]Those were the sons of Esau—that is, Edom—and those are their clans.

[20]These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were settled in the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, [21]Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, the descendants of Seir, in the land of Edom.

[22]The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. [23]The sons of Shobal were these: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. [24]The sons of Zibeon were these: Aiah and Anah—that was the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the wilderness while pasturing the asses of his father Zibeon. [25]The children of Anah were these: Dishon and Anah's daughter Oholibamah. [26]The sons of Dishon were these: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. [27]The sons of Ezer were these: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. [28]And the sons of Dishan were these: Uz and Aran.

[29]These are the clans of the Horites: the clans Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, [30]Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, clan by clan, in the land of Seir.

19 אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־עֵשָׂו וְאֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵיהֶם הוּא אֱדוֹם׃
ס 20 שבעי אֵלֶּה בְנֵי־שֵׂעִיר הַחֹרִי יֹשְׁבֵי
הָאָרֶץ לוֹטָן וְשׁוֹבָל וְצִבְעוֹן וַעֲנָה׃ 21 וְדִישׁוֹן וְאֵצֶר
וְדִישָׁן אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי הַחֹרִי בְּנֵי שֵׂעִיר בְּאֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם׃
22 וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־לוֹטָן חֹרִי וְהֵימָם וַאֲחוֹת לוֹטָן
תִּמְנָע׃ 23 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי שׁוֹבָל עַלְוָן וּמָנַחַת וְעֵיבָל
שְׁפוֹ וְאוֹנָם׃ 24 וְאֵלֶּה בְנֵי־צִבְעוֹן וְאַיָּה וַעֲנָה הוּא
עֲנָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא אֶת־הַיֵּמִם בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּרָעֹתוֹ אֶת־
הַחֲמֹרִים לְצִבְעוֹן אָבִיו׃ 25 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־עֲנָה דִּישׁוֹן
וְאָהֳלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֲנָה׃ 26 וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי דִישׁוֹן חֶמְדָּן
וְאֶשְׁבָּן וְיִתְרָן וּכְרָן׃ 27 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־אֵצֶר בִּלְהָן וְזַעֲוָן
וַעֲקָן׃ 28 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־דִישָׁן עוּץ וַאֲרָן׃ 29 אֵלֶּה
אַלּוּפֵי הַחֹרִי אַלּוּף לוֹטָן אַלּוּף שׁוֹבָל אַלּוּף
צִבְעוֹן אַלּוּף עֲנָה׃ 30 אַלּוּף דִּישׁוֹן אַלּוּף אֵצֶר
אַלּוּף דִּישָׁן אֵלֶּה אַלּוּפֵי הַחֹרִי לְאַלֹּפֵיהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ

THE INDIGENOUS HORITES OF SEIR (vv. 20–30)

As noted above, the territory of Seir was taken over by Esau. The information given in this chapter, taken in conjunction with the report of Deuteronomy 2:12, adds up to a picture of a violent invasion by the newcomers followed by a process of gradual absorption of the native Horites into the "descendants of Esau." We are now given a genealogy of Seir, who is regarded as the personified eponymous, or name-giving, patriarch of the leading native clans, numbering seven in all. The genealogy extends to a depth of three generations and is somewhat more detailed than the preceding lists.

*20. **the Horite*** This ethnic term is discussed in the Comment to 14:6.

*22. **Lotan's sister was Timna*** She is the concubine of Eliphaz of verse 12.

*24. **Aiah*** The Hebrew has "and Aiah" *(ve-'ayyah)* with no antecedent for the conjunction. The parallel list in 1 Chronicles 1:40 omits the *vav,* as do the Samaritan and the ancient versions here. Most medieval commentators attach no importance to it. However, Joseph Kimhi took it as evidence of some missing information.

Anah The memoir presupposes knowledge of the adventure on the part of the reader. There was obviously once a widely known tale about this person.

the hot springs Hebrew *ha-yemim* is unique and of unknown meaning. The present rendering is that of the Vulgate and has no philological support. The most ancient and widespread Jewish interpretation is "mules," but this apparently rests on nothing more than a similarity of *ha-yemim* to Greek *hēmionos.* This tradition makes Anah a culture hero, the first to crossbreed the horse with the donkey to produce the hybrid mule.[6]

*25. **Anah's daughter Oholibamah*** This apparently superfluous note serves to differentiate this Oholibamah from Zibeon's granddaughter of the same name who married Esau.

*28. **Uz*** See Comment to 10:23.

שֵׂעִיר: פ 31 וְאֵלֶּה הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר מָלְכוּ
בְּאֶרֶץ אֱדוֹם לִפְנֵי מְלָךְ־מֶלֶךְ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
32 וַיִּמְלֹךְ בֶּאֱדוֹם בֶּלַע בֶּן־בְּעוֹר וְשֵׁם עִירֹו
דִּנְהָבָה: 33 וַיָּמָת בֶּלַע וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו יוֹבָב בֶּן־
זֶרַח מִבָּצְרָה: 34 וַיָּמָת יוֹבָב וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו חֻשָׁם
מֵאֶרֶץ הַתֵּימָנִי: 35 וַיָּמָת חֻשָׁם וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו
הֲדַד בֶּן־בְּדַד הַמַּכֶּה אֶת־מִדְיָן בִּשְׂדֵה מוֹאָב וְשֵׁם
עִירֹו עֲוִית: 36 וַיָּמָת הֲדַד וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו שַׂמְלָה
מִמַּשְׂרֵקָה: 37 וַיָּמָת שַׂמְלָה וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו שָׁאוּל
מֵרְחֹבוֹת הַנָּהָר: 38 וַיָּמָת שָׁאוּל וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו
בַּעַל חָנָן בֶּן־עַכְבּוֹר: 39 וַיָּמָת בַּעַל חָנָן בֶּן־

[31]These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites. [32]Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, and 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 of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. [35]When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Avith. [36]When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. [37]When Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-on-the-river succeeded him as king. [38]When Saul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as king. [39]And when Baal-hanan son of

THE EDOMITE KINGS (vv. 31–39)

This list is not a genealogy. It details eight kings who reigned in Edom prior to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. The register bristles with difficulties, which are discussed in Excursus 28.

*31. **in the land of Edom*** Not necessarily over all Edom.[7]

before any king reigned over the Israelites That is, before the reign of Saul, first king of Israel, through whom the divine promises of kingship for Israel, recorded in 17:6 and 35:11, were first fulfilled. This development was critical for the history of Edom because it was then that the ancient prophecy to Rebekah of 25:23—"The older shall serve the younger"—and Isaac's blessing to Esau in 27:40—"You shall serve your brother"—began to materialize. According to 1 Samuel 14:47, Saul waged war against the Edomites. David reduced Edom to vassaldom, all but wiped out the royal house, and placed Israelite garrisons and governors in the land, as narrated in 2 Samuel 8:2,13–14 and 1 Kings 11:14–17.

*32. **Dinhabah*** This site has not been located, and it is unclear whether it is Bela's royal residence or his family seat.

*33. **Jobab*** The Greek translation of Job carries an addendum identifying that personality with this Jobab, a tradition known to but rejected by Ibn Ezra.

Bozrah This was a city of such major importance that it is sometimes equated with Edom as a whole.[8] It is identified with modern Buseirah, some 20 miles (35 km.) south-southeast of the Dead Sea and 35 miles (56 km.) north of Petra. Excavations have revealed a well-fortified town covering nearly twenty acres that flourished in the eighth century B.C.E.

*34. **of the land of the Temanites*** See above, verse 11.

*35. **Hadad*** The name of an ancient Semitic storm-god later identified with Baal, head of the Canaanite pantheon.

Midianites This nomadic people, descendant of Abraham according to 25:2, spread out in a wide arc stretching from the Sinai Peninsula through the Negeb and northwestern Arabia. The stories of Balaam and Baal-peor give evidence of Midianite clans in the region of Moab.[9]

Avith An unknown place.

*36. **Masrekah*** The name seems to indicate a grape-growing region. It may be the site known today as Jebel el-Mushrak, about 22 miles (35 km.) south-southwest of Ma'an.

*37. **Rehoboth-on-the-river*** Usually "the river" in the Bible is the Euphrates, but this is very far from Edom. Here it may refer to Wadi el-Hesa, the natural border between Edom and Moab.[10]

Achbor died, Hadar succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.

[40]These are the names of the clans of Esau, each with its families and locality, name by name: the clans Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, [41]Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, [42]Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, [43]Magdiel, and Iram. Those are the clans of Edom—that is, of Esau, father of the Edomites—by their settlements in the land which they hold.

עַכְבּוֹר וַיִּמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו הֲדַר וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ פָּעִו וְשֵׁם
אִשְׁתּוֹ מְהֵיטַבְאֵל בַּת־מַטְרֵד בַּת מֵי זָהָב:
מפטיר 40 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת אַלּוּפֵי עֵשָׂו
לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לִמְקֹמֹתָם בִּשְׁמֹתָם אַלּוּף תִּמְנָע
אַלּוּף עַלְוָה אַלּוּף יְתֵת: 41 אַלּוּף אָהֳלִיבָמָה
אַלּוּף אֵלָה אַלּוּף פִּינֹן: 42 אַלּוּף קְנַז אַלּוּף תֵּימָן
אַלּוּף מִבְצָר: 43 אַלּוּף מַגְדִּיאֵל אַלּוּף עִירָם אֵלֶּה
אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם לְמוֹשְׁבֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתָם הוּא עֵשָׂו
אֲבִי אֱדוֹם: פ

38. ***Baal-hanan*** He is the only king whose place-name is not given. Apparently, the Edomite source used by the writer was defective here.

39. ***Hadar*** The parallel list in 1 Chronicles 1:50–57, as well as the Samaritan, Syriac, and numerous Hebrew manuscripts, read here Hadad, as in verses 35–36, above. The Septuagint reads *Adad.* On the graphic confusion of ***resh*** and ***dalet,*** see Comment to 10:4 on Dodanim.

This eighth Edomite king could well have been an older contemporary of King Saul. The usual note that he died is here omitted. By the time of David, Saul's successor, dynastic kingship existed in Edom. This emerges from the story in 1 Kings 11:14–22, according to which Hadad of the royal house is heir presumptive to the throne. He may have been the grandson of the eighth king listed here.

Pau An unknown place.

his wife's name His own father is not named, but his wife's mother and grandmother are, indicating a very distinguished ancestry for her.

EDOMITE *'ALLUFIM* (vv. 40–43)

This list (see chart, section D) is apparently arranged by localities that are identical with the clan names. There are eleven in all, of which four, or possibly five, have been mentioned in the previous registers. The list may reflect Edomite administrative arrangements. The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 1:57 seems to interpret it as describing the state of leadership after the death of the last king.

41. ***Elah*** Most likely Elath on the Gulf of Akaba. According to Deuteronomy 2:8, this place marked the southernmost boundary of Edom.

Pinon Undoubtedly Punon, mentioned in Numbers 33:42–43 as one of the stations of the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings. It is identified with Feinan, an important copper-mining area on the slopes of the hills of Edom, east of the Arabah, about 20 miles (35 km.) south of the Dead Sea.

42. ***Mibzar*** The name means "fortification" and is probably the same as Bozrah in verse 33. It parallels Edom in Psalms 108:11.

43. ***which they hold*** Esau's death is not recorded, but his story closes on this note. The use of the Hebrew stem *'-ḥ-z,* "to hold," is quite likely an artful echo of the story in 25:26 that describes Esau's heel as being held *('-ḥ-z)* by Jacob at their birth.

VA-YESHEV

וישב

ל״ז וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃ ² אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף בֶּן־שְׁבַע־

37 Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan. ²This, then, is the line of Jacob:

CHAPTER 37

Prologue to the Joseph Story (vv. 1–36)

Va-Yeshev

The rest of the Book of Genesis is devoted to the story of Joseph—except for the abrupt and puzzling intrusion of the episode of Judah and Tamar (chap. 38) and Jacob's moving last testament (chap. 49). The present section and the preceding chapter are linked by their depiction of the contrasting fortunes of Esau and Jacob. Esau has already attained peoplehood and has established kingship and tribal territory in the hill country of Seir, to which his clan had migrated (36:6–8,43; cf. Deut. 2:5). But Jacob must go down to Egypt where his offspring will become enslaved, as foretold in the covenant God made with Abraham: "Your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs" (15:13). This same picture of contrasting destinies appears as an explicit element in Joshua's farewell speech to the tribal confederation delivered at Shechem: "I gave Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession, while Jacob and his children went down to Egypt" (Josh. 24:4). Both events belong to God's scheme of history; from now on, however, it will be the fortunes of Israel alone that will engage the attention of the biblical Narrator.

The importance of the Joseph story lies in the fact that it initiates the chain of events that leads to the descent to Egypt; it is the prelude to the drama of oppression and redemption that constitutes the overriding motif of biblical theology. Joseph's experience is the culmination of a series of episodes set in motion by causes that were often temporal, petty, sordid, and mundane. A father's favoritism, tittle-tattle, sibling jealousies, egotistic boyish dreams—all these are elements of a family situation that culminates in explosive tragedy.

The story of Joseph and his brothers differs markedly from the preceding patriarchal narratives. By far the longest and most complete narrative in Genesis, it is set forth by a master storyteller who employs with consummate skill the novelistic techniques of character delineation, psychological manipulation, and dramatic suspense. Another unique feature is the outwardly "secular" mold in which the narrative is cast, the miraculous or supernatural element being conspicuously absent. There are no direct divine revelations or communications to Joseph. He builds no altars. He has no associations with cultic centers. God never openly and directly intervenes in his life. No wonder that Joseph is not included among the patriarchs (cf. Exod. 2:24) and that Jewish tradition restricts that category to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ber. 16b). Nevertheless, the secularity of the story is superficial, for the narrative is infused with a profound sense that God's guiding hand imparts meaning and direction to seemingly haphazard events: when Joseph is lost he meets "a man" who knows exactly where his brothers are (37:15); the caravans of traders happen to be going to Egypt (37:25,28); the Lord is with Joseph in Potiphar's house (39:2) and in prison (39:21f.). It is significant that the name of God comes readily to Joseph's lips at critical moments: when he is confronted by Potiphar's wife (39:9); when he interprets dreams (40:8; 41:16 et seq.); and when he tests his brothers (42:18). The ultimate interpretation of events is given by Joseph himself at the dramatic conclusion of the narrative: "God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (45:7,8).

THE BEGINNING OF HOSTILITY (vv. 1–4)

1. ***Now Jacob was settled in the land*** In contrast to Esau, who had migrated.[1]

where his father had sojourned That is, the land of Canaan, which only Isaac, of the three patriarchs, had never left. More specifically, the reference is to the Hebron region (v. 14), where Jacob had gone to visit his aged father and where his father had died (35:27). Actually, according to the Genesis chronologies, Isaac was still alive when the events in this chapter took place. This may be

עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־אֶחָיו בַּצֹּאן וְהוּא נַעַר
אֶת־בְּנֵי בִלְהָה וְאֶת־בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה נְשֵׁי אָבִיו וַיָּבֵא
יוֹסֵף אֶת־דִּבָּתָם רָעָה אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם׃ 3 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל
אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זְקֻנִים הוּא לוֹ
וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים׃ 4 וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אֹתּוֹ

At seventeen years of age, Joseph tended the flocks with his brothers, as a helper to the sons of his father's wives Bilhah and Zilpah. And Joseph brought bad reports of them to their father. [3]Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. [4]And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they

calculated as follows:[2] to the 13 years Joseph spent in slavery must be added the 7 years of plenty and the 2 years of famine that elapsed before Jacob's migration. To these 22 years must then be added the 17 Jacob spent in Egypt before he died, at age 147. If one deducts the resultant 39 years from the 147, Jacob would have been 108 when Joseph was sold by his brothers. Since Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born, and died at 180, Jacob must have been 120 at the time of Isaac's death. Hence, Isaac lived on another 12 years after the sale of Joseph (see Comment to v. 35).

2. This, then, is the line of Jacob Contrary to usage, no genealogy follows this formula.[3] Mention of Joseph and his brothers is here, in effect, an abbreviated genealogy, the full version of which was already listed in 35:22–26.

tended . . . with his brothers Hebrew *ro'eh 'et* may carry a subtle suggestion of what is to follow since it can also be translated, "he used to lord it over his brothers."[4]

as a helper Hebrew *na'ar* is also used in this sense in describing Joshua's relationship to Moses.[5]

sons of . . . That is, he fraternized, in particular, with Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

Bilhah and Zilpah The order of the wives is here reversed[6] since Joseph would have been naturally closer to Bilhah, his late mother's maid. The concubines were until now referred to as "maidservants" when mentioned together with Rachel and Leah. The use of "wives" here, as Ramban suggests, may indicate a new status acquired after their mistresses had both died.

bad reports of them This is the first of the several causes of enmity between Joseph and his brothers. The nature of the "reports" is not given.

3. Israel loved Joseph best This is the second cause of enmity. Jacob's favoritism was perhaps understandable, for Joseph was the son of his beloved wife Rachel, born after so many years of heartbreak and frustration. It is quite clear from 30:25 that the patriarch looked upon Joseph's birth as signaling the beginning of a new period in his life. Jacob's undisguised partiality intensified the hostility caused by his son's behavior.

Israel Throughout the narrative the two names of the patriarch interchange indiscriminately.

the child of his old age He was the last of Jacob's sons to be born in Paddan-aram.[7]

an ornamented tunic The precise meaning of Hebrew *ketonet passim* remains unclear. In 2 Samuel 13:18–19 the garment is mentioned as the distinctive dress of virgin daughters of royalty. Josephus describes it as "a long-sleeved tunic reaching to the ankle."[8] In Aramaic and rabbinic Hebrew *pas* means the palm of the hand and the sole of the foot. Radak took *passim* to mean "striped." The Septuagint and Vulgate rendered the Hebrew "a robe of many colors."

Ancient Near Eastern art may shed some light on the subject. An Egyptian tomb painting at Beni-hasan from about 1890 B.C.E. features a Semitic clan with the men and women wearing multicolored tunics draped over one shoulder and reaching below the knees. Another Egyptian tomb has a representation of Syrian ambassadors bringing tribute to Tutankhamen. They are dressed in elaborately designed long robes wrapped around the body and over the shoulders. A mural fresco in the palace of King Zimri-lim at Mari, in southeast Syria, shows figures dressed in garments made of many small rectangular panels of multicolored cloth. The discovery of a "*pas* garment" *(lbš psm)* in a list of various articles of clothing from the town of Ugarit, dated not later than the thirteenth century B.C.E., provides a parallel to the biblical phrase but little clarification.[9]

hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.

[5]Once Joseph had a dream which he told to his brothers; and they hated him even more. [6]He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: [7]There we were binding sheaves in the field, when suddenly my sheaf stood up and remained upright; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf." [8]His brothers answered, "Do you mean to reign over us? Do you mean to rule over us?" And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.

[9]He dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers,

אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ
דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם: 5 וַיַּחֲלֹם יוֹסֵף חֲלוֹם וַיַּגֶּד לְאֶחָיו
וַיּוֹסִפוּ עוֹד שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ: 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם שִׁמְעוּ־
נָא הַחֲלוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלָמְתִּי: 7 וְהִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ
מְאַלְּמִים אֲלֻמִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה קָמָה
אֲלֻמָּתִי וְגַם־נִצָּבָה וְהִנֵּה תְסֻבֶּינָה אֲלֻמֹּתֵיכֶם
וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶיןָ לַאֲלֻמָּתִי: 8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אֶחָיו הֲמָלֹךְ
תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מָשׁוֹל תִּמְשֹׁל בָּנוּ וַיּוֹסִפוּ עוֹד
שְׂנֹא אֹתוֹ עַל־חֲלֹמֹתָיו וְעַל־דְּבָרָיו: 9 וַיַּחֲלֹם עוֹד

It may well be that the tunic was a sign of high social standing. It plays a key role in the narrative both because of the jealousy it aroused and because it was the only means by which Jacob could have been convinced that Joseph had been killed (vv. 31ff.).

4. ***loved him*** The Hebrew places the object *'oto* in an emphatic position before the verb: "It was he whom his father loved. . . ."

speak . . . to him Hebrew *dabbero* is unique. Usually the suffix attached to this verb carries a possessive sense, meaning "his speech." The passage would then be translated, "They could not abide his friendly speech." In other words, they rebuffed every attempt by Joseph to be friendly.[10]

JOSEPH'S DREAMS (vv. 5–11)

The third and most menacing source of discord was Joseph's dreams. This situation is easily understood when we view it against the cultural background of the times. Everywhere the dream was recognized as a means of divine communication. In the dreams previously described in Genesis, the revelation is straightforward and the message is conveyed verbally. In the case of Joseph's dreams, however, the language of communication is symbolic. God does not figure explicitly in the content of the dream; yet it is taken for granted that He is the source of the message being conveyed. The predictive aspect of dreams was universally assumed in the ancient world, and this was reason enough for the brothers to take Joseph seriously. However, since the dream was also recognized to be inseparable from the personality of the dreamer, reflecting his own needs and wishes, Joseph bore, in the eyes of his brothers, a measure of responsibility for his highly egocentric vision of superiority and lordship. Joseph's aspirations raised such hostility in his brothers as to inspire a conspiracy to murder (vv. 19–20).

THE FIRST DREAM (vv. 5–8)

5. ***to his brothers*** Not to his father, who does not figure in the first dream.

7. ***binding sheaves*** The documents found at Mari mention that pastoralists, although they were all shepherds, were employed to bring in the harvest. The agricultural motif here hints at the circumstances that will occasion Joseph's rise to greatness (chap. 41).

stood up . . . bowed low A clear assertion of authority by Joseph and of acquiescence on the part of his brothers.

8. Joseph's dreams are self-explanatory in contrast to those of the Egyptians, who need an interpreter to extract meaning from their enigmatic imagery (40:5–13; 41:1–8). The same need is present in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in the Book of Daniel (chaps. 2, 4). There is no record of an Israelite ever requiring the skill of an interpreter of dreams.

And they hated him The threefold repetition of this phrase (vv. 4,5,8) suggests an ever-increasing intensity of hostile emotions.[11]

saying, "Look, I have had another dream: And this time, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." [10]And when he told it to his father and brothers, his father berated him. "What," he said to him, "is this dream you have dreamed? Are we to come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow low to you to the ground?" [11]So his brothers were wrought up at him, and his father kept the matter in mind.

[12]One time, when his brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, [13]Israel said to Joseph, "Your

חֲלוֹם אַחֵר וַיְסַפֵּר אֹתוֹ לְאֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה
חָלַמְתִּי חֲלוֹם עוֹד וְהִנֵּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְאַחַד
עָשָׂר כּוֹכָבִים מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לִי: 10 וַיְסַפֵּר אֶל־אָבִיו
וְאֶל־אֶחָיו וַיִּגְעַר־בּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מָה הַחֲלוֹם
הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר חָלָמְתָּ הֲבוֹא נָבוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמְּךָ וְאַחֶיךָ
לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אָרְצָה: 11 וַיְקַנְאוּ־בוֹ אֶחָיו וְאָבִיו
שָׁמַר אֶת־הַדָּבָר: שני 12 וַיֵּלְכוּ אֶחָיו לִרְעוֹת
אֶת־צֹאן אֲבִיהֶם בִּשְׁכֶם: 13 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־

נקוד על את v. 12.

for his talk about his dreams That is, for his boastful narration of them. Since the phrase is, literally, "for his dreams and for his words," the latter may refer to his reports of their bad conduct.

dreams The plural is odd at this point. It either anticipates the second dream or implies a previous, unreported history of similar vainglorious dreams.[12]

THE SECOND DREAM (vv. 9–11)

9. ***another dream*** Throughout the Joseph narratives, dreams come in pairs[13] in order to demonstrate their seriousness, as noted in 41:32. The possibility of an idle dream was recognized by the ancients. From the literature of the ancient Near East we have accounts of double, triple, and even sevenfold repetition of dreams in which one symbol is successively substituted for another, although the basic meaning and central theme remain the same throughout the series.

the sun . . . This time the dream has a celestial setting and reproduces Joseph's secret thoughts and aspirations in a more obvious manner. The dream now includes his parents among those who are to be subservient to him.

stars This symbolism for the brothers is perhaps suggested by the repeated image comparing Israel to the stars of the heaven.[14]

10. ***and brothers*** Joseph now recounts his dream a second time, in the presence of his father as well. The brothers' silence on both occasions is ominous.

berated him Publicly, hoping thereby not only to relieve the tension, but also to curb Joseph's sense of self-importance.[15]

your mother Since she was long dead (35:19), this is either a distortion, which is not an uncommon element in dreams, or a reference to Joseph's stepmother, Bilhah.[16] Some scholars believe that this verse, along with 44:20, betrays an earlier version of the narrative in which Rachel was still alive at this time. However, if this were so, ten stars, not eleven, would be expected, since Benjamin would not yet have been born.

to the ground Joseph has not uttered this phrase. In adding it, Jacob subconsciously echoes the manner in which he himself had made obeisance to his brother Esau (33:3). Its use here is an intimation of future developments, for it appears in the narrative each time the brothers bow to Joseph in Egypt.[17]

11. The repetition of the dream has established the authenticity and seriousness of the message. Jacob muses upon it. The brothers now look upon him with passionate hatred.

THE SALE OF JOSEPH (vv. 12–36)

12. ***his brothers*** In contrast to the report in verse 2, Joseph was not with them, probably because he was now exempt from labor (see Comment to v. 2).

יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא אַחֶיךָ רֹעִים בִּשְׁכֶם לְכָה וְאֶשְׁלָחֲךָ
אֲלֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הִנֵּנִי: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֶךְ־נָא רְאֵה
אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אַחֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלוֹם הַצֹּאן וַהֲשִׁבֵנִי דָּבָר
וַיִּשְׁלָחֵהוּ מֵעֵמֶק חֶבְרוֹן וַיָּבֹא שְׁכֶמָה:
15 וַיִּמְצָאֵהוּ אִישׁ וְהִנֵּה תֹעֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּשְׁאָלֵהוּ
הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר מַה־תְּבַקֵּשׁ: 16 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־אַחַי
אָנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ הַגִּידָה־נָּא לִי אֵיפֹה הֵם רֹעִים:
17 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ נָסְעוּ מִזֶּה כִּי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֹמְרִים
נֵלְכָה דֹתָיְנָה וַיֵּלֶךְ יוֹסֵף אַחַר אֶחָיו וַיִּמְצָאֵם
בְּדֹתָן: 18 וַיִּרְאוּ אֹתוֹ מֵרָחֹק וּבְטֶרֶם יִקְרַב אֲלֵיהֶם
וַיִּתְנַכְּלוּ אֹתוֹ לַהֲמִיתוֹ: 19 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו

brothers are pasturing at Shechem. Come, I will send you to them." He answered, "I am ready." [14]And he said to him, "Go and see how your brothers are and how the flocks are faring, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

When he reached Shechem, [15]a man came upon him wandering in the fields. The man asked him, "What are you looking for?" [16]He answered, "I am looking for my brothers. Could you tell me where they are pasturing?" [17]The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say: Let us go to Dothan." So Joseph followed his brothers and found them at Dothan.

[18] They saw him from afar, and before he came close to them they conspired to kill him. [19]They said to one

at Shechem See Comment to 12:6. Being pastoral nomads, the brothers periodically move to temporary centers in order to secure pasturage for their livestock. The area around Shechem is blessed with an adequate water supply and fertile soil, and the city itself holds rich associations for Jacob and his family. The patriarch encamped there after returning from his long exile abroad, bought a plot of land, and set up an altar to the "God of Israel" (33:18–20). Joseph's remains were to be later interred in that very plot (Josh. 24:32).

13–14. In view of the relationship between Joseph and his brothers, Jacob's action is surprising and Joseph's ready response no less so. Clearly, the brothers had hitherto successfully disguised their true feelings and, indeed, there is no record of their having uttered any threats against Joseph. Shechem had been the site of a bloody massacre carried out by the brothers, who had apparently captured the city (chap. 34). This incident must have occurred very recently since Dinah was about the same age as Joseph (30:21–24) and could hardly have been younger than about fifteen at the time. Joseph is now seventeen (v. 2). The danger inherent in the brothers' presence in the vicinity of Shechem (cf. 34:30) may have been the source of Jacob's anxiety.[18]

14. ***how . . . are . . . word*** Hebrew *shalom . . . davar,* the same two words, but in reverse order, as used in the hostile context of verse 4. The verbal association suggests the underlying tragedy of the situation.

valley of Hebron A name found nowhere else. Hebron itself was located on a hill (see Comment to 13:18), but the Cave of Machpelah, in which Abraham was buried, was located in a field outside the city and the text may well refer to this area.[19] One midrash sees in the extraordinary mention of this place a hint that the first stage in the fulfillment of the prophecy made to Abraham (15:13) is about to begin.

Hebron . . . Shechem A distance of some 50 miles (80 km.). The south-north watershed road that traversed the central hill country connected these two cities. It split into two at Shechem, one branch turning northwest to Dothan (v. 17).

15–17. The entire journey must have taken about five days by foot. Joseph here exhibits a dogged persistence, undoubtedly a quality that later earned him the confidence of his Egyptian masters during his captivity.

The exchange between Joseph and the man is reported only in briefest outline. To be of help, the stranger surely must have asked for the identity of the brothers.

17. ***Dothan*** An ancient fortress town about 13 miles (21 km.) northwest of Shechem, lying in a valley known for its rich pastureland.[20]

18. The brothers are now far from their father's restraining presence. The mere sight of Joseph ignites their hatred and murderous passions.

another, "Here comes that dreamer! 20Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we can say, 'A savage beast devoured him.' We shall see what comes of his dreams!" 21But when Reuben heard it, he tried to save him from them. He said, "Let us not take his life." 22And Reuben went on, "Shed no blood! Cast him into that pit out in the wilderness, but do not touch him yourselves"—intending to save him from them and restore him to his father. 23When Joseph came up to his brothers, they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the ornamented tunic that he was wearing, 24and took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

הִנֵּה בַּעַל הַחֲלֹמוֹת הַלָּזֶה בָּא׃ 20 וְעַתָּה לְכוּ
וְנַהַרְגֵהוּ וְנַשְׁלִכֵהוּ בְּאַחַד הַבֹּרוֹת וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה
רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ וְנִרְאֶה מַה־יִּהְיוּ חֲלֹמֹתָיו׃
21 וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיַּצִּלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נַכֶּנּוּ
נָפֶשׁ׃ 22 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם רְאוּבֵן אַל־תִּשְׁפְּכוּ־דָם
הַשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּדְבָּר וְיָד
אַל־תִּשְׁלְחוּ־בוֹ לְמַעַן הַצִּיל אֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לַהֲשִׁיבוֹ
אֶל־אָבִיו׃ שלישי 23 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא יוֹסֵף אֶל־
אֶחָיו וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף אֶת־כֻּתָּנְתּוֹ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת
הַפַּסִּים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו׃ 24 וַיִּקָּחֻהוּ וַיַּשְׁלִכוּ אֹתוֹ

20. kill him Hebrew *h-r-g,* which connotes ruthless violence, is the same verb that is used when Cain slays Abel.

one of the pits These would be cisterns hewn out of rock intended for gathering and storing water in the rainy season. Large numbers of such cisterns have been found in excavations all over the Land of Israel. They vary in depth from six to as much as twenty-four feet. Dried out cisterns were occasionally used as temporary places of detention.[21] Murderers seem to have deliberately slaughtered their victims near such pits in order to dispose of the corpses there. One has only to bear in mind that lack of proper burial was considered to be the supreme dishonor in order to imagine something of the frenzied intensity of the brothers' hatred for Joseph. His wearing of the special tunic at the time probably was an added provocation.

21. The approach of Joseph galvanizes Reuben into action. On an earlier occasion he had impetuously asserted his rights as the first-born by taking his father's concubine (35:22); now he desperately asserts the authority that belongs to that status. His being under a cloud sharpened his sensitivity to the fact that he would surely bear the main share of blame for any misfortune. Perhaps he also hoped to regain his father's favor. There is no need, however, to question Reuben's sincerity. Still troubled by his failure to save Joseph (42:22), he is willing to go to extreme lengths in order to convince his father to let him be the protector of Benjamin (42:37).

he tried to save him Hebrew *va-yatsilehu,* which normally means "he saved him," has the sense of "he came to the rescue."

"Let us not" Rather, "We shall not!" The statement is made with a decisiveness that tolerates no opposition. The use of the first person plural makes clear that this is to be their collective decision.[22] Indeed, the brothers do not say another word, either of assent or dissent (contrast v. 27).

22. After leaving suitable pause for his words to take effect, Reuben presses his psychological advantage.

"Shed no blood!" Now he uses the second person plural to emphasize his own loathing for the idea.

out in the wilderness Hebrew *midbar* here refers to the extensive, uninhabited pastureland in the region of Dothan. The brothers believe that Joseph will die of hunger and exposure, while Reuben thinks he can rescue him somehow without their noticing.

23. the ornamented tunic The explanatory comment is necessary in light of verse 33.

24. cast him into the pit The narrative is abbreviated here, as in verse 28, for it says nothing of Joseph's reactions to their deeds. It is clear from 42:21 that the boy was no silent participant in his own misfortune but pleaded to be released.

no water in it Since such pits were dug largely for water storage, the observation is necessary.[23]

[25]Then they sat down to a meal. Looking up, they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels bearing gum, balm, and ladanum to be taken to Egypt. [26]Then Judah said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and covering up his blood? [27]Come, let

הַבֹּרָה וְהַבּוֹר רֵק אֵין בּוֹ מָיִם׃ 25 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לֶאֱכָל־
לֶחֶם וַיִּשְׂאוּ עֵינֵיהֶם וַיִּרְאוּ וְהִנֵּה אֹרְחַת
יִשְׁמְעֵאלִים בָּאָה מִגִּלְעָד וּגְמַלֵּיהֶם נֹשְׂאִים נְכֹאת
וּצְרִי וָלֹט הוֹלְכִים לְהוֹרִיד מִצְרָיְמָה׃ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר
יְהוּדָה אֶל־אֶחָיו מַה־בֶּצַע כִּי נַהֲרֹג אֶת־אָחִינוּ

25. sat down to a meal In callous indifference to their brother's anguished pleas. The action allows time for further discussion of Joseph's fate in the absence of Reuben. At the same time, it provides an interlude until a fresh and final opportunity for vengeance develops.

There is something portentous about this meal, as there is about the merchandise of the caravaneers, for later in the narrative both reappear, and in the same language, as symbols of the reversal of fortunes between Joseph and his brothers.[24]

a caravan of Ishmaelites The wandering traders are again so described in verse 27, and it is apparently they who buy Joseph, take him down to Egypt (v. 28), and sell him to Potiphar (39:1). However, Midianite traders are mentioned in verse 28, and these (or "Medanites") are also said to be responsible for selling Joseph to Potiphar (v. 36).

The discrepancy in names has been variously explained by traditional commentators. Genesis Rabba 84:20, followed by Rashi, postulates that Joseph was traded several times. Ibn Ezra identifies the Ishmaelites with Midianites on the basis of Judges 8:24, which relates that Midianites possessed golden earrings "because they were Ishmaelites." This passage suggests that the term "Ishmaelite" was used as an epithet for "nomadic traders" rather than in an ethnic sense. "Midianite," on the other hand, indicates a specific ethnic affiliation. Even if the two names are indicative of originally distinct narrative strands that have here been interwoven, it must have been the close connection between Ishmael and Midian in biblical tradition—both being offspring of Abraham (25:1–2,12)—that led to their fusion.

The fact that all those who had a hand in the sale of Joseph into foreign slavery were his own kinsfolk serves to heighten the tragedy.

from Gilead The central mountainous region east of the River Jordan (see Comment to 31:21). Spices and perfumes probably formed an important source of income for its inhabitants.[25] The caravaneers would have traveled from Gilead by way of the Valley of Beth-Shean (Beisan). The road southward passed by Dothan and then turned westward to link up with the route to Egypt.

camels See Comment to 12:16.

gum . . . Gums and resins played an important role in the economy of Egypt as they constituted the ingredients of perfumes, cosmetics, and medicines, all of which were put to a wide variety of uses in the cult of the gods, in embalming the dead, as sanitizing and deodorizing agents, as insect repellents, and, above all, for cleansing and conditioning the body in the absence of soap. The identification of the products mentioned in this verse is not at all certain, and there is no unanimity of translation among the ancient versions and traditions. The term translated here "gum" (Heb. *nekh'ot*) is generally taken to be "gum tragacanth," a sticky substance that exudes from the bark of shrubs of the genus *Astragalus,* which is native to arid high mountainous regions in the Near East. "Balm" (Heb. *tse/ori*) may be either a fragrant plant or a resin (Ker. 6a) derived from *Commiphora opobalsamum.* Its medicinal properties were widely recognized, as shown by Jeremiah 8:22 and 51:8. *"La(b)danum"* for Hebrew *lot* is similarly uncertain. If correct, it would refer to the oleoresin that exudes from the cistus shrub.

The uncommonly detailed account of the fragrant wares, which the brothers could not possibly have spotted from the distance, is explained in Genesis Rabba 84:16 as indicating a providential amelioration of Joseph's suffering on the road to Egypt in that, at least, he was not subject to the usual malodors that characterized nomadic caravans.

26. Judah He now assumes leadership, a role he is later to take once again in the protection of Benjamin.[26] The text leaves unclear whether Judah's suggestion is a desperate compromise to save Joseph's life, or whether his "What do we gain?" is an expression of sordid hostility.

us sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let us not do away with him ourselves. After all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. [28]When Midianite traders passed by, they pulled Joseph up out of the pit. They sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph to Egypt.

[29]When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he rent his clothes. [30]Returning to his

וְנִכְסֶינּוּ אֶת־דָּמוֹ׃ 27 לְכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֶנּוּ לַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים
וְיָדֵנוּ אַל־תְּהִי־בוֹ כִּי־אָחִינוּ בְשָׂרֵנוּ הוּא וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ
אָחִיו׃ 28 וַיַּעַבְרוּ אֲנָשִׁים מִדְיָנִים סֹחֲרִים וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ
וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיִּמְכְּרוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף
לַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים בְּעֶשְׂרִים כֶּסֶף וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף
מִצְרָיְמָה׃ 29 וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל־הַבּוֹר וְהִנֵּה אֵין־
יוֹסֵף בַּבּוֹר וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־בְּגָדָיו׃ 30 וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־אֶחָיו

At any rate, this narrative reflects the history of the Israelite tribes. Reuben's authority is on the decline while Judah rises to prominence. In consonance with this is Jacob's acceptance of a proposal by Judah (43:11–14) after having previously rejected the same advice from Reuben (42:37f.).

killing By leaving him to die in the pit. It is also possible that in Reuben's absence (v. 29) the idea of murdering Joseph had been revived.

covering up his blood In the biblical idiom, the blood of a murder victim was said to "cry out" for justice (see Comment to 4:10). Uncovered blood thus served as a constant reminder of a crime and as an incitement to revenge.[27]

27. ***flesh*** Used figuratively for kinship relationship.[28]

agreed Literally, "heard." The Hebrew verb here is neutral. It may connote listening in stony silence as well as willing assent.[29]

28. ***Midianite*** See Comment to verse 25.

they pulled . . . sold The subject of the two Hebrew verbs is ambiguous. On the basis of 45:5, it is generally taken to be the brothers. However, if the Midianites and Ishmaelites are not identical, then it might be assumed that, to avoid hearing Joseph's cries, the brothers had removed themselves some distance from the pit while they ate their meal. In the meantime, the Midianites chanced by and kidnapped Joseph. In 40:15 Joseph describes himself as having been kidnapped.

twenty pieces of silver The price of a slave would, of course, fluctuate with the market. The sum mentioned here corresponds to the monetary value of a male aged between five and twenty, as stated in Leviticus 27:5, presuming that the standard shekel is referred to in both instances. Twenty shekels is the average price of a slave in the laws of Hammurabi.[30]

to Egypt In order to sell him in the slave market. Although war with foreign countries provided the main source of slaves in Egypt, commercial slave-trafficking was well established with both Syria and Canaan. This particular type of trade in human misery is well illustrated in Egyptian documents. One such document is the last will and testament of King Amen-em-het III (end of the 19th cent. B.C.E.), in which he provides for the disposal of four Asian slaves he had received as a gift from his brother. More interesting is a papyrus (BAP 35.1446) from ca. 1740 B.C.E., which contains an inventory of servants on an estate. Thirty-seven of the ninety-five slaves listed are Asian. The document derives from an age when there was no known military activity in Canaan and Syria and when there was active commerce between these two countries. There is thus evidence for a brisk trade with Egypt in Asian slaves. The sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery accords well with what is known about the importation of slaves into that country from Canaan.

29. ***he rent his clothes*** Clearly, Reuben knows nothing about the sale and believes Joseph to be dead (cf. 42:22). This token of grief, called ***keri'ah*** in Hebrew, may have replaced an earlier custom of gashing the flesh.[31] ***Keri'ah*** has remained a traditional sign of mourning among Jews to the present time. Before the funeral, a rent of at least four inches in length is made in the lapel of the mourner's jacket, on the left lapel for parents and on the right for the other five relatives for whom formal mourning rites are obligatory (cf. Lev. 21:1–3). The mourner stands while the ***keri'ah*** is performed (cf. Job 1:20) and then recites a blessing acknowledging divine justice. Until modern times it was customary for the mourner himself to make the rent in his garment (YD, par. 340:1).

brothers, he said, "The boy is gone! Now, what am I to do?" [31]Then they took Joseph's tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood. [32]They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, "We found this. Please examine it; is it your son's tunic or not?" [33]He recognized it, and said, "My son's tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!" [34]Jacob rent his clothes, put sackcloth on his loins, and observed mourning for his son many days. [35]All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, saying, "No, I will go down mourning to my son in Sheol." Thus his father bewailed him.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַיֶּלֶד אֵינֶנּוּ וַאֲנִי אָנָה אָנִי־בָא: 31 וַיִּקְחוּ
אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ שְׂעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ
אֶת־הַכְּתֹנֶת בַּדָּם: 32 וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפַּסִּים
וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מָצָאנוּ הַכֶּר־נָא
הַכְּתֹנֶת בִּנְךָ הִוא אִם־לֹא: 33 וַיַּכִּירָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר
כְּתֹנֶת בְּנִי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ טָרֹף טֹרַף יוֹסֵף:
34 וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שִׂמְלֹתָיו וַיָּשֶׂם שַׂק בְּמָתְנָיו
וַיִּתְאַבֶּל עַל־בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים: 35 וַיָּקֻמוּ כָל־בָּנָיו
וְכָל־בְּנֹתָיו לְנַחֲמוֹ וַיְמָאֵן לְהִתְנַחֵם וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־
אֵרֵד אֶל־בְּנִי אָבֵל שְׁאֹלָה וַיִּבְךְּ אֹתוֹ אָבִיו:

*30. **to his brothers*** Who had removed themselves from the scene after the sale (see Comment to v. 28).

is gone! Or, "is no more!"[32]—perhaps meaning that Joseph must be dead.

what am I to do? An agonized cry. Literally, "as for me, whither do I go?"—to escape my father's grief.[33]

31. The brothers now use the alibi they had originally planned (v. 20).

tunic Compare verse 23.

a kid There is a touch of subtle irony here since years before, a kid and the garment of his brother had played key roles in Jacob's deception of his father, as told in 27:9,15,16. Now his own sons deceive him through the instrumentality of a kid and their brother's garment.

*32. **ornamented*** Its distinctive feature is mentioned because that is what establishes for Jacob the identity of its owner.

had . . . taken Literally, "They sent . . . and they brought," preserving a separate subject for each verb. Hoping to avoid any suspicion of involvement in Joseph's fate, the brothers apparently sent the bloodstained tunic to their father by way of others who pretended they had found it.[34] This interpretation overcomes the difficulty of the brothers' harsh and unlikely statement about "your son's tunic" when speaking to their father about their brother.

33. The full horror of the situation penetrates Jacob's consciousness only in stages. First he recognizes the tunic; then its bloody and tattered state leads to the inference that a wild beast had devoured his son; then he has a vivid mental image of his beloved Joseph actually being torn to pieces.[35] Jacob has been trapped into uttering the very words the brothers had originally planned to say (v. 20).

*34. **rent his clothes*** See Comment to verse 29.

sackcloth Another symbol of grief,[36] a coarse material probably made of goat hair or camel hair.

many days His inconsolable grief was perhaps intensified by feelings of guilt at having sent Joseph alone on such a long and perilous journey.[37]

*35. **daughters*** That is, Dinah and his daughters-in-law.[38]

go down mourning That is, never cease to mourn until the day of his death.

Sheol The most frequently used term in biblical Hebrew for the abode of the spirits of the dead. The region was imagined to be situated deep beneath the earth and to be enclosed with gates. There is no concept of "heaven" and "hell" in the Hebrew Bible. The underworld received all men—good and bad, great and small—and all are equal there. It was a place of unrelieved darkness and

[36]The Midianites, meanwhile, sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward.

36 וְהַמְּדָנִים מָכְרוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־מִצְרַיִם לְפוֹטִיפַר
סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים: פ רביעי

gloom and of complete silence. None who entered it could return.[39] The etymology of the word "Sheol" is uncertain, and the term is unknown in other ancient Semitic languages.

his father bewailed him The slight ambiguity of the pronouns gave rise to the notion that Isaac wept over his grief-stricken son Jacob.[40] Isaac, in fact, was still alive at this time, according to the biblical chronologies (see Comment to v. 1).

36. The real fate of Joseph (v. 28), the main theme of the narrative, is repeated after the digression (cf. 39:1).

the Midianites See Comments to verses 25, 28. In 39:1, the ones who sell Joseph are termed "Ishmaelites."

Potiphar The name of Joseph's master is almost identical with that of his future father-in-law, Potiphera (41:45). This latter name has been explained as the Egyptian *Pa-di-pa-re,* meaning "he whom Re (the sun-god) has given." It may be conjectured that Potiphar, a form not otherwise known, has been deliberately abbreviated in our narrative in order to avoid confusion of the two persons.

courtier Hebrew *saris,* from Akkadian *ša-rēši,* "the one at the head," that is, an officer of the realm. Because of the practice of castrating court officials, the term acquired the sense of "eunuch." However, this meaning cannot be applied indiscriminately, for Akkadian texts show that not all who held the title were emasculated, especially if they did not need to come into contact with the harem. Moreover, there does not seem to be evidence of eunuchs as an institution in ancient Egypt. Potiphar's wife plays a crucial role in Joseph's fortunes (chap. 39).

chief steward Hebrew *tabbaḥ* yields the possibility of either "cook" or "slaughterer," that is, executioner.[41] The title "chief cook" would correspond to the Egyptian *wdpw,* which originally also meant "cook," but which came to be a general designation for persons attached to the services of nobles, princes, and kings.

CHAPTER 38

Judah and Tamar (vv. 1–30)

The story of Joseph's fortunes is abruptly interrupted by a narrative about Judah that seems to be entirely unconnected to what precedes and follows it. Judah separates himself from his brothers, marries, and has three sons. In time, he finds a wife for his first-born son. She dies childless soon after his marriage. The second son refuses to follow what was then the common procedure and marry his dead brother's wife. Then he, too, dies. When the widowed Tamar realizes that her claim for a husband is unlikely to be satisfied even through the third son of Judah, she deceives her father-in-law. Oblivious of her identity, Judah is intimate with her. Tamar gives birth to twins.

This digression heightens the reader's suspense at a critical moment in the Joseph narrative, but the skillful blending of the chapter into the larger story shows that the digression is deliberate and the result of careful literary design, as noted in Genesis Rabba 85:3.

The concluding statement of chapter 37, about the sale of Joseph to Potiphar, is repeated in the first verse of chapter 39, thus providing continuity after the intervening diversion. The recurring use of certain key words also forges verbal links between chapter 38 and its preceding and following chapters. Thus the Hebrew root *y-r-d* appears in 37:35 (*'ered,* "I will go down"), 38:1 (*va-yered,* lit. "he went down"), and 39:1 (*hurad,* "was taken down"); the root *n-kh-r* is found in 37:32 (*hakker,* lit. "recognize"), verse 33 (*va-yakkirah,* "he recognized it"), as well as in 38:25 (*hakker)* and verse 26 (*va-yakker);* the root *n-ḥ-m* is used twice in 37:35 (*le-naḥamo,* "to comfort him"; *le-hitnaḥem,* "to be comforted") and in 38:12 (*va-yinnaḥem,* "was comforted"); while the root *ʿ-r-v* is employed in 38:17,

38 About that time Judah left his brothers and camped near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. [2]There

ל״ח וַיְהִי בָּעֵת הַהִוא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוּדָה מֵאֵת אֶחָיו
וַיֵּט עַד־אִישׁ עֲדֻלָּמִי וּשְׁמוֹ חִירָה: [2] וַיַּרְא־שָׁם

18, and 20 (*'eravon,* "a pledge") and in 43:9 (*'e'ervennu,* lit. "I will pledge myself for him") and 44:32 *'arav* ("has pledged himself"). A kid from the flock plays a role in the Joseph story (37:31) as well as in this one (vv. 17,20). Deception occurs in both narratives; a point is proved through the production of tangible evidence (37:32–33; 38:25–26); the theme of female temptation is central to this and the following chapter; and the genealogy of Judah is repeated in 46:12 in a way that requires knowledge of 38:3–10, 29–30 in order for it to be understood.

All this shows that the story of Judah and Tamar serves a function that is more complex than a simple suspenseful pause. It cannot be an accident that all the places mentioned—Adullam, Chezib, Timnah, and Enam—are contained within the later territory of the tribe of Judah. Nor can it be coincidental that Adullam is connected with incidents in the life of David, that Bath-shua and Tamar are names similarly linked with the biography of that king, and that the episode here recounted closes with the birth of Judah's sons, of whom Perez attained preeminence among the Judahite clans and became the ancestor of King David. This chapter, then, is replete with certain historic associations that place Judah, and by inference Joseph too, in a context far wider than that of their own individual personalities.

Reuben is the first-born of Jacob; yet it is not he but Judah, the fourth son, who rises to prominence in the Joseph narrative. It was Judah who suggested the sale of Joseph to the caravaneers (37:26f.), and it is he who will soon become the spokesman for his brothers to their father (43:3–5, 8–10). It is Judah who assumes a position of leadership when the delegation runs into trouble in Egypt (44:14–16) and who negotiates on behalf of the family for the release of the youngest brother (44:18–34). Finally, it is Judah whom Jacob selects to spearhead the migration to Egypt (46:28). So these narratives, while they recount the rise of Joseph, subtly register as well the ascendancy of Judah. The stage is being set for the future fulfillment of the divine promise to Abraham—"kings shall come forth from you" (17:6)—and to Jacob—"Kings shall issue from your loins" (35:11). Two kingdoms resulted from these divine promises to the patriarchs: Judah became the name of the southern kingdom, while the northern kingdom of Israel was known as Joseph (cf. Zech. 10:6). The present chapter, then, provides a foil to the Joseph-centered episodes. It hints, ever so obliquely, at the future Joseph-Judah polarity in the history of the people of Israel.

There is much in the narrative that testifies to great antiquity. Judah's wanderings take place in the border regions of the future tribe, not in its main area of settlement. He is not portrayed as a conqueror or even as a settler. He is still a pastoral nomad, not a city dweller. There is no hostility or tension between him and the Canaanites; later tradition would hardly have invented the uncomfortable account about his marriage to one. Thus the image of the tribe of Judah reflected here is, in general, not that of the postconquest situation. As regards the social situation, the head of the family still has the power of life and death over its members. Moreover, the levirate institution here, unlike that of Deuteronomy 25:5–9, presupposes that the main obligation rests upon the father-in-law, allowing no possibility of voluntary renunciation by the brother-in-law. Finally, both the fact that no stigma is attached to what would, in later times, be the offspring of an incestuous marriage and the Narrator's need to offer an apologia for Judah's behavior (see Comment to v. 15f.) combine to confirm an early date for the details of the action.

JUDAH'S MARRIAGE (vv. 1–5)

1. ***About that time*** The phrase clearly intends to connect, in time, the sale of Joseph with the marriage of Judah.[1] However, the events here described can be compressed into the twenty-two years that elapsed between the sale of Joseph and the descent to Egypt, only on the assumption that Er was born about a year after Judah's marriage and that Onan and Shelah followed in successive years. Er would then have been about eighteen when he married Tamar and died soon after, and Onan about seventeen when he repeated the experience of his brother. If Tamar waited a year in vain for Shelah before taking the initiative, the twins Perez and Zerah would have been born about twenty-one

Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua, and he married her and cohabited with her. 3She conceived and bore a son, and he named him Er. 4She conceived again and bore a son, and named him Onan. 5Once again she bore a son, and named him Shelah; he was at Chezib when she bore him.

יְהוּדָה בַּת־אִישׁ כְּנַעֲנִי וּשְׁמוֹ שׁוּעַ וַיִּקָּחֶהָ וַיָּבֹא
אֵלֶיהָ: 3 וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ עֵר:
4 וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ אוֹנָן:
5 וַתֹּסֶף עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁלָה
וְהָיָה בְכְזִיב בְּלִדְתָּהּ אֹתוֹ: 6 וַיִּקַּח יְהוּדָה אִשָּׁה

years after Judah's original marriage, which had taken place soon after the sale of Joseph. Thus they would have been about a year old upon arrival in Egypt. However, this assumption of a close temporal connection between the events of chapter 37 and Judah's marriage is clearly incompatible with the mention in 46:12 that two sons of Perez were in Jacob's company when he went down to Egypt. Accordingly, some modern scholars assign this last notice to a different strand of tradition. Others regard the Hebrew phraseology in 46:12 as indicating that Hezron and Hamul were not yet born and were included in the list simply for the sake of completeness (see Comment to 46:12). One or two traditional commentators treat the introductory formula "About that time" as a general phrase not meant to be precise, and they suppose that the marriage of Judah had occurred much earlier than the sale of Joseph. Against this is the clear intent of the phrase "About that time" in 21:22. Furthermore, the omission of the genealogy of Perez at the end of chapter 38, in contrast to 46:12, shows that no grandsons had been born within the time span encompassed by the events described in the chapter.

left his brothers Literally, "went down from . . . ," that is, from the hill country of Hebron (37:12,14,32). One midrash (Tanḥ. B., Gen. 183) connects this event with the brothers' anger at Judah for his unfortunate advice, as given in Genesis 37:26f. The narrative reflects the isolation of Judah from the other tribes in premonarchic times caused by the presence of Canaanite enclaves. Deuteronomy 33:7 also alludes to this isolation: "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah / And restore him to his people."

Adullamite A man of Adullam, a city in the northern sector of the Judean *shefelah* (lowland), about 9 miles (14.4 km.) northeast of modern Beit Guvrin. This Canaanite royal city, captured by Joshua and made part of the tribal inheritance of Judah, was also associated with the life of David.[2]

2. Canaanite In 1 Chronicles 2:3, this identification is given to the wife herself. Simeon, too, had a Canaanite wife. In both cases it is the foreign woman who is absorbed into the Israelite tribe. Conscious of the later prohibition on intermarriage with Canaanites (Deut. 7:1,3), Jewish commentators have generally understood Hebrew *kena'ani* here in the sense of "merchant."[3]

daughter . . . Shua Her name is not recorded. In verse 12 she is termed "the daughter of Shua" (Heb. *bat-shua*). In 1 Chronicles 2:3 she is called "Bath-Shua the Canaanite woman." Bathsheba, David's wife, also appears in the variant form Bath-shua in 1 Chronicles 3:5.

3. he named him Some Hebrew manuscripts read here "she named," as do the Samaritan version and Targum Jonathan. According to that reading, the mother names all three sons (cf. Comment to v. 29).

Er No interpretation of the names of Judah's sons is given. Er was probably understood to mean "watchful, vigilant." A midrash and Targum Jonathan connect it with Hebrew *'ariri,* "childless."

4. Onan Possibly understood to mean "vigorous." Targum Jonathan and Genesis Rabba 85:5 connect the name with Hebrew *'on,* "grief."[4]

5. Shelah Perhaps meaning "drawn out" (namely, out of the womb).[5]

Chezib Doubtless, the city that is elsewhere called Achzib, situated in the territory of Judah, southwest of Adullam. Later the clan of Shelanites[6] included a Cozeba among its descendants (1 Chron. 4:22). This clearly indicates that the clan had occupied the city of Chezib, and it explains why Judah's whereabouts are noted only in connection with Shelah. Because the Hebrew roots used

[6]Judah got a wife for Er his first-born; her name was Tamar. [7]But Er, Judah's first-born, was displeasing to the LORD, and the LORD took his life. [8]Then Judah said to Onan, "Join with your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother." [9]But Onan, knowing that the seed would not count as his, let it go to waste whenever he joined with his brother's wife, so as not to provide offspring for his brother. [10]What he did

לְעֵר בְּכוֹרוֹ וּשְׁמָהּ תָּמָר׃ 7 וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה
רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיְמִתֵהוּ יְהוָה׃ 8 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה
לְאוֹנָן בֹּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיךָ וְיַבֵּם אֹתָהּ וְהָקֵם זֶרַע
לְאָחִיךָ׃ 9 וַיֵּדַע אוֹנָן כִּי לֹא לוֹ יִהְיֶה הַזֶּרַע וְהָיָה
אִם־בָּא אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אָחִיו וְשִׁחֵת אַרְצָה לְבִלְתִּי
נְתָן־זֶרַע לְאָחִיו׃ 10 וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

here of clan and city—*k-z-v* and *sh-l-h*—both mean "to deceive, disappoint," some commentators see here a word play referring to the mother's disappointment at the absence of her husband or a suggestion of Tamar's subsequent disappointment at not being given to Shelah.

THE LEVIRATE OBLIGATION (vv. 6–11)

6. Judah, the father, selects a bride for his son, as was the custom in biblical times.[7]

Tamar The word means "a palm tree." As a personal name, it appears in the Bible only in the Davidic family.[8]

7. ***displeasing*** Hebrew *ra'*, a word play on Er. The inversion of consonants may symbolize his disordering of nature (cf. Comment to 6:8). The text does not specify the sin, but as Bekhor Shor notes, it is that he refused to consummate the marriage, perhaps simply wishing to avoid having children. According to a rabbinic tradition, Er did not want Tamar's beauty to be marred by pregnancy (Yev. 34b).

8. The death of Er without a son made Onan subject to the levirate law. Marriage between a man and his brother's wife is strictly forbidden in the Pentateuchal legislation of Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21. The only exception to the prohibition occurs when the brother dies without a son. According to Deuteronomy 25:5, a man has an obligation to his widowed sister-in-law: "When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her: take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty." This institution is known in Hebrew as *yibbum,* or "levirate marriage" (from Latin *levir,* "a husband's brother"). The basic root meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain, but it is believed to be "to procreate." In Deuteronomy 25:7, the brother of the deceased husband is called the *yavam* (? "progenitor") and the widow *yevamah* (? "progenitrix").

The levirate institution long antedated the Pentateuchal legislation. In fact, it is widely documented in one form or another in several extrabiblical sources. The compendium of laws from the Middle Assyrian Empire (15th–14th cent. B.C.E.) apparently provides that a widow who has no son should be married off by the father-in-law to the son of his choice (A, par. 33). The text, however, is fragmentary, and its full import and application are matters of scholarly dispute. Far more explicit are the Hittite laws (14th–13th cent. B.C.E.), which lay down that if a married man dies "his brother shall take his wife, then [if he dies] his father shall take her" (par. 193). The text does not distinguish between a childless widow and one who has offspring. A contract from the town of Nuzi from the middle centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. specifies that should the daughter-in-law be widowed, she is to be married to the second son and, if necessary, to the others in turn.

It is widely interpreted that the levirate institution had its origin in the notion that the widow had initially been purchased, through marriage, by the head of the family and so became part of the dead husband's estate. As such, she remained the property of the clan after his death. At the same time, she would be assured of livelihood and protection.

provide offspring for your brother There was no requirement to name the son of such a union after the dead brother.[9] This is evident from verses 29–30 and from Ruth 4:5, 10, and 17. Rather, the surviving brother became a surrogate for the deceased husband who posthumously gained a child, socially acknowledged to be his progeny and heir.

was displeasing to the LORD, and He took his life also. 11Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Stay as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up"—for he thought, "He too might die like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

12A long time afterward, Shua's daughter, the wife of Judah, died. When his period of mourning was over, Judah went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, together with his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13And Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is coming up to Timnah for the sheep-shearing." 14So she took off her widow's garb, covered her

וַיָּמָת גַּם־אֹתוֹ: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה לְתָמָר כַּלָּתוֹ
שְׁבִי אַלְמָנָה בֵּית־אָבִיךְ עַד־יִגְדַּל שֵׁלָה בְנִי כִּי
אָמַר פֶּן־יָמוּת גַּם־הוּא כְּאֶחָיו וַתֵּלֶךְ תָּמָר וַתֵּשֶׁב
בֵּית אָבִיהָ: 12 וַיִּרְבּוּ הַיָּמִים וַתָּמָת בַּת־שׁוּעַ
אֵשֶׁת־יְהוּדָה וַיִּנָּחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיַּעַל עַל־גֹּזְזֵי צֹאנוֹ
הוּא וְחִירָה רֵעֵהוּ הָעֲדֻלָּמִי תִּמְנָתָה: 13 וַיֻּגַּד
לְתָמָר לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה חָמִיךְ עֹלֶה תִמְנָתָה לָגֹז צֹאנוֹ:
14 וַתָּסַר בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתְּכַס בַּצָּעִיף

*9. **would not count as his*** The callous refusal of Onan to perpetuate the line of his brother may have been due to a lack of a sense of duty to the dead. An even more powerful motivation would have been the fact that with the death of the first-born, Onan inherits one-half of his father's estate. However, should he provide an heir to his brother, his portion would be diminished.

let it go to waste Literally, "he let it spoil on the ground." Genesis Rabba 55:5–6 understands that he practiced a primitive form of birth control through coitus interruptus. Another tradition (Yev. 34b) interprets the act as unnatural intercourse. Clearly, society at this time had made no provision for voluntary renunciation of the levirate duty as is found in Deuteronomy 25:7–9.

*10. **What he did was displeasing*** The text does not make clear specifically why Onan incurs divine wrath. The development of the narrative favors the explanation that it is due to the evasion of his obligation to his dead brother rather than because of the manner in which he acts. By frustrating the purpose of the levirate institution, Onan has placed his sexual relationship with his sister-in-law in the category of incest—a capital offense. The unusual emphasis given to the particular socio-legal background of the story clearly shows that the point at issue is the levirate obligation and not the general topic of birth control.

*11. **as a widow in your father's house*** She was not free to remarry but could return to live with her parents, although still subject to the authority of her father-in-law (cf. v. 24).[10]

for he thought Judah had no intention of ever marrying her to Shelah.

THE DECEPTION OF JUDAH (vv. 12–26)

*12. **A long time afterward*** In accordance with the chronological scheme required by the present position of the narrative (see Comment to v. 1), about a year would have elapsed. In 1 Samuel 7:2, the same Hebrew phrase is defined as twenty years.

died The death of Judah's wife is probably mentioned as an extenuating circumstance to account for his consorting with a harlot.

his period of mourning was over Literally, "he was comforted"; the official mourning rites had ended.

went up In contrast to "went down" (v. 1).

Timnah Probably not the locale of the Samson stories in Judges 14:1 but another place in the hill country of Judah, mentioned in Joshua 15:10,57.

sheepshearers See Comment to 31:19. The season of shearing was one of joy and revelry.[11]

*14. **her widow's garb*** The mode of dress characteristic of a widow in mourning.[12] It is not known of what it consisted or the length of time it was worn. In the case of Tamar, she may have continued to wear such clothing beyond the usual period as a symbol of the unfulfilled levirate obligation. At any rate, the presence of the widow's garb (cf. v. 19) provides a tacit contrast with

face with a veil, and, wrapping herself up, sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him as wife. 15When Judah saw her, he took her for a harlot; for she had covered her face. 16So he turned aside to her by the road and said, "Here, let me sleep with you"—for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. "What," she asked, "will you pay for sleeping with me?" 17He replied, "I will send a kid from my flock." But she said, "You must leave a pledge until you have sent it." 18And he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your seal and cord, and the staff which you carry." So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she conceived by

וַתִּתְעַלָּף וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם אֲשֶׁר עַל־דֶּרֶךְ
תִּמְנָתָה כִּי רָאֲתָה כִּי־גָדַל שֵׁלָה וְהוּא לֹא־נִתְּנָה
לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃ 15 וַיִּרְאֶהָ יְהוּדָה וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ לְזוֹנָה כִּי
כִסְּתָה פָנֶיהָ׃ 16 וַיֵּט אֵלֶיהָ אֶל־הַדֶּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר
הֲבָה־נָּא אָבוֹא אֵלַיִךְ כִּי לֹא יָדַע כִּי כַלָּתוֹ הִוא
וַתֹּאמֶר מַה־תִּתֶּן־לִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֵלָי׃ 17 וַיֹּאמֶר
אָנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח גְּדִי־עִזִּים מִן־הַצֹּאן וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־
תִּתֵּן עֵרָבוֹן עַד שָׁלְחֵךְ׃ 18 וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הָעֵרָבוֹן
אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶּן־לָךְ וַתֹּאמֶר חָתֻמְךָ וּפְתִילֶךָ וּמַטְּךָ
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדֶךָ וַיִּתֶּן־לָהּ וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ וַתַּהַר לוֹ׃

Judah's completion of his period of mourning (v. 12). At the same time, it forges a link with the story of Joseph, in which clothing also plays a role in deception.

a veil See Comment to 24:65. From verses 15 and 19, it is clear that Tamar was not normally veiled and that she simply wanted to conceal her identity (cf. 24:65). Interestingly, the Middle Assyrian laws (A, par. 40) require an unmarried cult prostitute and a harlot never to be veiled. The harlot who contravened this law was to be flogged fifty times, and pitch was to be poured on her head.

Enaim Probably to be identified with the village Enam in the territory of Judah.[13]

Shelah Nothing more is reported of him here, but his clan is mentioned in Numbers 26:20, and one of his sons was named Er, according to 1 Chronicles 4:21.

she had not been given Apparently, Tamar has no claim against Shelah, only against Judah. It seems that the responsibility for the enforcement of the levirate obligation rested at this time with the widow's father-in-law, as in the Hittite laws (see Comment to v. 9). The legislation of Deuteronomy 25:5–10 modified the existing levirate institution by restricting the duty of ***yibbum*** to the brothers of the deceased.

15ff. The text is very careful to emphasize that had Judah known the identity of the woman, he would never have had relations with her: "she had covered her face"; "he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law" (v. 16): "he was not intimate with her again" (v. 26). All this is explication by the Narrator, who is conscious of the contradiction between the moral standards of his own, later age and the fact that the offspring of Judah's venture with Tamar bore no stigma of illegitimacy.

17. a kid from my flock The fact that Judah carried nothing at that moment with which to pay for the woman's services proves that he acted on impulse in "turning aside to her by the road"—another example of the biblical motif of God using human frailty for His own purposes.

a pledge Security to be held pending the fulfillment of the obligation.

18. seal . . . cord The reference is to the widely used cylinder seal, a small object made of a hard material, engraved with distinctive ornamentation. The center was hollowed out and a cord passed through so that the seal could be worn around the neck. When the cylinder was rolled over soft clay, the resultant impression served as a means of identifying personal possessions and of sealing and legitimating clay documents. It was a highly personal object that performed the function of the signature in modern society, a kind of extension of the personality. Judah leaves part of himself with Tamar when he gives her his seal.

staff Hebrew ***matteh*** can mean either "staff" or "scepter." It is attested as the symbol of power and leadership in Isaiah 14:5 and Ezekiel 19:11–14, and also of royalty in Psalms 110:2. Numbers 17:17 states that each of the chieftains of the tribes of Israel in the wilderness had his own staff. Judah's

him. [19]Then she went on her way. She took off her veil and again put on her widow's garb.

[20]Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to redeem the pledge from the woman; but he could not find her. [21]He inquired of the people of that town, "Where is the cult prostitute, the one at Enaim, by the road?" But they said, "There has been no prostitute here." [22]So he returned to Judah and said, "I could not find her; moreover, the townspeople said: There has been no prostitute here." [23]Judah said, "Let her keep them, lest we become a laughingstock. I did send her this kid, but you did not find her."

[24]About three months later, Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot; in fact, she is with child by harlotry." "Bring her out," said Judah, "and

19 וַתָּקָם וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתָּסַר צְעִיפָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתִּלְבַּשׁ
בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ׃ 20 וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוּדָה אֶת־גְּדִי הָעִזִּים
בְּיַד רֵעֵהוּ הָעֲדֻלָּמִי לָקַחַת הָעֵרָבוֹן מִיַּד הָאִשָּׁה
וְלֹא מְצָאָהּ׃ 21 וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־אַנְשֵׁי מְקֹמָהּ לֵאמֹר
אַיֵּה הַקְּדֵשָׁה הִוא בָּעֵינַיִם עַל־הַדָּרֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא־
הָיְתָה בָזֶה קְדֵשָׁה׃ 22 וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר
לֹא מְצָאתִיהָ וְגַם אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם אָמְרוּ לֹא־הָיְתָה
בָזֶה קְדֵשָׁה׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה תִּקַּח־לָהּ פֶּן נִהְיֶה
לָבוּז הִנֵּה שָׁלַחְתִּי הַגְּדִי הַזֶּה וְאַתָּה לֹא מְצָאתָהּ׃
24 וַיְהִי כְּמִשְׁלֹשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיֻּגַּד לִיהוּדָה לֵאמֹר
זָנְתָה תָּמָר כַּלָּתֶךָ וְגַם הִנֵּה הָרָה לִזְנוּנִים וַיֹּאמֶר

staff must have had some personalized identifying sign. Bronze staffs topped by small lions' heads have been found in Syria dating from the time of the Assyrian Empire (8th–7th cent. B.C.E.). Similar scepter heads, some incised with names, have been discovered over a wide area of the Near East.

Herodotus (Histories 1.195) reports that every Babylonian carried a seal and a stick with a carved ornamented top. Whether the same custom prevailed in Canaan in an earlier age is not known.

Judah must have been willing to part with these valuable identifying items temporarily only because he was a man of substance; for him the payment of a kid was inexpensive and could have been accomplished with ease in a very short while.

20. the woman The relationship had been so casual that he had not even bothered to find out her name.

21. cult prostitute Hebrew *kedeshah* seems to have referred to a woman who practiced prostitution in the service of a deity, probably in connection with a fertility cult. Deuteronomy 23:18 outlaws such an institution in Israel. The office of *qadishtu* is known from tablets listing Mesopotamian temple personnel and from Babylonian and Assyrian laws, but the nature of her religious function remains unclear.

It should be noted that the term "cult prostitute" is employed in the dialogue, whereas "harlot" appears in the narration (v. 15). Clearly, the use of "harlot" reveals the Israelite view of such a perversion of religion (cf. Hos. 4:14). It is possible that Hirah is expressing Canaanite notions or that he is deliberately using the term *kedeshah* to avoid embarrassment.

24. Judah was told He had not seen her himself because she had returned to her father's house (v. 11).

"Bring her out" To the city gate, where justice was administered (see Comment to 19:1). The order has a magisterial ring to it.[14] By virtue of his status as head of the family, Judah here exercises his power of life and death (see Comment to 31:32), even though Tamar lives with her parents.

"let her be burned" The tie between the childless widow and the levir exists automatically from the moment of widowhood. Tamar's status was thus what is termed *shomeret yavam* ("awaiting the levir") in rabbinic parlance, and any extralevirate sexual relationship would have been adulterous. This offense carries the death penalty in biblical legislation, as specified in Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22, though the particular mode of execution is not stated. In rabbinic tradition, all cases of unspecified capital punishment involve strangulation (Sanh. 52b). In other instances in the Bible, the mode of execution for sexual crimes is stoning by the public (Deut. 22:21,24; cf. Ezek. 16:40). Death by burning is prescribed only in two cases mentioned in Leviticus 20:14 and 21:9. Judah's extreme verdict may reflect contemporary Canaanite practice. Ramban raises the possibility that the exceptional severity of the punishment was dictated by Judah's exalted status, so that the

let her be burned." 25As she was being brought out, she sent this message to her father-in-law, "I am with child by the man to whom these belong." And she added, "Examine these: whose seal and cord and staff are these?" 26Judah recognized them, and said, "She is more in the right than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he was not intimate with her again.

27When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb! 28While she was in labor, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife tied a crimson thread on that hand, to signify: This one came out first. 29But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" So he was named Perez. 30Afterward his brother came out, on whose hand was the crimson thread; he was named Zerah.

יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשְׁרַף׃ 25 הִוא מוּצֵאת וְהִיא
שָׁלְחָה אֶל־חָמִיהָ לֵאמֹר לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אֵלֶּה לּוֹ
אָנֹכִי הָרָה וַתֹּאמֶר הַכֶּר־נָא לְמִי הַחֹתָמֶת
וְהַפְּתִילִים וְהַמַּטֶּה הָאֵלֶּה׃ 26 וַיַּכֶּר יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר
צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי
וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ׃ 27 וַיְהִי בְּעֵת לִדְתָּהּ וְהִנֵּה
תְאוֹמִים בְּבִטְנָהּ׃ 28 וַיְהִי בְלִדְתָּהּ וַיִּתֵּן־יָד וַתִּקַּח
הַמְיַלֶּדֶת וַתִּקְשֹׁר עַל־יָדוֹ שָׁנִי לֵאמֹר זֶה יָצָא
רִאשֹׁנָה׃ 29 וַיְהִי כְּמֵשִׁיב יָדוֹ וְהִנֵּה יָצָא אָחִיו
וַתֹּאמֶר מַה־פָּרַצְתָּ עָלֶיךָ פָּרֶץ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פָּרֶץ׃
30 וְאַחַר יָצָא אָחִיו אֲשֶׁר עַל־יָדוֹ הַשָּׁנִי וַיִּקְרָא
שְׁמוֹ זָרַח׃ ס חמישי

violation of family honor was felt all the more keenly. Another possibility is that the body was to be burned after the administration of death by stoning. An analogous case is that of Achan who was ordered to be burned for violating the ban on Jericho but who, in practice, was first executed by public stoning and then burned. This is related in Joshua 7:15,25.

25. The dramatic denouement comes as Tamar, who has sustained her remarkable self-restraint until the very last moment, confronts Judah with the at once overwhelming and unimpeachable evidence. Yet her tactic of indirect accusation assures a minimum of embarrassment and so elicits a noble response.

26. ***he was not intimate with her again*** See Comment to verse 15. There is a distinction between the levirate law of Deuteronomy 25:5 and this incident. There the widow becomes her brother-in-law's wife; here it would appear that Tamar has only a clear right to conceive a child but no claim on marriage. Again, the narrative reflects a much earlier sociojuridical stratum than the Pentateuchal legislation.

THE BIRTH OF THE TWINS (vv. 27–30)

27. ***When the time came . . . twins*** Unlike in Rebekah's case, as told in 25:24, twins were apparently not expected.[15]

twins Perhaps in compensation for Judah's two deceased sons.

28. ***came out first*** The narrative seems to echo a history of rivalry between the two clans and is to be compared with 25:22–23.

29. ***she said*** That is, the midwife.

breach Hebrew *perets*. This is a play on Perez, the only name in this chapter for which an explanation is given, a fact that reflects the preeminence of the Perezite clan within the tribe of Judah. David was descended from Perez, according to Ruth 4:18–22 and 1 Chronicles 2:5, 9–15. The fact that ten generations separate David from Perez—symbolic of a complete and significant unit of time (see Comment to chap. 5)—shows that the birth of Perez is taken to be a historic turning point.

So he was named Literally, "so he called his name"; that is, Judah did, basing himself on the midwife's words. Some ancient versions read here "she called."[16]

30. ***Zerah*** No interpretation of the name is given. The Hebrew stem means "brightness," which suggests an allusion to the crimson thread. The Zerahites were a clan of Judah.[17]

39 When Joseph was taken down to Egypt, a certain Egyptian, Potiphar, a courtier of Pharaoh and his chief steward, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there. [2]The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he stayed in the house of his Egyptian master. [3]And when his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD lent success to everything he undertook, [4]he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal

ל״ט וְיוֹסֵף הוּרַד מִצְרַיְמָה וַיִּקְנֵהוּ פּוֹטִיפַר
סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אִישׁ מִצְרִי מִיַּד
הַיִּשְׁמְעֵאלִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹרִדֻהוּ שָׁמָּה: 2 וַיְהִי יְהוָה
אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי אִישׁ מַצְלִיחַ וַיְהִי בְּבֵית אֲדֹנָיו
הַמִּצְרִי: 3 וַיַּרְא אֲדֹנָיו כִּי יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־
הוּא עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ בְּיָדוֹ: 4 וַיִּמְצָא יוֹסֵף חֵן

CHAPTER 39

Joseph in Potiphar's Household (vv. 1–23)

1. Resuming the story of Joseph, the narrative now recapitulates the concluding verses of chapter 37.

a certain Egyptian The national identity of Joseph's master is repeated three times for emphasis (vv. 1,2,5), probably because the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery sets the stage for the looming enslavement and subsequent redemption of Israel. The prophecy of 15:13 to Abraham is being fulfilled.

Potiphar So 37:36. The full name and titles are here given to draw attention to the aristocratic nature of the household into which Joseph is sold, a detail essential to the development of the story. Otherwise, the name of the master is of no significance—indeed is not mentioned again.

2. ***The LORD*** The divine name YHVH, used only in this chapter of the Joseph story,[1] is confined exclusively to the narrative framework and never used in speech. The preference for this proper name of the God of Israel, as opposed to the generic *'elohim,* is determined by an underlying intent to emphasize that the unfolding events in the odyssey of Joseph are key elements in God's plan for the people of Israel. The use of YHVH gives an appropriate nuance to this wider national inflection in the narrative.

was with Joseph This seminal phrase appears four times in this chapter,[2] forming a literary framework within which the narrative is encased. The repetitious use of the phrase imparts coherence and meaning to what superficially appear to be merely random events. The phrase enables the reader to understand how the spoiled lad of seventeen, utterly alone in a foreign land and in dire adversity, suddenly matures and acquires great strength of character. He can rise again and again in situations that would surely have crushed others.

a successful man The phrase expresses the idea that innate gifts of intelligence and skill cannot achieve fruition without divine support.[3]

he stayed in the house The first of four stages in the rise of Joseph. He is not sent to work in the fields. It was not uncommon for slaves in Egypt to be employed in professional tasks such as household management and the administration of property. This situation is illustrated by an Egyptian papyrus (Brooklyn 35.1446) deriving from 1833–1742 B.C.E., which lists the names of nearly eighty slaves in an Egyptian household, together with their occupations. Strangely, the Asian slaves clearly enjoyed superior status and performed the skilled jobs while the Egyptian slaves were given the more onerous and strenuous labors in the fields. By working in the house, Joseph has the opportunity to display his administrative talents and to win the favor of his master. But he is also brought into close and constant contact with his master's wife!

3. ***when his master saw*** Joseph's competence in fulfilling his duties—not here specified (cf. vv. 11,22)—is visible proof to the master of divine support for his slave.[4]

4. ***he took a liking*** Literally, "Joseph found favor in his eyes."[5] He wins the esteem and confidence of his master—the second stage in his rise.

attendant and put him in charge of his household, placing in his hands all that he owned. 5And from the time that the Egyptian put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed his house for Joseph's sake, so that the blessing of the LORD was upon everything that he owned, in the house and outside. 6He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.

7After a time, his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8But he refused. He said to his

בְּעֵינָיו וַיְשָׁרֵת אֹתוֹ וַיַּפְקִדֵהוּ עַל־בֵּיתוֹ וְכָל־יֶשׁ־
לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ׃ 5 וַיְהִי מֵאָז הִפְקִיד אֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ וְעַל
כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ־לוֹ וַיְבָרֶךְ יְהוָה אֶת־בֵּית הַמִּצְרִי
בִּגְלַל יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי בִּרְכַּת יְהוָה בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר יֶשׁ־לוֹ
בַּבַּיִת וּבַשָּׂדֶה׃ 6 וַיַּעֲזֹב כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף
וְלֹא־יָדַע אִתּוֹ מְאוּמָה כִּי אִם־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא
אוֹכֵל וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יְפֵה־תֹאַר וִיפֵה מַרְאֶה׃ ששי
7 וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אֵשֶׁת־אֲדֹנָיו
אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי׃ 8 וַיְמָאֵן

his personal attendant Compare Exodus 24:13; 2 Kings 6:15. This is the third stage.

in charge of his household The fourth and final rung on the ladder of success. Joseph is now overseer of the entire estate, a function that conforms to that of the title frequently encountered in Egyptian texts as *mer-per,* "comptroller."

5. ***the LORD blessed*** That is, He brought great prosperity to the master.[6]

in the house and outside Literally, "in the house and in the field." The phrase is a merism, a figure of speech that combines two contrasting elements to express totality.

6. Joseph has now reached the pinnacle of his career as a servant in the wealthy household, having won his Egyptian master's complete and unqualified confidence in his ability and integrity.

He left . . . in Joseph's hands The Hebrew phrase *ʿ-z-v beyad* in place of the usual ***n-t-n beyad,*** as in verses 4, 8, and 22, is unique, for elsewhere the phrase *ʿ-z-v beyad* means "to abandon to the power of" and has a negative connotation, as in Psalms 37:33 and Nehemiah 9:28. The exceptional style here is probably a deliberate literary device to hint at impending evil and to allude to a cause-and-effect connection with verses 12, 13, and 15, which employ the same phrase but in a different association.

the food that he ate In view of the parallel passage in verse 9, early exegesis understood the term as a euphemism for "wife." Support for this may be found in Proverbs 30:20: "Such is the way of an adulteress: / She eats, wipes her mouth, / And says, 'I have done no wrong.'" An alternative interpretation sees a connection with the ritual separation said to have been practiced by Egyptians at meals, mentioned in 43:32.[7]

well built and handsome No other male is so described in Scripture. The Hebrew phrase also is used of Rachel, Joseph's mother, in 29:17. Joseph's physical attractiveness is not mentioned as an element in Jacob's favoritism or as an additional cause of his brothers' envy. Its insertion here serves solely to introduce the next episode.

THE ATTEMPTED SEDUCTION (vv. 7–20)

Has Joseph's success corroded his moral fiber? His character is about to be put to the test. The picture of Joseph as it emerges from the pages of this narrative is far different from that of the boy back in his father's home. So skillfully is the story set forth that, in our sympathy and admiration for the hero's nobility of character, we forget those displeasing traits that alienated us at the outset. Joseph is now the unwitting instrument of God's providence, and his behavior in the face of temptation demonstrates his worthiness for the role.

7. ***After a time*** Sufficient time has elapsed for Joseph's relative independence and authority to be accepted as commonplace.

master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. 9He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin before God?" 10And much as she coaxed Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her request to lie beside her, to be with her.

11One such day, he came into the house to do his work. None of the household being there inside, 12she caught

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֵשֶׁת אֲדֹנָיו הֵן אֲדֹנִי לֹא־יָדַע אִתִּי
מַה־בַּבָּיִת וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־יֶשׁ־לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי: 9 אֵינֶנּוּ
גָדוֹל בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא־חָשַׂךְ מִמֶּנִּי מְאוּמָה
כִּי אִם־אוֹתָךְ בַּאֲשֶׁר אַתְּ־אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה
הָרָעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לֵאלֹהִים: 10 וַיְהִי
כְּדַבְּרָהּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף יוֹם ו יוֹם וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ
לִשְׁכַּב אֶצְלָהּ לִהְיוֹת עִמָּהּ: 11 וַיְהִי כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
וַיָּבֹא הַבַּיְתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלַאכְתּוֹ וְאֵין אִישׁ מֵאַנְשֵׁי
הַבַּיִת שָׁם בַּבָּיִת: 12 וַתִּתְפְּשֵׂהוּ בִּבְגָדוֹ לֵאמֹר

his master's wife She remains nameless throughout the story.[8] Her designation serves a dual purpose. It draws attention to Joseph's dilemma in antagonizing someone so powerful, and it emphasizes the inherent irony of the situation: She, the mistress of the house, is a slave to her lust for her husband's slave!

cast her eyes upon With longing,[9] lasciviously.

Lie with me There are no verbal preliminaries, no expressions of love. Her peremptory mode of speech flows from her consciousness of Joseph's status as a slave. In no other biblical narrative does a woman brazenly proposition a man in this manner.[10]

8–9. Joseph's spontaneous response is a categorical no. His moral excellence can be appreciated all the more if one remembers that he is a slave and that sexual promiscuity was a perennial feature of all slave societies. Moreover, an ambitious person might well have considered that the importuning woman had presented him with a rare opportunity to advance his personal and selfish interests.

Conscious of his subordinate position, Joseph dares not display anger. Nor does he preach. He only explains his personal reasons for refusing her advances, and he presents these in an order that reflects his perception of her hierarchy of values. First he points to the abuse of trust that would be involved, then to the violation of the husband's proprietary rights over his wife, then to the religious and moral nature of the offense. The second of these reasons reflects pagan legal theory that adultery was largely a private injury, an affront and indignity to the husband. The third line of argument conforms to the distinctive Israelite concept of morality as having its source and sanction in divine will, not in social convention or utilitarian considerations.

before God Joseph here uses *'elohim,* not YHVH, because he is speaking to one of another people.

10. The woman does not reply to Joseph's arguments. Her tactic is to wear down his resistance by her relentless importuning.

she coaxed Hebrew *ke-dabberah,* the verb indicating repeated speech (cf. vv. 17,19).

to lie beside . . . to be with . . . The unique usage of the Hebrew preposition *'etsel* in this context may indicate that she moderated her demands on him. In that case, as Rashbam suggests, the second clause would mean simply "to be in her company." Another possibility is that the phrase "to be with her" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, as in 2 Samuel 13:20, in which case the clauses express successive states of intimacy.

11. ***into the house*** As 43:26 shows, Hebrew *ha-baytah* means "into the interior of the house."[11]

to do his work Not here specified (cf. vv. 3,22), but excluding menial labor. Early exegesis, as reflected in the Targums, has Joseph attending to his master's accounts. A rabbinic tradition (Sot. 36b) interprets the phrase as a euphemism: Joseph actually succumbed to the woman's blandishments, but at the critical moment a mental image of his father inhibited him from sinning.

there inside In that part of the house—not necessarily that no one was around (cf. v. 14).

hold of him by his garment and said, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand and got away and fled outside. 13When she saw that he had left it in her hand and had fled outside, 14she called out to her servants and said to them, "Look, he had to bring us a Hebrew to dally with us! This one came to lie with me; but I screamed loud. 15And when he heard me screaming at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and got away and fled outside." 16She

שְׁכָבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה:
13 וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹתָהּ כִּי־עָזַב בִּגְדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיָּנָס
הַחוּצָה: 14 וַתִּקְרָא לְאַנְשֵׁי בֵיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
לֵאמֹר רְאוּ הֵבִיא לָנוּ אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בָּנוּ בָּא
אֵלַי לִשְׁכַּב עִמִּי וָאֶקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל: 15 וַיְהִי
כְּשָׁמְעוֹ כִּי־הֲרִימֹתִי קוֹלִי וָאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדוֹ
אֶצְלִי וַיָּנָס וַיֵּצֵא הַחוּצָה: 16 וַתַּנַּח בִּגְדוֹ אֶצְלָהּ

12. ***she caught hold*** Her verbal assaults having failed to achieve their end, she resorts in desperation and frustration to physical aggression.[12]

garment The loose-fitting outer garment of the well-to-do, which was removed on entering the house. The poor usually possessed only one garment (Exod. 22:26; Deut. 24:13). The use of Hebrew *beged* (six times), a general term for clothing, in place of the regular *me'il,* evokes an association with the homonymous Hebrew stem *b-g-d* employed for marital infidelity.[13]

got away and fled Literally, "he fled *(va-yanos)* and went out *(va-yetse')* to the outside." The first verb describes his spontaneous and abrupt withdrawal from the room; the second suggests the assumption of a normal gait, once outside, in order not to attract attention.

13–18. The turn of events must have left the wife terror-stricken at her vulnerability should the truth get out, while her feeling of anger and humiliation fueled a desire for revenge. Realizing that the abandoned coat can serve as prima facie evidence for a case against Joseph, she loses no time in accusing him of committing the acts she had wanted him to perpetrate.

13. ***had fled outside*** For the sake of brevity, the second verb is omitted in the recapitulation.

14. ***and said*** Hebrew *va-to'mer,* indicating a succinct report (cf. vv. 7,10,17).

to her servants Literally, "the people of her house," who are in another part of the building.

Look She may have held up the coat for all to see, but, more likely, Hebrew *re'u* is just a synonym of the demonstrative *hinneh,* "behold."[14]

he had to bring us The subject is indefinite, but verse 17 indicates that the sarcasm refers to her husband.

a Hebrew Whatever the origin of the term (see Comment to 14:13), there seems to be no doubt of a derogatory intent here. In contrast to her report to her husband (v. 17), the woman does not term Joseph a slave. She artfully knows how to adjust her language to the needs of the situation. In addressing her domestics, probably Egyptians, she appeals to their suspicion of foreigners and flatteringly employs the plural "us" (contrast v. 17), as though to imply that Joseph is threatening their common values and that she and they have mutual interests to defend that erase differences in class and status.

to dally The Hebrew stem *ts-ḥ-k* is the same as that used in 26:8, though with a different preposition (here *b;* there *'et*). It can also mean simply "to mock us, insult us" (cf. v. 17).

I screamed The scream was regarded as evidence of resistance to attempted rape and, hence, was a sign of innocence, as is formulated in Deuteronomy 22:24, 27. She well knows that none of those to whom she speaks had been close enough to hear her (v. 11).

15. ***with me*** The same phraseology as in the report to her husband (v. 18), but she subtly avoids mentioning that the garment was left in her hand (vv. 12,13).

and fled outside See Comment to verse 12. Again she is cautious in her formulation, just in case anyone might have seen Joseph leaving her room and walking normally.

kept his garment beside her, until his master came home. 17Then she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew slave whom you brought into our house came to me to dally with me; 18but when I screamed at the top of my voice, he left his garment with me and fled outside."

19When his master heard the story that his wife told him, namely, "Thus and so your slave did to me," he was furious. 20So Joseph's master had him put in prison, where the king's prisoners were confined. But even while he was there in prison, 21the LORD was with Joseph: He extended

עַד־בֹּוא אֲדֹנָיו אֶל־בֵּיתֹו׃ 17 וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו
כַּדִּבְרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בָּא־אֵלַי הָעֶבֶד הָעִבְרִי
אֲשֶׁר־הֵבֵאתָ לָּנוּ לְצַחֵק בִּי׃ 18 וַיְהִי כַּהֲרִימִי קֹולִי
וָאֶקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בִּגְדֹו אֶצְלִי וַיָּנָס הַחוּצָה׃ 19 וַיְהִי
כִּשְׁמֹעַ אֲדֹנָיו אֶת־דִּבְרֵי אִשְׁתֹּו אֲשֶׁר דִּבְּרָה אֵלָיו
לֵאמֹר כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה לִי עַבְדֶּךָ וַיִּחַר אַפֹּו׃
20 וַיִּקַּח אֲדֹנֵי יֹוסֵף אֹתֹו וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֶל־בֵּית הַסֹּהַר
מְקֹום אֲשֶׁר־אסורי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲסוּרִים וַיְהִי־שָׁם
בְּבֵית הַסֹּהַר׃ 21 וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יֹוסֵף וַיֵּט אֵלָיו

v. 20. אֲסִירֵי ק׳

16. his master Not "her husband," since it was in the capacity of slavemaster that she would confront him.

17. Hebrew slave This time she emphasizes Joseph's slave status (cf. v. 14).

into our house Literally, "to us," as though to say, "The whole house suffers from him." Cunningly, however, she goes on to use the singular, "to dally with me," not "us," as before—a fine psychological touch designed to arouse her husband's jealous instincts and sense of outrage. Significantly, she does not repeat to her husband her previously stated charge of attempted rape. This omission was probably a powerful factor in saving Joseph from the executioner. Perhaps she secretly nourishes the hope that, by having Joseph incarcerated, she might be able to break his spirit and finally get him to succumb to her.

19. he was furious The text does not say at whom, an omission that may hint at an underlying ambivalence in his reaction. He must also have resented losing the services of so accomplished an administrator as Joseph.

20. had him put Literally, "took him and put him." It is known that high administrative officials in the Egyptian government also performed judicial functions.

in prison Hebrew *beit ha-sohar,* perhaps deriving from a stem *s-h-r,* "to be round" (cf. Song 7:3), which appears in postbiblical Hebrew as *sahar,* "moon," "enclosed area." Employed eight times in this narrative, but nowhere else, *beit ha-sohar* may then be, literally, "a house of enclosure," "a prison fortress." It might also be an as yet unidentified foreign term. At any rate, the prison detail is characteristically Egyptian, for the punishment of imprisonment was unknown in ancient Near Eastern law but is well attested in Egyptian documents. The prison, of which there was one in each town of any size, served as a penal institution for convicted criminals, as a labor camp for those forced into the corvée, and as the seat of the criminal court. In the present instance, the prison is under the jurisdiction of Joseph's master and is housed on his property, as is clear from 40:3,7 and 41:10; compare Jeremiah 37:15f. This recalls an Egyptian papyrus (Leiden I.368.7–9), which tells of slaves who were committed to "the little prison of the Overseer of the Treasury."

where the king's prisoners . . . Being an officer of the court, Potiphar puts Joseph in the section reserved for royal prisoners, a detail vital to the understanding of the next episode. Why does Joseph escape execution, which would certainly have been the fate of a slave who attempted to assault his master's wife sexually? Is it because of Potiphar's extreme fondness for him, or because he really doubts the veracity of the woman's story?[15] Support for the latter notion might be sought in the vague description of his reaction upon hearing the accusation in verse 19 and in the unusual fivefold repetition of forms of the Hebrew stem *d-b-r* (vv. 17,19; cf. v. 10) as opposed to the previous use of the verb *'-m-r* (vv. 7,14); there is an implication here that a profusion of words is needed on the part of the wife to overcome her husband's reluctance to accept her story. As has already been noted, she did not explicitly report to her husband, as she had to the domestics (v. 14), that Joseph had intended to rape her (v. 17). Furthermore, it must not be assumed that Joseph silently accepted his unjust fate. The narrative is mute on this point; but it also recorded no reaction from Joseph when he was thrown into

kindness to him and disposed the chief jailer favorably toward him. 22The chief jailer put in Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in that prison, and he was the one to carry out everything that was done there. 23The chief jailer did not supervise anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him, and whatever he did the LORD made successful.

חֶסֶד וַיִּתֵּן חִנּוֹ בְּעֵינֵי שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר׃ 22 וַיִּתֵּן
שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר בְּיַד־יוֹסֵף אֵת כָּל־הָאֲסִירִם אֲשֶׁר
בְּבֵית הַסֹּהַר וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עֹשִׂים שָׁם הוּא הָיָה
עֹשֶׂה׃ 23 אֵין | שַׂר בֵּית־הַסֹּהַר רֹאֶה אֶת־כָּל־
מְאוּמָה בְּיָדוֹ בַּאֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ וַאֲשֶׁר־הוּא עֹשֶׂה
יְהוָה מַצְלִיחַ׃ ס שביעי

40 Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt gave offense to their lord the king of Egypt.

מ וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָטְאוּ מַשְׁקֵה
מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם וְהָאֹפֶה לַאֲדֹנֵיהֶם לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם׃

the pit (chap. 37), while a subsequent incident reveals that he had indeed pleaded with his brothers for his life (42:21). Here, too, it is reasonable to assume that he defends his innocence in a manner that at least raises some doubts about his guilt in his master's mind. It is also pertinent to mention here that there are many versions in ancient literature of the motif of the blameless accused who honorably repels the amorous advances of a married woman, and that the innocent victim generally escapes death. On this topic, see Excursus 29.

IMPRISONMENT (vv. 20–23)

20. ***But even while*** Literally, "He was there in prison." To avoid the apparent redundancy of the clause, Radak took it to mean "he remained there," that is, he had no expectation of release. However, it is better to attach the phrase to the next verse, as is done in this translation, following Shadal. This has the advantage of making verse 21 almost exactly parallel to verse 2.

21. When Joseph was a slave in Potiphar's household "God was with him" and gave him success in his work, thereby enabling him to win his master's favor. Here in prison he is at the lowest point of his fortunes, forlorn and helpless. According to the tradition in Psalms 105:17–18, Joseph's feet were placed in fetters and an iron collar was put around his neck. God is again "with him," but Joseph has no opportunity as yet to prove himself. He first needs divine *ḥesed* (see Comment to 24:12) to gain the prison keeper's favor.

22. ***The chief jailer*** The jailer, who is responsible to the chief steward (cf. 40:3f.), gives Joseph administrative duties not here specified (cf. vv. 3,11).

23. This verse parallels verses 3 and 6.

CHAPTER 40

Joseph in Prison (vv. 1–23)

1. ***Some time later*** An indefinite statement. See Comments to 51:1 and 21:1. We may calculate that Joseph is now twenty-eight years old, for we know that in another two years, when he appears before Pharaoh, he is then thirty.[1] Eleven years have elapsed since his sale into slavery; but we have no way of determining how many of those years he spent in the service of Potiphar and how many in prison.

the cupbearer . . . the baker The next verse identifies them as the respective chief officials of their professions in the royal household. Since the cupbearer is crucial to the narrative, he is always mentioned first.

[2]Pharaoh was angry with his two courtiers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, [3]and put them in custody, in the house of the chief steward, in the same prison house where Joseph was confined. [4]The chief steward assigned Joseph to them, and he attended them.

When they had been in custody for some time, [5]both of them—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—dreamed in the same night, each his own dream and each dream with its own meaning. [6]When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were distraught. [7]He asked Pharaoh's courtiers, who were with him in custody in his master's house, saying, "Why do you appear downcast today?" [8]And they

2 וַיִּקְצֹף פַּרְעֹה עַל שְׁנֵי סָרִיסָיו עַל שַׂר
הַמַּשְׁקִים וְעַל שַׂר הָאֹפִים: 3 וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם בְּמִשְׁמַר
בֵּית שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אֶל־בֵּית הַסֹּהַר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
יוֹסֵף אָסוּר שָׁם: 4 וַיִּפְקֹד שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף
אִתָּם וַיְשָׁרֶת אֹתָם וַיִּהְיוּ יָמִים בְּמִשְׁמָר:
5 וַיַּחַלְמוּ חֲלוֹם שְׁנֵיהֶם אִישׁ חֲלֹמוֹ בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד
אִישׁ כִּפְתְרוֹן חֲלֹמוֹ הַמַּשְׁקֶה וְהָאֹפֶה אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר אֲסוּרִים בְּבֵית הַסֹּהַר: 6 וַיָּבֹא
אֲלֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּרְא אֹתָם וְהִנָּם זֹעֲפִים:
7 וַיִּשְׁאַל אֶת־סְרִיסֵי פַרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בְּמִשְׁמַר
בֵּית אֲדֹנָיו לֵאמֹר מַדּוּעַ פְּנֵיכֶם רָעִים הַיּוֹם:

The cupbearer was an important official in the Egyptian court. Because of the sensitivity of his position—he personally served wine to the king—his loyalty in what was a perpetually intrigue-ridden household had to be beyond reproach. Ready access to the monarch could make a savvy cupbearer a trusted advisor and place him in a position of great influence. Egyptian documents testify to the wealth and power of such officials.

the king of Egypt This title (so v. 15), in place of the otherwise invariable mention of Pharaoh, takes up the point of 39:20.

gave offense The details, being irrelevant to the narrative, are ignored.

2. The specific mention of the two men, following the general statement regarding the officials, may be intended as an indication that the offenses of the two were separate and distinct. This explains why they eventually received different treatment at the hands of Pharaoh.

3. ***in custody*** Hebrew *be-mishmar,* that is, in temporary detention pending final disposition of their case.[2]

4. ***The chief steward*** That is, Joseph's own master, on whose estate the prison was situated. The cupbearer later characterizes Joseph as "a servant of the chief steward."[3]

When . . . for some time Literally, "There were days. . . ." Hebrew *yamim* may indicate indefinite time[4] or "a year." In the latter case, as their confinement ended on the royal birthday, their offenses could have been committed in connection with the celebration of the preceding birthday, as Shadal suggests.

5. ***both of them*** For dreams in pairs, see Comment to 37:9. In this case, the two are needed to establish Joseph's reputation as an interpreter of dreams[5] (cf. 41:11–13). Joseph's own dreams caused his misfortunes. Now the dreams of others lead to his prosperity.

dreamed See Comment to 37:5–11.

each . . . own meaning Literally, "each according to the interpretation of his dream"—the same phrase used by the cupbearer later, in 41:11. The Hebrew can be variously taken to mean that the interpretation turned out to be appropriate to the content or that each dreamed as if his dream were a prediction.

6. ***distraught*** The anxiety normally brought on by the accepted seriousness of dreams is here intensified for the prisoners by the uncertainty as to their fate and by their being denied access to a professional dream interpreter. The coincidence of the two officials having simultaneous dreams doubtless also heightened their tension.

8. ***there is no one*** Here in prison.

said to him, "We had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." So Joseph said to them, "Surely God can interpret! Tell me [your dreams] ."

[9]Then the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph. He said to him, "In my dream, there was a vine in front of me. [10]On the vine were three branches. It had barely budded, when out came its blossoms and its clusters ripened into grapes. [11]Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." [12]Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: The three branches are three days. [13]In three days Pharaoh will pardon you and restore you to your post; you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand, as was your custom formerly when you were his cupbearer. [14]But think of me when all is well with you again, and do me the kindness of mentioning me to Pharaoh, so as to free me from this place. [15]For in truth, I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews; nor have I done anything here that they should have put me in the dungeon."

8 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו חָלוֹם חָלַמְנוּ וּפֹתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הֲלוֹא לֵאלֹהִים פִּתְרֹנִים
סַפְּרוּ־נָא לִי: 9 וַיְסַפֵּר שַׂר־הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ
לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ בַּחֲלוֹמִי וְהִנֵּה־גֶפֶן לְפָנָי:
10 וּבַגֶּפֶן שְׁלֹשָׁה שָׂרִיגִם וְהִיא כְּפֹרַחַת עָלְתָה
נִצָּהּ הִבְשִׁילוּ אַשְׁכְּלֹתֶיהָ עֲנָבִים: 11 וְכוֹס פַּרְעֹה
בְּיָדִי וָאֶקַּח אֶת־הָעֲנָבִים וָאֶשְׂחַט אֹתָם אֶל־כּוֹס
פַּרְעֹה וָאֶתֵּן אֶת־הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף פַּרְעֹה: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר
לוֹ יוֹסֵף זֶה פִּתְרֹנוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַשָּׂרִגִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
הֵם: 13 בְּעוֹד ׀ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פַרְעֹה אֶת־
רֹאשֶׁךָ וַהֲשִׁיבְךָ עַל־כַּנֶּךָ וְנָתַתָּ כוֹס־פַּרְעֹה בְּיָדוֹ
כַּמִּשְׁפָּט הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתָ מַשְׁקֵהוּ: 14 כִּי אִם־
זְכַרְתַּנִי אִתְּךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִיטַב לָךְ וְעָשִׂיתָ־נָּא עִמָּדִי
חֶסֶד וְהִזְכַּרְתַּנִי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵאתַנִי מִן־הַבַּיִת
הַזֶּה: 15 כִּי־גָנֹב גֻּנַּבְתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִים וְגַם־פֹּה
לֹא־עָשִׂיתִי מְאוּמָה כִּי־שָׂמוּ אֹתִי בַּבּוֹר: 16 וַיַּרְא

"Surely God can interpret!" Compare 41:16.

Tell me . . . "Perhaps, then, He will reveal the meaning to me," implies Joseph.

THE CUPBEARER'S DREAM (vv. 9–15)

9–11. The cupbearer seems to find Joseph's response persuasive, while the baker remains skeptical and hesitant. The dream's blend of reality and fantasy is recounted in a series of staccato scenes, often without a conjunction between the short clauses. The effect is a telescoping of time in which the grape-growing season, the production process, and the serving of the finished wine each takes place instantaneously, and follow one another in swift succession.

12–13. Joseph deciphers the dream by a scheme of equivalences. The rapidity of the action suggests imminent fulfillment. The recurrence of the number three indicates specifically three days, three branches, three stages of growth, three actions performed; and both "Pharaoh" and his "cup" are mentioned three times. It is quite likely that Joseph actually has knowledge of Pharaoh's impending birthday celebration, as Bekhor Shor and Ibn Ezra suggest. Moreover, he cannot help noting that in the dream the cupbearer is actually performing his duties in the presence of Pharaoh.

*13. **pardon you*** Literally, "lift up your head," that is, you will regain your dignity, honor, and independence. The inability to "raise the head" is synonymous with indignity, shame, and a state of subjection.[6] In Akkadian, the equivalent idiom *našû rêša* may mean "to summon a delinquent, to call someone into the presence of the king." This meaning admirably fits the context here and in verses 19 and 20.

*14. **this place*** Hebrew *bayit,* literally "house"—short for *beit ha-sohar,* "prison," or "the house of my master" (v. 7; 41:10). The professional diviner and dream interpreter expected to be paid for his services, as is illustrated by the case of Balaam in Numbers 22:17f. Joseph therefore feels free to request a personal favor instead, a tactic that also enhances the credibility of his interpretation.

15. Joseph assures the cupbearer that he would be intervening on behalf of an innocent man.

[16]When the chief baker saw how favorably he had interpreted, he said to Joseph, "In my dream, similarly, there were three openwork baskets on my head. [17]In the uppermost basket were all kinds of food for Pharaoh that a baker prepares; and the birds were eating it out of the basket above my head." [18]Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: The three baskets are three days. [19]In three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale you upon a pole; and the birds will pick off your flesh."

שַׂר־הָאֹפִים כִּי טוֹב פָּתַר וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַף־
אֲנִי בַּחֲלוֹמִי וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה סַלֵּי חֹרִי עַל־רֹאשִׁי:
17 וּבַסַּל הָעֶלְיוֹן מִכֹּל מַאֲכַל פַּרְעֹה מַעֲשֵׂה אֹפֶה
וְהָעוֹף אֹכֵל אֹתָם מִן־הַסַּל מֵעַל רֹאשִׁי: 18 וַיַּעַן
יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר זֶה פִּתְרֹנוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת הַסַּלִּים שְׁלֹשֶׁת
יָמִים הֵם: 19 בְּעוֹד ו שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים יִשָּׂא פַרְעֹה
אֶת־רֹאשְׁךָ מֵעָלֶיךָ וְתָלָה אוֹתְךָ עַל־עֵץ וְאָכַל
הָעוֹף אֶת־בְּשָׂרְךָ מֵעָלֶיךָ: מפטיר 20 וַיְהִי יוֹם

kidnapped The reference would be to the development described in 37:28, 36, in which case it would have been the Midianites, not the brothers, who drew Joseph up from the pit. However, Joseph may simply have used this term because he was ashamed to tell his fellow prisoner that his own brothers had sold him into slavery.

land of the Hebrews That is, the land in which the Hebrews sojourn, either Canaan or the Hebron area in which they were concentrated and were buried. The term is not likely to be an anachronism since the designation was not used in later times. It recalls the description in the Mari documents of the Middle Euphrates region as the "land of Hana," after the Haneans who wandered and resided there. On "Hebrews," see Comments to 10:21 and 14:13.

dungeon Hebrew *bor,* literally "pit," another term for "prison," deriving from the subterranean nature of the place of detention,[7] the same term as used in 37:20–29.

THE BAKER'S DREAM (vv. 16–19)

The baker's skepticism has vanished. He is now eager to talk because he recognizes the points of similarity between his dream and that of the cupbearer. But, all too humanly, he disregards the crucial differences.

16. ***openwork*** Hebrew *ḥori,* a term of uncertain meaning. It has variously been connected with *ḥor,* "a hole," and *ḥvr,* "white," and explained as describing either the nature of the baskets, "perforated," "wicker-work," or their contents, "white bread." Another interpretation is "cakes baked on glowing coals" or "thick cakes."[8]

on my head Repeated in verse 17 and of special significance for the interpretation.

17. ***uppermost basket*** Only the contents of this one are described because it is the one accessible to the birds.

all kinds . . . The dream here reflects native Egyptian foods. No less than fifty-seven varieties of bread and thirty-eight different types of cake are known from hieroglyphic texts.

birds The baker has neither the strength nor the presence of mind to drive them away[9]—an ominous detail.

18–19. Joseph notes that, unlike the cupbearer, the baker does not prepare the delicacies himself and does not personally serve Pharaoh in his dream. In fact, the food does not even reach Pharaoh, for it is eaten by the birds. This symbolizes the devouring of the baker's own flesh by the vultures.

19. ***will lift off your head*** This looks like a grim play on words (see Comment to v. 13). However, since verse 20 uses a single phrase to indicate the fate of both officials, and since the "removal of the head" is expressed in Hebrew by a different verb (cf. 1 Sam. 17:46), and verse 22 indicates that his punishment was not decapitation but impalement (41:13), many scholars regard the preposition "off" (Heb. *meʿ-aleikha*) as a dittograph, an unintentional scribal insertion influenced by the last word of the verse. As a matter of fact, the word does not appear in all Hebrew manuscripts or

[20]On the third day—his birthday—Pharaoh made a banquet for all his officials, and he singled out his chief cupbearer and his chief baker from among his officials. [21]He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; [22]but the chief baker he impaled—just as Joseph had interpreted to them.

[23]Yet the chief cupbearer did not think of Joseph; he forgot him.

הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יוֹם הֻלֶּדֶת אֶת־פַּרְעֹה וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה
לְכָל־עֲבָדָיו וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ שַׂר הַמַּשְׁקִים וְאֶת־
רֹאשׁ שַׂר הָאֹפִים בְּתוֹךְ עֲבָדָיו: 21 וַיָּשֶׁב אֶת־שַׂר
הַמַּשְׁקִים עַל־מַשְׁקֵהוּ וַיִּתֵּן הַכּוֹס עַל־כַּף פַּרְעֹה:
22 וְאֶת שַׂר הָאֹפִים תָּלָה כַּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר לָהֶם
יוֹסֵף: 23 וְלֹא־זָכַר שַׂר־הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־יוֹסֵף
וַיִּשְׁכָּחֵהוּ: פ

MIKKETS

41 After two years' time, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, [2]when out of the Nile there came up

מקץ

מ״א וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים וּפַרְעֹה חֹלֵם
וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד עַל־הַיְאֹר: 2 וְהִנֵּה מִן־הַיְאֹר עֹלֹת

in the Vulgate translation. It is quite likely that the idiom "to raise the head" (Heb. *n-s-' ro'sh*) here has the meaning of "call to account" or "bring to justice."

impale you If we hold to the rendering that the baker is, indeed, to be decapitated, then he cannot also be "hanged." We must assume that what is meant here is that his corpse is to be publicly exposed after execution by being hung over a spiked pole set in the ground. Impaling, and not hanging, was a widely used mode of execution in the ancient Near East. (Cf. Deut. 21:22f.; Josh. 10:26; 1 Sam. 31:10.)

pick off your flesh The theological beliefs of the Egyptians motivated them to pay special attention to the preservation of the body after death. Hence, the punishment foretold here is particularly loathsome.

FULFILLMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT (vv. 20–23)

20. ***singled out*** Literally, "lifted the head" (see Comments to vv. 13,19).

21.–22. The narration employs the very words of Joseph to indicate the precision with which his predictions were fulfilled.

23. ***did not think of . . . forgot*** The combination of negative-positive formulation has led to varying interpretations: He did not recall Joseph, not out of malice but because he forgot—so Bekhor Shor; he remembered him neither at the time he gained his freedom nor subsequently—so Rashi and Rashbam; neither in speech nor mentally did he recall him—so Ibn Ezra. Actually, the wording is purely idiomatic and means complete forgetfulness.[10]

The ingratitude of the Egyptian cupbearer prefigures the later national experience of the Israelites in Egypt (cf. Exod. 1:8).

CHAPTER 41

Joseph's Liberation and Rise to Power (vv. 1–56)

Mikkets

The wheel of fate has turned full circle. Joseph's misfortunes began with dreams and now end through dreams. Because of their critical role in the subsequent history of Joseph and Israel, Pharaoh's dreams are narrated immediately and then repeated by Pharaoh himself.

seven cows, handsome and sturdy, and they grazed in the reed grass. 3But presently, seven other cows came up from the Nile close behind them, ugly and gaunt, and stood beside the cows on the bank of the Nile; 4and the ugly gaunt cows ate up the seven handsome sturdy cows. And Pharaoh awoke.

5He fell asleep and dreamed a second time: Seven ears of grain, solid and healthy, grew on a single stalk. 6But close behind them sprouted seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind. 7And the thin ears swallowed up the seven solid and full ears. Then Pharaoh awoke: it was a dream!

8Next morning, his spirit was agitated, and he sent for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dreams, but none could interpret them for Pharaoh.

שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת מַרְאֶה וּבְרִיאֹת בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעֶינָה
בָּאָחוּ׃ 3 וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן
מִן־הַיְאֹר רָעוֹת מַרְאֶה וְדַקּוֹת בָּשָׂר וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה
אֵצֶל הַפָּרוֹת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר׃ 4 וַתֹּאכַלְנָה
הַפָּרוֹת רָעוֹת הַמַּרְאֶה וְדַקֹּת הַבָּשָׂר אֵת שֶׁבַע
הַפָּרוֹת יְפֹת הַמַּרְאֶה וְהַבְּרִיאֹת וַיִּיקַץ פַּרְעֹה׃
5 וַיִּישָׁן וַיַּחֲלֹם שֵׁנִית וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים עֹלוֹת
בְּקָנֶה אֶחָד בְּרִיאוֹת וְטֹבוֹת׃ 6 וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים
דַּקּוֹת וּשְׁדוּפֹת קָדִים צֹמְחוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן׃
7 וַתִּבְלַעְנָה הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַדַּקּוֹת אֵת שֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים
הַבְּרִיאוֹת וְהַמְלֵאוֹת וַיִּיקַץ פַּרְעֹה וְהִנֵּה חֲלוֹם׃
8 וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַתִּפָּעֶם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־
כָּל־חַרְטֻמֵּי מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־כָּל־חֲכָמֶיהָ וַיְסַפֵּר פַּרְעֹה
לָהֶם אֶת־חֲלֹמוֹ וְאֵין־פּוֹתֵר אוֹתָם לְפַרְעֹה׃

PHARAOH'S DREAMS (vv. 1–8)

1. ***After two years' time*** Literally, "at the end of two years of days"; that is, two complete years have elapsed since the release of the cupbearer. Possibly the dreams and the events connected with them also took place on Pharaoh's birthday, as suggested by Shadal.

the Nile Hebrew *ye'or,* an Egyptian loan word also found as *ya-ru-'ú* in Assyrian.[1] The Nile as the setting for Pharaoh's dream is fateful, for the river was literally the lifeline of Egypt, the source of its entire economy.

2. ***seven cows*** This is a touch of local color, for cows were abundant in Egypt and important to the economy. The motif of seven cows is a familiar one from Egyptian paintings and texts.

reed grass Hebrew *'aḥu,* from an Egyptian loan word that originally meant the land flooded by the Nile and then came to be used for pastureland in general. From Egyptian it passed into Hebrew and other Semitic languages.[2]

3. ***close behind them*** That is, in time.

5. ***grew*** Hebrew *'olot,* the same word as in verses 2f. for the "coming up" of the cows.

on a single stalk A clear symbol of abundance.

6. ***scorched by the east wind*** This is usually taken to refer to the hot, dry, withering wind known as the *ḥamsin,* or sirocco, which is frequently used in the Bible as a symbol of destruction.[3] Here, however, as in Exodus 10:13 and 14:21, Hebrew ***kadim*** may signify the south wind that blows in from the Sahara since Egypt was oriented southward to the source and headwaters of the Nile.

7. ***it was a dream*** Much to Pharaoh's surprise, for it all seemed so vivid and real. It should be noted that this phrase is not found in verse 4 after the first dream and that the singular "dream" is used in verses 8, 15, and 25, although the reference is to both dreams. The text hints at the underlying identical nature of the interpretations (cf. Comment to v. 22).

8. ***Next morning . . . agitated*** Implying that, following his dreams, Pharaoh spent a sleepless night, anxiously awaiting the dawn.

[9]The chief cupbearer then spoke up and said to Pharaoh, "I must make mention today of my offenses. [10]Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the chief steward, together with the chief baker. [11]We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. [12]A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. [13]And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was impaled."

9 וַיְדַבֵּר שַׂר הַמַּשְׁקִים אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר אֶת־
חַטָּאַי אֲנִי מַזְכִּיר הַיּוֹם: 10 פַּרְעֹה קָצַף עַל־עֲבָדָיו
וַיִּתֵּן אֹתִי בְּמִשְׁמַר בֵּית שַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים אֹתִי וְאֵת
שַׂר הָאֹפִים: 11 וַנַּחַלְמָה חֲלוֹם בְּלַיְלָה אֶחָד אֲנִי
וְהוּא אִישׁ כְּפִתְרוֹן חֲלֹמוֹ חָלָמְנוּ: 12 וְשָׁם אִתָּנוּ
נַעַר עִבְרִי עֶבֶד לְשַׂר הַטַּבָּחִים וַנְּסַפֶּר־לוֹ
וַיִּפְתָּר־לָנוּ אֶת־חֲלֹמֹתֵינוּ אִישׁ כַּחֲלֹמוֹ פָּתָר:
13 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר פָּתַר־לָנוּ כֵּן הָיָה אֹתִי הֵשִׁיב עַל־
כַּנִּי וְאֹתוֹ תָלָה: 14 וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־

magicians Hebrew *ḥartumim,* probably an Egyptian loan word. It appears in the Bible only in connection with Egypt and Babylon.[4] Magic was a feature of Egyptian life. It should be noted that although Israel shared with its pagan neighbors a belief in the reality of dreams as a medium of divine communication, it never developed, as did Egypt and Mesopotamia, a class of magicians; quite the contrary, the religion of Israel banished magic and sorcery from its midst (cf. Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10f.).

wise men Hebrew *ḥakhamim,* the first use of the stem *ḥ-k-m* in the Bible. Here the term refers to those who possessed a fund of specialized, utilitarian knowledge and skill in the magic arts.

his dreams Literally, "his dream," in the singular. See Comment to verse 7.

none could interpret them for Pharaoh It is inconceivable that the professional dream interpreters are unable to provide "interpretations." The key phrase, therefore, is "for Pharaoh," that is, their solutions do not satisfy him.[5] The fact is that there is nothing in the dreams that relates in a personal way to Pharaoh himself. This, incidentally, is in contrast to all previous dreams in Genesis in which the dreamer plays a central role. It is therefore clear to Pharaoh that his dream experience has a wider, national significance. The customary fawning and flattering expositions of the magicians are therefore unconvincing.

The failure of the Egyptian professional dream interpreters has a significance that reaches far beyond the immediate story. This incident—the first clash recorded in the Bible between pagan magic and the will of God—constitutes a polemic against paganism. The same motif recurs in the contest between Moses and Aaron and the court magicians of Egypt in Exodus 7–9, in the rivalry between Daniel and the magicians of Babylon in Daniel 2 and 4, and in the story of Balaam in Numbers 22–23.

THE CUPBEARER REMEMBERS JOSEPH (vv. 9–13)

9. ***I must make mention*** Hebrew *mazkir,* the same stem as used by Joseph in his plea in 40:14 and by the Narrator in reporting the ingratitude of the cupbearer in 40:23. The similarity of language conveys a direct relationship between the events. Hence, he speaks of his "offenses" in the plural, that is, against Pharaoh and against Joseph.

10. Compare 40:1–3.

11. ***with a meaning of its own*** Compare 40:5.

12. ***A Hebrew youth . . . a servant*** Rabbinic tradition understood this description as being deliberately derogatory, as though the cupbearer paid his debt to Joseph only reluctantly.[6] While there is nothing in the text itself to suggest other than a simple factual statement, it is to be noted that the cupbearer actually stops short of recommending that Joseph be brought to Pharaoh.

יוֹסֵף וַיְרִיצֻהוּ מִן־הַבּוֹר וַיְגַלַּח וַיְחַלֵּף שִׂמְלֹתָיו
וַיָּבֹא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה: שני 15 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף
חֲלוֹם חָלַמְתִּי וּפֹתֵר אֵין אֹתוֹ וַאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי עָלֶיךָ
לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתֹּר אֹתוֹ: 16 וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף
אֶת־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר בִּלְעָדָי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת־
שְׁלוֹם פַּרְעֹה: [שני לספרדים] 17 וַיְדַבֵּר
פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף בַּחֲלֹמִי הִנְנִי עֹמֵד עַל־שְׂפַת
הַיְאֹר: 18 וְהִנֵּה מִן־הַיְאֹר עֹלֹת שֶׁבַע פָּרוֹת
בְּרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר וִיפֹת תֹּאַר וַתִּרְעֶינָה בָּאָחוּ:
19 וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע־פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן
דַּלּוֹת וְרָעוֹת תֹּאַר מְאֹד וְרַקּוֹת בָּשָׂר לֹא־רָאִיתִי
כָהֵנָּה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָרֹעַ: 20 וַתֹּאכַלְנָה
הַפָּרוֹת הָרַקּוֹת וְהָרָעוֹת אֵת שֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת
הָרִאשֹׁנוֹת הַבְּרִיאֹת: 21 וַתָּבֹאנָה אֶל־קִרְבֶּנָה וְלֹא
נוֹדַע כִּי־בָאוּ אֶל־קִרְבֶּנָה וּמַרְאֵיהֶן רַע כַּאֲשֶׁר
בַּתְּחִלָּה וָאִיקָץ: 22 וָאֵרֶא בַּחֲלֹמִי וְהִנֵּה שֶׁבַע

[14]Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. [15]And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning." [16]Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "Not I! God will see to Pharaoh's welfare."

[17]Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, [18]when out of the Nile came up seven sturdy and well-formed cows and grazed in the reed grass. [19]Presently there followed them seven other cows, scrawny, ill-formed, and emaciated—never had I seen their likes for ugliness in all the land of Egypt! [20]And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the first seven cows, the sturdy ones; [21]but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke. [22]In my other dream, I saw seven ears of grain, full and healthy, growing

JOSEPH'S DREAM INTERPRETATION (vv. 14–32)

14. The six verbs indicate a series of actions performed in swift succession in the atmosphere of urgency and stress that is created when Pharaoh's wishes are to be satisfied.

dungeon Hebrew *bor*. See Comment to 40:15. The term forges a connection with 37:20–29, for Joseph's misery began in a *bor* ("pit") and ends when he is brought out of a *bor* ("dungeon").

his hair cut The Hebrew verb *g-l-ḥ*, "to shave," applies both to the head, as in Numbers 6:9, and to the face, as in Jeremiah 41:5. For hygienic reasons, Egyptian men generally shaved both areas.

his clothes Clothing has been a constant factor in Joseph's misfortunes.[7] This change of clothing has symbolic meaning as the process of his liberation now begins.

15. ***no one can interpret*** See Comment to verse 8.

you . . . Pharaoh believes Joseph is endowed with innate magical power.

16. ***God will see to . . .*** The precise meaning of Hebrew *ya'aneh shalom* is unclear. If it is connected with the phrase *sha'al shalom* (Pss. 122:6), "to pray for the welfare of," then it implies, "God will respond [to me and grant] Pharaoh's welfare." It is not that Joseph knows the interpretation of the dreams in advance; rather, he is convinced that the sudden turn of events that has brought him from the dungeon into the presence of Pharaoh is providential for him. And he believes that he will receive a dream interpretation from God that will entirely satisfy Pharaoh.

17.–24. The recitation of the dreams to Joseph contains a number of expansions of and verbal variations from the original narration. This literary device is a recurring feature of repetitions in biblical discourse.

19. ***never had I seen . . .*** This previously unstated personal observation points to the real meaning of the dream.

21. This entire verse is not in the original narrative. Here, again, it directs attention to the key element (cf. v. 30f.).

22. ***In my . . . dream*** Significantly, the phrase (v. 5) "a second time" is omitted, as though Pharaoh himself realizes that the two dreams are really one (cf. Comment to v. 7).

on a single stalk; [23]but right behind them sprouted seven ears, shriveled, thin, and scorched by the east wind. [24]And the thin ears swallowed the seven healthy ears. I have told my magicians, but none has an explanation for me."

[25]And Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same: God has told Pharaoh what He is about to do. [26]The seven healthy cows are seven years, and the seven healthy ears are seven years; it is the same dream. [27]The seven lean and ugly cows that followed are seven years, as are also the seven empty ears scorched by the east wind; they are seven years of famine. [28]It is just as I have told Pharaoh: God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. [29]Immediately ahead are seven years of great abundance in all the land of Egypt. [30]After them will come seven years of famine, and all the abundance in the land of Egypt will be forgotten. As the land is ravaged by famine, [31]no trace of the abundance will be left in the land because of the famine thereafter, for it will be very severe. [32]As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, it means that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out.

שִׁבֳּלִים עֹלֹת בְּקָנֶה אֶחָד מְלֵאוֹת וְטֹבוֹת: 23 וְהִנֵּה
שֶׁבַע שִׁבֳּלִים צְנֻמוֹת דַּקּוֹת שְׁדֻפוֹת קָדִים
צֹמְחוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶם: 24 וַתִּבְלַעְנָה הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַדַּקּוֹת
אֵת שֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַטֹּבוֹת וָאֹמַר אֶל־הַחַרְטֻמִּים
וְאֵין מַגִּיד לִי: 25 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־פַּרְעֹה חֲלוֹם
פַּרְעֹה אֶחָד הוּא אֵת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה הִגִּיד
לְפַרְעֹה: 26 שֶׁבַע פָּרֹת הַטֹבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה
וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים הַטֹּבֹת שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה חֲלוֹם
אֶחָד הוּא: 27 וְשֶׁבַע הַפָּרוֹת הָרַקּוֹת וְהָרָעֹת
הָעֹלֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים הֵנָּה וְשֶׁבַע הַשִּׁבֳּלִים
הָרֵקוֹת שְׁדֻפוֹת הַקָּדִים יִהְיוּ שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי רָעָב:
28 הִוא הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר
הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׂה הֶרְאָה אֶת־פַּרְעֹה: 29 הִנֵּה שֶׁבַע
שָׁנִים בָּאוֹת שָׂבָע גָּדוֹל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
30 וְקָמוּ שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי רָעָב אַחֲרֵיהֶן וְנִשְׁכַּח כָּל־
הַשָּׂבָע בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְכִלָּה הָרָעָב אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:
31 וְלֹא־יִוָּדַע הַשָּׂבָע בָּאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָב הַהוּא
אַחֲרֵי־כֵן כִּי־כָבֵד הוּא מְאֹד: 32 וְעַל הִשָּׁנוֹת
הַחֲלוֹם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה פַּעֲמָיִם כִּי־נָכוֹן הַדָּבָר מֵעִם

*24. **none has an explanation*** Hebrew *maggid,* literally "told," a verb often used in connection with elucidation of what had been obscure.[8] The phrase refers to what was related in verses 8 and 15.

*25. **one and the same*** Both dreams, although separate and successive, form part of a single whole and give expression to the identical phenomenon.

has told Hebrew *higgid,* that is, "has disclosed" (see vv. 24, 28).

*27. **famine*** Pharaoh elaborated upon the negative aspects of his dreams (vv. 19,21) emphasizing the elements that had deeply disturbed him. Joseph, therefore, mentions the famine first, inverting the order of the dream phenomena. In this way, the narrative indicates that it is the famine that causes Joseph's emancipation and elevation to high office and brings his brothers down to Egypt. It is these events that are the ultimate points of interest in the story.[9]

*28. **just as I have told*** Compare verses 16 and 25.

revealed Hebrew *her'ah* expresses the language of vision—that is, of visual imagery—as distinct from verbal articulation.

*31. **no trace*** Hebrew *ve-lo' yivvada'*, literally "it will not be known," echoes and interprets verse 21 (cf. *ve-lo' noda'*). The reserves of food set aside for the famine will be completely used up.

*32. **the same dream twice*** See Comment to 37:9.

determined Hebrew *nakhon,* a word borrowed from Israelite legal terminology, meaning it is established beyond the shadow of a doubt.[10]

soon The seven-year cycle begins at once.

JOSEPH'S ADVICE (vv. 33–36)

Emboldened, perhaps by some silent gesture of satisfaction on the part of Pharaoh, and desirous of imparting a sense of urgency, Joseph seizes the opportunity to offer unsolicited advice, the tenor of which is concern for the welfare of the people. He suggests that three measures be taken to avert the

33"Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34And let Pharaoh take steps to appoint overseers over the land, and organize the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty. 35Let all the food of these good years that are coming be gathered, and let the grain be collected under Pharaoh's authority as food to be stored in the cities. 36Let that food be a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which will come upon the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish in the famine."

37The plan pleased Pharaoh and all his courtiers. 38And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?" 39So Pharaoh

הָאֱלֹהִים וּמְמַהֵר הָאֱלֹהִים לַעֲשֹׂתוֹ׃ 33 וְעַתָּה יֵרֶא
פַרְעֹה אִישׁ נָבוֹן וְחָכָם וְיָשִׁיתֵהוּ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃
34 יַעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה וְיַפְקֵד פְּקִדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְחִמֵּשׁ
אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי הַשָּׂבָע׃ 35 וְיִקְבְּצוּ
אֶת־כָּל־אֹכֶל הַשָּׁנִים הַטֹּבֹת הַבָּאֹת הָאֵלֶּה
וְיִצְבְּרוּ־בָר תַּחַת יַד־פַּרְעֹה אֹכֶל בֶּעָרִים וְשָׁמָרוּ׃
36 וְהָיָה הָאֹכֶל לְפִקָּדוֹן לָאָרֶץ לְשֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי הָרָעָב
אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶיןָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְלֹא־תִכָּרֵת הָאָרֶץ
בָּרָעָב׃ 37 וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי כָּל־
עֲבָדָיו׃ 38 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־עֲבָדָיו הֲנִמְצָא כָזֶה
אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ׃ 39 וַיֹּאמֶר שלישי

dreaded menace of famine: the selection of a national commissioner, the appointment of regional overseers, and the institution of urban grain storage.

33. ***Accordingly*** Hebrew *ve-'atah* frequently introduces a new episode or development.[11] Joseph presents his advice not as part of the dream message but as a personal suggestion.

34. ***let Pharaoh*** Joseph is extremely tactful and cautious. He does not wish to raise any suspicion that he is suggesting the creation of a new, and possibly threatening, focus of ruling power. The repeated emphasis on "Pharaoh," in fact, accords with the ancient Egyptian concept of government, which stressed the ubiquitous, omniscient, and omnipotent nature of the king.

take steps Hebrew *ya'aseh.* Joseph deliberately uses the same verbal stem he has used three times before in connection with the impending divine action (vv. 25,28,32), as though to imply that Pharaoh is the human counterpart of God.

and organize Hebrew *ḥimmesh.* This rendering connects the word with *ḥamush,* "armed, equipped, prepared." An alternative interpretation understands it to be derived from *ḥamesh,* "five"; that is, the populace is to give a fifth part of the produce to the crown for storage purposes. Support for this view may be found in the analogous *shillesh,* "to divide into three"; *shishsheh,* "to set aside a sixth part"; *'isser,* "to give/take a tithe." It is to be noted that Joseph later institutes a permanent tax of one-fifth on all produce (47:24,26) and that the number "five" recurs many times in the Joseph story.[12]

35. Joseph sensibly suggests the stockpiling of grain in the plentiful years against the forthcoming years of famine.

JOSEPH'S APPOINTMENT AS VIZIER (vv. 37–46)

37. Pharaoh and his courtiers recognize at once that Joseph's interpretation of the dreams is correct and his advice sound. They are impressed by his perception that the two dreams are actually one, by his relating them to national affairs rather than to the king's personal interests, and by the social concern that he displays in his advice. Not content just to predict disaster, Joseph immediately suggests measures to alleviate the lot of the Egyptian people.

38. ***Could we find*** Pharaoh's question to his courtiers is rhetorical. He knows at once what he must do. Although they had shown their pleasure at Joseph's interpretation and advice, the courtiers now make no comment. Perhaps they expected the new appointee to be one of themselves and are disappointed.

in whom is the spirit of God This is the first biblical mention of one so endowed. In Exodus 31:3 and 35:31, Bezalel is described as another who is endowed with God's spirit and therefore has "skill, ability and knowledge." Belshazzar similarly describes Daniel: "I have heard about you that

said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. 40You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you." 41Pharaoh further said to Joseph, "See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt." 42And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck. 43He had him ride in the

פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרֵי הוֹדִיעַ אֱלֹהִים אוֹתְךָ אֶת־
כָּל־זֹאת אֵין־נָבוֹן וְחָכָם כָּמוֹךָ: 40 אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה
עַל־בֵּיתִי וְעַל־פִּיךָ יִשַּׁק כָּל־עַמִּי רַק הַכִּסֵּא אֶגְדַּל
מִמֶּךָּ: 41 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֵה נְתַתִּי אֹתְךָ
עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: 42 וַיָּסַר פַּרְעֹה אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ
מֵעַל יָדוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ עַל־יַד יוֹסֵף וַיַּלְבֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
בִּגְדֵי־שֵׁשׁ וַיָּשֶׂם רְבִד הַזָּהָב עַל־צַוָּארוֹ: 43 וַיַּרְכֵּב

you have the spirit of the gods in you, and that illumination, knowledge, and extraordinary wisdom are to be found in you" (Dan. 5:14). Generally, possession of the "spirit of God" impels one to undertake a mission (Num. 27:18), imparts extraordinary energy and drive (Judg. 3:10; 11:29), and produces uncommon intelligence and practical wisdom.

39. discerning and wise Pharaoh repeats Joseph's own words (v. 33).

40. in charge of my court This function probably refers to the position of "Overseer of the Domain of the Palace," one of the known Egyptian bureaucratic titles. Most likely, Joseph is given control over the king's personal estates. A similar title was later employed in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.[13]

by your command . . . directed Hebrew *ve-'al pikha yishshak kol 'ammi* may be rendered literally, "on your mouth shall all my people kiss," perhaps a figurative expression for paying homage. However, none of the ancient versions understood it in this way. The first two words undoubtedly mean "by your order," as in Genesis 45:21 and Exodus 17:1. *Yishshak* has been connected with *n-sh-k,* "to be armed, equipped," that is, "provisioned."[14] The context requires a meaning "conduct themselves, be directed."

41. Pharaoh further said In contrast to his previous loquacity, Joseph does not utter a word in response to Pharaoh's announcement. The threefold repetition of the phrase "Pharaoh said to Joseph," in verses 39, 41, and 44, probably indicates that the king pauses after each statement to ascertain the young man's reaction and then reiterates his decision in order to reassure the dumbstruck Joseph that he really means what he says.

in charge of all the land The function reflects the Egyptian title "Chief of the Entire Land."

42. Pharaoh now performs a series of ceremonial acts that, in effect, constitute Joseph's investiture as "Grand Vizier of Egypt."

signet ring Hebrew *tabba'at* derives from Egyptian *ǧb'.t,* attested in Egyptian Old Kingdom texts (29th–23rd cent. B.C.E.). The transfer of the ring bearing the royal seal from the finger of Pharaoh to that of Joseph signifies the delegation of authority; it enables the new official to validate documents in the king's name.[15] The title "Royal Seal-Bearer" was well known in the Egyptian bureaucracy.

fine linen Hebrew *shesh* is a loan word from Egyptian *šś,* "byssus," used for cloth of exceptional quality. The same material was used in Israel for the Tabernacle furnishings and the priestly vestments. In later Hebrew, *shesh* was replaced by *buts,* the term current in the Mesopotamian-Syrian area.

Joseph's new robes bring to mind the passage in the autobiography of Rekh-mi-Re, vizier of Upper Egypt in the days of Thutmose III (15th cent. B.C.E.), where he describes how he "went forth . . . clad in fine linen."[16]

a gold chain This, too, is a well-known Egyptian symbol; the giving of a gold chain was one of the highest distinctions the king could bestow upon his favorites. The three items mentioned here in the investiture ceremony, as well as the one in verse 43, all appear in the report of the seventh-century B.C.E. Assyrian conqueror Ashurbanipal concerning his campaign against Egypt. Describing

אֹתוֹ בְּמִרְכֶּבֶת הַמִּשְׁנֶה אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְפָנָיו
אַבְרֵךְ וְנָתוֹן אֹתוֹ עַל כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: 44 וַיֹּאמֶר
פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבִלְעָדֶיךָ לֹא־יָרִים
אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:
45 וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה שֵׁם־יוֹסֵף צָפְנַת פַּעְנֵחַ וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ
אֶת־אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּצֵא

chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, "Abrek!" Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt.

44Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh; yet without you, no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him for a wife Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On. Thus Joseph emerged in charge of

his installation of Necho as pharaoh, which was performed according to Egyptian custom, Ashurbanipal says that he clad Necho in a garment with multicolored trimmings, placed a golden chain around his neck, put golden rings on his hands, and presented him with chariots.

*43. **chariot*** This is the first reference to a chariot in the Bible. The horse is not mentioned here, but there is little doubt that the horse-drawn chariot is intended, for the ass was not used in Egypt as a draft animal. The Hyksos invasion of Egypt in the eighteenth century B.C.E. first introduced the chariot to that country as an instrument of warfare. The narrative here implies the use of the chariot as a status symbol, as in 2 Samuel 15:1.

second-in-command This meaning of Hebrew *mishneh* is established by such texts as 1 Samuel 23:17, 2 Kings 23:4 and 2 Chronicles 28:7; it is so understood by Rashbam, Radak, and Ramban. It would thus be a title corresponding to the Akkadian *terdennu* (= *tartan,* Isa. 20:1) and equivalent to viceroy. The ancient versions, such as the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Targums, applied *mishneh* to the chariot and took it to mean "his second one," in accordance with the use of *mishneh* as "double" in Genesis 43:12 and Exodus 16:22 and "copy" in Deuteronomy 17:18 and Joshua 8:32. A similar phrase in 2 Chronicles 35:24, *rekhev ha-mishneh,* is itself ambiguous in its context.

they cried before him The practice of having heralds declaim in front of the chariot rider is recorded in Esther 6:9. It seems to have been customary to have runners preceding the chariot of a dignitary in the early days of the Israelite monarchy, as is evidenced by 2 Samuel 15:1 and 1 Kings 1:5.

Abrek! An exclamation found nowhere else. Its meaning was already lost by rabbinic times. A fanciful interpretation, *ab rek* (= rex), "father of the king" (cf. Gen. 45:8), is found in the Targums (cf. BB 4a) and is reflected in the Peshitta, "father and ruler." Medieval Jewish commentators took the term to be a verb formed from the noun *berekh,* "knee," meaning "bend the knee!"[17] In Akkadian, *abarakku* is the term for a steward of the temple and the chief steward of a private or royal household. The word may well be Egyptian, and *'b-r.k,* meaning "attention!", has been suggested.

*44. **I am Pharaoh*** That is, I speak with the full authority of my royal office. See Comment to 15:7.

lift up hand or foot A figure of speech meaning "no action shall be taken."

45. The change of name signifies a new identity and a fresh start in life. See Comment to 17:5. In the case of Joseph, additional factors are involved. The king may have wanted to "Egyptianize" Joseph. An analogy exists in the case of another foreigner, Ben Ozen, who rose to high office at the court of Merneptah (ca. 1224–1214 B.C.E.) and was given two Egyptian names by his royal master. The general tendency of foreigners to acculturate in Egypt is well documented. Hyksos rulers adopted Egyptian names, and an eighteenth-century B.C.E. inventory of servants on an estate (see Comment to 39:2) shows that most of the children of the Asians bore local names.

The changing of Joseph's name is also connected with the key role that his elevation plays within the larger story. For the prophecy of Genesis 15:13f. to be fulfilled and the Exodus accomplished, the Israelites must settle in Egypt. The descent of Joseph's brothers is the indispensable means to this end, and the external Egyptianization of Joseph is pivotal, for his brothers must not recognize him.

Zaphenath-paneah Traditional exegesis connects the name with Joseph's penchant for interpreting dreams, seeing in the first element a derivation from the Hebrew stem *ts-f-n,* "to hide," and rendering the second, contextually, "elucidate." The name would thus mean "revealer of hidden

the land of Egypt.—[46]Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt.—Leaving Pharaoh's presence, Joseph traveled through all the land of Egypt.

[47]During the seven years of plenty, the land produced in abundance. [48]And he gathered all the grain of the seven years that the land of Egypt was enjoying, and stored the grain in the cities; he put in each city the grain of the fields

יוֹסֵף עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 46 וְיוֹסֵף בֶּן־שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה
בְּעָמְדוֹ לִפְנֵי פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרָיִם וַיֵּצֵא יוֹסֵף
מִלִּפְנֵי פַּרְעֹה וַיַּעֲבֹר בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 47 וַתַּעַשׂ
הָאָרֶץ בְּשֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי הַשָּׂבָע לְקֻמָצִים׃ 48 וַיִּקְבֹּץ
אֶת־כָּל־אֹכֶל שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם וַיִּתֵּן־אֹכֶל בֶּעָרִים אֹכֶל שְׂדֵה־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר

things."[18] However, an Egyptian origin is evident, and a widely held view regards it as the transcription of *ḏd-p'-nṯr-'iw.f-'nḫ,* "God speaks; he lives." The Septuagint transcribed it *psonthomphanech,* which seems to represent the Late Egyptian word *psontenpa'anḫ,* which means, "the creator/sustainer of life." This latter interpretation has the advantage of being appropriate to Joseph's mission as vizier.

Asenath The form of the name is Hebraic.[19] Its origin is Egyptian *'Iw.s-(n)-Nt*, meaning "she who belongs to (the goddess) Neith."

Poti-phera For this name, see Comment to 37:36.

priest of On This city, situated 7 miles northeast of modern Cairo, was the great cultic center of the sun-god Re, called Bet Shemesh in Hebrew (Jer. 43:13) and Heliopolis in Greek. *On* is derived from Egyptian *iwnw,* which means "a column." The name reflects the city's most outstanding architectural features, which were columns and colonnades. The high priest at On[20] held the exalted title "Greatest of Seers." Joseph thus marries into the elite of Egyptian nobility.

emerged in charge of Literally, "went out over." The precise meaning of the Hebrew is unclear. The present rendering is supported by the force of the preposition *'al* in verses 40, 41, and 43, and was so understood by the Targums and by Saadiah. The clause should probably be understood as short for "he left Pharaoh's presence to be in charge of the land of Egypt."

46. Joseph . . . king of Egypt This parenthetic note, giving Joseph's age as thirty at the time his sufferings finally ended, corresponds to the recording of his age as seventeen when they began (37:2). This provides a chronological framework for the narrative.

entered the service of This is the force of the Hebrew expression *'amad lifnei,* literally "stood before."[21]

traveled . . . Egypt Joseph loses no time in familiarizing himself with local conditions preparatory to his main task of enabling the Egyptians to survive the expected famine.

The elevation of Joseph by the king raises the question of whether a foreigner could really have risen to such high office in the Egyptian government. The cases of the Semitic nomad Yanḥamu, who became Egyptian commissioner for Canaan and Syria in the days of Akhnaton (ca. 1370–1353 B.C.E.), and of Ben Ozen, who came from a place situated east of Lake Tiberias and rose to become the royal herald, or marshal, at the court of Merneptah (ca. 1224–1214 B.C.E.) indicate that such elevation of foreigners was indeed possible. In fact, a brother of the same Merneptah was given in marriage by his father Ramses II (ca. 1290–1224 B.C.E.) to the daughter of a Syrian sea captain named Ben-Anath. Thus it was not at all extraordinary for foreigners, and Semites in particular, to be welcomed by the court and to rise to positions of responsibility and power in the government of Egypt.

THE SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY (vv. 47–49)

47. in abundance Hebrew *li-kematsim.* The singular ***komets*** means "a handful" (Lev. 2:2). It is assumed that "by handfuls" means "bumper crops." Another tradition takes the ***kematsim*** to mean "storage pits for grain."[22]

48–49. From Joseph's activities it is clear that he holds the well-known Egyptian office of "Overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt," whose duties were responsibility for the

around it. 49So Joseph collected produce in very large quantity, like the sands of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

50Before the years of famine came, Joseph became the father of two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera, priest of On, bore to him. 51Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, "God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home." 52And the second he named Ephraim, meaning, "God has made me fertile in the land of my affliction."

סְבִיבֹתֶיהָ נָתַן בְּתוֹכָהּ: 49 וַיִּצְבֹּר יוֹסֵף בָּר כְּחוֹל
הַיָּם הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד עַד כִּי־חָדַל לִסְפֹּר כִּי־אֵין
מִסְפָּר: 50 וּלְיוֹסֵף יֻלַּד שְׁנֵי בָנִים בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא
שְׁנַת הָרָעָב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי פֶרַע
כֹּהֵן אֹן: 51 וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת־שֵׁם הַבְּכֹר מְנַשֶּׁה
כִּי־נַשַּׁנִי אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית
אָבִי: 52 וְאֵת שֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי קָרָא אֶפְרַיִם כִּי־הִפְרַנִי
אֱלֹהִים בְּאֶרֶץ עָנְיִי: רביעי 53 וַתִּכְלֶינָה שֶׁבַע

collection of tax payments on field produce (cf. Gen. 47:24), the storage of an adequate supply of food in years of plenty, and the distribution of food during years of famine.

It was a strange quirk of fate that the shepherd boy should have become, in effect, "Minister of Agriculture." Joseph's first dream, described in Genesis 37:7, perhaps contained a hint of his future vocation.

JOSEPH'S TWO SONS (vv. 50–52)

50. years Literally, "year of famine." The use of the singular may imply that the sons were born either before the first year of the famine or before the year when its effect first becomes severe—that is, toward the end of the second year of famine, when the migration of Jacob and his family took place. The information is inserted here in order to anticipate and explain the incident in 48:5f.

became the father of The use of the singular form of the Hebrew verb *yullad* here and in 46:27 may indicate that the boys were twins, but the same use is found in 35:26, which defies such an explanation.

whom Asenath . . . bore Joseph seems to have remained monogamous.

51. Manasseh The primary meaning of the name is "he who causes to forget." Such a name would most likely be given to a child born after some misfortune, such as the death of an earlier child or of the father. Joseph here adapts the name to his own situation.[23]

meaning Hebrew *ki,* "because." See Comment to 4:25.

my hardship and my parental home Since the second son is named in reference to Joseph's sufferings in Egypt (v. 52), this must refer wholly to his previous experiences in Canaan. Hence, it is best, with Saadiah and Ibn Janaḥ, to take the clauses as an instance of hendiadys, a single idea being expressed by two terms. The combination, in effect, means "my suffering in my parental home."

With the birth of an heir, Joseph now has founded his own nuclear family. He has achieved physical, social, and psychological security and feels he can forget his miserably unhappy youth or at least not allow it to intrude upon his future.

52. Ephraim The name originally must have meant either "fertile land," from the stem *p-r-ḥ,* or "pastureland," from *'afar,* preserved in postbiblical Hebrew.[24] Either etymology would aptly describe the future territory of the tribe bearing this name, which was located west of the Jordan in the central region. It was blessed with good soil and rainfall.

made me fertile Hebrew *hifrani,* an obvious word play on Ephraim (cf. Hos. 13:12,15). All biblical Hifil forms of the stem *p-r-ḥ* refer to the blessing of abundant posterity.[25] However, it is curious that such language should be used here after the birth of only the second child. There may be a hint here of the later history of the tribe: Moses bestows upon Joseph a fertility blessing in his farewell address in Deuteronomy 33:13–17, and he explicitly refers to "the myriads of Ephraim" and "the thousands of Manasseh."

[53]The seven years of abundance that the land of Egypt enjoyed came to an end, [54]and the seven years of famine set in, just as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all lands, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread.

שְׁנֵי הַשָּׂבָע אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃
54 וַתְּחִלֶּינָה שֶׁבַע שְׁנֵי הָרָעָב לָבוֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר
יוֹסֵף וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּכָל־הָאֲרָצוֹת וּבְכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

my affliction That is, where I spent thirteen years in captivity. The same Hebrew word *'oni* is often used of the later Israelite bondage in Egypt,[26] and is most likely an intended allusion here to the larger purposes of the Joseph story and to its role in the divine plan of history. This would explain the antithetical usage of "affliction" and "fertility," even though they do not form natural antonyms.

THE ONSET OF FAMINE (vv. 53–57)

Lower Egypt, the northern area of the country, is virtually rainless. Its entire economy, of which agriculture was the core in ancient times, has always depended upon the Nile floods caused by the river's periodic rise during three summer months. The swelling of the river results from the torrential rains in the Upper Nile Basin being carried down to the Delta by the Blue Nile. In ancient times an elaborate series of artificially constructed irrigation works controlled the distribution and utilization of the flood waters. The measurements of the maximum levels of inundation, as recorded by the Nilometers placed at strategic points along the river, were noted in the royal annals.

Normally, the floods come with remarkable regularity. But there are years when the rainfall in the southern Sudan provides an insufficient volume of water. A shortfall of only a few inches could deny irrigation to the arid areas of the north, deprive the arable land of its productivity, and bring famine to the inhabitants of Egypt.

The biblical story presupposes a succession of such low annual rises. This phenomenon and the motif of seven-year famines are well documented in Egyptian and other Near Eastern texts. Several pertinent inscriptions, dating from the First Intermediate Period in Egyptian history (ca. 2250–2000 B.C.E.), have been discovered. Iti, the treasurer of the town of Imyotru, boasted that he supplied his fellow citizens with barley in years of famine and helped other towns as well. The steward Seneni of Coptus reported in his stela, or inscribed commemorative stone pillar, that "in the painful years of distress" he had rationed out barley to his town. Ankhtify, "the great chieftain of Nekhen," recorded a seven-year famine in which the entire south of Egypt is said to have died of hunger and people devoured their own children. He took pride in having foreseen the event, caused by a low Nile, and in having been able to rush grain and grant loans of corn to various towns in order to alleviate the situation. Another famine inscription from this period comes from Ameny, a chief in the days of Senwosre I (ca. 1971–1928 B.C.E.), who recalled that in years of famine he had supplied wheat and barley to the people so that no one went hungry "until the great Nile had returned." The most celebrated report of all is a late Ptolemaic inscription purporting to derive from King Djoser (ca. 28th cent. B.C.E.). A great misfortune had befallen the country: the Nile had not inundated the land for seven years. Grain was scarce, seeds had dried up, and all food was in short supply.

The motif of a seven-year famine is present even in fertile Mesopotamia. In the Gilgamesh Epic (6.102–106), the sky-god Anu threatens that "seven years of empty husks" could occur. From the Syro-Canaanite area comes the Ugaritic Epic of Aqht, which mentions the seven-year failure of Baal, the god of rain and thunder (1 Aqht 1.42–46). In addition, a copy of a mid-eighth century B.C.E. political treaty from the town of Sfire, about 16 miles (25.6 km.) southeast of Aleppo, has survived; among the curses to be imposed for a breach of its stipulations it includes seven years of famine. Finally, the same motif is found in Israel where the prophet Gad presents David with a choice of punishments, among them seven years of famine, as related in 2 Samuel 24:13. All this demonstrates the existence of a widespread Near Eastern literary convention defining severe famine in terms of a seven-year duration.

54. in all lands The phenomenon is emphasized three times in this brief section because it is to be the essential factor causing the descent of Joseph's brothers to Egypt. In actuality, of course, there could not be any natural connection between the famine in Egypt and that in neighboring countries since the two had entirely unrelated causes (cf. Zech. 14:17f.). The situation in Canaan resulted from a prolonged lack of rainfall that had nothing to do with the failure of the Nile to rise.

55And when all the land of Egypt felt the hunger, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he tells you, you shall do."—56Accordingly, when the famine became severe in the land of Egypt, Joseph laid open all that was within, and rationed out grain to the Egyptians. The famine, however, spread over the whole world. 57So all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to procure rations, for the famine had become severe throughout the world.

55 הֵיָה לָחָם: וַתִּרְעַב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּצְעַק
הָעָם אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לַלֶּחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה לְכָל־מִצְרַיִם
לְכוּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר לָכֶם תַּעֲשׂוּ: 56 וְהָרָעָב
הָיָה עַל כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ וַיִּפְתַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־
אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וַיִּשְׁבֹּר לְמִצְרַיִם וַיֶּחֱזַק הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרָיִם: 57 וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ בָּאוּ מִצְרַיְמָה לִשְׁבֹּר אֶל־
יוֹסֵף כִּי־חָזַק הָרָעָב בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

42 When Jacob saw that there were food rations to be had in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? 2Now I hear," he went on, "that there are rations to be had in Egypt. Go down and procure rations

מ״ב וַיַּרְא יַעֲקֹב כִּי יֶשׁ־שֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרָיִם וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב לְבָנָיו לָמָּה תִתְרָאוּ: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי
כִּי יֶשׁ־שֶׁבֶר בְּמִצְרַיִם רְדוּ־שָׁמָּה וְשִׁבְרוּ־לָנוּ מִשָּׁם

55. This verse, too, anticipates the next episode. It explains why the brothers have to appear in person before Joseph (cf. v. 57).

56. For the sake of clarity and continuity with verse 55, the English has inverted the order of the clauses.

within Hebrew ***bahem,*** literally "in them," has no antecedent. The ancient versions variously rendered "all the granaries" (Septuagint, Vulg., Pesh.), "all the granaries in which was grain" (Targs.), and "everything in which was grain" (Sam.). These either reflect a different text or are attempts to interpret the difficult Hebrew.

rationed out grain See Comment to 42:1.

over the whole world Literally, "over all the face of the land," an inversion of the usual word order.[27]

CHAPTER 42

Joseph and His Brothers–Once Again (42:1–43:34)

Just when Joseph has reached a point in his life where he prefers not to be reminded of his past, he is forced to confront it by the rush of events. Once again he finds himself face to face with his brothers. On the previous, disastrous occasion, Joseph had been sent by his father to them; now it is they whom Jacob sends, unknowingly, to Joseph. Then Joseph had been at the mercy of his brothers; now he is master of the situation, and they come as suppliants.

THE BROTHERS' JOURNEY TO EGYPT (vv. 1–5)

1. ***saw*** He observed his countrymen returning from Egypt laden with supplies.[1]

there were food rations Hebrew ***yesh shever.*** The term ***shever,*** "rations," and its verbal forms, as in 41:57 and 42:6, derive from a stem meaning "to break," namely, "hunger/thirst,"[2] and are mainly used in emergency situations.

looking at one another Inactive and helpless. The Hebrew Hitpael verbal form is taken to express reciprocal action. Elsewhere, this form of the verb ***r-'-h*** is always followed by ***panim,*** "face," in the sense of "to meet in combat." Since the Hitpael conjugation frequently expresses affectation,[3] the phrase may be rendered, "Why do you make an outward show" of being well supplied?

for us there, that we may live and not die." [3]So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to get grain rations in Egypt; [4]for Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, since he feared that he might meet with disaster. [5]Thus the sons of Israel were among those who came to procure rations, for the famine extended to the land of Canaan.

[6]Now Joseph was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed low to him, with their faces to the ground. [7]When Joseph saw his brothers, he

וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת: 3 וַיֵּרְדוּ אֲחֵי־יוֹסֵף עֲשָׂרָה
לִשְׁבֹּר בָּר מִמִּצְרָיִם: 4 וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִין אֲחִי יוֹסֵף
לֹא־שָׁלַח יַעֲקֹב אֶת־אֶחָיו כִּי אָמַר פֶּן־יִקְרָאֶנּוּ
אָסוֹן: 5 וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁבֹּר בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּאִים
כִּי־הָיָה הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: 6 וְיוֹסֵף הוּא הַשַּׁלִּיט
עַל־הָאָרֶץ הוּא הַמַּשְׁבִּיר לְכָל־עַם הָאָרֶץ וַיָּבֹאוּ
אֲחֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה: 7 וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף
אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיַּכִּרֵם וַיִּתְנַכֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אִתָּם

2. When the narrative spotlight last shone on Jacob, we witnessed a pitiable spectacle of an inconsolable father mourning his lost son. Now, after an interval of over twenty years, the old patriarch is once again the man of action, exercising authority and initiative in a critical situation.

*3. **ten of Joseph's brothers*** Not "Joseph's ten brothers," because there were eleven in all. The rations in Egypt must have been available on a limited per capita basis, so that the presence and services of all ten were needed to purchase and transport sufficient supplies for their large households (cf. Gen. 46:7–27). Reasons of security may also have dictated the need to travel as a convoy on the journey, which lasted a week each way.

The descriptive "brothers of Joseph" (so v. 6) in place of the expected "sons of Jacob" is a subtle anticipation by the Narrator of the ensuing encounter.

went down Underlying the phrase (Heb. *va-yerdu*) is a possible allusion to the reversal of fortunes that has taken place since Joseph was "brought down" (Heb. *hurad*) to Egypt (Gen. 39:1).

*4. **Joseph's brother Benjamin*** The description explains the special status of Benjamin, who has replaced Joseph as his father's favorite (Gen. 44:20). At the same time, the reader is reminded that the two were full brothers, a fact that will be significant in subsequent developments.

might meet with disaster Benjamin's mother, Rachel, and his brother have both met with misfortune in the course of a journey.[4]

*5. **the sons of Israel*** The change in designation (Heb. *benei yisra'el*) is significant—an intimation that the journey to Egypt has national import. The brothers come as a unit, as a nation in embryo.

among those who came Just one among many such groups who came from neighboring countries[5]—yet they alone attract attention.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH (vv. 6–17)

*6. **vizier*** This title of Joseph, in addition to "seller of corn," explains in what capacity he interrogated and accused the brothers. A man who was solely the dispenser of rations would not normally be concerned with matters of state security.

The Hebrew term *shallit,* "vizier," is otherwise only found in postexilic Hebrew texts. Nevertheless, it is of interest that the Hyksos founder of the Fifteenth Dynasty in Egypt was King Salitis, a name that seems to reflect the same word. Furthermore, *šalṭum* and *šāliṭum* appear in Old Assyrian documents.

bowed low Joseph's boyhood dreams (Gen. 37:7,9f.) are being fulfilled.

*7. **acted like a stranger*** Hebrew *va-yitnakker,* from *nokhri,* "stranger." It may also be rendered, "he hid his identity from them."[6] The Hebrew not only contains an internal play on

recognized them; but he acted like a stranger toward them and spoke harshly to them. He asked them, "Where do you come from?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to procure food." [8]For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. [9]Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them, Joseph said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness." [10]But they said to him, "No, my lord! Truly, your servants have come to procure food. [11]We are all of us sons of the same man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies!" [12]And he said to them, "No, you have come to see the land in its nakedness!" [13]And they

קָשׁוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֵאַיִן בָּאתֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵאֶרֶץ
כְּנַעַן לִשְׁבָּר־אֹכֶל: 8 וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם
לֹא הִכִּרֻהוּ: 9 וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר
חָלַם לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם לִרְאוֹת
אֶת־עֶרְוַת הָאָרֶץ בָּאתֶם: 10 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לֹא
אֲדֹנִי וַעֲבָדֶיךָ בָּאוּ לִשְׁבָּר־אֹכֶל: 11 כֻּלָּנוּ בְּנֵי
אִישׁ־אֶחָד נָחְנוּ כֵּנִים אֲנַחְנוּ לֹא־הָיוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ
מְרַגְּלִים: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם לֹא כִּי־עֶרְוַת הָאָרֶץ
בָּאתֶם לִרְאוֹת: 13 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר עֲבָדֶיךָ

words—*va-yitnakker–va-yakkirem* ("he recognized them")—but also is perhaps playfully allusive to Genesis 37:18—*va-yitnakklu,* "they conspired." Joseph now schemes against the erstwhile schemers.

to procure food To each question the brothers respond with unsolicited information.

8. Joseph recognized The repetition of this fact is simply due to the stylistic need for an equipoise to the new fact, "they did not recognize him."[7]

they did not recognize him Not surprisingly, for since their last meeting over twenty years ago, Joseph has developed from boyhood into mature manhood. In addition, his language, his dress, and even his name have all become Egyptianized.

9. Recalling the dreams The sight of his brothers prostrating themselves before him suddenly reminds Joseph of those long-forgotten dreams, and he realizes for the first time that they had actually presaged his future. Yet he cannot help but recall as well the hatreds they had engendered. He must have heard his brothers mention those dreams derisively as they threw him into the pit.[8]

Joseph now finds himself caught in a maelstrom of conflicting emotions. His sense of contentment is shaken by his unpleasant memories. The instinctive desire for revenge is tempered by the knowledge that his father and brother back in Canaan may be starving and are depending on the acquisition of provisions in Egypt. He is desperate for news of their welfare but dares not give himself away by overly anxious inquiry. Above all, he feels he must find out conclusively whether or not his brothers regret their actions and have truly reformed themselves. He decides upon a series of tests.

You are spies They were foreigners and had entered Egypt from the northeast. This was the land's most vulnerable border. Incursions into Egypt by Asians coming via "the Way of Horus," the military highway from Canaan that led through Gaza to El-'Arish, were a recurrent phenomenon. Frontier guards would routinely check every traveler, for the discovery of spies might herald an imminent attack.[9] Thus an allegation of espionage provided a convenient pretext under which Joseph could have the brothers arrested and subjected to psychological pressure.

the land in its nakedness Hebrew *'ervat ha-'arets* has its analogy in Isaiah 20:4, "the nakedness of Egypt," in the sense of "the shame of Egypt" as a conquered state. Similarly, at the downfall of Jerusalem, peoples are said to "have seen her disgraced" (Lam. 1:8). Thus the figure here means to uncover any defects in its fortifications.

10. Truly, your servants Hebrew *va-'avadekha.* The initial *vav* is here taken as having affirmative force. It could also be adversative: "to the contrary."

11. We are all of us... We are one family unit and would not jeopardize the lives of all of us by collectively engaging in such a dangerous occupation.[10] This refutation of the accusation of espionage is felt to be so compelling as to warrant reiteration (v. 13).

replied, "We your servants were twelve brothers, sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more." 14But Joseph said to them, "It is just as I have told you: You are spies! 15By this you shall be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, by Pharaoh, you shall not depart from this place! 16Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain confined, that your words may be put to the test whether there is truth in you. Else, by Pharaoh, you are nothing but spies!" 17And he confined them in the guardhouse 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 you brothers be held in your place of detention, while the rest of you go and take home rations for your starving households; 20but you must bring me your youngest brother, that your words may be verified and that you may not die." And they did accordingly. 21They said to

אַחִים׀ אֲנַחְנוּ בְּנֵי אִישׁ־אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְהִנֵּה
הַקָּטֹן אֶת־אָבִינוּ הַיּוֹם וְהָאֶחָד אֵינֶנּוּ׃ 14 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲלֵכֶם לֵאמֹר
מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם׃ 15 בְּזֹאת תִּבָּחֲנוּ חֵי פַרְעֹה אִם־
תֵּצְאוּ מִזֶּה כִּי אִם־בְּבוֹא אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן הֵנָּה׃
16 שִׁלְחוּ מִכֶּם אֶחָד וְיִקַּח אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם וְאַתֶּם
הֵאָסְרוּ וְיִבָּחֲנוּ דִּבְרֵיכֶם הֲאֶמֶת אִתְּכֶם וְאִם־לֹא
חֵי פַרְעֹה כִּי מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם׃ 17 וַיֶּאֱסֹף אֹתָם אֶל־
מִשְׁמָר שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים׃ 18 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף בַּיּוֹם
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי זֹאת עֲשׂוּ וִחְיוּ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרֵא׃
חמישי 19 אִם־כֵּנִים אַתֶּם אֲחִיכֶם אֶחָד יֵאָסֵר
בְּבֵית מִשְׁמַרְכֶם וְאַתֶּם לְכוּ הָבִיאוּ שֶׁבֶר רַעֲבוֹן
בָּתֵּיכֶם׃ 20 וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן תָּבִיאוּ אֵלָי
וְיֵאָמְנוּ דִבְרֵיכֶם וְלֹא תָמֻתוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן׃

*13. **one is no more*** The phrasing may either reflect their uncertainty as to Joseph's fate or be a delicate way of saying that he was dead. Later on, Judah explicitly states the latter.[11] Joseph does not pursue the point.

14. Joseph peremptorily rejects their defense in a show of despotic arbitrariness. The burden of disproof is on the brothers.

*15. **by Pharaoh*** Literally, "the life of Pharaoh." This phrase gives the following statement the character of an oath, validated and sanctioned by the awesome power of the king. An oath of this type is found in an Egyptian inscription as early as the twentieth century B.C.E. In Israel, too, it was the practice to swear by the life of the king (cf. 1 Sam. 17:55; 2 Sam. 14:19) as well as by God (cf. 1 Sam. 25:26; 2 Sam. 15:21).

16. This is the first of the tests Joseph imposes. How would they stand the strain of imprisonment? What rivalries would surface as a result of their awareness that only one would return to Canaan and that the fate of all others would depend on that one?

*17. **guardhouse*** Hebrew *mishmar* (so v. 19), the same term as used previously for the place of Joseph's imprisonment. Its use hints at a sort of retributive justice.

THE SECOND ENCOUNTER WITH JOSEPH (vv. 18–26)

18. It is not clear whether Joseph originally intended only a three-day incarceration and made his threat (v. 15) in order to exert psychological pressure, or whether he now changes his mind. If the latter is the case, Joseph must have become conscious of the terrible suffering, perhaps fatal in its consequences, that he would be inflicting on his father by detaining nine of the brothers. Furthermore, how would the starving families back home obtain food?

a God-fearing man Fearing God is the ultimate restraint on perfidy (see Comment to 20:11).

*20. **that you may not die*** Joseph has forced the brothers into a position in which they have no choice but to bring Benjamin in order to avoid dying of hunger.

And they did accordingly This editorial remark echoes verse 18, "Do this." It means they agreed to the conditions.

one another, "Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother, because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us." 22Then Reuben spoke up and said to them, "Did I not tell you, 'Do no wrong to the boy'? But you paid no heed. Now comes the reckoning for his blood." 23They did not know that Joseph understood, for there was an interpreter between him and them. 24He turned away from them and wept. But he came back to them and spoke to them; and he took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes. 25Then Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, return each one's money to his sack, and give them provisions for the journey; and this was done for them. 26So they loaded their asses with the rations and departed from there.

27As one of them was opening his sack to give feed to his

כא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֲבָל אֲשֵׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ
עַל־אָחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוֹ
אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמָעְנוּ עַל־כֵּן בָּאָה אֵלֵינוּ הַצָּרָה
הַזֹּאת: כב וַיַּעַן רְאוּבֵן אֹתָם לֵאמֹר הֲלוֹא אָמַרְתִּי
אֲלֵיכֶם לֵאמֹר אַל־תֶּחֱטְאוּ בַיֶּלֶד וְלֹא שְׁמַעְתֶּם
וְגַם־דָּמוֹ הִנֵּה נִדְרָשׁ: כג וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ כִּי שֹׁמֵעַ
יוֹסֵף כִּי הַמֵּלִיץ בֵּינֹתָם: כד וַיִּסֹּב מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וַיֵּבְךְּ
וַיָּשָׁב אֲלֵהֶם וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיִּקַּח מֵאִתָּם אֶת־
שִׁמְעוֹן וַיֶּאֱסֹר אֹתוֹ לְעֵינֵיהֶם: כה וַיְצַו יוֹסֵף
וַיְמַלְאוּ אֶת־כְּלֵיהֶם בָּר וְלָהָשִׁיב כַּסְפֵּיהֶם אִישׁ
אֶל־שַׂקּוֹ וְלָתֵת לָהֶם צֵדָה לַדָּרֶךְ וַיֵּעָשׂ לָהֶם כֵּן:
כו וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־שִׁבְרָם עַל־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וַיֵּלְכוּ מִשָּׁם:
כז וַיִּפְתַּח הָאֶחָד אֶת־שַׂקּוֹ לָתֵת מִסְפּוֹא לַחֲמֹרוֹ

*21. **Alas*** Hebrew *'aval* apparently has this meaning also in 2 Samuel 14:5 and 2 Kings 4:14. The Targums understood it as having asseverative force, "assuredly."

we are being punished Hebrew *'ashem* can mean both guilt and its consequent punishment (cf. Pss. 34:22), the two being inseparable in Israelite thought (see Comment to 4:13). In this moment of common adversity, their long-smoldering, tortured consciences erupt.

anguish . . . distress Hebrew uses *tsarah* in both clauses, emphasizing again the aspect of retributive justice.

*22. **Do no wrong*** An embellishment of Reuben's speech as reported in 37:22.

the reckoning for his blood On this phrase, see Comment to 9:5. Reuben had warned his brothers (37:22), "Shed no blood!" Apparently, he believes Joseph is dead (cf. 37:29–30).

*23. **an interpreter*** This is the only instance in the patriarchal narratives when free and direct communication is impeded by differences in language.

between him and them This is the force of Hebrew *beinotam.*[12]

*24. **and wept*** Joseph is deeply affected by the genuineness of the contrition behind the exchange of words, but for the present he must hide his emotions and suppress his deep natural sympathy for his brothers.

Simeon Having overheard that Reuben, the eldest, had tried to save his life, Joseph selects the next in seniority to be detained. Besides, Simeon had a reputation for cruelty[13] and may well have been the one who actually led the others in persecuting Joseph.

before their eyes To show that his threats were to be taken seriously and to test their solidarity.

*25. **each one's money*** Hebrew *kaspeihem.* This plural form of *kesef,* "money," used also in verse 35 and employed nowhere else in biblical Hebrew, indicates the several individual bags of money. Did Joseph mean to test their integrity or intensify the psychological pressure? His motivation here is unclear.

THE RETURN TO CANAAN (vv. 27–38)

*27. **one of them*** The use of the definite article in Hebrew *(ha-'eḥad)* led the midrash to identify him with Levi, the next in seniority after Simeon.[14]

ass at the night encampment, he saw his money right there at the mouth of his bag. [28]And he said to his brothers, "My money has been returned! It is here in my bag!" Their hearts sank; and, trembling, they turned to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

[29]When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had befallen them, saying, [30]"The man who is lord of the land spoke harshly to us and accused us of spying on the land. [31]We said to him, 'We are honest men; we have never been spies! [32]There were twelve of us brothers, sons by the same father; but one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' [33]But the man who is lord of the land said to us, 'By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take something for your starving households and be off. [34]And bring your youngest brother to me, that I may know that you are not spies but honest men. I will then restore your brother to you, and you shall be free to move about in the land.'"

[35]As they were emptying their sacks, there, in each one's sack, was his money-bag! When they and their father saw their money-bags, they were dismayed. [36]Their father Jacob

בַּמָּלוֹן וַיַּרְא אֶת־כַּסְפּוֹ וְהִנֵּה־הוּא בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ׃
28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אֶחָיו הוּשַׁב כַּסְפִּי וְגַם הִנֵּה
בְאַמְתַּחְתִּי וַיֵּצֵא לִבָּם וַיֶּחֶרְדּוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו
לֵאמֹר מַה־זֹּאת עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לָנוּ׃ 29 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־
יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיַּגִּידוּ לוֹ אֵת כָּל־
הַקֹּרֹת אֹתָם לֵאמֹר׃ 30 דִּבֶּר הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ
אִתָּנוּ קָשׁוֹת וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָנוּ כְּמְרַגְּלִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ׃
31 וַנֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו כֵּנִים אֲנָחְנוּ לֹא הָיִינוּ מְרַגְּלִים׃
32 שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר אֲנַחְנוּ אַחִים בְּנֵי אָבִינוּ הָאֶחָד
אֵינֶנּוּ וְהַקָּטֹן הַיּוֹם אֶת־אָבִינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן׃
33 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵינוּ הָאִישׁ אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּזֹאת אֵדַע
כִּי כֵנִים אַתֶּם אֲחֵיכֶם הָאֶחָד הַנִּיחוּ אִתִּי וְאֶת־
רַעֲבוֹן בָּתֵּיכֶם קְחוּ וָלֵכוּ׃ 34 וְהָבִיאוּ אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם
הַקָּטֹן אֵלַי וְאֵדְעָה כִּי לֹא מְרַגְּלִים אַתֶּם כִּי כֵנִים
אַתֶּם אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם אֶתֵּן לָכֶם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ תִּסְחָרוּ׃
35 וַיְהִי הֵם מְרִיקִים שַׂקֵּיהֶם וְהִנֵּה־אִישׁ צְרוֹר־
כַּסְפּוֹ בְּשַׂקּוֹ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־צְרֹרוֹת כַּסְפֵּיהֶם הֵמָּה
וַאֲבִיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ׃ 36 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם

night encampment Pastoral nomads did not stay in inns but in crude tent encampments.[15]

bag Hebrew *'amtaḥat* is employed fifteen times in this story but never elsewhere in the Bible. On the basis of Assyrian *matāḫu,* "to bear, carry, lift up," it must mean "a pack," and it was so understood by the Targums. It is thus to be distinguished from "a sack." It should be noted that *befi,* "at the mouth of," is used only with *'amtaḥat,* never with "sack," and that the latter term appears only in the narrative framework, never in reported speech, which is concerned with the actual discovery of the money.[16] It must be assumed, then, that the "pack" *('amtaḥat)* was inside a sack.

28. The unexpected find engenders a sense of foreboding. They know they must return to Egypt, both to secure further supplies and to obtain the release of their imprisoned brother.

What is this . . . Conveys the sense of being completely at the mercy of fate.

29–30. The brothers report to their father with an economy of information, narrating only what is necessary to explain Simeon's absence and to stress the importance of sending Benjamin next time. They say nothing of the three days in detention, of the shackling of Simeon "before their eyes," or of finding the money.

33. ***and take . . . households*** Literally, "and take the starvation of your households." All the ancient versions render the Hebrew as though a word has dropped out of the text.[17]

34. ***free to move about*** Or, "to trade in . . ."; for Hebrew stem *s-ḥ-r,* see Comment to 34:10.

35. It is obvious that all the brothers must have dipped into their packs for food or fodder in the course of their six-day (or so) return journey. Therefore, each must have discovered his money long before reaching Canaan. As a matter of fact, that is what they tell Joseph on the next trip (43:21). We must assume, therefore, that they had prearranged to tell their father nothing of this and to stage the "discovery" in his presence.

saw . . . dismayed The Hebrew contains a word play *(va-yir'u–va-yira'u).*[18]

said to them, "It is always me that you bereave: Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you would take away Benjamin. These things always happen to me!" 37Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my care, and I will return him to you." 38But he said, "My son must not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he meets with disaster on the journey you are taking, you will send my white head down to Sheol in grief."

אֹתִי שִׁכַּלְתֶּם יוֹסֵף אֵינֶנּוּ וְשִׁמְעוֹן אֵינֶנּוּ וְאֶת־
בִּנְיָמִן תִּקָּחוּ עָלַי הָיוּ כֻלָּנָה: 37 וַיֹּאמֶר רְאוּבֵן
אֶל־אָבִיו לֵאמֹר אֶת־שְׁנֵי בָנַי תָּמִית אִם־לֹא
אֲבִיאֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ תְּנָה אֹתוֹ עַל־יָדִי וַאֲנִי אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ
אֵלֶיךָ: 38 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא־יֵרֵד בְּנִי עִמָּכֶם כִּי־אָחִיו מֵת
וְהוּא לְבַדּוֹ נִשְׁאָר וּקְרָאָהוּ אָסוֹן בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר
תֵּלְכוּ־בָהּ וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־שֵׂיבָתִי בְּיָגוֹן שְׁאוֹלָה:

43 But the famine in the land was severe. 2And when they had eaten up the rations which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again and procure some food for us." 3But Judah said to him, "The man warned us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.' 4If you will let our brother go with us,

מ״ג וְהָרָעָב כָּבֵד בָּאָרֶץ: 2 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כִּלּוּ
לֶאֱכֹל אֶת־הַשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵיהֶם אֲבִיהֶם שֻׁבוּ שִׁבְרוּ־לָנוּ מְעַט־אֹכֶל:
3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר הָעֵד הֵעִד בָּנוּ
הָאִישׁ לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִרְאוּ פָנַי בִּלְתִּי אֲחִיכֶם

*36. **It is always me that you bereave*** The translation is determined by the emphatic position of the accusative particle ahead of the verb. The sense is: "It is I who suffer; it is my sons who disappear!"

*37. **Reuben*** He assumes leadership for the last time.

my two sons Since, according to 46:9, Reuben had four sons, the text probably means "two of my sons."[19]

*38. **My son*** This formulation, instead of "your brother," may well imply a rebuke, in that it echoes what the brothers said when they had Joseph's tunic sent to their father: "Is it *your son's* tunic?" (37:32).

is left That is, from his mother.

disaster on the journey Father and sons seem to be worried about different things. That is why Reuben's self-confidence leaves Jacob unimpressed. Deeply concerned about the perils of the journey, the worried father does not see that Reuben is trying to assure him of an ultimate positive outcome—that the viceroy of Egypt will keep his promise.

CHAPTER 43

The Second Journey to Egypt

Jacob bluntly rejects Reuben's plea and offer. Further discussion is now futile. The brothers know that the fear of starvation will ultimately overcome their father's resistance. Indeed, Jacob has already recognized the need for another journey to Egypt.

*1. **But*** The initial Hebrew conjunctive *vav* has adversative force.

the famine . . . was severe Compare 12:10; 41:31; and 47:4,13.

*2. **when they had eaten up*** That is, the provisions are coming to an end. There is just enough food left to enable their families to survive while the brothers travel to Egypt and back.

*3. **Judah*** He is the spokesman from now on; Reuben is not heard from again, even though he is the first-born. The incident described in 35:22 shows that he has long been discredited.

we will go down and procure food for you; 5but if you will not let him go, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'Do not let me see your faces unless your brother is with you.'" 6And Israel said, "Why did you serve me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?" 7They replied, "But the man kept asking about us and our family, saying, 'Is your father still living? Have you another brother?' And we answered him accordingly. How were we to know that he would say, 'Bring your brother here'?"

8Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy in my care, and let us be on our way, that we may live and not die—you and we and our children. 9I myself will be surety for him; you may hold me responsible: if I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, I shall stand guilty before you forever. 10For we could have been there and back twice if we had not dawdled."

אִתְּכֶם׃ 4 אִם־יֶשְׁךָ מְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת־אָחִינוּ אִתָּנוּ נֵרְדָה
וְנִשְׁבְּרָה לְךָ אָכֶל׃ 5 וְאִם־אֵינְךָ מְשַׁלֵּחַ לֹא נֵרֵד
כִּי־הָאִישׁ אָמַר אֵלֵינוּ לֹא־תִרְאוּ פָנַי בִּלְתִּי
אֲחִיכֶם אִתְּכֶם׃ 6 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמָּה הֲרֵעֹתֶם
לִי לְהַגִּיד לָאִישׁ הֲעוֹד לָכֶם אָח׃ 7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁאוֹל
שָׁאַל־הָאִישׁ לָנוּ וּלְמוֹלַדְתֵּנוּ לֵאמֹר הַעוֹד
אֲבִיכֶם חַי הֲיֵשׁ לָכֶם אָח וַנַּגֶּד־לוֹ עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה הֲיָדוֹעַ נֵדַע כִּי יֹאמַר הוֹרִידוּ אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם׃
8 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו שִׁלְחָה הַנַּעַר
אִתִּי וְנָקוּמָה וְנֵלֵכָה וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ
גַּם־אַתָּה גַּם־טַפֵּנוּ׃ 9 אָנֹכִי אֶעֶרְבֶּנּוּ מִיָּדִי
תְּבַקְשֶׁנּוּ אִם־לֹא הֲבִיאֹתִיו אֵלֶיךָ וְהִצַּגְתִּיו לְפָנֶיךָ
וְחָטָאתִי לְךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים׃ 10 כִּי לוּלֵא הִתְמַהְמָהְנוּ
כִּי־עַתָּה שַׁבְנוּ זֶה פַּעֲמָיִם׃ 11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם

The man Abbreviated from "the man who is lord of the land" (42:30,33). Joseph is henceforth called "the man," while the brothers are correspondingly termed "the men."[1] This anonymity is an artful device of the Narrator—just as events move toward the climactic moment when Joseph discloses his true identity and is reconciled with his brothers.

warned Hebrew *ha'ed he'id* expresses a solemn admonition tantamount to a threat.[2]

7. The report now given by the brothers to their father does not correspond to the account of the interrogation in chapter 42, where the brothers appeared to offer unsolicited information about themselves quite freely (vv. 11,13). However, from 44:19 it is clear that Joseph had indeed asked the specific questions referred to here. Accordingly, it must be assumed that chapter 42 represents a very abbreviated account.

our family Hebrew *moledet* is used here in the sense of "kindred," not "homeland."[3]

8–10. The argument has reached a dead end. Judah steps in to save the situation. His approach is forthright, firm, sober, and severely to the point. The issue must be confronted headlong. Unless Benjamin is sent, the entire family is doomed to slow death by starvation. That is the awful and urgent reality. There is no alternative.

8. you and we and our children Judah actually lists them in ascending order of importance to himself (lit. "we and you and our children").

the boy Hebrew *na'ar.* Benjamin is referred to in this manner repeatedly in the next chapter (44:22,30–34). Elsewhere he is described as *ha-katan,* "the youngest" (42:13,15,20; 43:29; 44:23,26), and even as "a child *(yeled)* of old age" (44:20), while Joseph blesses him as "my son" (43:29). We are given the clear impression that Benjamin is still very young. The probability of his youthfulness accords with, and renders particularly poignant, Jacob's fears and reluctance to let him undertake the journey to Egypt. The term *na'ar* is flexible in biblical Hebrew and can be used of any male from infancy (Exod. 2:6) to marriageable age (Gen. 34:19).

9. I myself The addition of the separate personal pronoun has the force of an emphatic, meaning "I personally."

be surety To underline the seriousness with which he is willing to assume the guardianship of Benjamin, Judah employs two distinct legal idioms. The Hebrew stem *'-r-v* is most frequently used in reference to the acceptance of legal responsibility for a debt contracted by another. The guarantor may undertake to insure that the borrower will not disappear, or he undertakes to repay the loan should the borrower default. The second idiom, *le-vakkesh mi-yad,* means "to hold responsible," "to require an accounting for," and is particularly used with respect to bloodshed.[4]

[11]Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, do this: take some of the choice products of the land in your baggage, and carry them down as a gift for the man—some balm and some honey, gum, ladanum, pistachio nuts, and almonds. [12]And take with you double the money, carrying back with you the money that was replaced in the mouths of your bags; perhaps it was a mistake. [13]Take your

יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם אִם־כֵּן אֵפוֹא זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קְחוּ
מִזִּמְרַת הָאָרֶץ בִּכְלֵיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לָאִישׁ מִנְחָה
מְעַט צֳרִי וּמְעַט דְּבַשׁ נְכֹאת וָלֹט בָּטְנִים
וּשְׁקֵדִים: [12] וְכֶסֶף מִשְׁנֶה קְחוּ בְיֶדְכֶם וְאֶת־הַכֶּסֶף
הַמּוּשָׁב בְּפִי אַמְתְּחֹתֵיכֶם תָּשִׁיבוּ בְיֶדְכֶם אוּלַי

I shall stand guilty before you The Hebrew verb *ḥ-ṭ-'* encompasses not merely the offensive act itself but also its aftereffects: the deleterious psychic, spiritual, and emotional state that it creates.

forever The consciousness of ineradicable personal guilt and blame would weigh upon him always as an oppressive burden.

11. If it must be so Judah's forceful speech has its effect. The aged Jacob offers no further resistance and resigns himself to the inevitable.

do this He unwittingly echoes Joseph's own words (42:18). Still the man of action, he gives orders that two steps be taken: Joseph must be mollified with a gift, and the payments for the grain must be returned.

choice products of the land This translation of the unique Hebrew *zimrat ha-'arets* follows the Targums, Peshitta, and Vulgate and is based on taking *zimrat* as a derivative of the stem *z-m-r* "to sing," here meaning that which is celebrated in song. More likely, the term here represents the well-known Semitic root *ḏ-m-r,* "to be strong," which appears in Exodus 15:2 (= Isa. 12:2; Pss. 118:14), "The LORD is my strength and might *(zimrat),*" and Psalms 119:54, "Your laws are a source of strength *(zemirot)* to me," as well as in the biblical names Zimran (Gen. 25:2), Zimri (Num. 25:14), and Zemirah (1 Chron. 7:8). The stem is also widely found in many extrabiblical names, such as the north Israelite *b'lzmr;* the Phoenician *ḏmr* and *zmr;* the Ugaritic *ḏmrb'l* and *ḏmrhḏ;* the West Semitic (Mari) *zimrî-alum, zimrî-eraḥ,* and *zimrî-lim*; and the Old South Arabic *ḏmr'l, ḏmrkrb,* and *ḏmrmr.* The noun *zimrah* used in this verse would thus correspond to Hebrew *koaḥ,* "strength," also used in a transferred sense of "yield, produce" (cf. Gen. 4:12; Hos. 7:9; Job 31:39).

gift Hebrew *minḥah* signifies a gift brought as a token of submission.[5] The composition of the gift recalls the wares of the caravaneers who had originally sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery (see Comment to 37:25). It is ironic that these same products, and more, constitute the tribute the brothers now pay to Joseph himself.

honey Since there is no evidence of apiculture in the Land of Israel in biblical times, it is not certain whether Hebrew *devash* means bees' honey, cultured or wild (cf. Deut. 32:13; 1 Sam. 14:25ff:, Pss. 85:17), or the thick, intensely sweet syrup made from dates and grape juice and called *dibs* by the Arabs. A celebrated description of the land is one "flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8, etc.), and the latter is listed as one of its seven characteristic products (Deut. 8:8). According to rabbinic tradition, the reference here is to date syrup. "Honey" was one of the products Israel exported to its neighbors (Ezek. 27:17). Of interest in connection with the gift brought to Joseph is the Story of Sinuhe, a popular Egyptian tale from Middle Kingdom times, in which "the land of Yaa" (southern Syria or northern Israel) is described as "a good land" where figs and grapes were plentiful and honey and olives abundant, with every kind of fruit on its trees, much barley and emmer, and cattle galore.[6]

12. double the money Hebrew *kesef mishneh,* an appositional phrase, literally "money, double amount." The rest of the sentence literally translates "and the money that was returned. . . ." The meaning is ambiguous. It could be either that Jacob is recommending the payment of a double restitution or that the brothers are being advised to purchase double rations this time in order to avoid having to return to Egypt again. However, verse 15 mentions only "double the money" *(mishneh kesef)* and verses 21–22 make clear that it is only twice the purchase price of food, and no other money, that is involved. Hence, the second clause of this verse must be understood as clarifying the reason for the double amount.

brother too; and go back at once to the man. [14]And may El Shaddai dispose the man to mercy toward you, that he may release to you your other brother, as well as Benjamin. As for me, if I am to be bereaved, I shall be bereaved."

[15]So the men took that gift, and they took with them double the money, as well as Benjamin. They made their way down to Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph. [16]When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his house steward, "Take the men into the house; slaughter and prepare an animal, for the men will dine with me at noon." [17]The man did as Joseph said, and he brought the men into Joseph's house. [18]But the men were frightened at being brought into Joseph's house. "It must be," they thought, "because of the money replaced in our bags the first time that we have been brought inside, as a pretext to attack us and seize us as slaves, with our pack animals." [19]So they went up to Joseph's house steward and spoke to him at the entrance of the house. [20]"If you please, my lord,"

מִשְׁגֶּה הוּא: 13 וְאֶת־אֲחִיכֶם קָחוּ וְקוּמוּ שׁוּבוּ
אֶל־הָאִישׁ: 14 וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יִתֵּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים לִפְנֵי
הָאִישׁ וְשִׁלַּח לָכֶם אֶת־אֲחִיכֶם אַחֵר וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִין
וַאֲנִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁכֹלְתִּי שָׁכָלְתִּי: 15 וַיִּקְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה הַזֹּאת וּמִשְׁנֶה־כֶּסֶף לָקְחוּ בְיָדָם
וְאֶת־בִּנְיָמִן וַיָּקֻמוּ וַיֵּרְדוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיַּעַמְדוּ לִפְנֵי
יוֹסֵף: 16 וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף אִתָּם אֶת־בִּנְיָמִין
וַיֹּאמֶר לַאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ הָבֵא אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים
הַבַּיְתָה וּטְבֹחַ טֶבַח וְהָכֵן כִּי אִתִּי יֹאכְלוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
בַּצָּהֳרָיִם: 17 וַיַּעַשׂ הָאִישׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר יוֹסֵף וַיָּבֵא
הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף: 18 וַיִּירְאוּ
הָאֲנָשִׁים כִּי הוּבְאוּ בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַל־דְּבַר
הַכֶּסֶף הַשָּׁב בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה אֲנַחְנוּ
מוּבָאִים לְהִתְגֹּלֵל עָלֵינוּ וּלְהִתְנַפֵּל עָלֵינוּ וְלָקַחַת
אֹתָנוּ לַעֲבָדִים וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵינוּ: 19 וַיִּגְּשׁוּ אֶל־הָאִישׁ

a mistake Jacob would like to convince himself that the return of the money by the Egyptians has no sinister implications.

13. Take your brother Jacob leaves the most painful item till last. He says "your brother," rather than Benjamin, in order to give emphasis to their fraternal responsibilities.

at once This is the force of Hebrew *ve-kumu* (see Comment to 27:43).

14. Having done all that is humanly possible, Jacob leaves the rest to God, whose blessing he invokes. On the divine title "El Shaddai," see Excursus 11.

if I am to be bereaved... Jacob's speech opens (v. 11) and closes on a note of resignation.[7]

THE BROTHERS IN JOSEPH'S HOUSE (vv. 15–34)

15. they presented themselves to Joseph Since on this occasion there is no contact between him and the brothers, the phrase simply means that they have arrived at the trading post over which Joseph presides. Perhaps he deliberately ignores them so as to feed their anxiety and intensify their fears. In addition, when told to proceed to the vizier's house, the brothers must have become filled with dread. Of course, the surprise meal in his house is a necessary prelude to the subsequent scene. The convivial atmosphere deceptively dispels all foreboding while the stage is set for the contrived "theft" of the silver goblet.

16. his house steward Hebrew *'asher 'al beito* (so 44:1,4), literally, "the one who is over his house."

18. frightened Because they alone, of all the buyers of grain, are singled out for this treatment. The brothers are probably aware of the fact that high Egyptian officials maintained private dungeons in their homes (cf. v. 23; see Comment to 39:20).

as a pretext Hebrew *le-hitgolel 'aleinu* is found nowhere else in this sense. It has been connected with Hebrew *biglal,* "because of" (cf. Gen. 39:5), that is, "to find a cause against us."[8]

to attack us Hebrew *le-hitnappel 'aleinu* is likewise unique and is taken as a reflexive of *n-f-l,* that is, "to throw oneself against us," or "to attack."

19. at the entrance They lose no time in forestalling an accusation.

they said, "we came down once before to procure food. 21But when we arrived at the night encampment and opened our bags, there was each one's money in the mouth of his bag, our money in full. So we have brought it back with us. 22And we have brought down with us other money to procure food. We do not know who put the money in our bags." 23He replied, "All is well with you; do not be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, must have put treasure in your bags for you. I got your payment." And he brought out Simeon to them.

24Then the man brought the men into Joseph's house; he gave them water to bathe their feet, and he provided feed for their asses. 25They laid 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 to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground. 27He greeted them, and he said, "How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?" 28They replied, "It is well with your servant our father; he is still in good health." And they bowed and made obeisance.

29Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he went on, "May God be gracious to you, my boy." 30With that, Joseph hurried out,

אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּית יוֹסֵף וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו פֶּתַח הַבָּיִת׃
20 וַיֹּאמְרוּ בִּי אֲדֹנִי יָרֹד יָרַדְנוּ בַּתְּחִלָּה לִשְׁבָּר־
אֹכֶל׃ 21 וַיְהִי כִּי־בָאנוּ אֶל־הַמָּלוֹן וַנִּפְתְּחָה אֶת־
אַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ וְהִנֵּה כֶסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ כַּסְפֵּנוּ
בְּמִשְׁקְלוֹ וַנָּשֶׁב אֹתוֹ בְיָדֵנוּ׃ 22 וְכֶסֶף אַחֵר
הוֹרַדְנוּ בְיָדֵנוּ לִשְׁבָּר־אֹכֶל לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מִי־שָׂם
כַּסְפֵּנוּ בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ׃ 23 וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם לָכֶם אַל־
תִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם נָתַן לָכֶם מַטְמוֹן
בְּאַמְתְּחֹתֵיכֶם כַּסְפְּכֶם בָּא אֵלָי וַיּוֹצֵא אֲלֵהֶם
אֶת־שִׁמְעוֹן׃ 24 וַיָּבֵא הָאִישׁ אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים בֵּיתָה
יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן־מַיִם וַיִּרְחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם וַיִּתֵּן מִסְפּוֹא
לַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם׃ 25 וַיָּכִינוּ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה עַד־בּוֹא יוֹסֵף
בַּצָּהֳרַיִם כִּי שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־שָׁם יֹאכְלוּ לָחֶם׃ 26 וַיָּבֹא
יוֹסֵף הַבַּיְתָה וַיָּבִיאוּ* לוֹ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדָם
הַבַּיְתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ־לוֹ אָרְצָה׃ 27 וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם
לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲשָׁלוֹם אֲבִיכֶם הַזָּקֵן אֲשֶׁר
אֲמַרְתֶּם הַעוֹדֶנּוּ חָי׃ 28 וַיֹּאמְרוּ שָׁלוֹם לְעַבְדְּךָ
לְאָבִינוּ עוֹדֶנּוּ חָי וַיִּקְּדוּ וישתחו 29 וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו
וַיַּרְא אֶת־בִּנְיָמִין אָחִיו בֶּן־אִמּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲזֶה
אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן אֲשֶׁר אֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָי וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
יָחְנְךָ בְּנִי׃ 30 שביעי וַיְמַהֵר יוֹסֵף כִּי־נִכְמְרוּ

א׳ דגושה v. 26.
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ׃ ק׳ v. 28.

*21. **in full*** Literally, "by its weight." See Comment to 23:16.

*22. **who put*** Hebrew *sam.* They delicately refrain from using the stem *sh-w-v,* "return," as hitherto (43:12,18; 42:28) so as to avoid any insinuation of chicanery on the part of an official.

23. The reassuring reply of the steward is intelligible only on the assumption that he is privy to Joseph's scheme. His purpose is to lull them into a false sense of relief, reinforced by the release of Simeon.

I got your payment Literally, "your money came to me," a legal formula of West Semitic traders confirming receipt of full payment and implying renunciation of any claim.[9]

*24. **brought the men** . . .* Repeated from verse 17 to resume the narrative after the digression (cf. 39:1).

*27. **your aged father*** The adjective was not reported in the account of the brothers' first meeting with Joseph, but 44:20 shows that it had indeed been used (see Comment to v. 7).

in good health A closer definition of *shalom* in the first clause. Hebrew *ḥai* (cf. 1 Kings 20:32) usually means "living," so that Joseph's questions may be an instance of hysteron proteron, a figure of speech in which a logical sequence is inverted. Alternately, Joseph may immediately ask how Jacob is and then realize he should first inquire if he is still alive.

*28. **bowed and made obeisance*** Either as a sign of appreciation to Joseph for his solicitude in asking about their father's welfare or as a gesture of gratitude to God, a physical equivalent of the verbal "Thank God."

for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there. [31]Then he washed his face, reappeared, and—now in control of himself—gave the order, "Serve the meal." [32]They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; for the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians. [33]As they were seated by his direction, from the oldest in the order of his seniority to the youngest in the order of his youth, the men looked at one another in astonishment. [34]Portions were served them from his table; but Benjamin's portion was several times that of anyone else. And they drank their fill with him.

רַחֲמָיו אֶל־אָחִיו וַיְבַקֵּשׁ לִבְכּוֹת וַיָּבֹא הַחַדְרָה
וַיֵּבְךְּ שָׁמָּה: 31 וַיִּרְחַץ פָּנָיו וַיֵּצֵא וַיִּתְאַפַּק וַיֹּאמֶר
שִׂימוּ לָחֶם: 32 וַיָּשִׂימוּ לוֹ לְבַדּוֹ וְלָהֶם לְבַדָּם
וְלַמִּצְרִים הָאֹכְלִים אִתּוֹ לְבַדָּם כִּי לֹא יוּכְלוּן
הַמִּצְרִים לֶאֱכָל אֶת־הָעִבְרִים לֶחֶם כִּי־תוֹעֵבָה
הִוא לְמִצְרָיִם: 33 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְפָנָיו הַבְּכֹר כִּבְכֹרָתוֹ
וְהַצָּעִיר כִּצְעָרָתוֹ וַיִּתְמְהוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל־
רֵעֵהוּ: 34 וַיִּשָּׂא מַשְׂאֹת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֲלֵהֶם וַתֵּרֶב
מַשְׂאַת בִּנְיָמִן מִמַּשְׂאֹת כָּלָם חָמֵשׁ יָדוֹת וַיִּשְׁתּוּ
וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ:

30. ***overcome with feeling*** The Hebrew idiom *nikhmeru raḥamav* (lit. "his mercies were heated up") occurs elsewhere only in 1 Kings 3:26,[10] where it means "to have compassion for." Here, however, Benjamin is not an object of pity. The sight of him arouses overwhelming feelings of tenderness and affection in Joseph. He can find relief only through tears.

on the verge of This is here the force of Hebrew *va-yevakkesh,* rather than the usual "he sought." The stem *b-k-sh* in postbiblical Hebrew (cf. Mish. Yoma 1:7) and its Aramaic equivalent *b-ʿ-y* (cf. Dan. 2:13) often carry the meaning "to be about to."

31. ***Serve the meal*** Joseph hosts a meal for his brothers, who years before had callously sat down to eat while he languished in the pit (see Comment to 37:25)—a piquant note.

32. Joseph eats alone undoubtedly because of his exalted status; but the segregation of the Hebrews was due to the Egyptian feeling of racial and religious superiority that engendered contempt for foreigners, who were regarded as unclean. Herodotus (Histories, 2.41) reports that because the cow was taboo to Egyptians but eaten by Greeks, no native of Egypt would kiss a Greek, use his kitchen utensils, or even eat the flesh of an ox that had been cut with the knife of a Greek. It is therefore likely that Egyptian particularism asserted itself here because the Hebrews were shepherds—an abhorrent profession (46:34)—and because they ate sheep—an abomination to Egyptians (Exod. 8:22).

could not dine The observation is given in the idiom of a legal formula[11] expressing prohibition, not disability.

Hebrews Compare 40:15; see Comment to 14:13.

33. ***were seated by his direction*** Literally, "they sat before him." Saadiah and Rashbam point out that the seating arrangement by descending order of seniority can only be at Joseph's direction. This arouses the surprise of the brothers. A midrash in Genesis Rabba 92:5 has Joseph himself pretending to divine their order of birth by means of his silver goblet (cf. 44:5,15). Ḥizkuni suggests that the brothers usually seat themselves for meals in this manner and that their wonderment is occasioned by their segregation. It is likely, in fact, that the Egyptians, too, are amazed that the vizier should invite foreigners, especially shepherds, to dine at his house.

34. ***several*** Literally, "five," a round number (see Comment to 41:34). Joseph is perhaps testing his brothers to see whether this obvious favoritism would arouse their envy or expose any hostile feelings that they might harbor against the one who is now their father's favorite.

44 Then he instructed his house steward as follows, "Fill the men's bags with food, as much as they can carry, and put each one's money in the mouth of his bag. [2]Put my silver goblet in the mouth of the bag of the youngest one, together with his money for the rations." And he did as Joseph told him.

[3]With the first light of morning, the men were sent off with their pack animals. [4]They had just left the city and had not gone far, when Joseph said to his steward, "Up, go after the men! And when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why did you repay good with evil? [5]It is the very one from which

מ״ד וַיְצַו אֶת־אֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ לֵאמֹר מַלֵּא
אֶת־אַמְתְּחֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֹכֶל כַּאֲשֶׁר יוּכְלוּן שְׂאֵת
וְשִׂים כֶּסֶף־אִישׁ בְּפִי אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ: 2 וְאֶת־גְּבִיעִי
גְּבִיעַ הַכֶּסֶף תָּשִׂים בְּפִי אַמְתַּחַת הַקָּטֹן וְאֶת
כֶּסֶף שִׁבְרוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ כִּדְבַר יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר:
3 הַבֹּקֶר אוֹר וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שֻׁלְּחוּ הֵמָּה וַחֲמֹרֵיהֶם:
4 הֵם יָצְאוּ אֶת־הָעִיר לֹא הַרְחִיקוּ וְיוֹסֵף אָמַר
לַאֲשֶׁר עַל־בֵּיתוֹ קוּם רְדֹף אַחֲרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים
וְהִשַּׂגְתָּם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לָמָּה שִׁלַּמְתֶּם רָעָה
תַּחַת טוֹבָה: 5 הֲלוֹא זֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה אֲדֹנִי בּוֹ

CHAPTER 44

The Brothers' Last Trial (vv. 1–34)

Following their reception at Joseph's house, the brothers, undoubtedly in high spirits, set out on their homeward journey. However, their ease of mind is soon shattered as Joseph employs his one last harrowing stratagem.

JOSEPH'S INSTRUCTIONS (vv. 1–5)

1. ***Then he instructed*** Presumably, these preparations take place during the night while the brothers sleep.

By generously supplying them with provisions in excess of what their money can buy, Joseph makes the brothers' "ingratitude" appear all the greater when they are apprehended for alleged theft. The restoration of their money this time is puzzling since it plays no role in the accusation that is soon to be made against them. Ramban suggests that it was done by prior mutual agreement as compensation for the trouble and anguish the brothers had endured on their first visit.

2. ***goblet*** Hebrew *gavia'* is probably a loan word from Egyptian *ḫbḥ.w,* "libation vessel." It appears in other contexts only in the sense of a container for wine larger than an ordinary cup and as a receptacle for oil in the menorah of the Tabernacle.[1] In the present instance, the goblet serves both as a drinking vessel and as a divining instrument (v. 5). The fact that we are told it is made of silver is not meant solely to emphasize its preciousness; the offense would be grave enough no matter what the composition of the goblet might have been. The main point here is that Hebrew *kesef,* "silver, money," is a key word, reiterated twenty times in the accounts of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt (chaps. 42–45). The brothers had sold Joseph into slavery for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28); now he harasses and tests them with silver.

3. ***the first light of morning*** This detail explains why Joseph is still at home when the brothers later return (v. 14).

the men . . . with their pack animals The brothers' fears that they would be enslaved and their animals confiscated (43:18) are groundless—or so it seems.

4. ***the city*** The city is said to be situated "in the region of Goshen" (see Comment to 45:10).

repay good with evil Later, Joseph tells his brothers that God used their evil intentions to good end (50:20).

my master drinks and which he uses for divination. It was a wicked thing for you to do!'"

[6]He overtook them and spoke those words to them. [7]And they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything of the kind! [8]Here we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money that we found in the mouths of our bags. How then could we have stolen any silver or gold from your master's house! [9]Whichever of your servants it is found with shall die; the rest of us, moreover, shall become slaves to my lord." [10]He replied, "Although what you are proposing is right, only the one with whom it is found shall be my slave; but the rest of you shall go free."

וְהוּא נַחֵשׁ יְנַחֵשׁ בּוֹ הֲרַעֹתֶם אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם:
6 וַיַּשֵּׂג וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה:
7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו לָמָּה יְדַבֵּר אֲדֹנִי כַּדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה חָלִילָה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ מֵעֲשׂוֹת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה: 8 הֵן כֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר מָצָאנוּ בְּפִי אַמְתְּחֹתֵינוּ הֱשִׁיבֹנוּ אֵלֶיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאֵיךְ נִגְנֹב מִבֵּית אֲדֹנֶיךָ כֶּסֶף אוֹ זָהָב: 9 אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא אִתּוֹ מֵעֲבָדֶיךָ וָמֵת וְגַם־אֲנַחְנוּ נִהְיֶה לַאדֹנִי לַעֲבָדִים: 10 וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם־עַתָּה כְּדִבְרֵיכֶם כֵּן־הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא אִתּוֹ יִהְיֶה־לִּי עָבֶד וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ נְקִיִּם: 11 וַיְמַהֲרוּ וַיּוֹרִדוּ אִישׁ אֶת־

5. The steward is not to make explicit mention of either the goblet or its theft. This deliberate vagueness is intended to fill the brothers with a sense of foreboding.

It is the very one . . . That is, the one they saw him using at dinner. If the goblet is found in their possession, the brothers certainly cannot claim that it is their own property.

he uses for divination It is not stated that Joseph actually believes in divination. He wants the brothers to think he does. The technique of divining by means of a goblet is well known from the ancient world. It took various forms: the use of water (hydromancy), oil (oleomancy), or wine (oenomancy). The practitioner professed to be able to interpret either the surface patterns formed when a few drops of one liquid were poured onto another or the movement of objects floating on or sinking in the fluid. The aim of the exercise was to determine the future, to locate the source of trouble, or to apportion blame or credits, as in 30:27. The legislation in Deuteronomy 18:10 outlawed divination in Israel.[2]

THE STEWARD'S ACCUSATION AND SEARCH (vv. 6–12)

8. ***Here. . . . How then . . . ?*** Hebrew ***hen . . . ve-eikh.*** This inference from a minor premise to a major one is known in rabbinic terminology as ***kal va-ḥomer.*** This is the first of ten such instances of this type of reasoning in the Bible. They are listed in Genesis Rabba 92:7.

9. Undoubtedly, the spontaneous pronouncement of a death penalty for the thief and of slavery for the others is rhetorical and intended to be a convincing and categorical assertion of innocence. It is not clear whether these penalties reflect contemporary law (see Comment to Gen. 31:32). The formula "shall die" (Heb. ***va-met***) has more of a judicial than an imprecatory ring (cf. Deut. 18:20; 19:12; 1 Kings 1:52). Ancient Near Eastern collections of laws display no uniformity in the case of theft. Hammurabi (cf. pars. 6–10) and the Middle Assyrian laws (cf. A, pars. 3,4) prescribe capital punishment or mutilation of the body for certain offenses of this kind. The codes of Lipit-Ishtar (par. 9) and of the kingdom of Eshnunna (pars. 40,49,50) appear to be much more lenient. Biblical law never legislates the death penalty for crimes against personal property. In the present instance, it is possible that the proposed punishments reflect Egyptian law, unknown to us from any other source. It is also likely that the theft of a sacred object entailed far more severe penalties than ordinary theft. Moreover, it is very possible that because the brothers are convinced of their innocence, they propose a harsher punishment for themselves than the law actually requires.

the rest of us The brothers accept the principle of collective responsibility.

10. The opening words of the steward's response—literally "also now according to your words so it is"—are unclear. They could mean, "The penalties you invoke are indeed the law, but I shall be lenient." However, this interpretation is countered by Joseph's apparent rejection of the

[11]So each one hastened to lower his bag to the ground, and each one opened his bag. [12]He searched, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest; and the goblet turned up in Benjamin's bag. [13]At this they rent their clothes. Each reloaded his pack animal, and they returned to the city.

[14]When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, who was still there, they threw themselves on the ground before him. [15]Joseph said to them, "What is this deed that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me practices divination?" [16]Judah replied, "What can we say to my lord? How can we plead, how can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered the crime of your servants. Here we are, then, slaves of my lord, the rest of us as much as he in whose possession the goblet was found." [17]But he

אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ אַרְצָה וַיִּפְתַּח אִישׁ אַמְתַּחְתּוֹ׃
[12] וַיְחַפֵּשׂ בַּגָּדוֹל הַחֵל וּבַקָּטֹן כִּלָּה וַיִּמָּצֵא הַגָּבִיעַ
בְּאַמְתַּחַת בִּנְיָמִן׃ [13] וַיִּקְרְעוּ שִׂמְלֹתָם וַיַּעֲמֹס
אִישׁ עַל־חֲמֹרוֹ וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הָעִירָה׃ מפטיר [14] וַיָּבֹא
יְהוּדָה וְאֶחָיו בֵּיתָה יוֹסֵף וְהוּא עוֹדֶנּוּ שָׁם וַיִּפְּלוּ
לְפָנָיו אָרְצָה׃ [מפטיר לספרדים] [15] וַיֹּאמֶר
לָהֶם יוֹסֵף מָה־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עֲשִׂיתֶם הֲלוֹא
יְדַעְתֶּם כִּי־נַחֵשׁ יְנַחֵשׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּמוֹנִי׃
[16] וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה מַה־נֹּאמַר לַאדֹנִי מַה־נְּדַבֵּר
וּמַה־נִּצְטַדָּק הָאֱלֹהִים מָצָא אֶת־עֲוֹן עֲבָדֶיךָ הִנֶּנּוּ
עֲבָדִים לַאדֹנִי גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲשֶׁר־נִמְצָא הַגָּבִיעַ
בְּיָדוֹ׃ [17] וַיֹּאמֶר חָלִילָה לִּי מֵעֲשׂוֹת זֹאת הָאִישׁ

unfairness of collective responsibility in verse 17. The steward might also mean, "I accept the logic of your argument to the effect that you are generally honest."[3]

shall go free Hebrew *nekiyyim,* a legal term for "cleared of offense or obligation."

11. Their haste to unload is a demonstration of innocence as well as an attempt to dispose of the entire business as expeditiously as possible.

12. The steward adroitly manipulates the situation. One can easily imagine the rising self-confidence of the brothers after each successive search yielded nothing.

THE RETURN TO JOSEPH (vv. 13–17)

13. ***they rent their clothes*** The horror of their predicament leaves them speechless. They can only do what they caused their father to do years before (37:34).[4]

14. ***Judah*** He has personally gone surety for Benjamin, so he naturally takes the lead.

Joseph . . . was still there He has not yet left the house for his place of work because it is still very early in the morning (v. 3). Joseph's presence, therefore, does not raise any suspicion of trickery.

on the ground This unique addition to the usual phrase expresses their abject state of utter despair.

15. Feigning anger, Joseph addresses them collectively, implying that they are all involved in the theft. His "leniency," soon to be displayed (v. 17), thus appears to be all the more generous.

practices divination See Comment to verse 5. Since no mention is made of the goblet, it may be assumed that Joseph simply boasts of his ability to detect a thief by divination.[5]

16. ***has uncovered the crime*** Judah may deliberately be making a false collective confession of guilt regarding the theft of the goblet in order to save Benjamin from being singled out for punishment. It is also possible that, as on their first journey to Egypt (42:21f.), the confrontation with great danger releases their long-suppressed, but ever-festering, feelings of guilt concerning their crime against Joseph.[6] Alternatively, Judah's words may merely express the simplistic ancient belief that suffering was divine punishment for sin, even if the particular sin could not be identified, so that, in effect, this is a resignation to misfortune.

slaves Naturally, Judah does not refer to his earlier rash statement regarding the death penalty (v. 9).

replied, "Far be it from me to act thus! Only he in whose possession the goblet was found shall be my slave; the rest of you go back in peace to your father."

אֲשֶׁר֩ נִמְצָ֨א הַגָּבִ֜יעַ בְּיָד֗וֹ הֽוּא־יִֽהְיֶה־לִּ֣י עָ֔בֶד
וְאַתֶּ֖ם עֲל֣וּ לְשָׁלֽוֹם׃ אֶל־אֲבִיכֶֽם׃ פ

VA-YIGGASH

ויגש

[18]Then Judah went up to him and said, "Please, my lord, let your servant appeal to my lord, and do not be impatient with your servant, you who are the equal of Pharaoh. [19]My lord asked his servants, 'Have you a father or another brother?' [20]We told my lord, 'We have an old father, and there is a child of his old age, the youngest; his full brother is dead, so that he alone is left of his mother, and his father dotes on him.' [21]Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set eyes on him.' [22]We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he were to leave him, his father would die.' [23]But you said to your servants,

18 וַיִּגַּ֤שׁ אֵלָיו֙ יְהוּדָ֔ה וַיֹּאמַ֕ר בִּ֚י אֲדֹנִ֔י יְדַבֶּר־נָ֥א
עַבְדְּךָ֖ דָּבָ֑ר בְּאָזְנֵ֣י אֲדֹנִ֔י וְאַל־יִֽחַר־אַפְּךָ֙ בְּעַבְדֶּ֔ךָ
כִּ֥י כָמ֖וֹךָ כְּפַרְעֹֽה׃ 19 אֲדֹנִ֛י שָׁאַ֥ל אֶת־עֲבָדָ֖יו
לֵאמֹ֑ר הֲיֵ֥שׁ־לָכֶ֛ם אָ֥ב אוֹ־אָ֖ח׃ 20 וַנֹּ֣אמֶר אֶל־אֲדֹנִ֑י
יֶשׁ־לָ֨נוּ֙ אָ֣ב זָקֵ֔ן וְיֶ֥לֶד זְקֻנִ֖ים קָטָ֑ן וְאָחִ֥יו מֵ֛ת וַיִּוָּתֵ֥ר
הוּא֙ לְבַדּ֣וֹ לְאִמּ֔וֹ וְאָבִ֖יו אֲהֵבֽוֹ׃ 21 וַתֹּ֤אמֶר אֶל־
עֲבָדֶ֙יךָ֙ הוֹרִדֻ֣הוּ אֵלַ֔י וְאָשִׂ֥ימָה עֵינִ֖י עָלָֽיו׃
22 וַנֹּ֤אמֶר אֶל־אֲדֹנִי֙ לֹא־יוּכַ֣ל הַנַּ֔עַר לַֽעֲזֹ֖ב אֶת־
אָבִ֑יו וְעָזַ֥ב אֶת־אָבִ֖יו וָמֵֽת׃ 23 וַתֹּ֤אמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדֶ֙יךָ֙

17. With an affectation of self-righteousness, Joseph applies his supreme and final test of their integrity. He confronts the brothers with a dilemma that involves agonizing decisions. They can save their own lives, but this would be disastrous to their father and would be at the expense of their loyalty to Benjamin. If the brothers stay with Benjamin, they cannot bring back food to their father and to their families, who will then die of starvation.

JUDAH'S SPEECH (vv. 18–34)

Va-Yiggash

The encounter between Joseph and his brothers has now reached its climactic moment. A personal appeal to the great man is Judah's last desperate resort. He pours out his heart in what is the longest speech in the Book of Genesis, although it could not have lasted more than five minutes. Divided into three parts, the address recapitulates recent events (vv. 18–29), stresses the adverse impact of Joseph's act upon their father (vv. 30–32), and culminates in a personal offer to take Benjamin's place as a slave (vv. 33–34). It makes no mention of the theft of the goblet or of the innocence or guilt of the accused. This shrewd but simple appeal to Joseph's sense of fairness and mercy attempts to invoke his humanity through repeated reference to the state of their aged father. It is also designed to impress Joseph with the speaker's noble self-sacrifice.

Judah's eloquence is effective because it is deferential yet dignified, spirited but not provocative, full of pathos and passion, yet restrained and transparently sincere.

18. appeal to . . . Literally "speak in the ears of . . . ," which is idiomatic for "have a hearing."[7]

the equal of Pharaoh The phrase is not mere flattery but a subtle reminder of Joseph's power to grant a pardon by virtue of his exalted position.

20. his full brother is dead In 42:13, they had said, ambiguously referring to Joseph, that "one is no more." Now Judah cites Jacob's words of 42:38. He obviously cannot tell the truth.

21. I may set eyes on him Elsewhere the Hebrew phrase *sim 'ayin 'al* means "to pay special attention to" (Jer. 39:12; 40:4) and may be further defined as to advantage (Jer. 24:6) or disadvantage of the one watched (Amos 9:4). Judah may be subtly calling Joseph's integrity and fair play into question. He had inferred from the request to bring Benjamin an assurance on the part of Joseph that no harm would befall the lad.

'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, do not let me see your faces.' 24When we came back to your servant my father, we reported my lord's words to him.

25"Later our father said, 'Go back and procure some food for us.' 26We answered, 'We cannot go down; only if our youngest brother is with us can we go down, for we may not show our faces to the man unless our youngest brother is with us.' 27Your servant my father said to us, 'As you know, my wife bore me two sons. 28But one is gone from me, and I said: Alas, he was torn by a beast! And I have not seen him since. 29If you take this one from me, too, and he meets with disaster, you will send my white head down to Sheol in sorrow.'

30"Now, if I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us—since his own life is so bound up with his— 31when he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will send the white head of your servant our father down to Sheol in grief. 32Now your servant has pledged himself for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I shall stand guilty before my father forever.' 33Therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord instead of the boy, and let the boy go back with his brothers. 34For how can I go back to my father unless the boy is with me? Let me not be witness to the woe that would overtake my father!"

אִם־לֹא יֵרֵד אֲחִיכֶם הַקָּטֹן אִתְּכֶם לֹא תֹסִפוּן
לִרְאוֹת פָּנָי: 24 וַיְהִי כִּי עָלִינוּ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי
וַנַּגֶּד־לוֹ אֵת דִּבְרֵי אֲדֹנִי: 25 וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִינוּ שֻׁבוּ
שִׁבְרוּ־לָנוּ מְעַט־אֹכֶל: 26 וַנֹּאמֶר לֹא נוּכַל לָרֶדֶת
אִם־יֵשׁ אָחִינוּ הַקָּטֹן אִתָּנוּ וְיָרַדְנוּ כִּי־לֹא נוּכַל
לִרְאוֹת פְּנֵי הָאִישׁ וְאָחִינוּ הַקָּטֹן אֵינֶנּוּ אִתָּנוּ:
27 וַיֹּאמֶר עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי אֵלֵינוּ אַתֶּם יְדַעְתֶּם כִּי
שְׁנַיִם יָלְדָה־לִּי אִשְׁתִּי: 28 וַיֵּצֵא הָאֶחָד מֵאִתִּי
וָאֹמַר אַךְ טָרֹף טֹרָף וְלֹא רְאִיתִיו עַד־הֵנָּה:
29 וּלְקַחְתֶּם גַּם־אֶת־זֶה מֵעִם פָּנַי וְקָרָהוּ אָסוֹן
וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־שֵׂיבָתִי בְּרָעָה שְׁאֹלָה: 30 וְעַתָּה
כְּבֹאִי אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ אָבִי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינֶנּוּ אִתָּנוּ וְנַפְשׁוֹ
קְשׁוּרָה בְּנַפְשׁוֹ: שני 31 וְהָיָה כִּרְאוֹתוֹ כִּי־אֵין
הַנַּעַר וָמֵת וְהוֹרִידוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ אֶת־שֵׂיבַת עַבְדְּךָ
אָבִינוּ בְּיָגוֹן שְׁאֹלָה: 32 כִּי עַבְדְּךָ עָרַב אֶת־הַנַּעַר
מֵעִם אָבִי לֵאמֹר אִם־לֹא אֲבִיאֶנּוּ אֵלֶיךָ וְחָטָאתִי
לְאָבִי כָּל־הַיָּמִים: 33 וְעַתָּה יֵשֶׁב־נָא עַבְדְּךָ תַּחַת
הַנַּעַר עֶבֶד לַאדֹנִי וְהַנַּעַר יַעַל עִם־אֶחָיו: 34 כִּי־
אֵיךְ אֶעֱלֶה אֶל־אָבִי וְהַנַּעַר אֵינֶנּוּ אִתִּי פֶּן אֶרְאֶה
בָּרָע אֲשֶׁר יִמְצָא אֶת־אָבִי:

22. ***his father would die*** Actually, the subject of the Hebrew verb *va-met* is ambiguous. It may be either Benjamin or the father.[8] In light of verse 31, the latter is the more likely.

28. ***and I said*** That is, "I had to admit." The succeeding phrase "And I have not seen him since" implies some lingering doubt as to whether he is really dead. For this reason, Hebrew *'akh* seems to mean "alas," not "surely."

31. ***with us*** An addition to the literal Hebrew required by the context. The same is found in the Septuagint, Samaritan, and Peshitta versions.

your servants will send . . . Judah probably means, "you will be responsible for his death."

32. Judah must explain why he acts as the spokesman because Joseph knows that he is not the oldest brother (43:33).

33–34. The one who had been responsible for the sale of Joseph into slavery (37:26f.) now unwittingly offers to become the slave of his own victim! The story has come full circle, and the stage is set for the dramatic denouement, brought on by Judah's noble gesture of self-sacrifice and the moving image of his father's misery.

45 Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone withdraw from me!" So there was no one else about when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2His sobs were so loud that the Egyptians could hear, and so the news reached Pharaoh's palace.

3Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still well?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dumfounded were they on account of him.

4Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come forward to me." And when they came forward, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, he whom you sold into Egypt. 5Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me hither; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you.

מ״ה וְלֹא־יָכֹל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק לְכֹל הַנִּצָּבִים
עָלָיו וַיִּקְרָא הוֹצִיאוּ כָל־אִישׁ מֵעָלָי וְלֹא־עָמַד
אִישׁ אִתּוֹ בְּהִתְוַדַּע יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו: 2 וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־
קֹלוֹ בִּבְכִי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה:
3 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו אֲנִי יוֹסֵף הַעוֹד אָבִי חָי
וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ אֶחָיו לַעֲנוֹת אֹתוֹ כִּי נִבְהֲלוּ מִפָּנָיו:
4 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו גְּשׁוּ־נָא אֵלַי וַיִּגָּשׁוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יוֹסֵף אֲחִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי
מִצְרָיְמָה: 5 וְעַתָּה אַל־תֵּעָצְבוּ וְאַל־יִחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
כִּי־מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי לְמִחְיָה שְׁלָחַנִי אֱלֹהִים
לִפְנֵיכֶם: 6 כִּי־זֶה שְׁנָתַיִם הָרָעָב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ

CHAPTER 45

The Reconciliation (vv. 1–28)

JOSEPH REVEALS HIS TRUE IDENTITY (vv. 1–3)

1. The brothers have repeatedly proved their integrity and family loyalty. Joseph can gain nothing more from his stratagems. By now the emotional tension is overwhelming. Twice before Joseph had broken down—when he overheard Reuben describe the agonies of his sale into slavery (42:24) and when he first set eyes on Benjamin (43:30f.). On this last occasion Joseph had succeeded in controlling himself, but he can no longer contain his pent-up feelings.

before all his attendants Literally, "before all who were standing by him," that is, the great man's entourage.

no one else about No outsider may share this intensely intimate, climactic moment of self-revelation and reconciliation. Besides, Joseph would not want the Egyptians to know that his own brothers had sold him into slavery.

2. ***the news reached Pharaoh's palace*** Literally, "the house of Pharaoh heard." The report was quickly bruited about so that it reached the court.

3. ***I am Joseph. Is my father . . .*** The statements follow in rapid succession with no pause between them. Judah could not have known it, but more than anything, it was the repeated mention of the aged father—no less than fourteen times—that shook Joseph and brought his self-restraint to an end. No wonder, then, that Joseph's first thought is for the welfare of his father. True, he had already sought and obtained the information he wanted (43:27f.), yet the terrifying picture Judah has painted makes Joseph cry out in such a way that his words are more an exclamation than an inquiry. That is why there is no reply and Joseph does not press the point.

REASSURANCE (vv. 4–8)

4. ***your brother Joseph, he whom you sold*** At once a reassurance and a rebuke: I shall behave as a brother should even though you were unbrotherly.

5. ***you sold . . . God sent*** The brothers had indeed acted with evil intent; yet behind it all had been the hidden, guiding hand of Divine Providence investing the base deeds of men with

וְעוֹד חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־חָרִישׁ וְקָצִיר׃
7 וַיִּשְׁלָחֵנִי אֱלֹהִים לִפְנֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם לָכֶם שְׁאֵרִית
בָּאָרֶץ וּלְהַחֲיוֹת לָכֶם לִפְלֵיטָה גְּדֹלָה׃ שלישי
8 וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הֵנָּה כִּי
הָאֱלֹהִים וַיְשִׂימֵנִי לְאָב לְפַרְעֹה וּלְאָדוֹן לְכָל־
בֵּיתוֹ וּמֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃ 9 מַהֲרוּ וַעֲלוּ
אֶל־אָבִי וַאֲמַרְתֶּם אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר בִּנְךָ יוֹסֵף שָׂמַנִי
אֱלֹהִים לְאָדוֹן לְכָל־מִצְרָיִם רְדָה אֵלַי אַל־תַּעֲמֹד׃
10 וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בְּאֶרֶץ־גֹּשֶׁן וְהָיִיתָ קָרוֹב אֵלַי אַתָּה
וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְנֵי בָנֶיךָ וְצֹאנְךָ וּבְקָרְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃
11 וְכִלְכַּלְתִּי אֹתְךָ שָׁם כִּי־עוֹד חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים רָעָב

[6]It is now two years that there has been famine in the land, and there are still five years to come in which there shall be no yield from tilling. [7]God has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival on earth, and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. [8]So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of all his household, and ruler over the whole land of Egypt.

[9]"Now, hurry back to my father and say to him: Thus says your son Joseph, 'God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. [10]You will dwell in the region of Goshen, where you will be near me—you and your children and your grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that is yours. [11]There I will provide for you—for there are yet

meaning and benign purpose. Joseph reiterates this conviction to his brothers after his father dies (50:20).

to save life To be the instrument of your survival.

6. no yield from tilling Literally, "no plowing and harvesting," a compound expression for agricultural activities.[1] Since the farmer would certainly till the soil, the phrase here means there will be no effective plowing, none that will produce a yield.

8. not you . . . but God For the third time, Joseph reiterates the true significance of the fateful vicissitudes of his life. He no longer accuses the brothers of having sold him but says they "sent" him, thereby substituting the beneficial result for their evil purpose.

father to Pharaoh No such title is known to us from ancient Egypt. The closest to it in Egyptian seems to be *it nṯr,* "father of god," in which "god" may refer to the king. But its precise usage is in dispute, it having been variously interpreted as referring to the clergy, or given to the king's father-in-law, or belonging to the tutor of the crown prince. In several biblical passages "father" is used as a title of honor for a prophet, a king, or a high administrator.[2]

ruler Hebrew *moshel* is meant to remind us of the brothers' reaction to Joseph's dreams. They had scornfully asked, "Do you mean to rule over us?"[3]

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE FAMILY (vv. 9–13)

10. You will dwell Joseph clearly has in mind a thoroughgoing and long-term migration from Canaan to Egypt.

the region Hebrew *'erets* is used here in the sense of a defined "territory," "a district" (see Comment to 34:2).

Goshen The name has not been identified as Egyptian and is most likely Semitic. It is probably connected with Hebrew *gush,* "a clod" (Job 7:5), referring to a type of soil. This element appears as a place-name in Gush-Ḥalav (Giscala) in Upper Galilee. Another "region of Goshen" is a strip of land south of Hebron in the Land of Israel mentioned in Joshua 10:41 and 11:16. A hill city of the same name, situated in the southern extremity of Judah, southwest of Hebron, is listed in Joshua 15:51. The presence of such a name in Egypt accords with other Semitic place-names such as Succoth (Exod. 12:37), Migdol, and Baal-zephon (Josh. 14:1) in the same region, thus attesting to its early occupation by Semites.

Although no source defines the precise geographic location of Goshen, the cumulative effect of various pieces of evidence is to place it in the area of Wadi Tumeilāt, which stretches from the eastern

five years of famine to come—that you and your household and all that is yours may not suffer want.' 12You can see for yourselves, and my brother Benjamin for himself, that it is indeed I who am speaking to you. 13And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed."

14With that he embraced his brother Benjamin around the neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; only then were his brothers able to talk to him.

16The news reached Pharaoh's palace: "Joseph's brothers have come." Pharaoh and his courtiers were pleased. 17And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do as follows: load up your beasts and go at once to the land of Canaan. 18Take your father and your households and come

פֶּן־תִּוָּרֵשׁ אַתָּה וּבֵיתְךָ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ׃ 12 וְהִנֵּה
עֵינֵיכֶם רֹאוֹת וְעֵינֵי אָחִי בִנְיָמִין כִּי־פִי הַמְדַבֵּר
אֲלֵיכֶם׃ 13 וְהַגַּדְתֶּם לְאָבִי אֶת־כָּל־כְּבוֹדִי
בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם וּמִהַרְתֶּם
וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת־אָבִי הֵנָּה׃ 14 וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְּארֵי
בִנְיָמִן־אָחִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ וּבִנְיָמִן בָּכָה עַל־צַוָּארָיו׃
15 וַיְנַשֵּׁק לְכָל־אֶחָיו וַיֵּבְךְּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן
דִּבְּרוּ אֶחָיו אִתּוֹ׃ 16 וְהַקֹּל נִשְׁמַע בֵּית פַּרְעֹה
לֵאמֹר בָּאוּ אֲחֵי יוֹסֵף וַיִּיטַב בְּעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי
עֲבָדָיו׃ 17 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֱמֹר אֶל־אַחֶיךָ
זֹאת עֲשׂוּ טַעֲנוּ אֶת־בְּעִירְכֶם וּלְכוּ־בֹאוּ אַרְצָה
כְּנָעַן׃ 18 וּקְחוּ אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם וְאֶת־בָּתֵּיכֶם וּבֹאוּ
אֵלָי וְאֶתְּנָה לָכֶם אֶת־טוּב אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאִכְלוּ

arm of the Nile to the Great Bitter Lake. Egyptian texts confirm the presence of Semites and other Asians in the northeastern part of the country both at the end of the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2250 B.C.E.) and about 1700 B.C.E. in the wake of the Hyksos invasion. Exodus 12:38 refers to a "mixed multitude," that is, foreign tribes, dwelling in the area of Israelite settlement.

Goshen is blessed with excellent grazing facilities (Gen. 46:32–34; 47:6,11), and it is known that the Nile Delta was the center of cattle breeding. The natural route from Asia to Egypt emerges from Wadi Tumeilāt, and Joseph traveled to Goshen to greet his father, who arrived from Canaan (46:29). Thus it could not have been too distant from the Egyptian frontier. The route of the Exodus from Goshen, where the Israelites were still living hundreds of years later (Exod. 8:18), also shows that it could not have been too far from the border (Exod. 12:37; 13:17f.). In addition, Goshen is said to have been in the vicinity of Joseph's residence (Gen. 45:10) and also not too far from the royal palace (47:1f.). This is possible only if the capital was situated in the Nile Delta region at this time.

*11. **for there are yet five years of famine*** This parenthetical note is inserted in order to overcome Jacob's anticipated resistance to a massive migration from Canaan.

12. This sentence is not part of the message to the father but is directed at the brothers.

I who am speaking Face-to-face, in your own language, without an interpreter.

*13. **all that you have seen*** That is, your knowledge of my situation is not derived from rumor but is firsthand.

THE FINAL GESTURE (vv. 14–15)

So far the brothers have not uttered a word. It is only after this emotional embrace that their consternation is overcome. They are now able to communicate with Joseph, something they were unable to do when he lived among them as a boy (Gen. 37:4).

PHARAOH'S INVITATION (vv. 16–20)

16. The point made in verse 2, and interrupted by the details of the denouement, is now resumed and expanded.

*17. **Pharaoh said*** Joseph's invitation to his family to settle in Egypt is now endorsed by the king himself.

to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you shall live off the fat of the land.' 19And you are bidden [to add], 'Do as follows: take from the land of Egypt wagons for your children and your wives, and bring your father here. 20And never mind your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt shall be yours.'"

21The sons of Israel did so; Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey. 22To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and several changes of clothing. 23And to his father he sent the following: ten he-asses laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey. 24As he sent his brothers off on their way, he told them, "Do not be quarrelsome on the way."

25They went up from Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 26And they told him, "Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt." His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. 27But when they recounted all that Joseph had said to them, and

אֶת־חֵלֶב הָאָרֶץ׃ 19 רביעי וְאַתָּה צֻוִּיתָה זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קְחוּ־לָכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עֲגָלוֹת לְטַפְּכֶם וְלִנְשֵׁיכֶם וּנְשָׂאתֶם אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם וּבָאתֶם׃ 20 וְעֵינְכֶם אַל־תָּחֹס עַל־כְּלֵיכֶם כִּי־טוּב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָכֶם הִוא׃ 21 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף עֲגָלוֹת עַל־פִּי פַּרְעֹה וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם צֵדָה לַדָּרֶךְ׃ 22 לְכֻלָּם נָתַן לְאִישׁ חֲלִפוֹת שְׂמָלֹת וּלְבִנְיָמִן נָתַן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף וְחָמֵשׁ חֲלִפֹת שְׂמָלֹת׃ 23 וּלְאָבִיו שָׁלַח כְּזֹאת עֲשָׂרָה חֲמֹרִים נֹשְׂאִים מִטּוּב מִצְרַיִם וְעֶשֶׂר אָתֹנֹת נ�ֹשְׂאֹת בָּר וְלֶחֶם וּמָזוֹן לְאָבִיו לַדָּרֶךְ׃ 24 וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת־אֶחָיו וַיֵּלֵכוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אַל־תִּרְגְּזוּ בַּדָּרֶךְ׃ 25 וַיַּעֲלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֶל־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃ 26 וַיַּגִּדוּ לוֹ לֵאמֹר עוֹד יוֹסֵף חַי וְכִי־הוּא מֹשֵׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וַיָּפֶג לִבּוֹ כִּי לֹא־הֶאֱמִין לָהֶם׃ 27 וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֵת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיַּרְא אֶת־הָעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף

load up The stem *ta'an* here is unique. Its meaning is suggested by the context and by its Aramaic usage.

beasts Hebrew *be'ir* is a collective.[4]

18. the fat of the land The choicest products of the soil.[5] The phrase may imply recognition that seminomads often engaged in agriculture (cf. 26:12).

19. you are bidden [to add] The order is given to Joseph to relay to his brothers. The previous instructions could be carried out with no outside assistance. This one, however, requires official authorization, the effect of which is to accord Jacob's clan the special status of ward of the king.

20. never mind Do not begrudge having to leave behind personal possessions that will cause you inconvenience if you bring them along; do not allow such considerations to delay you.

RETURN TO JACOB (vv. 21–28)

22. a change of clothing Hebrew *ḥalifot* is specifically employed for a gift of clothing, as a valued prize or as a token of affection or honor.[6] The consistent use of the plural form may signify a set of clothing comprising more than one article. Since an article of apparel had featured prominently in the tale of hostility between Joseph and his brothers, it is only fitting that their reconciliation should be marked by a gift of apparel.

several Literally, "five" (see Comments to 41:34; 43:34).

24. quarrelsome The Hebrew stem *r-g-z,* which means "trembling," carries overtones of agitation, deep concern, or rage. Hence, some understand the text to mean: Have no fear for your safety on the journey to Canaan and back. The present rendering understands the text to mean: Do not engage in mutual recrimination.[7]

when he saw the wagons that Joseph had said to them, and him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 28"Enough!" said Israel. "My son Joseph is still alive! I must go and see him before I die."

לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם: חמישי
28 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד־יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חַי אֵלְכָה
וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְטֶרֶם אָמוּת:

46 So Israel set out with all that was his, and he came to Beer-sheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2God called to Israel in a vision by night: "Jacob! Jacob!" He answered, "Here." 3And He said, "I am

מ״ו וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּאֵרָה
שָׁבַע וַיִּזְבַּח זְבָחִים לֵאלֹהֵי אָבִיו יִצְחָק: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֱלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמַרְאֹת הַלָּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי הָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי

*28. **go and see him*** Jacob does not mention the famine and is not concerned with Joseph's power and glory. His only desire is to visit his son, not to settle in Egypt.[8]

CHAPTER 46

The Migration to Egypt (46:1–47:10)

With this narrative, the patriarchal period in the history of Israel comes to an end.

Jacob's descent to Egypt appears at first to be merely a family visit. Yet this visit is presented as being fraught with national significance. It is a summing up of the past as well as a new beginning. Famine drove Abraham to Egypt (12:10); now famine impels his grandson in the same direction. Abraham's career opened with a divine revelation; Jacob's closes with a similar experience. Jacob's odyssey began at Beer-sheba (28:10); it fittingly concludes with a revelation at the same place. The divine Voice will not be heard again until the advent of Moses.

JACOB AT BEER-SHEBA (vv. 1–4)

*1. **Israel set out*** Presumably from Hebron, which was his last specified location (37:14).

Beer-sheba An important north-south road linked Hebron to this city, a distance of about 25 miles (40 km.). Jacob's reasons for stopping at Beer-sheba in order to worship are not given. The arduous and exhausting journey to Egypt, especially for one of such advanced age, would be an understandable cause of great anxiety. But verse 3 shows that Jacob's doubt and hesitation go much deeper. Is the patriarch distressed at having to leave the promised land? Is he afraid of dying on alien soil? Are his fears intensified by the memory that his father had been expressly forbidden by God to go to Egypt (26:2)? Perhaps he is troubled by the recollection of the divine announcement to Abraham that his descendants were destined to be enslaved and oppressed as strangers in a foreign land (15:13). At any rate, Jacob seems to experience a sudden reluctance to continue the journey. According to a tradition recorded in the Book of Jubilees 44:3, Jacob decided to invite Joseph to come and visit him in Canaan.

offered sacrifices No mention is made of an altar. It must be taken for granted that he uses the one that Isaac had once constructed at this place (26:25). The sacrifices here are termed *zevaḥim,* a type mentioned in Genesis only in connection with Jacob (cf. 31:54). It was distinguished from the "burnt offering" (cf. 8:20; 22:2) in that only a small portion was actually burned on the altar, while the major part of the slaughtered animal was eaten at a festive family or communal meal. Hence, it is probable that this sacrificial rite was an offering of thanks to God that Joseph was still alive.

the God of his father Isaac On the formula, see Comment to 26:24. Isaac is exclusively invoked here because he built the altar at Beer-sheba and received a revelation there (26:24–25).

*2. **called*** Hebrew *va-yo'mer* is used here rather than the more appropriate *va-yera'*, "appeared," because the revelation is wholly verbal and without any visual aspect and because, being

God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down to Egypt, for I will make you there into a great nation. 4I Myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I Myself will also bring you back; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."

5So Jacob set out from Beer-sheba. The sons of Israel put their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to transport him; 6and they took along their livestock and the wealth that they had amassed in the land of Canaan. Thus Jacob and all his off-

אָבִיךָ אַל־תִּירָא מֵרְדָה מִצְרַיְמָה כִּי־לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל
אֲשִׂימְךָ שָׁם׃ 4 אָנֹכִי אֵרֵד עִמְּךָ מִצְרַיְמָה וְאָנֹכִי
אַעַלְךָ גַם־עָלֹה וְיוֹסֵף יָשִׁית יָדוֹ עַל־עֵינֶיךָ׃
5 וַיָּקָם יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שָׁבַע וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם וְאֶת־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם
בָּעֲגָלוֹת אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח פַּרְעֹה לָשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ׃ 6 וַיִּקְחוּ
אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ מִצְרַיְמָה יַעֲקֹב וְכָל־זַרְעוֹ אִתּוֹ׃ 7 בָּנָיו

the last revelation to the patriarchs, the word forges a link with the very first revelation to Abraham (12:1).

a vision Hebrew *mar'ot,* a plural form found elsewhere only in Ezekiel, where it indicates a multiplicity of visions. Here, however, the plural seems to express the intensity of the experience. The term *mar'ah,* although rendered "vision," may also be used, as here, for a purely oral divine communication.[1]

by night The most frequent time of divine communication to the patriarchs.[2]

3. I am God... On this formula, see Comments to 15:7 and 26:24.

the God of your father This echoes verse 1 and suggests that when he performed the sacrifice Jacob recited some invocation that mentioned Isaac by name.

Fear not The same reassurance was given to Abraham and to Isaac; it will be given to Moses as well.[3] It is never preceded by a statement revealing their disquiet. The idea is that man's inner anxieties and fears—although unexpressed—are known to God.

a great nation Another point of contact with the first revelation to the patriarchs (12:2). Now it is explained that the divine promise of peoplehood is to be fulfilled in Egypt. Thus the patriarch is indirectly but unmistakably told that the migration to Egypt is to be total and of long duration. A family visit is thereby transformed into an event of national significance with its preordained place in God's scheme of history.

4. I Myself will go down with you Meaning, I shall protect you both on the journey and in Egypt. The God of the patriarchs knows no territorial limitations. He was with Jacob in Mesopotamia (31:13) and in Canaan (35:3) and now will display His providence in Egypt.

will also bring you back The promise is both personal and national. Jacob himself will be brought back for burial in the grave of his fathers (47:29f.; 50:5–13); his offspring will return to possess the Land of Israel.

Joseph's hand shall close your eyes Literally, "Joseph shall place his hand on your eyes," understood as a reference to the custom that the eldest son or nearest relative would gently close the eyes of the deceased. Such has remained time-honored Jewish practice to the present day.[4] The promise, then, is that Joseph will outlive Jacob and will be present at the moment of his death. The promise was indeed fulfilled, as told in 49:33 and 50:1.

DEPARTURE FOR EGYPT (vv. 5–7)

5. set out Hebrew *va-yakom* usually introduces an action that is then specified (cf. 21:32; 24:10); here it signifies firm resolve. The action is performed by his sons because Jacob is too weak.

in the wagons Apparently, the patriarch has refrained from using them until his doubts have been dispelled.

6–7. The strong emphasis on the all-inclusive nature of the migration is meant to draw

spring with him came to Egypt: 7he brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters—all his offspring.

8These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt.

Jacob's first-born Reuben; 9Reuben's sons: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. 10Simeon's sons: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman. 11Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12Judah's sons: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah—but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan; and Perez's sons were Hezron and Hamul. 13Issachar's sons: Tola,

וּבְנֵי בָנָיו אִתּוֹ בְּנֹתָיו וּבְנוֹת בָּנָיו וְכָל־זַרְעוֹ הֵבִיא
אִתּוֹ מִצְרָיְמָה: ס 8 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיְמָה יַעֲקֹב וּבָנָיו בְּכֹר יַעֲקֹב
רְאוּבֵן: 9 וּבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן חֲנוֹךְ וּפַלּוּא וְחֶצְרֹן וְכַרְמִי:
10 וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יְמוּאֵל וְיָמִין וְאֹהַד וְיָכִין וְצֹחַר
וְשָׁאוּל בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית: 11 וּבְנֵי לֵוִי גֵּרְשׁוֹן קְהָת
וּמְרָרִי: 12 וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה עֵר וְאוֹנָן וְשֵׁלָה וָפֶרֶץ וְזָרַח
וַיָּמָת עֵר וְאוֹנָן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיִּהְיוּ בְנֵי־פֶרֶץ חֶצְרֹן
וְחָמוּל: 13 וּבְנֵי יִשָּׂשכָר תּוֹלָע וּפֻוָּה וְיוֹב וְשִׁמְרוֹן:

attention, once again, to the national significance of the event. This passage provides a smooth transition to the next section.

7. ***daughters*** That is, his daughter Dinah, his daughters-in-law, and his granddaughters.[5]

THE GENEALOGY OF JACOB (vv. 8–27)

At this point the narrative is interrupted by a census of the Israelite clans. This document bears its own distinctive literary form. Those included are listed according to the matriarch with whom they are associated. The order is: Leah and her maidservant Zilpah, Rachel and her maidservant Bilhah. Coincidentally, this parallels the descending order of the number of progeny. Each of the four groupings concludes with a formula that contains the initial statement, "These are the sons/descendants of . . . ," the name of the matriarch, and a numerical summation (vv. 15,18,22,25).

The genealogical lists bristle with difficulties that derive from apparent inconsistencies contained within the information given and from a comparison with parallel lists found elsewhere in the Hebrew text as well as in the Septuagint version. On many of these issues, see Excursus 30.

8. ***These are the names*** A standard introductory formula.[6]

the Israelites The children of the patriarch Israel have imperceptibly become "the Israelites," a national entity. The promise of verse 3 is already being fulfilled in embryo.

first-born See Comment to 35:22f.

9. The four sons of Reuben listed here are identical to those recorded in the parallel genealogies of Exodus 6:14, Numbers 26:5–6, and 1 Chronicles 5:3.

10. ***Jemuel*** So Exodus 6:15. However, in Numbers 26:12 and 1 Chronicles 4:24 the name is listed as Nemuel. The difference may be a matter of dialect.

Ohad This name is missing from Numbers 26:12 and 1 Chronicles 4:24, perhaps due to the fact that the clan disappeared in later times.

Zohar So Exodus 6:15. However, in Numbers 26:13 and 1 Chronicles 4:24 it is replaced by Zerah. Both names mean "shining, brightness."

Saul the son of a Canaanite So in Exodus 6:15 but not in Numbers 26:13 or 1 Chronicles 4:24. The exceptional notice reflects the disfavor in which tribal intermarriage with Canaanites was held.[7]

12. ***Er, Onan*** Compare 38:3–10.

died in the land of Canaan So Numbers 26:19.

Perez's sons were . . . The Hebrew formula *va-yihyu benei* does not appear again in these genealogies. The change in terminology indicates that the two sons are mentioned even though they

Puvah, Iob, and Shimron. [14]Zebulun's sons: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. [15]Those were the sons whom Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, in addition to his daughter Dinah. Persons in all, male and female: 33.

[16]Gad's sons: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. [17]Asher's sons: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah, and their sister Serah. Beriah's sons: Heber and Malchiel. [18]These were the descendants of Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah. These she bore to Jacob—16 persons.

[19]The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. [20]To Joseph were born in the land of Egypt Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Poti-phera priest of On bore to him. [21]Benjamin's sons: Bela, Becher,

יד וּבְנֵי זְבוּלֻן סֶרֶד וְאֵלוֹן וְיַחְלְאֵל: טו אֵלֶּה ׀ בְּנֵי
לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב בְּפַדַּן אָרָם וְאֵת דִּינָה
בִתּוֹ כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ בָּנָיו וּבְנוֹתָיו שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁלֹשׁ:
טז וּבְנֵי גָד צִפְיוֹן וְחַגִּי שׁוּנִי וְאֶצְבֹּן עֵרִי וַאֲרוֹדִי
וְאַרְאֵלִי: יז וּבְנֵי אָשֵׁר יִמְנָה וְיִשְׁוָה וְיִשְׁוִי וּבְרִיעָה
וְשֶׂרַח אֲחֹתָם וּבְנֵי בְרִיעָה חֶבֶר וּמַלְכִּיאֵל:
יח אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי זִלְפָּה אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לָבָן לְלֵאָה בִתּוֹ
וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־אֵלֶּה לְיַעֲקֹב שֵׁשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה נָפֶשׁ: יט בְּנֵי
רָחֵל אֵשֶׁת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן: כ וַיִּוָּלֶד לְיוֹסֵף
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה־לּוֹ אָסְנַת בַּת־פּוֹטִי
פֶרַע כֹּהֵן אֹן אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אֶפְרָיִם: כא וּבְנֵי

could not possibly have been born at the time of the migration to Egypt (see Comment to 38:1). Judah sired five clans in all. Since two died out in Canaan, two of the second generation are listed to complete the five to be credited to Judah. Only Perez's sons are named because his was the most important of the clans: David was his descendant.[8]

13. ***Puvah*** In 1 Chronicles 7:1 he is called Puah. Judges 10:1 mentions a judge, "Tola son of Puah," also of the tribe of Issachar.

Iob The Septuagint and Samaritan texts read here Jashub, as in Numbers 26:24 and 1 Chronicles 7:1.

15. The sum total of the progeny of Leah listed here is indeed thirty-three. However, this computation includes Er and Onan, who died in Canaan, as well as Hezron and Hamul, who were certainly born in Egypt (see Comment to 38:1), and it excludes Dinah. But the phrase "male and female" (lit. "his sons and daughters") requires her to be included. Accordingly, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Radak omit Er and Onan and reckon in Dinah and Jacob. This would make Leah's progeny thirty-two in all. The coincidental advantage of this is that Leah and Rachel would each have twice the number of descendants credited to their respective maidservants. Still, the text clearly refers to the children of Leah and cannot encompass Jacob within that total. Although not included in the computation, Dinah is mentioned because of the narrative about her in Genesis 34.

16. ***Gad*** He is seventh in the list of sons; the numerical value of the letters of his name is seven, and he has seven descendants.

Ziphion In Numbers 26:15 he appears as Zephon.

Ezbon In Numbers 26:16 the fourth son is Ozni.

17. ***Ishvah*** So 1 Chronicles 7:30; he is omitted from the list in Numbers 26:44.

their sister Serah She is also specified in Numbers 26:46 and 1 Chronicles 7:30. It is inconceivable that Jacob's twelve sons should have had fifty-three sons in all and only one daughter. In light of the general biblical tendency to omit women from the genealogies, there must be some extraordinary reason for mentioning her in this particular one, although not a hint of it is given in the text. A similar notice about a sister is found in 4:22 (see Comment) and 36:22 (cf. 28:9; 33:3).

18. The sixteen descendants of Zilpah consist of two sons, eleven grandsons, one granddaughter, and two great-grandsons.

19. ***The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel*** Of the four mothers, only Rachel is called "wife." This is because she is listed after a concubine. The title thus affirms Rachel's superior status.[9]

20. ***Manasseh and Ephraim*** See Comment to 41:50.

Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. [22]These were the descendants of Rachel who were born to Jacob—14 persons in all.

[23]Dan's son: Hushim. [24]Naphtali's sons: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. [25]These were the descendants of Bilhah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel. These she bore to Jacob—7 persons in all.

[26]All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt—his own issue, aside from the wives of Jacob's sons—all these persons numbered 66. [27]And Joseph's sons

בִּנְיָמִן בֶּלַע וָבֶכֶר וְאַשְׁבֵּל גֵּרָא וְנַעֲמָן אֵחִי וָרֹאשׁ
מֻפִּים וְחֻפִּים וָאָרְדּ: 22 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רָחֵל אֲשֶׁר יָלַד
לְיַעֲקֹב כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר: 23 וּבְנֵי־דָן
חֻשִׁים: 24 וּבְנֵי נַפְתָּלִי יַחְצְאֵל וְגוּנִי וְיֵצֶר וְשַׁלֵּם:
25 אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בִלְהָה אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן לָבָן לְרָחֵל בִּתּוֹ
וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־אֵלֶּה לְיַעֲקֹב כָּל־נָפֶשׁ שִׁבְעָה: 26 כָּל־
הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַבָּאָה לְיַעֲקֹב מִצְרַיְמָה יֹצְאֵי יְרֵכוֹ מִלְבַד
נְשֵׁי בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ שִׁשִּׁים וָשֵׁשׁ: 27 וּבְנֵי

21. The genealogy of Benjamin presents special problems. Ten sons are listed here, whereas Numbers 26:38–40 records five sons (and two grandsons), 1 Chronicles 7:6 has three sons, and 1 Chronicles 8:1ff. has five sons. Moreover, the names and the order of seniority differ in the various lists. Most likely, the divergences reflect different periods in biblical history as well as variant textual and historical traditions.

Becher He is not mentioned in Numbers 26:38–40 or in 1 Chronicles 8:1. According to Numbers 26:35, the clan of Becherites was associated with Ephraim. The name appears as that of a Benjaminite in 2 Samuel 20:1.

Ashbel He is the second son in Numbers 26:38 and in 1 Chronicles 8:1.

Gera He appears neither in Numbers 26 nor in 1 Chronicles 7. According to the Septuagint here and to 1 Chronicles 8:3, he was the son of Bela. All other bearers of the name Gera are Benjaminites.[10]

Naaman He does not appear in 1 Chronicles 7, but the Septuagint in this passage, in Numbers 26:40, and in 1 Chronicles 8:4 makes him Bela's son.

Ehi Though omitted in 1 Chronicles 7, he is probably to be identified with Ahiram, Benjamin's third son according to Numbers 26:38. In 1 Chronicles 8:1 Aharah occupies this place.

Rosh He is Bela's son in the Septuagint list but appears in none of the parallel lists.

Muppim He is Bela's son in the Septuagint. This form of the name occurs nowhere else. In Numbers 26:39 Shephupham is Benjamin's fourth son, and Shephuphan is the eighth son of Bela in 1 Chronicles 8:5.

Huppim The Septuagint omits him. In Numbers 26:39 Benjamin's fifth son is called Hupham.

Ard In the Septuagint he is the son of Gera, while in Numbers 26:40 he is listed as Bela's son. Addar is a son of Bela in 1 Chronicles 8:3.

23. ***Dan's son*** The Hebrew reads ***benei,*** "sons," and the incongruity of a plural with a single name has been variously explained. An early tradition—in Jubilees 44:28f.—gives Dan originally five sons; four died and their names were omitted from the list. This explanation is accepted by Ibn Ezra and Ḥizkuni. Another tradition records a different Hebrew text: ***ben,*** "son," found in the Torah copy of R. Meir (Gen. R. 94:8). The most convincing suggestion is that the plural simply follows the stereotyped formulaic pattern. This is intimated in Bava Batra 143b and is supported by the analogy of Numbers 26:8, 42f., and 1 Chronicles 1:41 and 2:8.

Hushim In Numbers 26:42 he is called Shuham, an inversion of the consonants.

24. The same list is given in Numbers 26:48f. and 1 Chronicles 7:13, except that in the latter source Jahzeel appears as Jahziel and Shillem as Shallum.

26. ***his own issue*** Literally, "that came out of his loin."[11] While the loins are the seat of procreative power in the Bible, it is possible that the word in the singular here is a euphemism for the reproductive organ. See Comment to 24:2.

who were born to him in Egypt were two in number. Thus the total of Jacob's household who came to Egypt was 70 persons.

28He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to point the way before him to Goshen. So when they came to the region of Goshen, 29Joseph ordered his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel; he presented himself to him and, embracing him around the neck, he wept on his neck a good while. 30Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I can die, having seen for myself that you are still alive."

31Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell the news to Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32The men are shepherds; they have always been breeders of livestock, and they have brought with them their flocks and herds and all that is theirs.' 33So when Pharaoh summons you and asks, 'What is your occupation?' 34you shall answer, 'Your servants have been breeders of livestock from the start until now, both we and our fathers'—so that you may stay in the region of Goshen. For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians."

יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה־לּוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם נֶפֶשׁ שְׁנָיִם כָּל־
הַנֶּפֶשׁ לְבֵית־יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיְמָה שִׁבְעִים׃
פ ששי 28 וְאֶת־יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל־
יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גֹּשְׁנָה וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה גֹּשֶׁן׃
29 וַיֶּאְסֹר יוֹסֵף מֶרְכַּבְתּוֹ וַיַּעַל לִקְרַאת־יִשְׂרָאֵל
אָבִיו גֹּשְׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוָּארָיו וַיֵּבְךְּ
עַל־צַוָּארָיו עוֹד׃ 30 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף
אָמוּתָה הַפָּעַם אַחֲרֵי רְאוֹתִי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ כִּי עוֹדְךָ
חָי׃ 31 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אֶחָיו וְאֶל־בֵּית אָבִיו
אֶעֱלֶה וְאַגִּידָה לְפַרְעֹה וְאֹמְרָה אֵלָיו אַחַי וּבֵית־
אָבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ־כְּנַעַן בָּאוּ אֵלָי׃ 32 וְהָאֲנָשִׁים
רֹעֵי צֹאן כִּי־אַנְשֵׁי מִקְנֶה הָיוּ וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל־
אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם הֵבִיאוּ׃ 33 וְהָיָה כִּי־יִקְרָא לָכֶם פַּרְעֹה
וְאָמַר מַה־מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם׃ 34 וַאֲמַרְתֶּם אַנְשֵׁי מִקְנֶה הָיוּ
עֲבָדֶיךָ מִנְּעוּרֵינוּ וְעַד־עַתָּה גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־אֲבֹתֵינוּ
בַּעֲבוּר תֵּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן כִּי־תוֹעֲבַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל־
רֹעֵה צֹאן׃

numbered 66 Since this is not a typological or symbolic number in the Bible, it must therefore represent a genuine calculation based on the data just recorded. The key phrase is "who came to Egypt." Accordingly, Er and Onan must be omitted because they died in Canaan. Verse 27 indicates that Manasseh and Ephraim are not included among the 66. They were born in Egypt and cannot be said to have come there. The computation would then be: Leah 31 + Zilpah 16 + Rachel 12 + Bilhah 7 = 66.

27. the total . . . 70 persons It is not clear how this number is obtained, but the aggregate of the summations given for each matriarch is 70. However, this computation does not include only "those who came to Egypt" (see preceding Comment). It might be assumed to refer to Jacob and 69 progeny—excluding Er and Onan but including Dinah. However, Exodus 1:5 repeats the number 70 tradition in reference to the totality of "Jacob's issue"; it does not include Jacob in the calculation. On the other hand, Deuteronomy 10:22 states, "Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all," apparently including Jacob in that number. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the total of 70 excludes Jacob's daughters-in-law and granddaughters, so that it is obviously not intended to be an exact census of the Israelites at this period.

There is no way of satisfactorily solving the problem and reconciling the differences unless 70 is understood here to be a typological rather than a literal number. It is here used, as elsewhere in biblical literature, to express the idea of totality. Thus it reiterates, in another way, the point made in verses 1 and 6–7, emphasizing the comprehensive nature of the descent to Egypt because this event is seen as the fulfillment of Genesis 15:13.

JACOB AND JOSEPH REUNITED (vv. 28–30)

28. This verse really belongs immediately after verse 7, from which it has been separated by the genealogy.

Judah For the rise of Judah to predominance, see the introduction to chapter 38. It is only fitting that Judah, who bore responsibility for separating Joseph from Jacob (34:26), should now be charged with arranging the reunion.

47 Then Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh, saying, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that is theirs, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the region of Goshen." [2]And selecting a few of

מ"ז וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף וַיַּגֶּד לְפַרְעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וְאַחַי
וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם בָּאוּ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וְהִנָּם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן׃ [2] וּמִקְצֵה אֶחָיו לָקַח חֲמִשָּׁה

to point the way Hebrew *le-horot* is unclear in that it possesses no object and usually means "to instruct." The present rendering is found in Targum Jonathan and is followed by Rashi and Radak. Josephus (Ant. 2.184) takes the verb to mean "to inform," namely, to inform Joseph of his father's imminent arrival. Another tradition—the Samaritan—understands it as "to present himself," which implies a variant Hebrew text *le-heraot.*

29. ***ordered his chariot*** The Hebrew reads literally "hitched . . . ," although it was not done by Joseph personally. The device of attributing this to him heightens the impression of Joseph excitedly rushing forth to Goshen to greet his father. Despite his exalted position, he does not wait for his father to come to him.

The reunion of father and son, cruelly separated for so long, is marked by a mute embrace and copious tears. No words are initially exchanged, for none can be adequate. Only the sounds of Joseph's weeping pervade the silence.

30. ***"Now I can die"*** I am ready for death now that my dearest wish has been fulfilled.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE AUDIENCE WITH PHARAOH (vv. 31–34)

Earlier, Joseph had designated Goshen as the proposed domicile of the family (45:10), but Pharaoh, in confirming the invitation to settle in Egypt, has left the place unspecified (45:17–20). Joseph must now obtain clear and unambiguous royal authorization for Israelite settlement in Goshen. He therefore shrewdly prepares his brothers for an audience with Pharaoh and rehearses the speeches and answers to be given on that occasion so as to elicit the desired result.

32. This verse is part of Joseph's address to be made to the king.

shepherds . . . breeders of livestock The difference between the two is not clear, for the latter designation (Heb. *'anshei mikneh*) occurs only here and in verse 34 and nowhere else in biblical literature. Furthermore, the brothers do not mention it in response to Pharaoh's question (47:3). In all probability, this is simply a synonymous variant of "shepherd" without any more grandiose meaning.

34. One gets the impression that Joseph wishes to obscure the fact that the brothers have an additional occupation. This may support the suggestion that the Hebrews were also traders (see Comment to 34:10).

For all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians This remark is probably occasioned by the undoubted fact that the townsfolk held the shepherd in very low social esteem.

CHAPTER 47 PHARAOH AND JOSEPH'S BROTHERS (vv. 1–6)

1. ***reported to Pharaoh*** Joseph carries out his previously stated intention (46:31). He must personally inform the king of his family's arrival because Pharaoh had originally extended the invitation to them through him (45:16–20).

are now in the region of Goshen Joseph had selected this location from the beginning (45:10; 46:34). He now artfully insinuates the name into Pharaoh's mind so as to prepare him for the brothers' formal request (v. 4) and to predispose him in its favor.

his brothers, he presented them to Pharaoh. 3Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They answered Pharaoh, "We your servants are shepherds, as were also our fathers. 4We have come," they told Pharaoh, "to sojourn in this land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, the famine being severe in the land of Canaan. Pray, then, let your servants stay in the region of Goshen." 5Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "As regards your father and your brothers who have come to you, 6the land of Egypt is open before you: settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them stay in the region of Goshen. And if you know any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּצְּגֵם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה׃ 3 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־
אֶחָיו מַה־מַּעֲשֵׂיכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה רֹעֵה צֹאן
עֲבָדֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ׃ 4 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־
פַּרְעֹה לָגוּר בָּאָרֶץ בָּאנוּ כִּי־אֵין מִרְעֶה לַצֹּאן
אֲשֶׁר לַעֲבָדֶיךָ כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְעַתָּה
יֵשְׁבוּ־נָא עֲבָדֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן׃ 5 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־
יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ וְאַחֶיךָ בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ׃ 6 אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם לְפָנֶיךָ הִוא בְּמֵיטַב הָאָרֶץ הוֹשֵׁב אֶת־
אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אַחֶיךָ יֵשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וְאִם־יָדַעְתָּ
וְיֶשׁ־בָּם אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל וְשַׂמְתָּם שָׂרֵי מִקְנֶה עַל־

2. The first clause is literally "and from the extremity of his brothers he took five men," that is, "from the totality," implying random selection.[1] For "five" as a round number, see Comment to 43:34.

*3. **What is your occupation?*** Pharaoh had not yet been told anything about the brothers, so his question is not surprising and was anticipated by Joseph (46:33).

*4. **to sojourn*** This statement[2] is the basis for the observation in the Passover Haggadah that Jacob intended to stay in Egypt only temporarily. The use of Hebrew *la-gur* (see Comment to 12:10) connects the migration to Egypt with the divine prophecy to Abraham, "Know well that your offspring shall be strangers (Heb. *ger*) in a land not theirs" (15:13). The awareness of their status as strangers in Egypt left a deep imprint on the Israelite consciousness that found expression in repeated ethical injunctions: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 22:20); "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9); "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34); "You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:19).

5–6. These verses have occasioned difficulty because Pharaoh addresses Joseph, not the brothers; because his initial statement does not seem to relate to the petition, and because he appears to be informing Joseph of the arrival of the family when Joseph has already so informed him and has even introduced his brothers! Actually, Pharaoh does not really announce the arrival of Jacob and his sons. He makes a simple announcement of fact that acknowledges, and thus legitimates, the Israelite presence on Egyptian soil. If he does not reply to the brothers directly, it is because he grants the desired permission only as a special favor to Joseph. By addressing himself to Joseph, he implicitly authorizes him to be responsible for implementing the royal decree of verse 11. This authorization is phrased in laconic, almost staccato, tones that suggest the superior aloofness and absolute authority of Pharaoh.

*6. **in the best part of the land*** The king is true to his word (45:18).

capable men Hebrew *'anshei ḥayil* is sometimes used in the sense of "men of ability."[3]

in charge of my livestock Hebrew *sarei mikneh,* literally "officers of cattle," that is, superintendents of the royal cattle. This office is mentioned frequently in Egyptian inscriptions since the king possessed vast herds of cattle. Ramses III is said to have employed 3,264 men, mostly foreigners, to take care of his herds. The appointment of some of Joseph's brothers to supervise the king's cattle means that they are to be officers of the crown and thus will enjoy legal protection not usually accorded aliens.

[7]Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob greeted Pharaoh. [8]Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" [9]And Jacob answered Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourn [on earth] are one hundred and thirty. Few and hard have been the years of my life, nor do they come up to the life spans of my fathers during their sojourns." [10]Then Jacob bade Pharaoh farewell, and left Pharaoh's presence.

[11]So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. [12]Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.

7 וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־יַעֲקֹב אָבִיו וַיַּעֲמִדֵהוּ
לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶת־פַּרְעֹה: 8 וַיֹּאמֶר
פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב כַּמָּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֶּיךָ: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר
יַעֲקֹב אֶל־פַּרְעֹה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי מְגוּרַי שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת
שָׁנָה מְעַט וְרָעִים הָיוּ יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיַּי וְלֹא הִשִּׂיגוּ
אֶת־יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אֲבֹתַי בִּימֵי מְגוּרֵיהֶם: 10 וַיְבָרֶךְ
יַעֲקֹב אֶת־פַּרְעֹה וַיֵּצֵא מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה: שביעי
11 וְיוֹשֶׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם
אֲחֻזָּה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּמֵיטַב הָאָרֶץ בְּאֶרֶץ
רַעְמְסֵס כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה פַּרְעֹה: 12 וַיְכַלְכֵּל יוֹסֵף אֶת־
אָבִיו וְאֶת־אֶחָיו וְאֵת כָּל־בֵּית אָבִיו לֶחֶם לְפִי

PHARAOH AND JACOB (vv. 7–10)

Joseph now presents his father to Pharaoh. The reason for the separate audience, after that of his brothers, is probably that Joseph felt it would not be dignified for the aged patriarch to appear in the role of a supplicant.

7. ***greeted*** Hebrew *va-yevarekh,* literally "and he blessed," here probably simply means "he saluted."[4] The content of the greeting is not given, but widespread custom in the ancient Near Eastern world dictated wishing the king long life as in 2 Samuel 16:16 and 1 Kings 1:31. Later rabbinic practice required the recital of a special blessing upon seeing a non-Israelite king: "Blessed be He who has imparted of His glory to His creatures" (Ber. 58a).

8. Perhaps Pharaoh wondered whether Jacob exceeded the ideal Egyptian life span of 110 (see Comment to 50:22).

9. ***my sojourn*** Pharaoh asked about the years of his "life." Jacob answers regarding his "sojournings," either in reference to the unsettled and turbulent nature of his life or as a figure of speech for "life's journey."[5]

hard Jacob recalls the unbroken chain of misfortunes and suffering that has been his lot.

my fathers In the mouth of Jacob the term refers only to Isaac and Abraham.[6] The former lived to 180 (35:28), the latter to 175 (25:7).

10. ***bade . . . farewell*** Hebrew *va-yevarekh,* as in verse 7.[7]

Joseph's Agrarian Policies (vv. 11–27)

11–12. These two verses serve as a transition to the following unrelated narrative. Joseph's role as provider for his family reminds the reader that the famine is still in progress.

11. ***the region of Rameses*** Another name for Goshen (see Comment to 45:10). Ramses II, in the thirteenth century B.C.E., enlarged the city of Tanis and made it his capital. Thereafter, this royal name was attached to it.[8] The use of the name here in Joseph's time is anachronistic.

as Pharaoh had commanded Compare 45:18,20; 47:6.

12. ***down to the little ones*** The unique Hebrew *left ha-taf* should normally mean "by the mouth of/ according to the children." The Septuagint understood the phrase to signify "per person." Ḥizkuni took it to mean "as much as children can eat," that is, "liberally."

[13]Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. [14]Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace. [15]And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!" [16]And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone." [17]So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock. [18]And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. [19]Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our

הַשָּׁף׃ 13 וְלֶחֶם אֵין בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי־כָבֵד הָרָעָב
מְאֹד וַתֵּלַהּ אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָב׃
14 וַיְלַקֵּט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּסֶף הַנִּמְצָא בְאֶרֶץ־
מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן בַּשֶּׁבֶר אֲשֶׁר־הֵם שֹׁבְרִים
וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה פַּרְעֹה׃ 15 וַיִּתֹּם
הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ כָל־
מִצְרַיִם אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר הָבָה־לָנוּ לֶחֶם וְלָמָּה
נָמוּת נֶגְדֶּךָ כִּי אָפֵס כָּסֶף׃ 16 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף הָבוּ
מִקְנֵיכֶם וְאֶתְּנָה לָכֶם בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אִם־אָפֵס כָּסֶף׃
17 וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם אֶל־יוֹסֵף וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף
לֶחֶם בַּסּוּסִים וּבְמִקְנֵה הַצֹּאן וּבְמִקְנֵה הַבָּקָר
וּבַחֲמֹרִים וַיְנַהֲלֵם בַּלֶּחֶם בְּכָל־מִקְנֵהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה
הַהִוא׃ 18 וַתִּתֹּם הַשָּׁנָה הַהִוא וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה
הַשֵּׁנִית וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא־נְכַחֵד מֵאֲדֹנִי כִּי אִם־תַּם
הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל־אֲדֹנִי לֹא נִשְׁאַר לִפְנֵי
אֲדֹנִי בִּלְתִּי אִם־גְּוִיָּתֵנוּ וְאַדְמָתֵנוּ׃ 19 לָמָּה נָמוּת

13–26. The severity of the remaining years of famine is such that the people become wholly dependent upon the state for their survival. Joseph rises to the occasion and averts disaster through a series of drastic measures that, in effect, nationalize the land and livestock and turn the populace into tenant farmers of the state. This section has no connection with the story of the Israelites; a continuation of the narrative of chapter 41 describing the measures taken by Joseph in preparation for the famine, it has been included here because it provides examples of Joseph's wisdom and leadership capabilities. It also supplies an explanation for the extraordinary contrast between the Egyptian system, which concentrated land ownership in the hands of the state, and the Israelite ideal of private ownership of property. It is also likely that the Narrator wishes to emphasize the great benefits that Joseph brought to the crown, thus accentuating the base ingratitude of a later Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8). In this sense, this digression provides a link with the Book of Exodus.

13. ***languished*** The unique Hebrew form *va-telah* is taken as deriving from a stem *l-h-h,* a variant of *l-'-h,* "to be weary, helpless."[9]

14. ***into Pharaoh's palace*** Joseph took nothing for himself.[10]

15. ***the land of Canaan*** The threefold repetition of this phrase in verses 13–15 serves to remind us that if Jacob and his family had not migrated to Egypt they might have starved to death.

16. ***sell*** This is the sense of Hebrew *n-t-n* followed by the preposition *b.* The understood object is the "bread" mentioned in verse 15.[11]

17. ***horses*** This is the first time the Bible mentions this animal, which had become widespread throughout the Near East by the middle of the sixteenth century B.C.E. Its place at the head of the list here is indicative of its high value.[12]

18. ***the next year*** Literally, "the second year." We are not told to what this refers; hence the present translation. The indefiniteness has given rise to various interpretations:[13] (i) the second year of the famine, (ii) two years after the arrival of Jacob, (iii) the second of the remaining five years of famine, (iv) the seventh year of the famine. This last seeks to explain why the people ask for seed; the predicted end of the famine is at hand, and it is time to prepare for next year's harvest. It is a mistake to think that farmers do not sow their fields in years of famine.

land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, and we with our land will be serfs to Pharaoh; provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste."

[20]So Joseph gained possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, every Egyptian having sold his field because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh. [21]And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other. [22]Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land.

[23]Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. [24]And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children." [25]And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh." [26]And Joseph made

לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אַדְמָתֵנוּ קְנֵה־אֹתָנוּ וְאֶת־
אַדְמָתֵנוּ בַּלָּחֶם וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאַדְמָתֵנוּ עֲבָדִים
לְפַרְעֹה וְתֶן־זֶרַע וְנִחְיֶה וְלֹא נָמוּת וְהָאֲדָמָה לֹא
תֵשָׁם: 20 וַיִּקֶן יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אַדְמַת מִצְרַיִם
לְפַרְעֹה כִּי־מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם אִישׁ שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי־חָזַק
עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעָב וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ לְפַרְעֹה: 21 וְאֶת־הָעָם
הֶעֱבִיר אֹתוֹ לֶעָרִים מִקְצֵה גְבוּל־מִצְרַיִם וְעַד־
קָצֵהוּ: 22 רַק אַדְמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא קָנָה כִּי חֹק
לַכֹּהֲנִים מֵאֵת פַּרְעֹה וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־חֻקָּם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן
לָהֶם פַּרְעֹה עַל־כֵּן לֹא מָכְרוּ אֶת־אַדְמָתָם:
23 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־הָעָם הֵן קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם
וְאֶת־אַדְמַתְכֶם לְפַרְעֹה הֵא־לָכֶם זֶרַע וּזְרַעְתֶּם
אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה: 24 וְהָיָה בַּתְּבוּאֹת וּנְתַתֶּם חֲמִישִׁית
לְפַרְעֹה וְאַרְבַּע הַיָּדֹת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה
וּלְאָכְלְכֶם וְלַאֲשֶׁר בְּבָתֵּיכֶם וְלֶאֱכֹל לְטַפְּכֶם:
מפטיר 25 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֶחֱיִתָנוּ נִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינֵי
אֲדֹנִי וְהָיֵנוּ עֲבָדִים לְפַרְעֹה: 26 וַיָּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵף

19. The suggestion to barter livestock for food had come from Joseph. Now the Egyptians initiate the proposal to surrender their land and become serfs of the crown.

provide the seed Egyptian sources document the practice of the state lending seed-corn to farmers for repayment at harvest time.

20. The Egyptian theory of government gave the pharaoh the supreme right of ownership of the land by virtue of his divine status. In practice, private landed property existed in all periods of Egyptian history, but after the expulsion of the Hyksos in the middle of the sixteenth century B.C.E., the major part of the land became the actual property of the state. There is no way, however, of determining to which period in Egyptian history the present story relates.

sold The Hebrew stem ***m-k-r*** does not distinguish between a sale for money and a barter arrangement.[14]

21. he removed the population town by town Literally, "the populace, he removed it to/by cities." The exact meaning is uncertain, but it is generally understood as referring to a population transfer on a large scale,[15] probably to oust farmers from nationalized lands.

22. the land of the priests The text seems to mean that since the temples received fixed royal endowments[16] they were under no pressure to barter their lands for food or seed.

23–24. Whereas . . . here is The construction of the statement indicates that the provision of seed is contingent upon the barter of the peasants' land for food.

The state-controlled land is cultivated by the former landowners, who pay a tax of 20 percent of the harvest in return for the privilege and for the seed allotment. Such an interest rate was not considered excessive in the ancient Near East. During the reign of Hammurabi, for instance, the state's share of the harvest from administered fields varied between two-thirds and one-half after the deduction of production expenses. An interest rate of 20 percent on money loans was quite common in Babylon, while the rate for loans of produce was usually 33.3 percent.

25. saved our lives Contrast the fears expressed in verses 15 and 19.

grateful Joseph's actions cannot be measured by the moral standards that the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophetic tradition, has inculcated in Western civilization. Rather, they must be

it into a land law in Egypt, which is still valid, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.

לְחֹק עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל־אַדְמַת מִצְרַיִם לְפַרְעֹה
לַחֲמֵשׁ רַק אַדְמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבַדָּם לֹא הָיְתָה
לְפַרְעֹה׃ 27 וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ
גֹּשֶׁן וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בָהּ וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ מְאֹד׃

27Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were fertile and increased greatly.

VA-YEḤI

ויחי

28Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so that the span of Jacob's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years. 29And when the time approached for Israel to

28 וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁבַע עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
וַיְהִי יְמֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁנֵי חַיָּיו שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים וְאַרְבָּעִים
וּמְאַת שָׁנָה׃ 29 וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת

judged in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world, by whose norms Joseph emerges here as a highly admirable model of a shrewd and successful administrator. Nonetheless, a moral judgment on the situation is subtly introduced into the narrative by shifting the onus of responsibility for the fate of the peasants from Joseph to the Egyptians themselves. The peasants initiate the idea of their own enslavement (v. 19) and even express gratitude when it is implemented![17]

26. ***still valid*** Here, as in 1 Samuel 30:25, the Hebrew formula *'ad ha-yom ha-zeh* is used in a legal context in which the Narrator bears witness to the fact that the ancient laws described in verses 22 and 24 were still operative in his day. The statement refers to the fact that at various periods of Egyptian history individual temple estates were exempt from taxation by royal decree.

27. Following the digression, the narrative resumes the story of the Israelites. This verse is closely connected with verse 11.

Israel The accompanying verb is in the singular form, whereas the succeeding three verbs are plural. The inconsistency is deliberate and the ambiguity intentional: Israel the individual merges with the national entity. The phenomenon has already been noted in the Comment to 46:3f.,8. It appears again in 48:20.

and were fertile and increased greatly God's blessing bestowed upon Jacob on his return from Haran, in 35:11, and reiterated as he was about to go down to Egypt, is now in the process of being fulfilled (cf. 48:4).

Jacob Prepares for Death (vv. 28–31)

Va-Yeḥi

Four verses were devoted to the passing of Abraham (25:7–10); two to the death of Isaac (35:28f.). In each case the numerical summation of the years of life immediately preceded the report of death. Here, in 47:28–50:14, the demise of Jacob is told in extraordinary detail, and several scenes come between the account of his lifespan and his death (47:28; 49:33). The explanation for this exceptional treatment of Jacob's end lies in the special circumstances surrounding his situation. He alone, of the patriarchs, dies on alien soil. He is therefore particularly concerned about interment in his ancestral grave, and burial in accordance with his wishes involves considerable effort and elaborate arrangements, all of which must be described. Furthermore, from the time that Jacob settled down in Canaan after returning from Haran, his life had been wholly intertwined with that of Joseph. Just as the beginning of the period in Canaan was marked by a chronological note involving seventeen years (37:2), so its close is similarly indicated (47:28). It is this literary framework that has influenced the placement of the numerical summation here, rather than with the actual announcement of death.

28. ***lived*** This term is an apt description of the years Jacob spent reunited with his beloved son, for something had died within him when Joseph disappeared, and his "spirit revived" with the knowledge that he was alive and well in Egypt. Jacob had thought this would be a brief happiness, the final experience of his life.[18] Instead, he has enjoyed many more years.

וַיִּקְרָא֙ לִבְנ֣וֹ לְיוֹסֵ֔ף וַיֹּ֥אמֶר ל֖וֹ אִם־נָ֣א מָצָ֣אתִי חֵ֔ן
בְּעֵינֶ֑יךָ שִׂ֨ים־נָ֤א יָדְךָ֙ תַּ֣חַת יְרֵכִ֔י וְעָשִׂ֥יתָ עִמָּדִ֖י
חֶ֣סֶד וֶאֱמֶ֑ת אַל־נָ֣א תִקְבְּרֵ֔נִי בְּמִצְרָ֖יִם׃
30 וְשָׁכַ֙בְתִּי֙ עִם־אֲבֹתַ֔י וּנְשָׂאתַ֥נִי מִמִּצְרַ֖יִם
וּקְבַרְתָּ֣נִי בְקִבְרָתָ֑ם וַיֹּ֖אמֶר אָנֹכִ֥י אֶֽעֱשֶׂ֖ה כִּדְבָרֶֽךָ׃
31 וַיֹּ֖אמֶר הִשָּׁבְעָ֣ה לִּ֑י וַיִּשָּׁבַ֣ע לוֹ֔ וַיִּשְׁתַּ֥חוּ יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל
עַל־רֹ֥אשׁ הַמִּטָּֽה׃ פ

מ״ח וַיְהִ֗י אַחֲרֵי֙ הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֔לֶּה וַיֹּ֥אמֶר לְיוֹסֵ֖ף

die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt. 30When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." He replied, "I will do as you have spoken." 31And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.

48 Some time afterward, Joseph was told, "Your father is

seventeen years This is precisely as many years as Joseph had lived with his father in Canaan (37:2). There was a similar pattern for Abraham, who lived exactly as many years in his father's home (12:4) as in the lifetime of his son Isaac (21:5; 25:7).

one hundred and forty-seven The lifespans of the three patriarchs lend themselves to factorization according to the following pattern:

Abraham 175 = 5 × 5 × 7; Isaac 180 = 6 × 6 × 5; Jacob 147 = 7 × 7 × 3.

In this series, the squared number increases by one each time while the coefficient decreases by two. Furthermore, in each case the sum of the factors is 17.

Through their factorial patterns, the patriarchal chronologies constitute a rhetorical device expressing the profound biblical conviction that Israel's formative age was not a concatenation of haphazard incidents but a series of events ordered according to God's grand design.

29. ***place your hand*** See Comment to 24:2.

do not bury me in Egypt Similarly, Joseph later adjures his brothers to rebury him in the land of Canaan (50:25). This motif is found in the Egyptian Story of Sinuhe, where the exiled courtier asks, "What is more important than that I be buried in my native land?" The biblical examples, however, have an added dimension, for the deathbed requests are bound up with the divine promise of redemption and nationhood in the Land of Israel (cf. 48:21; 50:24f.).

30. ***When I lie down with my fathers*** An idiomatic expression for death, analogous to "going to one's fathers" (see Comment to 15:15) or being "gathered to one's kin" (see Comment to 25:8). It is applied equally to the righteous and the wicked, as such texts as 1 Kings 14:20 and 22:40 show. Since, as here, it most often precedes the notice of burial (cf., e.g., 1 Kings 11:43 and 2 Kings 8:24), and because it is used of Moses (Deut. 31:16), David (1 Kings 2:10), Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:27), and Manasseh (2 Kings 21:18), none of whom was actually buried in the ancestral grave, the phrase clearly refers to death and not to interment.

in their burial-place That is, in the Cave of Machpelah.

31. ***"Swear to me."*** Jacob exacts this solemn oath in addition to the promise in order to strengthen Joseph's hand when he will request the royal authorization needed to fulfill the difficult assignment. Indeed, Pharaoh later refers to the oath in granting permission.[19]

bowed at the head of the bed Being an invalid, the aged patriarch can only make some bodily gesture symbolic of prostration.[20] It is not clear whether it is a token of gratitude to Joseph or an expression of thanks and praise to God.

CHAPTER 48 EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH (vv. 1–20)

Chapter 48 has two main themes: the elevation, by adoption, of Joseph's two sons to the status of Israelite tribes and the advance in status of Ephraim over the first-born Manasseh.

ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. [2]When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to see you," Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

[3]And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, [4]and said to me, 'I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.' [5]Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon.

הִנֵּה אָבִיךָ חֹלֶה וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁנֵי בָנָיו עִמּוֹ אֶת־
מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אֶפְרָיִם: 2 וַיַּגֶּד לְיַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה
בִנְךָ יוֹסֵף בָּא אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּתְחַזֵּק יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־
הַמִּטָּה: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־יוֹסֵף אֵל שַׁדַּי נִרְאָה־
אֵלַי בְּלוּז בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתִי: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי
הִנְנִי מַפְרְךָ וְהִרְבִּיתִךָ וּנְתַתִּיךָ לִקְהַל עַמִּים
וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרֶיךָ אֲחֻזַּת
עוֹלָם: 5 וְעַתָּה שְׁנֵי־בָנֶיךָ הַנּוֹלָדִים לְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם עַד־בֹּאִי אֵלֶיךָ מִצְרַיְמָה לִי־הֵם אֶפְרַיִם
וּמְנַשֶּׁה כִּרְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ־לִי: 6 וּמוֹלַדְתְּךָ

THE ADOPTION (vv. 1–12)

1. ***Some time afterward*** That is, following the oath ceremony described in the preceding four verses and within the closing year of Jacob's life.

was told The impersonal nature of the Hebrew verb (lit. "and one said") gives it the force of a passive.

"Your father is ill" This is the first reference to illness in the Bible.

So he took with him . . . The narrative framework, as opposed to the dialogues, uses an economy of words, leaving the destination and arrival to the reader's imagination. The Septuagint adds, "He came to Jacob."

2. ***sat up*** Out of respect for the office that Joseph represented.

3. ***El Shaddai*** On this divine epithet, see Comment to 17:1.

Luz This is the original name of Bethel, according to 28:19. At this site Jacob received a momentous revelation after he had returned from Paddan-aram, recounted in chapter 35. His name was changed to Israel, and the promises made to Abraham and Isaac were reiterated.

4. Jacob now paraphrases those divine promises (cf. 35:11–12) in order to establish the legal basis for his subsequent actions. As heir to the blessings, Jacob has the right to decide who is to be included in the "community of peoples" that will be known as Israel. Because only he who receives the divine blessing directly can impart it, Joseph, who never received a divine revelation, cannot endow his sons with tribal territory.

an everlasting possession Hebrew *'aḥuzzat 'olam*[1] stands in a subtle contrast to 47:11 (*'aḥuzah;* cf. 47:27), thereby emphasizing that the only true and inalienable "possession" of territory is the Land of Israel. Only God can give an "everlasting possession." Pharaoh's gift is transitory.

5–12. Jacob now formally adopts his two grandchildren, thereby elevating them to full membership in the Israelite tribal league.

The language and narration are noteworthy for their legal precision. The adopter is invariably called Israel (cf. 35:10); there is a declaration of intent comprising the careful, unambiguous designation of the persons involved and those excluded (vv. 5–6); the true identity of the boys present is established through interrogation of the father (vv. 8f.); certain physical acts reinforce the oral declaration (vv. 10–12).

Intra-family adoptions are well attested in the ancient Near East. In the Bible it is possible to construe the episodes dealing with Naomi and her grandson Obed (Ruth 4:16f.) and with Mordecai and Esther (Esther 2:7) as examples of this practice. A striking analogy to the present narrative is provided by an Akkadian legal document from Ugarit recording the adoption of a grandson by a grandfather who then makes him his heir (cf. 50:23).

אֲשֶׁר־הוֹלַדְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם לְךָ יִהְיוּ עַל שֵׁם אֲחֵיהֶם
יִקָּרְאוּ בְנַחֲלָתָם: 7 וַאֲנִי בְּבֹאִי מִפַּדָּן מֵתָה עָלַי
רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כִּבְרַת־אֶרֶץ לָבֹא
אֶפְרָתָה וָאֶקְבְּרֶהָ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת הִוא בֵּית
לָחֶם: 8 וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־
אֵלֶּה: 9 וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו בָּנַי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־

[6]But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance. [7]I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"—now Bethlehem.

[8]Noticing Joseph's sons, Israel asked, "Who are these?"

Ephraim and Manasseh Here Jacob mentions the younger son first, in contrast to the order in verse 1—a hint of impending developments.

Reuben and Simeon The parallel drawn between the two sons of Joseph and the two oldest sons of Jacob exemplifies the new legal status of the former.

6. ***born to you*** Hebrew ***holadeta,*** literally "you have begotten." The past meaning of this verb is confirmed by the following participle, ***ha-noladim*** (v. 5), "who were born." We therefore have here a fragment of a lost tradition, not otherwise referred to in the Bible, concerning other children born to Joseph, that is, clans who adhered to the "House of Joseph." This interpretation finds much support among traditional exegetes such as Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Radak. Another view, that of the Targums, Saadiah, and Rashi, is that the verb expresses a future possibility. Still other interpreters, such as the Lekaḥ Tov and Ḥizkuni, believe that the reference is to Joseph's grandsons.

shall be yours They shall not constitute separate tribal entities but shall partake of the inheritance of either Manasseh or Ephraim.

7. Traditional commentators have by and large understood this verse to be an apologia by Jacob for troubling his son with the arduous task of burying him in the Cave of Machpelah when he himself had not done the same for Rachel, Joseph's mother, who had died but a short distance from the site. However, this interpretation does not explain the intrusiveness of the verse in its present position. It would more appropriately belong with 47:29–31 or 49:29–32, both of which deal with Jacob's instructions regarding his burial.

It is best to understand this chapter as being dependent on 35:9–20, which is composed of two sections: Verses 9–15 deal with the vision at Luz-Bethel and the divine promises of numerous progeny, a league of tribes, and possession of the land; immediately thereafter, verses 16–20 tell of Rachel's death and burial. So here Jacob repeats the substance of these divine blessings to Joseph and follows with the report of Rachel's death. It is quite natural that, on his deathbed, Jacob should recall his beloved wife who had died so young and for whom he had endured so much. Moreover, it was probably because she had been deprived of the opportunity to bear more children that her two grandchildren are adopted by Jacob as a substitute for those whom her death had robbed of the possibility of life. The mention of Ephrath may constitute a covert verbal allusion to Ephraim, who is soon to be the focus of Jacob's attention.

Paddan The full place-name is Paddan-aram, as in 25:20; 35:9.[2]

to my sorrow Hebrew ***'alai,*** literally "upon me."[3]

while I was journeying Hebrew ***ba-derekh*** describes the attendant circumstance, not the location.[4]

some distance . . . See Comment to 35:16.

Ephrath See Comment to 35:19.

8–9. Jacob's question seems to suggest that he does not know his grandsons seventeen years after arriving in Egypt! Traditional commentators have attempted to overcome this anomaly by connecting this verse with verse 10, which records the patriarch's poor vision. They suggest that he

לִי אֱלֹהִים בָּזֶה וַיֹּאמֶר קָחֶם־נָא אֵלַי וַאֲבָרְכֵם:
שני 10 וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּבְדוּ מִזֹּקֶן לֹא יוּכַל
לִרְאוֹת וַיַּגֶּשׁ אֹתָם אֵלָיו וַיִּשַּׁק לָהֶם וַיְחַבֵּק לָהֶם:
11 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף רְאֹה פָנֶיךָ לֹא
פִלָּלְתִּי וְהִנֵּה הֶרְאָה אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים גַּם אֶת־זַרְעֶךָ:
12 וַיּוֹצֵא יוֹסֵף אֹתָם מֵעִם בִּרְכָּיו וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְאַפָּיו
אָרְצָה: 13 וַיִּקַּח יוֹסֵף אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם
בִּימִינוֹ מִשְׂמְאל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה בִשְׂמֹאלוֹ
מִימִין יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּגֶּשׁ אֵלָיו: 14 וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת־יְמִינוֹ וַיָּשֶׁת עַל־רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וְהוּא הַצָּעִיר
וְאֶת־שְׂמֹאלוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה שִׂכֵּל אֶת־יָדָיו כִּי
מְנַשֶּׁה הַבְּכוֹר: 15 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת־יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמַר

9And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." "Bring them up to me," he said, "that I may bless them." 10Now Israel's eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well."

12Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground. 13Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel's left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel's right—and brought them close to him. 14But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was the first-born.

could dimly discern the presence of two human forms but could not recognize them. Modern scholars generally regard the scene as belonging to a different strand of tradition.

Actually, we have here the second stage of the legal adoptive process, namely, the establishment of the true identity of the candidates for adoption by formal interrogation of the natural father.[5]

Israel This name, rather than Jacob, is used hereafter until the end of the chapter in order to reflect the change of name (35:10) upon which this episode is dependent. Further, the name Israel is more appropriate since the narrative concludes with tribal history.

10. Israel's eyes . . . The statement explains Joseph's reaction in the following scene. He attributes his father's unusual act to his impaired vision.

kissed . . . embraced These two verbs appear together again in the Bible only in 29:13 and 33:4, where the embrace precedes the kiss. Here these acts, in reverse order, express not simply a show of affection but the reinforcement of the oral declarations through symbolic physical gestures that have significance in the adoptive process.

12. from his knees The reference is to Jacob's knees, on or between which the two boys had been placed—another symbolic gesture that betokens acceptance and legitimation as son and heir. See Comment to 30:3.

and bowed low The Hebrew verb is singular, referring to Joseph. Several of the ancient versions render it in the plural, the subject being the two lads. The Hebrew singular may be distributive.

THE GRANDFATHER'S BLESSING (vv. 13–16)

13. Joseph stations the lads before their grandfather in such a way as to ensure that Jacob's right hand, the symbol of action and power, will naturally rest on Manasseh, the first-born. The high importance that this has for Joseph is conveyed by the precision of language, the repeated use of "right" and "left" seven times in combination (vv. 13f.,17).

14. The placing of the hand upon the head establishes physical contact between the parties to the blessing, heightening the sense of intimacy and communication between the donor and the recipient. The Hebrew verb used here is not the same as that employed for the ceremony of the "laying on of the hands" used in the case of sacrificial offerings and ordination.[6]

crossing his hands The etymology of Hebrew *sikkel* is uncertain, but the sense is clear.

15And he blessed Joseph, saying,
"The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and
Isaac walked,
The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to
this day—
16The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—
Bless the lads.
In them may my name be recalled,
And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.

הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְּכוּ אֲבֹתַי לְפָנָיו
אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק
הָאֱלֹהִים הָרֹעֶה אֹתִי
מֵעוֹדִי עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה׃
16 הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגֹּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל־רָע
יְבָרֵךְ אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים
וְיִקָּרֵא בָהֶם שְׁמִי
וְשֵׁם אֲבֹתַי אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק
וְיִדְגּוּ לָרֹב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ׃ שלישי

15. he blessed Joseph Mention of Joseph here is surprising since the blessing is wholly directed to the two grandsons. The Septuagint reads "he blessed them," and the Vulgate has ". . . the sons of Joseph." Traditional commentators explain that a father is the vicarious recipient of blessings bestowed on his children.

my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked Jacob, out of modesty, does not include himself.

my shepherd The image for the deity as a shepherd is common throughout ancient Near Eastern literature and appears frequently in the Bible.[7] It expresses the idea of God as provider, protector, and guide.

16. The Angel On biblical angelology, see Excursus 10. The capitalization reflects the fact that the parallelistic structure of verses 15–16 strongly suggests that "angel" is here an epithet of God. No one in the Bible ever invokes an angel in prayer, nor in Jacob's several encounters with angels is there any mention of one who delivers him from harm. When the patriarch feels himself to be in mortal danger, he prays directly to God, as in 32:10–13, and it is He who again and again is Jacob's guardian and protector (28:15,20; 31:3; 35:3). Admittedly, "Angel" as an epithet for God is extraordinary, but since angels are often simply extensions of the divine personality, the distinction between God and angel in the biblical texts is frequently blurred (cf. Gen. 31:3,11,13; Exod. 3:2,4). Nevertheless, this verse may reflect some tradition associated with Bethel, not preserved in Genesis, concerning an angelic guardian of Jacob (cf. 31:13; 35:3). An echo of this may be found in Hosea 12:5.

Bless For blessing by an angel, cf. 32:27,30.

In them may my name be recalled "May my name . . . be perpetuated through Ephraim and Manasseh"; that is, may they ever be part of the Israelite tribal confederation identifying themselves with the history, traditions, and values of their patriarchs.

teeming multitudes Hebrew *ve-yidgu,* a unique verb apparently formed from *dag,* "fish," a symbol of proliferation and multiplicity (cf. Num. 11:22). The two censuses taken in the course of the wilderness wanderings show the populousness of the Joseph tribes. At the beginning of the period, Ephraim and Manasseh jointly numbered 72,700 male adults (Num. 1:32–35). Forty years later, the figure was 85,200 (Num. 26:28–37), exceeding the combined population of Reuben and Simeon. Moses' farewell address in Deuteronomy 33:17 refers to "the myriads of Ephraim" and "the thousands of Manasseh," and the huge population posed a special problem for Joshua in the allotment of tribal territories recounted in Joshua 17:14–18.

REVERSAL OF SENIORITY (vv. 17–20)

The texts that record Manasseh as being the natural first-born must reflect an exceedingly early and authentic phase in the history of the Israelite tribal relationships, a phase in which Manasseh enjoyed hegemony over Ephraim. There would be no conceivable reason to invent such a tradition, given subsequent developments. The present episode provides an explanation for the reversal, with

17 וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף כִּי־יָשִׁית אָבִיו יַד־יְמִינוֹ עַל־רֹאשׁ
אֶפְרַיִם וַיֵּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמֹךְ יַד־אָבִיו לְהָסִיר אֹתָהּ
מֵעַל רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם עַל־רֹאשׁ מְנַשֶּׁה: 18 וַיֹּאמֶר
יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו לֹא־כֵן אָבִי כִּי־זֶה הַבְּכֹר שִׂים
יְמִינְךָ עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ: 19 וַיְמָאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדַעְתִּי
בְנִי יָדַעְתִּי גַּם־הוּא יִהְיֶה־לְעָם וְגַם־הוּא יִגְדָּל
וְאוּלָם אָחִיו הַקָּטֹן יִגְדַּל מִמֶּנּוּ וְזַרְעוֹ יִהְיֶה מְלֹא־
הַגּוֹיִם: 20 וַיְבָרְכֵם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּךָ יְבָרֵךְ
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר יְשִׂמְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכִמְנַשֶּׁה

17When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. 18"Not so, Father," Joseph said to his father, "for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head." 19But his father objected, saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations." 20So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

Ephraim becoming the more powerful and more influential of the two tribes, even to the extent that its name eventually became synonymous with the kingdom of Israel.[8] This phenomenon is traced to Jacob's blessing. Following his adoption of Joseph's two sons, Jacob now exercises his prerogative to set aside chronological priority and to grant Ephraim preferential status.

*17. **he thought it wrong*** That is, to disregard the rule of primogeniture. He attributes the "error" to his father's failing eyesight (v. 10), an ironic touch in view of the manner in which Jacob years before had exploited his own father's failing vision (27:1–29).

*19. **I know*** That is, who is the real first-born and how you placed the two sons before me.

shall be greater than he Strangely, according to the census taken in the second year after the Exodus, the population of Ephraim exceeded that of Manasseh (Num. 1:33,35), while the opposite is the case a generation later (Num. 26:34,37). Some disaster seems to have befallen the tribe, reducing its population for a while. Perhaps an echo of this is to be found in an obscure narrative in 1 Chronicles 7:20–23 to the effect that the native Gathites slew the sons of Ephraim, who had raided their cattle, and their father mourned for them many days. At any rate, Moses' farewell address reflects the numerical superiority of Ephraim.

plentiful enough for nations Hebrew *melo' ha-goyim,* literally "the fullness/mass of the nations."[9] Jacob transfers to Ephraim the contents of the blessing that he himself had received (v. 4; 35:11). This is probably an interpretation of the name "Ephraim" that is suggestive of fertility (see Comment to 41:51).

20. Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 16), interrupted by Joseph, is now resumed. There can be no greater blessing for the two lads than that their names be invoked by future generations in Israel as paradigms of a glorious destiny. The full meaning of the benediction is clear from a similar formula used by Jeremiah, though to negative effect: "And the whole community of Judah in Babylonia shall use a curse derived from their fate: 'May God make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon consigned to the flames!'—because they did vile things in Israel" (Jer. 29:22f.). That the citation of ancient worthies in the conferring of blessings must have been more widespread in Israel than is indicated by the literature is illustrated in Ruth 4:11–12: "All the people at the gate and the elders answered, . . . May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel. . . . And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah. . . ."

By you The Hebrew uses the singular either in reference to Joseph, as in verse 15, or as a distributive. The latter usage in a blessing is well exemplified by the Priestly Benediction (Num. 6:23, "them"; vv. 24–26, "you" sing.).

Israel See Comment to 47:27.

וַיֹּ֤שֶׁם אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם֙ לִפְנֵ֣י מְנַשֶּׁ֔ה: 21 וַיֹּ֥אמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל
אֶל־יוֹסֵ֑ף הִנֵּ֥ה אָנֹכִ֖י מֵ֥ת וְהָיָ֣ה אֱלֹהִ֔ים עִמָּכֶ֖ם
וְהֵשִׁ֥יב אֶתְכֶ֖ם אֶל־אֶ֥רֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶֽם: 22 וַאֲנִ֣י נָתַ֤תִּי
לְךָ֙ שְׁכֶ֣ם אַחַ֔ד עַל־אַחֶ֖יךָ אֲשֶׁ֣ר לָקַ֑חְתִּי מִיַּ֤ד
הָאֱמֹרִי֙ בְּחַרְבִּ֣י וּבְקַשְׁתִּֽי: פ רביעי

[21]Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. [22]And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow."

A GIFT TO JOSEPH (vv. 21–22)

*21. **I am about to die; but God will be with you** . . .* The apparently unrelated clauses allude, by virtue of their juxtaposition, to the sharp contrast between the present situation that permits Jacob to be buried in the promised land and the impending bondage in Egypt. Yet future redemption is assured because God wills it.

***with you** . . .* The Hebrew uses the plural form. Jacob speaks through Joseph to the entire people.

*22. **one portion** . . .* Hebrew ***shekhem 'aḥad*** is of uncertain meaning and has generated varied interpretations. The present rendering, which is that of the Targums, Peshitta, and Vulgate, has been overwhelmingly accepted by Jewish commentators although devoid of philological support.[10] If correct, it means that Jacob gives Joseph a double share, thus elevating him to the status of first-born. Such a tradition is indeed preserved in 1 Chronicles 5:1–2. Because Hebrew ***shekhem*** usually means "shoulder," it has been assumed that, like its synonym ***katef*** in Numbers 34:11 and Joshua 15:8, ***shekhem*** can be used in the sense of "shoulder," that is, "side/slope, of a mountain." However, this usage too is not otherwise paralleled. Most likely, ***shekhem*** must be connected with the city of Shechem, which is so intimately associated with Jacob and Joseph. Jacob bought a parcel of land there (Gen. 33:18f.; Josh. 24:32), the seduction of Dinah took place there, and Simeon and Levi massacred its inhabitants (Gen. 34). It was to Shechem that Jacob sent Joseph to visit his brothers (Gen. 37:12,14), and Joseph himself is to be buried in the city (Josh. 24:32). Moreover, Shechem lay within the future territory of Joseph's two sons near the border between the two tribes Ephraim and Manasseh (Josh. 17:7), and it was to become the most important city in the kingdom of northern Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:1,25).

The identification of Hebrew ***shekhem*** in this verse with the city of Shechem is reflected in the Septuagint translation and in early Jewish sources. It has been accepted by many traditional commentators as well. Yet there are difficulties. First, the phrase "one Shechem" is very strange, and, in any case, Hebrew usage requires a feminine adjective with a city name (***'aḥat,*** not ***'aḥad***). These problems may perhaps be overcome if ***shekhem*** is a play on words using a vocable whose meaning is now lost (possibly "portion"), which alludes to the city of Shechem.

The historical problem is more difficult. Jacob did not participate in the raid on the city and, in fact, denounced the action, as related in Genesis 34:30 and 49:5–7, while the plot of land he held there was purchased peacefully, not taken in war. This is made clear in Genesis 33:18f. and Joshua 24:32. Hence, it cannot be said that Jacob captured Shechem by his "sword and bow." Sensing the difficulties, early tradition interpreted this phrase figuratively for "prayer and petition," or "***mitsvot*** and good deeds,"[11] or as a metaphorical expression for divine help. More likely, the reference is to some tradition in the life of Jacob regarding a war against Shechem in which he participated but which has not otherwise been preserved in the Bible. Echoes of such an event may well be present in postbiblical literature. In this connection, it is interesting that although Joshua delivered his farewell address and conducted a covenant ceremony in Shechem, where a shrine already existed (Josh. 24:26), the Book of Joshua contains no report of the conquest of that city. This tends to support the likelihood of a pre-Mosaic Israelite conquest of Shechem. Possibly the city was razed in such a conquest and remained largely in ruins until it was reoccupied by Joshua without a fight. See Excursus 26.

from the Amorites In Genesis 34 the inhabitants are described as "Hivites." As in many other passages, "Amorite" is used here as a generic term for the pre-Israelite peoples of Canaan (see Comment to 15:16).

CHAPTER 49

The Testament of Jacob (vv. 1–33)

Before his death Jacob summons all his sons to his bedside to hear his farewell words, addressing each individually through a series of aphorisms in poetic form. This document (vv. 1–27) is the first sustained piece of Hebrew poetry in the Torah. It is a combination of three literary genres: the deathbed blessing familiar to us from earlier patriarchal narratives, such as 27:27ff., 28:1–4 and 39f.; the farewell address found later in the Bible, as in Joshua 23f. and 1 Kings 2:1–9; and the tribal poem, as in Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5. Although the composition of these verses conforms to the general patterns that characterize biblical poetry, there is much uncertainty of meaning, extreme allusiveness, and considerable double entendre. The chapter is the most difficult segment of the Book of Genesis.

Genesis 49 is widely known as "The Blessing of Jacob." However, as Ibn Ezra recognized long ago, this designation is not strictly accurate because the poems contain material of a very mixed nature. Blessings and curses, censure and praise, geographical and historical observations—all are included. For this reason, a title such as "The Last Words of Jacob" or "The Testament of Jacob" better suits the context.

In origin, the collection of aphorisms about the tribes is not a unity, and no inner thread of logic binds the diverse elements together. The individual tribal traditions embedded in the poetry are undoubtedly independent of each other and relate to widely separate and discrete situations. This was fully recognized by the medieval Jewish exegetes, who were also quite aware of the fact that some aphorisms appear to refer to past individual acts of the eponymous ancestor, the remote hero from whom the tribe derived its name, while others allude to tribal history hundreds of years later. Modern scholarship has added almost nothing to the great variety of medieval exegesis in its attempt to unravel the historic background of the sayings, except that the medievals treated these as prophetic, whereas the moderns would be generally inclined to view them as retrojections from later historical reality. See Excursus 23.

An external unity that lends cohesion and meaning to the whole has been imposed upon the diverse material. The poem is encased within a prose framework, the passing of the patriarch, which provides the appropriate setting for its placement within the Joseph narrative. This setting reflects the popular belief in the common origin of the tribes and the basic unity of the nation of Israel. Throughout the chapter, the names "Jacob" and "Israel" each appear five times, the equality of distribution symbolizing the dual character of the patriarch and his sons, now as individual personalities, now as the personifications of the nation with its tribal constituents, as in verse 27. On this phenomenon, see Excursus 25. The aphorisms spoken by Jacob are presented as prophetic pronouncements that will ultimately determine the character and destiny of the future tribes. Also, the actions and behavior of the ancestors leave an indelible imprint on their descendants, affecting the course of history. It is fitting that the Book of Genesis, which opened with the creative power of the divine word, closes with the notion of the effective power of the inspired predictive word of the patriarch.

Three distinct narrative cycles converge here, at the end of the book. Firstly, the patriarchal period began with a divine promise of nationhood to Abraham (12:2), and the fulfillment of that promise is expressed here through "the twelve tribes of Israel" (49:28). Secondly, the Jacob stories, too, commenced with God's assurance of numerous offspring (28:14), and the scene of the dying patriarch surrounded by his sons and grandsons is its proper conclusion. Finally, the first act of the Joseph drama (chap. 37) was immediately succeeded by the fortunes of Judah (chap. 38), and throughout the Joseph biography the personality of Judah repeatedly injects itself in a point-counterpoint relationship. It is surely no coincidence that these two tribes dominate the poem to the extent that five verses are devoted to each, together totaling ten of the twenty-four lines of poetry.

The literary structure is the product of careful design. The tribal order corresponds neither to the sequence of birth, as recounted in chapters 29–30, nor to any of the tribal lists found elsewhere in the Torah. The six sons of Leah are addressed first and the two of Rachel last. In between come the sons of the maidservants; the two sons of Zilpah, maid of Leah, are inserted between the two sons of Bilhah, maid of Rachel. This yields a deliberate chiastic arrangement:

LEAH, Bilhah-Zilpah, Zilpah-Bilhah, RACHEL.

Each group is presented in a descending order of seniority. The single exception is Issachar and Zebulun, reversed for historical reasons (see Comment to v. 13).

מ״ט וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר הֵאָסְפוּ
וְאַגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית
הַיָּמִים:
2 הִקָּבְצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב
וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:
3 רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אַתָּה

49 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.

[2]Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob;
Hearken to Israel your father:
[3]Reuben, you are my first-born,

A PROSE INTRODUCTION (v. 1)

1. The scene presupposes the preceding statement (48:21): "I am about to die."

called That is, he sent for his sons.

Come together Hebrew *he'asfu* is paralleled by *hikkavtsu,* to "assemble," in verse 2. The use of these two verbs, which constitute a fixed pair of synonyms in Hebrew poetry,[1] is evidence that this introductory prose sentence is an organic part of the whole composition.

what is to befall you The reference is to the distant future. Jacob is speaking to the individual tribes personified as his sons.

in days to come Hebrew *be-'aḥarit ha-yamim,* like its Akkadian counterpart *ina aḫrat umē,* means simply "in the future," without precise definition. In the Torah the phrase is used in a context of historical time, but in prophetic literature the phrase became a technical term for the "end-time" *(eschaton),* when the historical process would reach its culmination and God's grand design for the human race would be fulfilled. Because the later eschatological meaning of the term *'aḥarit ha-yamim* ("the end of days") is not appropriate to the contents of the poem, rabbinic exegesis has the divine spirit (Shekhinah) departing from Jacob just as he was about to reveal to his sons the secrets of messianic times.[2]

THE POEM (vv. 2–27)

2. ***hearken . . . Hearken*** The repetition of the same word at the beginning of both parallel clauses, a phenomenon known as anaphora, is a characteristic of biblical Hebrew poetry.[3]

hearken, O sons . . . By adopting a standard formula of wisdom literature,[4] the poet has cleverly woven the image of a sage addressing his disciples into the father-sons relationship.

REUBEN (vv. 3–4)

Reuben is censured for the flaws in his character and for his moral failing, hinted at in 35:22. He has proved himself unworthy of inheriting the headship of the tribes upon his father's death and must therefore forfeit the prerogatives that otherwise naturally flow from the first-born status.

On one level, the demotion of Reuben reflects the ideal of leadership in Israel. Those who hold the responsibility of high office must adhere to moral norms. Misconduct that might be overlooked in men of lesser status assumes notoriously magnified proportions when perpetrated by those who rule. The frequent confrontations between kings and prophets in Israel clearly illustrate the application of this principle.

From an historical viewpoint, Reuben's loss of leadership must reflect very early traditions. Since at no period is there any record of the hegemony of this tribe, there cannot be any possible reason for inventing its first-born status. Hence, its consistent place at the head of the tribal lists in the Bible must be an authentic echo of a state of affairs that existed in dim antiquity. The same situation obtains in Reuben's prominent role in the sale of Joseph into slavery (see Comment to 37:21). See Excursus 23.

The legal situation behind Reuben's loss of his first-born status also points to an early period when it was still possible for a father to annul the birthright of his first-born son, in contrast to the later legislation of Deuteronomy 21:15–17 (see Comment to 25:29–34).

My might and first fruit of my vigor,
Exceeding in rank
And exceeding in honor.
[4]Unstable as water, you shall excel no longer;
For when you mounted your father's bed,
You brought disgrace—my couch he mounted!

כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי
יֶתֶר שְׂאֵת וְיֶתֶר עָז׃
4 פַּחַז כַּמַּיִם אַל־תּוֹתַר
כִּי עָלִיתָ מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ
אָז חִלַּלְתָּ יְצוּעִי עָלָה׃ פ

*3. **My might*** An ellipsis for "the fruit of my might" (cf. 4:12), that is, "of my virility."

my vigor Hebrew *'on,* in parallel with "might" (Heb. *koaḥ*), means here the procreative powers.[5] The designation of the first-born as "the first fruit of one's vigor" is found elsewhere in both legal and poetic texts, such as Deuteronomy 21:17 and Psalms 78:51 and 105:36. The rendering "first fruit" for Hebrew *re'shit* (lit. "beginning") is based on the usage of the term in agricultural contexts.[6] The word might also appropriately be translated "choicest product," as in Deuteronomy 33:21, 1 Samuel 2:29, and Amos 6:6.

Exceeding Hebrew *yeter,* literally "excellence." The meaning is: Being the first-born, you should have preeminence over your brothers.

rank Hebrew *se'et,* literally "exaltation," is used as an attribute of both man, as in Habakkuk 1:7 and Psalms 62:5, and God, as in Job 13:11 and 31:23.

honor Hebrew *'az* usually means "might, strength," but it is frequently used together with such terms as "glory" (Heb. *kavod*), as in Psalms 29:1 and 63:3, "majesty" (Heb. *ga'avah*), as in Psalms 68:35, and "splendor" (Heb. *tif'eret, hadar*), as in Psalms 96:6 and Proverbs 31:25. It is an attribute of royalty in 1 Samuel 2:10.

*4. **Unstable*** Hebrew *paḥaz,* an abstract noun, is unique, although other forms of the same stem exist. In Judges 9:4 and Zephaniah 3:4 the reference is to "reckless" men (Heb. *poḥazim*); in Jeremiah 23:32 the false prophets are said to have led the people astray with "their reckless" *(paḥazutam)* lies. Some light is thrown on the range of meaning by reference to cognate languages: Arabic, "to be haughty, boastful, reckless"; Aramaic and Syriac, "to be wanton, lascivious." In rabbinic Hebrew the verb is used of rising passion (Ned. 9b, Naz. 4b). Jacob would thus be censuring Reuben for acting in an irresponsible, impetuous manner, casting off all moral restraint, even as a torrent of water rushes wildly headlong. For the image of water applied to character, see Isaiah 57:20: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea / Which cannot rest, / Whose waters toss up mire and mud."

excel no longer That is, you have lost your preeminence. Hebrew *'al totar* would normally mean, "you shall not leave/have left over," as in Ruth 2:14 but is here employed in a play on *yeter,* "excellence" (v. 3).

mounted . . . bed The reference is to the incestuous act of Reuben recorded in 35:22 (see Comment) and again mentioned in 1 Chronicles 5:1: "Reuben the first-born of Israel. He was the first-born; but when he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, son of Israel. . . ."[7]

bed Hebrew *mishkevei,* in the plural, is always used in a context of carnal relations, as in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The phrase is probably elliptical for "the bed of your father's wife."

You brought disgrace Hebrew stem *ḥ-l-l,* "to pollute, defile, profane," is used in connection with sexual depravity, as in Leviticus 19:29 and 21:9. The present text presents a problem in that the verb otherwise invariably takes a direct object. Also, the understanding of the verse is complicated by the abrupt change of person: "he mounted!" Mention of the incident in 1 Chronicles 5:1—"he defiled his father's bed"—suggests that "my couch" here is the object of the verb *ḥ-l-l* and does double duty as the object of the following verb as well. The rendering would then be: "You defiled my couch—my couch he mounted!" The last clause is an aside addressed to the assembled sons.

[5]Simeon and Levi are a pair;
Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.
[6]Let not my person be included in their council,
Let not my being be counted in their assembly.
For when angry they slay men,
And when pleased they maim oxen.

5 שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אַחִים
כְּלֵי חָמָס מְכֵרֹתֵיהֶם׃
6 בְּסֹדָם אַל־תָּבֹא נַפְשִׁי
בִּקְהָלָם אַל־תֵּחַד כְּבֹדִי
כִּי בְאַפָּם הָרְגוּ אִישׁ
וּבִרְצֹנָם עִקְּרוּ־שׁוֹר׃

SIMEON AND LEVI (vv. 5–7)

These two brothers are strongly censured for acts of violence and cruelty. Since all the others are individually addressed, the linkage of these two most likely refers to their combined attack on the city of Shechem, which is described in chapter 34. No other instance of joint activity is recorded anywhere. Jacob's initial response to the atrocity was fear for the safety of his group (34:30). Now, with the passage of time, the patriarch renders a moral verdict on the act. With Reuben disqualified, Simeon was next in line of seniority to inherit the mantle of leadership; after him came Levi. The Testament of Jacob explains why neither of them did. The poem is clearly moving toward the glorification of Judah.

The tribe of Simeon completely lost its importance. In the first Israelite census the tribe numbered 59,300 (Num. 1:23); for unknown reasons, its population was reduced to 22,200 by the end of the wilderness wanderings (Num. 26:14). Neither the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33) nor the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5) mentions the tribe. From Joshua 19:1 and 1 Chronicles 4:24–43, it is clear that Simeon was largely swallowed up by Judah and remained unsettled until quite late in the monarchy period.

Levi is here depicted as a purely secular, warlike tribe. There is no hint of its future sacerdotal status. Its martial qualities are still evident in the Exodus period, but at that time its association with the cult is well defined (Exod. 32:26ff.; Deut. 33:11). By conquest and settlement times, the Levites play only a sacral role; they do not participate in the wars, despite their earlier reputation. Jacob's Testament thus reflects a very early tradition. This conclusion is reinforced by the further striking contrast between Levi here as a tribe in disfavor and the consistent concept of the other Torah sources, such as Numbers 3:12f., 8:14–18, and 16:9f., that the Levites were God's elect who enjoyed a privileged status. Similarly, the explanation implied here that the lack of tribal territory is in punishment for reprehensible conduct conflicts with the reasons given in other texts, which attribute it to the spiritual destiny and special status and emoluments granted the tribe (Num. 18:20–24). This holds true even in Deuteronomy (10:8f.; 18:1f.) in which the Levites belong to the economically depressed classes (12:12; 14:27ff.). Genesis 49:5–7 thus echoes an early, independent, preconquest tradition.

5. ***a pair*** Hebrew *'aḥim,* literally "brothers," that is, partners and allies.[8]

Their weapons Hebrew *mekheroteihem.* Any translation of this unique word is guesswork. Neither the ancient versions nor medieval exegetes preserved any convincing tradition.[9] The present rendering is based on Hebrew *k-r-ḥ,* "to dig," hence "a digging or piercing instrument." A translation "wares," based on the stem *m-k-r,* "to sell," is particularly attractive in that it becomes an ironic comment on the response of the two brothers to the offer of the Shechemites, as reported in Genesis 34:10.

6. Jacob dissociates himself from the activities of these two tribes because of their disregard for human values.

council/assembly Hebrew *sod/kahal* are here the tribal gatherings at which decisions are made.[10]

my being Hebrew *kavod,* usually translated "honor," is the God-endowed quality that distinguishes humans from other forms of life, as it is expressed in Psalms 8:6. *Kavod* expresses the essence of being and as such is found in parallel with such terms as *nefesh,* "person," or *ḥayyim,* "life," as here and in Psalms 7:6, and *leb,* "heart," in Psalms 16:9, 57:8f., and 108:2.[11]

7 Cursed be their anger so fierce,
And their wrath so relentless.
I will divide them in Jacob,
Scatter them in Israel.
8 You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes;
Your father's sons shall bow low to you.

7 אָרוּר אַפָּם כִּי עָז
וְעֶבְרָתָם כִּי קָשָׁתָה
אֲחַלְקֵם בְּיַעֲקֹב
וַאֲפִיצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃ ס
8 יְהוּדָה אַתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אַחֶיךָ
יָדְךָ בְּעֹרֶף אֹיְבֶיךָ
יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ׃

angry . . . pleased An example of merism, the polarity expressing totality; that is, in any mood, as the whim strikes them.

maim The verb may mean either "to spay," from Hebrew *'akar,* "sterile," as in Deuteronomy 7:14; or, more likely here, "to hamstring," that is, to cripple a beast by severing the tendons of its hind legs.[12]

According to Genesis 34:28f., the cattle in Shechem were not mutilated but carried off as spoil. Jacob's reproach, therefore, may refer to some other acts of cruelty perpetrated by these two tribes, the record of which has not been preserved. The difficulty of identifying the atrocities led some ancient versions, such as the Targums, Aquila, Symmachus, and Peshitta, as well as some medieval exegetes (Mid. Lek. Tov, Ibn Ezra, Ramban) to treat *shor* as *shur,* "wall," and to understand its accompanying verb as meaning the tearing down of the city walls. The verb seems to be used in this sense in Zephaniah 2:4.

7. ***Cursed be their anger*** The curse is applied to the anger but actually refers to those who display it. The content of the curse is the loss of the independence and territorial integrity of these two tribes. Their future condition is explained in terms of the punitive ban decreed upon their original ancestors.

I will . . . Presumably, it is Jacob who pronounces their fate. The use of "Jacob . . . Israel" to designate the nation reflects later usage (cf. v. 16).

JUDAH (vv. 8–12)

In striking contrast to the preceding, Judah is lavishly praised and blessed: His preeminence is to be acknowledged by his brothers; he possesses (or will possess) lionlike strength; his hegemony is to be long lasting; and his territory is extraordinarily fertile.

The slow, almost imperceptible, rise of Judah has already been subtly insinuated into the Joseph story (see Comment to 37:26). Here it receives formal recognition and confirmation. In the wilderness Judah is, by far, the largest tribe: its population increases during the wanderings, as shown by the censuses of Numbers 1:26 and 26:22. The tribe encamps in front of the Tent of Meeting and heads the march (Num. 2:3,9; 10:14). Its chieftain is the first to bring gifts for the Tabernacle (Num. 7:12), and its representative is listed first among those designated to apportion the land (Num. 34:19).

The undisputed hegemony of Judah was not always taken for granted, as is clear from Deuteronomy 33:7 and from the relative unimportance of Judah during the period of the judges. Judah provides no important judge, and it is ignored by Deborah (Judg. 5). Only in Saul's day does the tribe begin to emerge from its isolation; it gains hegemony over Israel in the time of David.

The Testament of Jacob can only have in mind this latter period. The language of the blessing is obscure, and the meaning of some words and phrases quite uncertain.

8. ***You . . . to you*** That is, to you alone, in contrast to the others.

shall praise With rare exception,[13] this verb is reserved for praise of God. Its use here is for purposes of word play on the name Judah *(yehudah–yodukhah;* cf. 29:35).

your foes Judah was constantly beset by the Philistines on the west, by Amalekites in the Negeb, and by Edomites to the east. Moses, in his farewell blessing, asks for divine help against the foes of Judah (Deut. 33:7). For a long time, Judah was isolated from the northern tribes by Canaanite enclaves and was forced to expand southward.

9 גּוּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה
מִטֶּרֶף בְּנִי עָלִיתָ
כָּרַע רָבַץ כְּאַרְיֵה
וּכְלָבִיא מִי יְקִימֶנּוּ׃
10 לֹא־יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיהוּדָה
וּמְחֹקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו
עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילֹה
וְלוֹ יִקְּהַת עַמִּים׃

[9]Judah is a lion's whelp;
On prey, my son, have you grown.
He crouches, lies down like a lion,
Like the king of beasts—who dare rouse him?
[10]The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet;
So that tribute shall come to him
And the homage of peoples be his.

hand . . . on the nape . . . The image is of the enemies turning their backs in flight but being seized by the nape before they can escape.[14]

Your father's sons The contrast with Isaac's blessing in 27:29, "your mother's sons," is explained by the fact that Isaac was monogamous, whereas Jacob had four wives and wished to indicate that all the tribes would acknowledge Judah's hegemony. Possibly, the blessing is meant to offset the note of 38:1, which reported that Judah left (lit. "went down from") his brothers.[15]

9. ***a lion's whelp*** A metaphor of strength, daring, and unassailability. In Moses' blessing both Gad and Dan are so compared, while Balaam applies the image to the people of Israel as a whole.

The lion is one of the most frequently mentioned animals in the Bible and is referred to by six different names. Under the influence of this verse, the "lion of Judah" became a favorite motif in Jewish art and acquired messianic associations.[16]

have you grown Hebrew *'aliyta.* Compare Ezekiel 19:3: "She raised (Heb. *va-ta'al*) up one of her cubs, / He became a great beast." The reference is to the heroic and expansionist campaigns of David, as noted by Rashi and Radak. Hebrew *'aliyta* may also be taken in its usual sense of "going up," an image of the lion returning to its mountain lair after stalking and running down its prey. There may be still another level of interpretation embedded in the somewhat ambiguous syntax, allowing one to read *mi-teref beni,* "from the prey of my son." This suggests an allusion to 37:33 and 44:28: "Joseph was torn *(tarof toraf)* by a beast." Judah's rise was consequent upon Joseph's misfortune. This rendering is given in Genesis Rabba 98:12 and 99:9.

10. The meaning of this celebrated but difficult verse has been much disputed.

The scepter Hebrew *shevet* serves as an emblem of authority and sovereignty in several texts.[17] The general idea is that Judah will always enjoy hegemony over the other tribes. It provided the royal house of David.

the ruler's staff Hebrew *meḥokek* has this meaning in Numbers 21:18 and Psalms 60:9 and 108:9, and it provides a perfect parallel to "scepter." The term may also be translated "leader, ruler," as in Deuteronomy 33:21, Judges 5:14, and Isaiah 33:22, in which case the preceding *shevet* would be an instance of metonymy, the substitution of an attribute for the name of the thing intended, namely, the one who wields the scepter. Many early and medieval commentators derived *meḥokek* from the root *ḥ-k-k,* meaning "to incise, inscribe," and understood it as a term for a scribe.[18]

from between his feet Taken literally, the phrase conjures up a picture of a ruler holding the staff of office between his legs when seated in formal session. This favors "mace" for *meḥokek.* However, a widely held view sees here a euphemism for the sexual parts and prefers the meaning "offspring, descendants," in which case *meḥokek* would be better rendered "leader."[19]

So that Hebrew *'ad ki* is rare and is otherwise used only in narrative prose to express the leading up to a climactic passage.[20] The present usage is exceptional in that it takes a verb in the imperfect and refers to the future, making its signification uncertain. It seems to mean that Judah will exercise hegemony over the tribes for a period of time leading up to some climactic event.

tribute shall come to him Hebrew *yavo' shiloh* is wholly obscure; neither the subject of the verb nor the meaning of *shiloh* is clear. The present rendering, that of the Yalkut and Lekaḥ Tov, takes *shiloh* as a combination of *shai,* "tribute," and *loh,* "to him." Several ancient versions understand it as in late Hebrew *shello,* "that which belongs to him," that is, until he obtains the monarchy. Rashbam

[11]He tethers his ass to a vine,
His ass's foal to a choice vine;
He washes his garment in wine,
His robe in blood of grapes.
[12]His eyes are darker than wine;
His teeth are whiter than milk.

יא אֹסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עִירֹה
וְלַשֹּׂרֵקָה בְּנִי אֲתֹנוֹ
כִּבֵּס בַּיַּיִן לְבֻשׁוֹ
וּבְדַם־עֲנָבִים סוּתֹה׃
יב חַכְלִילִי עֵינַיִם מִיָּיִן
וּלְבֶן־שִׁנַּיִם מֵחָלָב׃ פ

v. 11. עִירוֹ ק׳ סוּתוֹ: ק׳

identifies the word with the city of Shiloh, a very ancient cultic center in Israel situated in the territory of Ephraim. The specific historic reference would be the defection of the ten tribes from Judah with the resultant division of the kingdom, announced by the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh. Judah's hegemony over all Israel will last until the secession of the north.

An early tradition, found in texts from Qumran, in the Targums, and in rabbinic literature, sees in *shiloh* a messianic title, although no biblical passage supports this. It has even been noted that the numerical value of the consonants *y-b-' sh-y-l-h,* "Shiloh will come," is equal to that of ***mashiaḥ,*** "messiah": 358.[21]

None of the many interpretations of *shiloh* is without objection, and the term remains an enigma, though the present translation seems to be the most acceptable.

homage Hebrew *yikkhat* occurs elsewhere only in Proverbs 30:17. Its meaning is assured by context and by an Arabic cognate.[22]

peoples Either the other tribes, that is, "kinsmen," or, more likely, an allusion to foreign peoples,[23] probably the subject peoples of the Davidic empire.

11. The blessed fertility of the tribal territory of Judah is symbolized by the abundance of vines and wine. This is a common biblical figure of divine favor and of prosperity. The vine was one of the indigenous characteristic products of the Land of Israel (Deut. 8:8), and the region around Hebron in Judah was particularly noted for viticulture.[24]

He tethers . . . The image is problematic because an ass would soon destroy the vine to which it is tied. The idea, apparently, is that the luxuriance and productivity of the vine will be so great that the destructive proclivities of the ass[25] will be of no significance. This is hyperbolic language, as Radak noted.

choice vine Hebrew *sorekah*. A place named Wadi Sorek, in the territory of Judah, seems to have been located in the region of Timnah, which was rich in vineyards. The region figures in the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38:12).[26]

He washes his garment in wine This extraordinary figure may be simply another hyperbole for the abundance of wine, or it may poetically relate to the stained garments of those engaged in the manufacture of wine, as mentioned in Isaiah 63:2ff.[27] Another possibility is that we have here a reference to the fact that prominent Judean families were engaged in the weaving and dyeing industry, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 4:21. In the excavations at modern Tell Beit Mirsim, in the territory of Judah, a major and well-organized dyeing and weaving industry was uncovered. In this case, either "wine" was used as a poetic term for red-colored dye, or wine was actually used as an ingredient of dyestuffs.

blood of grapes A poetic term for wine (cf. Deut. 32:14). "Blood" (Heb. ***dam***) is also used in Akkadian *(dāmu)* for red wine. In Ugaritic *yn,* "wine," is paralleled with *dm ʿṣm,* "blood of trees" (51.III.43f.; cf. IV.38).

12. ***darker than wine . . . whiter than milk*** The phrases express an ideal of beauty: sparkling eyes[28] and shining white teeth.

ZEBULUN (v. 13)

The usual order, Issachar-Zebulun, is here reversed. This is strange because, according to the birth narrative of Genesis 30:17–20, Issachar was the older of the two and he generally appears first in the

tribal lists. Yet the Blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:18 also reverses the sequence, reflecting some genuine historic tradition. One cannot simply say that Deuteronomy 33 is dependent on Genesis 49, for two other texts also give Zebulun precedence over his brother tribe. These are the narratives detailing the commission for the division of the land in Numbers 34:25f. and the drawing of lots for the allocation of territory in Joshua 19:16–17. Very likely, therefore, the Testament of Jacob relates to a time when Zebulun was in ascendancy. Certainly, the content of the sayings about them in both poems—Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33—suggests that Issachar was the less energetic of the two tribes, and this impression is reinforced by the Song of Deborah, which gives high praise to Zebulun for its contribution to the national victory, mentioning it before Issachar and citing it a second time (Judg. 5:14,18; cf. 4:6,10), the only tribe to be so honored. Zebulun also joined Gideon's battle against the Midianites (Judg. 6:35), and its importance in the time of David is illustrated by the fact that it contributed to David's armies the largest military contingent of all of the western tribes (1 Chron. 12:33).

Another problem arising out of verse 13 is the portrayal of Zebulun as living along the seacoast[29] and being involved in shipping. The Blessing of Moses also credits Zebulun (together with Issachar) with drawing wealth from the sea (Deut. 33:19). The boundaries of Zebulun are delimited in Joshua 19:10–16, and it is clear that the tribe occupied inland territory, being blocked from the sea and from Phoenicia by the tribe of Asher. Apart from this specific problem of Zebulun's boundaries, there is also the general question of Israel's littoral and seafaring interests. In the Song of Deborah, in Judges 5:17, Dan is also said to "linger by the ships" and Asher to live "at the seacoast and . . . at his harbors." Yet seafaring and fishing never played an important role in the economy of the Land of Israel. The coast below the Carmel has no bays or natural harbors, and the dune sands in various places meant that roads had to be located at an inconvenient distance from the coastline, a considerable part of which was occupied by the Philistines. Above the Carmel, where several natural harbors existed, the region was largely the preserve of the Phoenicians. The general inland orientation of Israel is demonstrated by Solomon's desire to build a fleet at Elath on the Red Sea; he was forced to import manpower and technology from Phoenicia, as told in 1 Kings 9:26f. and 10:5,22.

The associations of some tribes with the sea can probably be explained in two ways. It is quite likely that Philistines and Phoenicians employed Israelite labor. Coastal cities of the Near East always featured mixed populations, so that the above-cited verses may refer not to Israelite occupation of the area but, rather, to the presence of considerable numbers of Israelites engaged as stevedores, in the servicing of ships, and in commerce (cf. 2 Sam. 24:6–7). Another possibility, complementary to the first, lies in the Israelite exploitation of convenient anchorage sites for very small ships at the points where more important wadis drain into the sea. Excavations at Abu Hawam on Wadi Kishon, at Tell Qasile on the Yarkon, and at Tell Mor on Wadi Lachish have revealed examples of this practice.

the seashore Hebrew *ḥof yamim,* literally "shore of seas." The plural, found elsewhere only in Judges 5:17, is probably a poetic form referring to the Mediterranean.

a haven for ships Hebrew *ḥof 'oniyot,* literally "a shore of / for ships," *ḥof* being used in two different senses here, the second unparalleled elsewhere.[30]

Sidon The mention of Sidon need not be taken literally as referring to the port city of that name high up in Phoenicia, about 25 miles (40 km.) north of Tyre. The Bible often uses Sidon as a generalized term for Phoenicia(ns).[31] The same tendency is found in Homer and, in fact, follows the usage of the Phoenicians themselves to whom the title "King of (the) Sidon(ians)" meant all the Phoenicians including both Tyre and Sidon. The list in Genesis 10:15 (= 1 Chron. 1:13) that makes Sidon "the first-born of Canaan" simply testifies to the preeminence of the city that gave its name to Phoenicia in general. It was called Sidon even when Tyre was the dominant city-state of all southern Phoenicia.

ISSACHAR (vv. 14–15)

It is quite apparent from the Books of Joshua (15:63; 16:10; 17:16) and Judges (1:19–34) that during the wars of conquest, and for a long time afterwards, the invading Israelites were unable to dislodge the Canaanites from many of their strongholds in the plains and lowlands. The epigram relating to Issachar seems to be connected with this situation. The tribe is not even mentioned in the inventory of Judges 1, which means that it played a very minor, if not inglorious, role in the wars. Here it is

[13]Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore;
He shall be a haven for ships,
And his flank shall rest on Sidon.
[14]Issachar is a strong-boned ass,
Crouching among the sheepfolds.
[15]When he saw how good was security,
And how pleasant was the country,
He bent his shoulder to the burden,
And became a toiling serf.

יג זְבוּלֻן לְחוֹף יַמִּים יִשְׁכֹּן
וְהוּא לְחוֹף אֳנִיּוֹת
וְיַרְכָתוֹ עַל־צִידֹן׃ ס
יד יִשָּׂשכָר חֲמֹר גָּרֶם
רֹבֵץ בֵּין הַמִּשְׁפְּתָיִם׃
טו וַיַּרְא מְנֻחָה כִּי טוֹב
וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נָעֳמָה
וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לִסְבֹּל
וַיְהִי לְמַס־עֹבֵד׃ ס

chided for passively submitting to servitude as the price of peace with its neighbors. Implied in the taunt is a bitter play on the name Issachar. In the birth narrative of this son, this is explained, by popular etymology, as deriving from the Hebrew stem *s-k-r,* "to hire," and is taken to mean "man of reward" (see Comment to 30:16,18). There the name is intended to be understood as "hireling." The Blessing of Moses similarly specifies the withdrawn nature of this tribe, but not in a disparaging way. By the time of Deborah, the Canaanites had become sufficiently weakened for Issachar to be emboldened to rally to the cause of the northern tribes. For this it received the praise of the prophetess (Judg. 5:15).

14. a strong-boned ass Hebrew *ḥamor garem* is unique and obscure. The present rendering is based on identifying the second word with the noun *gerem,* Aramaic *gram,* "bone,"[32] used adjectivally, "bony," in the sense of "strong-limbed." The characterization would then imply a criticism of the tribe for placing its strength at the service of the Canaanites. A different tradition is preserved by the Samaritan reading *ḥamor gerim,* "an ass of foreigners," that is, one pressed into the service of alien peoples. Some of the ancient versions appear to have reacted to the negative associations of the ass with stupidity and stubbornness in their respective cultures and so paraphrased or changed the original. Thus, the Peshitta has *gabra ganbara,* "a strong man"; Targum Onkelos renders *'attir benikhsin,* "rich in possessions"; Targum Jonathan interprets *ḥamir beurya' ve-shevet takif,* "laden with the Law and a strong tribe." The Septuagint, apparently reading *ḥamad* for *ḥamor,* presents "Issachar desired that which is good." It would seem that the phrase *ḥamor garem* is an ancient idiom still awaiting elucidation through some epigraphic find.

Rabbinic legend found in Genesis Rabba 72:4 and 99:11 has Issachar engaged in the study of the Torah while Zebulun busied himself with commerce and maintained his brother (cf. Deut. 33:18).

Crouching among the sheepfolds That is, inactive, content to enjoy its safety at the expense of its freedom. The term rendered "sheepfolds" (Heb. *mishpetayim*) occurs elsewhere only in Judges 5:16 (cf. Pss. 68:14): "Why then did you stay among the *mishpetayim,* / And listen as they pipe for the flocks?" The context there is likewise an accusation of tribal indifference to the wars of Israel. The meaning of the word, however, is by no means certain. The stem *sh-f-t* can mean "to set the pot on the fire," as in 2 Kings 4:38 and Ezekiel 24:3, and *mishpetayim* may therefore be a word for an open hearth or fireplace around which the shepherds would gather with their flocks for food, rest, and amusement. Less likely philologically is the interpretation "saddlebags," suggested by Radak. This refers to the pannier, or pair of bags, carried over the back of a beast of burden and hanging on either side. Another possibility is "defense enclosures" for animals. This rests on archaeological, rather than philological, evidence.[33]

15. security Hebrew *menuḥah,* literally "resting place" (cf. Num. 10:33), is used in the sense of "haven, settled home," as the parallel *ha-'arets* ("country") shows.[34]

good . . . pleasant The territory of the tribe lay in a fertile plateau in Lower Galilee.

to the burden Hebrew *s-v-l* means "to carry a burden." In Psalms 81:7 and Nehemiah 4:11, the noun *sevel* is a basket carried on the shoulder in heavy corvée labor.[35] In Akkadian texts from Mari and Amarna, *sablum* is used of corvée workers, and Hebrew *sevel* is also used of corvée work in 1 Kings 11:28.

[16]Dan shall govern his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.

16 דָּן יָדִין עַמּוֹ
כְּאַחַד שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

a toiling serf Hebrew *mas 'oved,* a combination that also appears in Joshua 16:10 and 1 Kings 9:21. Otherwise, the phrase is simply *mas.*[36] It is difficult to differentiate between the two forms, for a comparison of 1 Kings 9:21 with 2 Chronicles 8:8 shows that both refer to the corvée. In Akkadian texts from Mari, Alalakh, and Amarna, *massu* similarly occurs in the sense of "corvée." This type of enforced hard labor imposed upon a subservient people is well illustrated by the experience of the Israelites in Egypt: "So they set taskmasters (Heb. *sarei missim*) over them to oppress them with forced labor (Heb. *sivlotam*)" (Exod. 1:11). The Amarna document is of particular interest because it derives from the prince of Megiddo and relates to the employment of corvée workers (Akk. *amilûti massa*) in the town of Shunem, which lay within the territory allotted to Issachar (Josh. 19:18). It would seem that until the final overthrow of the Canaanite city-states in the time of Deborah, the tribe had been content to perform corvée labor for the local overlords in return for a quiet existence.

DAN (vv. 16–17)

These two verses may well be unconnected, each alluding to a different situation. The first deals with Dan's status among the tribes of Israel, the second with its position vis-à-vis its enemies. Our meager knowledge of the history of this tribe and the elliptical language used here greatly complicate our understanding of the aphorisms and make it difficult to identify the historic situations behind them.

Dan is the first of the concubine tribes to be addressed. This implies a position of importance, a conclusion reinforced by its also being the only such to be allocated territory between the Leah and Rachel tribes. Furthermore, in the wilderness censuses it is actually the second largest tribe, its adult male population numbering over 60,000 (Num. 2:26; 26:43).

There is much evidence, however, that during the settlement period Dan was a small tribe in a precarious position. The tribal genealogies of the Torah assign it only a single clan (Gen. 46:23—Hushim; Num. 26:42—Shuham), part of which seems to have been absorbed by the neighboring Benjaminites (cf. 1 Chron. 7:12; 8:8). The genealogies of Chronicles ignore the tribe altogether. The stories about the Danite blasphemer in the wilderness whose father was an Egyptian (Lev. 24:11), about Samson's easy relationships and intermarriages with Philistines (Judg. 14:1ff.; 16:4), and about the Danite master craftsman Huram-abi whose father was a Tyrian (2 Chron. 2:12f., but contrast 1 Kings 7:13f.) all point to a certain amount of intermingling of blood between Danites and neighboring peoples. Very significantly, the Book of Joshua does not define the borders of the tribe. These are inferred from those of the neighboring tribes, Ephraim to the north, Benjamin to the east, and Judah to the south. All we have is a list of cities allocated to Dan (Josh. 19:40–48), but some of these, such as Zorah, Eshtaol, and Ekron, are earlier assigned to Judah (Josh. 15:33,11,45). There are no reports of the Danites having captured any of their allotted cities. In fact, the term "the Camp of Dan"—Hebrew *maḥaneh dan*—in Judges 13:25 (cf. 18:12) shows that they occupied a fortified camp, not a true settlement, between the two Canaanite cities of Zorah and Eshtaol. All attempts on the part of the Danites to settle in the Valley of Aijalon and in the Shephelah were unsuccessful, and they finally despaired of gaining their originally assigned territory and migrated northward, as told in Joshua 19:47 and in Judges 1:34f. and chapter 18. Biblical tradition thereafter presupposes the presence of Dan in the north. The Song of Deborah, Judges 5:17, censures Dan for not participating in the war of the northern tribes against the Canaanites (cf. Deut. 33:27).

The Testament of Jacob can be interpreted as referring either to the premigration period or to events after the settlement in the north.

16. shall govern Hebrew *yadin* is a word play on the name Dan (see Comment to 30:6), so that "his people" would mean "himself": The tribe of Dan will maintain its independence like any other tribe, despite its tribulations and failures. However, *yadin* more frequently means "to vindicate," and the object could refer to all Israel. In this case, the allusion could be to the exploits of Samson against the Philistine oppressors, which, though they are generally more of the nature of personal vengeance, acquire national significance.[37]

the tribes of Israel This is the first usage of the phrase (cf. v. 28; see above, Introduction to chapter).

17 יְהִי־דָן נָחָשׁ עַלֵי־דָּרֶךְ
שְׁפִיפֹן עַלֵי־אֹרַח
הַנֹּשֵׁךְ עִקְבֵי־סוּס
וַיִּפֹּל רֹכְבוֹ אָחוֹר׃
18 לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה׃ חמישי

[17]Dan shall be a serpent by the road,
A viper by the path,
That bites the horse's heels
So that his rider is thrown backward.
[18]I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!

*17. **viper*** The unique Hebrew ***shefifon*** is probably to be identified with the horned cerastes, which buries itself in the sand, especially in the hollows made by camel's hoofs, and feeds on rodents and scavenger birds attracted by grains and particles of food left by the Bedouin along caravan routes. It has a venom-injecting spinelike scale above each eye that kills its prey on contact, almost instantaneously. However, its poison is not powerful enough to be fatal to a camel or a horse. It will bite its heel if it crosses its path and cause the beast to rear suddenly and violently, thereby throwing its rider (cf. 3:15).

The image may allude to the form of guerrilla warfare to which the tribe of Dan was forced to resort in its struggle for survival against its neighbors during the period of settlement. It could also refer to the fact that Dan, whether in the Shephelah or in its northern relocation, lay alongside important caravan routes and may have engaged in highway robbery.

horse's . . . rider The use of the horse for riding, as opposed to draft purposes, first appears in the fourteenth century B.C.E. (see Comment to 47:17), but it was not common. The horse does not figure among the livestock of the patriarchs. Only around 1000 B.C.E. did mounted cavalry appear on the battlefields in Syria and Canaan. Since Hebrew ***rokhev,*** "rider," can also be used of a charioteer, as in Exodus 15:2 and Jeremiah 51:21, the likely reference is to Canaanite chariots, which for a long time constituted the primary obstacle to Israelite penetration into the lowlands and caused the migration of the Danites (Josh. 17:18; Judg. 1:19; 4:3).

A PRAYER (v. 18)

The use of the first person, as in verses 1,3–4,6–7, and 9, leaves no doubt that the worshipper is Jacob. The formulation corresponds to well-established liturgical patterns.[38] The meaning is clear: the patriarch suddenly calls for divine deliverance. Such a prayer would only originate in a situation of danger. What, then, is its context here? It might be a personal prayer for the strength to finish the Testament, at a moment of physical weakness. It might reflect the deep disappointment felt at the fate of Samson (Judg. 15) if the oracle about Dan really refers to him. This explanation is given in Genesis Rabba 98:19f. and 99:12. The prayer could also be invoked by the discouraging experiences of the tribe of Dan in its struggle for a territorial foothold.

GAD (v. 19)

This tribe had its territory east of the Jordan.[39] Its boundaries are defined in the Book of Joshua. However, for most of its history, Gad was engaged in a series of wars with its neighbors, Ammonites (Judg. 11), Moabites (Mesha Inscription, lines 10–13), and Arameans (1 Kings 22:3; 2 Kings 10:33). Its members acquired a reputation as fighting warriors (Deut. 33:20; 1 Chron. 5:18 and 12:8) and, doubtless, the Testament of Jacob reflects this. No particular historic situation can be pinpointed as the background to this aphorism.

Gad . . . raided The Hebrew contains a play on the name (see Comment to 30:11); ***gad*** is associated with ***gedud,*** "a troop," and the verb formed from it, ***yegudenu,*** "shall be raided."[40]

ASHER (v. 20)

This tribe settled in Western Galilee between the Carmel and Phoenicia (Josh. 19:24–31). The area was famed for its fertility (cf. Deut. 33:24) and lay within the Canaanite-Phoenician sphere of political and commercial activity. Asher did not succeed in capturing the most important cities in its allotted territory, as noted in Judges 1:31f., and seems to have thrown in its lot with the local city-states from

[19]Gad shall be raided by raiders,
But he shall raid at their heels.
[20]Asher's bread shall be rich,
And he shall yield royal dainties.
[21]Naphtali is a hind let loose,
Which yields lovely fawns.

19 גָּ֤ד גְּדוּד֙ יְגוּדֶ֔נּוּ
וְה֥וּא יָגֻ֖ד עָקֵֽב׃ ס
20 מֵאָשֵׁ֥ר שְׁמֵנָ֖ה לַחְמ֑וֹ
וְה֥וּא יִתֵּ֖ן מַעֲדַנֵּי־מֶֽלֶךְ׃ ס
21 נַפְתָּלִ֥י אַיָּלָ֖ה שְׁלֻחָ֑ה
הַנֹּתֵ֖ן אִמְרֵי־שָֽׁפֶר׃ ס

which it derived its prosperity. The Testament would thus refer to the period of the judges before the final defeat of the Canaanites in the north under Deborah's inspiring leadership.

Asher The name, which means "fortune, happiness" (Gen. 30:13), contains a veiled allusion to the prosperity of the tribe.[41]

bread Hebrew *leḥem* can mean food in general, as in Psalms 136:25.

royal dainties The phrase may either be figurative, "delicacies fit for a king," or literal, that is, Asher serviced the petty Canaanite kingdoms.

NAPHTALI (v. 21)

The territory of this tribe lay in Upper Galilee and ran parallel to the Jordan from the south shore of the Sea of Galilee to an unspecified line in the north beyond Lake Huleh, with its western boundary bordering on Asher (Josh. 19:32–39). Little is known of its early history, except that it was forced to accept a symbiotic relationship with the Canaanites until it felt strong enough to subjugate them (Judg. 1:33). It played a glorious role in the war of Deborah. The Israelite commander-in-chief came from Naphtali (Judg. 4:6; 5:18). The aphorism here is obscure both because the language yields many interpretations and because none can easily be related to the sparse data available about the tribe and its history.

a hind In Proverbs 5:19, Hebrew *'ayyalah* is a symbol of beauty. In Psalms 18:34 and Habakkuk 3:19 it typifies fleet-footedness. Naphtali is the only tribe compared to a female animal, but the significance of the fact is not apparent. The Hebrew consonants can also be read *'e(y)lah,* "a terebinth," which is the way the Septuagint took it.

let loose Hebrew *sheluḥah,* "unrestrained," is used of a beast in Exodus 22:4 and Leviticus 16:22. The stem is also used of one sent on a mission, as in Proverbs 17:11 and Obadiah 1, as well as of the spreading shoots or branches of a tree, as in Isaiah 16:8, Jeremiah 17:8, and Psalms 80:12.

lovely fawns Hebrew *'imerei shafer,* a unique phrase, can be variously translated. The present rendering is based on a word meaning "lamb" in many Semitic languages. The reference could then be to Naphtali being quick to pay tribute of sheep to its Canaanite overlords or to the beauty, openness, and fruitfulness of its tribal territory. Another possibility is to translate "beautiful words"; that is, a swift runner from Naphtali brings good tidings of victory in Deborah's war against the Canaanites. Yet a third interpretation renders "goodly boughs/ crest of a tree." This compares the tribe to a terebinth with spreading branches and a lovely crest.[42]

JOSEPH (vv. 22–26)

The Testament to Joseph is of extraordinary length, equaled only, and significantly, by that to Judah. Lavish blessing is showered upon Joseph, the name here standing for Ephraim and Manasseh together (see below). The language is enigmatic and allusive, and the meaning is often uncertain. Echoes of the Testament are to be found in the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:13–16).

There seem to be four themes in the verses directed to Joseph: the attributes of the tribes (v. 22), an historical allusion (vv. 23f.), divine protection (vv. 24f.), and blessings of prosperity (vv. 25f.). This is the only Testament that does not commence with the name of the tribe. This stylistic variance may be intended to draw attention to the special importance of the Joseph tribes.

22 Joseph is a wild ass,
A wild ass by a spring
—Wild colts on a hillside.
23 Archers bitterly assailed him;
They shot at him and harried him.
24 Yet his bow stayed taut,
And his arms were made firm
By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob—
There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel—

22 בֶּן פֹּרָת יוֹסֵף
בֶּן פֹּרָת עֲלֵי־עָיִן
בָּנוֹת צָעֲדָה עֲלֵי־שׁוּר׃
23 וַיְמָרְרֻהוּ וְרֹבּוּ
וַיִּשְׂטְמֻהוּ בַּעֲלֵי חִצִּים׃
24 וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּאֵיתָן קַשְׁתּוֹ
וַיָּפֹזּוּ זְרֹעֵי יָדָיו
מִידֵי אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב
מִשָּׁם רֹעֶה אֶבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

*22. **Joseph*** The Blessing of Moses similarly uses the name "Joseph" for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh; but such usage is rare. Otherwise, the name designates the entire northern kingdom of Israel. The two tribes are known as "the House of Joseph" or "the sons of Joseph."[43]

a wild ass . . . A wild ass Literally, "a wild ass is Joseph, A wild ass by a spring"—an example of anaphora (see Comment to v. 2).

wild ass Hebrew *ben porat* is probably a word play on "Ephraim," the more important of the two Joseph tribes, for a member of the tribe was designated *'efrati ('prti)*.

The present translation takes *ben* as signifying a class or quality and *porat* as a feminine poetic form of *pere'*. The parallel clause *banot tsa'adah* is understood as the Hebrew equivalent of Arabic *banāt sa'adat,* "wild colts."[44] This rendering has the virtue of maintaining the pattern of the figurative use of animal names for the tribes. In this particular case, the "wild ass" allusion (see Comment to 16:2) may be to the freedom and independence of the Joseph tribes, which occupied an area that had previously been sparsely populated, as is clearly implied in Joshua 17:14–18.

spring . . . hillside Hebrew *'ayin, shur* may well be word play concealing a reference to the Ishmaelites who sold Joseph to Egypt, as related in Genesis 37:25,28. "The spring *('ayin)* on the road to Shur" plays an important role in the birth narrative about Ishmael (16:7), who is also described as "a wild ass" (16:12). Further, the following two verses here refer to hostile archers, and Ishmael was indeed "a bowman" (21:20). It is also worth noting that both *'ayin* and *shur* are terms of "seeing,"[45] and Hagar, mother of Ishmael, referred to the "God of Seeing," who reassured her at "the Well of the Living One Who sees me" (16:13f.).

hillside A poetic extension of the otherwise attested meaning, "wall."[46]

23. Scripture nowhere else records attacks by archers upon Joseph. Unless this refers to some unreported episode in his life or to attacks on Ephraim and Manasseh by neighboring tribes or Canaanite armies, the phraseology may be figurative. It could allude to the Ishmaelites (see above), to the hostility of Joseph's brothers, or to the slanderous accusations of Potiphar's wife with their bitter aftereffects. The figure of slander as an arrow is well attested.[47]

24. The Hebrew text is difficult. In the present state of our knowledge, this translation is the best that can be wrested from it. The idea seems to be that Joseph remained steadfast in the face of adversity and drew his strength from God, who championed his cause.[48]

Mighty One of Jacob Hebrew *'avir ya'akov,* a rare divine title, appearing elsewhere only four times, always in poetic texts. It corresponds to the Akkadian divine title *bel abāri,* "endowed with strength," and is to be distinguished from *'abbir,* which is used of stallions, bulls, and warriors.[49]

Jacob . . . Israel The ambiguity as to whether the patriarch or the people of Israel is intended is probably deliberate.[50] See the Introduction to this chapter.

There Hebrew *mi-sham,* literally "from there." The patriarch may have pointed heavenward. The Peshitta reading *mi-shem,* "by the name of," reflects the idea that the "Name" of God expresses the essence of His being from which flows help and salvation.[51] Although this reading has been widely accepted as original, the biblical usage is invariably *be-shem.*

the Shepherd For the common image of God as a shepherd, see Comment to 48:15.

[25]The God of your father who helps you,	25 מֵאֵל אָבִיךָ וְיַעְזְרֶךָּ
And Shaddai who blesses you	וְאֵת שַׁדַּי וִיבָרְכֶךָּ
With blessings of heaven above,	בִּרְכֹת שָׁמַיִם מֵעָל
Blessings of the deep that couches below,	בִּרְכֹת תְּהוֹם רֹבֶצֶת תָּחַת
Blessings of the breast and womb.	בִּרְכֹת שָׁדַיִם וָרָחַם:
[26]The blessings of your father	26 בִּרְכֹת אָבִיךָ
Surpass the blessings of my ancestors,	גָּבְרוּ עַל־בִּרְכֹת הוֹרַי
To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills.	עַד־תַּאֲוַת גִּבְעֹת עוֹלָם
May they rest on the head of Joseph,	תִּהְיֶיןָ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף
On the brow of the elect of his brothers.	וּלְקָדְקֹד נְזִיר אֶחָיו: פ שׁשׁי

the Rock of Israel Hebrew *'even,* literally "stone," is nowhere else used as a divine name or in association with God. The present translation is that of *tsur*, "rock," a frequent epithet of God,[52] expressing strength, permanence, and protection. Unlike *tsur, 'even* does not appear as a component of proper names. It is possible that "Stone of Israel" may have been a very ancient title that disappeared early and that might have derived from the traditions about Jacob setting up a stone pillar at Bethel, as reported in 28:18,22 and 35:14. This suggestion is bolstered by the use of the epithet "God of . . . your father" on that occasion (28:13) and by the title El Shaddai associated with the revelation there (35:11; 48:3). All these terms occur here in the Testament of Jacob.

25. The Testament to Joseph now shifts from the miseries of the past to the promise of the future. Underlying the blessing is the concept of a God who has a personal relationship with the individual and who, at the same time, is a cosmic, universal deity in sovereign control of all the forces of nature.

The God of your father This title stresses the continuity of the generations, the unbroken chain of religious tradition that alone makes the dying patriarch's blessing meaningful and effective. Hebrew *'el 'avikha* is unique; otherwise, *'elohim* is used in this compound. The reason for the exception is that the composite epithet *'el shaddai* is here split up into its components for purposes of poetic parallelism (cf. Num. 24:4,16).

blessings These consist of rain and dew and abundance of water resources, all of which symbolize fruitfulness of the soil and the fecundity (= "breast and womb") of animals and humans.

breast and womb The natural order (cf. Hos. 9:14) is here reversed for reasons of sound-harmony (Heb. *shamayim–shadayim; tehom–raḥam*), and there is also an obvious word play between *shaddai* and *shadayim.*

the deep that couches below On Hebrew *tehom,* see Comment to 1:1. Here (cf. Deut. 33:13) it means the subterranean source of waters that rise to the earth's surface. The language used is borrowed from a lost myth about a sea monster, another fragment of which is Habakkuk 3:10 (literally): "The deep gave forth its voice; it raised its hands on high." This is another example of the biblical employment of mythic language purely as a literary convention, emptied of its original content.

26. According to the present rendering, the patriarch assures Joseph that the blessings he bestows on him immeasurably exceed what he himself had received from his forebears. This interpretation, however, depends upon a particular understanding of several unique and difficult words and phrases of uncertain meaning.

Surpass Hebrew *gavar 'al* is used elsewhere of the flood waters that "swelled upon" the earth, as in Genesis 7:19,24; of troops that "prevailed against" an enemy, as in 2 Samuel 11:23; and of God's steadfast love being "great in respect of" the recipient, as in Psalms 103:11 and 117:2. Clearly, this last best fits the context, except that one would expect the object to be Joseph rather than the other blessings. Perhaps *'al* should here be taken as "in addition to," as in Exodus 35:22 and Deuteronomy 22:6.

my ancestors Hebrew *horai* is so rendered based on postbiblical usage. However, the stem *h-r-h* in the Bible can only mean "to become pregnant" and is, of course, solely used in the feminine. Seeing that "mountain(s)"—"hill(s)" is a fixed pair of parallel terms in Hebrew poetry, occurring more than thirty times in that order, Rashbam is undoubtedly correct in connecting *horai* here with *har,* "mountain." The Septuagint indeed reads here "ancient mountains," joining the word to the following *'ad.* The phrase *harere 'ad,* "ancient mountains," appears in Habakkuk 3:6 in parallel with *give'ot 'olam,* "eternal hills." The Blessing of Moses to Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:15 employs the same imagery, though in variant form: "With the best from the ancient mountains, / And the bounty of hills immemorial. . . ." Therefore, it is best to render here, "the blessings of the ancient mountains."

the utmost bounds Hebrew *ta'ava(t)h* is taken to be connected with a rare verbal form *teta'u* (Num. 34:7–8), apparently meaning "to draw a line, delineate."[53] But this is itself uncertain (cf. Num. 34:10). Elsewhere, the noun means "desire" and is best translated here "desirable things, delights (cf. Gen. 3:6), bounty," parallel to "blessings." In light of the above analysis, the text may be translated: "Mighty are the blessings of your father, / In addition to the blessings of the ancient mountains, / The bounty of the eternal hills."

on the head An example of synecdoche, the head representing the entire person.[54]

head . . . brow Hebrew *ro'sh kodkod* (lit. "pate") are a fixed pair of parallel terms in poetry.[55]

the elect Rather, "leader." Hebrew *nazir* may here be "one who wears the *nezer,*" the symbol of royal power, as in 2 Samuel 1:10 and 2 Kings 11:12.[56] Another tradition takes it in the sense of "separated," a transferred use of its usual meaning, "Nazirite," meaning the one who took vows of abstinence as detailed in Numbers 6:1–6. This refers to the early relationships between Joseph and his brothers. Since Hebrew *nezer* also means "the hair of the head" (Jer. 7:29)—the outward characteristic of the Nazirite, who is not permitted to cut his hair—a word play with *ro'sh* and *kodkod* is probably intended.

BENJAMIN (v. 27)

The picture of Benjamin drawn here is certainly not the same as the one that emerges from the Joseph story. Far from being a "ravenous wolf," he is there the patriarch's lamblike youngest son whom he is reluctant to let out of his sight. Clearly, the image in the Testament, which portrays the Benjaminites as warlike and predatory, is tribal and not individual.

The martial qualities of this small tribe are indeed well attested. The first judge-savior of Israel from Moabite oppression was Ehud the Benjaminite, mentioned in Judges 3:15, and the army of the tribe took part in the war of Deborah (Judg. 5:14). In a civil war, it is said to have mustered twenty-six thousand men armed with swords and seven hundred crack slingers and to have fought back savagely against the combined forces of the other tribes, so Judges 20:15,16,21,25. It provided skilled archers, men "valiant in battle," says 1 Chronicles 8:40 and 12:2, and two of David's heroes came from this tribe, according to 2 Samuel 23:27,29.

The historic explanation for the militancy of the Benjaminites is grounded in the geographical situation of its territory. Occupying a narrow strip of land separating the hill country of Judah to the south from the hill country of Ephraim to the north, it was so strategically located that the important north-south central highway, as well as a main east-west road leading to Transjordan, passed through it. As a result, the territory of Benjamin became an arena for wars. It is no accident that Israelite opposition to Philistine oppression was centered in that tribe (1 Sam. 10:5; 13:3) and that Saul, first king of Israel and warrior-liberator, came from Benjamin (1 Sam. 9:1).[57]

The Testament of Jacob here reflects this general historic situation. It is quite likely that Benjaminites preyed upon the caravans that passed along the trade routes within their territory, an activity echoed in the text.

morning . . . evening The two contrasting terms express continual action (cf. Pss. 55:18; 92:3) or describe the wolf as prowling among the sheep at night, snatching its prey and returning to its lair to share it with its young. In the latter instance, the image would be poetic hyperbole: The loot is so great that there is even enough left to eat the next morning (cf. Zeph. 3:3).[58]

27 בִּנְיָמִין זְאֵב יִטְרָף
בַּבֹּקֶר יֹאכַל עַד
וְלָעֶרֶב יְחַלֵּק שָׁלָל׃

[27]Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he consumes the foe,
And in the evening he divides the spoil."

28 כָּל־אֵלֶּה שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר וְזֹאת
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אֲבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר
כְּבִרְכָתוֹ בֵּרַךְ אֹתָם׃ 29 וַיְצַו אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף אֶל־עַמִּי קִבְרוּ אֹתִי אֶל־אֲבֹתָי אֶל־
הַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׂדֵה עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי׃ 30 בַּמְּעָרָה
אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי־מַמְרֵא
בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה מֵאֵת
עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי לַאֲחֻזַּת־קָבֶר׃ 31 שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־
אַבְרָהָם וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־יִצְחָק
וְאֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ וְשָׁמָּה קָבַרְתִּי אֶת־לֵאָה׃

[28]All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

[29]Then he instructed them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, [30]the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—[31]there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—[32]the field and the

PROSE EPILOGUE: THE DEATH OF JACOB (vv. 28–33)

These verses recapitulate some of the details mentioned previously.

All these . . . This is a formula frequently used after lists to emphasize the unifying element.[59]

the tribes of Israel Cf. verse 16. The phrase expresses the consciousness of an overall national unity and common identity that is "Israel," even though each tribe is separately treated in the Testament as an autonomous entity.

twelve in number This is the first biblical reference to the twelve tribes of Israel. The number is a constant and is maintained in tribal lists either by regarding Joseph as a single tribe when Levi is included, as here, or, if Levi is excluded, by splitting Joseph into two separate tribes (cf. Num. 1,13,26). The clans of Ishmaelites (Gen. 17:20; 25:16), of Arameans (22:20–24), and of Esau (36:10–13) likewise numbered twelve, and the duodecimal organization is also known from ancient Greece.

as he bade . . . farewell Hebrew *va-yevarekh* and the following derivatives of the same stem *b-r-k* are here so understood, as in 47:7,10 (see Comments), rather than in the usual sense of "bless," because not all the tribes received blessings.

29. he instructed The Hebrew stem *ts-v-h,* "to command" (cf. v. 33), is used in the sense of laying a charge on someone in preparation for death.[60] This usage has given rise to the postbiblical Hebrew *tsavva'ah,* "last will and testament."

gathered to my kin See Comment to 25:8 and 47:30. This is the only instance of the use of this phrase by the speaker about himself, and the only case in which "kin" appears in the singular Hebrew form *('am).*

Bury me . . . Here Jacob imposes upon all his sons the obligation to bury him in Canaan, but he does not make them swear to that effect, as he had Joseph (47:29–31), because it was not in their power to implement his wish. Only Joseph had the necessary ready access to the Egyptian authorities (50:4f.).

30. the cave The precise description of the burial site follows that of 23:17–20.

31. Rebekah . . . Leah The death and burial of these matriarchs has not previously been mentioned.

cave in it, bought from the Hittites." 33When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

32 מִקְנֵה הַשָּׂדֶה וְהַמְּעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת׃
33 וַיְכַל יַעֲקֹב לְצַוֹּת אֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֶּאֱסֹף רַגְלָיו אֶל־
הַמִּטָּה וַיִּגְוַע וַיֵּאָסֶף אֶל־עַמָּיו׃

50 Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. 2Then Joseph ordered the physicians in his service to embalm his father, and the physicians embalmed Israel. 3It required forty days, for such is the full period of embalming. The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days; 4and when the wailing period was over, Joseph spoke

נ וַיִּפֹּל יוֹסֵף עַל־פְּנֵי אָבִיו וַיֵּבְךְּ עָלָיו וַיִּשַּׁק־לוֹ׃
2 וַיְצַו יוֹסֵף אֶת־עֲבָדָיו אֶת־הָרֹפְאִים לַחֲנֹט אֶת־
אָבִיו וַיַּחַנְטוּ הָרֹפְאִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ 3 וַיִּמְלְאוּ־לוֹ
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם כִּי כֵן יִמְלְאוּ יְמֵי הַחֲנָטִים וַיִּבְכּוּ
אֹתוֹ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעִים יוֹם׃ 4 וַיַּעַבְרוּ יְמֵי בְכִיתוֹ

33. he drew his feet into the bed Presumably, he had been sitting with his feet over the side of the bed (cf. 48:2,12), but this is hardly a likely posture for one about to breathe his last. The unique phrase may be a figurative expression for dying. The usual threefold formula (cf. 25:8,17; 35:29) includes *va-yamot,* "and he died," which is here missing; this phrase may be used instead. In fact, "the drawing in (Heb. *va-ye'esof*) of the feet" goes together with *va-ye'asef,* "he was gathered. . . ." Furthermore, the two words tie in with *he'asefu,* "come together," in the very first verse of the chapter to form a literary frame for the entire Testament.

CHAPTER 50

Mourning and Burial (vv. 1–14)

1. Joseph flung himself upon his father's face Such a gesture is unique. The usual phrase for such an emotional embrace is "to fall on the neck,"[1] but this would be appropriate only when the parties involved are in an upright position.

and kissed him For the kiss as a farewell token, see Genesis 31:28, 32:1; and Ruth 1:9,14. It is not otherwise attested in parting from the dead. But the author of the Book of Jubilees (23:5) similarly has Isaac kissing the dead Abraham, and it may be that the practice was widespread though unrecorded.

2. Joseph orders the embalming of his father. He too is to be embalmed at death (v. 26). Such a practice is never again referred to in the Bible. It is well known that mummification, with all its elaborate ritual, played a crucial role in the Egyptian religion and was bound up with the cult of Osiris and conceptions of the afterlife. Survival of death was taken for granted by the Egyptians. Central to this notion was the belief in the importance of the physical preservation of the body. They took meticulous care to prevent the putrefaction of the corpse in order to ensure the right of the deceased to immortality. But the embalming of Jacob and Joseph is without any religious significance. In both cases the act is a purely practical measure, for Jacob is to be buried far from his place of death, and Joseph is to be reinterred many years later (v. 25). The text subtly underlines the disconnection of the embalming procedure from any pagan context by having Joseph entrust the task to "physicians in his service." It was not performed by professional mortuary priests.

3. forty days . . . seventy days It is not clear if the two periods overlap or are consecutive. Detailed information on the embalming process is lacking for the ancient period, but is available from the fifth century B.C.E. and from the late Hellenistic period. Herodotus (Histories 2.86) reports that the body was placed in niter for seventy days. Diodorus of Sicily (Histories 1.91) describes a thirty-day dressing of the corpse with oils and spices and seventy-two days of public mourning for a king. Jacob is apparently being accorded royal honors. Jewish exegetes have by and large understood that forty days were required for embalming, followed by another thirty days of mourning. The time of mourning would be in accordance with the period of public grief observed for Aaron (Num. 20:29)

to Pharaoh's court, saying, "Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh: 5'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die. Be sure to bury me in the grave which I made ready for myself in the land of Canaan." Now, therefore, let me go up and bury my father; then I shall return.'" 6And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath."

7So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the senior members of his court, and all of Egypt's dignitaries, 8together with all of Joseph's household, his brothers, and his father's household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the region of Goshen. 9Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him; it was a very large troop.

10When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation; and he observed a mourning period of seven days for his father. 11And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the

וַיְדַבֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶל־בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר אִם־נָא
מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם דַּבְּרוּ־נָא בְּאָזְנֵי פַּרְעֹה
לֵאמֹר: 5 אָבִי הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מֵת
בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרִיתִי לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן שָׁמָּה
תִּקְבְּרֵנִי וְעַתָּה אֶעֱלֶה־נָּא וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־אָבִי
וְאָשׁוּבָה: 6 וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה עֲלֵה וּקְבֹר אֶת־אָבִיךָ
כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעֶךָ: 7 וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו
וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ כָּל־עַבְדֵי פַרְעֹה זִקְנֵי בֵיתוֹ וְכֹל זִקְנֵי
אֶרֶץ־מִצְרָיִם: 8 וְכֹל בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאֶחָיו וּבֵית אָבִיו
רַק טַפָּם וְצֹאנָם וּבְקָרָם עָזְבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן: 9 וַיַּעַל
עִמּוֹ גַּם־רֶכֶב גַּם־פָּרָשִׁים וַיְהִי הַמַּחֲנֶה כָּבֵד מְאֹד:
10 וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֹּרֶן הָאָטָד אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן
וַיִּסְפְּדוּ־שָׁם מִסְפֵּד גָּדוֹל וְכָבֵד מְאֹד וַיַּעַשׂ לְאָבִיו
אֵבֶל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: 11 וַיַּרְא יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי

and Moses (Deut. 34:8). Jewish law to the present time requires a thirty-day mourning period after burial *(sheloshim)* for close relatives, during which various restrictions are observed.

4. ***the wailing period*** That is, the period fixed by convention (cf. Deut. 34:8).

to Pharaoh's court The king is not directly approached by Joseph probably because a mourner was considered unclean and was not allowed in his presence.[2]

5. ***made me swear*** See Comments to 47:29–31 and 49:29–32.

I made ready Hebrew *kariti,* from stem *k-r-h,* may mean either "I dug"[3] or "I purchased." But neither meaning suits a reference to the Cave of Machpelah (v. 13), which had been purchased, not dug, by Abraham, not Jacob (chap. 23). In light of this, some moderns have suggested that the verse reflects another tradition about the site of Jacob's burial. However, as Malbim points out, a similar usage of the verb *k-r-h* in 2 Chronicles 16:14 (cf. 1 Kings 15:24) indicates that the term may simply mean "to prepare a grave in advance."

then I shall return The assurance reflects an undercurrent of anxiety (cf. Exod. 1:10), and hints at something of a deterioration in the situation of the Israelites in Egypt.

7–9. The funeral procession comprises a vast throng. The elite of the court and government participate. The charioteers, not usually depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings of such events, are most likely present for security reasons, since the burial is to take place beyond the borders of the land. Women, children, flocks, and herds would not be included in a funeral cortege. The explicit mention of their exclusion may hint at a thwarted desire on the part of the tribes to return to Canaan.

10–13. The funeral takes place in two stages. The entire cortege first proceeds to a place at which a great public mourning ceremony is held. Here formal Egyptian participation in the rites is completed. Then, after a week's stay, the immediate family continues the journey to the Cave of Machpelah, where the body is privately interred.

10–12. ***Goren ha-Atad*** Literally, "the threshing-floor of the bramble." The site is mentioned nowhere else and cannot be certainly identified. "Beyond the Jordan" can mean either east or west of the river, depending on the standpoint of the speaker or writer.[4] Here it refers to Canaan (v. 11), and the place most probably lies along the coastal road (the Via Maris), since this would be the shortest route for anyone traveling from Egypt to Canaan, as Exodus 13:17 notes. Another name for the site is Abel-mizraim (v. 11). The first element here most likely means "a stream" and is a component of several biblical place-names.[5] By a play on words, it is connected with the Hebrew stem *'-y-l,* "to mourn." Why does the procession stop just at this place? Interestingly, the local Canaanites

land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians." That is why it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. 12Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. 13His sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

15When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!" 16So

אֶת־הָאֵבֶל בְּגֹרֶן הָאָטָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵבֶל־כָּבֵד זֶה
לְמִצְרַיִם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ אָבֵל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר
בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן: 12 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָנָיו לוֹ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּם:
13 וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בָנָיו אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ
בִּמְעָרַת שְׂדֵה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־
הַשָּׂדֶה לַאֲחֻזַּת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת עֶפְרֹן הַחִתִּי עַל־פְּנֵי
מַמְרֵא: 14 וַיָּשָׁב יוֹסֵף מִצְרַיְמָה הוּא וְאֶחָיו וְכָל־
הָעֹלִים אִתּוֹ לִקְבֹּר אֶת־אָבִיו אַחֲרֵי קָבְרוֹ אֶת־
אָבִיו: 15 וַיִּרְאוּ אֲחֵי־יוֹסֵף כִּי־מֵת אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לוּ יִשְׂטְמֵנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהָשֵׁב יָשִׁיב לָנוּ אֵת כָּל־הָרָעָה
אֲשֶׁר גָּמַלְנוּ אֹתוֹ: 16 וַיְצַוּוּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אָבִיךָ

are impressed by the Egyptian presence. The name Abel-mizraim suggests that the site had important Egyptian connections. It may well be Tell el-'Ajjul (Beth 'Eglaim) situated 4.5 miles (7 km.) southwest of Gaza on the eastern Mediterranean coast alongside the desert road that connected the Hyksos capital in the Nile Delta with Asia. Excavations have disclosed that the town was an Egyptian stronghold. Just a little to the south, on the same highway, lies Deir el-Balah, where a large collection of Egyptian-style anthropoid clay coffins have been found in a Late Bronze Age cemetery. The place was a burial ground for high-ranking Egyptians serving in Canaan and for Egyptianized Canaanite rulers and dignitaries. Such an association would explain why the cortege halted at Abel-mizraim for public homage to Jacob in his own country.

seven days The antiquity of this custom is attested by its presence in the Epic of Gilgamesh.[6] In biblical times we find the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead fasting seven days after the funeral rites for Saul and his sons (1 Sam. 31:13). Job and his friends similarly observe a seven-day mourning period (Job 2:13). This is a well-established rule among Jews by the early second century B.C.E. (Ben Sira 22:12; cf. Jth. 16:24). Strict mourning for seven days *(shiv'ah)* following the burial of a close relative has remained the Jewish practice.

12–14. The focus now shifts back to the brothers. They too fulfilled their father's last request (49:29–32) by completing the final segment of the journey to Hebron.

returned See Comments to verses 5,7–9.

Joseph and His Brothers: The Finale (vv. 15–21)

The Joseph story reverts to its opening theme: the complicated relations between the brothers and Joseph. Earlier the brothers had not sought forgiveness. In fact, they had maintained an unbroken silence (chap. 45). Yet throughout the seventeen years that elapsed since the day of reconciliation, the nagging voice of conscience was not stilled. Now that death has removed the commanding presence of the patriarch, family cohesion falls apart and the brothers anticipate Joseph's revenge for the terrible crime they committed against him (cf. 27:41).

15. When Joseph's brothers saw That is, when the reality of the situation struck them on their return to Egypt.

What if Hebrew *lu* is unparalleled in this sense. It is always used in conditional sentences (cf. 17:18). It must be assumed that the apodosis, or resolution of the condition, is understood but unspoken. The idea would be, "If Joseph should harbor a grudge, what would become of us?"

16–17. The brothers send Joseph a message through a third party, rather than risk a personal confrontation. Apparently, they trifle with the truth in reporting a message from their

they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction: [17]So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.

[18]His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves." [19]But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? [20]Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. [21]And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

[22]So Joseph and his father's household remained in Egypt. Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. [23]Joseph

צִוָּה לְפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר: 17 כֹּה־תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף
אָנָּא שָׂא נָא פֶּשַׁע אַחֶיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי־רָעָה
גְמָלוּךָ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפֶשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ
וַיֵּבְךְ יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְּרָם אֵלָיו: 18 וַיֵּלְכוּ גַּם־אֶחָיו
וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנֶּנּוּ לְךָ לַעֲבָדִים: 19 וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אַל־תִּירָאוּ כִּי הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי:
20 וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חֲשָׁבָהּ
לְטֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֹׂה כַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַחֲיֹת עַם־רָב:
שביעי 21 וְעַתָּה אַל־תִּירָאוּ אָנֹכִי אֲכַלְכֵּל
אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְּכֶם וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עַל־לִבָּם:
22 וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם הוּא וּבֵית אָבִיו וַיְחִי יוֹסֵף
מֵאָה וְעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים: מפטיר 23 וַיַּרְא יוֹסֵף

father, for had Jacob really known the fact of Joseph's kidnapping and sale into slavery, he would surely have made a clear reference to it in his Testament.

God of your father As Abravanel observes, they do not invoke a claim of brotherliness since they had forfeited it by their own actions. Hence, they appeal to his respect and love for his father and to the religion that unites them all. Once again we meet with the biblical idea of the consciousness of God as the most powerful factor controlling human behavior, stronger than the ties of kinship.[7]

18. When the brothers learn of Joseph's emotional reaction they feel free to go to him in person. There is here an echo of the opening scene of the Joseph narrative. The boyhood dreams of lordship over his kin (37:7–10) have long been fulfilled, but the reality is now distasteful to him for his character is being called into question (cf. 42:6,9; 44:14,16). He had earlier tested his brothers; now they challenge him, even though they are wholly in his power. Will the base human desire for revenge triumph over nobility of character?

19–20. ***Have no fear!*** Their anxiety is allayed at once. Joseph has no interest in seeking revenge because the very idea offends his personal theology. Man dares not usurp the prerogative of God to whom alone belongs the right of punitive vindication (cf. Lev. 19:18). Moreover, human actions and their consequences are far more profound than human intentions. God may use man's evil purposes as the instrument for ultimate good, beyond the knowledge, desire, or realization of the human agents involved (cf. Gen. 44:5–7). What may seem to be a chance succession of disparate incidents is in reality a process, so that what has happened and what is unfolding take on meaning when viewed from the perspective of God's time (cf. Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 20:24).

21. ***I will sustain you*** This reassurance is puzzling since the famine is long over. Again there is a hint of a deterioration in the Israelite situation (cf. vv. 5,8).

22. Joseph is singularly blessed with respect to age and progeny. One hundred and ten years were regarded as the ideal life span in ancient Egypt. In Israel it seems to have been 120 years (cf. Gen. 6:3), attained only by Moses (Deut. 31:2; 34:7).

23. It is not clear whether the great-grandchildren (= "children of the third generation," cf. Exod. 20:5; Num. 14:18) are Ephraim's or Joseph's ("through Ephraim"). If the former, Ephraim's line would have begotten one more generation than Manasseh's in the same period of time. This would be in fulfillment of the blessing of Genesis 48:19. If the latter, then Joseph would have seen only the grandchildren of both his sons before dying. He would thus have lived to see at least the fourth generation. This is a sign of special favor, such as Job enjoys as a reward for his piety (Job 42:16). A seventh-century B.C.E. Aramaic funerary inscription from Syria airs the notion that living to see "children of the fourth generation" is the reward of righteousness.[8]

לְאֶפְרַ֔יִם בְּנֵ֥י שִׁלֵּשִׁ֖ים* גַּ֣ם בְּנֵ֣י מָכִ֔יר בֶּן־מְנַשֶּׁ֖ה
יֻלְּד֥וּ עַל־בִּרְכֵּ֖י יוֹסֵֽף׃ 24 וַיֹּ֤אמֶר יוֹסֵף֙ אֶל־אֶחָ֔יו
אָנֹכִ֥י מֵ֖ת וֵאלֹהִ֣ים פָּקֹ֤ד יִפְקֹד֙ אֶתְכֶ֔ם וְהֶעֱלָ֥ה
אֶתְכֶ֖ם מִן־הָאָ֣רֶץ הַזֹּ֑את אֶל־הָאָ֗רֶץ אֲשֶׁ֤ר נִשְׁבַּע֙
לְאַבְרָהָ֣ם לְיִצְחָ֔ק וְלְיַעֲקֹ֖ב׃ 25 וַיַּשְׁבַּ֤ע יוֹסֵף֙ אֶת־
בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל לֵאמֹ֑ר פָּקֹ֤ד יִפְקֹד֙ אֱלֹהִ֣ים אֶתְכֶ֔ם
וְהַעֲלִתֶ֥ם אֶת־עַצְמֹתַ֖י מִזֶּֽה׃ 26 וַיָּ֥מָת יוֹסֵ֛ף בֶּן־
מֵאָ֥ה וְעֶ֖שֶׂר שָׁנִ֑ים וַיְחַנְּט֣וּ אֹת֔וֹ וַיִּישֶׂם֙ בָּאָר֔וֹן
בְּמִצְרָֽיִם׃

ס׳ רבתי v. 23.

lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees. 24At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here."

26Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

children of Machir Machir was the most important of the clans of Manasseh and, at one time, was identified with the tribe as a whole. The Machirites captured and occupied the Transjordanian regions of Gilead and Bashan.[9] Machir's first-born is given as Gilead in 1 Chronicles 7:14, a name without doubt derived from the association of the clan with the area.

likewise born upon Joseph's knees This idiom, as explained in the Comments to 30:3 and 48:12, usually implies legitimation of progeny. Here the parallel phrase "Joseph lived to see . . ." suggests that a figurative use of the idiom is intended. However, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that behind the narrative lies a tradition about the formal incorporation of the clans of Machir into the House of Joseph.

24. I am about to die Compare 48:21. Joseph's last words would seem to imply that he died before his brothers, even though, with the exception of Benjamin, they were all his seniors. This is hardly likely. Clearly, "brothers" here is loosely used since in the next verse it is the "children of Israel" who are put under oath. We have here another example of the biblical tendency to treat the tribe or people as a corporate personality (cf. 46:3f.).

God will surely take notice of you On the Hebrew stem *p-k-d*, see Comment to 21:1. This reassuring profession of faith, made fifty-four years after Jacob's death, betrays a serious deterioration in the situation of the Israelites in Egypt in the intervening period. The repetition of the statement in verse 25 underscores its seminal importance. The measure of its impact is its use as the rallying cry when Moses first appears as the national savior (Exod. 3:16).

Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob This clustering of the three patriarchs for the first time sets the pattern for all such subsequent citations in the Torah, which are invariably in a context of the divine promises of national territory for the people of Israel,[10] the unifying theme of all the patriarchal narratives.

25. Why Joseph does not request immediate interment in the land of his fathers is not explained; no doubt, he knows that present conditions are unfavorable. The oath he extracts was indeed carried out at the time of the Exodus, as Exodus 13:19 reports. No request for any specific burial place is made, and he is finally laid to rest in a plot of land that Jacob had once bought in Shechem (Josh. 24:32; cf. Gen. 33:19).

26. a coffin The use of a coffin is characteristically Egyptian and is never again mentioned in biblical literature. In striking contrast to the honors accorded Jacob, no ritual or mourning is recorded. The atmosphere, heavy with the anticipation of enslavement, is filled with foreboding.

The formative period in Israel's history is now over. The divine promise of nationhood has been fulfilled. The great national drama of the slavery and the Exodus is about to unfold. Yet the Book of Genesis closes with an assurance of redemption. The people of Israel will possess the land pledged to them by God in His oaths to the patriarchs.

חזק
סכום הפסוקים שׁל ספר
אלף וחמשׁ מאות
ושׁלשׁים וארבעה
אַךְ לוֹ
וחציו ועל־חרבך
וסדרים מֹה

תם ונשלם תהלה לאל בורא עולם
חזק חזק ונתחזק

NOTES TO THE COMMENTARY

Chapter 1

B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1960); C. Westerman, *The Genesis Account of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964); M. Weinfeld, "The Creator God in Genesis I and in the Prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 37 (1968): 105–132; N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 1–36; B. W. Anderson, "A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story," in *Canon and Authority,* ed. G. W. Coats and B. O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 148–162.

1. Cf. Isa. 27:1; 51:9–10; Job 26:12–13. As to their fate, cf. Ps. 104:9; Prov. 8:27; Job 26:10; 38:8–11.

2. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 49–52. Heb. *re'shit* is absolute in Lev. 2:12; Deut. 33:21; Isa. 46:10; Ps. 105:36; cf. Job 8:7. It never appears with the definite article, so that *bare'shit* would in any case be unlikely in a temporal sense. Similar words of time are also used absolutely without the articled preposition, e.g., *le-fanim, mi-kedem, me-ro'sh.*

3. For the plural of majesty with a singular, cf. Exod. 22:10; Isa. 19:4.

4. For *bara'*, cf. Exod. 34:10; Num. 16:28–30; Isa. 65:17; Jer. 31:22; cf. also Isa. 41:20; 48:6–7; Ps. 51:12.

5. So Gen. 2:1, 4; 14:19, 23; Exod. 20:11; 31:17; Deut. 3:24; 2 Kings 19:15; cf. Akk. *šamu u erṣetu.* With Ps. 33:6, 8, 9, cf. Isa. 48:13.

6. The breakup of the hendiadys appears in Isa. 34:11. Otherwise, only *tohu* again appears, always in a context expressing nonentity, vacuity, confusion. Cf. 1 Sam. 12:21; Isa. 49:9; Job 26:7; Ps. 107:40. With the assonantal *tohu va-vohu,* cf. Gen. 4:12 *na' va-nad;* 18:27 *'afar va-'efer;* Nah. 2:11 *bukah u-mevukah u-mevullakah;* Zeph. 1:15 *sho'ah u-mesho'ah.*

7. As evil, etc., cf. Isa. 5:20, 30; 8:22; 9:1; Nah. 1:8; Zeph. 1:15; Ps. 88:11–13; Job 10:20–22; 17:12–13; Lam. 3:2; Eccl. 6:4.

8. *Tehom* is feminine in Gen. 7:11; 49:25; Deut. 33:19; Isa. 51:10; Ezek. 31:4; Amos 7:4; Ps. 36:7. The appearance of *thm,* "deep," in Ugar. suggests it is a common Semitic noun. The presence of guttural *h* makes a derivation from Akk. *ti'āmat* improbable. The dependency may well be in the reverse direction.

9. So Targ. Onk., Ḥag. 12a, Saadiah, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak, Ḥizkuni, Shadal. For wind as a divine agent, cf. Num. 11:31; Isa. 40:7; Ezek. 8:3; Hos. 13:15; Jon. 1:4; Ps. 147:18. For *ruaḥ* as God's energy, cf. Isa. 42:5; Ezek. 37:5, 6, 9; Ps. 33:6; 104:30; Job 27:3; 32:8; 33:4; as God's immanence, cf. Ezek. 1:4; Ps. 18:11 = 2 Sam. 22:11; 104:3; 139:7; Job 4:13. See H. M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Ruah in Gen. 1.2," JQR 48 (1957): 174–182; idem, *Notes,* 52–55.

10. For *r-ḥ-f* in Ugar., cf. 1 Aqht 32; 3 Aqht 20, 21, 31.

11. As life, cf. Ps. 49:20; 56:14; Job 3:16; 33:30. As joy, cf. Job 30:26; Ps. 97:11; Isa. 60:20. As justice, cf. Hos. 6:3; Mic. 7:8; Zeph. 3:5; Ps. 87:6. As deliverance, cf. Isa. 9:1; Ps. 27:1; 97:11; Job 33:28.

12. Cf. Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26. For the Egyptian text, see W. Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 7; for the Mesopotamian, see ANET, p. 60, Beyerlin, p. 82.

13. For "day and night," cf. Exod. 13:21; Lev. 8:35; Num. 9:21; Josh. 1:8. For "night and day," cf. 1 Kings 8:29; Isa. 27:3; 34:10; Jer. 14:17; Ps. 55:18. See P. J. Heawood, "The Beginning of the Jewish Day," JQR 36 (1946): 393–401.

14. For *'eḥad* as an ordinal, see Gen. 2:11, 13; 5:19, and the frequent "first of the month" *(be-'eḥad)* in 8:5, 13; Exod. 40:2, 17; Lev. 23:24; Num. 1:1, 18; 29:1; 33:38; so in the sequences of Exod. 39:10–13; Ezek. 10:14; Job 42:14. The same is true of Akk. *išten* in the sequence in Gilgamesh 11:142–145, 215–218. See S. E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Literatures* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Kevelaer, 1980), 13–16; J. Blau, "Philological Notes on the Bible based on Medieval Judeao-Arabia" [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 1 (1975): 29.

15. for the verbal form of *r-k-'*, cf. Exod. 39:3; Num. 17:4; Isa. 40:19; Jer. 10:9. Cf. the noun *rikua'* in Num. 17:3, and Phoen. *mrq' ḥrṣ,* "a gold plate." For the sense of "stamping with the feet," i.e., flattening out the earth, cf. 2 Sam. 22:43; Ezek. 6:11; 25:6; and Isa. 42:5; 44:24; Ps. 136:6. In Isa. 44:24, *rk-k-'* is parallel to *n-ṭ-h,* "to spread out." For *rakia'* as congealed ice, see Josephus, Ant. 1.1.30 (Loeb, pp. 14–15).

16. For the interchange of *'-s-h* and *b-r-'*, cf. Isa 41:20; 43:7; 45:7, 12. On the omission of *ki-tov,* cf. Gen. R. 4:8.

17. So vv. 21, 24; 6:20; Lev. 11:14–16, 19, 22; Ezek. 27:10. This latter passage is so explained in TJ Shek. 6:2 (3a).

18. So Ramban.

19. Cf. Isa. 27:1; 51:9; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2; Ps. 44:20; 74:13–14; Job 7:12. Gen. R. 7:5, BB 74b identify this phrase with Leviathan.

20. For the celestial court, cf. 1 Kings 22:19–22; Isa. 6:8; Ps. 29:1–2; 82; 89:6–7; Job 1:6; 2:1. In Job 38:7, divine beings are present at creation. The present interpretation is found in Gen. R. 8:3; Rashi.

21. Adam is a proper noun in 2:20; 3:17, 21; 4:25; 5:3–5. In Ugar., too, *'adm* is "humankind." In Phoen., plural *'dmm,* "persons," occurs.

22. A glimmering of the democratization of the idea may possibly be found in "The Instruction for King Meri-ka-re," line 132, ANET, p. 417. See J. Maxwell Miller, "In the Image and Likeness of God," JBL 91 (1972): 289–304; H. L. Creager, "The Divine Image," in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers,* ed. H. N. Bream *et al.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 103–118; J. H. Tigay, "The Image of God and the Flood: Some New Developments," in *Studies in Jewish Education and Judaica in Honor of Louis Newman,* ed. A. M. Shapiro and B. I. Cohen (New York: Ktav, 1984), 143–156.

23. For the imperative used in blessing, cf. Gen. 24:60; Exod. 4:18; Deut. 33:18. In Gen. 9:2, 7, only Noah and his sons, not the women, are addressed. See Mish. Yev. 6:6, Yev. 12b, Tosef. Yev. 8:4, Gen. R. 8:14. See D. Daube, *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977).

24. On Gen. 9:1–4, see Sanh. 59b.

Chapter 2

For vv. 1–3, see N. A. Barack, *A History of the Sabbath* (New York: Jonathan David, 1965); N. E. Andreason, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Approach* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1972); M. Tsevat, "The Basic Meaning of the Sabbath," ZAW 84 (1972): 447–459; A. Toeg, "Genesis I and the Sabbath" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 50 (1972): 288–296; W. W. Hallo, "New Moons and Sabbaths," HUCA 48 (1977): 1–18; M. Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple Building, and the Enthronement of God" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 69 (1977): 188–193; J. Tigay, "Notes on the Development of the Jewish Week," *Eretz-Israel* 14 (1978): 111*–121*.

1. Exod. 16:5, 22, 26; 23:12; 31:13–17; 34:21; 35:2; Lev. 23:3 all bear traces of the vocabulary of our passage.

2. Cf. Neh. 9:6.

3. Sam., LXX, Pesh., Jub. 2:1, 16 all read, "On the sixth day." Cf. Meg. 9a. For the "declarative Piel," cf. Gen. 30:13; Lev. 13:3, 6; Prov. 31:28.

4. Cf. Gen. 8:22; Exod. 34:21; Josh. 5:21; Isa. 14:4; 24:8; 33:8; Jer. 31:36(35); Job 32:1; Lam. 5:15. The development from "ceasing" to "resting" can be traced in Exod. 23:12; 31:17, so that in Exod. 20:11, the verb "to rest" may replace "to cease."

5. For a similar syntactic construction, cf. Gen. 41:50. For an analogous phrase, cf. Gen. 11:8; 41:49; *'-s-h* with *mela'khah* is a standard phrase; cf. Gen. 39:1; Exod. 20:9; 35:35.

6. So Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2. It appears otherwise only in Num. 3:1 and Ruth 4:18; cf. Exod. 6:19; 1 Chron. 8:28; 9:34. For *y-l-d* in the sense of "develop," cf. Prov. 27:1. On the formula, see M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 14–16, 21; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 302.

7. So also, only in Ps. 148:13. In that composition, the order is likewise "heaven" (vv. 1–6), "earth" (vv. 7–13[a]), then "earth and heaven."

8. Heb. *'ed* appears again only in Job. 36:27, where it is equally enigmatic. Traditional interpretation varies between "vapor-cloud" and "groundflow." Ta'an. 9b preserves both; Targums favor the former; and the LXX, Vulg., Pesh., and SyroP. the latter. Akk. *edû,* borrowed from Sum., has been adduced in favor of "groundflow," but since it means "an inrush of water," "high water," "tidal wave" (CAD, s.v. *edû,* p. 35), it would seem to be too strong to suit the context. A more likely etymology is Sum. ID, the term for the primordial river. W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 92–93 n. 99.

9. for "dust . . . clay," cf. Job 4:19; 10:9; 27:16; 30:19; cf. 13:12. For *yotser,* "a potter," cf. Isa. 41:25; 45:9; Jer. 18:2f. For a picture of Khnum at work, see ANEP, p. 190, no. 569. For Amen-em-opet, see ANET, p. 424. For the Mesopotamian material, see "Enki and Ninmah," in W. Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 77, ANET, p. 100; Gilgamesh 1.2.34ff. (ANET, p. 74); *Luklul Bel Nemeqi* 4.40 (ANET, p. 600); Atrahasis (W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969], 61, lines 249ff.; 63, lines 8f.). For the mastery of the potter over the clay, cf. Isa. 29:17; 45:9; 64:7; Jer. 18:6.

10. Cf. Gen. 7:22. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 59–60.

11. Cf. Gen. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 36:35; Joel 2:37. For "Enki and Ninhursag," see ANET, pp. 38–41; for Gilgamesh 9.5.46–50, see ANET, p. 89. G. Bibbey, *Looking for Dilmun* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

12. Cf. Heb. *pardes,* Song of Sol. 4:13; Eccl. 2:5; Neh. 2:8.

13. For this as a place-name, cf. 2 Kings 19:12; Isa. 37:12; Ezek. 27:23; Amos 1:5. For the meaning "pleasure," cf. Gen 18:12; 2 Sam. 1:24; Jer. 51:34; Ps. 36:9; Neh. 9:25. A. R. Millard and P. Bordeuil, "A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions," BA 45 (1982): 135–141, especially 140.

14. So LXX, Ḥul. 60b, Saadiah, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak; cf. Gen. 11:2; 12:8; Isa. 9:11; Zech. 14:4. The temporal meaning is that of Targums, Pes. 54a, Ned. 39b, Gen. R. 15:4; Aq., Sym., Theod., Pesh., Vulg. Cf. Isa. 45:21; 46:10; Mic. 5:1; Hab. 1:12; Ps. 74:12; 77:6, 12; 143:5.

15. For Gilgamesh and Adapa, see ANET, pp. 72–99, 101–103.

16. The tree of life is mentioned again only in Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4, where it is employed as a figure of speech denoting happy, healthful longevity.

17. Heb. *p-w-sh* means "to increase, stamp, skip." Cf. Jer 50:11; Nah. 3:18; Hab. 1:8; Mal. 3:20. For Havilah, see Gen. 10:7 = 1 Chron. 1:9; Gen. 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7, all within the Egyptian orbit; Gen. 10:29 = 1 Chron. 1:23 refer to Arabia. For Ophir, see 1 Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:49; Isa 13:12; Ps. 45:10; Job 28:16; 1 Chron. 8:18; 9:10. Gen. R. 16:3 takes "good gold" as having universal currency. See Y. Grintz, *Studies in Early Biblical Ethnology and History* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Y. Marcus, 1969), 35–50; M. Elat, *Economic Relations in the Lands of the Bible ca. 1000–539 B.C.* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977), 100f.

18. Gen. R. 16:4 has both interpretations. LXX has *anthrax,* "red garnet"; Saadiah, Ibn Janah, Ibn Ezra favor "pearls."

19. For *shoham,* cf. Exod 25:7; 28:9, 20; 35:9, 37; 39:6; Job 28:16.

20. For the name, cf. 1 Kings 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chron. 32:30; 33:14. For the verbal form, cf. Ezek. 32:2; Job 38:8; 40:23.

21. Cf. Exod 2:16–21 with Num. 12:1; cf. Hab. 3:7. Saadiah, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban all identify Pishon with the Nile. The Greek to Jer. 2:18 renders the phrase for the Nile "Geon," and Josephus, Ant. 1.39 (Loeb, pp. 19, 21) similarly connects the Gihon with the Nile, but the Pishon with the Ganges in India; Targ. Jon. also identifies Havilah with India.

22. This river is called IDIGNA in Sum., *idiqlat* in Akk., *deqlat* in Aram., *dijlat* in Arab. Heb. initial laryngeal would seem to preserve the earliest form of the name.

23. Cf. Gen. 15:18; 31:21.

24. For this formula, cf. Gen. 20:7; Exod. 10:28; Num. 26:65; Judg. 13:22; 1 Sam. 14:39, 45; 22:16; 1 Kings 2:37, 42, cf. 46; 2 Kings 1:4, 6, 16; Jer. 26:8. Hos. 13:1 shows that the verb can mean, not instant death, but that the process of dying instantly began.

25. Heb. *ke-negdo,* unique to this v. and v. 20, has this meaning in postbiblical Heb.

26. Heb. *'ezer* is used of God in Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20; 70:6; 115:9–11; 146:5.

27. So 3:17.

28. Cf. Gen. 15:12; 1 Sam. 26:12; Isa. 29:10; Job 4:13; 33:15. Only in Prov. 19:15 is *tardemah* used in a secular sense.

29. For the frequent use of Akk. *banû* in the sense of a deity creating mankind and individuals, see CAD, s.v. *banû* 3.1, pp. 87f. Similarly, in Ugar., an epithet of the god Il is *bny bnwt,* "creator (lit. "builder") of creatures" (49.III.5, 11, etc.). A Heb. name like Banaiah, Heb. *benayahu,* literally "Yahu-built" or "May Yahu build," indicates that the verb *b-n-h* may well have been much more commonly used in Heb. with God as the subject than the biblical sources would indicate. For *tsela'* in building texts, see Exod. 26:20–35; 36:25, 31f.; 1 Kings 6:5, 8, 15f., 34; Ezek. 45:5–11. R. Amiran, "Myths of the Creation of Man and the Jericho Statues," BASOR 167 (1962): 23–25.

30. Yal. Gen. 24; cf. Gen. R. 18:4.

31. Cf. 10:9; 11:9; 16:14; 21:31; 32:32.

32. For *d-v-k* of man's relationship to God, cf. Deut. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:5; 30:20; in interpersonal relationships, cf. Ruth 1:14; 1 Kings 11:2; Prov. 18:24.

Chapter 3

M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 19–29.

1. Cf. Prov. 30:18–19. As a primeval monster, cf. Isa. 51:9–10; Ps. 74:13–14; Job 26:12–13. See K. R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield, N.J.: Haddonfield House, 1974).

2. Cf. Gen. 21:19; 2 Kings 6:18, 20.

3. Cf. Gen. 28:12 *mal'akh* = 35:7 *'elohim;* 32:25 *'ish* = vv. 29, 31 *'elohim;* Judg. 13:3, 9, 13, 15–18, 20f. *mal'akh* = vv. 6, 8 *'ish*

'elohim = v. 22 *'elohim*. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 63f.

4. Gilgamesh 1.4.34 (ANET, p. 75).

5. Cf. 1 Sam. 18:14, 15; Jer. 10:21; 20:11; 23:5. The stem *s-k-l*, "to see," may be present in Prov. 21:12.

6. Gilgamesh 2.2.26–30 (ANET, p. 77).

7. Cf. Gen. 4:9; 16:8; 18:19; Num. 22:9; 2 Kings 20:14; Isa. 39:3.

8. Gen. R. 19:1.

9. Sot. 9b, Gen. R. 19:1.

10. Cf. Isa. 49:23; Mic. 7:17; Ps. 72:9.

11. For nudity as shame and humiliation, cf. Gen. 9:22–23; Isa. 20:4; Amos 2:16. For clothes as a sign of dignity, cf. Exod. 28:2, 40–41.

12. Of skins: with Targ. Jon., cf. Radak who cites PdRE 20. The second explanation is that of Targ. Onk., Ibn Ezra, Bekhor Shor, and Hizkuni.

Chapter 4

M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); J. M. Miller, "The Descendants of Cain: Notes on Genesis 4," ZAW 86 (1974): 164–174; R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," JAOS 83 (1968): 163–173; H. M. Gevaryahu, "The Punishment of Cain and the City that He Built" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 32 (1968): 27–36.

1. For *k-n-h*, "to create," cf. Deut. 32:6; Ps. 104:24; 139:13; Prov. 8:22. For the name Elkanah, cf. Exod. 6:24; 1 Sam. 1:18; etc. UT 51.I.23; III.26, 30, 35; IV.32. See M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 49–54; N. C. Habel, "Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study in Tradition Criticism," JBL 91 (1972): 321–339; I. M. Kikawada, "Two Notes on Eve," JBL 91 (1972): 35–37.

2. Job 3:3 and 1 Sam. 1:11 are not really analogous.

3. Cf. Gen. 17:16; 1 Sam. 1:11, 20.

4. Cf. Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 22:3, 5, Sanh. 38b, ARN[1], p. 6; but note the similar omission in Gen. 30:10, 12, 21; 38:5.

5. For *hevel*, cf. Ps. 39:6; 62:10; 144:4; Job 7:16. Cf. Josephus, Ant. 1.52 (= 2.1) (Loeb, p. 25); so Radak, Shadal.

6. So Sifra, *shemini*, 10, 1, 32, Gen. R. 34:9, Lev. R. 9:10, Num. R. 13:3, Song R. 4:31; so Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak.

7. Cf. Gen. 34:7; 1 Sam. 18:8; Jon. 4:1, 9.

8. Heb. *se'et* could also be an ellipsis for *se'et 'avon*, "forgiving sin," as in Gen. 18:24, 26; so Gen. R. 22:11, Targums, Rashi, Ibn Ezra (i), Bekhor Shor, Radak.

9. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 68. Ibn Ezra, Bekhor Shor, Radak, Hizkuni, Sforno refer to foregoing words. Saadiah, Rashi take the third view.

10. So Isa. 13:4; 52:8; 66:6; Jer. 10:22.

11. "You shall be more cursed than the ground." This rendering, which is that of Ramban, takes the Heb. particle *min* comparatively and as referring to 3:17. It could also, with Ibn Ezra, be privative, yielding the sense, "You are accursed [banished] from the ground." A third possibility, favored by Radak, understands *min* to mean "out from," that is, the ground is the element out of which the curse arises.

12. For *'avon*, "punishment," cf. 1 Sam. 28:10. Cf. *hatt'at* in Zech. 14:19.

13. For Heb. *lakhen* in this sense, cf. Gen. 30:15; Num. 16:11; 20:12; Judg. 8:7; 10:13; 11:8; 1 Sam 28:2; Jer. 5:2; etc. It is most likely composed of *ken*, "verily," reinforced by the asseverative *lamed*. The use of *kol* with a participial construction to express the legal circumstances, followed by a statement of the legal consequences, is found again in Exod. 12:15; 19:12. The identical formulation, but without *kol*, appears in Gen 26:11 and in the two clusters of laws in Exod 21:12, 15–17 and Lev. 24:16, 18, 21. Orlinsky, *Notes*, 69.

14. Josephus, Ant. 1.58 (Loeb, p. 27), Targums, Rashi, Ibn Ezra support the last interpretation.

15. Targ. Jon., Rashi: on the forehead. Cf. Exod. 12:13, 23 for the Passover sign. Ibn Ezra, Radak take as corroborative sign; cf. Exod 3:12; 4:8; Josh. 2:12; Judg. 6:17; 2 Kings 20:8; Isa. 7:11, 14; 38:22; etc.

16. Cf. Gen. 41:46; 47:10; Exod. 35:20; 2 Kings 5:2.

17. For the Kenite-Midianite connection, cf. Exod. 2:15, 16; 3:1; 18:1 with Judg. 1:16; 4:11.

18. For *y-l-d* with masculine subject, cf. 10:8, 13, 15, 24–26; 22:23; 25:3; etc. On the city, see W. W. Hallo, "Antediluvian Cities," JCS 23 (1970): 57–67.

19. With the variant reading Mehujael-Mehijael, cf. Gen. 32:31–32; Peniel-Penuel with 1 Chron. 8:25; 1 Sam. 25:3 Abigail with v. 18 Abugail *(Ketiv)*; 1 Chron. 7:2 Jeriel with 2 Chron. 20:16 Jeruel; 1 Chron. 9:6 Jeuel with Jeiel *(Ketiv)*.

20. For *mt* in Heb., cf. Gen. 34:30; Deut. 2:34; 3:6; etc. See M. Tsevat, "The Canaanite God *Šälaḥ*," VT 4 (1954): 41–49.

21. Cf. Num. 31:27; Amos 2:15; Jer. 2:8; 46:9; 50:16; Ezek. 27:29; 38:4. Cf. Song of Sol. 3:8.

22. For Heb. *l-t-sh*, "to hammer, sharpen," cf. 1 Sam. 13:20; Ps. 7:13; 52:4; and figuratively Job 16:9. Cf. Ugar. *lṭš*, "to burnish" a sword. Heb. *horesh* occurs in 1 Kings 7:14 with *neḥoshet*, "a coppersmith." Hence, *horesh* is a synonym of *lotesh* and may define it more precisely. J. Lewy, "Tabor, Tibar, Atabyros," HUCA 23 (1950–1951): 357–386; W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 5th ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 96, 121, 188 n. 7, 198 n. 5; J. D. Muhly, *The Coming of the Age of Iron* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

23. The stem is connected with music in 2 Sam. 23:1; Ps. 81:3; 135:3; 147:1; and UT 22225. Cf. Heb. Ben Sira 45:9. W. F. Albright, "Islam and the Religions of the Ancient Orient," JAOS 60 (1940): 297f. and n. 52.

24. Cf. 1 Kings 12:8, 9, 14. S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 25–34; P. D. Miller, "*Yeled* in the Song of Lamech," JBL 85 (1966): 477–478.

Chapter 5

1. There seems to be a poetic substratum to these vv., as evidenced by the chiasm, *bara' 'adam—'adam bara'*, and the pair *'-s-h/b-r-'*, as well as by the assonance noted.

2. In regard to the Aaronide list in 1 Chron. 6:35ff., cf. also Lev. 10:12 and Exod. 6:23; 28:1.

3. For the phrase, cf. Gen. 37:30; 42:13, 32, 36; Jer. 31:15; 49:10; Ezek. 28:19; Ps. 37:10, 36; 39:14; 59:14; 103:16; 104:35; Job 7:8, 21; 8:22.

4. The use *l-k-ḥ* in Ps. 49:16; 73:24 is too ambiguous in those contexts for them to be used as proof texts.

5. For *shelaḥ* as weapon, cf. Joel 2:8; Neh. 4:11; 2 Chron. 23:10; 32:5; Arab. *silāḥ*. There is some evidence for Shelah having been the name of a god of the river that must be crossed to reach the netherworld. See M. Tsevat, "The Canaanite God Šälaḥ," VT 4 (1954): 41–49.

6. For the effect of wine, cf. Judg. 9:13; Jer. 16:7; Ps. 104:15; and especially Prov. 31:6–7.

Chapter 6

L. Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian, and Mohammedan Literature* (1926; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1974); U.

Cassuto, "The Story of the Divine Beings and the Daughters of Men" (Hebrew), in *Essays in Honour of . . . J. H. Hertz*, ed. I. Epstein *et al.* (London: Goldston, 1942), 35–44; B. J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1952); B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1960), 49–57; B. Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Towards an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4," JBL 106 (1987): 13–26.

1. *'Adam* is followed by a plural "them," just as in Gen. 1:27–28.

2. In Ps. 29:1; 89:7, the variant *benei' elim* instead of *benei ha-'elohim* is used. This term appears in Ugar. and Phoen. sources in reference to the gods of the pantheon. In place of gods, the Israelite poetic imagination has one God surrounded by a host of courtiers. Of course, *ben*, usually "son of," has no biological implication but has the sense of "belonging to the class of" as in 1 Kings 20:35 and 2 Kings 2 *passim*, *benei hanevi'im*, "the members of the prophetic guild." That the "divine beings" were thought of as being angels can be demonstrated by Dan. 3:25, 28, where Aram. *bar' elahin* is identified as *mal'akh*, "angel." In Ps. 148:2, "angels" parallel "His hosts," *tseva'av*, which in 1 Kings 20:19 have the same function as *benei ha-'elohim* in Job 1:6; 2:1.

The earliest known exegesis of Gen. 6:1 took *benei ha-'elohim* to mean angels. This is attested by the Noah fragment of 1 Enoch 6–11, which goes back to the first half of the second century B.C.E.. Josephus, Ant. 1.78 (Loeb, p. 34) had the same tradition. However, about the middle of the second century C.E., R. Simeon b. Yohai strenuously objected to this interpretation and insisted on the meaning "sons of nobles" (Gen. R. 26:8). This is how the two Aram. Targums render the term, as do Sym. and Sam. Targum. Manuscripts of the LXX vary between "the sons of God" and "the angels of God." Aq. uses the enigmatic "the sons of the gods." The striking contrast between *'adam* and *'elohim* in our passage together with the other biblical usages of *benei ha-'elohim* leave no doubt that the latter was originally understood to refer to the members of the celestial host. The later rendering, adopted generally by medieval Jewish commentators, most likely owes its origin to the need to combat sectarian misinterpretations of the entire narrative.

3. Cf. Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22; Ezek. 37:9–14; Ps. 104:29; 146:4; Eccl. 12:7.

4. Heb. *beshaggam* is unique and is taken as *be-sha-gam*. The relative *sha* does not otherwise appear in the Torah. Many manuscripts vocalize *be-shaggam* (with final *kamets*), deriving the word from the stem *sh-g-g*, "to err." This would yield "in their erring," which is contextually and syntactically difficult.

5. Heb. *yamav*, "his days," often has the sense of fixed life span; cf. Isa. 65:20; Ps. 103:8; 109:8; 144:4; Job 7:1; 14:5.

6. Seder Olam 28, Targums, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak all take this as the respite before the Flood. For 40 years as a generation or conventional number, cf. Exod. 16:35; Num. 14:33–34; Josh. 5:6; Judg. 3:4; 5:31; 8:28; 2 Sam. 5:4; 1 Kings 11:42; Ps. 95:10.

7. Targ. Jon. has "fallen ones." LXX has "giants." Cf. Aram. *nifla'*, *nefila'* as the constellation Orion, who was a mythical giant. Targ. Onk., Pesh., Saadiah, Ramban, Radak have "heroes"; cf. Ps. 103:21. It is noteworthy that in Deut. 2:10–11, 20–21; 3:11; 1 Chron. 20:4–9, Nephilim are not mentioned.

8. Cf. Gen. 6:12; 7:1; 18:21; 31:42; Exod. 5:21; 32:9.

9. So understood here by Bekhor Shor, Ibn Ezra, and Radak.

10. Job 12:4 seems to indicate that *tsaddik tamim* was originally a hendiadys, here broken up for purposes of parallelism.

11. So Ramban, Abravanel.

12. Cf. Exod. 23:1; Deut. 19:16; Ps. 35:11; Isa. 53:9. In Ezek. 9:9 the readings in the Heb. manuscripts vary between *damim*, "bloodshed," and *ḥamas*.

13. So LXX, Vulg., Pesh., Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon. For the purging of the earth, cf. Lev. 18:27–28; 20:22; Num. 35:33–34; Isa. 24:5–7; Jer. 3:1, 2, 9; Ps. 106:38.

14. The present rendering is based on a connection with *tsohorayim*, "noon-day," *zohar*, "brilliance," and is the tradition of the Targums, Aq., Sym. For "roof," cf. Arab. *ẓahr*, Akk. *ṣeru*, Ugar. *ẓr*, "back, top."

15. *Mabbul* recurs outside the Flood story only in Ps. 29:10. Its etymology is unknown. It may be connected with Akk. *biblu*, "a devastating flood," *bibel me*, "flood water"; cf. *bubbulu*, a variant of *abubu*, "a devastating flood," CAD s.v. *biblu*, p. 228, and s.v. *bubbulu*, p. 298.

16. For this formula, cf. Exod. 7:6; 12:28, 30; 39:32, 43; 40:16.

Chapter 7

N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 37–62.

1. Sam., LXX read here "clean birds" as in 8:20. On the classification, see J. Milgrom, JBL 100 (1981): 628.

2. Cf. Moses' 40 days on Sinai in preparation for receiving both editions of the Decalogue, Exod. 24:18; Deut. 9:11; 10:10; and his 40 days of supplication to atone for the sin of Israel through the golden calf, Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:18–25; Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness to atone for the sin in connection with the spies, who took 40 days to explore the land, Num. 13:25; 14:33; Josh. 5:6; Ps. 95:10; cf. Exod. 16:35; Elijah journeys 40 days in the wilderness to Horeb where he receives a revelation, 1 Kings 19:8; Ezekiel lies on his right side 40 days in symbolic atonement for the sin of Judah, Ezek. 4:6; the same prophet sees the desolation of Egypt lasting 40 years, 29:11–13.

3. Cf. Josephus, Ant. 1.3.3 (Loeb, p. 37).

4. For the "great deep," cf. Isa. 51:10; Amos 7:4; Ps. 36:7; 78:15. For the "windows" or "floodgates" of heaven, cf. 2 Kings 7:2, 19; Isa 24:18; Mal. 4:10. The parallel between *'urbt* and *ḫln*, "window," in UT 51.V.123–124, 126–127 confirms that Heb. *'arubot* refer to apertures, probably lattices; cf. Eccl. 12:3.

5. Cf. 1 Sam. 9:24; Isa. 10:2–21, as opposed to Exod. 12:10; Joel 1:4; Ruth 2:14.

Chapter 8

1. Cf. Gen. 9:15; 19:29; 30:22; Exod. 2:24; 6:5.

2. Cf. Gen. 6:6, 8; 7:21.

3. Cf. Exod. 13:17.

4. Cf. Ezek. 17:9.

5. Cf. Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:7; Ps. 52:10; 128:3.

6. Cf. Gen. 1:8. For the sequence *ḫ-r-b, y-v-sh*, the second a consequence of the first, cf. Isa. 19:5, Jer. 50:38; Job 14:11.

7. Gen. R. 31:12; 34:7; etc. See B. J. Bamberger, "Philo and the Aggadah," HUCA 48 (1977): 164, par. 10.

8. For the technical formula, cf. Exod. 29:18, 25, 41; etc. See especially, Lev. 26:31; Amos 5:21.

9. Cf. Shev. 36a.

Chapter 9

1. See D. J. McCarthy, "The Symbolism of Blood and Sacrifice," JBL 88 (1969): 166–176 and 92 (1973): 205–210; H. C. Brichto, "On Slaughter, Sacrifice, Blood, and Atonement," HUCA 47 (1976): 18–55. The eating of blood is prohibited in Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:15–16, 23, 27; 15:23; cf. 1 Sam. 14:32–34; Ezek. 33:25; 39:17–19.

2. For the preposition *bet* expressing instrumentality, cf. 1 Sam. 28:6; Hos. 1:7; 12:14. The Targums, Rashi, Ibn Ezra (i) take

ba- 'adam to refer to the need for witnesses. The *bet* can also be rendered "for that man," having the same function as in Deut. 19:21; 2 Sam. 3:27; 14:7.

3. The same applies in the case of the covenant of circumcision in Gen. 17:10–11, the blood of the paschal lamb in Exod. 12–13, the *tefillin* in Exod. 13:9, 16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18, and the Sabbath in Exod. 31:12, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20. See M. Fishbane, "The 'Sign' in the Hebrew Bible" (Hebrew), *Shnaton* 1 (1975): 213–234.

4. For God's bow, cf. Hab. 3:9; Ps. 7:13–14; Lam. 2:4; 3:12. For His arrows, cf. Num. 24:8; Deut. 32:23, 42; 2 Sam. 22:15 = Ps. 18:15; Hab. 3:11; Zech. 9:14; Ps. 38:3; 64:8; 144:6; Job 6:4.

5. Cf. Gilgamesh 11.164f. (ANET, p. 95), Atraḫasis 3.6,2–4.

6. Other examples are 11:28–30; 13:10, 13; 22:20–23; 24:1, 29–30; 25:25, 27–28; 26:34–35; 35:22.

7. The literal interpretation is upheld by LXX, Jub. 7:1–2, Philo, Quest. in Gen. 2.70 (Loeb, p. 161), and Josephus, Ant. 1.6.3 (Loeb, p. 69). For the rabbinic discussion, see Sanh. 70a, reflected in Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 36:7. See J. H. Hoftijzer, "Some Remarks to the Tale of Noah's Drunkenness," OS 12 (1957): 22–27; D. Neiman, "The Date and Circumstances of the Cursing of Canaan," *Biblical Motifs*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 113–134; A. Phillips, "Uncovering the Father's Skirt," VT 30 (1980): 38–43.

8. For this specialized use of "woke up," cf. Joel 1:5; Ps. 78:65; Prov. 23:25; cf. Gen. R. 36:24.

9. Cf. Gen. 5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9:18; 10:1. LXX, Vulg., "younger" is inadmissible since the comparative applies only if two items are involved, e.g., Gen. 27:15, 42; 29:16, 18; 48:19; etc. Otherwise, the definite article invariably indicates superlative, e.g., Gen. 42 *passim*; 43:29; 44 *passim*; Judg. 9:5; 1 Sam. 16:11; 17:14; 2 Chron. 22:1, cf. 21:17.

10. For the construction, cf. Exod. 29:37; Num. 3:32; Deut. 10:17; Isa. 34:10; Ezek. 26:7; Ps. 136:2, 3; Song of Sol. 1:1. For *k-n-'*, cf. Deut. 9:3; Judg. 3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33; Ps. 106:42.

11. Cf. 1 Sam. 25:32; 2 Sam. 18:28; 1 Kings 1:48; 8:15; 41:14; 72:18; 106:48; 1 Chron. 16:36; 2 Chron. 2:11; 6:4; cf. Ezra 7:27; 1 Chron. 29:10.

12. Cf. Lev. 24:11, 16; Num. 6:27; Deut. 28:58; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Kings 8:16, 29; 9:3; 11:36; 2 Kings 21:4, 7; Ps. 72:19; etc.

13. For a possible semantic equivalent to *p-t-h* in the sense of "enlarge," cf. *r-ḥ-v*, Gen. 26:22; Ps. 4:2; 2 Sam. 22:37 = Ps. 18:37; 118:5. For the idiom "dwell in the tents of," cf. Ps. 78:55; Job 11:14; 18:15.

Chapter 10

J. Simons, "The 'Table of Nations' (Gen. X): Its General Structure and Meaning," OS 10 (1954): 155–184; D. J. Wiseman, "Genesis 10: Some Archaeological Considerations," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 87 (1955): 14–24, 113–118; T. Ishida, "The Structure and Historical Implications of the Lists of Pre-Israelite Nations," *Bib* (1979): 461–490.

1. For the Canaanite pantheon, cf. UT 51.VI.46. Cf. the pattern of seventy sons of progeny found in connection with the judges Gideon and Abdon son of Hillel in Judg. 8:30; 9:2; 12:14 and with King Ahab in 2 Kings 10:1, 6, 7. The eighth-century B.C.E. inscription found at Zinjirli in northern Syria deriving from the state of Ya'udi-Sam'al mentions the "seventy kinsmen of King Panammuwa." F. C. Fensham, "The Numeral Seventy in the Old Testament . . .," PEQ 109 (1977): 113–115.

2. For "the seventy peoples," see Suk. 55b; for "the seventy languages," see Mish. Sot. 7:5, Sot. 36a–b, Meg. 13b, Shek. 5a, Sanh. 17a, Men. 65a; so Test. Naph. 8:4–6; 9:1, Targ. Jon. to Gen. 11:8; Deut. 32:8.

3. Deut. 32:8–9 explicates the theme of Israel and the international community. This is so even according to the reading *benei 'el* in place of *benei yisra'el* of the LXX, Sam. and Vulg. versions as well as in Targ. Jon. with its double text. The existence of such a Heb. text is decisively confirmed by 4QDeut. 32. Undoubtedly, this reading is behind the tradition that each nation has its celestial representative at the divine court, which comprises seventy ministering angels; cf. Dan. 10:13, 20. This notion doubtless has its roots in the pre-Israelite Canaanite myth about the seventy sons of Il cited previously. For the heavenly tribunal, cf. 1 Kings 22:19; Zech. 3:1–2; Ps. 82; and perhaps 7:8.

4. On the promises to the patriarchs, see 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

5. For the "ships of Tarshish," cf. 1 Kings 10:22 = 2 Chron. 9:21; 1 Kings 22:49 = 2 Chron. 20:36–37; Isa. 2:16; 60:9; Ezek. 27:25; Ps. 48:8. W. F. Albright, "New Light on the History of Phoenician Colonization," BASOR 83 (1941): 21f.; idem, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, 5th ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 133; C. H. Gordon, "The Wine-Dark Sea," JNES 37 (1978): 51f.

6. For the graphic blurring of *resh* and *dalet*, cf. above v. 3 Riphath-Diphath; Num. 1:14 Deuel = 2:14 Reuel; 2 Sam 22:11 *va-yera'* = Ps. 18:11 *va-yede'*; 2 Sam. 23:30 Hiddai = 1 Chron. 11:32 Hurai; Ezek. 6:14 Diblah = 2 Kings 23:33; 25:6ff. Riblah; cf. Rashi to Job 15:24.

7. In Isa. 11:11 Shinar is Babylon and is clearly distinguished from Assyria. In Dan. 1:2 it is plainly Babylon. In Gen. 11:2 the context similarly confirms the identification. In Gen. 14:1, 9 and Zech. 5:11 Shinar must also certainly refer to Babylon. Josh. 7:21 remains obscure. Both Targums in the present passage render *shin'ar* by "the land of Babylon," and Gen. Apoc. 21.23 to Gen. 14:1 reads "Babylon."

8. For the verb *y-ts-'* with the accusative of the destination, cf. Gen. 27:3; Jer. 14:18.

9. Cf. Nah. 3:9; Dan. 11:43; 2 Chron. 12:3.

10. Cf. Josh. 15:8, 63; Judg. 1:21; 2 Sam. 5:6; for Jerusalem as Jebus, cf. Judg. 19:10; 1 Chron. 11:4; cf. Josh. 18:28. For Araunah, cf. 2 Sam. 24:16–25; 1 Chron. 21:15–22:1; 2 Chron. 3:1.

11. Cf. Gen. 15:21; Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; 24:11; Neh. 9:8.

12. The relevant texts are Gen. 11:22–31; 19:30–38; 22:20–24; 25:1–4, 12–14. Targ. Jon. followed by Ibn Ezra understood *benei 'ever* here to mean Hebrews.

13. Cf. Jub. 9:4; Josephus, Ant. 1.6.4 (Loeb, p. 71).

14. Cf. Gilgamesh 9.2.1–2 (ANET, p. 88). The Sam. text here reads *massa'*, which is also the reading of the 1QM 2.11. Massa is a tribe affiliated with the Ishmaelites in Gen. 25:14. The parallel list in 1 Chron. 1:7 has *meshekh*, already listed under Japheth in v. 2.

15. For *Peleg*, "water channel," cf. Isa. 30:25; 32:2; Ps. 1:3; 46:5; 65:10; Prov. 5:16; Job 38:25.

16. Cf. 1 Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:49; Isa. 13:12; Ps. 45:10; Job 28:16; 1 Chron. 29:4; 2 Chron. 8:18; 9:10. In Job 22:24 Ophir seems to be a synonym for gold.

17. Either identification presents a problem since Arab. *ṣ* would not yield Heb. *s*.

Chapter 11

S. N. Kramer, "Sumerian Literature and the Bible," *Studia Biblica et Orientalia* 3 (1959): 193; N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 63–80; I. M. Kikawada, "The Shape of Genesis 11:1–9," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 18–32; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 11–45; M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 34–39.

1. The Heb. expression, literally "to brick a brick," found again only in Exod. 5:8, has its exact counterpart in Akk. *labanu libittu*.

2. In Deut. 1:28; 9:1 a similar phrase indicates great, imposing height.

3. The Sam. text and the LXX add "and the tower" as in vv. 4, 5.

4. With Abram from Abiram, cf. 'Aḥ'ab from 'Aḥi'ab, 'Amram from 'Ami-ram, 'Abner from 'Abi-ner. The form 'Abrm occurs in Ugar., but it is spelled syllabically in the Akk. texts from Ugarit as *A-bi-ra-am.* It is also possible that the second syllable derives not from the Heb. stem *r-w-m,* "to be exalted," but from Akk. *ramu,* "to love"; cf. Syr., Aram. *r'ḥem.* In that case, the name would mean: "He loves the Father" or "The Father loves [him]."

5. For the centrality of Haran in the narratives, cf. Gen 12:1, 4; 24:4, 10; 27:43; 29:4ff.

6. For her as Sarai, cf. Josephus, Ant. 1.6.5 (Loeb, p. 75), Targ. Jon., Meg. 14a.

7. For Nahor and Haran, cf. Gen. 24:15, 24, 47; 29:4–5; 31:53.

8. In the Sam., Terah's death occurs in the same year as Abram's departure, thus suggesting a causal relationship.

Chapter 12

For the patriarchal period, see N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 81–210; T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974); J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); R. Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger," Semeia 3 (1975): 81–97; J. T. Luke, "Abraham and the Iron Age: Reflections on the New Patriarchal Studies," JSOT 4 (1977): 35–47; J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller, *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 70–148; R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 153–287; J. Bright, *A History of Israel,* 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 67–103; J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 89–108; G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 22–77.

1. Cf. Exod. 18:27; Josh. 22:4.

2. While Heb. *moledet* means "birth" in Ezek. 16:3f., the term means "progeny" in Gen. 48:6, "family, kindred" in Gen. 43:7; Ruth 1:11; Esther 2:10, 20.

3. Cf. Gen. 18:20; 46:3; Deut 4:6–8; 26:5.

4. Cf. Deut. 7:13ff.

5. So Ramban, Radak; cf. Gen. 48:20. For the consequential meaning of the imperative with *vav—ve-heyeh—* being logically dependent on the preceding verbs, cf. Gen. 17:1; 20:7; 42:18.

6. Some Heb. manuscripts and ancient versions—Sam., LXX, Vulg.—have the plural in the second clause as well.

7. The second rendering is that of Targ. Onk., LXX.

8. The Nifal form of *b-r-k* is found only in Genesis—12:3; 18:18; 28:14; the respective contexts do not show how it differs from the Hitpael form in Gen. 22:18; 26:4 or the Pual form in Num. 22:6; 2 Sam. 7:29.

9. Cf. Gen. 16:16; 17:1, 24; 21:5.

10. N.B., Jacob arrives at "the city of Shechem" in Gen. 33:18. Makom as sacred space is frequently found in Deuteronomy (e.g., chap. 12 *passim*), and is used in 1 Sam. 7:16 of the shrines (so LXX) of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. The term clearly has this meaning in Isa. 26:21; 66:1; Mic. 1:2–3; Ps. 132:5; 1 Chron. 16:27 (= Ps. 96:6 "Temple"). B. Mazar, *Canaan and Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), 144–151; M. Haran, "Shechem Studies" (Hebrew), *Zion* 38 (1973): 1–31.

11. Mentioned again in Deut. 11:30. Sam. and LXX have the singular. For the fertility cults, cf. Deut. 12:12; 1 Kings 14:23; Jer. 2:20; Ezek. 6:13. For *'elon* in combination with another term, cf. Gen. 13:18; Josh. 19:33; Judg. 9:6, 37; 1 Sam. 10:3.

12. For biblical famines, see 2 Sam. 21:1; 1 Kings 17:1; 8:2; 2 Kings 4:38; Ruth 1:1.

13. Cf. Gen. 26:2; 46:3; the reverse direction in 13:1; 46:4.

14. On the treatment of the *ger,* cf. Exod. 22:20; Deut. 10:18–19; 14:29; etc.

15. Critics assign the present story to a J source, the second Abrahamic episode to E, and the Isaac version again to J or to a variant version of J. There is no unanimity as to which of the three is supposed to represent the original.

16. See Gen. 17:17; 12:4 re Sarah's age. On her beauty, see 12:14–15; cf. 26:7. So Gen. Apoc. 20.1–9, Josephus, Ant. 1.8.1 (Loeb, p. 81), Gen. R. 40:4, Meg. 14a, BB 58a, Sanh. 39b.

17. Cf. Song of Sol. 4:9–10, 12; Prov. 7:4. C. H. Gordon, "Fratriarchy in the Old Testament," JBL 54 (1935): 223–234; S. Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," HUCA 46 (1975): 5–31.

18. For *tso'n* including goats, cf. Lev. 1:10.

19. For *ḥamor* as a collective, cf. Gen. 32:6; Isa. 21:7. Regarding redemption of its first-born, see Exod. 13:2, 12f.; 34:20.

20. Cf. Jer. 2:24; Ezek. 23:20; Hos. 8:9. As a riding animal, cf. Num. 22:21; Judg. 5:10; 2 Kings 4:24.

21. Used by women, see 24:61; 31:17, 34. See W. G. Lambert, "The Domesticated Camel in the Second Millennium: Evidence from Alalakh and Ugarit," BASOR 160 (1960): 42f.; R. W. Bullict, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

22. On the stem *n-g-'*, cf. Gen. 20:6; 26:11; Prov. 6:29; Ruth 2:9.

Chapter 13

1. See ANET, p. 258, no. 1.

2. Cf. 17:12–13, 23, 27; 23:9, 13, 15–16; 24:22, 35, 53.

3. Cf. 21:25; 26:13–22.

4. Cf. the parenthetic note in Gen. 12:6, on which see Comment. For Perizzites, cf. Gen. 15:10; Exod. 3:8, 17.

5. For *merivah,* see Exod. 17:7; Num. 20:13, 24; 27:14; Deut. 32:57; 33:8; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28; Ps. 81:8; 95:8; 106:32.

6. For *kikkar,* "a loaf," cf. Exod. 29:23; as a weight, cf. Exod. 37:24; 38:27. For the "plain of the Jordan," see Gen. 19:17–29; Deut. 34:3; 1 Kings 7:46. M. Har-el, "The Pride of the Jordan," BA 41 (1978): 66f.

7. Cf. Gen. 2:10; Isa. 51:3.

8. Cf. Deut. 11:10.

9. Cf. 11:2.

10. So 15:7; 17:8; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East," JAOS 90 (1970): 184–203; S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Divine Grants of Land to the Patriarchs," JAOS 91 (1971): 509f.

11. Cf. 2 Chron. 1:9; cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 32:13.

12. See TJ Kid. 1:3, 60c, Tosef. BB 2:11, BB 100a, Gen. R. 41:13, Ruth R. 7:10. E. R. Lachman, "Note on Ruth 4:7–8," JBL 56 (1937): 53–56.

13. LXX, Jub. 14:11 have the singular; cf. Gen. 18:4, 8.

14. B. Mazar, *Cities and Districts in Eretz-Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1975), 45–64.

Chapter 14

M. D. Cassuto, "Jerusalem in the Pentateuch," (Hebrew), *Eretz-Israel* 3 (1954): 15–17; W. F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," BASOR 163 (1961): 36–54; L. A. Fisher, "Abraham and His Priest King," JBL 81 (1962): 264–270; M. C. Astour, "Political and Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis 14 and in Its Babylonian Sources," in *Biblical*

Motifs, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966): 65–112; S. Gevirtz, "Abraham's 318," IEJ 19 (1969): 110–113; J. A. Emerton, "Some False Clues in the Study of Gen. XIV," VT 21 (1971): 24–47, 403–439; J. Gammie, "Loci of the Melchizedek Tradition of Genesis 14:18–20," JBL 90 (1971): 385–396; Y. Muffs, "Abraham the Noble Warrior: Patriarchal Politics and Laws of War in Ancient Israel," JJS 33 (1982): 81–107.

1. For the wars against the Amorites, see Num. 21:21–35; Josh. 5:1; 10:5, 12.

2. Cf. Isa. 7:1; Ruth 1:1; Esther 1:1. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 86.

3. Cf. Isa. 8:23.

4. For the midrash on the royal names, cf. Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 42:8. For a biblical example, see 1 Chron. 7:23.

5. So Gen. Apoc. 21:27, Sam., Pesh., Targ. Jon. For a thirteen-year rebellion, cf. Targ. Onk., Shab. 11a, Gen. R. 42:10, Rashi.

6. For Rephaim as giants, cf. Deut. 2:11, 20–21; 3:11; Jub. 29:9. For *refa'im* as shades of the dead, cf. Isa. 14:9; 26:14, 19; etc.

7. See NJPS Num. 32:41.

8. Cf. Num. 32:37; Josh. 13:19; Jer. 48:1, 23; Ezek. 25:9, Mesha inscription, lines 9f.

9. Cf. Gen. 25:25; 27:11; Deut. 2:8.

10. Cf. Gen. 21:21; Num. 13:3, 26.

11. Cf. Num. 34:4; Deut. 1:46.

12. Cf. Exod. 17:14–16; Deut. 25:17–19.

13. Cf. 1 Kings 9:18; Ezek. 47:19; 48:28. The identification with Ein-gedi, given in 2 Chron. 20:2, is not compatible with the invasion route. Y. Aharoni, "Tamar and the Roads to Elath," *Eretz-Israel* 5 (1958): 129–134.

14. See Josephus, Ant. 1.9 (Loeb, p. 85), and Wars 4.8.4 (Loeb, p. 141).

15. Cf. Gen. 17:3; 24:64; 33:4; etc.; so Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni.

16. Cf. Num. 13:23–24; 32:9; Deut. 1:24.

17. Sam. reads *'nrm* (and Gen. Apoc. 21.21, 22.6 *'rnm*), which would be a West Semitic name meaning "the Exalted One has answered."

18. For *va-yarek*, cf. Gen. 42:35; Exod. 15:9; Lev. 26:33. Sam. reads *va-ayadek*, on which cf. Ps. 18:43 with 2 Sam. 22:43. This may be connected with Akk. *dekû*, used of readying troops for war. LXX renders "he counted," perhaps reading *va-yifkod*.

19. For Dan as Laish, cf. Judg. 18:29; cf. Josh. 19:47.

20. For the word play, see NJPS note to Isa. 33:6–7.

21. So Sforno. For the formula, cf. Judg. 17:2; 1 Sam. 15:13; 23:21.

22. On *koneh*, see Excursus 8 and Comment to 4:11.

23. Cf. Exod. 6:8; Num. 14:30; Deut. 32:40; Ezek. 20:23. The substitution of the stem *r-w-m*, only also in Dan. 12:7, for the usual *n-s-'* may be due to a word play on *terumah*, "contribution," that is often paired with *ma'aser*, "tithe"; cf. Num. 18:26; Deut. 12:11; Mal. 3:8; PdRK 10:6.

24. E. A. Speiser, "A Figurative Equivalent for Totality in Akkadian and West-Semitic," JAOS 54 (1934): 200–203; Y. Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 59 and n. 1, 182.

25. For the same kind of word play on *'-s-r—'-sh-r*, cf. PdRK 10:10 on Deut. 14:22.

Chapter 15

L. A. Snijders, "Genesis XV: The Covenant with Abraham," OS 12 (1958): 261–279; H. Cazelles, "Connections et structure de Gen. XV," RB 69 (1962): 321–349; R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Gen. 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1967); M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East," JAOS 90 (1970): 184–203; S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Covenant between the Pieces: A Traditio-Historical Investigation," VT 18 (1968): 500–506.

1. For the inseparability of the promises of posterity and land, cf. 12:2, 7; 13:14–17; 17:6–7; 24:7; 26:3–4; 28:3–4, 13–14.

2. Cf. Gen. 22:1, 20; 39:7; 40:1; cf. Gen. R. 44:6.

3. Cf. 1 Sam. 15:10; 2 Sam. 7:4. See J. S. Ackerman, "Prophecy and Warfare in Ancient Israel," BASOR 220 (1975): 6f.

4. Cf. Num. 24:4, 16; Ezek. 13:7.

5. See ANET, pp. 655, 450.

6. Cf. Ps. 3:4; 18:3, 31, 36; etc.

7. For *sakhar* in the sense of spoils of war, cf. Ezek. 29:18f.

8. So Gen. 15:8; Deut. 3:24; 9:26.

9. So understood by Gen. Apoc. 22.33 and Targ. Jon. For a similar usage, cf. Ps. 39:14; Job 10:21; 2 Chron. 21:20.

10. So Targ. Onk., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Sforno.

11. So in Deut. 9:4; 2 Sam. 19:29; Dan. 9:18. The alternative interpretation is given by Bekhor Shor, Ramban, Ralbag, Abravanel.

12. Cf. Gen. 17:1; 26:24; 46:3; Exod. 20:2; etc.

13. For Sfire, see KAI 222.A.7, ANET, pp. 659–661. For Arslan Tash, see KAI 27.9–10, ANET, p. 658. For the treaty of Ashurnirari V, see ANET, p. 532. See E. Bickerman, "Couper une alliance," *Archives d'histoire du droit oriental* 5 (1950): 133–156; P. J. Henninger, "Was bedeutet die rituelle Teilung eines in zwei Hälften," Bib 34 (1953): 344–353; A. Caquot, "L'alliance avec Abram (Genèse 15)," Sem 12 (1962): 51–66; J. Priest, "*Orkia* in the Iliad and Consideration of a Recent Theory," JNES 23 (1964): 48–56; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 265–273.

14. So LXX, Targ. Jon., Pesh., Ibn Ezra, Radak. Cf. Mish. BM 5:4, Mish. Par. 1:1, Pliny, Nat. Hist. 8.70, par. 180. For "three-fold," cf. Gen. R. 44:17, Targ. Onk., Rashi. It is to be noted that the received Heb. *be-farim sheloshah* in 1 Sam. 1:24, "with three bulls," is rendered "a three-year-old bull" by LXX. This presupposes a Heb. reading *be-far meshullash*, which, indeed, has turned up in 4QSam; cf. 1 Sam. 1:25, "the bull."

15. Cf. Gen. R. 44:17, Targ. Onk., LXX: "a pigeon." For parallel *tor*, cf. Lev. 1:14; 5:7, 11; etc.

16. Cf. Ps. 8:9.

17. For the rabbinic reckoning, cf. Mekh. Pisḥa 14, SOR 13, Yal. Gen. 77. W. F. Albright, "Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," BASOR 58 (1935): 16; idem, "Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation," BASOR 163 (1961): 50f.; J. Greenfield, "The Etymology of *'amtaḥat*," ZAW 77 (1965): 91, especially n. 11; K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Hill, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1975), 53f.

18. Cf. Exod. 3:20–22; 11:1–3; 12:32, 35–36; Ps. 105:37.

19. For four generations as the limit of God's tolerance, cf. Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9.

20. For smoke and fire as symbols of God, cf. Exod. 19:18; 20:15; Isa 4:5; 31:9.

21. Cf. Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47; 2 Kings 24:7; etc.

22. Cf. Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4. Y. Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1953), 46–56, 61f.

23. For seven nations, see Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; 24:11. For six, see Exod. 3:8, 17; 23:23; 33:2; etc. For five, see Exod. 13:5; 1 Kings 9:20; 2 Chron. 8:7. For three, see Exod. 23:28. For the Jebusites, cf. Josh. 15:8; 18:28; Judg. 19:10–11.

24. Cf. Judg. 1:16; 4:11; Num. 24:21–22; 1 Sam. 15:16.

25. See 1 Chron. 4:13, 15; Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6, 14. For the judges, see Josh. 15:17; Judg. 1:13; 3:9, 11.

26. On "Kedemites," cf. Gen. 25:6; 29:1, 4; Num. 23:7; Judg. 6:3, 33; 7:12; 8:10ff.; 1 Kings 5:10; Isa. 19:11; cf. 1 Sam. 24:14.

Chapter 16

1. Gen. R. 45:2.

2. Cf. 21:9, 21.

3. Cf. v. 6; Shadal.

4. Cf. Gen. 30:3. Cf. Deut. 25:9–10 for *bayit* as "house" and "family."

5. See ANET, p. 160, par. 27; p. 543; p. 172, par. 144.

6. See ANET, p. 525, 22′, 23′; p. 172, par. 146.

7. See Gen. 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7. For *shur* as "wall," cf. Gen. 49:22; 2 Sam. 22:30; Ezra 4:12f. For Nefer-rohu, see ANET, p. 446; for Sinuhe, see ANET, p. 19. For *sh-u-r,* "to see," cf. Num. 23:9; 24:17; Song of Sol. 4:8. For *shur-ʿayin,* see Gen. 49:22; Job 7:8; 20:9; 24:15. See J. Simons, *The Geographic and Topographic Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 217, 251, 317.

8. Cf. Gen. 17:19; Judg. 13:3, 5, 7; etc.

9. See 17:20; 21:3; 25:12–18.

10. Cf. Jer. 2:24; Job 24:5; 39:5. D. Silber, *Beth Mikra* 6 (1961): 42–46. S. Gevirtz, "Patriarchs and Puns," HUCA 46 (1975): 42ff.

11. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 90. Cf. Gen. 25:18. For *ʿal penei,* cf. Exod. 20:3; Deut. 21:16; Job 1:11.

12. "God of seeing," so Targ. Onk.; "God of my seeing," so Bekhor Shor. Radak: "God who sees me," so LXX, Vulg. A personal name "Baal-roy" is found in the journal of an Egyptian frontier official; see ANET, p. 258.

13. For *ḥai* as "a clan," cf. 1 Sam. 18:18. For the proper name, cf. 1 Chron. 4:2; 5:5.

Chapter 17

1. Cf. Gen. 6:9; Deut. 18:13; Ps. 15:2; etc. The rabbinic tradition is reflected in Targ. Jon., LXX, and Pesh.; so Rashi, Bekhor Shor, and Radak.

2. Cf. Lev. 9:24; Josh. 5:14; Ezek. 1:28.

3. For other examples of name changing, cf. Gen. 41:45; Num. 13:16; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17.

4. The new name is a dialectic variant of Abram following the Aram. pattern of expanding weak verbs by the insertion of *h,* so that the stem *r-w-m* becomes *r-h-m,* just as Heb. *r-w-ts* becomes Aram. *r-h-ṭ,* and Heb. *h-w-sh* becomes Aram. *h-h-ṭh.* The normal construct form of *ʾav* is *ʾavi,* so that *ʾavi hamon goyim* would be expected.

5. Cf. Exod. 6:7; Lev. 11:45; Deut. 26:17; etc.

6. See Deut. R. 6:1; Exod. R. 23:12.

7. For *sar* paired with *melekh,* cf. Isa. 49:7, 23; Ps. 148:11; Prov. 8:15f.; cf. Akk. *šarru,* "king." For the old Semitic feminine form, cf. the Ugar. names *pdry, ṯly, aryṯ, rḥmy.* See A. Van Selms, "Some Reflections on the Formation of the Feminine in Semitic Languages," *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright,* ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977), 427. V. Zakovitz, "The Synonymous Word and Synonymous Name in Name-Midrashim," *Shnaton* 2 (1977): 103ff.

8. F. F. Hvidberg, *Weeping and Laughing in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962).

9. For God "coming down," cf. Exod. 3:8; 19:11, 18; 34:5.

Chapter 18

T. Rudin-O'Brasky, *The Patriarchs in Hebron and Sodom (Genesis 18–19)* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Simor, 1982).

1. On the theophany here, see Maimonides, Guide 2.42, Rashbam.

2. Cf. Gen. 3:8; 1 Sam. 11:9, 11; 2 Sam. 4:5; Mic. 2:1. See T. Bowman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek Thought* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 129–183.

3. Cf. vv. 16, 22; 19:5, 10, 12, 16 with 19:1, 15.

4. Cf. Gen. 33:2; 42:6; Ruth 2:10.

5. Cf. Maimonides, Yad, Yesodai Ha-Torah 6.9.

6. Cf. Exod. 39:2; Lev. 2:1. On milk, see F. C. Fensham, "An Ancient Tradition of the Fertility of Palestine," PEQ 98 (1966): 166f.

7. Cf. Judg. 6:19–21; 13:15–20.

8. Cf. Gen. 3:9; 4:9; 16:8; Num. 22:9.

9. So Gen. R. 49:21.

10. Cf. 13:10; 19:27f.

11. Cf. Exod. 13:8, 14; Deut. 6:7; 32:46, for the educational responsibility of parents. For *ts-v-h* in sense of a charge, cf. Gen. 49:33; 50:12, 16; 2 Sam. 17:23.

12. For *tseʿakah* in this sense, cf. Ps. 9:13; Prov. 21:13; Job 36:28; Neh. 5:1, 6. See H. J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and the Ancient East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Co., 1980), 49–52.

13. On divine tolerance of evil, cf. Jer. 12:1; Hab. 1:13; Jon. 4:2; and Job. On individual versus communal responsibility, cf. Exod. 20:5; Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:28f.; Ezek. 18; 33:20. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 282–286.

14. Cf. Gen. 44:18; Exod. 24:4; Isa. 41:1; 50:8.

15. Cf. v. 21; Ezek. 16:46–55.

16. Cf. Ruth 4:2.

Chapter 19

W. C. van Hatten, "Once Again Sodom and Gomorrah," BA 44 (1981): 87–92.

1. Cf. 2 Sam. 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10; Gen. 23:10, 18; Ruth 4:1, 11; Deut. 16:18; 22:19; Amos 5:12, 15. A. Biran, "Tel Dan," BA 37 (1974): 43–48.

2. So Bekhor Shor, Abravanel.

3. On hospitality to strangers, cf. Judg. 19:17–21; Job 31:22.

4. Cf. 2 Chron. 32:6.

5. Cf. 1 Sam. 28:24.

6. For a similar note, cf. Judg. 19:22.

7. On the death penalty for the violator of an engaged woman, cf. Hammurabi, par. 130, Deut. 22:23–27.

8. Cf. Yoma 22b. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 93f.; E. A. Speiser, "The 'elative' in West-Semitic and Akkadian," JCS 6 (1952): 81ff.

9. On *l-ʾ-h,* cf. Exod. 7:18, 21, 24; so Rashbam.

10. Cf. 2 Kings 25:19; Esther 1:5.

11. Cf. Ezek. 38:22; Ps. 11:6.

12. On salty soil as a punishment, cf. Jer. 17:6; Ps. 107:34. F. C. Fensham, "Salt as a Curse in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East," BA 25 (1962): 48–50.

13. On the destruction of all five cities, cf. Wisd. of Sol. 10:6, Josephus, Wars 4.484 (Loeb, p. 143), Gen. R. 42:8, 51:6; cf. 57:10, Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor.

14. Note the frequent repetition of *ʾav* in vv. 31–36. The association of sound involved in this play on words may be closer than is now apparent, for there is evidence for the pronunciation of *ḥolem* (ō sound) as *tsere* (ē sound) in one of the Heb. dialects outside Jerusalem. Thus, 2 Kings 3:4 *mesha*ʿ is written *mōsa* in the Greek; Num. 11:26 *medad* appears as *Mōdad* in Sam. and LXX; Ruth 2:1 *moda*ʿ in the *Ketiv* becomes *meda*ʿ in the *Kere.* The name Moab may well have been pronounced *meʾav* by the Narrator. An Egyptian source transcribes the name *m-iʾ-b.* S. Morag, "Meša: A Study of Certain Features of Old Hebrew Dialects," *Eretz-Israel* 5 (1958): 138–144.

15. Just as the word *ʾav* appears as a leitmotif hinting at Moab, so the element *ʿm* is also featured in vv. 32, 34, 35; the preposition *ʾet,* used in v. 33 with *sh-k-v,* "to lie with," in

connection with the older daughter, is replaced by *ʿim* with the same verb in v. 35 in speaking of the younger, who mothered the Ammonites. H. O. Thompson and F. Zayadine, "The Tell Siran Inscription," BASOR 223 (1976): 56.

Chapter 20

R. Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger," Semeia 3 (1975): 81–97.

1. On the pasturelands, cf. 1 Chron. 4:39f. LXX; 2 Chron. 14:13f.

2. Cf. Judg. 8:31; Ps. 34:1; 1 Chron. 18:16.

3. Cf. Num. 12:6; Deut. 13:26.

4. Cf. 2 Kings 6:18; Ps. 43:1; Dan. 11:23. The same usage is found for *gāyum, gāwum* in the Mari dialect of Akk., which contains West Semitic elements (CAD, s.v. *gāʾu*, p. 59; v. AHW 284). See A. Malamat, "Mari and the Bible: Some Patterns of Tribal Organization and Institutions," JAOS 82 (1962): 143f. n. 3.

5. Tanḥ. Va-yera' 25, Rashi.

6. For the prophet as intercessor, cf. Exod. 32:11; 34:8f.; Num. 14:13–19 (Moses); 1 Sam. 7:8f.; 12:19, 23 (Samuel); Amos 7:2, 5; Jer. 7:16; 37:3; 42:2f. Y. Muffs, "Reflections on Prophetic Prayer in the Bible" (Hebrew), *Eretz-Israel* 14 (1978): 48–54; A. B. Rodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors," in *Scripture in History and Theology*, ed. A. L. Meril and T. W. Overholt (Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, 17. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977), 107–128.

7. Cf. Gen. 42:18; Lev. 19:14, 32; Deut. 25:18; Job 1:1, 8.

8. So Ralbag, Abravanel.

9. C. J. Labushagne, "The *nasû-nadānu* Formula and Its Biblical Equivalent," in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament: Studies Presented to M. A. Beek*, ed. M. S. H. G. Heerma van Voss *et al.* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 176–180.

10. Shadal, cf. Gen. R. 52:12, takes literally; Rashbam, Bekhor Shor take figuratively. See M. Weinfeld, "Sarah and Abimelech (Genesis 20) against the Background of an Assyrian Law and the Genesis Apocryphon," *Festschrift Delcore*, AOAT 215 (1985): 431–435.

11. So Ramban, Abravanel, Shadal.

Chapter 21

1. For the providential meaning of Heb. *p-k-d*, cf. Ps. 8:5; 65:10; the judgmental usage is found in Exod. 20:5; 32:34; Lev. 18:25; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9; Job 31:14; the redemptive connotation in Gen. 50:24f.; Exod. 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; Jer. 29:10; Zeph. 2:7; Ruth 1:6.

2. Cf. the Egyptian wisdom text, "The Instruction of Ani," ANET, p. 420, col. b, bottom. For the rabbinic material, see J. Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*, trans. F. Rosen (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978), 404–406.

3. For rabbinic interpretation, cf. Tosef. Sot. 6:6, RH 18b, Gen. R. 53:13. LXX, Vulg., Jub. 17:4 have Ishmael playing with Isaac.

4. For Lipit-Ishtar, par. 25, see ANET, p. 160; for Hammurabi, par. 170f., see ANET, p. 173. It is quite possible that the verb *garesh* in v. 11 means "divorce," as in Lev. 21:7, 14; Ezek. 44:22; *va-yeshalḥeha* in v. 14 has this same connotation; cf. Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:1, 8; Mal. 2:16; cf. also the identical verb in respect to the manumission of slaves in Deut. 15:12, 13, 18; Jer. 34:9–11, 14, 16. See F. C. Fensham, "The Son of the Handmaid," VT 19 (1969): 312–321.

5. For the age of Ishmael, cf. Gen. 16:16; 21:5. For *yeled* as a youth, cf. Gen. 4:23; 1 Kings 12:8–14; 2 Chron. 10:8; *naʿar* is used for a baby in Exod. 2:6 and for a man in 2 Chron. 13:7.

6. Cf. Deut. 22:19, 29; 24:1, 3; Jer. 34:9, 16.

7. For her links with Egypt, cf. Gen. 16:7; 21:21.

8. So Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, Ḥizkuni.

9. So Rashbam.

10. Cf. v. 20; 26:3, 28; 28:15.

11. Cf. Isa. 14:22; Job 18:19.

12. B. Jacob.

13. Cf. Mic. 2:2; Job 20:19.

14. LXX, Sam., Pesh., Vulg.

Chapter 22

E. Auerbach, *Mimesis* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 1–20; S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); J. Licht, *Testing in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Post-biblical Judaism* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 13–29; G. W. Coats, "Abraham's Sacrifice of Faith: A Form-Critical Study of Genesis 22," Int 27 (1973): 389–400.

1. So Maimonides, Guide 3.24, Radak.

2. For imperative with *naʾ*, cf. Num. 20:10; Judg. 13:4; 16:6, 10, 28; 18:5; Isa. 1:18; Amos 7:2, 5.

3. So LXX, SyroP. Cf. Judg. 11:34; Amos 8:10; Zech. 12:10.

4. On the concealment from Sarah, see Josephus, Ant. 1.12.2 (Loeb, p. 111). On two, cf. Exod. 17:10; Num. 22:22; 1 Sam. 28:8. See Comment to 18:2.

5. On three-day units, cf. Gen. 31:22; 42:18; Exod. 3:18; 15:22; 19:11, 15, 16; Num. 10:33; 19:12, 19; 31:19; 33:8; Hos. 6:2; Jon. 3:3; Esther 5:1. The same is featured in Gilgamesh 1.3.48 (ANET, p. 75).

6. Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 56:2, Tanḥ. Va-yera' 46.

7. On Isaac carrying the wood, see Gen. R. 56:4, Tanḥ. Va-yera' 46.

8. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 163.

9. On *ʾ-k-d*, see Shab. 54a, Tam. 31b.

10. Exod. R. 2:12; cf. Gen. 46:2; Exod. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:10.

11. For a similar usage, cf. 1 Kings 17:24.

12. *ʾAyil ʾeḥad*, so LXX, Sam., Targ. Jon., Pesh., SyroP., Jub. 18:12f.; *ʾayil ʾaḥar*, so Targ. Onk., Sym., Vulg. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 98; C. Rabin, "Etymological Miscellanea," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8 (1961): 387.

13. For altar naming, cf. Gen. 16:14; 21:31; 28:19; 32:3.

14. Cf. Gen. 10:9.

15. For God swearing by Himself, cf. Isa. 45:23; Jer. 22:5; 49:13; Amos 6:8.

Chapter 23

E. Z. Melamed, "The Purchase of the Cave of Machpelah" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 14 (1942): 11–18; H. Petschow, "Die Neubabylonische Zweigesprächsurkunde und Genesis 23," JCS 19 (1965): 103–120; G. M. Tucker, "The Legal Background of Genesis 23," JBL 85 (1966): 77–84; R. Westbrook, "The Purchase of the Cave of Machpelah," *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971): 29–38; H. Reviv, "Non-Israelite Cities in the Bible," IEJ 27 (1977): 190–193.

1. So noted by Rashbam, Ramban, Bekhor Shor, Ḥizkuni.

2. For the formula-type, cf. Gen. 14:2, 3, 7, 8, 17. Num. 13:22; Deut. 9:2; Josh. 14:15; 21:11; Judg. 1:20 identify the Anakites as the aboriginal inhabitants.

3. So Ramban, Ehrlich; cf. Deut. 32:44.

4. Cf. Isa. 3:26; Jer. 4:2; Job 2:8, 13; Lam. 2:10.

5. Cf. vv. 9, 11, 13. For the meaning "to sell," cf. Gen. 25:34; Joel 4:3; Prov. 31:24. The multiple meaning appears also in 1 Kings 21:6. Comparison of 2 Sam. 24:21–24 with the parallel 1 Chron. 21:22–25 is instructive. Phoen. *ytn* and Akk. *nadānu* are similarly multivalent.

6. For 'aḥuzzah in this clear sense, cf. Lev. 14:34; 25:25–28, 41, 45f.; Josh. 21:12.

7. Cf. the prophetic lawsuit style in Isa. 1:2; Mic. 6:1f.; Jer. 2:4; and the admonitory Amos 4:1; 8:4.

8. *'Elohim* may here be used in a superlative sense; cf. Gen. 10:9; 30:8; Jon. 3:3; and the similar use of *'el* in Ps. 36:7; 80:11, and of *yah* in Jer. 2:31; Song of Sol. 8:6.

9. Cf. Gen. 34:2.

10. For Machpelah as a place-name, so Rashbam, Ramban, Sforno, Shadal. The meaning "twofold" is found in LXX, Vulg., Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., Jub. 19:5, and is so understood in Er. 53a, Gen. R. 49:31, Rashi, Ibn Ezra. For the other interments in the cave, see Gen. 25:9f.; 49:29ff.; 50:13.

11. Cf. Ziyyoni, Ehrlich.

12. The legal formula appears as *ana šim gamir, kaspu gammur, šimti-šu gamiriti* in Akk. documents, as *ldmy mgmr* in a Nabatean inscription (4th cent. C.E.), and as *dmyn gmrn* in an Aramaic deed of sale from Wadi Murabba'at (134 C.E.).

13. Cf. 2 Sam. 24:18–25; 1 Chron. 21:23.

14. Cf. Gen. 20:16; 37:28; Lev. 27:16; 1 Kings 16:24; Jer. 32:9.

15. Cf. Exod. 22:16; 1 Kings 20:39; Isa. 55:2; Jer. 32:9f.; Zech. 11:12. Akk. *šaqālu* has the same semantic range.

16. Cf. 25:9; 35:27; 49:30; 50:13.

17. Cf. Mish. BB 5:4 for such a practice in Second Temple times.

18. Cf. Lev. 25:30; 27:14, 19; Num. 30:5–6; Deut. 19:15; and the phrase *sharir ve-kayyam* as the closing formula of a legal document (BB 160b–161b).

19. So 25:10.

Chapter 24

N. Tucker, "Gen. 24" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 46 (1971): 326–338; W. Roth, "The Wooing of Rebecca," CBQ 34 (1972): 177–187; R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47–62; M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 131–152.

1. According to the chronological scheme of Genesis, Abraham is now 140 years of age (21:5; 25:20) and will live for another 35 years (25:7); cf. Gen. R. 62:6.

2. The wealth is referred to in vv. 10, 22, 30, 35, 36, 47, 53.

3. Cf. the status of Joseph, Gen. 39:4; Ps. 105:21; cf. 2 Sam. 12:17.

4. For holding a sacred object while taking an oath, cf. Shevu. 38b. D. M. C. Englert, "Bowdlerizing in the Old Testament," in *A Light Unto My Path*, ed. H. N. Beam *et al.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 143; R. D. Freedman, "'Put Your Hand Under My Thigh'—the Patriarchal Oath," BARev 112 (1976): 3–4, 42.

5. For thigh as euphemism, cf. Gen. 46:26; Exod. 1:5; Judg. 8:30. In favor of the circumcision association are Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 59:11, Tanḥ. B. Gen. 120, Yal. Gen. 106, Rashi, Shadal. It is rejected by Ibn Ezra, Radak, and Ḥizkuni.

6. For heaven and earth as witnesses, cf. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:29; 32:1; Isa. 1:2. The title "God of Heaven" is frequently employed in texts that derive from the Persian period; cf. Dan. 2:18f., 37; 44; Ezra 1:2 (= 2 Chron. 36:23); 5:11; 6:9f.; 7:12, 21, 23; Neh. 1:4f.; 2:4, 20; cf. also Jon. 1:9; Ps. 136:26. In none of these sources is the full formula found as it is here. It should be noted that the early-eighth-century Aram. inscription of Zakkur king of Hamath invokes "the gods of heaven" (ANET, p. 655), and in an Aram. letter discovered in Saqqara, Egypt, deriving from seventh/sixth century B.C.E., a deity is entitled "[lord] of heaven and earth" (KAI 266.1–2). The Phoenician god Baal was often called "Baal of heaven," *ba'al shamem* (Yehimilk, 10th cent. B.C.E., ANET, p. 653; Karatepe, 8th cent. B.C.E., ANET, p. 654).

7. For *l-k-ḥ* meaning marriage, cf. Gen. 25:20; 28:6; Deut. 22:13; 23:1; 24:5; etc. For the parent initiating the marriage transaction, cf. Gen. 21:21; 28:1f.; 34:4; 38:6; Judg. 14:2; cf. Hammurabi, par. 155 (ANET, p. 182).

8. So Abravanel. For the angel as the personification of God's providence, cf. Gen. 48:15f.; Exod. 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2; Ps. 34:8; 91:11.

9. For this usage, cf. Num. 32:22; Deut. 24:5; Josh. 2:20; 1 Kings 15:22.

10. Aram-naharaim appears also in Deut. 23:5; Judg. 3:8; Ps. 60:2; 1 Chron. 19:6. J. J. Finkelstein, "Mesopotamia," JNES 21 (1962): 73–92.

11. So Abravanel.

12. For the transposition, cf. Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak, Yehudah He-Ḥasid, Abravanel, Ḥizkuni, Tosafot to Ḥul. 95b.

13. Cf. Song of Sol. 3:4; 8:2.

14. So Radak.

15. For poetic *levanah,* cf. Isa. 24:23; 30:26; Song of Sol. 6:10.

16. For types of repetition, cf. Gen. 39:13–18; 41:1–7, 17–24; Exod. 25–28; 36–39; Num. 7; 27:18–23; 2 Kings 1:9–13.

17. So Ramban, Shadal.

18. So Shadal.

19. For the wedding gifts, cf. Hammurabi, par. 159f. (ANET, p. 173); Middle Assyrian laws A, par. 38 (ANET, p. 183).

20. For *yamim* as a year, cf. Rashi, Radak, based on Lev. 25:29; Num. 9:22.

21. So Rashbam, Radak.

22. For maids, cf. Exod. 2:5; 1 Sam. 25:42; cf. also Gen. 29:24, 29.

23. For *suaḥ* as "talking," so LXX, Aq., Sym., Vulg., Ramban, Ḥizkuni (ii); cf. Judg. 5:10; Prov. 6:22; Job 12:8. On *siaḥ* as "shrub," cf. Gen. 2:5, 21:15; so Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ḥizkuni (i). For "praying," so Targ. Jon., Targ. Onk., Ber. 26a, Gen. R. 60:14, Saadiah, Rashi, Ralbag, Abravanel, Sforno; cf. Ps. 55:3, 18; 77:4; 102:1; 142:3; Job 7:11, 13.

24. So Ibn Ezra, Ibn Janaḥ, Ḥizkuni.

25. Middle Assyrian laws A, pars. 40, 41 (ANET, p. 183). M. Tsevat, "The Husband Veils a Wife," JCS 27 (1975): 235–240.

26. Cf. Deut. 21:13; Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 3:3.

Chapter 25

1. J. A. Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934); W. Van Beek, "Frankincense and Myrrh in Ancient South Arabia," JAOS 78 (1958): 141–152; J. Simons, *The Geographic and Topographic Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959); W. F. Albright, "Midianite Donkey Caravans," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May,* ed. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 197–205; F. V. Winnet, "The Arabian Genealogies in the Book of Genesis," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament,* 171–196; M. Elat, *Economic Relations in the Lands of the Bible, ca. 1000–539 B.C.* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977), 98–123; I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982).

1. For the chronological details, see chap. 24, nn. to v. 1.

2. The promises are found respectively in 17:2, 4–6; 15:15; 17:19, 21; 21:12; and 16:10; 17:20; 21:13.

3. "Arab" first appears in the Bible in Isa. 13:20.

4. For Israel's relationships with the Midianites, see Num. 22:4, 7; 25:6–18; 31:1–20; Josh. 13:21; Judg. 6–9. The Israelite victory is mentioned in Isa. 9:3; 10:26; Ps. 83:10.

5. For Moses' relations with Midian, see Exod. 2:15f.; 3:1; 4:19; 18:1; Num. 10:29.

6. See Gen. 17:1, 3, 17.

7. Note that Bilhah is also both a "concubine" and a "wife" (30:4; 35:22; 37:2). For the tradition identifying Keturah with

Hagar, cf. Gen. R. 61:4, Targ. Jon.; so Rashi. This is rejected by Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni.

8. On Medan, cf. Gen. 37:36. For Badana, see ANET, pp. 283, 284; for Iasbuq, see ANET, p. 277; for Suhu, see ANET, pp. 275, 304, 482.

9. For Sheba, see ANET, p. 286; cf. Isa. 60:6; Jer. 6:20; Ezek. 27:22.

10. For the five Midianite "kings" or "chiefs," cf. Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:21; cf. also Num. 25:15, 18.

11. On the Ḥaiappā, see ANET, pp. 283, 284, 286.

12. On Apparu, see ANET, p. 299.

13. For Hammurabi's laws and the Middle Assyrian laws, see ANET, pp. 173, 183. For a parallel to the present case, cf. 2 Chron. 21:2.

14. On Kedem, cf. Comment to Gen. 2:8; 10:30. Gen. 28:2; 29:1; Num. 23:7 connect the term with the Aramean region; Judg. 6:3, 33; 7:15 connect it with the Midianites and Amalekites. For Sinuhe's reference, see ANET, pp. 20f.

15. Cf. Gen. 12:4; 21:4; 25:20, 26; cf. Gen. R. 62:6.

16. Cf. v. 17; Gen. 35:29; 49:29, 33; Num. 20:24, 26; 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50. Outside the Pentateuch, the standard idiom is "to lie down with one's fathers"; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Kings 1:21; etc.; cf. also Gen. 47:30; Deut. 31:16. No perceptible difference in meaning between the two can be determined. For poetic glimpses of the popular notions of the afterlife, cf. Isa. 14:9–11; Ps. 49:20; Job 3:13–19. H. C. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land, and Afterlife: A Biblical Complex," HUCA 44 (1973): 1–54.

17. For the order, cf. 1 Chron. 1:27.

18. Cf. Gen. R. 62:7.

19. For Heb. *ʿim* in this sense, cf. Gen. 35:4; Josh. 19:46; 1 Sam. 13:23.

20. The double caption is found again only in Gen. 36:9–10 and Num. 3:1–2.

21. For the Nabaiati, see ANET, p. 298; for Kedar, see Isa. 21:16f.; 42:11; 60:7; Jer. 2:10; 49:28; Ezek. 27:21; Ps. 120:5; Song of Sol. 1:5; ANET, pp. 298, 299, 300; for Idiba'il, see ANET, pp. 283, 284. J. R. Bartlett, "From Edomites to Nabataeans: A Study in Continuity," PEQ 111 (1979): 53–66.

22. For Dumah, see ANET, pp. 291, 299, 301, 305; for Massa, see ANET, p. 284; for Tema, see ANET, pp. 283, 284.

23. On the *ḥatserim*, cf. Josh. 13:23; 15, 19 *passim*. Several place-names composed of Hazar (= *ḥatser*) are located on the fringes of the Negeb. Hazar-addar (Num. 34:4), Hazar-gaddah (Josh. 15:27), Hazar-shual (Josh. 15:28), Hazar-susah (Josh. 19:5); cf. also Num. 34:9; Ezek. 47:16. A. Malamat, "Mari and the Bible," JAOS 82 (1962): 146f.

For the Jacob cycle, see N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 181–210; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 86–231; M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 40–62; G. A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 53–69.

24. Cf. 16:16, 17:25. So Rashbam.

25. Heb. *boʾakhah ʾashurah* looks very much like 1 Sam. 15:7 *boʾakha shur*.

26. For the symmetry with Ishmael's line, see Rashbam, who also notes the analogy with 1 Chron. 1:28.

27. On the redundancy, see Ramban.

28. The theme of Abrahamic paternity is noted by BM 87a, Targ. Onk., Rashi.

29. So B. Jacob.

30. So 28:2, 5–7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9, 26; 46:15; cf. 48:7. For *paddan* as a "field," see S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), *ad loc.*, and C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), *ad loc.* For Laban's hometown, see 27:43; 28:10; 29:4. For *paddan* as another name for Aram, see Skinner.

31. The blessing is found in 24:60.

32. The twenty years can be calculated from 25:20, 26.

33. The divine pledges are found in 17:19; 21:12.

34. The first explanation is that of Rashi, the second is by Ramban. For the construction, cf. v. 32; Jer. 6:20; Amos 5:18; Prov. 17:16. Cf. also UT Krt 282 *lm. ank. ksp*, "What need have I of silver?"

35. Cf. 1 Sam. 9:9; 1 Kings 14:1–5; 2 Kings 8:8; 22:18. In 2 Kings 1:2–5 the same technical expression is used in connection with a pagan god.

36. Note that the definite article is entirely lacking, a characteristic of early Heb. poetry.

37. The defectively written *tomim* for *teʾomim* may be intended to indicate that they were not identical twins, so Ḥizkuni.

38. For Heb. *rav*, "the older," cf. Job 32:9; cf. Akk. *rabu-ṣiḫru*, "older-younger."

39. For Seir as the Edomite homeland, see Gen. 33:14, 16; 36:8f., 21; Deut. 2 *passim*; Josh. 24:4. The redness of the land of Edom is noted in Gen. R. 36:17. On Enkidu, see Gilgamesh 1.2.36 (ANET, p. 74). On reddish skin as appropriate for a man, see C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 230f.

40. The derivation from Arab. *ghašiya* is noted by I. Eitan, *A Contribution to Biblical Lexicography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 57f.; and D. Yellin, "Hora'ot Nishkaḥot Le-Shorashim ʿIvriim," *Leshonenu* 1 (1928–1929): 19, who also points to Prov. 13:16 (cf. 12:23) and 26:28 (cf. 10:6). He also cites Isa. 32:6; Jer. 49:10; Obad. 6; Job 23:9 as further examples of *ʿ-s-ḥ* in the sense of "cover." Word play on Esau *ʿ-s-ḥ* is also found in Ezek. 35:6, 11, 14f.; cf. 25:14. Targ. Jon., Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor all derive the name from *ʿ-s-ḥ*.

41. The biblical texts on the first-born are Exod. 13:2, 12–15; 22:28; 34:19f.; Lev. 27:26f.; Num. 3:5–13; 8:5–19; 18:15–17; Deut. 15:19. For the Sumerian Hymn to Enlil, see ANET, p. 574; for the Mari text, see ANET, p. 545; for Nuzi, see ANET, p. 220. The Middle Assyrian law B, par. 1 is found in ANET, p. 185. See I. Mendelsohn, "On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son," BASOR 156 (1959): 38–40.

42. So Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni. The corresponding term *āšibūtu kúltari, āšibūt kuštari* is used in Akk. to characterize pastoral nomads (Speiser). Cf. ANET, p. 564.

43. So Rashbam.

44. So Ibn Ezra. Cf. Isa. 32:2; Ps. 63:2; 143:6, used of parched land.

45. Cf. Mish. Shab. 24:3, Shab. 155b, Ḥul. 55b, 58b, BK 69a.

46. So Ḥizkuni. See D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 193–200.

47. For the Edom-dam word play, cf. 2 Kings 3:8, 20, 22f.; Isa. 34:3, 5–7; Ezek. 35:1–7 (Seir); Joel 4:19, 21. For blood as the life-essence, cf. Lev. 17:11; Deut. 12:23.

48. The first interpretation is favored by Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak; the second by Sforno.

49. The pertinent texts are Gen. 23:18; 33:19; Josh. 24:32; 2 Sam. 24:24.

Chapter 26

R. Polzin, "The Ancestress of Israel in Danger," Semeia 3 (1975): 81–97; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 113–121.

1. Cf. Ps. 34:1 with 1 Sam. 21:11–16.

2. For *sh-k-n*, "to tent," cf. 9:27; 16:12; 25:18; 35:21. On *g-w-r*, see Comment to 12:10. The Heb. contains a word play on Gerar; cf. 20:1.

3. For *ʾerets* as "district, region," cf. Gen. 19:28; 22:2; Josh. 11:3; 1 Sam. 9:4–5; Ps. 42:7. For the idealized boundaries, cf. Exod. 23:31–33; Deut. 1:8; 11:24; Josh. 1:3–4; cf. also Judg. 3:1–3; and see Comment to 10:15.

4. Cf. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 28:14.

5. Cf. Lev. 26:46; Deut. 11:1; Ps. 19, 119.

6. Cf. Judg. 5:28; 2 Sam. 6:16; 2 Kings 9:30.

7. Cf. 17:17; 18:12; 21:6, 9.

8. On *'asham*, cf. especially Lev. 4, 5. See J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), especially 131ff.

9. Cf. the verbal form in Prov. 23:7. Postbiblical *sha'ar* means "estimate, proportion." On the Agricultural potentialities of the region, see E. Oren, "Ziglag—A Biblical City on the Edge of the Negev," BA 45 (1982): 157. On the mixed economy, see V. Matthews, *Pastoral Nomadism in the Mari Kingdom* (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1978); idem, "Pastoralists and Patriarchs," BA 44 (1981): 215–218.

10. On well names, cf. Deut. 10:6.

11. Cf. Ket. 93a, BK 9a, BM 14a, Shev. 31a.

12. Cf. Ps. 38:21; 71:13; 109:20, 29; Zech. 3:1.

13. On *hirhiv* in the sense of freeing from distress, cf. Ps. 4:2; 18:20, 37; 31:9; 118:5; 119:45. The phraseology may derive from some thanksgiving formula.

14. On Abraham's associations with Beer-sheba, see 22:19; 21:33; on Jacob's, see 46:1.

15. Cf. Exod. 14:31, and so some 36 times re Moses; for Caleb, see Num. 14:24; for David, 2 Sam. 3:18 and so some 30 times. On the righteous in general, see Isa. 54:17; Ps. 113:1; etc.

16. Targ. Onk., Gen. R. 64:8 (R. Nehemiah), Rashi, Rashbam treat *'ahuzzat* not as a proper noun but as a noun in construct from an absolute *'ahuzzah*, usually "possession," and here taken to mean "a company." LXX, Vulg., Pesh., Gen. R. 64:8 (R. Judah), Saadiah, Radak treat as proper noun. This is undoubtedly correct since *mere'ehu* is singular. Although the name Ahuzzath is unique, it follows the pattern of masculine names ending in *-at*, such as Goliath, Becorath (1 Sam. 9:1), and Genubath (1 Kings 11:20).

17. For the "king's friend," see 2 Sam. 15:37 (cf. v. 32); 16:16 (cf. v. 19); 1 Kings 4:6. See A. Van Selms, "The Origin of the Title 'The King's Friend,'" JNES 16 (1957): 118–123.

18. Cf. Num. 5:21–28; Deut. 29:11, 13, 20; Ezek. 16:59; 17:13, 18. H. C. Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), chap. 2.

19. Cf. Gen. 31:54; Exod. 24:11; 2 Sam. 3:20f.

20. Cf. Num. 25:12; Josh. 9:15; Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26.

21. LXX has *horkos*, which implies a Heb. text with *shevu'ah*. Aq., Sym., Vulg., Pesh. all render "abundance," apparently based on a reading *sov'ah*.

22. For the social convention, cf. Gen. 21:21; 24; 28:1f.; 34:4–6; 38:6; Josh. 15:16; Judg. 14:2–3; etc. For endogamy, cf. Gen. 10:24; 20:12; 24:3ff.; 28:1ff.; 29:19; Judg. 14:3; on the proscription of intermarriage, see Gen. 24:3; cf. Exod. 34:15f.; Deut. 7:3f.

Chapter 27

S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 35–47; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 97–112.

1. The relevant texts about Isaac's age are 25:20, 26; 26:34; 31:38.

2. For the figurative implication of Isaac's blindness, see Gen. R. 65:5.

3. Cf. vv. 15, 42. Only Jacob and Esau describe themselves as "first-born," vv. 19, 32.

4. The unique Heb. *teli* is rendered "sword" by Targ. Onk., Pesh., Rashi, Ibn Ezra (ii), Abraham b. Maimon; but LXX, Vulg., Targ. Jon., Ibn Ezra (i), Bekhor Shor, Radak all render "quiver," which fits the context much better. Saadiah's "weaponry," however, is supported by the Elephantine Papyri, Cowley 30, line 8 *tly*, which has a synonym *zny* in the parallel text 31, line 8.

5. The meal is mentioned in vv. 19, 25, 31, 33.

6. So vv. 19, 25, 31.

7. For this usage of Heb. *sh-m-'*, "to be listening," cf. 18:10.

8. Cf. 1 Sam. 23:18 and the reverse in Josh. 6:26.

9. Rashbam.

10. See Comment to 25:25. S. Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns," HUCA 46 (1975): 48.

11. Rashbam.

12. Cf. vv. 4, 9, 14.

13. For the pattern of tripartite blessing, cf. the priestly benediction of Num. 6:24–26.

14. For heaven as the supposed source of dew, cf. Deut. 33:13, 28; Hag. 1:10; Zech. 8:12; Prov. 3:20. The same appears in UT 6.27; *'nt* II.39–40; IV.87; cf. Arab. *talla*, "(the sky) rained fine rain." On the prayer of the High Priest, cf. TJ Yoma 5:3 (42c), Lev. R. 20:4, Tanh. B. 'Aharei Mot 3, p. 59, Pesik. 26:4 (Mandelbaum, p. 391); cf. Ta'an. 24b.

15. Cf. UT 49.VI.10–11, 14–15; Krt. 9; cf. Ps. 50:20; 69:9; Deut. 13:7; Judg. 8:19.

16. See Comment to 25:26 on the origin of the name. For *l-k-h*, "to purchase," cf. Gen. 20:3; Prov. 31:16; Neh. 5:3; so Ugar. *lqh* and Akk. *leqû*.

17. For the privative *min*, cf. 1 Sam. 15:23; Isa. 7:8; 17:1; 22:3; 23:1; 52:14; Jer. 48:2, 42; Mic. 3:6; Ps. 83:5; Prov. 30:2. For another case of deliberate ambiguity, cf. Gen. 40:13, 19.

18. The relevant texts are 2 Sam. 8:13–14; 1 Kings 11:14–22; 22:48; 2 Kings 8:20–22; 14:7; 16:6.

19. So Ramban; cf. Gen. 8:21, 1 Sam. 27:1.

20. Cf. Gen. R. 65:12, Deut. R. 1:14.

21. So Ramban.

22. See Hizkuni, Rashi, Rashbam; cf. 2 Sam. 14:7.

Chapter 28

F. O. Garcia-Treto, "Bethel: The History and Traditions of an Israelite Sanctuary" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1967); A. de Pury, *Promesse divine et légende cultuelle dans le cycle de Jacob*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975).

1. So Targums; cf. Gen. 48:4; 35:11. In 17:4–6 the reference is to other nations.

2. Cf. Josh. 24:4; contrast Gen. 35:29.

3. The calculation is as follows: Ishmael was Isaac's senior by 14 years (17:23–26; 21:5). Isaac was 60 when the twins were born (25:26), so Ishmael was 74 at the time. He died aged 137 (25:17) and thus lived on another 63 years after that event. But Jacob could not have been younger than 71 when he fled to Laban. This is clear from several texts. He was 130 when he migrated to Egypt (47:9) at which time Joseph was 39 (41:46; 45:6, 11). Jacob was thus 91 at the birth of Joseph, which event occurred either in the fourteenth or twentieth year of Jacob's service with Laban (30:25; 31:38, 41). This would make Jacob either 77 or 71 when he fled from Esau.

4. Cf. Targ. Jon. Interestingly, Pesh. here reads Basemath in place of Mahalath, whereas Sam. 36:3 has Mahalath in place of Basemath. Modern critical scholars ascribe the discrepancy to divergent traditions.

5. Celestial beings who patrol the earth are mentioned in Job 1, 2 and in Zech. 1:10f.

6. The Heb. can also yield ". . . upon/above it." The application of the preposition, whether to Jacob or the *sullam* was already a matter of dispute in rabbinic times, as recorded in Gen. R. 69:2. LXX, Vulg., Pesh., Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban all refer it to *sullam* (cf. Exod. 17:9; Amos 7:7). Saadiah refers it to Jacob (cf. Gen. 18:2; Exod. 18:14).

7. With vv. 13–14, cf. 13:15, the only other text in which *lekha 'ettnennah u-le-zar'akha* occurs. Unique to both texts are also the imagery of dust and the four directions (cf. 13:16, 14). On the other hand, the Nifal of *b-r-k* occurs only in 12:3.

8. So Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Radak.

9. Cf. Judg. 6:22–23; 13:22.

10. TJ Av. Zar. 4:4 (44a) defines it as a monolith. *Matsevot* are proscribed in Exod. 23:24; 34:13; Lev. 26:1; Deut. 7:5; 12:3; 16:21–22; cf. 2 Kings 34:14; Hos. 10:1–2; Mic. 5:12.

11. For anointing as a means of consecration of cultic objects, cf. Exod. 30:22–29; 40:9–11; Lev. 8:10–11; Num. 7:1. Hos. 12:2 may well be an example of the use of oil in an international treaty. Cf. also CAD, s.v. *naqû*, p. 339. J. J. Castelot, *Anointing in the Old Testament* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1950); T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah* (Lund: Gleerup, 1976), 185–232.

12. Cf. Gen. R. 69:7, "An almond tree stood at the entrance to the city." Arab. *laudha* means "to take refuge." Such a meaning may be behind Gen. R. 69:7, Sot. 46b that the angel of death had no control over Luz. For the change of place-name, cf. Num. 32:42; Deut. 3:14; etc. See also Gen. 14:2, 3, 7, 8, 17.

13. Modern critical scholars solve the problem by ascribing these vv. to E and vv. 13–16 to J.

14. For the formula "to be your/their God," cf. Gen. 17:7–8; Exod. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 45; Num. 15:41; Deut. 26:17; 29:12. The phrase is especially frequent in the prophets; cf. 2 Sam. 7:24; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; etc.

Chapter 29

D. Daube and R. Yaron, "Jacob's Reception by Laban," JSS 1 (1956): 60–62; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 123–134.

1. Rashi, Bekhor Shor, Radak (i), Sforno (ii), Akedat Yitshak (iii).

2. Cf. Num. 23:7, where *aram* parallels *kedem;* cf. Isa. 9:11 *aram mi-kedem.*

3. Cf. 24:47, 48, 50; 28:5; 31:53.

4. Cf. 31:38; 32:15.

5. Gen. R. 70:12 (i), Ramban (ii); cf. Gen. 18:1ff.

6. The stem *ʿ-y-d* occurs in vv. 15, 18, 20, 25, 27^2, 30. See 25:23; 27:29, 37, 40.

7. Cf. Akk. *litu, littu,* Arab. *laʾt,* "cow," Akk. *lēʾûtu,* "power, strength."

8. For lustrous eyes as a sign of beauty, cf. 1 Sam. 16:12; Song of Sol. 4:1, 9; Taʿan. 24a.

9. Cf. 1 Sam. 18:23–27. J. N. Postgate, "On Some Assyrian Ladies," Iraq 41 (1979): 93–103; H. J. Boecke, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and the Ancient East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 108f.

10. For "Laban the Aramean," cf. 25:20; 28:5; 31:20, 24.

11. So Gen. 34:7; 2 Sam. 13:12; cf. Gen. 20:9.

12. Cf. Gen. 25:23 for *tsaʿir.* The stem *b-k-r* is featured exactly seven times in the Jacob-Esau narratives: 25:31, 32, 33, 34; 27:19, 32, 36.

13. See Bekhor Shor, Radak, and Shadal. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 109.

14. So Radak.

15. So Rashbam.

16. For the pair *raʾah-shamaʿ*, cf. 16:11, 13.

17. Sam. as well as some medieval mss. read *karʾaha,a* "she called."

18. For the full form, cf. Ps. 28:7; 45:18; Neh. 11:17.

Chapter 30

J. Feliks, EncJud, s.v. "Biology," 1024–1027; D. Ashbel, "*ʿakuddim, nekuddim, beruddim,*" (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 23–24 (1965): 48–52; D. Etkin, "Jacob's Cattle and Modern Genetics: A Scientific Midrash," Tradition 7 (1965): 5ff.; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 134–151.

1. So Gen. R. 71:9, Rashi. Cf. Gen. 25:22; 27:46.

2. For *d-y-n,* "to vindicate," cf. Jer. 22:16; Ps. 43:1; 54:3; Prov. 31:9.

3. So Ibn Janaḥ, Radak. See note to 23:6.

4. Cf. the prophet Gad (2 Sam. 24:11), the names Gaddi (Num. 13:10, 11; 2 Kings 15:14, 17), Azgad (Ezra 2:12), Gadio in the Samaria ostraca (2:2; 6:16, 18), the Heb. seals with Abgad and Gadyahu, and the Phoen. names Abrgd, Mlkgd, Gdrm, Gdʿzyz, Gdnʿm. The *Kere baʾgad,* "luck has come," is the reading of the Targums, Pesh. and is so understood by Gen. R. 71:2, Rashi, Rashbam, Radak. The *Ketiv bgd* must mean "in/with luck," and is the reading of LXX, Vulg. It would be parallel to *be-ʾoshri,* "What fortune!" in v. 13.

5. Cf. Ps. 72:17; Prov. 31:28; Job 29:11; Song of Sol. 6:9.

6. Cf. Exod. 23:15; 34:22; Judg. 15:1; 1 Sam. 21:9; Ruth 1:22; Amos 7:1.

7. For *dodim,* "love," cf. Ezek. 16:8; 23:7; Prov. 7:18. See J. Feliks, *Plant World of the Bible* (Hebrew) (Ramat Gan: Masada, 1976), 192; but see M. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 188f.

8. Cf. 19:32, 33, 34, 35; 26:10; 34:2, 7; 35:22; 39:7, 10, 12, 14.

9. The Masoretic traditions and medieval Heb. mss. record no fewer than six variant vocalizations. W. F. Albright, "Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century B.C.," JAOS 74 (1954): 227; E. Wiesenberg, "The Pronunciation of the Name Issachar, Its Vocalizations, and Translations" (Hebrew), *Ha-Maʿayan* (Tishrei, 1967): 71–80.

10. Cf. the names Zabad (1 Chron. 2:36), Zabdi (Josh. 7:1), Zabdiel (Neh. 11:14), Zebadiah (Ezra 8:8), Zebadiah(u) (1 Chron. 16:2).

11. In 1 Kings 8:13 = 2 Chron. 6:2, *zevul* means "stately house"; cf. Isa. 63:15 "height"; Hab. 3:11 "height"; Ps. 49:15 "nobility"; cf. Ugar. *zbl,* "prince"; Akk. *zabālu,* "to carry, lift up."

12. For this anticipatory technique, see Comment to 9:18.

13. For this use of *shillaḥ,* cf. Exod. 21:26f.; Deut. 15:12, 13, 18; 21:14; Jer. 34:9, 10, 11, 14, 16; 50:33; cf. Isa. 58:6.

14. For "learn by experience," see Targ. Onk., Gen. R. 73:6. Akk. *nuḫšu,* "abundance, prosperity" probably explains Ezek. 16:36 *neḫushtekh.* See N. M. Waldman, "A Note on Genesis $30:27^b$," JQR (1964): 164f.; W. Chomsky, "The Case of Genesis $30:27^b$," JQR 55 (1965): 365f.; J. J. Finkelstein, "An Old Babylonian Herding Contract and Genesis 31:38f," JAOS 88 (1968): 34 n. 19; M. Greenberg, "*NHŠTK* (Ezek. 16:36): Another Hebrew Cognate of Akkadian *naḫāšu,*" in *Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of J. J. Finkelstein,* ed. Maria de Jong Ellis (Hamden: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977), 85–86.

15. For white sheep, cf. Isa. 1:18; Ps. 147:16; Song of Sol. 4:2; 6:6; Dan. 7:9. For black goats, cf. Song of Sol. 4:1; 6:5. Cf. Akk. *pesû,* "white," in contrast to *ṣalmu,* "black," both referring to sheep.

Chapter 31

J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 151–196.

1. For ten as a rhetorical number, cf. Lev. 26:26; Num. 14:22; Job 19:3; Neh. 4:6.

2. For *y-n-ḥ,* "to maltreat, oppress," cf. Exod. 22:20; Lev. 19:33; 25:14, 17; Deut. 23:17; etc., especially Isa. 49:26; so Bekhor Shor.

3. The legal formula *hintsil* appears in the Elephantine Papyri with *n-t-n* in CAP 8.18–19 and with *y-ḥ-v* in 18.2–3 and in BAP 6.14–15; 7.41–42; 10.9–10. J. Greenfield, "*Našû-nadānu*

and Its Congeners," in *Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of J. J. Finkelstein*, ed. Maria de Jong Ellis (Hamden: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1977), 90f.

4. Cf. Gen. 16:13; 29:31; 31:42; Exod. 3:7, 9; 4:31.

5. So Targums and LXX. For the definite article with a noun in the construct state, cf. Gen. 2:16–17; 24:67; Exod. 39:23; Num. 21:14; 34:2; Josh. 14:5; 2 Kings 23:17; 25:11.

6. For the festivities at sheepshearing time, cf. Gen. 38:12ff.; 1 Sam. 25:2, 8, 11; 2 Sam. 13:23–28.

7. For the Nuzi text, see ANET, pp. 219f. For their cultic role, cf. Judg. 17:5; 18:14, 17, 18, 20. For their divinatory role, see 1 Sam. 15:26; Ezek. 21:26; Zech. 10:2. Cf. Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni. See M. Greenberg, "Another Look at Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim," JBL 81 (1962): 239–248; H. A. Hoffner, "Hittite *Tarpiš* and Hebrew Teraphim," JNES 27 (1968): 61–68.

8. See Comment to 22:4.

9. Cf. Gen. 20:3; Num. 22:9–12, 20.

10. Cf. Gen. 4:10; 12:18; 20:19; 26:10; 29:15; Exod. 14:11; Num. 23:11; Judg. 15:11.

11. ANEP, no. 188 (pp. 59, 271).

12. Cf. Exod. 23:2, 3, 6; 25:1–2; Deut. 19:17.

13. So Ramban, Sforno.

14. Cf. Isa. 2:4; 11:3–4; Amos 5:10; Job 9:33; 1 Chron. 12:7.

15. Cf. Hammurabi, pars. 263, 266; Exod. 22:11; Amos 3:12.

16. So Akk. CAD, s.v. *ḫâtu*. S. E. Loewenstamm, "'ānoki' 'aḥaṭṭānnā," *Leshonenu* 29 (1965): 69–70; S. M. Paul, "Unrecognized Biblical Legal Idioms in the Light of Comparative Akkadian Expressions," in *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 93f.; idem, RB 86 (1979): 237–239; J. N. Postgate, "Some Old Babylonian Shepherds and Their Flocks," JSS 20 (1975): 1–21; C. Mabee, "Jacob and Laban: The Structure of Judicial Proceedings," VT 30 (1980): 192–207.

17. In other compound phrases with *paḥad*, the second term expresses the cause or source of the fear, not its object: cf. 1 Sam. 11:7; Ps. 36:2; 64:2; 91:5; Prov. 1:33; Esther 8:17; 9:3. Further, *paḥad* itself almost always denotes fear in the primitive sense, not reverence or awe. The sole exceptions are Hos. 3:5; Ps. 119:161; so Ben Sira 7:29; 41:12. Nor is the title analogous to such names as *'avir ya'akov*, "The Mighty One of Jacob" (Gen. 49:24), or *kedosh ya'akov/yisra'el*, "The Holy One of Jacob/Israel" (Isa. 29:23; 1:4), where the noun expresses an inherent attribute of God. In view of the several Aramaisms that characterize this chapter, *paḥad* may well be the Heb. rendering of Aram. *daḥla'*, "fear, object of reverence"; cf. Targums, Pesh., all of which employ *dḥl*. For an analogue of *paḥad* as a divine title, cf. Ps. 76:12 *(ha-)mora'*, "The Awesome One." See D. R. Hillers, "*Paḥad Yiṣḥāq*," JBL 91 (1972): 90–91.

18. It is to be noted that 1QIs[a] to Isa. 33:8 reads *'dym* for *'rym//berit*. For the interchange of *berit* with *'edut*, cf. Exod. 25:22 with Josh. 3:6 and Exod. 31:18 with Deut. 9:9. See M. Parnas, "*'Edut, 'Edot, 'Edwot* in the Bible against the Background of Ancient Near Eastern Documents" (Hebrew), *Shnaton* 1 (1975): 235–246.

19. So Targ. Jon., Radak, Bekhor Shor. For "denial of conjugal rights," see Yoma 77a–b, Ket. 47b, Saadiah, Rashi, Ḥizkuni; Ibn Ezra regards this as untenable.

20. Cf. Gen. 26:30; Exod. 24:11.

Chapter 32

G. A. Danell, *Studies in the Name of Israel in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Appelbergs boktryckeri, 1946); Y. Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-'emunah ha-yisre'elit*, vols. 6–7 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1947–1948), 134–137; M. H. Segal, *Masoret u-Bikkoreth* (Jerusalem: Kiriat Sefer, 1957), 61–75; F. Van Trigt, "La signification de la lutte de Jacob près du Yabboq, Gen. XXXII 23–33," OS 12 (1958): 280–309; H. L. Ginsberg, "Hosea's Ephraim, More Fool than Knave," JBL 80 (1961): 339–347; J. L. McKenzie, CBQ 25 (1963): 71–76; J. R. Bartlett, "The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Edom," PEQ 104 (1972): 26–37; A. de Pury, *Promesse divine et légende cultuelle dans le cycle de Jacob* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1975), 1:92ff.; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 197–223, 230f.; S. Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns," HUCA 46 (1976): 50–54; B. Dinur, *Historical Writings* (Hebrew), vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1977), 18–45.

1. Josh. 21:36; 2 Sam. 2:4, 8, 12, 29; 17:24, 27–29; 19:33; 1 Kings 2:8; 4:14.

2. Cf. Gen. 14:6; 33:14; 36:8f., 30; Deut. 2:4, 12.

3. 25:25, 27, 29, 30; 27:11.

4. So noted by Ramban. See O. Pardee, "An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography," JBL 97 (1978): 321–246.

5. Gen. R. 7:2, 11, Sot. 41b; cf. Ramban.

6. So Sforno, Hoffmann.

7. Cf. the lists in Gen. 12:16; 24:35; Job 1:3; 42:12. The phrase "I send this message," literally "I send to tell," without a direct object, occurs in Lachish letter 3.1–2.

8. Cf. Gen. 24:65; Josh. 9:11; 2 Kings 8:9 with 1 Kings 20:27; 2 Kings 23:29.

9. For *minḥah* as a gift, cf. Gen. 43:11, 15, 25f.; as tribute paid by a vassal, cf. 2 Sam. 8:2, 6; 1 Kings 5:1.

10. The etymology of *va-ye'avek* has not been satisfactorily explained. It has been variously rooted in *'avak*, "dust," i.e., "to kick up dust," so Rashi (i), Ibn Ezra, Radak, and in *ḥavak*, "to entangle, clasp," so Rashi (ii), Ramban. The suggestion of word play is found in Mid. Sekhel Tov 1.173.

11. Cf. Prov. 3:4; Dan. 6:8, 13.

12. Other than Gen. 36:31, which also appears in an Esau-Edomite context, 42:5; 45:21; 46:5, 8 all refer to the sons of Jacob.

Chapter 33

1. See ANET, pp. 483ff.; El-Amarna 52.3–4; 55.3. The same is found in Akk. and Ugar. letters from Ugarit. PRU 5.60; UT 89.6–11; 2063.5–8; 2115. rev. 5–8. S. E. Loewenstamm, "Prostration from Afar in Ugaritic, Accadian, and Hebrew," BASOR 188 (1967): 41–43.

2. With the present description, cf. Gen. 29:11; 45:14f.; 46:29; Exod. 4:27.

3. The dots above each letter of Hebrew *va-yishakehu* are a scribal device, also used by the Alexandrian scholars for Greek texts, to draw attention to something unusual. Gen. R. 78:12 records rabbinic difference of opinion as to the sincerity of Esau's actions. The same is to be found in ARN[1] 34, ARN[2] 37, and Sifrei 1. S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 44.

4. Cf. "servant" v. 14, "my lord" vv. 8, 13, 14[2], 15.

5. So Rashi, Radak.

6. For a similar hyperbole, cf. 2 Sam. 14:20; so Radak. For not visiting a shrine emptyhanded, cf. Exod. 23:15, 17; 34:20, 23; Deut. 16:16; so Gen. R. 78:15, Bekhor Shor, Ḥizkuni, Sforno, Shadal. For the idiom of being admitted to the presence, cf. Gen. 43:3, 5; 44:23, 26; Exod. 10:28–29; 2 Sam. 14:24, 28, 32; Job 33:26.

7. For *berakhah* as "gift," cf. Josh. 15:19; Judg. 1:15; 1 Sam. 25:27; 30:26; 2 Kings 5:15. The fivefold *minḥah*, Gen. 32:14, 19, 21, 22; 33:10.

8. For *n-ḥ-l* in this sense, cf. Isa. 40:11; 49:10; Ps. 23:2.

9. So Ibn Janaḥ, Ibn Ezra, Radak; cf. 1 Sam. 15:9.

10. For the tradition of an eighteen-month stay, see SOR 2, Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 78:20, Meg. 17a.

11. "Safe and sound," so Gen. R. 79:3, 5, Shab. 33b, Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., Samuel b. Hofni, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak,

Sforno; the village of Salim, so LXX, Vulg., Pesh., Jub. 30:1, Rashbam, Ḥizkuni; cf. Gen. 14:18.

12. Cf. Num. 21:26; Esther 3:15; 8:15 for the construction.

13. Josh. 24:32 repeats the detail. The meaning "lamb" is that of LXX, Targ. Onk., Gen. R. 79:9, Vulg., Pesh., Saadiah, Samuel b. Hofni, Bekhor Shor and is found in the Qumran Targum to Job 42:11. For the meaning "Jewelry," see Targ. Jon., Targ. Yer.; cf. Job 42:11 where the term goes together with "a gold ring"; see Comment to 24:22.

14. For *va-yatsev* with *matsevah,* cf. Gen. 35:14, 20; 2 Sam. 18:18; 2 Kings 17:10. For its use with other memorial markers, cf. 1 Sam. 15:12; 2 Sam. 18:17; Jer. 31:21; 1 Chron. 18:3.

15. Cf. Gen. 35:7; Exod. 17:15; Judg. 6:24; Ezek. 48:35.

Chapter 34

Y. Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-'emunah ha-yisre'elit,* vols. 1–3 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1937–1947), 178, 194, 739; vols. 4–5, 306f.; E. Nielsen, *Shechem: A Tradition-Historical Investigation* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1955, reprint 1959); A. Van Selms, "The Canaanites in the Book of Genesis," OS 12 (1958): 200–202; G. E. Wright, *Shechem* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1965); H. Reviv, "The Government of Shechem in the El-Amarna Period and in the Days of Abimelech," IEJ 16 (1966): 252–257; M. Haran, "Schechem Studies" (Hebrew), *Zion* 38 (1973): 1–31; M. Sternberg, "Delicate Balance in the Story of the Rape of Dinah" (Hebrew), *Ha-Sifrut* 4 (1973): 193–231; B. Mazar, *Canaan and Israel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), 144–151; E. F. Campbell, "Two Amarna Notes: The Shechem City-State and Amarna," in *Magnalia Dei: Essays in Honor of George Ernest Wright,* ed. F. M. Cross *et al.* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 39–54.

1. The details of the chronological problem are as follows: Jacob found himself married to Leah at the end of the seventh year of a twenty-year term of service with Laban (29:20–23; 31:41). Since Dinah was Leah's seventh child (30:21), she must have been born, at the earliest, six years before Jacob headed home, although 29:35 suggests she was very likely not more than five years old at the time. If we allow for a two-year interval until Jacob arrived at Shechem, Dinah would have been seven or eight. Simeon and Levi, Leah's second and third sons, who slaughter all the males in the city, would have been respectively fourteen and thirteen. It should be noted that Jacob refers to the tender age of his children when he meets with Esau (33:13). All this makes it hardly likely that the events of this chapter occurred soon after the arrival at Shechem. According to 30:22, Joseph and Dinah were about the same age. When Joseph was sold into slavery, he was seventeen years old (37:2), by which time the family had moved away from Shechem. This allows for a ten-year interim between Jacob's arrival in Shechem and his latest possible departure, sufficient time for Dinah to have become a mature young lady and her two brothers, grown men.

2. So Ramban.

3. Cf. postbiblical *yots'et ba-ḥuts, yats'anit,* "a wanton woman, a gadabout"; Akk. *waṣû,* "to exhibit promiscuous behavior"; Aram. *nafka'/h* (lit. "she who goes out"), "a prostitute"; cf. Rashi, "she was a gadabout."

4. So 27:46; 28:1, 6, 8.

5. For Khu-sebek, see ANET, p. 230; for El-Amarna, EA 289.22–24, see ANET, p. 489 *(māt šakmi).* The usual title is "king," Gen. 14:2, 18; 20:2; 26:1; Num. 20:14; 21:1, 21, 26, 33; 22:9; especially Josh. 12 *passim.* For *nasi'* as tribal chief, cf. Gen. 17:20; 25:16; Num. 1:16; 7:2; 25:18; Josh. 13:21. The frequent use of *nasi'* in Ezekiel (12:10; 19:1; 21:17; 27:21; 32:29; etc.) is a special case resulting from contemporary geopolitical realities and his own ideology.

6. Heb. *va-ye'anneha.* The stem denotes maltreatment, humiliation, as is clear from Gen. 15:13; 16:6; 31:50; Exod. 1:11–13; 22:21–22. It is especially used in connection with sexual offenses; cf. Deut. 21:14; 22:24, 29; Judg. 20:5; 2 Sam. 13:12, 14, 22. A rabbinic tradition in Yoma 77b, Gen. R. 80:4 interprets the present usage as implying unnatural intercourse. Note that the order of the second two verbs is the reverse of that in 2 Sam. 13:14.

7. Cf. Gen. 21:21; 24:1–4; 28:8f.; 38:6; Josh. 15:16f.; Judg. 4:2; 1 Sam. 18:17, 19, 21, 27; 25:44.

8. For *l-k-ḥ,* "to take a wife," cf. 19:14; 24:3, 4, 7, 37, 38, 40, 67; 25:1; 27:46; 28:2, 6, 9; 38:1.

9. Cf. Judg. 14:7; 1 Sam. 25:39; Song of Sol. 8:8.

10. So Josephus, Ant. 1.21.1 (Loeb, p. 163). Gen. R. 80:5 raises the possibility of connecting the phrase with the following clause, thus interpreting the text to mean that the brothers only heard about the affair when they happened to return home.

11. Cf. Deut. 22:21; Josh. 7:15; Judg. 19:23–24; 20:6, 10; 2 Sam. 13:12; Jer. 29:23.

12. So Gen. R. 80:5, Rashi.

13. Targums, LXX, Vulg., "trade."

14. Cf. Targ. Jon., "We shall take by force."

15. So Joseph Kara, Ḥizkuni.

16. The first possibility is supported by LXX, Gen. R. 80:9, Rashi, Radak, the second by Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Shadal; cf. Judg. 8:11; 18:27; Ezek. 30:9.

17. Cf. Gen. R. 80:10. For the verb, cf. Josh. 6:18; 7:25; 1 Sam. 14:29; 1 Chron. 2:7.

18. So Rashbam; cf. Exod. 5:21.

Chapter 35

J. Muilenburg, "The Birth of Benjamin," JBL 75 (1956): 194–201; M. Tsevat, "Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel," JSS 3 (1958): 237–243; idem, and "Studies in the Book of Samuel," HUCA 33 (1962): 107–118; U. Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Baal in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 114ff.; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 231–236; Y. Zakovitz, "Genesis 35:4," *Beth Mikra* 80 (1980): 30–37.

1. Cf. Exod. 24:24; Deut. 17:8; 1 Sam. 1:3; Isa. 2:3 = Mic. 4:2; Jer. 31:6; Ps. 24:3; 122:4.

2. Cf. Josh. 24:14, 23; Judg. 10:16; 1 Sam. 7:3, 4; 2 Chron. 33:15.

3. Cf. *ben nekhar,* Gen. 17:2; Isa. 56:3, 6. In Gen. 31:30, 32, the *terafim* are termed "gods."

4. For the impurity of idols, cf. Deut. 7:25–26; Isa. 30:22; Jer. 2:23; 7:30; 32:34; Ezek. 5:11; 20:7, 18, 30, 31; 22:3; 36:18, 25; 37:23; cf. Mish. Shab. 9:1, Av. Zar. 3:6. Targ. Jon., Bekhor Shor see the pollution as corpse defilement; cf. Num. 9:11–16; 31:19–20.

5. Cf. Gen. 41:14; Lev. 6:4; 16:23–24; 2 Sam. 12:20; Ezek. 44:19; Zech. 3:3–5. For the laundering, cf. Lev. 11, 13–17; Num. 8:7, 21; 19; 31:24.

6. The corresponding Aram. and Syr. for Heb. *nezem* is *kedasha',* literally "holy object," so Targ. Onk. and Targ. Jon., which latter adds, "on which were portrayed types of images."

7. Cf. Exod. 32:30; Deut. 9:21; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4; 1 Chron. 14:12.

8. 28:10–19; 31:13; 35:1.

9. Targ. Jon., Bekhor Shor, Radak, Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni all prefer "angels."

10. Rashi, Bekhor Shor, Ḥizkuni, Radak all refer to 27:45. This is unlikely. When Joseph was 39, Jacob was 130, as can be calculated from 41:46, 53, 54; 45:6; 47:9. Hence, Jacob was 91 when Joseph was born in Haran. Jacob was born 20 years after Rebekah's marriage, 25:20, 26. Thus at least 100 years had passed since Deborah, presumably then an adult, attended Rebekah at her marriage.

11. Sennacherib's Bit Kutalli inscription, col. 6, lines 76–79. D. D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 130.

12. The ancient versions give no help. The medieval exegetes and lexicographers were divided as to whether the initial consonant belongs to the root or is a preposition. Menahem b. Saruk, Ibn Janaḥ, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Ḥizkuni take the stem to be *k-v-r*, "to be much, many"; i.e. *kivrat 'erets* means "much land," but this is not supported by the contexts in which the phrase is found. Dunash, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban understand *k+brt*. In favor of the latter is Akk. *beru*, "a mile, a double hour"; ca. Saadiah, "a mile," Pesh. *parasang*.

13. Cf. 1 Sam. 4:20.

14. For *'on*, "sorrow," cf. Deut. 26:14; Hos. 9:4; cf. stem *'-n-ḥ*, "to lament," in Isa. 3:26; 19:18; 29:2; Lam. 2:5, so Targ. Onk., Targ. Jon., LXX, Vulg., Gen. R. 82:10, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban. For *'on*, "vigor," cf. Gen. 49:3; Deut. 21:17; Isa 40:26, 29; Hos. 12:4; Ps. 78:51; 105:36; Job 40:16. Curiously, Ono is a place-name in the territory of Benjamin: Ezra 2:33; Neh. 6:2; 7:37; 11:35; 1 Chron. 8:12.

15. For *yamin* as power, etc., cf. Exod. 15:6, 12; Isa. 41:10; Ps. 18:36; 21:9; 20:7; etc. For right hand as south, cf. 1 Sam. 23:19, 24; Ezek. 16:46; Ps. 89:13. Curiously, the only left-handed people in the Bible are Benjaminites; cf. Judg. 3:15; 20:16. For plural *yamin*, "days," cf. Dan. 12:13. Heb. masculine plural *-in* in place of *-im* occurs in Judg. 5:10; 1 Kings 11:33; 2 Kings 11:13; Ezek. 4:5; 29:18; Prov. 31:3; etc. Especially instructive is Mic. 3:12 in comparison with Jer. 26:18. The *-in* ending is regular in Moabite.

16. Cf. 2 Chron. 26:19.

17. As was demonstrated in the note to Gen. 28:6–9, Jacob was 91 at the birth of Joseph. According to 37:2, Joseph was 17 when he was sold to Egypt, thus making Jacob 108 at the time. Since Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born (25:26), Isaac would then have been 168, so that he lived on another 12 years after the sale of Joseph. See also Comment to 27:1.

18. So noted by Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Ibn Ezra, Radak.

Chapter 36

H. M. Orlinsky, "The Tribal System of Israel and Related Groups in the Period of the Judges," OrAnt 1 (1962): 11–20; J. R. Bartlett, "The Edomite King-List of Genesis XXXVI.31–39 and 1 Chron. 1.43–50," JTS, n.s., 16 (1965): 301–314; idem, "The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Edom," PEQ 104 (1972): 26–37; A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," JAOS 88 (1968): 163–173; T. J. Prewitt, "Kinship Structures and Genesis Genealogies," JNES 40 (1981): 87–98.

1. Cf. Phoen. names *'hlb'l, 'hlmlk;* Sabean *'hl'l, 'hl'ttr;* Thamudi *'hln*.

2. Cf. Ugar. *bn'n, 'nil, hd'n;* El-Amarna *bin-Ana*.

3. So Saadiah, but Ramban takes the phrase in the same way as the Pesh. LXX and Sam. read, "From the land of Canaan," an unlikely restoration.

4. For Teman=Edom, cf. Jer. 49:7, 20; Ezek. 25:13; Amos 1:12; Ob 9; Hab. 3:3; Zech. 6:6.

5. *'Alluf* appears in Zech. 9:7; 12:5–6 as an archaism and certainly means "clans" there. For *'elef* as a subdivision of a tribe, cf. Josh. 22:14, 21, 30; Judg. 6:14; 1 Sam. 10:19; 23:23; Mic. 5:1; and probably also Num. 1:16; 10:4, 36.

6. LXX, Aq., Pesh. simply transliterated. The rendering "mule" is that of the Targ. Jon., TJ Ber. 8:6(12b), Gen. R. 82, and is implicit in Ḥul. 7b, Pes. 54a. This is followed by Sherira Gaon, Saadiah, Ibn Janaḥ, Rashi, Ramban, and Radak. Targ. Onk., followed by Rashbam, took it to mean "heroes."

7. Heb. *m-l-k* with *b* indicates the place where he ruled, not "over which." That is expressed by *'al*. Cf. Judg. 4:2; 2 Sam. 5:5; 1 Kings 2:11; 11:37; 2 Chron. 9:30. (In 1 Kings 14:21 the emphasis is on the king in Judah as opposed to the one in Israel.)

8. For Bozrah=Edom, cf. Isa. 34:6; 63:1; Jer. 49:13.

9. For the habitat of the Midianites, cf. Exod. 3:1; 18:1; Num. 10:29–31; 31:2–3; Judg. 6; 7:25; 8:18–19. For their connection with Moab, cf. Num. 22:1–7; 25:6–7.

10. Cf. 10:11; 26:22.

Chapter 37

J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvaine: Publications Universitaires, 1959); N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 211–227; D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970); M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972); E. I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1973); G. W. Coats, "Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50," JBL 93 (1974): 15–21; idem, "From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story," CBQ Monograph Series 4, 1976; R. Alter, "Joseph and His Brothers," *Commentary* (Nov. 1980): 59–69; idem, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 155–177; E. L. Greenstein, "An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives," ed. K. R. R. Gros Louis, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 114–125; G. A. Rendsburg, The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 79–97.

1. Contrast 36:6–8.

2. The pertinent passages for calculating the chronology are Gen. 37:2; 41:46, 48; 45:6; 47:28; 25:26; 35:28.

3. See Comment to 2:4. *Toledot* here is parallel to 36:9.

4. Cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7.

5. Cf. Exod. 33:11; 1 Sam. 20:35f.

6. Cf. 29:24, 29.

7. So Rashbam. In light of the equivalent *yeled zekunim* in 44:20, (cf. 21:2, 7; 24:36) the unique Heb. phrase *ben zekunim* can have no other meaning than this. It can hardly mean "a wise/mature son," as Targ. Onk. has it, or "a son who would care for his aged father," as Ramban takes it.

8. Josephus, Ant. 2.2.1 (Loeb, p. 17).

9. For *lḥš psm*, see UT 1112.5. See ANEP, 17, no. 52; 256, no. 52; W. F. Albright, "From the Patriarchs to Moses," BA 36 (1973): 31f.

10. So Shadal; cf. Tanḥ. B. Gen. 180. For the verb *y-k-l* with a direct object, cf. Isa. 1:13; Hos. 8:5; Ps. 101:5. For the previous dreams in Genesis, see 15; 20:3; 28:12–15; 31:10–13, 24.

11. Heb. *va-yosifu* may be word play on the name *yosef*.

12. So Radak, Shadal.

13. For dreams in pairs, see Gen. 40:5; 41:1, 5. For idle dreams, cf. Jer. 23:25ff.; Zech. 10:2. See A. L. Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956).

14. Cf. 15:5; 22:17; etc.

15. So Ramban, Shadal.

16. So Gen. R. 84:10; Rashi, Ibn Ezra.

17. See 42:6; 43:26; 44:14.

18. So Targ. Jon., Joseph Kara, Rashbam.

19. Cf. Gen. 23:11, 17, 19f. See Gen. R. 84:13, Sot. 11a, LXX to 23:2 reads: "the city of Arbok, which is in the valley, the same is Hebron. . . ."

20. Cf. 2 Kings 6:13f. See J. P. Free, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Dothan."

21. For cisterns as places of detention, cf. Gen. 40:15; Jer. 38:6; as burial sites, cf. 2 Kings 10:14; Jer. 41:7.

22. So Hoffmann.

23. Cf. Jer. 38:6.

24. Cf. Gen. 43:11, 25, 31–32.

25. Cf. Jer 8:22; 46:11; Ezek. 27:17. M. Ottosson, *Gilead: Tradition and History* (Lund: Gleerup, 1969).

26. Cf. 43:8–10; 44:16–34.

27. Cf. Ezek. 21:37; Job 16:18; Isa. 26:21; Ezek. 24:7f.

28. Cf. Isa. 58:7; Neh. 5:5.
29. Cf. Gen. 35:22; 1 Sam. 17:23; Judg. 42:21.
30. Cf. Hammurabi, pars. 116, 214, 252.
31. Cf. v. 34; Job 1:20. For gashing the flesh, see Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1.
32. Cf. Gen. 5:24.
33. So Rashi.
34. So Rashbam.
35. So Shadal.
36. Cf. 1 Kings 7:18.
37. So Radak.
38. Cf. Gen. 46:15; Ruth 1:11.
39. Cf. Num. 16:32–33; Prov. 9:18; Isa. 38:10; Job 3:13–19; 10:21–22; Ps. 31:18; 94:17; Job 7:9; Prov. 2:19.
40. So Rashi; cf. Targ. Jon.
41. Rashi: cook; Targums, Ibn Ezra, Ramban: executioner; cf. 2 Kings 25:8ff.; Jer. 39:9ff.; Dan. 2:14, where the officer is chief of the guards.

Chapter 38

R. de Vaux, "Patriarches hébreux et découvertes modernes," RB 56 (1949): 30–32; M. Tsevat, "Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel," JSS 3 (1958): 237–243; M. C. Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule," JBL 85 (1966): 185–196; S. Belkin, "Levirate and Agnate Marriage in Rabbinic and Cognate Literature," JQR 60 (1970): 275–329; G. W. Coats, "Widow's Rights: A Crux in the Structure of Gen. 38," CBQ 34 (1972): 461–466; J. A. Emerton, "Some Problems in Gen. 38," VT 25 (1975): 338–361; J. Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong?" JBL 96 (1977): 27–44.

1. Cf. Gen. 21:22. For the chronology, see 37:1; 41:46; 45:11.
2. See Josh. 12:7, 15; 15:20, 35; 1 Sam. 22:1–2; 2 Sam. 23:13.
3. Gen. 46:10; Exod. 6:15. For *kena'an* as "merchant," cf. Hos. 12:8; Prov. 31:24.
4. Cf. 49:3. See 35, n. 14.
5. Cf. Deut. 28:57.
6. See Josh. 15:44. For Shelanites, see Num. 26:20; for Achzib, see Josh. 15:44; cf. Mic. 1:14f. For the meaning "deceive, disappoint," cf. 2 Kings 4:16, 28. For word play, see Sforno; cf. Targ. Jon.
7. Cf. 21:21; 24.
8. Cf. 2 Sam. 13:1; 14:14.
9. See Yev. 24a on Deut. 25:6.
10. Cf. Lev. 22:13; Ruth 1:8.
11. Cf. 1 Sam. 25:11, 36; 2 Sam. 13:23, 28.
12. Cf. 2 Sam. 14:2, 5; Isa. 54:4.
13. Cf. Josh. 15:34; see Sot. 10a.
14. Cf. Lev. 24:14; Deut. 17:5; 22:21, 24.
15. So Radak.
16. Sam., Pesh., Targ. Jon. read here, "she called."
17. For the stem *z-r-ḥ*, cf. 2 Kings 3:22; so Rashbam, Radak. For the clan, cf. Num. 26:20; Josh. 7:1, 16–18, 24; 22:20.

Chapter 39

1. Vv. 2, 3, 5, 21, 23.
2. Vv. 2, 3, 22, 23.
3. With this unique phrase, cf. Ps. 1:3; 1 Chron. 22:11.
4. So Ramban.
5. Cf. 6:8.
6. Cf. 30:27.
7. So Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 86:6, Rashi, Ramban. Radak, Ibn Ezra refer to ritual separation at mealtimes.
8. One tradition gives her name as Zuleika.
9. Cf. Ps. 123:1–2.
10. Cf. the picture of the adulteress in Prov. 7:5–23.
11. Contrast v. 16 *'el beito,* "home."
12. For the use of the stem *t-f-s* in this sense, cf. Deut. 22:28.
13. For the single garment of the poor, cf. Exod. 22:26; Deut. 24:13. For *me'il,* cf. 1 Sam. 15:27; 18:4; 24:5. For the stem *b-g-d* as marital infidelity, cf. Jer. 3:20; 9:1; Mal. 2:14f.
14. Cf. 27:27; 31:50; 41:41.
15. The second possible reason for Joseph's survival is given by Ibn Ezra, Abravanel, Sforno, and Shadal.

Chapter 40

1. For Joseph's age, see 41:1, 46; 37:1.
2. Cf. Gen. 42:17, 19; cf. Lev. 24:12; Num. 15:34.
3. See Gen. 39:1, 20; 41:12.
4. So Radak, cf. Gen. 4:3; Rashi, Rashbam take as a year. See Comment to 24:55.
5. Cf. 41:11–13.
6. Cf. 2 Kings 25:27. For the opposite, cf. Job 10:15; Judg. 8:28; Zech. 2:4.
7. Cf. Isa. 24:22; Jer. 37:15f.
8. Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, and Radak all give the first explanation, whereas Targ. Yer., Saadiah, and Ramban give the second; cf. Mish. Bets. 2:6, TJ Bets. 2:6 (61c), and Bets. 21b.
9. Contrast Abraham's action in 15:11.
10. Cf. Deut. 9:7; Isa. 54:4; Prov. 31:7.

Chapter 41

1. So regularly in Exod. 2, 4, 7, 8. T. O. Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament," JAOS 73 (1953): 151.
2. Cf. Job 8:11; UT 76.II.9,12 *aḥ;* Aram., Sfire I.A.29 *'aḥw.* Lambdin, *ibid.* 146.
3. Cf. Isa. 27:8; Hos. 13:15.
4. Cf. Exod. 7:11, 22; Dan. 1:20. Lambdin, *op. cit.,* 150.
5. So Gen. R. 89:7.
6. So Gen. R. 89:9.
7. Cf. 37:3, 23, 32f.
8. For this meaning of the verbal form *higgid,* cf. Judg. 14:12; 1 Kings 10:3.
9. So Ḥizkuni.
10. Cf. Deut. 13:15.
11. Cf. Gen. 3:22; 4:11.
12. For *ḥamush,* see Exod. 13:18; Josh. 1:14; Judg. 7:11; so Targ. Onk., Rashi, Shadal. Ramban, Ḥizkuni, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Abravanel take as "a fifth." For *shillesh,* cf. Deut. 19:3; for *shishsheh,* cf. Ezek. 45:13; for *'isser,* cf. Gen. 28:22; Neh. 10:38. For the number five, cf. Gen. 43:34; 45:6, 11, 22; 47:2, 24, 26. See also the Egyptian "Journey of Wen-Amon," ANET, p. 28.
13. Cf. Gen. 45:8; 1 Kings 6:6; Isa. 22:15; 1 Kings 16:9.
14. Cf. Prov. 24:26. For *yishshak* as "equipped," "provisioned," cf. Ps. 78:9; 1 Chron. 12:2, so Targums, Rashi, Radak.
15. Cf. Esther 3:10, 12.
16. Cf. Ezek. 27:7; Exod. 26:1; etc. For *huts;* cf. Esther 1:6; 8:15; Ezek. 27:16. For Rekh-mi-Re, see ANET, p. 213. For Ashurbanipal's report, see ANET, p. 295.
17. Ibn Janaḥ, Bekhor Shor, and Ibn Ezra take as "bend the knee"; cf. Gen. 24:11.
18. Josephus, Ant. 2.6.1 (Loeb, p. 207), Targums, Pesh., Saadiah all take it as "revealing hidden things."
19. For the form, cf. Basemath, Gen. 26:34.
20. For the form of the title, cf. Exod. 3:1; Amos 7:10.
21. Cf. 1 Sam. 16:22; 1 Kings 1:2.
22. Targ. Onk., Ramban (cf. Targ. to 2 Sam. 18:17) take as "storage pits."
23. The unique Heb. Piel form *nashshani,* in place of the expected *nishshani,* is due to the influence of the vowels of *menashsheh.*
24. For *'afar,* "pastureland," cf. Mish. Shevi. 9:1, Mish. Bets. 5:7.

25. Cf. Gen. 17:6, 20; 28:3; etc.
26. Cf. Gen. 15:13; Exod. 3:7, 17; 4:31; etc.
27. Contrast Gen. 19:28; Ezek. 34:6.

Chapter 42

1. Cf. Gen. 41:57, so Radak.
2. Cf. Ps. 104:11.
3. Cf. 2 Kings 14:8, 11 = 2 Chron. 25:17, 21. For the Hitpael expressing affectation, cf. Num. 16:13; 2 Sam. 13:5f., so Ta'an. 10b, Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Abravanel.
4. Gen. 35:16; 42:38; 44:29.
5. Cf. 41:57.
6. So Gen. R. 91:6, Rashi. The alternative rendering is that of Ramban; cf. 1 Kings 14:5f.
7. Cf. v. 2, "that we may live and not die"; Gen. 27:12, "a curse, not a blessing"; 40:23, "did not think of Joseph; he forgot him."
8. Cf. 37:8, 19f.
9. Cf. Num. 21:32; Josh. 2:1; 7:2.
10. So Abravanel.
11. M. Greenberg, "The Hebrew Oath Particle *Ḥay/Ḥe*," JBL 76 (1957): 34–39.
12. Cf. 26:28.
13. On his cruelty, cf. 34:25; 49:57.
14. So Targ. Jon.
15. For Heb. ***malon*** in this sense, cf. Exod. 4:24; Josh. 4:3; Isa. 10:29.
16. For ***befi***, see 43:12, 21; 44:1, 2, 8. For "sack," see 42:25, 27, 35. On the etymology of ***'amtahat***, see J. Greenfield, "The Etymology of *'amtahat*," ZAW 77 (1965): 90–92.
17. Cf. v. 19.
18. Cf. Isa. 41:5; Ps. 40:6; Job 6:21.
19. So Radak.

Chapter 43

1. So vv. 5ff., 11, 13f.; 44:26; "the men," vv. 16f.; 18:24; 44:1, 3f.
2. For the verb in this sense, cf. Exod. 19:21, 23; 1 Sam. 8:9; 1 Kings 2:42.
3. Cf. Gen. 12:1; 48:6; Esther 2:10, 12; 8:6.
4. Cf. Prov. 6:1–5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26–27; 27:13. See also Gen. 38:17, 18, 20; Neh. 5:3. For ***le-vakkesh mi-yad***, cf. Gen. 31:39; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Sam. 4:11; Ezek. 3:18, 20; 33:8.
5. Cf. Gen. 32:14; 1 Kings 10:25; 2 Kings 17:4.
6. Cf. Deut. 32:13; 1 Sam. 14:25ff.; Ps. 85:17 for bees' honey. For the date-syrup tradition, cf. TJ Bik. 1:3(63b); cf. Rashi to Ber. 41b, Er. 4b. For Sinuhe, see ANET, p. 19.
7. For the formulation, cf. Esther 4:16.
8. So LXX, Targ. Jon., Saadiah, Ibn Janaḥ.
9. J. Muffs, "Two Comparative Lexical Studies," JANES 5 (1973): 287–294.
10. Cf. Hos. 11:8.
11. For the formula, cf. Deut. 22:3, 19, 29; 24:4; etc.

Chapter 44

1. Cf. Jer. 35:5; Exod. 25:31, 33, 34; 37:17, 19. L. Koehler, "Hebräische Etymologien," JBL 59 (1940), 36.
2. Cf. Num. 23:23; see Sanh. 65b–66a. See Y. Kaufmann, *Toledot ha-'emunah ha-yisre'elit*, vols. 1–3 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1937), 485–498.
3. The first interpretation is that of Gen. R. 92:8, Rashi, Rashbam, Sforno; the second is the view of Ralbag, Abravanel, Shadal.
4. So Gen. R. 92:8.
5. Rashi, Rashbam.
6. The first interpretation is that of Shadal; the second is suggested by Rashi and Ibn Ezra.
7. Cf. Gen. 23:15; Josh. 20:4.
8. The ambiguity is noted in Yoma 52b. The Targums, Rashi, and Ramban understand Benjamin; Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Bekhor Shor, and Shadal take the subject as the father.

Chapter 45

1. Cf. Exod. 34:21; 1 Sam. 8:12.
2. Cf. the use of "father" in 2 Kings 2:12; 5:13; 1 Sam. 24:12; Isa. 22:21. J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte* (Louvaine: Publications Universitaires, 1959), 114–115.
3. Gen. 37:8.
4. Cf. Num. 20:4, 8, 11; Ps. 78:48.
5. Cf. Num. 18:12, 29; Ps. 147:14.
6. Cf. Judg. 14:12f., 19; 2 Kings 5:5, 22f.
7. Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, Ramban, Ḥizkuni take the verb as expressing concern for their safety. The NJPS rendering follows the Targums, Rashi, Ibn Janaḥ, and Radak.
8. So Abravanel.

Chapter 46

1. Cf. Ezek. 1:1; 8:3; 40:2. Cf. 1 Sam. 3:15.
2. Cf. 15:1, 5; 26:24; 28:12; 31:11.
3. Cf. Gen. 15:1; 26:24; Num. 21:34. The exceptional Heb. infinitive form ***redah*** in place of ***redet*** may be an echo of Gen. 45:9.
4. So Saadiah, Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni. For the practice, see Mish. Shab. 23:5, Maimonides, Yad 14.4.1; Homer, Iliad 11.453.
5. Cf. 37:35.
6. Cf. 25:13; 36:10, 40; etc.
7. Cf. 24:3. See Comment to 38:2.
8. Cf. Ruth 4:18–22.
9. So Ramban.
10. Cf. Judg. 3:15; 2 Sam. 16:5; 19:17.
11. Cf. Exod. 1:5; Judg. 8:30.

Chapter 47

1. For ***katseh*** in this sense, cf. Judg. 18:2; 1 Kings 12:31; 13:33; Ezek. 33:2. Rabbinic sources are divided as to whether the weakest or strongest were selected (Gen. R. 95:3, BK 92a).
2. Cf. Deut. 26:5; Ps. 105:23.
3. Cf. Exod. 18:21, 25; cf. ***'eshet ḥayil***, "a capable woman," Prov. 12:4; 31:10; Ruth 3:11.
4. For this verb meaning, "to bless," cf. 1 Sam. 31:10; 2 Kings 4:29, so Saadiah, Rashi, Radak.
5. Cf. Lev. 25:23; Ps. 39:13.
6. Cf. v. 30; 48:15f., 21; 49:29.
7. For this sense, cf. 2 Sam. 19:40; 1 Kings 8:66.
8. Cf. Exod. 1:11; 12:37; Num. 33:3, 5.
9. For the stem *l-'-h*, cf. Gen. 19:11; Exod. 7:18.
10. So Ramban.
11. See note to Gen. 23:4; cf. also Deut. 2:28; 14:25–26; Ezek. 27:12ff.; Joel 4:3; 1 Kings 21:6. Sam., LXX, and Vulg. all include "bread" in the text.
12. In the Bible horses are mentioned in particular in connection with Egypt; cf. Deut. 17:16; 1 Kings 10:28; Song of Sol. 1:9.
13. Cf. Exod. 2:13. (i) Rashi; (ii) Ibn Ezra, Ḥizkuni; (iii) Abravanel (cf. 45:11); (iv) Ramban, Radak, Sforno, Shadal.
14. Cf. Joel 4:3; Amos 2:6.

15. Cf. 2 Kings 17:23f.; 18:32.

16. For this meaning of Heb. *ḥok,* cf. Lev. 6:11; Prov. 30:8.

17. For the Heb. idiom *matsa' ḥen* in this sense, cf. 2 Sam. 16:4.

18. See 37:25; 45:27, 28; 46:30.

19. Cf. 50:6, so Ramban.

20. Cf. 1 Kings 1:47.

Chapter 48

I. Mendelsohn, "A Ugaritic Parallel to the Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh," IEJ 9 (1959): 180–183.

1. Cf. 17:8.

2. Sam. and LXX give the name in full.

3. Cf. Ps. 42:6f.

4. Cf. 42:38.

5. Cf. 27:18.

6. Cf. Exod. 29:10; Num. 27:18, 23.

7. Cf. Ps. 23:1; Jer. 31:9; Ps. 80:2.

8. On Manasseh as first-born, see Gen. 41:51; 48:14, 18; Josh. 17:1. For Ephraim as the northern kingdom, cf. Isa. 7:5, 8, 9; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 4:16f.; 5:3; 7:1; etc.

9. This is how Targ. Jon. and Ibn Ezra understood the phrase.

10. So Targ. Onk., Saadiah, Rashi (ii), Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Bekhor Shor, Radak, Shadal. That Joseph received a double portion is also the view of Sifre 217 to Deut. 21:17, BB 123a. Aq. rendered the phrase "one shoulder." For the identification with Shechem, cf. Targ. Jon., Gen. R. 97:9; so Rashi (i), Ḥizkuni.

11. For "prayer and petition," see Targ. Onk., BB 123a, Mekh. Beshallaḥ 2; for "*mitsvot* and good deeds," see Targ. Jon. (ii), Gen. R. 97:9; as "divine help," see Radak; cf. 2 Sam. 22:2f. For echoes of Jacob's assault on Shechem, see Jub. 34:1–9, Test. Judah 4:1, Gen. R. 80:9; 97:9.

Chapter 49

F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1975); B. Vawter, "The Canaanite Background of Genesis 49," CBQ 17 (1955): 1–18; J. Coppens, "La bénediction de Jacob," VTSup (1957): 97–115; E. M. Good, "The Blessing on Judah, Gen. 49,8–12," JBL 82 (1963): 427–432; J. A. Emerton, "Some Difficult Words in Genesis 49," in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to D. Winton Thomas,* ed. P. A. Ackroyd and B. Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 81–93.

1. Cf. Isa. 11:12; Mic. 2:12; Hab. 2:5 for parallelism with "assemble."

2. Cf. Num. 24:14; Deut. 4:30; 31:29; for the eschatological sense, cf. Isa. 2:2–4; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 10:14. For the rabbinic observation, see Targ. Jon., Pes. 56a, Gen. R. 98:3. H. M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 141; E. Lipinski, "*Be'aḥarith Ha-Yamim* dans les textes pré-exiliques," VT 20 (1970): 445–450.

3. Cf. Judg. 5:3; Ps. 29:1–2.

4. Cf. Prov. 1:8; 4:1; 5:7; etc.

5. For the parallelism, cf. Isa. 40:26, 29; Job 40:16. Some ancient versions, such as Targ. Jon., Aq., Sym., Vulg., influenced by the censure of v. 4, took *'oni* as though derived from *'aven,* "pain, sorrow"; cf. Gen. 35:18; Num. 23:21. S. Gevirtz, "The Reprimand of Reuben," JNES 30 (1971): 87–98; J. Greenfield, "The Meaning of *pḥz,*" in *Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East,* ed. Y. Avishur and J. Blau (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein, 1978), 35–40.

6. Cf. Exod. 23:19; Lev. 23:10; Num. 18:12; Jer. 2:3.

7. Targ. Onk., LXX, and Pesh. seem to have had a variant text, *'alita,* "you mounted."

8. For this meaning of Heb. *'aḥ,* cf. Judg. 1:3, 13, 17; Prov. 18:9.

9. Ge. R. 99:7 renders "sword" from Greek μάχαιρα, so Rashi. A connection with *mekhorah,* as in Ezek. 16:3 (cf. 21:35; 29:14), "their place of origin/habitation," is a widely held view, so Targ. Onk., Gen. R. 99:7, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Radak. See J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 57.

10. Cf. Ps. 89:6, 8.

11. Heb. *teḥad* is feminine, although its subject is masculine, due to the attractive influence of *tavo'*. For the parallel *b-w-', y-ḥ-d,* cf. Job 3:6.

12. Cf. Josh. 11:6; 2 Sam. 8:4.

13. Cf. Ps. 45:18; 49:19; Job 40:14.

14. Cf. Exod. 23:27; 2 Sam. 22:41; Job 16:12.

15. Gen. R. 98:11; 99:9.

16. Cf. Deut. 33:20, 22; Num. 23:24; 24:9. For the six names, see Sanh. 95a; ARN[1] 39, 119. See Rev. 5:5 for its messianic use.

17. Cf. Isa. 14:5; Ezek. 19:11, 14; Amos 1:5, 8; Zech. 10:11; Ps. 45:7.

18. LXX, Vulg., Ibn Janaḥ, and Radak take in the sense of "leader, ruler." Gen. R. 98:13, Targums, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Ḥizkuni understand as "scribe"; cf. Isa. 30:8.

19. Cf. Deut. 28:57; Isa. 7:20 for the euphemism. The Targums, LXX, Vulg., and Radak take as "progeny."

20. Cf. Gen. 26:13; 41:49; 2 Sam. 23:10; 2 Chron. 26:15.

21. For *shai,* cf. Isa. 18:7; Ps. 68:30; 76:12. With the final *h* of *loh,* cf. v. 11 *'iyroh, sutoh.* LXX, Sym., Pesh., cf. Targ. Onk. and Gen. R. 99:10, all take as *shello.* For Shiloh, the city, see Josh. 18:1; 19:51; Judg. 21:29; 1 Sam. 1:3; 1 Kings 11:29; 14:2, 4. For the messianic interpretation, see 4QGen. 49:10, Sanh. 98b, Gen. R. 98:13, Lam. R. 1:16. For the *gematria,* see Baal Ha-Turim. J. Lindblom, "The Political Background of the Shilo Oracle," VTSup Congress Volume (1953): 78–87; B. Margulies, "Gen. XLIX.10/Deut. XXXIII.2–3," VT 19 (1969): 202–210; T. H. Gaster, "Short Notes," VT 4 (1954): 73.

22. So Targ. Onk., Ibn Janaḥ, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak.

23. Cf. Deut. 33:19.

24. Cf. Num. 13:23; Amos 9:14; Joel 4:18; Zech. 10:7. Mish. Men. 8:6 details the wine-producing areas of Judea in Second Temple times.

25. Heb. *'iyroh* from *'ayir;* cf. Deut. 25:4 *disho* from *dayish;* Isa. 10:7 *shito* from *shayit.* Heb. *beni 'atono,* "the young of a she-ass—cf. Zech. 9:9—corresponds to Akk. *mār atānim.*

26. Heb. *sorekah* is a unique feminine of *sorek,* Isa. 5:2; Jer. 2:21, probably affected by the gender of *'aton,* "she-ass"; cf. Comment to 31:52. For Wadi Sorek, see Judg. 16:4.

27. Heb. *sut,* a unique term in the Bible, is attested in the ninth century B.C.E. Phoen. inscription of King Kilamuwa of Yaudi-Sam'al, line 8, and of Batno'am ca. 350 B.C.E., as well as in a Punic cultic inscription (KAI 76.A.4); cf. Mish. Kelim 16:7. There is no need to emend *sutoh* to *kesutoh.*

28. The Heb. term here rendered "dark" is unique, but an abstract noun formed from the same stem is found in Prov. 23:29f. in a similar context. It is to be connected with Akk. *ekēlu,* "to be dark." A burial tomb inscription from the Hebron area mentions *yyn kḥl,* probably meaning "dark-colored wine," so that the stems *ḥ-k-l/k-ḥ-l* are identical. See A. Demsky, "'Dark Wine' from Judah," IEJ 22 (1972): 233–234; S. M. Paul, "Classifications of Wine in Mesopotamian and Rabbinic Sources," IEJ 25 (1975): 42–44.

29. Heb. *yarkhah* (or *yerekhah*) occurs as a singular only here. Otherwise, it always appears in the dual form.

30. Heb. *'al* is literally "upon, by, above." The text of Rashbam appears to have read *'ad,* "as far as." This is the

reading of some Heb. manuscripts and of the Sam. and is presupposed by the renderings of the Targums, LXX, Vulg., and Pesh.

31. For Phoenicia(ns), cf. Deut. 3:9; Judg. 3:3; 1 Kings 5:20; etc. See H. J. Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre* (Jerusalem: Schocken Institute, 1973), 130ff.

32. Cf. Prov. 17:22; 25:15; Job 40:18. This is the rendering of Aq., Vulg., Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Sforno. On vv. 14–15, see S. I. Feigin, "Castrated Ass," JNES 5 (1945): 230–233; A. Biram, *"mas ʿoved," Tarbiz* 23 (1952): 137–142; A. J. Brawer, "Corrections in Ancient Translations of the Bible Concerning Jacob and His Family," *Beth Mikra* 60 (1975): 130; A. F. Rainey, "Compulsory Labor Gangs in Ancient Israel," IEJ 20 (1970): 191–202; S. Gevirtz, "The Issachar Oracle in the Testament of Jacob," *Eretz-Israel* 12 (1975): 104*–112*.

33. The ancient versions shed no light on the term. Sym., Targ. Onk., Vulg. render "borders"; Aq. has "land allotments." The apparently cognate but obscure Ugar. *mṯ pdm* (*ʿnt* iv.79) is of no help.

34. Cf. Deut. 12:9; 1 Kings 8:56; Ps. 95:11.

35. Cf. Heb. *sovel* in Isa. 9:3; 10:27; 14:25. See M. Held, "The Root *ZBL/SBL* in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Biblical Hebrew," JAOS 88 (1968): 90–96.

36. Cf. Deut. 20:11. For *mas* alone, cf. Josh. 17:13; Judg. 1:28–35; etc. For the El-Amarna text, see ANET, p. 485.

37. For this meaning, see Zech. 3:7; Ps. 9:9. For the sense of "vindicate," cf. Gen. 30:6; Deut. 32:36; Ps. 54:3. The Targums, Gen. R. 98:18, Rashi, Ramban, Radak all understand as referring to Samson; cf. Judg. 13:5; 15:11, 20; 16:31; cf. 1 Sam. 12:11.

38. For the combination *k-v-h* and *yeshuʿah,* cf. Isa. 25:9; 33:2; Ps. 25:5.

39. For the territory and boundaries of Gad, see Num. 32; Deut. 3:12–17; Josh. 1:12–15; 13:24–28; 20:8; 21:36–37; 22.

40. Heb. *ʿakev* in this verse is a collective singular and has no possessive suffix. The present rendering follows LXX, Vulg., and Pesh., which transfer the initial *mem* of the following word back to *ʿakev* to read *ʿakevam,* "their heels," referring to the collective *gedud,* "troops."

41. Heb. *shemenah* treats *leḥem* as feminine; cf. 1 Sam. 10:4.

42. Cf. Ugar. *ʾimr,* Phoen. *ʾmr,* Aram. *ʾmmar,* Akk. *immeru,* "lamb, fawn, sheep, ram." For *ʾimrei,* "words, speech," cf. Num. 24:4, 16; Prov. 22:21; so Rashbam. For the meaning "summit, crowning a tree," cf. *ʾamir,* Isa. 17:6, 9.

43. For Joseph as just Ephraim and Manasseh, cf. Deut. 27:12; Ezek. 47:13; 48:32; Ps. 77:16. For Joseph as the northern kingdom, cf. Ezek. 37:16, 19; Amos 5:15; 6:6; etc. For "House of Joseph," cf. Josh. 17:17; Judg. 1:22, 23, 35. For "sons of Joseph," cf. Num. 1:10; Josh. 16:1.

44. For *ʾefrati* as "Ephraimite," see Judg. 12:5; 1 Sam. 1:1; 1 Kings 11:26. For *ben* in this usage, cf. Gen. 17:12; 1 Sam. 14:52.

45. For *ʿayin* and *shur,* cf. Job 7:8; 20:9; 24:15. S. Gevirtz, "Of Patriarchs and Puns," HUCA 46 (1975): 33–54.

46. Cf. 2 Sam. 22:30 = Ps. 18:30.

47. For attacks on the Joseph tribes, cf. Josh. 17:16; Judg. 6:3–6; 1 Chron. 5:18–22. For slander as an arrow, see Jer. 9:2, 7(8); Prov. 25:18; 26:18f.

48. The initial Heb. *vav* is taken as adversative, not conjunctive. Ibn Janaḥ, Ibn Ezra, and Radak take Heb. *va-yafozzu* in the sense of "to be firm," although the only other example of the stem *p-z-z* means "to leap," 2 Sam. 6:16. What is rendered "arms" is literally "the arms of his hands," a unique and strange phrase.

49. So only also Isa. 49:26; 60:16; Ps. 132:2, 5; cf. Isa. 1:24, "Mighty One of Israel." For *ʾabbir,* cf. Judg. 5:22; Jer. 8:16; Isa. 34:7; Ps. 22:13; 78:25; Lam. 1:15.

50. Cf. vv. 2, 7, 16, 28.

51. For this understanding of the Name, cf. Ps. 20:2, 8; 44:6; etc. For *be-shem,* cf. Ps. 20:6; 33:21; 44:6; 54:3; 89:25; 116:4, 13.

52. Cf. Deut. 32:4, 15, 31; etc.

53. So Menahem b. Saruk, Ibn Janaḥ, Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Radak.

54. Cf. Prov. 10:6; 11:26; Isa. 35:10; cf. "guard of the head" in 1 Sam. 28:2 for "bodyguard."

55. Cf. Deut. 33:16; Ps. 7:17; 68:22; cf. UT 67.vi.15f.; 127:56f.; 137:8; etc.

56. LXX, Targ. Jon., Pesh., Rashbam, Ḥizkuni all take in sense of leader. Targ. Onk., Gen. 98:25, Vulg., Saadiah, Rashi take as "separated."

57. Rashi, Radak, and Ḥizkuni see here a reference to King Saul.

58. Heb. *ʿad,* rather, "booty," favored by the parallel "spoil," Heb. *shalal,* and supported by Aram. *ʿadaʾa,* which translates *shalal* in Targ. Onk. to Num. 31:11 and in Targ. to 1 Sam. 30:16; so Saadiah, Rashi, Radak.

59. Cf. 10:29; 14:3; 25:4.

60. For *ts-v-h* in this sense, cf. Deut. 3:28; 2 Kings 20:1 = Isa. 38:1.

Chapter 50

1. For falling on the neck, see 33:4; 45:14; 46:29.

2. Cf. Esther 4:2; Gen. R. 100:5.

3. For *k-r-h,* "to dig," cf. Gen. 26:25; Exod. 21:33; so LXX, Targ. Jon., SyroP., Vulg., Saadiah, Ibn Ezra, Rashi. For *k-r-h,* "to purchase," cf. Deut. 2:6; Hos. 3:2; so Targ. Onk., Pesh., Gen. R. 100:5; RH 26a.

4. Cf. Deut. 3:2, 25; 11:30.

5. Abel as a component of place-names, cf. Num. 33:49; Judg. 7:22; 11:33; 1 Kings 15:20; 1 Chron. 16:4.

6. Gilgamesh, OB version 10.2.5–9 (ANET, p. 90).

7. Cf. 20:11; 39:9.

8. For the Aram. text, see ANET, p. 661; cf. 2 Kings 10:30.

9. See Num. 26:29; 36:1; Judg. 5:14; for their conquests, see Num. 32:39f.; Deut. 3:15; Josh. 13:31; 17:1.

10. For the cluster of patriarchs, see Exod. 3:16; 6:3; 32:13; 33:1; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4.

EXCURSUSES

EXCURSUS 1

The Cherubim 3:24

The function of these creatures, as stated in 3:24, is to secure the Garden of Eden from intrusion. "The fiery ever-turning sword" is an additional and separate deterrent and not a weapon in the hands of the cherubim. The manner in which they are introduced into the narrative shows that they are well known and require no definition. It reflects the unique position of the cherubim in the religious art of ancient Israel.

Two golden cherubim with outstretched wings overshadowed the cover of the Ark in the Tabernacle in the wilderness,[1] and from the space between them issued the divine Voice that spoke to Moses.[2] Pictorial representations of the cherubim were also worked into the cloth curtains of that Tabernacle.[3] The same cherubic motif decorated Solomon's Temple[4] and was envisaged by Ezekiel in his restored temple.[5] One of the epithets of God, especially in poetry, is "The One Enthroned on the Cherubim."[6] Biblical poetic texts also imagine the cherubim bearing the invisible throne of God from place to place.[7]

In the Tabernacle in the wilderness the cherubim possess one face and two wings,[8] but Ezekiel has them as composite figures with four faces and four wings each.[9]

By the end of the Second Temple period, reliable traditions about their nature no longer existed.[10] Their frequent portrayal as beautiful winged children in Renaissance art has nothing to do with biblical notions. If this manner of representation was not inspired by the Greco-Roman Erotes ("Loves"), then it probably owes its origin to the fanciful rabbinic etymologizing of Sukkah 5b and Ḥagigah 13b, which derives Hebrew *keruv* from Aramaic *ke-ravia'*, "like a boy."

Archaeological findings in the Near East have shed some light on the mystery of the cherubim. The name would appear to be connected with the *kuribu,* the Akkadian term often applied to the composite figures—man-headed bulls with eagles' wings—that frequently stood outside Mesopotamian temples. These are highly reminiscent of the descriptions in Ezekiel 1:6–11 and 10:14. The name seems to derive from Akkadian *karābu,* "to pronounce formulas of blessings, to pray." The *kuribu* was an advocate for the faithful before the god and an advisor to the great gods, but it also guarded the entrance to the temple. The motif of the composite human-animal-bird figure is widespread in various forms in art and religious symbolism throughout the Fertile Crescent, and the biblical cherubim would seem to be connected with this artistic tradition.

An examination of the various scriptural passages in which cherubim occur leads to the conclusion that they filled multiple conceptual roles. First, they symbolized the invisible Divine Presence. Then, the emphasis on their perpetually outstretched wings projects supreme mobility and is an artistic presentation of God's omnipresence. The divine epithet "Enthroned on the Cherubim" expresses His sovereignty. Ezekiel depicts these creatures as composites of man-lion-ox-eagle, and each of the components is king in his respective domain. Finally, they guard over the Ark and its sacred contents inside the Holy of Holies.

The only pictorial representation permitted in an otherwise aniconic religion, the

cherubim do not violate the prohibition against the plastic arts decreed in the Ten Commandments. Purely products of the human imagination, they do not represent any existing reality in heaven and earth. Moreover, whether in the Tabernacle of the wilderness or in Solomon's Temple, they were hidden from public gaze.

EXCURSUS 2

The Chronology of the Flood

As noted in the Comment to 7:6, two kinds of time reckoning are used in the Flood narrative. That based on precise dates informs us that the Flood lasted exactly twelve months and eleven days, including the first and last days. That based on intervals of days is not a complete system in itself; it does not tell us how many days elapsed after the ark rested on Ararat before the mountain tops became visible or how many days it took after the dove finally failed to return for the earth to be fully dried out. The two modes of calculation are meant to be integrated.

If we now make a calculation taking into account the day formulas, the same result is achieved, provided a month is reckoned as exactly thirty days. This we may conclude since 7:11 and 8:4 state precisely that five months elapsed between the onset of the rains and the grounding of the ark, while 7:24 and 8:3 specify that period to be one hundred and fifty days.

The following computation thus emerges: To the 150 days just mentioned must be added 74 days between the seventeenth of the seventh month (8:4) and the first day of the tenth month, when the mountain tops first became visible (8:5), another 40 days before the release of the raven (8:6–7), and a further 21 days for the three forays of the dove (8:10–12). This makes a total so far of 285 days, bringing us to the second day of the twelfth month.

On New Year's day, 29 days later, the waters on earth had begun to dry up (8:13), and it took another 57 days for the ground to be completely dried out by the twenty-seventh day of the second month (8:14). The addition of 29 and 57 to the 285 gives a grand total of 371 days. Taking 30 days to a month, this figure yields twelve months and eleven days, identical with the conclusion based solely upon the date system.

Of course, a calendar of the type presupposed here is eccentric, but in the ancient Egyptian calendar the year was, in fact, divided into twelve months of thirty days each, yielding 360 days exactly, with five extra days intercalated at the end of the year. In Babylon, too, in addition to the true lunar calendar, there was a schematic calendar composed of twelve months of thirty days.

EXCURSUS 3

The Noachide Commandments

The notion of human responsibility and culpability and the idea of Noah's righteousness must be grounded on the assumption that there existed a moral code that was regarded as universally binding. This assumption is essential to the biblical concept of the morality of God and the moral responsibility of man; if moral laws had not then existed, how could the

generation of the Flood be punished for offenses? What would be the source of its moral obligations? The idea of the existence of a moral law that is binding on all humanity is understood in the eschatological judgment of the earth found in Isaiah 24. Verse 5 there reads: "For the earth was defiled / Under its inhabitants; Because they transgressed teachings, / Violated laws, / Broke the ancient covenant."

Rabbinic theology, sensitive to this problem, insisted on the existence of a divine covenant with the whole human race made through the two fathers of humanity, Adam and Noah. In rabbinic parlance, this covenant is known as "the commandments given to the sons of Noah." The term "sons of Noah" is simply a designation for the family of man, both before and after the Flood. Because Israel received an additional revelation at Sinai, which immeasurably expanded the obligations uniquely incumbent on the individual Jew, the description "son of Noah," is, in effect, synonymous with "non-Jew."

There is no rabbinic unanimity as to either the number of "Noachide commandments" or their contents; nor is there agreement as to which were given to Adam and which to Noah. The list that enjoys the widest consensus is as follows:[1] The prohibitions against (1) idolatry, (2) blasphemy, (3) bloodshed, (4) incest and adultery, and (5) robbery; (6) the injunction to establish courts of law; and (7) the prohibition against eating flesh cut from a living animal. These seven, all of which are given closer definition in respect to their applicability (Ḥul. 92a; Yad, Melakhim 9.2ff.), are regarded as comprising the minimal moral imperatives essential to the maintenance of an ordered and wholesome society. Most of them would come under the heading of "natural law," that is, they seem to be inherent in human nature and are rooted or founded in reason (cf. Yoma 67b). However, in rabbinic theology the Noachide commandments are revealed law, and the authority behind them is divine, not human. The formulation of Maimonides is: "Whosoever accepts the 'seven commandments' and carefully observes them, is among the pious ones of the nations of the world and enjoys a share of the hereafter—provided that he accepts and performs them because the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He ordained them in the Torah and informed us through Moses our Teacher that the 'sons of Noah' were originally so commanded."[2] Maimonides then goes on to stipulate that if a non-Jew practices these commandments solely for philosophic reasons he would not be considered among the pious gentiles who merit a share of the hereafter. This distinction in motivation is basic to rabbinic teaching because divine authority is considered to be indispensable to the preservation of a system of morality. The ultimate sanction for the values inherent in these laws is that they constitute the will of God. Rational processes are not regarded as sufficient incentives for right action.

EXCURSUS 4

"Abram the Hebrew" 14:13

The designation "Hebrew(s)," *'ivri(m),* is to be found about thirty times in the Hebrew Bible. It can only derive from an original *'iver* or *'ever,* and its form permits a connotation that is either geographic or gentilic—that is, having an ethnic denotation like *kena'ani,* "Canaanite," *mo'abi,* "Moabite." The former possibility is based on the use of *'ever,* meaning "the region beyond," as used in Genesis 50:10 and Numbers 21:13, so that *'ivri* is "the man from the other side." Such an understanding might be reflected in Joshua 24:2: "In olden times, your forefathers—Terah, father of Abraham and father of Nahor—lived

beyond the Euphrates." The Septuagint rendered *'ivri* in our passage: *ho perátes,* "the one from beyond," or "the wanderer." Opposed to the geographic interpretation is the associated "Mamre the Amorite" in 14:13. This and the vast majority of citations weight the balance heavily in favor of the ethnic nature of the term.

The biblical references to "Hebrews" are concentrated within three contexts. The first is the cycle of Joseph stories (Gen. 39:14,17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32), always having to do with relationships with Egyptians. The second cluster appears in the early chapters of Exodus (chaps. 1–3, 5, 7, 9), where again, without exception, "Hebrew" contrasts with "Egyptian." The third collection is in the Book of Samuel (chaps. 4, 13, 14, 29), where the term is invariably in opposition to "Philistines." The only other narrative usage is Jonah 1:9, also in a non-Israelite ambience. It will be noted that, apart from this last source, which is most likely a conscious archaism, all citations are pre-Davidic; all refer only to Israelites (including 1 Sam. 13:3,7; 14:21) in contrast to other peoples.

Apart from a narrative context, there is the sociolegal term "Hebrew slave," *'eved 'ivri,* in Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12. This, too, means an Israelite as is proved by the descriptive "your fellow" *('aḥikha)* in Deuteronomy 15:12 and by Jeremiah 34:9,14.

The foregoing data overwhelmingly support the view that *'ivri* is an ethnic term. The alternative geographic explanation is, moreover, discounted by the fact that Abram's family back home in Mesopotamia "beyond the river" is not called "Hebrew," but "Aramean" (Gen. 25:20).

However, there are several curious aspects to the biblical employment of "Hebrew." Why does Abram, alone of the three patriarchs, bear this epithet, and why only in Genesis 14:13? Why are the other peoples who are related to Israel and also descended from Eber, grandson of Noah, called "sons of Eber" (10:21) but never "Hebrews"? And why is the description reserved exclusively for the descendants of Abraham through the line of Isaac and Jacob but not used of the lines of Ishmael or Esau? Not all these questions can be satisfactorily resolved in the present state of our knowledge, but the possible relationship of the Hebrews to a well-documented Near Eastern phenomenon needs to be examined because this latter has often been adduced as evidence to provide a solution.

From the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. through the twelfth century B.C.E., cuneiform tablets from Sumer, Babylon, Upper Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Syria-Canaanite area, as well as hieroglyphic texts from Egypt, register the presence of groups of people variously referred to as SA.GAZ, *ḫapiru, 'pr(m),* and *'pr(w).* The meaning of these terms has long been subject to scholarly dispute, but they are all concerned with the same class of people. SA.GAZ is a Sumerian ideograph that is read in Akkadian *šaggašu* and to which the scribes often attached the gloss *ḫabbātu. Šaggašu* in Akkadian means "killer, aggressor, violent person." In West Semitic languages the same stem denotes "to be restless, ill at ease." *Ḫabbātu* means "a robber" as well as "a migrant," but *'pr,* which must be West Semitic, is still of uncertain meaning.

The people referred to by these terms are distinguished not only by extensive geographic distribution but also by considerable ethnic diversity and linguistic variety. They everywhere constitute a recognizable subservient social class, essentially an urban element. They are rootless aliens, deprived of legal rights, who often hire themselves out as professional soldiers of fortune or as slaves. Within the Egyptian sphere of influence, where authority was weak and centralized control lax, this group exhibits independence and aggressive behavior and appears as a socially disruptive element. The phenomenon as a

whole seems to be the product of the convulsions that afflicted the Near East in the course of the second millennium B.C.E. By the end of the period conditions became more stabilized, and the 'Apiru *(ḫapiru)* disappear from history.

Are the 'Apiru and the Hebrews related? Various lines of evidence converge to reject the identity. First, there is no doubt that *'apiru,* an adjective, is the correct form of the name, as Egyptian and Ugaritic texts show, and the differences in the vowels and middle consonant between it and *'ibri,* a gentilic, cannot easily be reconciled. Further, the *'apiru* are a social entity, not an ethnic group like the Hebrews. They possess nothing remotely resembling the Israelite tribal system. Extrabiblical sources of the second millennium B.C.E. do not identify *'apiru* with Israel, and where Israel is mentioned it is not identified as belonging to the *'apiru.* If Abram is an *'apiru,* it is surprising that he enlists the support of Amorites in Genesis 14, rather than call upon his fellow *'apiru* for help. Even more persuasive is a comparison between the descriptions of the *'apiru* in Canaan given in the El-Amarna letters (14th cent. B.C.E.) and the activities of the invading Israelites under Joshua. The *'apiru* are never portrayed, like the Israelites, as being invaders from without. They often collaborate with the local Canaanite rulers, absorb local elements into their ranks and defy Egyptian suzerainty over the land. The Israelites, on the other hand, are implacably hostile to the Canaanites, and Egypt never appears as a factor in the Israelite wars of conquest. Significantly, the term "Hebrews" is never featured in Joshua and Judges, which report on the Israelite wars of conquest and settlement in the land—precisely those books in which they would be expected to appear were they to be identified with the aggressive *'apiru.*

The true origin of the term "Hebrew" is still to be determined. Perhaps it came to be used of social elements marginal to a particular society. If it be a self-designation for the people in the formative period of Israelite history, it would explain why it is used exclusively of Israel. At any rate, the term fell into disuse with the founding of the monarchy until it was revived in much later times.

EXCURSUS 5

Pidyon Shevuyim: "Redemption of Captives" 14:14–16

Abram's intervention to rescue his kinsman provides the paradigm for the *mitsvah* of *pidyon shevuyim,* the paramount religious duty to ransom a fellow Jew from captivity. Maimonides powerfully distilled Jewish attitudes and obligations as follows: "The redemption of captives takes precedence over the feeding and clothing of the poor. There is no commandment as great as that of redeeming captives, for they are among the hungry, the thirsty and the naked, and are in mortal danger. . . ."[1] Any unnecessary delay in fulfilling this obligation is considered as serious as bloodshed.[2] Money collected by charitable organizations for other purposes is allowed to be diverted to *pidyon shevuyim,* for captives have first priority on communal funds.

Throughout the Middle Ages, and well into modern times, Jewish communities everywhere established societies for the specific purpose of ransoming Jewish captives. When the burden placed too great a strain on local resources, intercommunal and international Jewish efforts were made in order to pool assets. In the sixteenth century a French traveler

expressed amazement that in the course of his itinerary throughout the Balkan and Asian lands he could find no Jewish slaves even though Turkish law permitted Muslims and Christians to enslave Jews. He attributed this situation to the fact that Jewish solidarity "never permitted one of their people to remain in servitude."

Of course, the untiring efforts made by Jews everywhere toward this end stimulated exorbitant demands for ransom. In theory, this was counteracted by rabbinic injunction restricting ransom payments to the current value of slaves,[3] but the unfortunate reality and Jewish sensibilities led to its being honored more in the breach than in its fulfillment. Yet the most distinguished scholar of thirteenth-century Germany, Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg, remained imprisoned unjustly for seven years until the day of his death rather than allow the community to yield to the excessive ransom demands of Rudolph I, who even refused to deliver up the body for Jewish burial until it was redeemed fourteen years later by a generous Jew for a huge sum of money.

EXCURSUS 6

Melchizedek 14:18

The element *ṣdq* is a frequent component of West Semitic names. A Canaanite god Ṣidqu, referred to in late sources as Sydyk, was connected with the sun god who was the patron of justice. Doubtless, he was the personification of the ideal of righteousness. Melchizedek might thus be another example of this type of "theophoric" name, a name formed with a divine element. However, many a monarch in the ancient Near East was given, or adopted, the epithet *mlk ṣdq,* "righteous (or rightful) king." Thus, King Yehimilk (ca. 950 B.C.E.) and King Yehaumilk (5th–4th cent. B.C.E.), both of Byblos, Phoenicia, are referred to by that title.[1] In Mesopotamian royal inscriptions the corresponding epithet was *šar mešarim* (cf., also, the name Sargon = *šarru-kēn,* "the king is legitimate"). Melchizedek may therefore not be a proper name but an appellative, one particularly cherished from earliest times by kings of Jerusalem. (In Joshua's time the monarch of that city was Adoni-zedek, mentioned in Joshua 10:1.) This practice may underlie some prophetic texts dealing with Jerusalem that place special emphasis on *tsedeq,* "righteousness."[2] Another allusion to the figure of Melchizedek may be present in Psalms 110:4, but the translation of the passage is uncertain since *malki-tsedek* could as well mean "rightful/righteous king" as be a proper name. In any case, that passage sheds no light on the person of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, except that it might indicate that traditions about him as a prototypal ideal priest were current in popular lore.

The priest-king surfaces again in postbiblical Jewish literature. In the allegorical exegesis of Philo, the first-century B.C.E. Jewish scholar of Alexandria, he becomes a cosmic figure, the personification of the logos.[3] To the sectarians at Qumran, he is an eschatological figure.[4] Strangely, their midrash about him is independent of the two biblical references to Melchizedek, and the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran does not differ from the Pentateuch in its presentation of the king.[5] The New Testament sees him as a semi-divine character, a sort of prototype of the founder of Christianity.[6] In rabbinic sources he is the righteous priest who takes his place with the Messiahs of David and Joseph and with Elijah.[7]

EXCURSUS 7

'El 'Elyon 14:18–20,22

This composite divine title is found only once again in the Bible—in Psalms 78:35. It does not appear in the Ugaritic texts, but a variant form *'ly* occurs as an epithet of the god Baal and means "the exalted one."[1] From two extrabiblical sources comes evidence that *'elyon* was once the name of a separate deity. The Christian historian Eusebius (3rd–4th cent. C.E.), in his *Praeparatio Evangelica,* extensively cites the *Phoenician History* of Philo of Byblos (ca. 100 C.E.), who himself claims to have drawn his information from the writings of an early Phoenician priest named Sanchuniathon, who probably lived in the sixth century B.C.E. Here we are told of two Phoenician deities, El and "Elyon called most high."[2] The second source is an eighth-century B.C.E. Aramaic treaty of alliance between two Near Eastern states, discovered in or near the village of Sfire about 16 miles (25.7 km.) southeast of Aleppo. The document contains the names of divine witnesses to the treaty. The respective gods of the contracting parties are listed first, then comes "El and Elyon" followed by "Heaven and Earth, Abyss and Sources, Day and Night."[3] It is evident that El and Elyon were two distinct gods, very ancient, who must have been intimately associated in some way, although the evidential mythology for this linkage has been lost.

These data have a bearing on the biblical *'el 'elyon* used of the One God. The compound seems to be an original internal Israelite development. Biblical Hebrew *'elyon* is invariably used in poetic texts and exclusively in liturgical contexts. Occasionally, it is an independent divine name, though in each instance it is not entirely solitary but appears in the ambience of another appellative.[4] In combination, these phenomena lead to the conclusion that *'el 'elyon* is of great antiquity since Hebrew poetry, and especially liturgical poetry, is highly conservative and preserves archaic words, phrases, and forms. If *'elyon* was once the name of a pagan deity, there is no consciousness of this in the Bible and, like *'el,* it is simply an epithet of the One God. The fossilized nature of the formula is further supported by the telltale fact that *'elyon,* when used of God, never assumes the definite article even though it otherwise does so as an adjective in a secular context. Ancient Hebrew poetry did not use the definite article. Additional evidence for the antiquity of *'el 'elyon* is supplied by a study of *'el* itself. As a proper name of God, it belongs to the earliest stratum of the national literature. It fell into disuse, having been displaced by YHVH or *'elohim.* However, although *'el 'elyon* only occurs once again, the compound YHVH *'elyon* appears in three separate texts,[5] and the synonymous parallelism YHVH–*'elyon,* occurring seven times,[6] far exceeding in frequency that of *'el–'elyon.* To these must be added the compound *'elohim 'elyon*[7] and the parallelism of the two.[8] All of these forms derive from Psalms 42–83, which are known as the Elohistic psalter. The synonymous parallelism *'el–'elyon,* on the other hand, is found only five times.[9] There is a further peculiarity. Where YHVH/*'elohim–'elyon* occur in parallelism, the word order is invariable, but in two of the *'el–'elyon* examples the order of names is reversed. This suggests that the archaic divine title *'el 'elyon* was displaced by YHVH *'elyon,* which became stereotyped. The original compound had so fallen into desuetude that the order of its component elements could be fluid when used in parallelism.

EXCURSUS 8

"Creator of Heaven and Earth" 14:19,22

This divine epithet occurs several times in the Book of Psalms.[1] There, however, the Hebrew verb is always *'oseh,* whereas here, uniquely, *koneh* appears. Generally the root *k-n-h* means "to acquire, to purchase." The sense of *koneh* as "create" became obsolete and, in later biblical texts, was replaced by *'oseh.* The divine title employed by the priest Melchizedek and echoed by Abram (v. 22) is of particular interest because the formula *'el qn 'rṣ,* "El creator of earth," has turned up in an eighth-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscription from Karatepe[2] and in a Neo-Punic (2nd cent. C.E.) text from Leptis, Tripolitania.[3] The Hittite name El-Kunirsha seems to be an adaptation of the same title. This god's consort was Asherah, just as in Ugarit this latter was the wife of El. However, the formula as such has not yet turned up in the Ugaritic texts. It is clear that the Hebrew title of Genesis 14:19,22 belongs to a widespread liturgical tradition of the ancient Near East, which Israel adopted and modified to its own peculiar monotheism. What is exceptional is the full form of the Hebrew "Creator of heaven and earth"; the "heaven" is never included in any of the extrabiblical examples of the formula so far unearthed. Most likely, the original, widely used divine epithet has been disengaged from its polytheistic connections and has been expanded in a way that comprehends the Israelite conception of God as the cosmic Creator.

EXCURSUS 9

Ben Meshek–Dammesek 'Eli'ezer 15:2

The second half of this verse is replete with difficulties. The Hebrew phrase *ben meshek* has been traditionally rendered, "the one in charge of my house"; so Targums, the Vulgate, Saadiah, Ibn Janaḥ, and Rashi. The Septuagint takes *meshek* as a proper name and translates "the son of Masek my homeborn slave." Aquila connects it with Hebrew *mashkeh,* "drink," and understands it to mean "cupbearer"; compare Yoma 28b. The Genesis Apocryphon 22.33 omits the word. Possibly, Genesis 24:2 may shed light on the words: "Abraham said to the senior servant of his household, *who had charge of all that he owned. . . .*"

The two words *dammesek 'eli'ezer* seemingly form a construction that is contrary to biblical Hebrew usage. They have traditionally been construed as "Eliezer of Damascus" (so Syriac, Saadiah, Ibn Janaḥ, Rashi, Ramban; compare Genesis Apocryphon 22.34) on the following grounds: First, the analogy of 2 Samuel 23:24 *'elḥanan ben dodo beitleḥem,* "Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem" (so Ibn Janaḥ); second, the preceding *ben,* "son of," serves this phrase as well, that is, "[the son] of Damascus, Eliezer." The use of singular *ben* with a place-name may have an analogy in Shamgar ben Anath (Judg. 3:31; 5:6), which probably means "Shamgar the Beth-anathite" (cf. Josh 19:38), and in Hadadezer *ben* Rehob (2 Sam. 8:3,12), which means "Hadadezer of Beth-rehob" (cf. Judg. 18:12).

Another possibility is to take *dammesek 'eli'ezer* as a hyphenated double name like Tubal-cain (Gen. 4:22), the first element of which is incidentally also a place-name (cf. Gen. 10:20). Still other solutions lie in a different approach.

The city of Damascus was probably founded by non-Semites, but the name was etymologized as Semitic *Di-mašk,* the first syllable being the relative pronoun. *Meshek* may therefore be an early name of the city, so that *ben meshek* would mean "the one of mesheq," that is, Damascus (cf. Gen. 14:2f.,7,17). Support for this theory may well be supplied by a ninth-century B.C.E. Aramaic inscription that refers to *br hdd br 'zr mś[k]y[']*, "Bir-hadad son of 'Ezer of Damascus."

Still another interpretation sees *dammesek* as an Aramaic common noun meaning "a servant." The Assyrian scribes wrote the name of the city in cuneiform both as *dimašk* and as *ša imērē-šu.* This latter may either mean "donkey boy" (from Aram. *ḥamār,* "ass"), that is, "servant"; or, more likely, it might result from a confusion with Aramaic *ḥāmār,* "wine." The area around Damascus was rich wine country and the name of the city would have been interpreted as *Di-mašk,* "the one of the (wine) drink." *Dammesek* would thus mean, "wine-server," "cupbearer," or "servant."

EXCURSUS 10

Angelology 16:7

The bearer of the divine word is described as "an angel of the LORD." Hebrew *mal'akh* derives from a stem *l-'-k,* "to send," which is used as a verb in Ugaritic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. *Mal'akh,* like the Greek *angelos,* from which the English "angel" is derived, means nothing more than "messenger." It is used of ordinary humans, as in Genesis 32:4, Judges 9:31, and 1 Kings 19:2, as well as of spiritual beings. A prophet or priest may also be called "an angel of the LORD," as in Haggai 1:13 and Malachi 2:7. No special importance attaches to angels in preexilic biblical literature. Information about the nature of belief in them is very sparse. They are nameless; they are without any mythological qualities; they enjoy neither individuality nor free will, and there is no hierarchy among them. Their sole function is as the emissary of God to carry out His specific charge.

From several texts it is clear that the demarcation between God and His angel is often blurred. Hagar is addressed by the angel (16:7–8,9,11) but she responds directly to God (v. 13). The same interchange of speakers occurs in Genesis 22:11–12,15–18 and at the incident at the burning bush in Exodus 3:2,4. At the Exodus from Egypt it is now God (Exod. 13:21), now His angel (14:9) who goes ahead of the Israelite camp. In the story of Gideon (Judg. 6:11–23) God and His angel speak interchangeably.

On the other hand, angels most frequently assume human form so that the individuals to whom they appear are at first unaware of their angelic nature. Such is the case, for instance, in Genesis 18–19. The three who visit Abraham are variously described as "men" (18:1,16,22; 19:5,10,12,16) and as "angels" (19:1,15), and the Sodomites certainly perceive them to be humans (19:5,9). In the case of the mother of Samson (Judg. 13), the one who appears to her is "an angel of the LORD" (v. 3) whom she describes as "a man of God" who "looked like an angel of God, very frightening" (v. 6). When the angel reappears to her husband, Manoah does not recognize him as such (v. 16) until he disappears in the flames on the altar (vv. 20f.).

Several suggestions have been made to account for the presence of angelology in Israel. Some see a borrowing from Near Eastern mythology in which deities are surrounded by

ministers semidivine, semihuman. In Ugaritic the messenger who goes back and forth between the gods is termed *ml'k*. It is hypothesized that Israel borrowed, refined, and monotheized the notion. Another view regards the angel as the personified extension of God's will, or the personification of His self-manifestation. A third theory sees the angel as a conceptual device to avoid anthropomorphism. He serves as a mediator between the transcendent God and His mundane world.

Angelology largely disappears with the advent of classical prophecy in the middle of the eighth century B.C.E., only to reappear in postexilic times in highly developed and complex forms.

EXCURSUS 11

'El Shaddai 17:1

This is the most common of the several divine names constructed with an initial *'el* element. Like *'el 'elyon*, it could be a fusion of an initially independent element *shaddai*, with *'el*, or the compound could be original (see Comment to 14:18 and Excursus 7). One way or the other, the distribution of *shaddai* both with and without the accompanying *'el* is highly instructive. This divine name appears nine times in the Torah, of which three are in poetic texts (Gen. 49:25; Num. 24:4,16). All but two of the Bible's other thirty-nine usages are likewise poetic (Prophets, Psalms, and Job). The prose exceptions (Ruth 1:20–21) are more apparent than real since the Book of Ruth possesses a poetic substratum and frequently displays archaisms.

These statistics have an important bearing on the question of the antiquity of usage. The overwhelming appearance in poetic contexts points a priori to a venerable tradition, for Hebrew poetry tends to preserve or consciously to employ early forms of speech. The remarkably high incidence of Shaddai in Job is of particular importance in light of that book's patriarchal setting. All the true prose usages are concentrated within the Genesis narratives (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25), a fact that is in perfect harmony with Exodus 6:3: "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai," a tradition explicitly assigning the divine name to the pre-Mosaic age. Significantly, of the vast store of biblical personal names, only three are constructed with the element Shaddai. These are Shedeur (=? Shaddai-Ur), Zurishaddai, and Ammishaddai—all appearing solely in the lists of Numbers 1–2. Each is the father of a tribal representative at the time of the Exodus. In other words, the divine name Shaddai lost its vitality in Israel with the advent of Moses and was preserved only as a literary relic in poetic compositions. Interestingly, the personal name Shaddai-'ammi—that is, the Hebrew Ammishaddai with its two components inverted—has turned up in a hieroglyphic sepulchral inscription as the name of a petty official in fourteenth-century B.C.E. Egypt. Since it cannot be explained as Egyptian, and because it is written in the syllabic orthography often reserved for foreign words, there is every reason to believe that the name belongs to a Western Semite in Egyptian employ. It is indeed known that Semites served the Egyptian bureaucracy in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.E. There is thus additional evidence of the use of Shaddai in pre-Mosaic times.

The great antiquity of the name and its obsolescence in Israel in the Mosaic period explain why there are no consistent traditions as to its meaning and why the ancient

versions have no uniform rendering. The Septuagint variously has "God," "Lord," "All-powerful," and "The Heavenly One," among others, as well as the transliteration *shaddai.* The Vulgate has "Omnipotens," whence the English tradition "Almighty." The Syriac has "The Strong One," "God," and "The Highest," as well as *shaddai.* The Greek rendering *hikanós,* "He that is Sufficient," found in the versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian, reflects a rabbinic suggestion explaining the name as a combination of the relative particle *sha* with *dai,* meaning "sufficiency" (Gen. R. 46:2). The modern conjecture that has gained widest currency connects shaddai with Akkadian *šadu,* "a mountain," often used as a divine (and royal) epithet. The name would originally have meant, "The One of the Mountain," probably referring to a cosmic mount or corresponding to the divine epithet "The Rock."

EXCURSUS 12

Circumcision 17:9–14

Although the law of circumcision is included in the priestly legislation of Leviticus 12:3, biblical tradition, as illustrated by Genesis 17:9–14, consistently assumes that the rite antedates Sinai. In the days of Jacob, it is so important to the Israelite tribes as to be an essential precondition of marriage with outsiders (Gen. 34:14–17). Zipporah, wife of Moses, circumcises her son at a critical moment (Exod. 4:25); and the rite is a prerequisite for participating in the Passover offering before the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 12:43–48). In fact, we are explicitly told that the Israelites who came out of Egypt were circumcised (Josh. 5:4f.). In this connection, the use of a flint-blade knife for the operation (Exod. 4:25; Josh. 5:2f.)—during the Bronze Age—is as much a testimony to the hoary antiquity of the custom as evidence of religious conservatism.

Not only is circumcision the earliest institution of Israel, its introduction being assigned by our narrative to the time of Abraham, but the text tacitly implies that it preexisted the patriarch since it is taken for granted that he understands the procedure to be followed even though no specific instructions are forthcoming. This should occasion no surprise because circumcision is widely and independently attested in the histories of divergent cultures stretching from Anatolia to western Sudan, from the Australian Aborigines to the Masai of East Africa, from the Polynesian cultures to the kingdom of Lesotho in southern Africa. Herodotus reported that the Egyptians practiced circumcision "for the sake of cleanliness, considering it better to be clean than comely" (Histories 2.37). A stela from Naga ed-Der in Middle Egypt, written as early as the First Intermediate Period (23rd cent. B.C.E.), carries a report of a mass circumcision ceremony performed on 120 men (ANET, p. 326). A tomb relief from Saqqara, stemming from the Sixth Dynasty (2350—2000 B.C.E.) depicts the operation being conducted on boys by mortuary priests (ANEP, no. 629). Various other texts, pictures, and sculptures of naked males, as well as some mummies, all support the prevalence of the rite in Egypt, though it is unknown whether it was restricted to men of a certain class, whether it was obligatory or voluntary, or what its particular significance was. Apart from the Babylonians and Assyrians, most Semites seem to have practiced circumcision. Herodotus mentions Ethiopians, Phoenicians, and Syrians, mistakenly believing that these peoples borrowed the rite from the Egyptians (Histories

2.104). In truth, it was practiced in northern Syria during the early third millennium B.C.E. Of all the peoples with whom Israel came into close contact, only the Philistines are derisively called "uncircumcised" (cf. Judg. 14:3; 1 Sam. 4:6; 18:25, etc.), showing them to have been unique in that respect. The story of Dinah and the Shechemites (Gen. 34) is particularly instructive because these people are "Hivites," not Canaanites or Semites. Texts like Jeremiah 9:24f. and Ezekiel 31:18 and 32:22–30 clearly attest to the wide diffusion of circumcision among peoples of Transjordan, Phoenicia, and Asia Minor. Clearly, then, the originality of the biblical law does not lie in the fact of the institution itself but in the total transformation of a widespread and ancient ritual.

In those cultures that traditionally practice circumcision, the age at which it is performed may vary widely, but the overwhelming preference is at puberty or as a prenuptial rite. In either case, it takes place at a crucial period in the male life cycle and marks the initiation of the individual into the common life of his group. The biblical shift to the eighth day after birth is a radical break with existing tradition, severing all connection with puberty, marriage, and "rites of passage." This particular dissociation now permits circumcision to be invested with an entirely new and original meaning. The operation owes its sanction not to any natural reason but solely to its being divinely ordained. In the course of its performance, it derives its significance solely from its being the conscious expression of the external, immutable covenant between God and Abraham. Having been performed, it constitutes the ineradicable token of the imposition of that covenant upon every generation of his descendants. The religious life of the Jew begins, therefore, on the eighth day of his birth. Since the circumcision is performed on each individual at that age and is not, as it is frequently elsewhere, a ritual practiced collectively, it underscores the singularity of each Jew's relationship to God, his personal dedication and obligation as a member of a covenanted community. It is the distinguishing mark of Jewish identity and, more than anything else, has proved to be a powerfully cohesive force in the struggle for national survival.

The history of the observance of the institution among Jews is interwoven with that of the Jewish people itself. In the heyday of Hellenism some Jews tried artificially to efface the signs of circumcision by means of epispasm, that is, by having the prepuce drawn forward to cover up the corona (cf. 1 Macc. 1:15; Yev. 72a). But when the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes proscribed circumcision in 167 B.C.E., Jewish mothers suffered martyrdom for deliberately violating the royal decree (1 Macc. 1:60f.; 2 Macc. 6:10). This kind of resistance was the first sign of the rebellion that culminated in the Maccabean revolt. When the Roman emperor Hadrian (ca. 130 C.E.) made circumcision a capital crime, this became one of the main causes of the Bar Kokhba insurrection (132–135 C.E.). Throughout the ages Jews clung tenaciously to the practice in defiance of ridicule and persecution on the part of Christian authorities and in the full consciousness of its vital role in Jewish self-preservation. It is important to note, however, that circumcision is not a sacrament in the Christian sense of the term but an indispensable obligation of Jewish law, since one born of a Jewish mother is automatically Jewish. It is the status of the mother, not the act of circumcision, that determines the infant's religious character as a Jew.

The primary responsibility for circumcision devolves upon the father. Since the average Jew is unable to perform the operation in accordance with the requirements of Jewish law, he commissions a trained *mohel* to act on his behalf. The *mohel* is selected not solely for his skill and learning but also for his piety. Similarly, the *sandek* (Gk. *synteknos,* "godfather"),

who has the privilege of holding the babe on his knees during the operation, is expected to be a God-fearing man. The proper time for fulfilling the mitzvah is as soon as possible after sunrise on the eighth day after birth, even if it is a Sabbath or holy day. Should the birth take place just before sunset, that day is still regarded as one complete day. If, however, the child is born in the twilight period, rabbinic authority must be sought as to the correct time for performing circumcision. If circumcision has been postponed for medical reasons, it may not subsequently be carried out on a Sabbath or holy day. Once postponed, it is also not performed on a Thursday because this might lead unnecessarily to profanation of the Sabbath, which would be the third day after circumcision, when the pain is thought to be most intense and some special treatment might be called for.

The actual rabbinic procedure consists of three parts. First comes the surgical removal of the foreskin with a knife *(ḥittukh, milah)*. Then the inner lining of the prepuce is firmly held between the thumbnail and index finger of each hand, is torn down as far as the corona, and then rolled back completely to expose the glans and the corona *(peri'ah)*. After this, blood is sucked from the wound as a means of disinfection, a rite now often performed with the aid of a swab or glass tube *(metsitsah)*.

From early times, the terms for uncircumcision and circumcision came to be used figuratively. A mind blocked to God's commandments has been described as "an uncircumcised heart" (Lev. 26:41; Jer. 9:25; Ezek. 44:7,9), a heart that required "circumcising" (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4); one unreceptive to God's word as having "an uncircumcised ear" (Jer. 6:10); one impeded in his speech as having "uncircumcised lips" (Exod. 6:12,30). All these metaphors prove conclusively that circumcision in Israel was no mere formal outward ritual but was invested with a spiritual aspect that betokened dedication and commitment to God.

EXCURSUS 13

The Cities of the Plain 19:1–38

The sites of Sodom and Gomorrah and their sister cities remain unknown. There are no reliable postbiblical traditions about them. Moreover, the biblical texts themselves appear to yield conflicting information.

The destroyed cities are repeatedly referred to as being located in "the plain" (Heb. *kikkar*),[1] also called "the land of the plain" (v. 28) and "the plain of the Jordan" (13:10f.). The Hebrew term *kikkar* is of uncertain origin and application, but it is invariably rendered *meshra'*, "plain," by the Aramaic Targums. It seems to be either a geographical or a topographical term. The statement that King Solomon cast the bronze vessels for the Temple "in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zerethan"[2] refers to the middle section of the Jordan Valley, between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and it seems to imply that the northern shore of the Dead Sea is the southern extremity of "the plain." This conclusion is supported by Deuteronomy 34:3. From the summit of Mount Nebo in Transjordan "facing Jericho" (Deut. 32:49), Moses was able to see "the Negeb; and the Plain—the Valley of Jericho." Finally, Lot is said to have been able to view the entire Jordan Plain from Bethel,[3] which would have been impossible if the cities were south of the Dead Sea.

But other facts would seem to favor a southern location. We are told that Abraham saw

the devastated plain from a vantage point near Hebron.[4] Apparently, *kikkar* is a flexible term and can describe a fan-shaped area, a physical characteristic rather than a specific location. We find mention of a plain in the vicinity of Jerusalem,[5] and there is no reason why the term could not also be used for the region south of the Dead Sea. This harmonizes better with the observation in Genesis 13:10 that the plain was "well watered . . . like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt," for the area around the southern basin of the Dead Sea is blessed with an abundance of fresh water and is fed by several streams. The presence of bitumen in the region, mentioned in 14:10, likewise suits the southern basin or at least the southern shore of the northern basin in which this substance is especially prevalent, while mention of salt in the Sodom and Gomorrah traditions[6] suggests a closeness to the salt mountain known as Mount Sodom (Jebel Usdum), which lies near the southwest corner of the Dead Sea.

Further circumstantial evidence might be thought to be provided by the Dead Sea itself. It is today divided into two parts by the Lisan (Heb. *lashon*), a tonguelike peninsula that juts out from the eastern shore and extends to within two miles of the western shore. The lower, or southern, section comprises only 27 percent of the entire body of water. Because of the considerable difference in depth between the two basins, some 1300 feet (400 m.) average in the north as opposed to a mere 20 feet (6 m.) in the south, there can be no doubt that the latter is of far more recent formation than the former. In other words, the Lisan at one time formed the southern bank of the Dead Sea, a conclusion strengthened by the evidence for the one-time existence of roads along the Lisan connecting the eastern and western sides of the sea. Below the Lisan, therefore, once stretched forth a plain that subsided in historical times due to tectonic disturbances and was submerged by the encroaching waters of the Dead Sea to form the shallow southern basin. It is most plausible that the remark in Genesis 14:3, "the Valley of Siddim, now the Dead Sea," refers to this process.

Were the "cities of the Plain" situated in this area, and do their ruins now lie below the waters of the southern basin of the Dead Sea? No biblical text supports the notion that the cities were destroyed by flooding. In fact, the several passages that employ Sodom and Gomorrah as a figure of utter destruction and desolation rest upon the presumption of a wasteland of seared ruins and scorched, infertile, salty soil.[7] Yet this argument by itself is not conclusive; for while the original catastrophe may have been an earthquake followed by a massive conflagration, a partial collapse of the southern bank may have taken place. The resulting breakthrough of water may have been limited in extent, but in the course of the millennia the sea water would have gradually spread southward until it covered the entire area of the original plain and obliterated whatever remained of the ruined cities.

Another place that has to be taken into consideration in determining the location of the four cities of the Plain is Zoar. Genesis 13:10 shows that it lay to the south of these cities. Its closeness to Sodom is beyond question.[8] There is abundant testimony to the existence of continuous settlement at Zoar in biblical,[9] Second Temple,[10] and talmudic times.[11] Eusebius (3rd–4th cents.; Onom. 42) and Jewish tombstones from the fifth century provide further evidence of settlement in this region. Many of these sources place Zoar south of the Dead Sea, while the sixth-century C.E. mosaic map from the Byzantine church at Medeba marks it more specifically on the southeast edge. The most likely and most wisely accepted location for Zoar is the fertile area of es-Safi on the Seil el-Qurahi in Jordan, a stream that flows into the Dead Sea. Remains of Roman and Nabatean settlements have been found

here, but none from biblical times. The later Zoar is hardly likely to have been the city to which Lot fled, but it must have been situated not too far away to have stubbornly retained the name over the millennia.

As a matter of fact, surveys and excavations during the late 1970s showed that the southern end of the Dead Sea could not have contained cities any time after 3000 B.C.E. On the other hand, on the eastern shore, about one mile east of the Lisan in Jordan, the town of Bab edh-Dhra has been uncovered, and not too far away are the other sites: Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir. These are the only sites in the area of the Dead Sea, and all four were occupied during the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium B.C.E.). Following their destruction around 2300 B.C.E., they were not resettled until Roman times, more than 2,000 years later. In the present state of our knowledge, these sites would seem to be the most likely locations of "the cities of the Plain," but this conclusion raises intractable problems of chronology and text.

EXCURSUS 14

Beer-sheba 21:32

In biblical times, Beer-sheba was the most famous of all cities in the Negeb region. The popular phrase "from Dan to Beer-sheba"[1] indicates that the town constituted the southernmost boundary of Judah for all practical purposes.

In the days of Samuel it served as a kind of regional judicial center. The prophet's own sons functioned there as judges.[2] In the period of the monarchy it housed a well-known cult center that became the object of prophetic disapproval.[3] The sacred origins of Beer-sheba are traceable to its patriarchal associations. Abraham plants a terebinth there and invokes "the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God," following the making of a pact there with Abimelech;[4] Isaac receives a revelation, builds an altar, and worships at the site; and Jacob sacrifices there and also experiences a revelation.[5]

Interestingly, patriarchal associations with Beer-sheba are restricted to the well and the cult site. Negotiations over the use of the water facilities are carried on with the king of Gerar! No king, ruler, or inhabitant of Beer-sheba is ever mentioned. There is no suggestion of the existence of any permanent settlement. Only 26:33 refers to a "city" of Beer-sheba, but this is a redactional note that explains how it got its name, and it has nothing to do with patriarchal activities.

The picture that emerges from the patriarchal narratives is fully in accord with the results of the excavations conducted from 1969 to 1976 at the site of the ancient city, the mound now known as Tell es-Saba', situated on the outskirts of the modern Beersheba. These findings have conclusively proved that no Canaanite settlement ever existed here. The earliest Israelite encampment, small and unfortified, derives from the thirteenth–eleventh centuries B.C.E. The city proper, highly fortified, really belongs to the period of the united kingdom under David and Solomon and the later kingdom of Judah.

Two outstanding discoveries made in the course of the excavations are a horned altar and a well cut in the center of the eastern slope of the mound. The subterranean water level of the well is estimated to be at least 115 feet (35 m.) down. Though it is tempting to regard this as the well upon which the patriarchal stories focus, this cannot be proved.

EXCURSUS 15

The Land of the Philistines 21:32

Abimelech is previously identified as "king of Gerar."[1] Gerar is now characterized as "the land of the Philistines."[2] In the parallel story about Isaac, Abimelech is entitled "king of the Philistines," and he resides in Gerar.[3] His subjects are also called Philistines.

These passages have occasioned considerable controversy. The Philistines are never listed in the various biblical registers of pre-Israelite peoples who inhabited the land, such as 15:18. They are not a factor in Joshua's campaigns. They do not appear in the Tell el-Amarna letters of the fourteenth century B.C.E. In fact, the earliest historical reference to them so far discovered comes from the time of Ramses III. The *prst (= peleset)* are among a group of peoples referred to by ancient Egyptian sources as the "sea peoples," who invaded the Levant from the Cretan-Mycenaean area at the beginning of the twelfth century B.C.E. They tried to attack Egypt as well, but were repulsed by Ramses III. Groups of the *peleset* settled at points along the coast of Canaan, and Ramses III and his successors employed them as mercenaries in the service of Egypt. Over time the *peleset,* or Philistines, took over the various Canaanite cities in the Shephelah, the coastal plain, namely, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Organized into a five-city confederation, a "pentapolis," under the rule of *seranim,* "lords," they consolidated their hold on the region and became a formidable military force.

In light of what is known of the history of the Philistines, the references to them in the Abraham and Isaac narratives are generally regarded as anachronistic. Yet this conclusion itself raises serious difficulties. An anachronism is a chronological misplacing of events, institutions, concepts, objects, proper names, or place-names. That which is put in the wrong historical time frame must accurately reflect the time from which it is retrojected or into which it is projected. However, the picture of the Philistines in Genesis does not correspond to the realities of the later period.

Unlike the depiction of the Philistines in Judges and Kings, these of the patriarchal period do not inhabit the Shephelah but are situated inland in the south. There is no pentapolis with *seranim* but a king of a single city who acts alone. The king has a Semitic name. Relationships between this people and the patriarchs are governed by formal treaties of friendship, whereas the later Philistines are inveterate enemies of Israel. Unless the Narrator had some particular reason for consciously falsifying history—and no such is forthcoming, especially since the ethnic identity of Abimelech and his subjects is of no significance for the understanding of the story—the references to the Philistines in the patriarchal narratives cannot be anachronisms. No later Israelite writer could possibly be so ignorant of the elementary facts of the history of his people as to perpetrate such a series of blunders, and to no purpose whatsoever.

Accordingly, the "Philistines" of patriarchal times may have belonged to a much earlier, minor wave of Aegean invaders who founded a small city-state in Gerar long before the large-scale invasions of the Levant, which led to the occupation of the Canaanite coast. The Narrator may be using a generic term for the sea peoples. At any rate, the Philistines of patriarchal times adopted Canaanite culture and lost their separate identity.

EXCURSUS 16

The Land of Moriah 22:2

This place-name is replete with difficulties. The context suggests some well-known locality, for Abraham knows at once where to go. The area is hilly and apparently sparsely wooded. It lies three days' journey from Beer-sheba on foot, though the direction is not stated. Yet "the land of Moriah" is never mentioned again in the Bible or in any independent extra-biblical source.

Strangely, none of the ancient versions transliterates *moriah.* The Septuagint renders "lofty country" as does the Syro-Palestinian version, and the same appears in the Book of Jubilees 18:2; Aquila has "clearly seen"; Symmachus, Vulgate, and the Samaritan Targum all have "vision"; the Aramaic Targums translate "worship," and the Peshitta reads "Amorites," a rendering that is found in the commentary of Rashbam. As a matter of fact, the presence of the definite article in the Hebrew (lit. "the Moriah") greatly complicates the possibility of *moriah* being originally a proper name, since in Hebrew usage the definite article is not attached to proper names.

The derivation of the word is uncertain. Our chapter clearly reflects popular etymology based on *r-'-h,* "to see," which appears in verses 4, 8, and 14. It is this that lies behind the ancient versions' "vision" and probably also explains the Septuagint's "lofty country"—that is, visible from afar. The same association with *r-'-h* is suggested by the words "on Mount Moriah where He appeared (Heb. *nir'ah*) to David" in 2 Chronicles 3:1. It also finds expression in the explanation of R. Judah in Genesis Rabba 55:9 that *moriah* means "the place I shall show you (Heb. *mar'eh*)."

A different etymology is implied by "you fear (Heb. *yere'*) God" in verse 12, which interprets the term as though it were composed of *mora'-yah,* "fear of the Lord," and most likely explains the Targums. Saadiah, too, renders the phrase "the land of worship," and R. Jannai in Tanḥuma *Va-yera'* 46f. says that it is so called because it is "the place from which fear [of God] emanated to the world."

It is clear that the narrative reflects both verbs—*r-'-h* and *y-r-'*—as popular etymologies for *moriah.* The assonance in these two provides frequent occasion for word play elsewhere in the Bible;[1] it is not unlikely that a similar device is at work here.

A third solution involves the stem *y-r-h,* "to teach," as suggested by Ta'anit 16a, Genesis Rabba 55:9, and Tanḥuma *Va-yera'* 45. Moriah is the place "from which teaching issued to the world." The identification with Jerusalem *(yeru-shalem)* found in 2 Chronicles 3:1 may also reflect this connection. Hebrew *moriah* can well be a feminine form of *moreh,* "teacher."[2] Actually, the fact that there are place-names compounded of *moreh,* such as "the terebinth of Moreh" and Gibeath-moreh,[3] renders this explanation most attractive, particularly since it has the first and last revelation of God to Abraham take place at sites with similar sounding names, thus contributing to the literary framework within which the biography of the patriarch is encased.

Jewish tradition associates Mount Moriah with the site of the Temple, the earliest source being 2 Chronicles 3:1: "Solomon began to build the House of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah." The same identification is found in the Book of Jubilees

18:13 and is accepted by Josephus,[4] the Targums, and the Talmud (Ta'an. 16a). Without doubt, verse 14, which mentions "the mount of the LORD," is the main justification for the equation. Zion is called "the mountain of the LORD" in several biblical passages.[5] One difficulty is that Jerusalem is not a three-day trek from Beer-sheba, and it would hardly have been necessary to carry a supply of wood to that region. Also, identifying the mount with Jerusalem means that the text cannot be earlier than David's time. Indeed, the commentary on verse 14 by Joseph b. Eliezer Bonfils (*Tsafenat Pa'neaḥ,* 14th cent. C.E.) explicitly states: "Moses did not write this verse, but the latter prophets wrote it."

No explanation is given in the narrative for the choice of Moriah as the site of the Akedah. It may then have been a well-known and ancient place of worship. Indeed, there seems to be some testimony for this in the text. First, there is the repeated use of ***ha-makom*** (vv. 3,4,9), which, as has been noted in the Comment to 12:6, often has the sense of "sacred place." Then there is the undeniable fact that when Abraham tells his servants that they will go up to "the place" to "worship" (v. 5), it is taken as a perfectly natural thing to do. Further, Abraham builds "*the* altar" (v. 9). The use of the definite article, obscured in the English, implies more the restoration of an existing altar than the erection of a new one. This reasoning assumes added force once we realize that this is the only such usage with a definite article in connection with a patriarchal altar not previously referred to. Finally, the descriptive term "mount of the LORD" (v. 14) clearly implies a site with a cultic tradition.

The present state of our knowledge does not enable us to resolve the problems connected with "the land of Moriah." We are probably dealing with a name so ancient that its original location and meaning were already lost by the time the biblical narrative was committed to writing.

EXCURSUS 17

The Meaning of the Akedah 22:1–19

It has often been claimed that the story of the Akedah is a polemic against human sacrifice and thus constitutes a turning point in the history of religion, marking the transition from the ritual killing of human beings to animal substitution. Such an understanding of the narrative cannot be supported either by history or by biblical tradition. The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3f., the first incidence of sacrifice in the Bible, belies it, for it regards an animal or the products of the soil as the natural constituents of an offering. Similarly, on emerging from the ark, Noah sacrifices animals and birds, as related in 8:20. Isaac's innocent question (v. 27) on the way to Moriah assumes that a sacrifice to God normally involves a sheep, while substitution of the ram for Isaac is a spontaneous gesture on the part of Abraham, performed at his own initiative and not divinely ordained. Furthermore, animal sacrifice had always been the accepted norm throughout the ancient world. It had to be, in fact, if only because ancient pagans believed that the gods, for their own survival, needed the flesh of animals provided by man.

It is strange that Abraham does not protest the inhumanity of the divine request that he sacrifice his son on the altar. And the story contains no explicit condemnation or repudiation by God of such a practice. A contemporary might have reasonably inferred that only in this instance was the human victim reprieved but that on another occasion the sacrifice

might well be consummated. For all these reasons, the claim that the Akedah is a protest against human sacrifice cannot be sustained.

As a matter of fact, no such protest is needed. The Akedah has nothing in common with pagan human sacrifice, which was practiced in order to appease an angry or inattentive deity, as in 2 Kings 3:21–27. In such cases, it is the worshipper who takes the initiative. In the case of Abraham, there is no emergency, no impending disaster to be warded off. It is God Himself who makes the request, and it is God who interrupts the sacrifice. In its present form, the narrative is the product of a religious attitude that is already long conditioned to the notion that Israelite monotheism is incompatible with human sacrifice. An undeniable atmosphere of the singular and the unique pervades the episode. God's request is treated as something utterly extraordinary, something that a person would never think of doing on his own initiative. More than this, it so tries the man of faith that his response is by no means predictable. It is taken for granted that one would normally recoil from such an act as child sacrifice. God's request is so clearly shocking and unrepeatable that the reader is informed in advance that God is only testing Abraham and does not want the sacrifice for His own needs. Incidentally, it is worth noting that those writers who refer to the "temptation" of Abraham are employing an obsolete use of the word. In present-day parlance this is a singularly inappropriate description of the episode, which entailed only suffering and anguish.

Why is Abraham tested? Since the time of God's first call to him in Haran, no experience of his proved that his devotion to God was unconditional and boundless, not influenced by the many glorious promises he received or the wealth he achieved. In this respect, Abraham and Job share a common circumstance, and the adversary's questioning of the disinterested nature of Job's piety (Job 1:9) applies equally to the patriarch. Abraham is designated to father a new nation, a nation that is to be endowed with a unique destiny among the family of nations. He must therefore unequivocally prove his worthiness to be God's elect. The totally disinterested nature of his devotion to God must be established beyond any doubt.

It is this that dictates the abnormality of the test, and it is this very abnormality that explains why God, not His angel, must present it, in contrast to the order to desist. It would not be adequate for Abraham to be asked to sacrifice himself, because he would surely do this in order to preserve his son, and he would still know that the divine promises would be honored. The sacrifice of his son is thus the decisive ultimate test that can be devised.

The Akedah must be seen in this light, and in this light alone. The focus is exclusively upon Abraham. All the rest, from the Narrator's point of view, is irrelevant and intrusive. That is why we are told nothing about Sarah or about the feelings of Isaac.

EXCURSUS 18

The Akedah in Jewish Tradition

The story of Isaac's near sacrifice on the altar, although not mentioned again in biblical literature, captured the popular imagination and deeply penetrated the religious consciousness of the Jewish people. As the occasion prompted, one or another aspect of the episode

acquired special relevance. Thus, from early times the liturgy of fast days, called because of impending disaster, included the following prayer: "May He who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah answer you and hearken this day to the sound of your cry" (Mish. Ta'an. 2:4). Here, it is God's last-minute intervention that seemed to be singularly appropriate to the day. On Rosh Hashanah, when the fate of Israel hangs precariously in the balance because of its sins, the following passage is included in the Musaf, or additional, service: "Be Mindful of Abraham's binding of Isaac his son on the altar, how he suppressed his compassion in order to perform Your will wholeheartedly. In the same way, may Your compassion overcome Your anger toward us. . . . In behalf of his posterity may You this day recall with compassion the binding of Isaac."

So powerful and enduring is the impact of the Akedah that God is asked, as it were, to emulate Abraham's superhuman behavior in controlling His emotions. This daring notion has its source in a midrash (Gen. R. 56:15), according to which Abraham is said finally to pour out his soul, reminding God of his uncomplaining, unquestioning obedience despite the obvious contradiction between the Akedah and the previous promises. The old man pleads with God that just as he had suppressed his compassion to perform the divine request, so should God be mindful of the Akedah and be filled with compassion for Israel when it finds itself in adversity or mired in sin.

The reinterpretation of the Akedah in terms of expiation of sin contributed toward its selection as the Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah (Meg. 31a). The increasing emphasis on this motif, especially in the liturgy, was in all probability the rabbinic response to the teachings of the mystery cults. In opposition to the pagan idea that atonement for the sins of the faithful may be effected through the sacrifice of the god or of his son, the sages stressed the doctrine of patriarchal merit. The willingness of the founding father to sacrifice his son as a proof of his devotion to God created an inexhaustible store of spiritual credit upon which future generations may draw.

More than anything else, however, it was the recurring experience of persecution—from the Hellenistic age down through the Roman oppression, the Christian massacres on an unprecedented scale, and Muslim fanaticism—that secured the prominence of the Akedah as a theme in the Jewish liturgy. Abraham and Isaac became the supreme exemplars of wholehearted loyalty to God and to His Torah, even to the extent of self-sacrifice. Jewish martyrdom derived unfailing inspiration from the Akedah narrative, and medieval poets produced a whole genre of penitential poetry in which the central theme was the Akedah as a metaphor of martyrdom *'al kiddush ha-shem,* "in sanctification of the Name of God." The blowing of the ram's horn on Rosh Hashanah (Lev. 23:24) was interpreted in terms of the Akedah. Said R. Abbahu, "Why does one blow a shofar taken from a ram? The Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He said: Blow a ram's horn before Me so that I remember in your behalf the binding of Isaac son of Abraham and count it to you as though you had bound yourselves (as a sacrifice) before Me" (RH 16a).

In his comment to Genesis 21:19, Ibn Ezra takes note of and rejects a view that Abraham did actually slaughter Isaac. It is the lack of any mention of the boy in that text that seems to have provided biblical support for this curious interpretation, which is well documented in medieval Hebrew sources. These sources feature Isaac being resurrected from the ashes upon the altar.

EXCURSUS 19

The Hittites of Hebron 23:20

Any discussion of the historical problem of the Hittites in the Bible must start by differentiating those references in the literature that pertain to the premonarchic period from those that relate to the times of the monarchy. Solomon is said to have exported horses to "the Kings of the Hittites,"[1] and he takes Hittite wives.[2] "Kings of the Hittites" are feared by an Aramean king.[3] In each case, the reference is not to Hittites living inside the country but to foreigners in distant lands. Without doubt, the Neo-Hittite states of Syria are intended. When the Hittite Empire was suddenly destroyed about 1200 B.C.E. by the onslaught of the "sea peoples" (see Excursus 15), various city-states that were formerly Hittite vassals asserted their independence. In some cities the old feudal Hittite rulership remained intact and was even reinforced by new settlers who migrated from Asia Minor, so that their previous history and affiliation caused these states to continue to be known as "Hittite." In fact, Hittite hieroglyphic inscriptions can be documented in Syria until about 700 B.C.E. The biblical texts simply follow the practice of Assyrian scribes, as is well evidenced in the records of Shalmaneser III[4] (859–825 B.C.E.) and Tiglath-pileser III[5] (745–727 B.C.E.). Gradually, the designation "Hittite" lost all ethnic and political significance and came to apply loosely to all the territory between the Euphrates and the border of Egypt. Sargon II[6] (721–705 B.C.E.), Sennacherib[7] (704–681 B.C.E.), and Esarhaddon[8] (680–669 B.C.E.) include Philistia and the Land of Israel within the appellation "Hittites." The Babylonian Chronicle, in its entry for the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, also includes Jerusalem in this broad category.[9]

The references to Hittites in those portions of the biblical literature that deal with premonarchic, especially patriarchal, times raise serious historical problems, for we are dealing here with the period prior to the destruction of the Hittite Empire, and existing evidence proves conclusively that Hittite imperial expansion was restricted to the area north of the kingdom of Kadesh on the Orontes. At no time did the Hittite Empire reach into Canaan, nor is there any extrabiblical literary source testifying to the settlement of Hittites in Canaan. The problem is further complicated by the obvious fact that the Hittites of patriarchal times have Semitic names. This is the case with Ephron son of Zohar and with Esau's wives (26:34; 36:2). Moreover, Abraham is able to converse easily and directly with the Hebronites without need for an interpreter, and there is nothing peculiarly Hittite about them or their customs and legal practices as displayed in Genesis 23.

Nevertheless, there is a consistent tradition that includes Hittites among the pre-Israelite peoples that inhabit Canaan. In the numerous lists discussed in the Comment to 15:19–21, Hittites are prominently featured, occupying either first or second place. The spies sent by Moses from the wilderness to scout the land report on the presence of this people in the hill country;[10] and they were still there at the time of Joshua's invasion.[11] The prophet Ezekiel preserved a tradition about an ancient Hittite settlement in Jerusalem.[12] These texts clearly exhibit a consciousness of ethnic distinctions, and it is not possible simply to dismiss references to Hittites in Genesis 23 as examples of the loose generic designation for the pre-Israelite inhabitants. That Abraham's ally Mamre is described in 14:13 as an "Amorite" and that he is connected with Hebron,[13]—while Ephron is always designated a

"Hittite"[14]—certainly suggests once again that Amorite and Hittite are not identical. In fact, if Kiriath-arba/Hebron is so called because the town was an amalgam of four originally separate units, it is quite probable that Hittites occupied one quarter and Amorites another. The same distinction between Amorites and Hittites appears in Ezekiel 16:3,45.

The riddle of the presence of Hittites in Hebron and elsewhere in southern Canaan cannot be solved with confidence in the present state of our knowledge. This people most likely constituted one of the non-Semitic elements in the population, perhaps connected with Jebusites or Hurrians. They may well have come originally from Anatolia. In this connection it is pertinent to note that the Indo-Aryan element in the population of pre-Israelite Canaan is well attested by the presence of personal names in the Tell el-Amarna letters and in tablets from Taanach and Shechem. Of special interest is the fact that the ruler of Jerusalem, Abdi-Khepa, bears a name whose second element is that of a Hurrian goddess; there is also a well-known Hittite queen named Pudu-Khepa. Further, Shuwardata, who rules in the Hebron region, likewise bears an Indo-Aryan name. Despite the presence of the Hurrians in Canaan, there is little evidence of the use of the Hurrian language. Similarly, the Semitic language used by the population at Hebron does not prove that they were not of Hittite origin.

In considering the issue of Hittites at Hebron, it is pertinent to note that Hittite jugs have turned up in a tomb at Megiddo in Israel dating to ca. 1650 B.C.E. Hittite hieroglyphic seals deriving from the Late Bronze Age (1600–1200 B.C.E.) have been found, as well as Syro-Hittite ivories and jewelry, and the architecture at Hazor has been shown to have been influenced by Syro-Hittite models.

EXCURSUS 20

"God of the Father"

A distinctive and characteristic feature of the Book of Genesis is the frequent use of a certain type of divine epithet that is made up of the phrase "God of my/your/his father,"[1] often with "Abraham" or "Isaac"[2] or both names[3] added in apposition to "father." In some instances, God is further identified as YHVH.[4] This designation appears once again in Exodus 3:6 in God's self-manifestation to Moses, where it is intended to emphasize continuity. The God who speaks at the Burning Bush is the selfsame One who spoke to the patriarchs. Thereafter in the Torah the epithet becomes "God of your/their fathers," the plural referring to the entire people of Israel.[5]

The epithet "God of the father" is not unique to the Bible. It is, in fact, documented over a wide area of the ancient Near East over a long period of time, from the nineteenth century B.C.E. on. In these texts the "god of the father(s)" sometimes appears anonymously, sometimes with an accompanying personal name. For example, we find "Ashur god of my father," "Ashur and Amurrum the gods of our father," "Shamash the god of my father," "Ilaprat god of your father," an oath "by the name of the god of my father," an appeal to the king "by the name of (the god) Adad, lord of Aleppo and the god of your father."

The connotation of this divine epithet is a special, personal relationship between the individual and his god, who is his patron and protector. This designation is particularly

appropriate in the patriarchal narratives since they revolve around the lives of individuals. It is highly significant that it is never used in reference to Abraham's father. This is to be explained by the tradition, preserved in Joshua 24:2, that Terah was an idolator. It indicates that the advent of Abraham constituted a new stage in the history of religion. Similarly, the change from the singular to the plural form, "fathers," following the commissioning of Moses, registers another historic development.

An examination of the Genesis texts in which the epithet "God of the father" occurs shows that this particular title is not conditioned by the requirements of the narrative. Its employment is therefore to be explained as a genuine relic from the earliest stage of Israelite religion. This conclusion is reinforced by its being confined to the patriarchal period.

EXCURSUS 21

Jacob: The Moral Issue 27:1–28:5

Jacob as a young man is not portrayed in a favorable light. First he acquires the birthright through his heartless exploitation of his own brother's misery; then he purloins the patriarchal blessing by means of crafty deception practiced upon his blind and aged father. In both instances, the outcome is legally valid and irrevocable, notwithstanding the unsavory aspects of Jacob's actions. It is evident that the successful application of shrewd opportunism was well respected in the ancient Near East as it is in contemporary society. The two incidents also appear to betray a thoroughly formalistic conception of law in which the strict outward adherence to certain practices or principles is decisive, irrespective of the true spirit of the law and in disregard of moral considerations. It is remarkable, therefore, that the biblical narrative has succeeded in weaving the stories into the larger biography of Jacob in such a way as to add up to an unqualified condemnation of Jacob's actions.

As noted in the Comment to 25:33, the function of the divine oracle that Rebekah received during her difficult pregnancy is to disengage the fact of Jacob's election by God from the improper means that he employed in his impatience to formalize his predestined, independent right to be Isaac's heir. His claim rests wholly and solely on God's revealed predetermination, and the presence of the oracle constitutes a moral judgment on Jacob's behavior.

This clear, if implicit, censure is brought out all the more forcefully in the cycle of biographic tales. Scripture says of Abraham that he died at "a good ripe age, old and contented" (25:8). Isaac is similarly described as dying "in ripe old age" (35:29). But such notice is singularly and revealingly lacking in the case of Jacob. This patriarch can only report that the years of his life have been "few and hard" (47:9). The reference, of course, is to the unrelieved series of trials and tribulations that dogged his footsteps from the day he deceived his father until the last years of his life.

The quiet, mild, home-loving Jacob, favorite of his mother, was forced into precipitous flight, to be exiled for twenty years. Indeed, the catalogue of misfortunes that befell him reads like the retributive counterpart, measure for measure, of his own offenses. Just as he exploited his brother's plight, so Laban exploits his. He took advantage of his father's permanent darkness to misrepresent himself as his elder brother, so Laban makes use of the darkness to substitute the elder sister for the younger. When Jacob admonishes Laban with

the accusatory "Why did you deceive me?" (29:25), he echoes the very Hebrew stem *r-m-h* used about himself by Isaac to Esau (27:35). The perpetrator of deception is now the victim, hoist with his own petard.

When Jacob finally makes his escape from Haran and sets out for home after two decades in the service of his scoundrelly uncle, he finds his erstwhile employer in hot and hostile pursuit of him (chap. 31). No sooner has this trouble passed than he feels his life to be in mortal danger once again from Esau (32:4–33:16). Arriving at last at the threshold of Canaan, he experiences the mysterious night encounter that leaves him with a strained hip (32:25–33). His worst troubles await him in the land of Canaan. His only daughter, Dinah, is violated (chap. 34); his beloved wife, Rachel, dies in childbirth (35:16–20); and the first son she bore him is kidnapped and sold into slavery by his own brothers. In perpetrating this inhuman act, the brothers use an article of his clothing in order to deceive their father (37:26–33), just as Jacob years before had used Esau's clothes to mislead Isaac.

All the foregoing makes quite clear Scripture's condemnation of Jacob's early moral lapses. An explicit denunciation could hardly be more effective or more scathing than Jacob's unhappy biography. Nevertheless, expressions of outright censure of Jacob's behavior are found in prophetic literature. Hosea tells us (12:3) that the Lord once "punished Jacob for his conduct, / Requited him for his deeds." And Jeremiah warns (9:3): "Beware, every man of his friend! / Trust not even a brother! / For every brother takes advantage, / Every friend is base in his dealings." It can hardly be doubted that in coupling the term "brother" with an unusual phrase like *'akov ya'akov,* "takes advantage," the prophet intends to signal to the hearer an association with Jacob's treatment of Esau, a notorious example of such base behavior.

All of the above provide ample evidence that Jacob's duplicitous behavior with regard to the birthright was totally unacceptable to the biblical Narrator.

EXCURSUS 22

Bethel 28:10–22

The interpretation of the story of Jacob at Bethel that has enjoyed widest currency in scholarly literature understands its ultimate purpose to be the tracing of the founding of the Israelite temple of Bethel to that patriarch. This view cannot be sustained for several reasons. Were the story a reflex of a living cult at Bethel, one would expect to find mention of some act of worship and a reference to a sanctuary. No allusion to either appears. (As noted in the Comments to verses 17 and 22, the phrase *beit 'elohim* does not mean a sanctuary in this context.) Decisive is the contrast between the building of altars by Abraham and Isaac upon receiving the divine word[1] and Jacob's failure to do so in the present instance. He does erect an altar on his return from Haran (35:70), but again nothing is said of a sanctuary. The fact of the matter is that pastoral nomads have no need of temples.

There is no doubt, however, that the narrative is textured in such a way as to ascribe the initial sanctity of the site to Jacob's experience. The name of this patriarch is so interwoven with Bethel as to point to a consistent and enduring tradition connecting Jacob with the beginnings of Bethel as a sacred spot in Israel.

The first reference to the place appears in the traditions about Abraham, who is said to

have built an altar and to have worshipped YHVH in the vicinity.[2] It is unclear whether or not the text has in mind the same locality to which Jacob came, but, at any rate, Abraham did not experience a theophany at Bethel. Only Jacob did. His dedication of a *matsevah* ("pillar"), his vow, his return pilgrimage and erection of an altar and again of a *matsevah,*[3] the identification of Jacob's God as "the God of Bethel,"[4] the deathbed recollection of the episode (48:3), the prophet Hosea's reference to the same event (Hos. 12:5), and the attribution of the coinage of the name to Jacob himself[5]—all these constitute the ingredients of a tradition of unmistakable authenticity. A survey of the later history of Bethel also points to a tradition of venerable antiquity.

Bethel is first mentioned as a national Israelite religious center in the period of the judges, when it had already acquired prestige by virtue of housing the Ark of the Covenant and the ministry of Phinehas, grandson of Aaron.[6] In Samuel's day it was a focus of religious pilgrimage,[7] and with the secession of the northern tribes after the death of Solomon, King Jeroboam selected Bethel to become the major cult center of the kingdom of Israel in rivalry with Jerusalem.[8] In the days of Elisha, a school of prophets functioned there (2 Kings 2:2–3), but in the eighth century B.C.E. the Bethel cult earned the outright condemnation of Amos[9] as well as of Hosea. The latter, a northerner who was even more severe in his castigations, actually designated Bethel ("House of God") Beth-aven ("House of Delusion").[10] Yet even the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in 722/721 B.C.E. did not put an end to the sanctity of the place. Its priesthood continued to exist for another one hundred years,[11] until the Bethel cult center was finally destroyed by King Josiah of Judah in the course of his religious reforms.[12] In light of the discredited history of Bethel and its censure at the hands of the prophets, the positive associations of Jacob with the site are highly interesting. They could not have been invented at a late period, nor have the early traditions been expunged or reedited to conform with later events.

Yet this verdict does not exhaust the subject, for there is much evidence of a varied nature for Bethel as the site of an ancient, pre-Israelite sanctuary. This evidence may be summarized as follows:

(1) While the name itself might simply mean "house of a god," like Ugaritic *btil* and Akkadian *bīt ili,* it is far more likely, on the analogy of other Canaanite place names, that the second element is none other than El, the name of the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon. Beth-el would then follow the well-established pattern of temple names formed by prefacing *beit* to the god name. Examples are Beth-anath (Josh. 19:38), Beth-azmaveth (Ezra 2:24), Beth-baal-berith (Judg. 9:4), Beth-baal-meon (Josh. 13:17), Beth-choron (Josh. 16:5), Beth-dagon (Josh. 15:41), and Beth-shemesh (Josh. 15:10). In all such cases, the name of the sanctuary gradually encompassed the adjacent or surrounding urban area as well.

(2) The city of Bethel is now generally identified with the modern village of Beitin (= Beitil), which lies about 10.5 miles (17 km.) north of Jerusalem and is situated 2,886 feet (880 m.) above sea level. Blessed with an abundance of springs and strategically located at the junction of a north-south highway with an east-west road, the area provided convenient and attractive grazing grounds for pastoral nomads. Archaeological excavations have shown that as early as 3500 B.C.E. a bare mountain top there served as a great open air shrine. In the nineteenth century B.C.E. a temple was erected over it. A stone pillar was discovered there *in situ.* It is now certain that Bethel was a sacred Canaanite site before and during the patriarchal period.

(3) There is plenty of evidence for the existence of a god named Bethel who derived his name from the holy place. The parallelism in Jeremiah 48:13 shows that there were Israelites

who worshipped a god of that name: "And Moab shall be shamed because of Chemosh, as the House of Israel were shamed because of Bethel, on whom they relied." Chemosh was the national god of the Moabites,[13] and in this context Bethel also must be a deity. In fact, he is explicitly referred to in the list of deities who sanction the terms of the treaty made between King Esarhaddon of Assyria and King Baal of Tyre in the seventh century B.C.E.: "May Bethel and Anath-bethel deliver you to a man-eating lion."[14]

The Jews of Elephantine, Egypt, ca. 400 B.C.E., know of the divinities Eshem-bethel, Herem-bethel, and Anath-bethel. There are also many personal names compounded of the divine element "Bethel." Three examples appear in a sixth-century B.C.E. Aramaic inscription—*byt 'l'sny* ("Bethel made me"), *byt 'lyd'* ("Bethel knows"), *byt 'ldlny* ("Bethel rescued me")—and several more of the same type occur at Elephantine. A Mesopotamian name in Zechariah 7:2—Bethel-sharezer—has its exact counterpart in Babylonian documents, where it means "May (the god) Bethel preserve."

In sum, the existence of a god named Bethel is known from Mesopotamia, northern Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, and Egypt. This fact, together with the foregoing data, leads to the inevitable conclusion that Bethel had a long pagan cultic history behind it in Jacob's time. To know this is to understand the details of the story of Jacob at Bethel in an entirely new light.

With great subtlety, the narrative dissociates absolutely the sanctity of the place from its pagan antecedents. This is accomplished by the following devices. Although the site is repeatedly termed a *makom* (vv. 10,16,17,19), which often means a "sacred place" and which it was to the Canaanites, Jacob does not go there by design; he stumbles upon it by accident only because nightfall happens to find him there, recognizing nothing of its sanctity and in fact treating it irreverently. The stone he takes for a pillow is any stone, one just lying around; it becomes a pillar only to commemorate the theophany but possesses no inherent sanctity. The event itself, because it happens in this particular place, generates astonishment; yet the place is nameless—it has no prior history for Jacob. Finally, there is the emphasis on the divine name YHVH; it is He who is "standing" there, who speaks to Jacob, and who identifies Himself as the God who made promises to his forefathers. "Surely YHVH is in this place," exclaims Jacob on awakening, and it is YHVH from whom he seeks protection. As if further to underscore the dissociation from pagan antecedents, when the patriarch returns from Mesopotamia years later and travels to Bethel, he orders the members of his household to rid themselves of alien gods, to purify themselves, and to change their clothing before approaching the site (35:2). The biblical Narrator ignores the pre-Israelite sacred history of Bethel. The true sanctity of the site commences only with God's self-revelation to the patriarch. This is the thrust of the Jacob-Bethel narrative.

EXCURSUS 23

The Twelve Sons and the Twelve Tribes 29:31–30:26

The narrative in 29:31–30:26 tells of the birth of twelve sons to Jacob through two wives and two concubines. Eleven are born in the Haran region, and one in Canaan (35:16–18). The account is set forth according to a pattern that combines maternal origin, social status, and chronological order, as follows:

LEAH	Bilhah (Rachel's Maid)	Zilpah (Leah's Maid)	RACHEL
1. Reuben	5. Dan	7. Gad	11. Joseph
2. Simeon	6. Naphtali	8. Asher	[12. Benjamin
3. Levi			(35:16–18)]
4. Judah			
9. Issachar			
10. Zebulun			

As was pointed out above in the Introduction to 29:31ff., nothing in the language of the narrative suggests a reference to underlying tribal history; yet there can be no doubt that the sons are perceived to be the eponymous, or name-giving, ancestors of the future tribes of Israel. That is to say, the text exhibits consciousness of the fact that each son is to be regarded as the father of a tribe to which he lends his name. The ordering of births according to wives and concubines parallels the form used for the genealogies of the Arameans in Genesis 24:20–24 and of the Edomites in 36:1–5, 9–18. In the case of these two peoples, where segmented genealogies are featured—that is, where there is more than one line of descent from a common ancestor—the different branches are also attributed to a particular matriarch, whether a full wife or concubine. This design has meaning and function. It expresses various types of affiliations—whether ethnic, cultural, political, geographical, or other—within the larger supratribal organization. Those tribes subsumed under the rubric of a single mother constitute distinct subgroups. Concubine tribes had an inferior status.

This genealogical concept of history—the expression of clan, tribal, and national relationship by ascription to common ancestry back to a single individual—has been discussed in connection with the Table of Nations in chapter 10. In the case of the twelve sons of Nahor in Genesis 27:20–24, it was pointed out that many of their names are otherwise known to us as those of places, tribes, and peoples. The same personification of groups was shown to be present in the "line of Ishmael," who was prenatally destined to be "the father of twelve chieftains" (17:20). When the names are later listed "in the order of their birth," they turn out to be those of a confederation of Arab tribes (25:16). As a matter of fact, this tendency to obscure the differentiation between the ancestor and the tribe bearing his name is obvious from the concluding formula in the Testament of Jacob to his sons gathered about his deathbed. The chapter opens with the statement that "Jacob called his sons and said, 'Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.'" It closes with the declaration, "All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him" (Gen. 49:1,28). The individual and the tribe have become imperceptibly blended.

The patriarchal tribal pattern was characteristic of seminomadic peoples throughout the Near East. As noted, the Arameans and Ishmaelites were a conglomeration of clans, and so were the Edomites (Gen. 36) and Midianites (Num. 25:15). The Mari archives have abundantly illuminated this type of society. They tell of the existence of confederations of Ḫanean tribes and of Yaminites and of subgroups within each. Intertribal alliances were expressed in terms of brotherhood.

When viewed in light of the above facts, the Genesis narratives that detail the birth of Jacob's sons through a schematized arrangement actually constitute an important historic document relative to the evolution of the league of Israelite tribes. Certain stages of

development can be discerned. The six Leah tribes must have originated in Mesopotamia and have constituted a separate fraternity that evolved in two distinct stages. The handmaid tribes must have endured a subordinate status. The tribe of Benjamin was the last to join the Israelite league and came into being in Canaan.

According to our account, Reuben is Jacob's first-born, and his name consistently heads the biblical lists of the tribes of Israel. The prominent role he plays in the Joseph novella[1] echoes his position of seniority and creates the expectation that he will enjoy the leadership of the league of Israelite tribes. Yet such is not the case in the historical sources. During the conquest and settlement, the tribe of Reuben was insignificant. Its territory lay east of the River Jordan, where it felt itself isolated from the main body of Israel.[2] The Song of Moses (Deut. 33:6) shows that its very existence as a tribe was at one time in jeopardy. Deborah censured it for its inactivity in a moment of great national crisis (Judg. 5:15–17). The backwardness of the Reubenites is illustrated by the fact that as late as Saul's time, they still maintained their pastoral nomadic existence, and until the exile they continued to be governed by a "chieftain."[3]

What all the above adds up to is that the depiction of Reuben as Jacob's first-born cannot possibly be a retrojection from later times. It is, in fact, inexplicable unless it accurately represents an early historic reality in which Reuben enjoyed hegemony at least over the five other Leah tribes. Its loss of leadership is reflected in Genesis 35:22, 49:3–4, and 1 Chronicles 5:1, and the involvement of the Reubenites in the rebellion against Moses, as described in Numbers 16, may also be part of this process.

Similarly, decisive conclusions about the antiquity of the data in the birth narratives may be drawn from the portrayal of the other three sons in the first Leah group. Simeon is next in line in seniority, but he does not inherit the mantle of leadership. Historically quite unimportant, the tribe did not even merit a mention in the Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33) or the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5). It was largely absorbed by Judah, who took over many of the cities assigned to it.[4] Nevertheless, our narrative makes Simeon senior to Judah.

Levi, too, is here senior to Judah; yet in later times it had no territory and was dispersed throughout Israel. The story of his birth yields not the slightest intimation of all this. In fact, although Levi became a sacerdotal tribe, God is not invoked in explanation of his name, which is given a purely secular meaning. This is exceptional among the six sons of Leah.

Judah is also ignored by Deborah, and the early weakness of the tribe is evident from Deuteronomy 33:7. Our text, which has him as the fourth son, clearly reflects the situation prior to the ascendancy of Judah, an event that is reflected in Genesis 49:8–12.

The arrangement of the four above-named as Leah tribes must stem from a period when they were politically related. Since their tribal territories were not contiguous, the organizing principle cannot be geographical, and the list must be presettlement. This is further underlined by the association of Issachar and Zebulun with the Leah group. These two had their territories in the north. Nothing that is known of their later history could possibly explain the connection. As to Gad and Asher both being the sons of Leah's handmaid, here again there is no known history to account for the linkage or for the association of both with the other six. Gad had its territory east of the Jordan, far from Asher, who is situated in the north. Dan and Naphtali did occupy nearby territories in the north, but our scant information about the history of these two tribes prevents us from making any deductions about the reality behind our narrative or as to why Dan is the elder of the two.

All in all, the contrast between what is known of the postsettlement history of the tribes and the reality that can be culled from the present narrative account about the birth of Jacob's sons unmistakably points to the conclusion that the latter preserves the earliest traditions.

EXCURSUS 24

Jacob's Struggle with the Angel 32:23–33

This extraordinary episode, related with remarkable brevity, is replete with problems of interpretation. These involve: the imagery, the geographic locale, the purpose of the assault, the identity of the assailant, the significance of the name change, the cohesion of the diverse elements, and the place of the story within the larger narrative unit.

The literary artistry shows every sign of the influence of two dominant motifs common to a broad range of cultures. The river as the scene of the struggle recalls the many tales of river-spirits that fight with humans who seek to cross their abodes. Insofar as rivers frequently prove to be unexpectedly treacherous, they were believed to possess some malevolent power dangerous to human life. Travelers would take good care to propitiate the river-spirit through sacrifice, libation, or other ritual before attempting to ford. Equally widespread is the motif of a demonic being whose power is restricted to the duration of the night and who is unable to abide the breaking of the dawn. An obvious corollary is the opportunity accorded a brave soul to derive profit from the situation by holding on to the demon long enough to bend it to his will.

These motifs are obviously incompatible with Israelite monotheism. They have consequently been refracted and transformed in our biblical narrative. Nothing in the text connects the mysterious assailant with a river-spirit. The stranger does not interfere with the passage of personnel, livestock, and baggage. It is only after these have already crossed the river that he becomes active. It is Jacob alone who is the object of his aggression. Jacob clearly knows nothing of any river-spirit, for the attack is wholly unexpected, and no propitiatory ceremony takes place. The contrast with the folk-tale genre is further accentuated through the absence of any description of the adversary. The usual pattern requires the spirit to assume the form of animals, serpents, and monsters in a constant shift from one guise to another in the course of the struggle. Again, in a complete reversal of roles, it is the mysterious being who injures Jacob; traditionally, the spirit is the one who is punished and wounded by the human defender. The fact that the assailant blesses Jacob proves that it cannot be a demon, for the notion of eliciting and receiving a blessing from a demon is unexampled and inconceivable in a biblical context.

In short, the occurrence of this incident by a river and the sudden attack by a mysterious assailant indicate that popular folk tales provided the literary model for this biblical narrative. But a careful and radical purging of all elements offensive to the monotheism of Israel has taken place.

The geographical locale of the incident is crucial to its understanding. Its true significance lies not in the river ambience as such but in its having occurred exactly at the crossing of the Jabbok. This river is otherwise mentioned in the Bible exclusively as a frontier of Israel, the limit of Israel's first victory against the kingdoms east of the Jordan after it emerged from the desert wanderings.[1] The location at the Jabbok cannot be

coincidental; it suggests that the purpose of the assault upon Jacob is to frustrate his return to his homeland, to prevent him from crossing over into the future national territory of Israel.

This raises the question of the identity of the antagonist. Who but Esau would have had such an obstructionist interest? But the wrestler is definitely not Esau himself. Hence, he must stand for Esau in some manner. He is, as it were, Esau's alter ego. The vocabulary employed in the narrative to identify the strange personage—a "man," "a divine being" *('elohim)*—is that used elsewhere of angels.[2] Indeed, the prophet Hosea explicitly describes him as such in Hosea 12:4. The most plausible solution, therefore, is to see in this mysterious being the celestial patron of Esau. This, indeed, is the interpretation given in a midrash.[3] Throughout the ancient world, the idea was current that each city-state, each people, had its divine protector. In monotheistic Israel such a notion was intolerable. It therefore became transmuted into a belief in the existence of subordinate tutelary spirits who were part of the celestial host. This notion finds unambiguous expression in Daniel 10:13, 20, and 21, which speak of the celestial princes of Persia and Greece. But it is rooted in much earlier times. Psalm 82 is a classic example, and Isaiah 24:21 reflects the same picture. This idea is behind such passages as Deuteronomy 4:19 and 29:25, which state that God Himself allotted the nations their divinities. An interesting light on this belief is shed by the textual history of Deuteronomy 32:8, which reads as follows: "When the Most High gave nations their homes / And set the divisions of man, / He fixed the boundaries of peoples / In relation to Israel's numbers." In the last phrase, the Greek version of the Jews of Alexandria has "the messengers *(angeloi)* of God" presupposing a Hebrew reading ***benei 'el/'elohim*** instead of our received Hebrew text ***benei yisra'el.*** Such a Hebrew text actually turned up in Cave 4 of Qumran.

In summation, the mysterious creature who assails Jacob as he is about to cross the future border of Israel is none other than the celestial patron of Esau-Edom, who is the inveterate enemy of the people of Israel. The entire episode foreshadows the impending confrontation with Esau, whom Jacob can now meet with confidence. It is also emblematic of subsequent historic relationships between the peoples of Israel and Edom.

It is this antagonism that makes the blessing, the change of name from Jacob to Israel, all the more meaningful. This act constitutes Esau's acquiescence in Jacob's right to the paternal blessings. It acknowledges the promised land to be Jacob's rightful heritage. It is entirely appropriate that the new name, that by which the future nation is to be known, should be bestowed at the frontier, just as the patriarch overcomes his opponent and can enter that land unhindered.

Seen in light of the above, the narrative of the assailant is an integral part of the Jacob-Esau encounter, not an intrusion.

EXCURSUS 25

The Name "Israel" 32:29

The precise understanding of this name is impeded by many difficulties, not the least being that its grammatical structure has no exact analogue among biblical personal names.

The explanation presupposed by the narrative requires a stem *s-r-h.* This must be taken seriously for the following reasons: the same stem is found in Hosea 12:4; it is also the base

of Seraiah, another fairly frequent, if equally enigmatic, name (just as *d-l-h* is the stem of the analogous Delaiah); the element *s-r-h* is unlikely to be folk etymology, which invariably explains an obscure term by one in common use, not by one just as arcane—and *s-r-h* is otherwise unknown.

The meaning "to strive" for this stem is extracted from the context. However, in names formed by a verb combined with *'el,* the divine element is usually the subject of the action, not its indirect object. *Yisra'el,* therefore, should properly mean "God strives," not "He strives with God."

None of the suggestions proposed to explain the verbal element has yielded satisfaction. Until more philological evidence is forthcoming, the true explanation escapes us. It is worth noting that in biblical times there already seem to have been traditions connecting the name *yisra'el* with either sovereignty or rectitude. Hosea 12:5, in reference to our narrative, says of Jacob *va-yasar,* which can only derive from *s-w-r,* a by-form of *s-r-r,* "to have dominion," as proven by Judges 9:22 and Hosea 8:4. This suggests that the prophet took the name to mean "He had dominion over a divine being." Further support for this interpretation is the word *misrah* in Isaiah 9:5,6, which undoubtedly means "authority." Just as apt is the poetic use of *yeshurun* (Jeshurun) as a synonym for Israel in Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:15,26 and Isaiah 44:2. In this last passage it parallels "Jacob" (cf. Isa. 40:4). Since the stem *y-sh-r* means "to be upright, straight," it forms a perfect antonym of *ya'akov,* understood to be connected with "craftiness, deceit" (Gen. 27:36; Jer. 9:3; Hos. 12:4). If *yisra'el* is indeed associated with *yeshurun,* the change of name would express the transformation of character from deviousness to moral rectitude. According to this particular interpretation, found in the Yalkut Reubeni (Gen. 232.29) and in Ramban's commentary on Deuteronomy 2:10 and 7:12, the name would mean "He who is upright with God."

Another explanation, frequent in the writings of Philo and also adduced by Seder Eliyahu Rabba (25[27], pp. 138–139), regards *yisra'el* as a contraction of *ish-ra'ah-'el,* "The man who saw a divine being." This has doubtless been influenced by Genesis 32:31.

EXCURSUS 26

Shechem 34:1–31

Biblical archaeologists now have identified Shechem with the mound known as Tell Balâṭa, situated about 1 mile (1.6 km.) east of modern Shechem (Nablus). It is flanked by Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.[1] Already settled in Neolithic times, Shechem is first mentioned in the Egyptian "execration texts" of the nineteenth century B.C.E., a collection of clay tablets inscribed with the names of towns and their rulers hostile to Egyptian occupation of Canaan. From the same period comes a stela referring to an Asian campaign by King Sen-Usert III (c. 1880–1840 B.C.E.), which shows Shechem to have been a large and important city. The El-Amarna letters make clear that in the fourteenth century B.C.E. it was a major city-state, then under the rulership of a certain Lab'ayu. Other texts show that Western Semites were the main element in the population at this time.

Shechem was destined to play a crucial role in the history of Israel. Abraham had made it his first stopping place when he arrived in the land from Haran. Here he received his first theophany and built an altar.[2] Jacob had the same experience in Shechem and bought a plot

of land there.[3] He also buried there the idolatrous appurtenances found in his retinue.[4] Joseph set out for this city when he searched for his brothers,[5] and he was ultimately buried there.[6] Joshua appointed it one of the "cities of refuge"[7] and assembled all Israel there for a covenant-making ceremony.[8] In the days of the judges, Abimelech tried to set up a monarchy in the city,[9] and it became the first capital of the secessionist northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam.[10]

Because of the special role that Shechem played in the history of Israel from earliest times, the narrative of Genesis 34 assumes great interest. It contains several unusual features that suggest traditions of great antiquity. First, there is the contrast that it offers to the generally idyllic biblical picture of peaceful relationships between the patriarchs and the local peoples. Then, too, Levi is here depicted as a secular warrior figure, in contradistinction to the later image of the tribe of Levi, which is dedicated to priestly and religious duties and plays no military role in the wars of conquest. The martial image of Simeon is not in accord with later developments. This tribe lost its independence early, was swallowed up by Judah, and became insignificant.[11] It is ignored in the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5). The alliance of Simeon and Levi is unparalleled. Strangely, Reuben and Judah, also full brothers to Dinah, are not mentioned by name as being concerned with vindicating their sister's honor.

These unusual aspects of the narrative militate against a late fictional account. A late author would surely have drawn upon more conventional, familiar material in order to impart to the tale an air of authenticity. It is probable, therefore, that Genesis 34 records an incident that belongs to the prehistory of the Israelite tribes, the period prior to Joshua's wars of conquest. This is strengthened by the reference to Shechem as a "country," a designation that makes sense only in terms of conditions prevailing in that era, as the Comment to 34:2 demonstrates. Similarly, the ruler's not being accorded the title "king," usually given to the heads of the Canaanite city-states in the Torah and in Joshua-Judges, is another indication of authenticity. The Narrator was obviously familiar with a special political reality.

It is to be noted that the narrative speaks only of the fortunes of a family, of individuals within it, not of tribes. But it is difficult to understand the terms of the agreement with the Hivites unless one is dealing with a much larger unit than Jacob and his sons. Given the ages of the latter, how meaningful is the pledge to give their daughters in marriage to the men of the city (vv. 9,16,21)? The possibility exists that the characters of the story are really personifications, corporate personalities, much as John Bull and Uncle Sam represent, respectively, the English and American peoples. The actual presence of this phenomenon in the Torah is abundantly illustrated by the Testament of Jacob in Genesis 49 in which the individual and the tribe imperceptibly merge. Seen in this light, Genesis 34 would be an account of an assault upon Shechem by Israelite tribes in a very early period. Such an interpretation is of special interest because, as a matter of fact, the history of that city in relation to Israel is shrouded in mystery.

The Hebrew sources have preserved no traditions about the Israelite occupation of this city by force. The silence is wholly surprising in view of Shechem's strategic importance as the natural capital of the central hill country lying at the intersection of major arteries of communication. Its unusually large size and its historic role, as evidenced by Egyptian and El-Amarna texts, not to mention the fact that it was the first Canaanite city at which Abraham stopped over when he arrived in the country—the site where he built his first altar, the place where he first received the divine promises of nationhood and territory—

make it inconceivable that a successful campaign against this city by Joshua would not have been recorded had it occurred. Confounding matters further is the absence of Shechem from the several notices about still unconquered Canaanite enclaves.[12] As a matter of fact, archaeology does not support any devastation of Shechem in the Late Bronze period or early Iron Age, when so many Canaanite cities mentioned in Joshua show signs of violent destruction.

Despite all this, we find reports that Joshua built an altar and conducted a solemn national ceremony in the environs of Shechem and that he assembled all the tribes of Israel at that city for a rite of covenant renewal.[13] In other words, Shechem is found to be in Israelite hands in Joshua's day, but how it came to be so is an enigma.

It is not possible to claim that Genesis 34 represents the story of Shechem's capture, for the clan of Jacob fled the place immediately after the assault. Nor can it be argued that Joshua occupied and rebuilt a city that had all the while been in ruins. This is contradicted by both archaeological research and by our own story that says nothing about the devastation of Shechem itself. The only feasible solution is that Shechem was taken over gradually by peaceful infiltration. Indeed, the story of Judges 9 supports a theory of symbiotic relationship between the Canaanites and Israelites until the city was destroyed by Abimelech in the period of the judges. The archaeological remains testify to the violent destruction of Shechem during the second half of the twelfth century B.C.E. (cf. Judg. 9:45), after which it lay in ruins for about two hundred years.

In sum, the narrative of Genesis 34 has preserved authentic historical traditions deriving from preconquest times. It therefore cannot be used to sustain a theory of the retrojection of later events back into the patriarchal period.

EXCURSUS 27

Ephrath, Rachel's Tomb, and Migdal-eder 35:16–22

Leaving Bethel, Jacob journeys southward on the north-south longitudinal road that traverses the central hill country. Rachel's death and burial must have occurred not far from "Ephrath"; otherwise its location would have been gauged in relation to a nearer locality. Where is Ephrath? At first glance, the answer is simple: It is identified with Bethlehem in verse 19, in 48:7, and in a host of other texts. Thus, in 1 Samuel 17:12, David is described as "the son of a certain Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah." In Ruth 1:2, the two sons of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, are similarly termed "Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah." Micah 5:1 addresses "Bethlehem of Ephrath," and in Ruth 4:11 Boaz receives the blessing: "Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem."

But there are difficulties. It is strange that Rachel would be buried in Judean territory, which is where Bethlehem lies, rather than within the Benjaminite or Josephite tribal boundaries. Also, there exists another tradition, in 1 Samuel 10:2, that places Rachel's tomb "in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah." This place is not otherwise known, but the text must refer to somewhere near or on the border, and it locates the tomb, more appropriately, within the territories of the Rachel tribes. Jeremiah 31:14(15) supports this location of the tomb: "A cry is heard in Ramah—Wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel weeping for her children."

The two traditions would seem to be mutually exclusive. Rabbinic literature made

attempts to harmonize them by reinterpretation of the texts, such as in Tosefta Sotah 11:11 and Genesis Rabba 82:10. As far as Jeremiah 31:14 is concerned, it is not at all certain that Hebrew *ramah* is in fact the locality Ramah, that is, er-Ram, 5 miles (8 km.) north of Jerusalem. It may simply mean "on a height" and was so understood by Targum Jonathan, R. Joseph Kara, and Radak—not without good reason, for the place-name otherwise invariably appears with the definite article. But the explicit statement of 1 Samuel 10:2, cited above, cannot be convincingly argued away. It appears to testify to a different tradition from that of Genesis 35:19.

It should be noted, however, that this latter text speaks primarily of Ephrath and only secondarily identifies it with Bethlehem. In Psalms 132:6, which is a poetic summary of the wanderings of the Ark as described in 1 Samuel 6–7, we learn that the Ark was at Ephrath. This cannot be Bethlehem; no such fact is otherwise recorded. The parallel clause mentions "the region of Jaar," which is certainly the Kiriath-jearim of 1 Samuel 7:1. In other words, there is a tradition that identifies Ephrath with Kiriath-jearim, which lay on the border between Judah and Benjamin, about 8 miles (13 km.) west of the Bethel-Hebron road, close to present-day Abu Ghosh (cf. Josh. 15:9–10; 18:14–15). Both Bethlehem and Kiriath-jearim are thus identified with Ephrath. Many of the passages cited show that Ephrath was originally an important clan that became dominant in both locales. This is explicitly stated in 1 Chronicles 2:50–51, where one descendant of Ephrath is designated "the father of Kiriath-jearim" and another "the father of Bethlehem."

The original tradition about Rachel's tomb located it in Ephrath, that is, within the area occupied by the clan of Ephrath. More precisely, according to 1 Samuel 10:2, it lay on the Benjaminite border. When Bethlehem came under Ephrathite hegemony it too came to be known as Ephrath, which is how the phrase "now Bethlehem" came to be appended to the original Ephrath in Genesis 35:19.

This conclusion receives support from Jacob's next station, Migdal-eder, to which he journeyed after burying Rachel. Had he placed the tomb near Bethlehem, he would have had to reverse his direction, for Micah 4:8 identifies the site with a section of Jerusalem. The same is found in Mishnah Shekalim 7:4. If, however, the tomb lies on the border of Benjamin, then such a turnabout becomes unnecessary.

EXCURSUS 28

The Edomite King List 36:31–39

This list is not genealogical like the others, but it simply details eight kings who ruled in Edom prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.

The register is characterized by a lack of uniformity and by an assortment of anomalies: The length of the monarch's reign is never given; in four cases the father's name is recorded, in four not; a place-name is attached to seven kings, but in three instances the formula is "the name of his city was X," and in four there is simply the particle "from"; no place-name is repeated; with two kings some additional information of a personal nature is brought; remarkably, no king is succeeded by his son, yet the invariable formula "When X died, Y succeeded him as king" suggests unbroken continuity.

The royal record inserted here is unique in the Hebrew Bible. It is strongly reminiscent, however, of the several king lists that have come down to us from Sumer, Babylon, and

Assyria. It may well have been extracted by the Hebrew writer from original Edomite sources. The variations in formulas used, and the lack of uniformity in the type of detail cited, suggest that we have a compilation drawn from more than one Edomite source, not a single homogeneous tradition.

In its present form, the list conveys the impression of a continuous succession of national kings, each reigning from a different center. The absence of dynastic kingship is paralleled in the election of Saul in Israel. Here, too, no provision was made for the passage of the crown from father to son. If, then, we are dealing with a list of consecutive monarchs, the period of time covered by the eight would be between 160 and 200 years, based on the average twenty- to twenty-five-year reigns of ancient Near Eastern kings.

This conclusion raises serious problems. Since Saul ascended the throne about 1020 B.C.E., the Edomite monarchy could not have been founded before about 1200 B.C.E. Yet, according to Numbers 20:14 and Judges 11:17, Moses sends a communication to "the king of Edom," and the latest possible date for the Exodus is about 1250 B.C.E.! Of course, the eight kings could have exceeded the average in the lengths of their reigns, and this would take the establishment of the monarchy in Edom still further back in time. The indisputable fact is, however, that Egyptian texts from the thirteenth to the twelfth centuries B.C.E. depict the Edomites as Bedouin, and the region of Seir as the grazing ground of nomads. Thus, Ramses II (ca. 1290–1224) claims to have "laid waste the land of the Asiatic nomads and plundered Mount Seir." The report of an Egyptian frontier official from the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. refers to "bedouin tribes of Edom" passing into Egypt. Ramses II (1183–1152) boasts about having destroyed "the people of Seir among the bedouin tribes" and claims to have "razed their tents." There is not the slightest suggestion of a settled kingdom of Edom in this period. The same picture emerges from recent archaeological excavations in Transjordan. These provide no evidence for sedentary occupation in Edom between the thirteenth and the eleventh centuries B.C.E.

The solution to the problem lies in a proper understanding of the title "king" used in our text. By no means need it imply a settled, unified, national monarchy. The phenomenon of petty tribal kings who held sway over grazing lands within a particular locality is well documented in the ancient world. The Assyrian King List opens with the names of "seventeen kings living in tents." Royal archives from the city of Mari claim the defeat of "seven kings, fathers of Ḫana," and, further, of "three Yaminite Kings," the names being those of seminomadic tribes. In Greece the three tribes that made up the Dorian group and the four Ionian tribes that constituted the Athenian group had tribal kings. The Bible itself testifies to this restricted, tribal use of "king" in that the same five personages who are designated "kings of Midian" in Numbers 31:8 are called chieftains *(nesi'im)* in Joshua 13:21. It is no coincidence that in Genesis 25:4, Midian is made up of five tribes. Similarly, the king of the Amalekites referred to in 1 Samuel 15:8, 20, and 32 is nothing more than a tribal chief. Throughout its history, this wild people roamed the wastelands of the Negeb and Sinai regions and had no state of its own, only fortified encampments from which forays were made into the settled areas.

Thus, there is nothing in our Edomite King List that requires the existence of a national, unified kingdom of Edom. The various individuals cited were simply localized tribal chieftains, as were also "the king of Edom" with whom Moses dealt. This explains why each king is assigned a different territory and why there are no dynasties, just as there were none for the Israelite judges.

Finally, the possibility cannot be ruled out that our list, if it is a compilation made from

originally distinct Edomite records, refers in reality to tribal kings, many of whom were contemporaneous with one another. The formula that presupposes succession may well be the work of the Hebrew writer, not a part of the Edomite document from which it was extracted. If this is the case, the need to suppose a history of two centuries for the Edomite monarchy is eliminated.

EXCURSUS 29

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife 39:7–20

The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife echoes a well-known motif in world literature: the married woman who attempts to seduce a young, handsome man who nobly rejects her out of a sense of honor and duty. She then accuses him of having attempted to dishonor her. One is reminded of the Greek tales about Bellerophon and Anteia, Hippolytus and Phaedra, Prixus and his aunt, Peleus and Cretheis, and Tenes and Phylonome. Similar stories occur in the *Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron.*

One version that is of special interest here is the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers," which is by far the oldest of all and which originated on the same soil that witnessed Joseph's trials. The earliest surviving manuscript is dated ca. 1225 B.C.E., but the story had a history long antedating this particular papyrus.

The Egyptian tale tells of two brothers, Anubis and Bata, who lived together. Anubis was married, Bata was a bachelor. One day, when the former was not at home, his wife tried to seduce Bata, who virtuously rejected her advances. Knowing well her fate should her husband discover the truth, the guilty wife anticipated events by slandering Bata. The innocent brother was forced to flee from the murderous intentions of Anubis, who followed in vengeful pursuit. Bata finally succeeded in convincing his brother of his innocence. Anubis returned home, slew his wife, and threw her body into the river.

It is certain that this particular story was not the direct source of the tale about Joseph and Potiphar's wife. However, as an Egyptian literary theme, it may well have influenced the artistic form in which the biblical story has been recorded. A contrasting analysis of the two stories will help clarify the distinctive nature of the biblical presentation and disclose the spirit that animated it.

The "Tale of Two Brothers" belongs to a genre of literature intended for entertainment. It is adorned with several mythological elements such as talking cows, the miraculous appearance of a river, the resurrection of the dead, and many others. A particularly repulsive item is the way Bata proves his innocence. He mutilates himself and casts his dismembered limb into the river, where it is swallowed by a fish.

All these aspects of the Egyptian story find no echo in the biblical narrative about Joseph and the wife of Potiphar. It is not an independent tale but a single episode that has been integrated into a larger account. As such, it is recorded with a striking economy of detail and with a restraint that is austere. Potiphar is faceless, lacking in individuality. His wife is nameless. Scripture is silent about her fate, which is usually a prominent feature of the "spurned wife" motif. The focus of the biblical narrative is Joseph's reaction to her coaxing, an event that is a causal link in the chain of events leading to Joseph's subsequent rise to power, his reconciliation with his brothers, and their settlement in Egypt.

EXCURSUS 30

The Genealogical Lists 46:8–27

These lists pose numerous questions. Thus, four sons of Reuben are cited in verse 9, whereas in an incident that occurred about a year earlier only two were mentioned.[1] This in itself is not an insuperable problem but it takes on greater significance when seen in light of other facts. Judah is credited with two grandsons in verse 12, a situation that has been shown to be quite impossible at this time (see Comment to 38:1). Even more serious a problem is that of the ten sons of Benjamin listed in verse 21. Such a state of affairs is wholly incompatible with the image of the youthful Benjamin as portrayed in the preceding chapters. The contradiction is even more serious if one remembers that in the parallel lists in Numbers 26 and 1 Chronicles 7–8, as well as in the Septuagint version of the present chapter, a few of the names recorded here as those of Benjamin's sons are presented as those of his grandsons. The conclusion would seem to be inescapable: the data of verses 9–25 must have originally constituted an independent genealogical register, and this latter has been incorporated as a whole into the present narrative. In such a general, comprehensive genealogy, Manasseh, Ephraim, and the ten sons (and grandsons?) of Benjamin would all have found their proper place.

This theory about the origin of the lists likewise eliminates the problems presented by the summary and grand totals. Originally, the figure 70 was simply the sum of the individual figures: 33 + 16 + 14 + 7.[2] Because 70 is a symbolic number in the Bible, it could also be used to express totality, irrespective of its originally literal application. Its retention when the register was incorporated into our narrative therefore posed no difficulty.

The 33 male descendants of Leah comprise 6 sons, 25 grandsons, and 2 great-grandsons.[3] As a list unrelated to the present narrative, it is perfectly natural that Er and Onan should be included for the sake of completeness, even though they died in Canaan before the descent to Egypt. There would also be no reason not to include Hezron and Hamul, Judah's grandsons, even though they were born in Egypt. Dinah would not have been reckoned within the total of 33 in accordance with the general tendency of biblical genealogies to omit the female side (see Comment to 46:17). The phrase found in verse 15—"in addition to Dinah his daughter . . . male and female"—would seem not to have belonged to the original, independent register, which concluded Leah's genealogy with the summation, *kol nefesh sheloshim ve-shalosh* ("33 persons in all").[4]

The secondary grand total of 66, given in verse 26, is dependent on the phrase "who came to Egypt." Er, Onan, Manasseh, and Ephraim are therefore deducted from the total. When the register of Jacob's descendants was incorporated in its entirety into the account of the migration to Egypt, it was equipped with the introductory and concluding statements of verses 8 and 26–27.

NOTES TO THE EXCURSUSES

Excursus 1

W. F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" BA 1 (1938): 1–3; M. Haran, "The Ark and the Cherubim: Their Symbolic Significance in Biblical Ritual," IEJ 9 (1959): 30–38, 89–94.

1. Exod. 25:18–22.
2. Num. 7:8–9.
3. Exod. 26:31; 36:8,35; 37:7–9.
4. 1 Kings 6:23–35; 7:36; 8:6–7.
5. Ezek. 41:18–20,25.
6. 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Isa. 37:16; Pss. 80:2; 99:1.
7. 2 Sam. 22:11 = Ps. 18:11; Ezek. 9:3; 10 passim.
8. Exod. 25:20; 37:9.
9. Ezek. 1:6–11; 10:14; contrast 41:18–19.
10. See Josephus, Ant. 8.3.3 (Loeb, p. 611).

Excursus 3

D. Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983).

1. Tosef. Av. Zar. 9(8):4, Sanh. 56a, Maimonides, Yad, Hilkhot Melakhim 9.1.
2. Maimonides, ibid. 8.11.

Excursus 4

M. Greenberg, *The Ḥab/piru* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1955); W. F. Albright, "Abram the Hebrew," BASOR 163 (1961): 36–54; M. B. Rowton, "Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the *'Apiru-'Ibrim*," JNES 35 (1976): 13–20; R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 209–216.

Excursus 5

1. Maimonides, Yad, Hilkhot Zeraim ("Gifts to the Poor") 8:10.
2. YD 252.
3. Mish. Git. 4:6.

Excursus 6

R. Rosenberg, "The God *Ṣedeq*," HUCA 36 (1965): 161–177; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11," JBL 86 (1967): 25–41; M. Delcor, "Melchizedek from Genesis to the Qumran Texts and the Epistle to the Hebrews," JSJ 2 (1971): 115–135.

1. See KAI 4.6, 10.9; ANET, pp. 499, 502.
2. Cf. Isa. 1:21; Jer. 31:23; 33:16.
3. See Legum Allegoria 3.82 (Loeb, p. 356f.).
4. 11Q Melch.
5. 1QGen.Apoc. 22.14–17.
6. Hebrews 5–7.
7. Suk. 52b.

Excursus 7

F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 50–52.

1. UT 126.III.5–8.
2. Praeparatio Evangelica 1.10.
3. KAI 222.A.11; ANET, p. 659.
4. Deut. 32:8; Isa. 14:14; Pss. 9:3; 77:11; 87:5; 91:1; Lam. 3:35,38.
5. Pss. 7:18; 47:3; 97:9.
6. Pss. 9:3f.; 18:14 = 2 Sam. 22:14; Pss. 21:8; 83:19; 91:9; 92:2.
7. Pss. 57:3; 78:56.
8. Pss. 46:5; 50:14; 78:35; 82:6.
9. Num. 24:16; Pss. 57:3; 73:11; 78:7; 107:11.

Excursus 8

M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 49–54; N. C. Habel, "Yahweh: Maker of Heaven and Earth," JBL 91 (1972): 321–337.

1. Pss. 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:5–6.
2. KAI 26.A.III.18; ANET, p. 654.
3. KAI 129.1.

Excursus 9

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Excursus 10

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Excursus 11

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Excursus 12

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Excursus 13

J. Penrose Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," BA 5 (1942): 17–32 and 6 (1943): 41–54; idem, "Have Sodom and Gomorrah Been Found?" BAR VI, 5 (1980): 26–36; W. C. van Hatten, "Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah," BA 44 (1981): 87–92.

1. Gen. 13:12; 19:17,25,29.
2. 1 Kings 7:46; 2 Chron. 4:17.
3. Gen. 13:3,10–12.
4. Gen. 19:27–28; 18:1,16.
5. Neh. 12:28; cf. 3:22.
6. Gen. 19:26; Deut. 29:22; Zeph. 2:9; cf. Pss. 107:34.
7. Deut. 29:23; Isa. 13:19–22; Zeph. 2:9.
8. Gen. 14:28; 19:20–23,30.
9. Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:34.
10. Josephus, Wars 4.8.4 (Loeb, p. 143), and Ant. 13.15.4 (Loeb, p. 427), 14.1.4 (Loeb, p. 459).
11. Mish. Yev. 16:7, Tosef. Shev. 7:15, Pes. 52a, 53a.

Excursus 14

M. W. Fowler, "The Excavation of Tell Beer-Sheba and the Biblical Record," PEQ 114 (1982): 7–11; Z. Herzog, "Beer-sheba of the Patriarchs," BAR VI, 6 (1980): 12–28.

1. Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2,15; 1 Kings 5:5; for the reverse order, see 1 Chron. 21:2; 2 Chron. 30:5.
2. 1 Sam. 8:1–3.
3. Amos 5:5; 8:14; cf. 2 Chron. 19:14.
4. Gen. 21:32–33.
5. Gen. 26:24–25; 46:1–4.

Excursus 15

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1. Gen. 20:2.
2. Gen. 21:32.
3. Gen. 26:1, 8, 14–16, 26.

Excursus 16

1. Cf. Exod. 14:31; Isa. 41:5; Zech. 9:5; Pss. 40:4.
2. Cf. Deut. 29:17 *poreh* with Isa. 17:6 *poriyah*.
3. Gen. 12:6; Judg. 7:1.
4. Josephus, Ant. 1.8.2.226 (Loeb, p. 113).
5. Isa. 2:3; 30:29; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 8:3; Pss. 24:3.

Excursus 18

M. Fox, "Kierkegaard and Rabbinic Judaism," Judaism (2 Apr. 1953): 160–169; S. Spiegal, *The Last Trial*, trans. Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967).

Excursus 19

O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1964), 59–62; H. A. Hoffner, "The Hittites and Hurrians," in *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 197–228; R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, trans. D. Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 134–136.

1. 1 Kings 10.29; 2 Chron. 1:17.
2. 1 Kings 11:1.
3. 2 Kings 7:6.
4. ANET, pp. 276–281.
5. ANET, p. 283.
6. ANET, pp. 284–286.
7. ANET, p. 287.
8. ANET, pp. 290f.
9. British Mus. 21946, verso lines 11–13.
10. Num. 13:29.
11. Josh. 11:3.
12. Ezek. 16:3,45.
13. Gen. 13:18; 23:17,19; 25:9; 35:27; 49:30; 50:13.
14. Gen. 23:9; 25:9, 49:29f.; 50:13.

Excursus 20

J. P. Hyatt, "Yahweh as the God of My Father," VT 5 (1955): 130–136; M. Haran, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," ASTI 4 (1965): 51–52; A. Alt, "The God of the Fathers," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 3–100; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 4–43.

1. Gen. 31:5; 46:3; 31:29; 46:1.
2. Gen. 24:12; 46:1.
3. Gen. 28:13; 32:10.
4. Gen. 24:12,27,42,48; 28:13; 32:10.
5. Exod. 3:15,16; 4:5.

Excursus 22

R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. J. McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 291–292; F. O. Garcia-Treto, "Bethel: The History and Traditions of an Israelite Sanctuary" (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1967); J. Kelso et al., *The Excavation of Bethel (1934–60)*, American Schools of Oriental Research 39 (1968); M. Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 28 n. 26, 52, 57.

1. Gen. 12:7; 13:18; 26:25.
2. Gen. 12:8; 13:3–4.
3. Gen. 35:1,3,6–7.
4. Gen. 31:13; 35:7.
5. Gen. 28:19; 35:15.
6. Judg. 20:18–28; 21:2–4.
7. 1 Sam. 10:3.
8. 1 Kings 12:26–33; cf. Amos 7:13.
9. Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5–6.
10. Hos. 4:15; 5:8; 10:5; cf. Amos 5:5.
11. 2 Kings 17:28.
12. 2 Kings 23:15; cf. 1 Kings 13:1–5.
13. Cf. Judg. 11:24; 1 Kings 11:33.
14. ANET, p. 534.

Excursus 23

R. A. Wilson, ***Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*** (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 183–190.

1. Gen. 37:21–22; 29–30; 42:22,37.
2. Josh. 13:15–23; 22:9–34.
3. Heb. ***nasi'***, 1 Chron. 5:6,9,10.
4. Josh. 19:1–9; 15:26–32,42.

Excursus 24

1. Num. 21:24; Deut. 2:37; 3:16; Josh. 12:2; Judg. 11:13,22.
2. Cf. Gen. 18–19; Josh. 5:13,14–15; Judg. 13.
3. Gen. R. 77:2; 78:6; Song R. 3:6.

Excursus 25

G. A. Danell, ***Studies in the Name Israel*** (Uppsala: Appelburgs Boktrykeri-a.-b., 1946).

Excursus 26

1. Deut. 11:29; 27:12; Judg. 9:7.
2. Gen. 12:6–7.
3. Gen. 33:18–20.
4. Gen. 35:4.
5. Gen. 37:12.
6. Josh. 24:32.
7. Josh. 20:7; 21:21.
8. Josh. 24.
9. Judg. 9.
10. 1 Kings 12.
11. Josh. 19:1,9; Judg. 1:3.
12. Josh. 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:11–13; Judg. 1:21,27–33.
13. Josh. 8:30–35; cf. Deut. 11:26–32; 27; Josh. 24.

Excursus 29

J. D. Yohannan, ***Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*** (New York: New Directions, 1968).

Excursus 30

1. Gen. 42:37.
2. Gen. 46:15,18,22,26.
3. Gen. 46:8–15.
4. Cf. vv. 22,25.