
IGNATIUS
Catholic Study Bible

Genesis



Commentary, Notes, & Study Questions

Revised Standard Version
Second Catholic Edition

THE IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE

REVISED STANDARD VERSION

SECOND CATHOLIC EDITION

GENESIS

With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes

by

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and

with Study Questions by

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INTRODUCTION TO THE IGNATIUS STUDY BIBLE

by Scott Hahn

You are approaching the “word of God”. This is the title Christians most commonly give to the Bible, and the expression is rich in meaning. It is also the title given to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God the Son. For Jesus Christ became flesh for our salvation, and “the name by which he is called is The Word of God” (Rev 19:13; cf. Jn 1:14).

The word of God is Scripture. The Word of God is Jesus. This close association between God’s *written* word and his *eternal* Word is intentional and has been the custom of the Church since the first generation. “All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, ‘because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ’” (CCC 134). This does not mean that the Scriptures are divine in the same way that Jesus is divine. They are, rather, divinely inspired and, as such, are unique in world literature, just as the Incarnation of the eternal Word is unique in human history.

Yet we can say that the inspired word resembles the incarnate Word in several important ways. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate. In his humanity, he is like us in all things, except for sin. As a work of man, the Bible is like any other book, except without error. Both Christ and Scripture, says the Second Vatican Council, are given “for the sake of our salvation” (*Dei Verbum* 11), and both give us God’s definitive revelation of himself. We cannot, therefore, conceive of one without the other: the Bible without Jesus, or Jesus without the Bible. Each is the interpretive key to the other. And because Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, St. Jerome insists, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”² (CCC 133).

When we approach the Bible, then, we approach Jesus, the Word of God; and in order to encounter Jesus, we must approach him in a prayerful study of the inspired word of God, the Sacred Scriptures.

Inspiration and Inerrancy The Catholic Church makes mighty claims for the Bible, and our acceptance of those claims is essential if we are to read the Scriptures and apply them to our lives as the Church intends. So it is not enough merely to nod at words like “inspired”, “unique”, or “inerrant”. We have to understand what the Church means by these terms, and we have to make that understanding our own. After all, what we believe about the Bible will inevitably influence the way we read the Bible. The way we read the Bible, in turn, will determine what we “get out” of its sacred pages.

These principles hold true no matter what we read: a news report, a search warrant, an advertisement, a paycheck, a doctor’s prescription, an eviction notice. How (or whether) we read these things depends largely upon our preconceived notions about the reliability and authority of their sources—and the potential they have for affecting our lives. In some cases, to misunderstand a document’s authority can lead to dire consequences. In others, it can keep us from enjoying rewards that are rightfully ours. In the case of the Bible, both the rewards and the consequences involved take on an ultimate value.

What does the Church mean, then, when she affirms the words of St. Paul: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16)? Since the term “inspired” in this passage could be translated “God-breathed”, it follows that God breathed forth his word in the Scriptures as you and I breathe forth air when we speak. This means that God is the primary author of the Bible. He certainly employed human authors in this task as well, but he did not merely assist them while they wrote or subsequently approve what they had written. God the Holy Spirit is the *principal* author of Scripture, while the human writers are *instrumental* authors. These human authors freely wrote everything, and only those things, that God wanted: the word of God in the very words of God. This miracle of dual authorship extends to the whole of Scripture, and to every one of its parts, so that whatever the human authors affirm, God likewise affirms through their words.

The principle of biblical inerrancy follows logically from this principle of divine authorship. After all, God cannot lie, and he cannot make mistakes. Since the Bible is divinely inspired, it must be without error in everything that its divine and human authors affirm to be true. This means that biblical inerrancy is a mystery even broader in scope than infallibility, which guarantees for us that the Church will always teach the truth concerning faith and morals. Of course the mantle of inerrancy likewise covers faith and morals, but it extends even farther to ensure that all the facts and events of salvation history are accurately presented for us in the Scriptures. Inerrancy is our guarantee that the words and deeds of God found in the Bible are unified and true, declaring with one voice the wonders of his saving love.

¹Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2, 8: PL 176, 642: cf. *ibid.* 2, 9: PL 176, 642–43.

²DV 25; cf. Phil 3:8 and St. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri xviii*, prol.: PL 24, 17b.

The guarantee of inerrancy does not mean, however, that the Bible is an all-purpose encyclopedia of information covering every field of study. The Bible is not, for example, a textbook in the empirical sciences, and it should not be treated as one. When biblical authors relate facts of the natural order, we can be sure they are speaking in a purely descriptive and “phenomenological” way, according to the way things appeared to their senses.

Biblical Authority Implicit in these doctrines is God’s desire to make himself known to the world and to enter a loving relationship with every man, woman, and child he has created. God gave us the Scriptures not just to inform or motivate us; more than anything he wants to save us. This higher purpose underlies every page of the Bible, indeed every word of it.

In order to reveal himself, God used what theologians call “accommodation”. Sometimes the Lord stoops down to communicate by “condescension”—that is, he speaks as humans speak, as if he had the same passions and weakness that we do (for example, God says he was “sorry” that he made man in Genesis 6:6). Other times he communicates by “elevation”—that is, by endowing human words with divine power (for example, through the Prophets). The numerous examples of divine accommodation in the Bible are an expression of God’s wise and fatherly ways. For a sensitive father can speak with his children either by condescension, as in baby talk, or by elevation, by bringing a child’s understanding up to a more mature level.

God’s word is thus saving, fatherly, and personal. Because it speaks directly to us, we must never be indifferent to its content; after all, the word of God is at once the object, cause, and support of our faith. It is, in fact, a test of our faith, since we see in the Scriptures only what faith disposes us to see. If we believe what the Church believes, we will see in Scripture the saving, inerrant, and divinely authored revelation of the Father. If we believe otherwise, we see another book altogether.

This test applies not only to rank-and-file believers but also to the Church’s theologians and hierarchy, and even the Magisterium. Vatican II has stressed in recent times that Scripture must be “the very soul of sacred theology” (*Dei Verbum* 24). As Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI echoed this powerful teaching with his own, insisting that, “The *normative theologians* are the authors of Holy Scripture” (emphasis added). He reminded us that Scripture and the Church’s dogmatic teaching are tied tightly together, to the point of being inseparable: “Dogma is by definition nothing other than an interpretation of Scripture.” The defined dogmas of our faith, then, encapsulate the Church’s infallible interpretation of Scripture, and theology is a further reflection upon that work.

The Senses of Scripture Because the Bible has both divine and human authors, we are required to master a different sort of reading than we are used to. First, we must read Scripture according to its *literal* sense, as we read any other human literature. At this initial stage, we strive to discover the meaning of the words and expressions used by the biblical writers as they were understood in their original setting and by their original recipients. This means, among other things, that we do not interpret everything we read “literalistically”, as though Scripture never speaks in a figurative or symbolic way (it often does!). Rather, we read it according to the rules that govern its different literary forms of writing, depending on whether we are reading a narrative, a poem, a letter, a parable, or an apocalyptic vision. The Church calls us to read the divine books in this way to ensure that we understand what the human authors were laboring to explain to God’s people.

The literal sense, however, is not the only sense of Scripture, since we interpret its sacred pages according to the *spiritual* senses as well. In this way, we search out what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us, beyond even what the human authors have consciously asserted. Whereas the literal sense of Scripture describes a historical reality—a fact, precept, or event—the spiritual senses disclose deeper mysteries revealed through the historical realities. What the soul is to the body, the spiritual senses are to the literal. You can distinguish them; but if you try to separate them, death immediately follows. St. Paul was the first to insist upon this and warn of its consequences: “God ... has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:5–6).

Catholic tradition recognizes three spiritual senses that stand upon the foundation of the literal sense of Scripture (see CCC 115). (1) The first is the *allegorical* sense, which unveils the spiritual and prophetic meaning of biblical history. Allegorical interpretations thus reveal how persons, events, and institutions of Scripture can point beyond themselves toward greater mysteries yet to come (OT) or display the fruits of mysteries already revealed (NT). Christians have often read the Old Testament in this way to discover how the mystery of Christ in the New Covenant was once hidden in the Old and how the full significance of the Old Covenant was finally made manifest in the New. Allegorical significance is likewise latent in the New Testament, especially in the life and deeds of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. Because Christ is the Head of the Church and the source of her spiritual life, what was accomplished in Christ the Head during his earthly life prefigures what he continually produces in his members through grace. The allegorical sense builds up the virtue of faith. (2) The second is the *tropological* or *moral* sense, which reveals how the actions of God’s people in

the Old Testament and the life of Jesus in the New Testament prompt us to form virtuous habits in our own lives. It therefore draws from Scripture warnings against sin and vice as well as inspirations to pursue holiness and purity. The moral sense is intended to build up the virtue of charity. (3) The third is the *anagogical* sense, which points upward to heavenly glory. It shows us how countless events in the Bible prefigure our final union with God in eternity and how things that are “seen” on earth are figures of things “unseen” in heaven. Because the anagogical sense leads us to contemplate our destiny, it is meant to build up the virtue of hope. Together with the literal sense, then, these spiritual senses draw out the fullness of what God wants to give us through his Word and as such comprise what ancient tradition has called the “full sense” of Sacred Scripture.

All of this means that the deeds and events of the Bible are charged with meaning beyond what is immediately apparent to the reader. In essence, that meaning is Jesus Christ and the salvation he died to give us. This is especially true of the books of the New Testament, which proclaim Jesus explicitly; but it is also true of the Old Testament, which speaks of Jesus in more hidden and symbolic ways. The human authors of the Old Testament told us as much as they were able, but they could not clearly discern the shape of all future events standing at such a distance. It is the Bible’s divine Author, the Holy Spirit, who could and did foretell the saving work of Christ, from the first page of the Book of Genesis onward.

The New Testament did not, therefore, abolish the Old. Rather, the New fulfilled the Old, and in doing so, it lifted the veil that kept hidden the face of the Lord’s bride. Once the veil is removed, we suddenly see the world of the Old Covenant charged with grandeur. Water, fire, clouds, gardens, trees, hills, doves, lambs—all of these things are memorable details in the history and poetry of Israel. But now, seen in the light of Jesus Christ, they are much more. For the Christian with eyes to see, water symbolizes the saving power of Baptism; fire, the Holy Spirit; the spotless lamb, Christ crucified; Jerusalem, the city of heavenly glory.

The spiritual reading of Scripture is nothing new. Indeed, the very first Christians read the Bible this way. St. Paul describes Adam as a “type” that prefigured Jesus Christ (Rom 5:14). A “type” is a real person, place, thing, or event in the Old Testament that foreshadows something greater in the New. From this term we get the word “typology”, referring to the study of how the Old Testament prefigures Christ (CCC 128–30). Elsewhere St. Paul draws deeper meanings out of the story of Abraham’s sons, declaring, “This is an allegory” (Gal 4:24). He is not suggesting that these events of the distant past never really happened; he is saying that the events both happened *and* signified something more glorious yet to come.

The New Testament later describes the Tabernacle of ancient Israel as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary” (Heb 8:5) and the Mosaic Law as a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb 10:1). St. Peter, in turn, notes that Noah and his family were “saved through water” in a way that “corresponds” to sacramental Baptism, which “now saves you” (1 Pet 3:20–21). It is interesting to note that the expression translated as “corresponds” in this verse is a Greek term that denotes the fulfillment or counterpart of an ancient “type”.

We need not look to the apostles, however, to justify a spiritual reading of the Bible. After all, Jesus himself read the Old Testament this way. He referred to Jonah (Mt 12:39), Solomon (Mt 12:42), the Temple (Jn 2:19), and the brazen serpent (Jn 3:14) as “signs” that pointed forward to him. We see in Luke’s Gospel, as Christ comforted the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:27). It was precisely this extensive spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament that made such an impact on these once-discouraged travelers, causing their hearts to “burn” within them (Lk 24:32).

Criteria for Biblical Interpretation We, too, must learn to discern the “full sense” of Scripture as it includes both the literal and spiritual senses together. Still, this does not mean we should “read into” the Bible meanings that are not really there. Spiritual exegesis is not an unrestrained flight of the imagination. Rather, it is a sacred science that proceeds according to certain principles and stands accountable to sacred tradition, the Magisterium, and the wider community of biblical interpreters (both living and deceased).

In searching out the full sense of a text, we should always avoid the extreme tendency to “over-spiritualize” in a way that minimizes or denies the Bible’s literal truth. St. Thomas Aquinas was well aware of this danger and asserted that “all other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal” (*STh* I, 1, 10, *ad* 1, quoted in CCC 116). On the other hand, we should never confine the meaning of a text to the literal, intended sense of its human author, as if the divine Author did not intend the passage to be read in the light of Christ’s coming.

Fortunately the Church has given us guidelines in our study of Scripture. The unique character and divine authorship of the Bible call us to read it “in the Spirit” (*Dei Verbum* 12). Vatican II outlines this teaching in a practical way by directing us to read the Scriptures according to three specific criteria:

1. We must “[b]e especially attentive ‘to the content and unity of the whole Scripture’” (CCC 112).
2. We must “[r]ead the Scripture within ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’” (CCC 113).
3. We must “[b]e attentive to the analogy of faith” (CCC 114; cf. Rom 12:6).

These criteria protect us from many of the dangers that ensnare readers of the Bible, from the newest inquirer to the most prestigious scholar. Reading Scripture out of context is one such pitfall, and probably the one most difficult to avoid. A memorable cartoon from the 1950s shows a young man poring over the pages of the Bible. He says to his sister: "Don't bother me now; I'm trying to find a Scripture verse to back up one of my preconceived notions." No doubt a biblical text pried from its context can be twisted to say something very different from what its author actually intended.

The Church's criteria guide us here by defining what constitutes the authentic "context" of a given biblical passage. The first criterion directs us to the literary context of every verse, including not only the words and paragraphs that surround it, but also the entire corpus of the biblical author's writings and, indeed, the span of the entire Bible. The *complete* literary context of any Scripture verse includes every text from Genesis to Revelation—because the Bible is a unified book, not just a library of different books. When the Church canonized the Book of Revelation, for example, she recognized it to be incomprehensible apart from the wider context of the entire Bible.

The second criterion places the Bible firmly within the context of a community that treasures a "living tradition". That community is the People of God down through the ages. Christians lived out their faith for well over a millennium before the printing press was invented. For centuries, few believers owned copies of the Gospels, and few people could read anyway. Yet they absorbed the gospel—through the sermons of their bishops and clergy, through prayer and meditation, through Christian art, through liturgical celebrations, and through oral tradition. These were expressions of the one "living tradition", a culture of living faith that stretches from ancient Israel to the contemporary Church. For the early Christians, the gospel could not be understood apart from that tradition. So it is with us. Reverence for the Church's tradition is what protects us from any sort of chronological or cultural provincialism, such as scholarly fads that arise and carry away a generation of interpreters before being dismissed by the next generation.

The third criterion places scriptural texts within the framework of faith. If we believe that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, we must also believe them to be internally coherent and consistent with all the doctrines that Christians believe. Remember, the Church's dogmas (such as the Real Presence, the papacy, the Immaculate Conception) are not something *added* to Scripture; rather, they are the Church's infallible interpretation *of* Scripture.

Using This Study Guide This volume is designed to lead the reader through Scripture according to the Church's guidelines—faithful to the canon, to

the tradition, and to the creeds. The Church's interpretive principles have thus shaped the component parts of this book, and they are designed to make the reader's study as effective and rewarding as possible.

Introductions: We have introduced the biblical book with an essay covering issues such as authorship, date of composition, purpose, and leading themes. This background information will assist readers to approach and understand the text on its own terms.

Annotations: The basic notes at the bottom of every page help the user to read the Scriptures with understanding. They by no means exhaust the meaning of the sacred text but provide background material to help the reader make sense of what he reads. Often these notes make explicit what the sacred writers assumed or held to be implicit. They also provide a great deal of historical, cultural, geographical, and theological information pertinent to the inspired narratives—information that can help the reader bridge the distance between the biblical world and his own.

Cross-References: Between the biblical text at the top of each page and the annotations at the bottom, numerous references are listed to point readers to other scriptural passages related to the one being studied. This follow-up is an essential part of any serious study. It is also an excellent way to discover how the content of Scripture "hangs together" in a providential unity. Along with biblical cross-references, the annotations refer to select paragraphs from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. These are not doctrinal "proof texts" but are designed to help the reader interpret the Bible in accordance with the mind of the Church. The *Catechism* references listed either handle the biblical text directly or treat a broader doctrinal theme that sheds significant light on that text.


Topical Essays, Word Studies, Charts: These features bring readers to a deeper understanding of select details. The *topical essays* take up major themes and explain them more thoroughly and theologically than the annotations, often relating them to the doctrines of the Church. Occasionally the annotations are supplemented by *word studies* that put readers in touch with the ancient languages of Scripture. These should help readers to understand better and appreciate the inspired terminology that runs throughout the sacred books. Also included are various *charts* that summarize biblical information "at a glance".


Icon Annotations: Three distinctive icons are interspersed throughout the annotations, each one corresponding to one of the Church's three criteria for biblical interpretation. Bullets indicate the passage or passages to which these icons apply.



Notes marked by the book icon relate to the "content and unity" of Scripture, showing how par-

ticular passages of the Old Testament illuminate the mysteries of the New. Much of the information in these notes explains the original context of the citations and indicates how and why this has a direct bearing on Christ or the Church. Through these notes, the reader can develop a sensitivity to the beauty and unity of God's saving plan as it stretches across both Testaments.

 Notes marked by the dove icon examine particular passages in light of the Church's "living tradition". Because the Holy Spirit both guides the Magisterium and inspires the spiritual senses of Scripture, these annotations supply information along both of these lines. On the one hand, they refer to the Church's doctrinal teaching as presented by various popes, creeds, and ecumenical councils; on the other, they draw from (and paraphrase) the spiritual interpretations of various Fathers, Doctors, and saints.

 Notes marked by the keys icon pertain to the "analogy of faith". Here we spell out how the mysteries of our faith "unlock" and explain one another. This type of comparison between Christian beliefs displays the coherence and unity of defined dogmas, which are the Church's infallible interpretations of Scripture.

Putting It All in Perspective Perhaps the most important context of all we have saved for last: the

interior life of the individual reader. What we get out of the Bible will largely depend on how we approach the Bible. Unless we are living a sustained and disciplined life of prayer, we will never have the reverence, the profound humility, or the grace we need to see the Scriptures for what they really are.

You are approaching the "word of God". But for thousands of years, since before he knit you in your mother's womb, the Word of God has been approaching you.

One Final Note. The volume you hold in your hands is only a small part of a much larger work still in production. Study helps similar to those printed in this booklet are being prepared for *all* the books of the Bible and will appear gradually as they are finished. Our ultimate goal is to publish a single, one-volume Study Bible that will include the entire text of Scripture, along with all the annotations, charts, cross-references, maps, and other features found in the following pages. Individual booklets will be published in the meantime, with the hope that God's people can begin to benefit from this labor before its full completion.

We have included a long list of Study Questions in the back to make this format as useful as possible, not only for individual study, but for group settings and discussions as well. The questions are designed to help readers both "understand" the Bible and "apply" it to their lives. We pray that God will make use of our efforts and yours to help renew the face of the earth! «

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS

Author and Date Nowhere does the Book of Genesis identify its author. The vast stretch of Jewish and Christian tradition credits the work, along with the rest of the Pentateuch (the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), to Moses. This would mean that Genesis was first put into writing during the lifetime of the Lawgiver, which has been dated in either the 1400s or the 1200s B.C.

Modern scholarship has largely abandoned the tradition of Mosaic authorship in favor of a theory of multiple authorship. This newer paradigm, called the Documentary Hypothesis, holds that Genesis (and the Pentateuch as a whole) is the work of several writers whose contributions were pieced together into a single literary work long after the time of Moses. Documentary scholars generally contend that Genesis is a composite of two sources of epic narrative (labeled "J" and "E" for the Yahwist and Elohist sources) that were joined together and later expanded by the additions of a priestly writer (labeled "P" for the Priestly source). On this hypothesis, the composition of Genesis began around 900 B.C. and came to an end around 400 B.C., sometime after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian Exile. Most who adopt this view acknowledge that the stories in Genesis are often much older than their written form, and some would allow that certain parts of its contents may indeed be Mosaic in origin.

Studies of the Book of Genesis within its Near Eastern context tend to confirm both the antiquity and the authenticity of its traditions. Comparative evidence can be read to suggest an origin for the Genesis stories in the second millennium B.C. at a time roughly contemporary with the historical Moses. For example, the storyline of Gen 1–11 shows striking affinities with creation and flood stories from Mesopotamia that date back to the early second millennium. Parallels extend both to the broad outline of primeval history (*Sumerian King List*, *Sumerian Flood Tale*, *Atrahasis Epic*) as well as to specific details about creation (*Enuma Elish*), the flood (*Gilgamesh Epic*), and the origin of diverse human languages (*Enmerkar Epic*). In similar fashion, the patriarchal narratives of Gen 12–50 are consistent with our knowledge of the cultural conditions of the ancient Near East in the early second millennium. The names of the Patriarchs are characteristic of the archaic name types prevalent at this time (e.g., Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Joseph); the journeys of the Patriarchs back and forth across Near Eastern lands mirror the freedom of mobility that then prevailed (e.g., Gen 11:31; 12:4–5, 9–10;

13:1; 24:10; 28:6–7; 37:28); and the situation described in Gen 14:1–4 fits with the geopolitical conditions of greater Mesopotamia before the Old Babylonian kingdom gained control over the region around 1750 B.C. and made alliances between local monarchs a thing of the past. Furthermore, several of the legal and domestic customs played out in the lives of the Patriarchs find parallels in second-millennium texts from Babylon, Mari, and Nuzi (see notes on Gen 15:3, 16:1–6, and 31:39).

None of this evidence strictly demands that Genesis be dated before the first millennium B.C. However, it may be said to favor a greater antiquity for the work than is often accepted. For example, it is true that some of the Near Eastern literature that parallels the primeval stories of Genesis continued to be read (and updated) well into the first millennium, but virtually all of the works in question were first composed in the second or third millennium. Dating the stories of Gen 1–11 around the time of Moses and the founding of the nation of Israel puts them close to the period of composition, when works of this particular type were being produced in the Near East. So too, it seems more probable than not that the stories compiled in Gen 12–50, whose historical reliability is firmly supported (see note on 12:1–50:26), took written form before the second millennium came to a close. At least it is difficult to believe that authentic memories of the patriarchal period survived intact long after the period of Moses. This would require an extraordinarily tenacious oral tradition that scholars are generally unwilling to accept. By the same token, given the evolution of social, cultural, and political conditions in the Near East, it is unlikely that authors working during the period of the Israelite monarchy and even later could accurately recreate the circumstances of life that obtained in patriarchal times. Had they been the first to put the Book of Genesis into written form, most likely they would have described Israel's ancestors in situations and surroundings reflective of their own times and experiences. The comparative data can thus be read as broadly consistent with the tradition of Mosaic authorship, even if it fails to demonstrate it in a conclusive way.

It is also of relevance that the Pontifical Biblical Commission twice in the twentieth century addressed the origin of the Pentateuch. Although its pronouncements are not per se considered binding teachings of the Church today, they illustrate the wisdom of the Church in cautioning scholars against

a premature and uncritical rejection of longstanding traditions associated with the Bible. At its first intervention, the Commission judged that the modern arguments used to support the Documentary Hypothesis were insufficiently strong to overturn the tradition of Mosaic authorship. The Commission did not thereby insist that Moses penned the entire text of the Pentateuch with his own hand, but it considered several scenarios to be compatible with the traditional thesis: (1) Moses may have utilized secretaries to assist with the writing; (2) he may have incorporated oral and written sources into the work; and (3) scribes in later centuries may be said to have made additions and modifications to the text in an effort to modernize the Pentateuch for later generations of readers (*On the Mosaic Authenticity of the Pentateuch*, June 27, 1906). The second intervention of the Commission invited scholars to study further the sources and composition of the Pentateuch with the tools of modern literary criticism and with the help of allied sciences. Optimism was expressed that this effort would reveal the profound role of Moses as an author and lawgiver, even if it found that a certain development of Mosaic Law took place after the time of Moses (*Letter to Cardinal Suhard*, January 16, 1948).

In the final analysis, Catholic scholarship is not bound to espouse any particular view of the authorship and date of Genesis (or the Pentateuch). Scholars are free to investigate the historical background of the book within the doctrinal framework of Scripture's divine inspiration and without disparagement of the Church's tradition. A range of views, from the substantial Mosaic authorship of Genesis to the Mosaic origin of its sources and traditions to the notion that Genesis is indebted to Moses in a more indirect way, is allowable. Still, for reasons given above and elsewhere, it remains a defensible position that the Book of Genesis is substantially Mosaic, at least in the antiquity of its traditions and quite possibly in its authorship as well.

Structure Genesis can be divided neatly into two major movements. Chapters 1–11 cover the distant aeons of *primeval* history, while chapters 12–50 cover the shorter span of *patriarchal* history. These two movements, differing in scope and perspective, create a funnel effect: the primeval narrative is cosmic in scope; it stretches across undateable ages; and it presents a world that is steadily beaten down by sin. In contrast, the patriarchal narrative narrows the focus to a single family instead of the human family as a whole; it slows the pace of the story to four generations; and it outlines God's plan to restore the world to a state of blessing. Within these two halves, the internal structure of Genesis is marked off by the recurring formula "these are the generations" or "these are the descendants" or "this is the history" (Heb. *'elleh toledot*). Eleven times the underlying Hebrew expression occurs in Genesis,

each time pointing the way forward to a new phase or development in the story, usually with reference to a significant ancestor (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

Title The Hebrew title for Genesis consists of its opening phrase, *bere'shit*, meaning "in the beginning". The Greek Septuagint entitles the book *genesis*, meaning "origin" or "birth", as does the Latin Vulgate. These headings correctly indicate that Genesis is a book of beginnings. It narrates the origin of the world (chap. 1), the origin of the human race (chap. 2), the origin of sin and suffering (chap. 3), the origin of nations (chap. 10), the origin of languages (chap. 11), and the origin of Israel as a tribal family descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (chaps. 12–50).

Literary Background A sound interpretation of Genesis depends in part on a sound evaluation of its literary form. This has proven to be a formidable challenge in the case of Gen 1–11, which resists easy classification among the surviving genres of ancient literature. The Catholic Church has never taken an official position on its form, though several statements made in the twentieth century offer important guidance for its interpretation. The first is a response of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which maintained that the first three chapters of Genesis recount "things that actually happened", with the twofold proviso that Genesis does not offer a strictly scientific description of creation, nor must everything stated in these chapters be understood in a strictly literal way (*On the Historical Character of Genesis 1–3*, June 30, 1909). Several decades later the Biblical Commission sent a letter to the Archbishop of Paris contending that Gen 1–11 is a "popular description" of the world's beginning that expresses fundamental truths in "figurative language" (*Letter to Cardinal Suhard*, January 16, 1948). Pope Pius XII referred back to this letter in a 1950 encyclical in which he clarified that the first eleven chapters of Genesis "pertain to history in a true sense" and so must not be reduced to the level of "myths" (*Humani Generis* 38–39). Most recently, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms the creation of the world, along with the original holiness and fall of the first couple, as real historical events that Scripture describes in symbolic and figurative ways (CCC 337, 362, 375, 390, 396).

Guided by these pronouncements and informed by contemporary biblical scholarship, it seems best to say that Gen 1–11 occupies a unique position between history and myth. On the one hand, these chapters offer a *historical* account of primeval times that explains the existence and conditions of the world as we know it. The historicity of such things as the creation of the cosmos by God, the creation of man and woman, the unity of the human race, the testing and fall of man from a state of grace and

original innocence, etc., cannot be compromised, for these constitute the essential pillars of the biblical world view and remain basic presuppositions of the Christian faith. On the other hand, the first eleven chapters of Genesis exhibit notable parallels with the *mythological* traditions of the ancient Near East. These ancient myths of origin abound with poetic imagery and symbolic representations of the mysteries that pertain to divine and human realities. Of course, Genesis differs from the myths of Israel's neighbors in having an objective grounding in history, and at several points Genesis is anti-mythological in intention (see note on 1:1—2:4). Nevertheless, this did not prevent the sacred writer from utilizing common cultural forms of expression, also used by the mythmakers of the ancient world, in order to make his description of primeval history understandable to his contemporaries.

All things considered, then, Gen 1–11 may be regarded as historical in substance but mythopoeic in expression. Its narrative is anchored in realities and events of the past, and yet its description of those events makes use of the poetic symbolism and figurative modes of speech that once had a broad currency in biblical times. For the literary form of the patriarchal narratives in Gen 12–50, see note on 12:1—50:26.

Themes The Book of Genesis is a historical and theological introduction to the Bible. It lays the indispensable groundwork for the rest of biblical revelation. For this reason, the book adopts a universal and religious perspective: the world is the stage of the Genesis drama, and God is the main Actor behind the scenes of history and human affairs that it records. This broad perspective is most evident in the early chapters, which encompass the divine creation of the cosmos, the formation and fall of the human race, the epidemic spread of moral and spiritual corruption, the universal flood, and the scattering of peoples over the earth (chaps. 1–11). But concern for the world at large, though less obvious on the surface, remains at the center of the patriarchal narratives as well, where God's promises for the future continue to propel the story forward (chaps. 12–50).

In many ways, the theology of Genesis comes to expression in its preoccupation with "covenants". This is not strange in itself, since covenants were very much a part of social and political life in the ancient Near East. But unlike their ancient counterparts, several covenants in Genesis involve God, not simply as the witness or enforcer of a human arrangement, but as a full partner in forging covenant bonds with the world and pledging his love and loyalty to the human race. God thus makes covenants with creation (see note on 1:1—2:4), with Adam (2:15–17), with Noah and the world (9:8–17), and with Abraham and his descendants (15:18–21; 17:1–21; 22:16–18, etc.). Two of these covenants,

the Adamic and the Abrahamic, occasion events that mark the low point and the high point of the Genesis narrative. (1) The *Adamic* covenant is the primeval bond that unites the human family with God the Creator in a state of blessing. However, when this relationship is tested, the covenant is broken by the rebellion of the first couple (3:6) and the original blessings are exchanged for the discipline of divine curses (3:16–19). From that point on, everything goes downhill, as the plot bottoms out under the avalanche of human iniquity that follows, with envy, murder, bigamy, violence, impurity, and pride wreaking havoc throughout the world (4:6–11, 19, 23; 6:11; 9:22; 11:1–9). (2) The *Abrahamic* covenant is God's solution to the broken Adamic covenant. At first, his covenant with Abraham is simply the pledge of a new homeland (15:18; 17:8) and a future dynasty of kings (17:6, 16). But at the summit of the Genesis story, when Abraham is tested as Adam was, God responds to the faith and obedience of the patriarch by swearing a covenant oath to restore his blessings to the world through Abraham's offspring (22:16–18). It is this pledge, according to the NT, that envisions God's worldwide plan of redemption in Jesus Christ (Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:10–29).

The Book of Genesis, then, is protological as well as prophetic. It looks back on the earliest phase of human existence as the beginning phase of salvation history, focusing on the generations that paved the way for the founding of Israel as a covenant people. But it also looks forward to the future realization of the divine plan, when the curses of the Adamic covenant are slowly but eventually reversed by the blessings of the Abrahamic. Insofar as man's rebellion and estrangement from the Lord are dilemmas that go unresolved within the storyline of Genesis, the book presents itself as the first chapter in this larger story of redemptive history.

Christian Perspective Christianity sees the mystery of salvation prophesied and prefigured in multiple ways in Genesis. (1) The first man, Adam, is a type of the divine man, Jesus Christ, who assumes headship over the human race to repair the damage done by Adam's rebellion (chaps. 2–3; Rom 5:12–21). (2) The blessings of Eden, with its flowing rivers and tree of life, point to the blessings of eternal life that await us in heaven (2:8–14; Rev 22:1–5). (3) The vanquishing of the serpent is realized when Christ reigns victorious in the lives of his disciples (3:15; Rom 16:20). (4) The raging waters of the flood prefigure the saving waters of Baptism (chaps. 6–8; 1 Pet 3:20–21). (5) Melchizedek, the priest-king who offers bread and wine, is a type of Christ the King and his priestly offering of the Eucharist under the same visible signs (14:17–20; Mt 26:26–29; Heb 7:1–19). (6) Abraham is the archetype of the believer, and his faith in the power and goodness of God is the same faith that animates the lives of the Christian faithful (15:1–6; Rom 4:1–12; Gal 3:6–9). (7) The offering

Introduction to Genesis

and return of Isaac, not spared by his anguished father, foreshadow the dying and rising of Jesus, the beloved Son who was not spared by his Father but was handed over for the world's salvation (22:1-14;

Rom 8:32; Heb 11:17-19). (8) The expectation of an international ruler from the royal line of Judah is realized in Christ, who reigns over all nations as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (49:9-11; Rev 5:5). «

OUTLINE OF GENESIS

1. Primeval History (chaps. 1-11)

- A. The Story of Creation (1:1—2:25)
- B. The Fall of Adam and Eve (3:1-24)
- C. The Descendants of Adam (4:1—5:32)
- D. The Story of the Flood (6:1—9:19)
- E. The Descendants of Noah (9:20—10:32)
- F. The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)
- G. The Descendants of Shem (11:10-32)

2. Patriarchal History (chaps. 12-50)

- A. The Story of Abraham (12:1—25:11)
- B. The Descendants of Ishmael (25:12-18)
- C. The Story of Isaac (25:19—26:35)
- D. The Story of Jacob (27:1—35:29)
- E. The Descendants of Esau (36:1-43)
- F. The Story of Joseph (37:1—48:22)
- G. The Blessing of the Twelve Tribes (49:1-27)
- H. The Death of Jacob and Joseph (49:28—50:26)

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES COMMONLY CALLED

GENESIS

Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

1 In the beginning God created^a the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and

void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit^b of God was moving over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there


1:1: Jn 1:1.


1:1–2:25 Genesis begins with two accounts of creation. The first is grand in scope and majestic in tone; it stresses the Lordship of God over all things and describes his actions as an almighty voice that brings the world into being (1:1–2:4). The second is narrower in focus and more intimate in description; it emphasizes the closeness of the Lord to his creation and describes his actions in more humanlike terms (2:5–25). It is possible these were once independent accounts having different dates of origin. Regardless, their juxtaposition in Genesis makes for a balanced depiction of God's transcendence and immanence in relation to the world (CCC 289).

1:1–2:4 The first creation account affirms a cosmic event at the beginning of history. It offers neither a literal nor a scientific description of how the world was made; rather, it asserts theological truths about God and creation in a symbolic way (CCC 337). The account should not be interpreted as a revealed timetable about the actual historical sequence of creation, nor should the author's prescientific view of the cosmos be mistaken for divinely inspired teaching about the physical constitution of the natural world. Its main teachings include the following. (1) The entire universe owes its existence to God as Creator and Lord. (2) Each and every part of creation is good in the eyes of God. (3) God established a hierarchy among created things, as seen in the ascending movement of the account, from inanimate things to animate creatures to the human race as the crown of the material world. (4) Creation shows forth the power of God, who speaks the universe into existence, the wisdom of God, who arranges all things into a symphony of natural beauty and harmony, and the goodness of God, who bestows life and blessing gratuitously. (5) The creation story exhibits an apologetic interest in countering the mythological world views of the ancient Near East. According to the pagan myths, a pantheon of deities existed in the beginning; the gods were embodied in nature and had humanlike needs and imperfections; the world was born out of a struggle between the gods; and man was created only to be exploited by the gods. In contrast, Genesis teaches that only one God exists, that he stands outside of time, that he is altogether distinct from the natural world, and that he blessed mankind, making man the bearer of his image. In addition to these considerations, the seven-day structure of the account is best viewed as a literary device for communicating the following points. (6) Six days of work followed by one day of rest underscores the obligation of man to lay aside his labor and honor the Creator every seventh day (Ex 20:8–11). (7) The founding of the world in seven days parallels the building of the Tabernacle according to seven commands (Ex 40:16–33) and the dedication of the Temple in seven days (1 Kings 8:65) after seven years of construction (1 Kings 6:38). Also, the description of God resting on the seventh day (2:2–3) has links with ancient concepts of a tem-

ple, which is considered a place of divine rest (2 Chron 6:41; Ps 132:14; Sir 24:11; Is 66:1). The creation week in Genesis thus reflects the belief that the world is a cosmic sanctuary (see topical essay: *Theology of the Temple* at 2 Chron 5). (8) Seven days of divine speech hint that God established a covenant with creation. Not only does the Hebrew for "seven" share a common root with the verb for "swearing a covenant oath" (see 21:27–32), but in later Jewish tradition, God is said to have founded the world through his oath (1 Enoch 69, 15–27; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 330) (on creation, see CCC 282–87, 337–44).

1:1 the beginning: The moment when time and space burst into existence by a creative act of God. The date of the event cannot be ascertained from the biblical data. **created:** The Hebrew expression hints at God's unique ability to create *ex nihilo*, i.e., out of nothing, without reliance on preexisting materials. This is how creation came to be understood in Jewish (2 Mac 7:28) and Christian theology (Rom 4:17) (CCC 290, 296–97). **the heavens and the earth:** The totality of creation, which includes all things seen and unseen, material as well as spiritual (Neh 9:6; Col 1:16).

 **1:2 earth was without form:** The first thing created, as portrayed in the description, is an amorphous mass of land submerged in water. This is conceived as the raw material from which God then shapes the world into its recognizable parts. **the deep:** The cosmic ocean that forms the seas (Ps 33:7) and was thought to lie beneath the earth in Semitic cosmology (Ex 20:4). Here it is said to engulf the earth (Ps 104:6) before dry land emerges from its depths (1:9). **the Spirit of God:** Some render this phrase "a wind from God" or even "a mighty wind". Both translations are possible from a grammatical standpoint. However, the RSV translation is preferable because (1) the same expression is used elsewhere in the Pentateuch as a reference to God's Spirit (Gen 41:38; Ex 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2), (2) elsewhere in the Bible the divine Spirit is associated with God's creative work (Job 33:4; Ps 104:30), and (3) the preferred interpretation throughout Christian history takes it as a reference to the Holy Spirit (CCC 703). **moving:** i.e., hovering or fluttering like an eagle over its young (Deut 32:11). • *Allegorically*, the Holy Spirit was carried upon the waters as upon a chariot and brought forth the newborn world as a type of Baptism (St. Jerome, *Letters* 69).

 **1:3 God said:** The universe is created by divine utterance (Ps 33:6–9). In several creation myths of the Near East, the world emerged out of a conflict between rival gods; in Genesis, the word of God goes forth unchallenged, meeting no resistance or rival. • According to the NT, the creative word is not simply a power but a Person—God the Son, through whom all things were made (Jn 1:1–3; Heb 1:2; CCC 291). • One who pays close attention will recognize the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the beginning. The Father creates heaven and earth, the Spirit moves over the waters, and the Son, who acts while the Father is speaking, separates the light from the darkness (St. Ambrose, *The Holy Spirit* 2, 1).

^aOr *When God began to create*.

^bOr *wind*.

was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. ⁸And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the

dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons

1:4 good: Indicates that creation corresponds perfectly to the divine purpose for which it was made. Emphasis on the goodness of the natural world punctuates the account (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

1:5 Day ... Night: The organization of time, with its recurring cycles of daylight and darkness, is the work of the first day. **day:** The Hebrew word *yom* is capable of designating various durations of time but normally denotes a 24-hour day. Nevertheless, the seven "days" of creation are not intended to be read as literal history. Keeping in mind the symbolic nature of the account (CCC 337), the enumeration of "days" serves the purpose of promoting Sabbath observance, among other things (see note on 1:1–2:4). Perhaps the clearest indication that Genesis employs temporal language in a figurative way is the fact that light is created on day 1, together with the evening and morning, and yet the sun and the moon are not created until day 4.

1:6 firmament: The Hebrew term is related to a verb that means "hammer out" (see Ex 39:3). This suggests the ancient Israelites imagined the firmament as a hammered bowl that is placed over the world like a roof or dome, holding up waters above the earth and separating them from the seas below. This ancient cosmology has a phenomenological basis: to the

unaided senses, the sky looks like an enormous vault, and its blueness may have suggested the idea of an ocean suspended overhead. Modern readers must recognize that the author's world view is one of his cultural assumptions, not one of his inspired assertions; thus, the cosmological presuppositions of the author should not be taken as revealed propositions to be accepted by faith. The Church, following the wisdom of St. Augustine (*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 2, 9), maintains that the Bible does not contain any properly scientific teaching about the nature of the physical universe (Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* 39).

1:8 Heaven: Can also be translated "sky" or "heavens" (the Hebrew term is an archaic plural). It is uncertain what concept the Israelites had of multiple heavens. In later Jewish tradition, the lowest level of heaven was thought to be the atmosphere, and the highest level was the dwelling place of God. Different forms of the tradition counted three heavens (2 Cor 12:2; *Testament of Levi* 2, 7–10) or seven heavens (Talmud, *b. Hagigah* 12b). Scripture elsewhere conceptualizes the heavens as a cosmic tent (Ps 104:2; Is 40:22) that is stretched over the earth (Is 42:5; Zech 12:1).

1:14 days and years: The solar and lunar cycles determined the agricultural and liturgical seasons of the Israelite calendar (Ps 104:19; Hos 2:11; Gal 4:10; CCC 347).

The Framework of Seven Days

Genesis pictures the newly created world in a state of primeval chaos. Submerged in water and shrouded in darkness, it is a place that is unfit for habitation and life. The author conveys this idea by describing it as something "without form and void" (Gen 1:2). This twofold problem of formlessness and emptiness is important because it sets the stage for the days of creation that follow, where God imposes order on the chaos in two phases: on days 1–3 he *forms* the world into its temporal and spatial dimensions, and on days 4–6 he *fills* the world with its designated rulers. Genesis thus arranges the creation account in symmetrical fashion, with the first three days corresponding to the second three days (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, 70, 1). The seventh day stands apart as the day when God rested from his work. Inherent in this literary format is the message that the cosmos, in its artistic design and orderliness, bears witness to the consummate wisdom of the Creator (cf. Ps 19:1; Wis 13:5; Rom 1:20).

Formlessness

Emptiness

Day 1. Day and Night

► Day 4. Sun, Moon, and Stars

Day 2. Sea and Sky

► Day 5. Fish and Birds

Day 3. Land and Vegetation

► Day 6. Man and Animals

Day 7. The Sabbath Rest

and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so.¹⁶ And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also.¹⁷ And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth,¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens."²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."²³ And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so.²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.


26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all


1:26, 27: Gen 5:1; Mt 19:4; Mk 10:6; Col 3:10; Jas 3:9.

1:16 greater light ... lesser light ... stars: Israel was forbidden to worship these luminaries, which were deified as gods in the Near Eastern world (Deut 4:19). This may explain why the sun and moon are not mentioned by name in the creation account, for the Hebrew terms resemble the names of the Semitic sun and moon gods. Later passages in Genesis compare the sun, moon, and stars to a family representing father, mother, and children (15:5; 22:17; 37:9-10).

1:21 sea monsters: Large aquatic animals as distinct from small ones, which are called "swarms of living creatures" (1:20). The sea monsters are symbols of evil in biblical poetry, just as they represented primal forces of chaos in Canaanite mythology (Ps 74:13-14; Is 27:1; Ezek 29:3). In contrast to these myths, Genesis insists that God created the mighty sea creatures; they are not preexistent powers that God faced as rivals in the beginning.

1:22 blessed them: God endowed them with the creative power to reproduce their species. The divine gift of fertility is always viewed as a blessing in the Bible, especially in connection with human procreation (1:28; Deut 28:4; 30:19; Ps 128:3-4; CCC 1652).

 **1:26 Let us:** The plural expression does not imply a belief in multiple gods. It may be read as (1) a plural of majesty, in which God speaks as a king representing his court or the fullness of his authority (cf. Ezra 4:18); (2) a plural of deliberation, in which God decides to create man after considering his options (Is 6:8); (3) a plural of self-exhortation, in which God urges himself into action (11:7); or (4) a plural of assembly, in which God addresses his intention to the heavenly host of angels (cf. Job 38:4-7). • Christian tradition detects in this idiom a hint that God himself is a communion of Divine Persons, later revealed as the Trinity (Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). Scripture elsewhere indicates that creation is the work, not only of the Father, but also of the Son (Jn 1:1-3; Heb 1:2) and the Spirit (Job 33:4; Ps 104:30).

 **1:27 male and female:** The sexual distinction between man and woman is willed by God, as is its purpose to reproduce the human race (1:28). • The image of God is not only borne by individuals but is also expressed through man and woman as a couple. From the image of the natural family, then, we can infer that God, in the mystery of his inner life, is a community of persons united by a bond of love and shared life (cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem* 7).

1:28 subdue: The Hebrew means "bring into subjection" (2 Chron 28:10; Jer 34:11). Man is not given license to abuse creation but is called to harness its potential for good. He is to use his creative abilities to manage the earth's resources for the building of human civilization. In the theology of Genesis, man is the steward of God's world, not its owner or master in any absolute sense (CCC 373, 2415-17).

1:29 every plant: Man and animals are supplied with a diet of natural produce (1:30). Neither is a carnivore in the

Word Study

Image and Likeness (Gen 1:26)

Tselem and *demut* (Heb.): the first term often denotes a physical "representation" of something in two (Ezek 23:14) or three dimensions (Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5; Ezek 16:17), and the second term refers to a "pattern" (2 Kings 16:10) or visible "resemblance" of something (Is 40:18; Ezek 1:5). Genesis associates this word pair with *royal authority*, as when the first man and woman are given dominion to rule over creation (Gen 1:26); with the relational concept of *sonship*, as when a father produces an image of himself in a son (Gen 5:3); and with the *sanctity* of human life, as when the Lord pledges to avenge the dignity of human life against murderous violence (9:5-6). A similar complex of ideas had currency in the political ideology of the ancient Near East, where the kings of Mesopotamia and Egypt were said to be "sons" fashioned in the "image" of their patron deity. Thus, what was typically the prerogative of a ruling monarch in distinction from his subjects, Genesis applies to every human person in distinction from the plants and animals. Other aspects of the divine image include man's rational intelligence, his dignity as a person, his moral awareness, and his unique capacity for a personal relationship with God (CCC 343, 355-58).


the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

2:1-3: Ex 20:11. 2:2: Heb 4:4, 10. 2:7: 1 Cor 15:45, 47. 2:9: Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19.

beginning, since the shedding of lifeblood, which is necessary for the consumption of meat, is inconsistent with the harmony between creatures that reigns in the primeval state. Not until the disharmony of sin invades the world are animals given as food, and then only as a divine concession (9:3-4).

1:31 very good: God is pleased and delighted with the whole ensemble of creation. This final assessment comes after he approves its individual parts (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25).

 **2:2 rested:** God institutes the Sabbath by setting the example for its observance. For man, to bear the image of God means to bear the responsibility of imitating God in the weekly rhythm of labor and rest (Ex 20:8-11). Hence, the point is not that God had grown tired after creating the world, but that we have need of rest when we labor in imitation of him. Strictly speaking, God's work of sustaining the universe continues throughout history (Jn 5:16-17; Heb 1:3), as does his work of creation, e.g., each time he creates a human soul at conception (Pius XII, *Humani Generis* 36) (CCC 366, 2172-73). The Sabbath, which is set apart for the worship of God and the contemplation of his works, is the sign of his covenant with creation (Ex 31:12-17; CCC 346).
• The NT interprets the weekly Sabbath rest as a sign of the eternal rest that awaits us in heaven (Heb 4:1-10).

2:3 hallowed it: God sanctifies the seventh day and makes it a holy day (Is 58:13). The lesson is that work is ordered to worship, lest man become a slave to his labor and fail to acknowledge his total dependence on the Lord (CCC 347, 2175-76).

2:4-25 The second creation account describes the formation of the first human couple. The story is historical in content but symbolic in description (CCC 362, 375), its message being conveyed through images once familiar in the epic and mythopoeic literature of the ancient Near East. The setting is the garden of Eden, which represents the state of grace. Man, who is created outside the garden, is placed there by God (2:8) to show that he is raised to a level of divine blessedness that is above his natural state (CCC 374-78). The sacredness of this original situation is underscored by indications that Genesis imagines paradise as a primeval sanctuary. Like the Tabernacle and Temple of later times, the garden is (1) entered from the east (3:24; Ex 27:13; Ezek 47:1), (2) home to angelic guardians called cherubim (3:24; 1 Kings 6:23-28), (3) adorned with trees (2:9; Josh 24:26; 1 Kings 6:29-32), (4) the source of sacred waters (2:10; Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 3:18), and (5) the place where God dwells with his people on the earth (3:8; Lev 26:12; 2 Sam 7:6). According to one Jewish tradition, Eden is the Holy of Holies, i.e., the most sacred estate within the cosmic Temple of the world (*Jubilees* 8, 19). See note 1:1-2:4.


Another Account of Creation

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground;⁶ but a mist^c went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for

2:4 These are the generations: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*. **Lord God:** The first term in Hebrew is "Yahweh", the personal name of God revered by Israel. The second term is the common noun for a deity and is used throughout the first creation account (1:1-2:4). Used together, Genesis teaches that the God of Israel ("Yahweh") is none other than the Creator of the universe ("God").

2:5 no plant: In the second creation account, man is formed before the vegetation and animals; in the first account, man is created after the vegetation and animals (1:11, 20-26). The discrepancy does not amount to a contradiction insofar as the first account is not meant to be a chronological description of the actual stages of creation. See note on 1:1-2:4.

 **2:7 God formed man:** Evokes the image of a potter shaping a vessel out of clay (Job 10:9; Is 45:9). There is a wordplay in Hebrew between "man" (*'adam*) and the "ground" (*'adamah*) from which he is made (Sir 33:10). The creation of man out of dirt or clay is an ancient motif paralleled in Egyptian (*Great Hymn to Khnum*) and Mesopotamian literature (*Atrahasis Epic*; *Gilgamesh Epic*). **dust:** Symbolic of human mortality (3:19). **breath of life:** The animating principle that makes man a living creature like the animals (see 2:19; 7:21-22). However, man is unique in that God has made him a composite of matter and spirit, a being who possesses a body and a rational soul (Wis 15:11; CCC 362-66). The animation of human bodies by divine breath is paralleled in Egyptian texts (*Instruction for King Merikare*; *Great Hymn to Aton*).
• According to Catholic theology, Adam was not only created with natural or biological life, but was infused with the supernatural life of grace and holiness. Thus, from his first breath, Adam was an "upright" (Eccles 7:29) "son of God" (Lk 3:38) (CCC 374-76).

2:8 garden: The Greek Septuagint translates this as "paradise". See word study: *Paradise* at 2 Cor 12:3. **in the east:** i.e., east of Palestine. The geographical data in 2:10-14 suggest a location in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq).

2:9 tree of life: An ancient symbol of immortality and divine wisdom (Prov 3:18). Its fruit was thought to confer everlasting life (3:22). **knowledge of good and evil:** Not a moral awareness of right and wrong, which man possessed from the beginning as a rational creature, but the legal authority to determine what is good and evil (see 2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9). Adam will presume to wield this authority over the moral order, though it belongs exclusively to God. Overstepping his bounds, he will attempt to break free from the limits of being a creature who is made to love and serve God with the free submission of his will (Sir 15:15; CCC 396). See notes on 3:6 and 3:22.

^cOr *flood*.

food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. ¹¹The name of the first is Pi'shon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Hav'ilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gi'hon; it is the one which flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴And the name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphra'tes.

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ¹⁹So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of

the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; ²²and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman,^a

because she was taken out of Man."^e

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The Fall of Man

3 Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had

2:24: Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7; 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31. 3:1: Rev 12:9; 20:2.


2:15–17 The terms and conditions of the Adamic covenant (Sir 14:17). The tree of life and the tree threatening death represent the twin sanctions of the covenant—the blessing and the curse (see Deut 30:19). Adam was to learn from these boundaries that God is not his equal but his Father and Lord. The arrangement is an ordeal designed to test Adam's faith and filial obedience.

2:15 till ... keep: The command to "keep" the garden may be translated as a command to "guard" it, as in 3:24. In this case, a threat to the order of paradise is implied, and the appearance of the serpent in 3:1 is anticipated. Moreover, the two Hebrew verbs in question are used elsewhere in the Pentateuch for the liturgical duties of priests and Levites serving as ministers and guardians over the Tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). Their use here implies that man's work of cultivating and keeping watch over the garden is likewise a form of divine service. Rabbinic tradition thus considered Adam a priest (*Genesis Rabbah* 16, 7). For Eden as a sacred sanctuary, see note on 2:4–25.


2:17 you shall die: Mortality as well as the spiritual death of estrangement from God are the curse for transgressing the Adamic covenant (Sir 14:17; CCC 1008).

2:18 a helper fit for him: Anticipates the creation of woman, though other living creatures are fashioned first (2:19). The fact that woman comes last is not the result of trial and error, but is God's way of teaching man that he is fundamentally different from the animals, despite certain natural features and functions they share in common. Lower life forms cannot supply the love, help, and companionship man needs to be whole.

2:20 gave names: Adam's first act of sovereignty over the animal kingdom (1:26). In the ancient world, to name something was to exercise authority over it.

 **2:21–24** The institution of the marriage covenant, which is designed by God to be intimate (one flesh, 2:24), heterosexual (man and woman, 2:23), mutually supportive (helper, 2:18), and procreative (multiply, 1:28). For indications that the Bible considers marriage a covenant, see Ezek 16:8 and Mal 2:14. • Jesus teaches from this text that God designed marriage to be a permanent union of the

spouses (Mt 19:3–9). As such, it symbolizes the unbreakable bond between Christ and his spiritual bride, the Church (Eph 5:21–33).

 **2:22 the rib:** The first woman is created from the substance of the first man (1 Cor 11:8). Her sexual distinction from the man shows that the two are literally "made for each other". That she is taken from his side rather than from his head or feet is also significant—it shows that she is equal in dignity to the man, not above him or below him (CCC 369, 371). • *Allegorically*, the sleep of Adam foreshadows the death of Christ; and Eve, coming from Adam's side, is a type of the Church, the true mother of all the living (Tertullian, *On the Soul* 43).

2:23 my bones ... my flesh: An idiom for natural kinship (29:14; Judg 9:2). The bride becomes the kinswoman of the groom and his family through the covenant of marriage. **Woman ... Man:** The poem makes a wordplay on "man" (*'ish*) and "woman" (*'ishshah*), which are also the terms for "husband" and "wife" in biblical Hebrew.

2:24 clings: The term indicates fidelity to one's partner in a covenant relationship (Deut 10:20; 30:20; Josh 23:8).

2:25 naked ... not ashamed: Points to the innocence and original integrity of Adam and Eve. At this point, their lives are untouched by sin, and their sexual drive is under complete control. The expression also hints at their vulnerability, since the term "naked" (*'arummim*) resembles the term "subtle" (*'arum*), which characterizes the serpent in the next verse (3:1).

3:1–24 The account of the Fall affirms a primeval event using figurative language (CCC 390). It indicates that man, at the beginning of his history, rebelled against his Creator and brought sin and misery into the world. As Genesis presents it, the immediate effects of man and woman transgressing the original covenant (2:16–17) include shame (3:7), strife (3:12), suffering (3:16–19), and separation from the Lord (3:23–24). Its lasting effects, including death (3:19) and a disordered propensity toward evil (6:5), are passed down to the entire human family (CCC 390, 400). For the propagation of Original Sin (human nature deprived of sanctifying grace) and the fallen inclinations (concupiscence) that come with it, see notes on Rom 5:12 and 7:23.

3:1 the serpent: A personal agent of evil that Scripture later identifies as Satan (Rev 12:9). The serpent has been

^aHeb *ishshah*.

^eHeb *ish*.

made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" ²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the

man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." ¹¹He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹²The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." ¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all cattle,
and above all wild animals;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

3:4: 2 Cor 11:3. 3:13: 2 Cor 11:3. 3:14, 15: Rev 12:9; 20:2.

commonly considered (1) a mythopoeic image that represents the devil (or at least the diabolical) in a literary way, (2) the visible form assumed by the devil in the garden, or (3) a real serpent whose body is possessed and manipulated by the devil, much as demons are capable of speaking through bodily creatures and controlling their actions (cf. Mk 5:1-13). Whatever the case, Satan was driven by envy to rob man of his blessings and bring death into the world (Wis 2:24; CCC 391, 2539). Jesus thus refers to him as "a murderer from the beginning" (Jn 8:44). Note, too, that the Hebrew term *nahash* often refers to a snake (49:17), but in poetic and apocalyptic texts it can refer to a draconic sea serpent that represents opposition to the Lord (Job 26:13; Is 27:1; Amos 9:3). In the ancient Near East, serpents were symbolic of divinity and fertility as well as the threat of cosmic chaos. **subtle:** In the sense of "cunning". Notice that Satan uses half-truths to seduce and mislead: he claims that the couple will not die (3:4), that their eyes will be opened (3:5), and that they will become like God (3:5). These assurances all seem to come true at one level, since after eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve continue to live for many years (5:5), their eyes are opened (3:7), and they in some sense become like God (3:22). However, in the light of God's intentions, these promised gains turn out to be painful losses (CCC 392, 2847). **not eat of any tree . . . ?:** The question insinuates that God is an obstacle to human fulfillment. In particular, it raises doubts about the Lord's generosity and goodwill, as though Adam and Eve were deprived of much more than God provided them. This is a complete distortion of the divine allowance in 2:16 (CCC 215).

3:3 neither shall you touch: A curious addition to the divine commandment in 2:17. It may imply that Eve is beginning to slip on the serpent's suggestion that God is unreasonably restrictive (3:1; CCC 399).

3:4 You will not die: A bold contradiction of 2:17 that denies the truthfulness of God and his word.

3:5 God knows: The accusation makes God look jealous and self-interested, as though he is withholding life's finest blessings from the couple in order to safeguard his prerogatives. Satan, meanwhile, is posing as a friend who has the woman's best interests in mind. **like God, knowing:** The expression could also be translated: "like gods, knowing . . ." (as in the Greek LXX and Latin Vulgate). Either translation implies the belief that deities possess powers and perfections not shared by humans.



3:6 her husband: These words are followed in the Hebrew text by the phrase "with her", indicating that Adam was present when Eve committed the sin. **and he ate:** Unlike Eve, who was deceived by the serpent after engaging him in dialogue (3:13; 1 Tim 2:14), Adam bows without resistance to the wishes of his wife (3:17) and asserts himself against the commandment given to him by the Lord (2:17). Tradition holds that Adam, having surrendered his trust in God, committed a sin of pride in wanting to be "like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). His desire was not to discern the difference between good and evil, but to determine what was good and evil for himself, independently of God (cf. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* 36) (CCC 397-98). See note on 2:9. • In the theology of Paul, Christ is the counterimage of Adam. Just as Adam, by his transgression, made us sinners subject to death, so Christ, by his obedience, secured the grace that makes us heirs of eternal life (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:20-22). • Christ conquered the devil with the same weapons the devil used against us: a virgin, a tree, and death. These tokens of our demise have now become the tokens of our victory. Instead of Eve, there is Mary; instead of the tree of knowledge, there is the wood of the Cross; and instead of Adam's death, there is the death of Christ (St. John Chrysostom, *On the Cemetery and the Cross*).

3:7 sewed fig leaves: The couple, awakened to the disorder of sin, attempt to cover their shame and guilt. The effort proves unsatisfactory, for God reclothes them with animal skins in 3:21—perhaps a faint intimation that sin must be dealt with by blood sacrifice (Lev 17:11; Heb 9:22).

3:8-13 Interrogated by the Lord, Adam shifts the blame to Eve (3:12), and Eve shifts the blame to the serpent (3:13). Sin has sown division and discord between the spouses in addition to shattering their relationship with God (CCC 1606-7).

3:8 walking: A humanlike description of God that stresses his closeness to man and woman in Eden. The expression in Hebrew elsewhere describes the Lord dwelling in his sanctuary in the midst of Israel (Lev 26:12; 2 Sam 7:6). See note on 6:6.

3:9 Where are you?: Not a literal inquiry of Adam's whereabouts, but an invitation for Adam to confess his wrongdoing and seek forgiveness.

3:14 upon your belly: Animals that go on the belly are declared an abomination by the Mosaic Law (Lev 11:42). **dust you shall eat:** An idiom for suffering a humiliating defeat (Ps 72:9; Is 65:25; Mic 7:17).

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁶To the woman he said,
"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷And to Adam he said,
"Because you have listened to the voice of your
wife, and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;

in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹In the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread

till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return."

20 The man called his wife's name Eve,^f because she was the mother of all living. ²¹And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever"—²³therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain and Abel

4 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten^g

3:17, 18: Heb 6:8. 3:22, 24: Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19.



3:15 I will put enmity: A crucial verse in Genesis, which some think is an etiology that explains the origin of man's instinctive fear of snakes. More likely, the proverbial antagonism between men and snakes was evoked for the purpose of symbolizing man's ongoing struggle against sin and evil, which is personified by the serpent (cf. 4:7; Sir 21:2). In any case, neither interpretation captures the full meaning of the text, which foretells the eventual triumph of the woman and her offspring over Satan after a protracted period of hostility. **your seed:** The devil's accomplices in doing evil, including wicked men, who constitute his spiritual offspring (Jn 8:44). In Genesis, Cain and his line of godless descendants are the first to fulfill this role (4:8, 17–24; 1 Jn 3:12). **her seed:** The righteous descendants of the woman, initially linked with Abel (4:4) and the godly line of Seth (4:26; 5:6–32). **he shall:** The Hebrew could be read individually ("he shall") or collectively ("they shall"). The earliest known Jewish interpretation of this text takes the offspring of the woman to be an individual man (Gk. *autos*, "he" in the Greek LXX). **bruise:** Or, "crush" (as in Job 9:17). Victory over the satanic deceiver is assured: the serpent will sustain a fatal *head* injury, while the woman's offspring will suffer only a biting on the *heel*. At least one Jewish tradition connects this triumph with the coming of a messianic king (*Palestinian Targum*). • Christian tradition gives this text a messianic interpretation (Christ is the individual who tramples the devil underfoot: Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8; St. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3, 23, 7), an ecclesiological interpretation (the Church is the offspring that shares in his victory: Rom 16:20; Rev 12:17), and a mariological interpretation (Mary is the promised woman who bears the Redeemer: Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 55). This passage has long been called the "first gospel" (Lat. *protoevangelium*) and stands out as the first revelation of God's mercy in Scripture (CCC 410–11).

3:16–19 Suffering is imposed as the temporal consequence of sin. Eve and her descendants will suffer as wives (spousal domination) and mothers (painful childbirth). Adam and his descendants will suffer as family providers (toilsome labor for food) (CCC 1609).

3:17 cursed: A curse of futility and decay grips the earth, making the production of food an extremely tedious process. This is in contrast to the superabundance of food that was easily accessible in the garden (2:9, 16).

See note on Rom 8:22. **toil:** Labor itself is not a curse of the Fall, since man was charged with tilling the soil from the beginning (2:15). The point is that his work will now become wearisome. • Jesus accepted thorns in order to cancel the curse that brought thorns from the ground, and he was buried in the earth so that the ground, cursed by sin, might receive a blessing. From the tree of the garden came sin, but sin expired with the tree of the Savior (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 13, 18–19).

3:19 to dust you shall return: Physical death, which is the separation of body and soul, is part of the curse inherited by Adam's descendants (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22). Once the womb of man (2:7), the ground now becomes the tomb of man (Eccles 12:7) (CCC 400).

3:20 his wife's name: The Hebrew name for "Eve" (*hawwah*) resembles the term "living" (*hay*).

3:22 become like one of us: Man has acted the part of a god by presuming to exercise lordship over the moral order and redefine what is good and evil in opposition to his Creator (cf. Is 5:20). Only in this disordered way has his transgression made him like God. Adam would have attained true godliness had he humbly obeyed the Father as Jesus did (Phil 2:5–8). For possible meanings of the plural "us", see note on 1:26.

3:23 God sent him forth: By expulsion and exile, Adam learns that the most devastating effect of sin is separation from God and his blessings.

3:24 cherubim: Represent angels who guard the holiness of God's presence here in the garden as they will later do in the Tabernacle of Moses (Ex 25:18) and the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:23–28) (CCC 332). For other links between Eden and these Israelite sanctuaries, see note on 2:4–25. **guard:** Angelic sentries are posted to keep the defiled couple from reentering paradise. This may be seen as an act of divine mercy, lest fallen man eat of the tree of life and "live for ever" in a state of spiritual separation from God (3:22).

4:1–26 The prophecy of 3:15 begins to materialize in history, with the offspring of the serpent (Cain, 1 Jn 3:12) attacking the righteous offspring of the woman (Abel, Heb 11:4). The human family continues to grow apart as the line of Cain becomes ever more evil (4:19, 23–24) and the line of Seth develops a close relationship with the Lord (4:26; 5:22; 6:9). See note on 3:15.

4:1 knew: A biblical euphemism for sexual relations. a **man:** The Hebrew name "Cain" (*qayin*) resembles the expression "I have gotten" (*qaniti*). **help of the LORD:** Man and

^fThe name in Hebrew resembles the word for *living*.

^gHeb *qanah*, get.

a man with the help of the LORD.”² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴ and Abel brought some of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

⁸ Cain said to Abel his brother, “Let us go out to the field.”^h And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”¹⁰ And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.¹² When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me this day away from the ground; and from your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will

slay me.”¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Not so!¹ If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him.¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod,^j east of Eden.

Beginnings of Civilization

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore E’noch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.¹⁸ To E’noch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehu’ja-el, and Mehuja-el the father of Methu’sha-el, and Methusha-el the father of La’mech.¹⁹ And La’mech took two wives; the name of the one was A’dah, and the name of the other Zillah.²⁰ A’dah bore Ja’bal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.²¹ His brother’s name was Ju’bal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.²² Zillah bore Tu’bal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Na’amah.

²³ La’mech said to his wives:

“A’dah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say:
I have slain a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

²⁴ If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly La’mech seventy-sevenfold.”

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel,

4:4: Heb 11:4. 4:8: 1 Jn 3:12.

woman can only bring forth children in cooperation with God (Ps 139:13). This is one reason why children are always considered a divine blessing in the Bible (1:28; 22:17; Ps 127; 128).

4:4 firstlings: First-born animals represent the choice picks of the flock, i.e., those that are suitable as divine offerings (Ex 13:2). Abel thus offers his best to God as a sacrificial act of faith (Heb 11:4). Cain, however, appears to offer something less—at least no indication is given that his sacrifice was made from the “firstfruits” of his harvest. Insofar as the external act of worship is a reflection of the interior disposition of the worshiper, it is no surprise that God looked with favor on Abel’s offering but not on Cain’s (4:5). See note on Lev 1:9.

4:6 angry: Cain is enraged by the favor shown to Abel and thinks himself the victim of injustice. Instead of trying to emulate his brother, he allows envy to take hold and finally decides to eliminate him. Cain thus follows the way of the devil, which is the way of envy that leads to murder (Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:12) (CCC 2538–39).

4:7 lurking: Sin is like a predator ready to pounce on the unaware. Though cautioned to resist this deadly force, Cain is entirely mastered by it: in addition to his negligent worship (4:5), he resents Abel in his heart (4:5), murders him with hands (4:8), and then lies to God with his tongue (4:9). The reality of sin in primeval times presupposes that the natural moral law is in effect and that it prohibits crimes like fratricide (CCC 401, 2259).

4:8 let us go out: Suggests that the murder of Abel is a premeditated act rather than a crime of passion.

4:9 Where is Abel . . . ? God questions the sinner in order to draw forth contrition and give him an opportunity for confession. Cain refuses this mercy as Adam had done before him (3:9–12).

4:10 blood is crying to me: i.e., for vengeance (Is 26:21; Rev 6:10; CCC 1867, 2268).

4:11 you are cursed: Cain is banished from the soil he once cultivated as a farmer (4:2). He is now forced to roam aimlessly and restlessly in a state of exile (4:16).

4:13 greater than I can bear: A childish cry of self-pity.

4:15 a mark: A visible sign of protection and divine mercy. It seems that Cain fears retribution from his family for the murder of innocent Abel (5:4).

4:17–24 The descendants of Cain were technologically advanced and yet morally debased. To their credit, they were pioneers of urbanization (4:17), pastoral culture (4:20), instrumental music (4:21), and metalworking (4:22). To their shame, however, they were the first to engage in murder (4:23), polygamy (4:19), and vindictive violence (4:23–24). The point of presenting the genealogy in this way is not to say that scientific progress is evil or incompatible with religious obligations. Rather, it shows that advances in material civilization come with the danger of moral and spiritual decline. The more a culture is enamored with human achievements, the more it risks forgetting about God and its responsibilities toward him.

4:24 seventy-sevenfold: The number 77 (or possibly 490) signifies unlimited vengeance.

4:25 another child: The Hebrew name “Seth” (*shet*) resembles the word “appointed” (*shat*).

^hSam Gk Syr Compare Vg: Heb lacks *Let us go out to the field*.

^jGk Syr Vg: Heb *Therefore*.

^kThat is *Wandering*.

for Cain slew him.” ²⁶To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name E’nosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Adam’s Descendants to Noah

5 This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ²Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. ³When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. ⁴The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

6 When Seth had lived a hundred and five years, he became the father of E’nosh. ⁷Seth lived after the birth of E’nosh eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. ⁸Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

9 When E’nosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Ke’nan. ¹⁰E’nosh lived after the birth of Ke’nan eight hundred and fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹¹Thus all the days of E’nosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

12 When Ke’nan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Ma-hal’alel. ¹³Ke’nan lived after the birth of Ma-hal’alel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴Thus all the days of Ke’nan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

15 When Ma-hal’alel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jar’ed. ¹⁶Ma-hal’alel lived after the birth of Jar’ed eight hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷Thus all the days of Ma-hal’alel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died.

18 When Jar’ed had lived a hundred and sixty-two years he became the father of E’noch. ¹⁹Jared lived after the birth of E’noch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰Thus all the days of Jar’ed were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.

21 When E’noch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methu’selah. ²²E’noch walked with God after the birth of Methu’selah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²³Thus all the days of E’noch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴E’noch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

25 When Methu’selah had lived a hundred and eighty-seven years, he became the father of

5:1: Gen 1:27. 5:24: Heb 11:5.

4:26 call upon the name: A reference to prayer and worship (Mal 1:11) in which God’s name is praised (Ps 66:2, 4) and petitioned for help (Joel 2:32). The religious actions of the Patriarchs are often described in these terms (12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). The meaning of the statement in this context is difficult to determine. Perhaps it denotes the resumption of public worship since Cain and Abel first offered sacrifices to God—an event that sparked jealousy and ended in bloodshed (4:3–8). The verb *began* would thus carry the meaning “began again” (CCC 2569). **the LORD:** Indicates that the one true God, known to Israel as Yahweh or LORD, was worshiped from earliest times. For the revelation of the divine name, see note on Ex 6:3.

5:1–32 The genealogy of Adam through the line of Seth. Certain contrasts between Seth’s line and Cain’s line in 4:17–24 are highlighted, most notably in the *second* (Cain, Seth) and *seventh* generation (Lamech, Enoch). In the second generation, Cain founds a city and “names” it after his son, Enoch (Gen 4:17); Seth and his son, Enosh, instead of seeking their own glory, call upon the “name” of the Lord (4:25–26). In the seventh generation, Lamech flaunts his reputation as a murderer and bigamist (4:18–24); Enoch, however, walks with God and is caught up to heaven (5:21–24). Cain thus fathers a wicked family line, and Seth, a righteous family line. This is confirmed by the flood that follows: it destroys the line of Cain, but the line of Seth is preserved through righteous Noah (5:32; 6:9).

5:1 the generations: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*.

5:3 likeness ... image: Terms here associated with sonship in relation to a father. See word study: *Image and Likeness* at 1:26.

5:4 other sons and daughters: Unnamed children of Adam and Eve. The fact that several male and female offspring were born to the first couple explains how marriages could take

place in primeval times and how the world could become populated from a single human pair. Marriage between brothers and sisters was a matter of necessity at first, even though sexual union between close relatives was later prohibited (Lev 18:6–18; cf. St. Augustine, *City of God* 15, 16).

5:5 nine hundred and thirty years: Adam’s age falls within the range of 777 (Lamech, 5:31) to 969 years (Methuselah, 5:27) that characterizes the era before the flood. There is as yet no positive solution to the mystery of these enormous lifespans. Modern anthropology holds that the human species (called *homo sapiens*) is around 40,000 years old, that prehistoric man lived a fairly short life, and that human longevity slowly increased rather than decreased over the millennia. The Bible, however, as well as ancient Near Eastern writings (e.g., *Sumerian King List*) concur in giving the ancients an immensely long life, especially before the flood. Various approaches have been taken to explain this phenomenon in Genesis. (1) Some take the ages at face value and maintain the literal truth of the genealogies; however, this results in putting Adam less than 2000 years before Abraham and makes the human race only about 6000 years old. (2) Others have proposed converting the “years” into “months”, but this creates a situation in which some of the figures are children at the time they are said to bear children of their own. (3) Still others take the names of the Patriarchs to refer to “clans” rather than individuals, yet this fails to explain why some of the names clearly concern individuals, such as Adam, Cain, Enoch, and Noah. (4) Perhaps the best hypothesis, and one that would help to explain both the biblical and Near Eastern data, is that giving primeval figures extremely long lives was a way of conceptualizing the great antiquity of mankind. In other words, this may be simply a literary technique used to assert the remarkable age of the human race itself.

5:21–24 Seven generations from Adam, Enoch walked with God in righteousness and was taken into heaven without experiencing death (Heb 11:5). According to later

La'mech. ²⁶Methu'selah lived after the birth of La'mech seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷Thus all the days of Methu'selah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.

28 When La'mech had lived a hundred and eighty-two years, he became the father of a son, ²⁹and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands." ³⁰La'mech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred and ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters. ³¹Thus all the days

of La'mech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died.

32 After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Ja'pheth.

The Wickedness of Mankind

6 When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, ²the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. ³Then the LORD said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." ⁴The Neph'elim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when

6:4: Num 13:33.

traditions, Enoch was a model of repentance (Sir 44:16), a visionary prophet (Jude 14-15), and the author of nonbiblical apocalyptic books (e.g., *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*) (CCC 2569).

5:29 called his name: The Hebrew name "Noah" (*noah*) resembles the verb for "bring relief" (*naḥam*).

6:1-4 A critical event in the Genesis narrative, where the righteous line of Seth (sons of God) intermarries with the godless line of Cain (daughters of men) and becomes corrupted (except for Noah, 6:8-9). On top of the violence and moral decadence spreading over the earth, this is the final outrage that moves God to pour out his wrath in the waters of the flood. This interpretation appears in rabbinic tradition (*Genesis Rabbah* 26, 5-7; *b. Sanhedrin* 108a) and in the Church Fathers (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 22, 8; St. Augustine, *City of God* 15, 23; St. Ephraem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6, 3). Another interpretation, also represented in Jewish and Christian antiquity, holds that the sons of God are not men but rebel angels called the Watchers who took the form of men and had sexual relations with women (1 *Enoch* 6-7; *Jubilees* 5, 1; 7, 21; St. Justin Martyr, *First Apol-*

ogy 5, 2; St. Clement of Alexandria *Christ the Teacher* 3, 2). See note on Jude 6.

6:2 saw ... fair ... took: The same Hebrew expressions are used in the same sequence in 3:6 ("saw ... good ... took"), hinting that the sons of God replicate the original sin of Eve.

6:3 My spirit: The breath of life that God infuses into man to make him alive (2:7; Job 27:3; Eccles 12:7). **hundred and twenty years:** Seems to impose a limit so that man's lifetime will not run beyond 120 years. Although the life-span of subsequent generations begins to plummet after this point, the limit never takes full effect until the end of the Pentateuch, when Moses dies at 120 years of age (Deut 34:7). Another possibility is that the 120 years refers, not to a reduced life-span, but to a time of forbearance in which God grants an opportunity for sinners to repent before the onset of the flood (cf. St. Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 6, 3; St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 25, 4).

6:4 Nephilim: Remembered as a people of magnificent strength and stature from ancient times (Num 13:31-33).

The Family Line of Adam

Genesis sets forth a genealogical chain of 23 links from the person of Adam to the people of Israel (set in bold and numbered below). It focuses on a chosen line, blessed and preserved by God, that runs from Adam to Israel through the righteous figures of Seth, Noah, and Shem in Gen 1-11 and through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Gen 12-50.

The Chosen Line

1. Adam (Gen 2:7)	13. Shelah (Gen 11:12)
Cain (Gen 4:1)	14. Eber (Gen 11:14)
Abel (Gen 4:2)	15. Peleg (Gen 11:16)
2. Seth (Gen 5:3)	16. Reu (Gen 11:18)
3. Enosh (Gen 4:26; 5:6)	17. Serug (Gen 11:20)
4. Kenan (Gen 5:9)	18. Nahor (Gen 11:22)
5. Mahalalel (Gen 5:12)	19. Terah (Gen 11:24)
6. Jared (Gen 5:15)	20. Abram (Gen 11:26)
7. Enoch (Gen 5:18)	Nahor (Gen 11:26)
8. Methuselah (Gen 5:21)	Haran (Gen 11:26)
9. Lamech (Gen 5:25)	Ishmael (Gen 16:15)
10. Noah (Gen 5:28-29)	21. Isaac (Gen 21:3)
11. Shem (Gen 5:32)	Others (Gen 25:1-2)
Ham (Gen 5:32)	Esau (Gen 25:25)
Japheth (Gen 5:32)	22. Jacob (Gen 25:26)
12. Arpachshad (Gen 11:10)	23. The Twelve Tribes of Israel (Gen 35:22-26)

the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

9 These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Ja'pheth.

Noah Makes the Ark as God Commands

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with

pitch. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶Make a roof^k for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you, to keep them alive. ²¹Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." ²²Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

The Great Flood

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation. ²Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the

6:6 the LORD was sorry: The expression should not be taken literally, as though God could be moved or swayed by an emotional wave of regret. Scripture teaches that God does not change as man does (Mal 3:6), nor does he repent as man does (Num 23:19). The Bible often describes the thoughts and actions of God in human terms in order to make the mystery of God more understandable to human minds. Another class of figurative or anthropomorphic expressions includes those that describe God as having physical features such as hands (Ex 7:5), arms (Hos 11:3), feet (Ex 24:10), white hair (Dan 7:9), and a face (Ps 27:8). These and similar word pictures help to communicate the personal nature of God.



6:9–9:19 Noah and the flood. (1) *Compositionally*, the account may have been compiled from two independent flood stories that were skillfully woven together. Scholars who hold this view base their hypothesis on alleged tensions within the account and typically speak of the flood narrative as a composite of Yahwist (J) and Priestly (P) traditions. (2) *Comparatively*, the episode in Genesis has close affinities with other flood stories from ancient Mesopotamia, especially the *Gilgamesh Epic*. (3) *Chronologically*, the deluge lasts for ten and a half months: the floodwaters rise for 40 days (7:4), remain for a total of five months (7:24), and then recede for five and a half months (8:3–13). (4) *Theologically*, the flood brings about a new creation, cleansing the old world of the bloodstains of violence (4:10, 23; 6:11). Several parallels with the creation story bring this out: the land is once again engulfed by the deep (1:2; 7:11); the land reemerges dry from the water (1:9; 8:13); Noah and his family are blessed and made fruitful to multiply (1:28; 9:1); man's dominion over the animals is reaffirmed (1:26; 9:2); a food supply is given (1:29; 9:3); and God renews his commitment to continue the daily and seasonal cycles (1:14; 8:22). • The NT interprets the flood as a foreshadowing of Baptism, which cleanses the believer of sin and confers the grace of salvation in Christ (1 Pet 3:20–21; CCC 701,

1219). • *Allegorically*, the ark of Noah is a figure of the one Church, and the baptism of the world, which purified and redeemed it, corresponds to the saving Baptism of the Church (St. Cyprian, *Letters* 68). The family of Noah is saved by water and wood, just as the family of Christ is saved by Baptism, which represents the suffering of the Cross. And as every kind of animal was aboard the ark, so believers from all nations are enclosed in the Church (St. Augustine, *Against Faustus* 12, 14–15).

6:9 the generations: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*. **righteous ... blameless**: Means that Noah lived by the law of God (cf. Lk 1:6). At this early point in history, he observed the natural moral law inscribed on the heart (Rom 2:14–15). His obedience to the Lord continues throughout the narrative (6:22; 7:5, 16).

6:14–22 Noah is instructed to build an ark (6:14–16), load it with animals (6:19–20), stock it with food (6:21), and then board it with his family (6:18; 7:1).

6:14 gopher wood: An unidentified species of wood.

6:15 length ... breadth ... height: With an 18-inch cubit, the ark measured about 440 feet long, 73 feet wide, and 44 feet high, roughly the size of a naval battleship. Inside it was divided into three floors or decks (6:16).

6:18 establish my covenant: Or, "confirm my covenant". The Hebrew expression indicates the *renewal* of an already existing covenant rather than the *ratification* of an entirely new covenant. Understood in this way, it presupposes God's original covenant with creation. See note on 1:1–2:4.

7:1 all your household: A family of eight persons in all: Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his three daughters-in-law (7:13; 1 Pet 3:20).

7:2 seven pairs: Added to the general command of taking "two" of every animal aboard the ark (6:19). The rationale for this additional requirement emerges from the larger context of the story: the *single* pairs of unclean animals will go forth to repopulate the earth after the flood, whereas *seven* pairs of clean animals are needed so that sacrifices can

^kOr window.

male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate; ³and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive upon the face of all the earth. ⁴For in seven days I will send rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” ⁵And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. ⁷And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark, to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, ⁹two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰And after seven days 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 forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. ¹²And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³On the very same day Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Ja'pheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them entered the ark, ¹⁴they and every beast according to its kind, and all the cattle according to their kinds, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind, and every bird according to its kind, every bird of every sort. ¹⁵They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. ¹⁶And they that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷The flood continued forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸The waters prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. ¹⁹And the

waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; ²⁰the waters prevailed above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. ²¹And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, birds, cattle, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm upon the earth, and every man; ²²everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. ²³He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. ²⁴And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.

The Flood Subsides

8 But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ²the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, ³and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ar'arat. ⁵And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

⁶At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, ⁷and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. ¹⁰He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; ¹¹and the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so

7:7: Mt 24:38; Lk 17:27.

be offered after the flood without making the clean animals extinct (8:20). The number seven may also symbolize the covenant that follows (see note on 1:1–2:4). **clean:** Permissible to sacrifice (8:20) and eat (Lev 11:47).

7:4 forty days: Symbolic of a period of testing. See note on Lk 4:2.

7:11 great deep ... windows: The floodwaters are pictured surging up from the subterranean ocean below and pouring down through openings in the solid firmament above (cf. Ps 78:23; Jon 2:3; Mal 3:10). See notes on 1:2 and 1:6.

7:19 mountains ... covered: Recalls the status of the earth in the beginning, before God called back the waters on the third day of creation (1:9; Ps 104:6–9).

7:20 fifteen cubits: The waters rise nearly 23 feet above the mountaintops. Besides stressing the extent of divine judgment, the author also sees this as God's provision to keep the ark from running aground on the submerged peaks.

7:21 all flesh died: The flood is a universal disaster, drowning the entire population of man, along with every beast and

bird of the earth. The only land-dwelling creatures to escape the waters of judgment are aboard the ark.

8:1 God remembered Noah: Both the midpoint and turning point of the flood narrative, when God begins to drain the prevailing waters off the earth. **wind:** The Hebrew term can also be rendered "Spirit". Along with other parallels to the creation story, this detail recalls how the Spirit of God hovered over the primordial waters (1:2) before the dry land appeared (1:9). See note on 6:9–9:19.

8:4 Ararat: A mountainous region in historical Armenia (Is 37:38; Jer 51:27). It is known in ancient Assyrian texts as the kingdom of Urartu, which was located near the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (in eastern Turkey).

8:6–12 Noah sends out a raven and a dove in search of habitable land. The raven, which is forced to return, is an unclean species (Lev 11:15), whereas the dove, which never returns from its final mission, is taken from the extra pairs of clean birds taken aboard the ark (7:3). See note on 7:2.

8:11 olive leaf: A traditional symbol of peace.

Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹²Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

¹³In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. ¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶"Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." ¹⁸So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

God's Promise to Noah

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. ²²While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

The Covenant with Noah

9 And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. ²The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. ³Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. ⁴Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. ⁵For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. ⁶Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. ⁷And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it."


⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹"Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that 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." ¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant which is between me and

9:4: Lev 7:26, 27; 17:10–14; Deut 12:16, 23.

8:13 the first month, the first day: The waters are gone by the beginning of the new year, signifying a new beginning for the world. This marks ten and a half months since the flood began (7:11). Noah and his family stay aboard the ark for another two months, meaning they will have lived in the vessel for over a year (8:14–16).

8:17 be fruitful and multiply: A renewal of the blessing and mandate given to the fish and birds at creation (1:22).

8:20–9:17 The Noahic covenant. Ratified in response to Noah's obedience (6:22) and expressed in the sign of the rainbow (9:13), it features God taking upon himself the unconditional obligation—despite the persistence of sin (8:21)—to maintain the stability of the natural order (8:22) without the threat of another flood (9:11). The Noahic covenant is a renewal of the covenant that God established with creation in the beginning. See note on 6:18.

 **8:21 man's heart is evil:** The floodwaters cleanse the home of man but leave his heart unchanged. See word study: *Heart* at Deut 30:6. • The problem of sin awaits its final solution in the waters of Baptism, which cleanse the heart from sin and renew it with the life and love of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 15:8–9; Rom 5:5; CCC 1219).

9:1 Be fruitful and multiply: A renewal of the blessing and mandate given to the first couple at creation (1:28). Noah thus becomes a new Adam, who fathers the human family after the flood through his three sons (9:7, 18–19).

9:2 into your hand: Reaffirms man's dominion over the animal kingdom (1:26; CCC 2417).

9:3 food for you: The human diet of plants and fruits can now be supplemented with meat, so long as it is drained of blood (9:4). In the Bible, blood is considered a sacred substance because it bears within it the life of the creature, which must be respected (Lev 17:10–14). See note on 1:29.

9:6 his blood be shed: Murder is a crime against the sanctity of human life, and man is held fully responsible for the destruction of that life (CCC 2258). Homicide thus merits the stiffest penalty: capital punishment (Lev 24:17). The Lord can delegate to men, whether individuals (Num 35:19) or states (Rom 13:4), the judicial authority to avenge wrongful deaths. However, according to OT standards, a policy of strict proportion (one life is taken for one life lost) must be observed; otherwise, a single homicide might spark an ongoing blood feud that leaves many persons dead as a result.

9:13 my bow: The Hebrew term for a rainbow is the same term used for a hunting (27:3) or military bow (Lam 2:4). This has given rise to different explanations of the sign. (1) Some see the rainbow as a sign of peace. They picture God hanging up his bow in the sky, retiring it from service and signifying that he has ended his battle with the sinful world. (2) Others interpret the rainbow as a sign of God's *covenant oath*. They envision the bow pulled back and pointed up at heaven, signifying that God will be forever faithful to his pledge, for he threatens himself with a curse should he fail to uphold the terms of the Noahic covenant.

¹ Gk: Heb repeats *every beast of the earth*.

you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." ¹⁷God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth."

Noah and His Sons

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Ja'pheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

²⁰ Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; ²¹and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. ²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³Then Shem and Ja'pheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

²⁴When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said,

"Cursed be Canaan;

a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."

²⁶He also said,

"Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;^m

and let Canaan be his slave.

²⁷God enlarge Ja'pheth,

and let him dwell in the tents of Shem;

and let Canaan be his slave."

²⁸ After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. ²⁹All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

Nations Descended from Noah

10 These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Ja'pheth; sons were born to them after the flood.

² The sons of Ja'pheth: Gomer, Ma'gog, Ma'dai, Ja'van, Tu'bal, Me'shech, and Ti'ras. ³The sons of Gomer: Ash'kenaz, Ri'phath, and Togar'mah. ⁴The sons of Ja'van: Eli'shah, Tar'shish, Kittim, and Do'danim. ⁵From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the sons of Ja'pheth^a in their lands, each

9:16 everlasting covenant: The Noahic covenant remains in force as long as "the earth remains" (8:22), that is, "for all future generations" (9:12) (CCC 71).

9:20-27 Introduces the next phase of the Genesis story, showing that just as Adam's family line split between the righteous (Seth) and the wicked (Cain), so Noah's family line divides into the blessed (Shem) and the cursed (Ham). The Shemite line is a continuation of the righteous Sethite line through Noah (5:1-32).

9:20 the first tiller: I.e., after the flood. The first agriculturalists to appear in Genesis are Adam (2:15) and Cain (4:2). Another possible translation is: "Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard."

9:22 saw the nakedness of his father: Various interpretations to mean that Ham looked perversely upon his naked father (voyeurism), that he emasculated his father (castration), or that he sexually abused his father (homosexual incest). More likely, the expression is an idiom for maternal incest, where (1) a father's nakedness is an indirect way of referring to the nakedness of his wife (as in Lev 18:7), and (2) "seeing" nakedness is synonymous with "uncovering" the nakedness of a close relative to engage in sexual relations (as in Lev 20:17). So understood, Ham is guilty of having sexual relations with his mother, and this explains why a curse falls, not on himself, but on his son, Canaan, who would seem to be the child conceived of this sinful union (9:25). It is otherwise difficult to understand why Canaan, who plays no role in the story at all, is mentioned five times in the immediate context (9:18, 22, 25, 26, 27). The account of Ham's perversity thus supplies the backstory of how he became the father of Canaan and the Canaanites. For a parallel episode in Genesis where drunkenness leads to incest with a parent and the birth of nations that become traditional enemies of Israel, see 19:30-38.

9:23 covered the nakedness of their father: Supposing the use of the idiom in Lev 18:7, this means that Shem and Japheth discretely covered their naked and violated mother.

9:24 youngest son: This detail hints that Ham resorts to maternal incest as a bid for power, hoping to seize the more exalted blessings intended for Noah's first-born, Shem. As other examples illustrate, unlawful relations with another

man's wives or concubines is often linked with perverse ambitions to usurp his authority (e.g., Reuben, 35:22; 49:3-4; Absalom, 2 Sam 16:20-23). Near Eastern literature gives further examples of sexual aggression in the context of family power struggles.

9:26 Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem: Or, better, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem" (see textual note *m*). The blessing is unique, for this is the first time in Scripture that God is identified as the patron and protector of an individual. The Patriarchs will later share this same privilege ("the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob", Ex 3:6). **Canaan be his slave:** The curse upon Canaan goes into effect when Israel, who descends from Shem through Abraham (11:10-26), seizes the Promised Land and makes the Canaanite survivors of the Conquest into forced laborers (Josh 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 33; 1 Kings 9:20-21).

9:27 God enlarge Japheth: The Hebrew name "Japheth" (*yepet*) resembles the verb "enlarge" (*yapt*). **dwell in the tents of Shem:** Envisions a lasting fraternal friendship between Japheth and Shem.

9:28-29 Rounds off the genealogical record of Noah (5:28-32) after the intermission of the flood story and its aftermath (6:1-9:27).

10:1-32 The table of nations, an inventory of the national, geographic, and linguistic diversity of the ancient Near East. (1) *Numerically*, it lists a total of 70 nations: 14 from Japheth (10:2-5), 30 from Ham (10:6-20), and 26 from Shem (10:21-31). (2) *Genealogically*, it asserts the unity of the human family stemming from Noah's three sons (10:32). (3) *Chronologically*, it stands before the Tower of Babel narrative (11:1-9), yet it presents a map of the world and its languages as it existed after the Babel incident. (4) *Geographically*, it outlines a general pattern of migration and settlement with the Japhethites concentrated in Asia Minor and the islands of the Mediterranean, the Hamites spread across northern Africa and up into Syria-Palestine, and the Shemites settled in Mesopotamia and across the Arabian peninsula. Palestine is situated in the very center of this world map, reinforcing the central importance of the Holy Land in the theological world view of Israel (Ezek 5:5; 38:12).

10:1 These are the generations: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*.

^mOr *Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem*.

^aCompare verses 20, 31. Heb lacks *These are the sons of Japheth*.

with his own language, by their families, in their nations.

6 The sons of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. 7The sons of Cush: Seba, Hav'ilah, Sabtah, Ra'amah, and Sab'teca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and De'dan. 8Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. 9He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD." 10The beginning of his kingdom was Ba'bel, E'rech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shi'nar. 11From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nin'evah, Reho'both-Ir, Ca'lah, and 12Re'sen between Nin'evah and Ca'lah; that is the great city. 13Egypt became the father of Lu'dim, An'amim, Leha'bim, Naph'tuhim, 14Pathru'sim, Caslu'him (whence came the Philis'tines), and Caph'torim.

15 Canaan became the father of Si'don his first-born, and Heth, 16and the Jeb'usites, the Am'orites, the Gir'gashites, 17the Hi'vites, the Arkites,

the Si'nites, 18the Ar'vadites, the Zem'arites, and the Ha'mathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. 19And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Si'don, in the direction of Ge'rar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomor'rah, Admah, and Zeboi'im, as far as La'sha. 20These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

21 To Shem also, the father of all the children of E'ber, the elder brother of Ja'pheth, children were born. 22The sons of Shem: E'lam, Asshur, Arpach'shad, Lud, and Ar'am. 23The sons of Ar'am: Uz, Hul, Ge'ther, and Mash. 24Arpach'shad became the father of She'lah; and Shelah became the father of E'ber. 25To E'ber were born two sons: the name of the one was Pe'leg,^o for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. 26Joktan became the father of Almo'dad, She'leph, Haz'arma'veth, Je'rah, 27Hador'am, U'zal, Diklah, 28O'bal, Abim'a-el, Sheba, 29O'phir, Hav'ilah, and Jo'bab; all these were

10:6-20 Ham is depicted as a progenitor of Israel's traditional enemies: the Egyptians (10:6), the Canaanites (10:6), the Babylonians (10:10), the Assyrians (10:11), the Philistines (10:14), and the Jebusites (10:16).

10:10 Babel, Erech, Accad: Cities in lower Mesopotamia.

10:19 Sidon ... as far as Gaza: The land of the Canaanites, which is destined to become the Promised Land of Israel through the Abrahamic covenant (17:8).

^oThat is *Division*.

10:21 Shem: The eponymous ancestor of all Semitic peoples. The Israelites, descended from Shem through the Patriarchs, are among this group, but the two are not equivalent. The Semites constitute a much larger family of peoples spread across the Near East. Eber: The eponymous ancestor of all Hebrew peoples. Abraham descended from Shem through Eber and was thus an Eberite or Hebrew (14:13).

10:24 Arpachshad ... Shelah: The name "Cainan" appears between these two names in the Greek Septuagint and in Lk 3:36.



the sons of Joktan.³⁰The territory in which they lived extended from Me'sha in the direction of Se'phar to the hill country of the east.³¹These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.

The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and few words.²And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.³And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.⁴Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."⁵And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built.⁶And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.⁷Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."⁸So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹Therefore its name was called Ba'bel, because there the LORD confused^p the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Descendants of Shem

10 These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he became the

father of Arpach'shad two years after the flood;¹¹and Shem lived after the birth of Arpach'shad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

12 When Arpach'shad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of She'lah;¹³and Arpach'shad lived after the birth of She'lah four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters.

14 When She'lah had lived thirty years, he became the father of E'ber;¹⁵and She'lah lived after the birth of E'ber four hundred and three years, and had other sons and daughters.

16 When E'ber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Pe'leg;¹⁷and E'ber lived after the birth of Pe'leg four hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.

18 When Pe'leg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Re'u;¹⁹and Pe'leg lived after the birth of Re'u two hundred and nine years, and had other sons and daughters.

20 When Re'u had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Se'rug;²¹and Re'u lived after the birth of Se'rug two hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

22 When Se'rug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Na'hor;²³and Se'rug lived after the birth of Na'hor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

24 When Na'hor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Te'rah;²⁵and Na'hor lived after the birth of Te'rah a hundred and nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

26 When Te'rah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Na'hor, and Haran.

Descendants of Terah

27 Now these are the descendants of Te'rah. Terah was the father of Abram, Na'hor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.²⁸Haran died before

11:1-9 The Tower of Babel incident explains the dispersion of groups of people (11:8) and the diversity of their languages (11:9). Both are manifestations of divine judgment on man, whose pride has reached a new and towering height in the form of a mudbrick skyscraper. The tower may have resembled one of the colossal mountain temples, or ziggurats, of ancient Babylon. These sacred elevations were thought to be points of contact between heaven and earth (CCC 57).

11:2 the land of Shinar: The broad plain watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (10:10).

11:3 make bricks: Monumental architecture in ancient Mesopotamia was typically constructed of kiln-fired bricks. **bitumen:** A natural tar used for mortar joints and weather sealing.

11:4 make a name for ourselves: The family of man bands together to build a secular civilization that glorifies human achievement and the strength of social and political unity. The arrogance of this attempt illustrates how sin has come to corrupt, not only individuals, but whole societies and their collective pursuits. Moreover, as the broader context of Genesis shows, the "name" coveted by the sinners at Babel is never acquired; rather, it is Abraham and his descendants whom God promises to bless with a great "name" (12:2). Preparations for this had already been made

when God blessed Abraham's ancestor Shem, whose name in Hebrew means "name" (9:26) and whose two genealogies stand immediately before and after the Babel episode (10:21-31; 11:10-26). **lest we be scattered:** The dispersion that is feared by the builders will become the tragic result of their efforts (11:8).

11:5 the LORD came down: Implies that man's attempt at reaching the heavens (11:4) has failed, for God still has to descend from on high to inspect the tower.

11:7 Come, let us: Echoes the words of the builders in 11:3 and 11:4.

11:9 Babel: The name "Babylon" (*babel*), meaning "gate of God", resembles the Hebrew word for "he confused" (*balal*).

11:10-26 Ten generations stretch from Shem, the first-born of Noah, down to Abram, the first-born of Terah. The author is showing that the Patriarchs stand in the blessed line of Seth (5:3), Noah (5:32), and Shem (11:10). See chart: *The Family Line of Adam* at Gen 5.

11:16 Eber: The father of the Hebrews (10:21).

11:27 these are the descendants: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*. **Abram:** Abraham, whose name is changed in 17:5.

11:28 Ur of the Chaldeans: An ancient city and cultural center built along the Euphrates River in southern Mesopotamia

^p Compare Heb *balal*, confuse.

his father Te'rah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chalde'ans. ²⁹And Abram and Na'hor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sar'ai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Is'cah. ³⁰Now Sar'ai was barren; she had no child.

³¹Te'rah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sar'ai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chalde'ans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there. ³²The days of Te'rah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

The Call of Abram

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."^a

⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵And Abram took Sar'ai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions which they had gathered, and the persons that they had gotten in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at She'chem, to the Oak^x of Mo'reh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built

12:1: Acts 7:3; Heb 11:8. 12:2: Gen 15:5; 17:4, 5; 18:18; 22:17; 28:14; 32:12; 35:11; 46:3.

12:3: Gen 18:18; 22:17, 18; 26:4; 28:14; Gal 3:8. 12:7: Gen 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4; Acts 7:5; Gal 3:16.

(modern Iraq). Reference to the tribal people known as the Chaldeans seems to be a gloss added to the text after the ninth century B.C. to distinguish this city from others in the Near East bearing the same (or a similar) name.

11:30 Sarai: Sarah, whose name is changed in 17:15. was barren: The wives of the Patriarchs each endured the burden of childlessness (Rebekah, 25:21; Rachel, 29:31). This set the stage for several miracles of divine intervention and blessing (18:13-14; 25:21; 30:22-24).

11:31 Haran: A city 600 miles northwest of Ur (in modern Syria). It is mentioned several times in the Mari tablets, which date back to the 18th century B.C.

11:32 Terah died: Taken together with the information in 11:26 and 12:4, this verse implies that Terah remained in Haran a full 60 years after Abram left the city for Canaan. The Samaritan Pentateuch differs on this point, saying that Terah lived to be 145 instead of 205, meaning he died the same year that Abram set out from Haran. Stephen follows this Samaritan chronology in Acts 7:4.

12:1-50:26 The patriarchal narratives. These are often classified as folk tales, legends, or epic sagas; some even consider them the free creations of a later age. However, the stories of the Patriarchs are best regarded as genuine family history. Not only do the main characters and events have a solid claim to historicity, but a number of supporting details have been verified by modern research as well. Several considerations favor the authenticity of Genesis 12-50 and make it unlikely that these chapters were either fabricated by later storytellers or substantially altered with nonhistorical elements in the course of a lengthy oral transmission. (1) The patriarchal stories are sober and restrained in dealing with the miraculous. Attention is given to God and his actions, but not in ways that suppress the authentically human dimensions of the narrative. (2) The accounts give every impression of being objective. No obvious effort is made to idealize the Patriarchs by hiding their weaknesses or excusing their failures. Despite being the founding fathers of God's holy people, they are sometimes portrayed in an unflattering light: e.g., Abraham and Isaac are less than truthful (20:2, 13; 26:7); Jacob and Rebekah are deceptive (27:5-29); Judah fathers two sons by a prostitute (38:12-30); and most of Jacob's sons—ancestors of the tribes of Israel—struggled with jealousy and hatred (37:4, 11). (3) The Patriarchs live at variance with the standards of the Torah later erected for Israel: e.g., Abraham married his paternal half-sister

(20:10, contrary to Lev 18:11); Jacob married two sisters at the same time (29:21-30, contrary to Lev 18:18); Jacob consecrated sacred pillars (28:18; 35:14, contrary to Deut 16:22); and both Judah and Simeon married Canaanite women (38:2; 46:10; Ex 6:15, contrary to Deut 7:1-3). Stories of religious heroes would not likely be told in this way unless they were believed to rest on historical facts. (4) The Patriarchs always appear as outsiders and sojourners in the land of Canaan. This would probably not be the case if their stories were later inventions; more likely, national propagandists would have made them natives of Canaan, thus giving Israel an ancestral claim to the Promised Land and not simply a theological claim based on an ancient covenant with Yahweh (17:7-8). (5) The Patriarchs fit comfortably within the cultural, social, and religious environment of the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 B.C.). Archaeological finds, though not yet attesting the existence of the Patriarchs as individuals, confirm the general manner of life depicted in Genesis as well as specific features related to adoption, surrogate motherhood, restitution, and even the price of slaves. See notes on 15:3; 16:1-6; 31:39; 37:28.

12:1-25:11 The story of Abraham, the great grandfather of Israel. He stands tall in biblical history as a pillar of faith, righteousness, and obedience (Heb 11:8-19). But more than just a model of heroic trust in God, Abraham is presented in Genesis as a divinely chosen mediator of worldwide blessings (12:3; 18:17-18; 22:17-18). This promise is reaffirmed with Isaac in 26:3-5 and Jacob in 28:13-14 (CCC 144-47). See topical essay: *The Abrahamic Covenant*.

12:1 Go ... I will show you: An invitation to walk by faith and not by sight (Heb 11:8; CCC 2570).

12:3 families of the earth: Refers back to 10:32 and the entire family of man that issues from Noah's sons after the flood (CCC 56). **shall bless themselves:** A recurring promise in the patriarchal narratives (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Though translated in the RSV as reflexive, the verb can also be rendered in the passive voice: "shall be blessed" (see textual note q). This is how the text was understood in early Jewish tradition (Greek LXX of Gen 12:3 and Sir 44:21) and in the NT (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8).

12:6-9 Abram's initial sweep through Canaan moves from Shechem in the central highlands to Bethel 20 miles south and then down to the Negeb in the deep south of Palestine. On a literal reading of biblical chronology, Abram arrived in Canaan around 2090 B.C.

12:7 I will give this land: The first time in Scripture that Canaan (12:5) is designated as the Promised Land intended for the family of Abraham (13:15; 15:7; 17:8). **built there an**

^aOr in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

^xOr Terebinth.

there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Neg'eb.

Abram and Sarai in Egypt


10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sar'ai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold; ¹²and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³Say you are my sister, that it

may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." ¹⁴When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁶And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, he-donkeys, menservants, maidservants, she-donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sar'ai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for

12:10-20: Gen 20:1-18; 26:7-11.

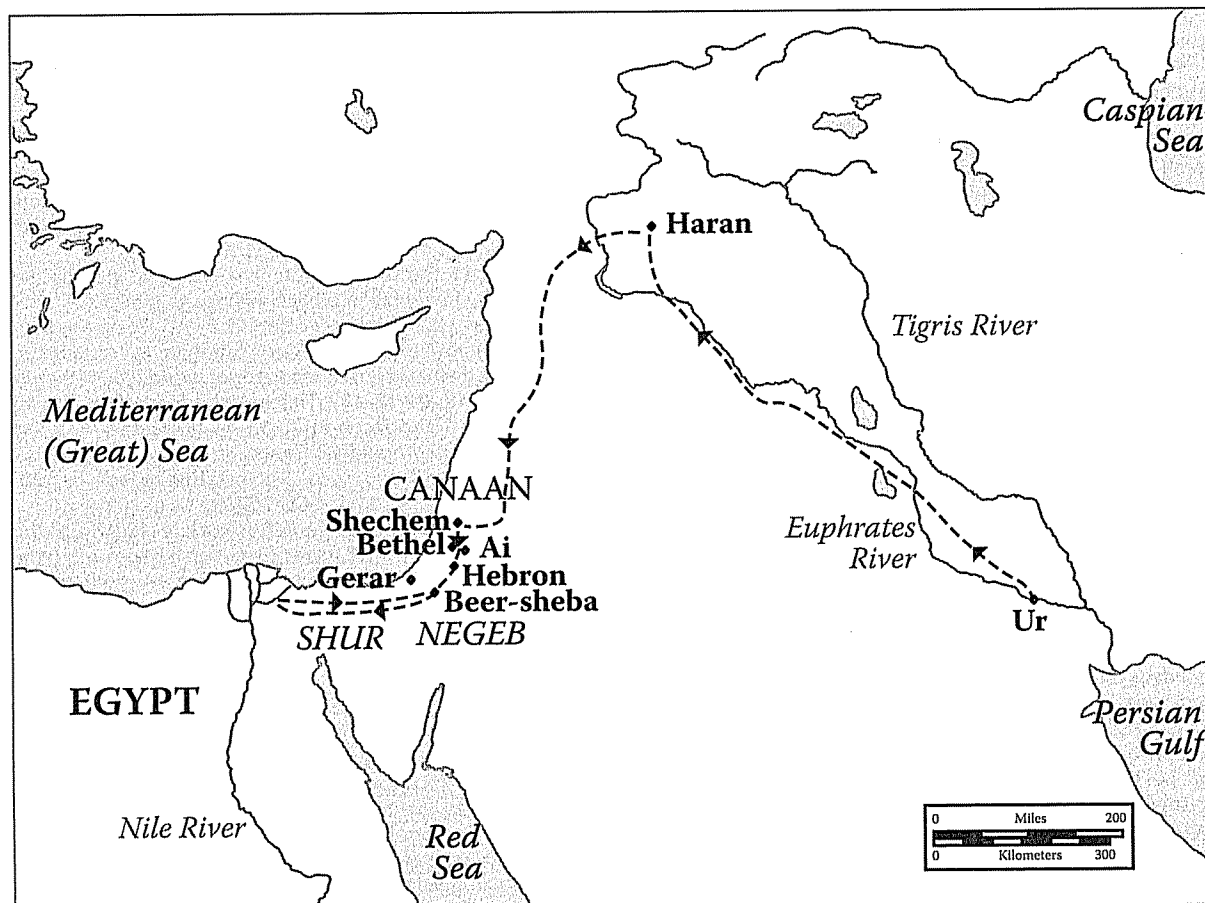
altar: Abram not only surveys the land of Canaan (13:14-17), he sanctifies it as a place of worship by erecting altars in Shechem (12:7), Bethel (12:8), Hebron (13:18), and Moriah (22:2, 9), and by planting a sacred tree in Beer-sheba (21:33). In addition to building altars, which implies the practice of ritual sacrifice (8:20; 46:1), patriarchal religion also includes tithing (14:20; 28:22), libations (35:14), and calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer (12:8; 21:33; 26:25). The Patriarchs themselves performed acts of public worship and served as priests over their families. See topical essay: *Priesthood in the Old Testament* at Num 18.

 **12:10-13:1** No sooner does Abram arrive in Canaan than his family is forced into Egypt. • Parallels with

the Exodus story show that Abram is preenacting the Exodus event: like Israel, the patriarch journeys to Egypt because of a famine in Canaan (12:10; 42:1-5), but he eventually comes out (13:1; Ex 12:41) with great wealth (12:16; Ex 12:35-36) because God sends plagues upon the house of Pharaoh (12:17; Ex 7-12).

12:13 you are my sister: Technically a half-truth, since Sarai and Abram have different mothers but share the same biological father (20:12). As a result of this tactic, Sarai is taken from Abram into the Pharaoh's royal harem (12:15). Similar episodes appear in 20:1-18 and 26:6-11.

12:16 maidservants: Perhaps this is how Sarai acquires Hagar, her Egyptian maid (16:1).



The Journeys of Abraham

my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone.”²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

Abram and Lot Separate

13 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Neg’eb.

2 Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.³ And he journeyed on from the Neg’eb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai,⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.⁵ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,⁷ and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdsmen of Lot’s cattle. At that time the Canaanites and the Per’izzites dwelt in the land.

8 Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen.⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”¹⁰ And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw that the Jordan valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomor’rah.¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley, and Lot journeyed east; thus they separated from each other.¹² Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, while Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward;¹⁵ for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants

13:15: Acts 7:5; Gal 3:16.

13:2–18 Abram and Lot divide their company and go their separate ways. The point is that Lot, of his own free will, chooses to put himself outside the land of promise and into a land of moral corruption (near Sodom, 13:12).

13:8 kinsmen: Literally, “brothers”, a term used for various family relations beyond that of biological male siblings. The relation between Abram and Lot is that of uncle and nephew (11:27).

13:10 direction of Zoar: Lot prefers the Dead Sea valley at the termination of the Jordan River. Genesis tells us this was a lush and fertile region before God scorched it with fire and brimstone (19:24–29; Deut 29:23).

13:14–17 Reiterates the promise made to Abraham in 12:7. Jacob will receive this same promise (land, 13:15; 28:13) while standing in the same place (Bethel, 13:3; 28:19) and peering out in the same four directions (points of the compass, 13:14; 28:14).

The Abrahamic Covenant

The story of Abraham begins with the voice of God calling him to a new land (Gen 12:1) and promising him extraordinary blessings for the future (Gen 12:2–3). The divine promise was threefold: (1) to make Abraham a *great nation*, (2) to make his *name great*, and (3) to make him an instrument of *blessing* for the entire world. The first promise is closely connected with the gift of land, which is a necessary foundation for building a nation. The second is closely connected with dynastic kingship, which involves the exaltation and propagation of a royal name. The third is a promise of worldwide blessing mediated through his offspring.

Within Genesis, these three promises are eventually upgraded to the status of divine covenants. The first promise becomes a covenant in Gen 15:7–21, where God swears to rescue the family of Abraham from the oppression of a wicked nation and to give them a new homeland. The second promise becomes a covenant in Gen 17:1–21, where God institutes the rite of circumcision and swears to raise up a dynasty of kings out of Abraham’s line. The third promise becomes a covenant oath in Gen 22:16–18, where the Lord swears to multiply the offspring of Abraham and to use them in blessing all nations.

Beyond Genesis, the promises and corresponding covenants reach their fulfillment in three historical stages. The first promise takes shape during the Exodus with the ratification of the Mosaic covenant, which forges the family of Israel into a nation (Ex 19–24) as they prepare to take possession of the Promised Land (in Deuteronomy). The second promise materializes at the founding of the Davidic covenant, where the Lord installs David as king, swearing to give him a great name (2 Sam 7:9) and an everlasting throne (Ps 89:3–4; 132:11–12). The third promise comes to realization in the New Covenant as universal blessings are poured out on the world by Jesus Christ, the messianic descendant of Abraham (Mt 1:1; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:14).

Promises	Covenants	Fulfillments
1. Great Nation	Genesis 15	Mosaic Covenant
2. Great Name	Genesis 17	Davidic Covenant
3. Worldwide Blessing	Genesis 22	New Covenant

«

for ever. ¹⁶I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted. ¹⁷Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." ¹⁸So Abram moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the Oaks^a of Mamre, which are at He'bron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

Lot's Captivity and Rescue

14 In the days of Am'raphel king of Shi'nar, Ar'ioch king of Ella'sar, Ched"-or-lao'mer king of E'lam, and Ti'dal king of Goi'im, ²these kings made war with Be'ra king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomor'rah, Shi'nab king of Admah, Sheme'ber king of Zeboi'im, and the king of Be'la (that is, Zoar). ³And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴Twelve years they had served Ched"-or-lao'mer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵In the fourteenth year Ched"-or-lao'mer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Reph'aim in Ash'teroth-karna'im, the Zu'zim in Ham, the E'mim in Sha'veh-kir"-iatha'im, ⁶and the Horites in their Mount Se'ir as far as El-par'an on the border of the wilderness; ⁷then they turned back and came to Enmish'pat (that is, Ka'desh), and subdued all the country of the Amal'ekites, and also the Am'orites who dwelt in Haz'azon-ta'mar. ⁸Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomor'rah, the king of Admah, the king of

Zeboi'im, and the king of Be'la (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim ⁹with Ched"-or-lao'mer king of E'lam, Ti'dal king of Goi'im, Am'raphel king of Shi'nar, and Ar'ioch king of Ella'sar, four kings against five. ¹⁰Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomor'rah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the mountain. ¹¹So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomor'rah, and all their provisions, and went their way; ¹²they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

¹³Then one who had escaped came, and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the Oaks^a of Mamre the Am'orite, brother of Eshcol and of A'ner; these were allies of Abram. ¹⁴When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Ho'bah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

Melchizedek Blesses Abram

¹⁷After his return from the defeat of Ched"-or-lao'mer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Sha'veh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸And Mel-chiz'edek king

14:17-20: Heb 7:1-10.

13:18 Hebron: In the hill country of lower Palestine, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem.

14:1-12 An alliance of four kings from Mesopotamia (14:1) makes war on five vassal kings from the Dead Sea valley (14:2). Under the leadership of Chedorlaomer, the eastern coalition subdues the entire region and plunders the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (14:11). Abram's nephew Lot is among the prisoners of war being hauled back to Mesopotamia (14:12).

14:5-6 The subjugation of people and settlements east of the Jordan River (Deut 2:10-20).

14:13 the Hebrew: Abram is a descendant of Eber. See note on 10:21. **allies of Abram:** Or, "Abram's overlords". The expression implies that Abram made a treaty covenant with Mamre, Eschol, and Aner that obligated these men to help him as their vassal in time of need.

14:14 Dan: A city at the northern extremity of Palestine named after Dan, the fifth son of Jacob (30:4-6). In Abram's day it was known as "Laish" (Judg 18:27-29).

14:16 all the goods: The spoils of people and property that Abram recovered from the Mesopotamian army during his nighttime raid (14:15).

14:17 the King's Valley: In the near vicinity of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 18:18).

14:18 Melchizedek: A royal title or throne name meaning "king of righteousness" (Heb 7:2). He is the first person in the Bible to be called a priest and is mentioned elsewhere in the OT only in Ps 110:4. The identity of Melchizedek is a mystery. Modern scholars tend to view him as a pagan

priest of the Canaanite high god, El, although this deity was deemed the father of the gods in Canaanite mythology, not the "maker of heaven and earth" (14:19). In Jewish tradition, Melchizedek is named in the Dead Sea Scrolls as a heavenly judge and eschatological deliverer (11QMelch) or is identified as Shem, the first-born of Noah (*Targum Neofiti* at Gen 14:18), an ancient figure who outlives Abraham, according to a literal reading of the Genesis genealogies (11:10-26; 25:7). Christian tradition sees him as a type of the royal-priestly Messiah (Heb 5-7) and has identified him as an angel, as a manifestation of the pre-incarnate Christ, or as the patriarch Shem. See topical essay: *The Order of Melchizedek* at Heb 7. **Salem:** A shorter name for ancient Jerusalem, as indicated by Scripture (Ps 76:2) and the testimony of Jewish tradition (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QapGen 22, 13). Canonically, it is significant that Jerusalem is a center of kingship and priesthood under Melchizedek even before it is made the political and spiritual capital of Israel under David (2 Sam 5-6). **bread and wine:** The elements of a celebratory meal. These may have been communion portions of a thanksgiving sacrifice offered to God after a successful campaign (14:17), or they may suggest that a covenant is forged between Abraham and Melchizedek and is sealed with a sacred meal (cf. 31:44-46; Josh 9:14-15). • *Allegorically*, in the actions of the priest Melchizedek the sacrament of the Lord is prefigured; for Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ, who offered the bread and wine of Melchizedek, that is, his body and blood (St. Cyprian, *Letters* 63, 4). This interpretation, shared by many Church Fathers, is implicit in the Roman Canon of the Mass ("the bread and wine offered by your priest Melchizedek", *Eucharistic Prayer I*) (CCC 1333). **God Most High:** The Hebrew is 'el 'elyon, a title given to Yahweh in 14:22.

^aOr *Terebinths*.

of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹And he blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
maker of heaven and earth;

²⁰and blessed be God Most High,

who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." ²²But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, ²³that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' ²⁴I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me; let A'ner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."

God's Covenant with Abram

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Elie'zer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no off-

spring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir." ⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." ⁵And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷ And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chalde'ans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and behold, a dread and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be

15:4: Gen 17:16, 21; 18:10; 21:2. 15:5: Rom 4:18; Heb 11:12. 15:6: Rom 4:3, 9, 22, 23; Gal 3:6. 15:13, 14: Acts 7:6, 7.

14:19 Blessed be Abram: Blessings are invoked upon others by Patriarchs (9:26–27; 27:27–29) and priests in the Pentateuch (Lev 9:22; Num 6:22–27).


14:20 gave him a tenth: Anticipates later Mosaic Law, which required the lay tribes of Israel to pay tithes to the clerical tribe of Levi for spiritual services (Num 18:21–24). See note on Heb 7:4–10.

14:22 I have sworn: Literally, "I have raised my hand", a gesture that accompanied the swearing of oaths in biblical antiquity (Deut 32:40; Rev 10:5–6).


15:1–6 A critical juncture in the spiritual journey of Abram. He clings to the Lord's *promise* of many descendants (13:16) and a land inheritance (12:7; 13:14–15), but he is forced to wrestle with the unsolved *problem* of childlessness (15:2). As later in 22:1–14, God is giving him an opportunity to be tested and found faithful (1 Mac 2:52) (CCC 2374, 2570).

15:3 a slave: A childless couple adopting a legal heir is a Near Eastern practice known from the Nuzi tablets of the 15th century B.C. and from an Old Babylonian text from Larsa.

15:4 your own son: Literally, "one coming from your body". The child in view is Isaac, whose conception will be a divine miracle (21:1–3) and who will grow up to inherit Abram's estate (25:5).

 **15:6 believed the LORD:** Abram trusts in the promise of offspring despite old age (12:4) and the inability of his wife to bear children (11:30). This is not the first time he has put his faith in God in the Genesis narrative. Long before this point, we see Abram building a relationship of trust with the Lord: he obeys the voice of Lord (12:1), builds altars in honor of the Lord (12:7; 13:18), calls on the Lord in prayer (12:8), and swears an oath in the name of the Lord (14:22–23). From the day that God called him, Abram's whole life has been an adventure in faith (as noted in Heb 11:8–19).
• The NT looks to Abram as the model believer of ancient times. From him we learn that faith is the indispensable foundation of a living relationship with God in every age (Rom 4:1–25; Gal 3:6–9). **righteousness:** Indicates a right relationship with God. One is established in righteousness by putting faith in God's word and by faithful adherence to his covenant

(Deut 6:25; Ps 106:31). Abram is counted a loyal friend of God precisely on this basis (Jas 2:23).

 **15:7 I am the LORD:** God will address Israel in these terms at Sinai (Ex 20:2). • The link is typological as well as verbal: both here and during the Exodus he leads his elect (Abraham, Israel) from a land of idolatry (Ur, Egypt) to the land of promise (Josh 24:2–3, 14).

15:8 how am I to know ...?: Up to this point, Abram has received only promises of land (12:7; 13:15; 15:7). Now God lays his uncertainties to rest by strengthening his promise with a covenant oath (15:18). For the absolute certainty attained when God adds an oath to a promise, see Heb 6:13–18.

15:9 heifer ... she-goat ... ram ... turtledove ... pigeon: Anticipates the sacrifices deemed suitable by later Levitical law (Lev 1:2, 10, 14).

15:10 cut them in two: A covenant ratification ceremony. Dividing animal carcasses and walking between the pieces is a ritual enactment of the threat of a curse that a covenant partner invokes upon himself when he swears an oath to ratify the agreement (Jer 34:18). Here it is God, appearing as smoke and fire, who puts himself under the threat of a curse as he moves through the slaughtered beasts and swears to grant land to the family of Abram (15:17–21). See topical essay: *The Abrahamic Covenant* at Gen 12. **did not cut the birds:** Anticipates a requirement of later Levitical law (Lev 1:17).

15:12–14 The first announcement of the Exodus in the Pentateuch. The effect is to show Abram that the promise of land and nationhood (12:1–2) will not materialize in his own lifetime but are the hope of a future generation.

15:12 a deep sleep: Recalls the deep sleep of Adam in 2:21.

15:13 four hundred years: Seems to indicate the duration of Israel's enslavement in Egypt. The total time of their stay is slightly longer, 430 years. (Ex 12:40). Presumably this is because the first generation of Israelites will live as guests in Egypt (Ex 1:1–7), and only after the rise of a new and ruthless Pharaoh will they be pressed into slavery (Ex 1:8–14).

slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; ¹⁴but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Am'orites is not yet complete."

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, ¹⁹the land of the Kenites, the Ken'izzites, the Kad'monites, ²⁰the Hittites, the Per'izzites, the Reph'aim, ²¹the Am'orites, the Canaanites, the Gir'gashites and the Jeb'usites."

The Birth of Ishmael

16 Now Sar'ai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; ²and Sar'ai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened

to the voice of Sar'ai. ³So, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, Sar'ai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵And Sar'ai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" ⁶But Abram said to Sar'ai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

⁷ The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸And he said, "Hagar, maid of Sar'ai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." ⁹The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." ¹⁰The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude." ¹¹And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his

15:18: Gen 17:2, 7, 9-14, 21.

15:16 the fourth generation: Equivalent to the 400 years in 15:13, the term "generation" being used in the sense of a "span" of time. **the Amorites:** The first victims of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan (Num 21:21-35).

15:18 I give this land: The land promised to Abram will have to be wrested from the ten nations who occupy it (15:19-21). **river of Egypt:** Either an eastern branch of the Nile or the smaller Brook of Egypt (modern Wadi el-Arish) that juts across the desert stretch of north Sinai between Canaan and Egypt (Num 34:5). **river Euphrates:** Flows southeast through the Mesopotamian plain and empties into the Persian Gulf. Solomon's kingdom will finally extend to the banks of the upper Euphrates in the tenth century B.C. (1 Kings 4:21).

16:1-6 Distressed by infertility, Sarai makes a fateful decision to give Hagar to the embrace of her husband. The fallout is tension in the home (16:4), retaliation (16:6), and the birth of a wild and contentious son (16:12). Archeological finds have shown that surrogate motherhood by a servant girl or concubine was indeed practiced in the ancient Near East. Childless couples could resort to such measures to produce a family heir (attested in the Nuzi tablets and the Babylonian *Code of Hammurabi* 144-45). Sarai's actions are understandable against the background of this domestic custom. For other examples of this practice in Genesis, see 30:1-6 and 30:9-13.

16:2 children by her: Evidence suggests that a man's lawful wife had maternal rights over a child born to a surrogate mother. **Abram listened:** An ominous note recalling how Adam listened to the voice of his wife in the garden (3:17). Perhaps it also foreshadows what follows: the Hebrew for "listened" (*yishma'*) is the verbal root of the name "Ishmael" (*yishma'e'l*), who is the child born as a result of Sarai's counsel.

16:3 the Egyptian: Hagar is a descendant of Ham (10:6). This makes her son, Ishmael, half-Hamitic (through Hagar) and half-Semitic (through Abram).

16:6 dealt harshly: The same verb is rendered "oppressed" in 15:13. This sets up a reversal in the Pentateuch: the oppression of Hagar will backfire when Sarai's great grand-

son, Joseph, is taken as a slave to Egypt by the "Ishmaelites" (39:1) and the family of Israel who follows him there is "oppressed" by the Egyptians (Ex 1:12).

16:7 the way to Shur: A desert route leading from Canaan to Egypt. It is implied that Hagar is fleeing back to her homeland (16:1).

16:10 multiply your descendants: Numerous descendants will spring from Hagar (through Ishmael, 17:20), just as they will from Abram (through Isaac, 15:4-5). For Ishmael's genealogy, see 25:12-18.

Word Study

Angel of the LORD (16:7)

Mal'ak YHWH (Heb): The "angel" or "messenger" of Yahweh. Sometimes this figure appears to be a messenger of God sent from heaven to speak in God's name (Gen 22:11-18; Judg 6:12). At other times, however, he appears to be an actual manifestation of God and a sounding forth of his own divine voice (Ex 3:2-6). For theological and other reasons, this messenger is most likely an angel who mediates the words of God to the world and manifests his divine presence in visible and audible ways. The angel of the Lord is said to be endowed with divine wisdom (2 Sam 14:17), and among his many tasks, he is called upon to lead the people of Israel (Ex 23:20), to thwart the enemies of Israel (Num 22:31-34), to send divine judgments on Israel (2 Sam 24:16), and to announce the birth of significant children in Israel (Gen 16:11; Judg 13:3), including the Messiah (Mt 1:20-21). The Bible also refers to this heavenly figure as "the angel of God" (Gen 21:17; 31:11; Ex 14:19).

name Ish'mael;^t because the LORD has given heed to your affliction. ¹²He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." ¹³So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"^u ¹⁴Therefore the well was called Be'er-la'hai-roi;^v it lies between Ka'desh and Be'ed.

¹⁵ And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ish'mael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ish'mael to Abram.

The Sign of the Covenant

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty;^w walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram,^x but your name shall be Abraham;^y for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. ⁷And I will establish my

covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. ⁸And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sar'ai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah

17:5: Rom 4:17. 17:7: Lk 1:55; Gal 3:16. 17:8: Acts 7:5. 17:10: Acts 7:8. 17:11-14: Gen 17:24; 21:4.


16:12 a wild donkey: Aggressive and untamed, Ishmael will be a desert dweller and skilled archer, always wrangling with his kinsmen (21:20-21).

16:13 alive after seeing him?: The ancients believed that seeing God directly would bring instant death (32:30; Ex 33:20; Judg 13:22).

16:16 eighty-six years old: Ishmael is born 11 years after Abram first set foot in Canaan (12:4-5).

17:1-21 The Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. It follows the pattern of a Near Eastern treaty covenant, meaning that a superior party or suzerain (God, 17:1-8) lays obligations on an inferior party or vassal (Abraham, 17:9-13) under the threat of a curse (cut off, 17:14). This is the second of three covenants that God makes with the patriarch. See topical essay: *The Abrahamic Covenant* at Gen 12.

17:1 ninety-nine years old: Marks 13 years since the birth of Ishmael (16:16). **God Almighty:** The Hebrew is 'el shad-day, the name of God known in the patriarchal period (28:3; 35:11; Ex 6:3; Job 5:17). The meaning of the name is uncertain, possibly "God of the mountain".

 **17:4 father of ... nations:** Several ancient peoples descend from Abraham: the Israelites (from Isaac and Jacob, 21:1-3; 35:22-26), the Ishmaelites (from Ishmael, 17:20; 25:12-18), the Edomites (from Esau, 36:1-43), and the Midianites and others (from the sons of his second wife, Keturah, 25:1-4). • The NT reveals that God destined Abraham to be the spiritual father of all who imitate his faith, regardless of their nationality (Rom 4:11-12; Gal 3:6-9) (CCC 59, 1819).

17:5 Abram ... Abraham: The original name, meaning "exalted father", is expanded to mean "father of a multitude".

^tThat is *God hears*.

^uCn: Heb *have I even here seen after him who sees me?*

^vThat is *the well of one who sees and lives*.


^wHeb *El Shaddai*.

^xThat is *exalted father*.

^yHere taken to mean *father of a multitude*.

In biblical times, a change in one's name signaled a change in one's mission and destiny (17:15; 35:10; Jn 1:42).

17:6 kings shall come: A royal dynasty will stem from Abraham and Sarah (17:16) through the genealogical line of their great grandson, Judah (49:8-10). This promise is first realized with the founding of the Israelite monarchy under King David (from Judah's son, Perez, Ruth 4:18-22) and comes to its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah (from David's royal son, Solomon, Mt 1:1-18).

 **17:11 sign of the covenant:** Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and will later serve as a rite of initiation into the liturgical life of Israel (Ex 12:48; Lev 12:3). Theologically, circumcision of the flesh points inward to the circumcision of the heart, i.e., it summons the descendants of Abraham to cut away the stubbornness of fallen human nature in order to follow the Lord's ways blamelessly (17:1; Deut 10:16). Historically, circumcision was practiced among many peoples of the Near East (Jer 9:25-26) and is still observed today as a religious rite among Jews (at eight days, like Isaac, 17:12) and Muslims (at age 13, like Ishmael, 17:25). • Baptism is the counterpart to circumcision as the initiation rite of the New Covenant. With Baptism, however, which is administered to males and females alike, the grace of the sacrament effects the interior circumcision of the heart that the cutting of the flesh merely signified (Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:11-12). See note on Deut 30:6.

17:14 shall be cut off: The curse for transgressing the circumcision covenant is signified by the rite itself: unless the foreskin is excised, the offender will be excised from the covenant people.

17:15-21 God's promise to give Abraham a son in 15:4 is now defined more precisely: the boy will be Isaac (not Ishmael); his mother will be Sarah (not Hagar); and he will be born next year (not in the unspecified future).

17:15 Sarai ... Sarah: Variations of the same name, both meaning "princess". Its royal overtones become more

shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." ¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, "O that Ish'mael might live in your sight!" ¹⁹God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. ²⁰I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²¹As for Ish'mael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²²But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

²² When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. ²³Then Abraham took Ish'mael his son and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. ²⁴Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵And Ish'mael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶That very day Abraham and his son Ish'mael were circumcised; ²⁷and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

18 And the LORD appeared to him by the Oaks^a of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, ³and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures^b of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰The LORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴Is anything too hard^c for the

18:10: Rom 9:9. 18:12: 1 Pet 3:6. 18:14: Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 1:37; Rom 9:9.

prominent with the promise that Sarah will be a mother of "kings" (17:16).

17:17 laughed: The Hebrew *yitshaq* is identical in form to the name "Isaac" (17:19). Sarah has the same reaction to the news of his birth in 18:12. For a similar wordplay linking Abraham to Ishmael, see note on 16:2.

17:21 covenant with Isaac: The election of Isaac as the heir shuts Ishmael out of the divine plan for Abraham's family. This is further demonstrated in the Genesis narrative as Hagar and Ishmael are expelled from the camp of Abraham and disinherited (21:8–14). See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

17:25 thirteen: Some evidence suggests that Egyptian boys were circumcised at puberty, around age 13. This would underscore that Ishmael was an Egyptian like his mother, Hagar (25:12).

18:1–15 God, appearing as a traveler, comes to the tent of Abraham and Sarah to reaffirm his promise of a son (15:4; 17:19). Abraham welcomes him and his companions as an eager and attentive host, doing everything possible to ensure their comfort (18:4–8). • Abraham is probably one of the models of hospitality spoken of in Heb 13:2.

18:1 the Oaks of Mamre: Near the city of Hebron in southern Palestine, where Abraham has been living since his

separation from Lot (13:18). **heat of the day:** When shade and refreshment are needed most.

18:2 three men: Identified in the context as Yahweh (18:1) and two of his angels (19:1). Following this encounter, the two angels are sent off to inspect Sodom (18:22; 19:13), while Abraham is left to haggle with the Lord over the fate of city (18:22–33). Christian tradition often saw the three visitors as an image of the Trinity. • Abraham saw three figures but worshiped only one, for there is one God, one Lord, and one Spirit. There is oneness of honor because there is oneness of power (St. Ambrose, *The Holy Spirit* 2, 4).

18:3 My lord: The Hebrew is *'adonay*, an address used exclusively for God in the Bible.

18:6 three measures: One for each guest, for a combined total of nearly a half bushel. • *Morally*, the three measures of flour are faith, hope, and love. These virtues contain all the fruits of the Church, so that if one possesses all three, he can receive the entire Trinity at the banquet of his heart (St. Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 83, 5).

18:11 the manner of women: At 90 years of age, Sarah has already passed through menopause (17:17).

18:12 Sarah laughed: A wordplay on Isaac's name, which means "he laughs". See note on 17:17.

18:14 too hard for the LORD?: The question is rhetorical, implying that nothing is impossible for God (Jer 32:17; CCC 269). • This verse, which prepares for the miraculous conception of Isaac, is later echoed when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary the virginal conception of Jesus (Lk 1:37; CCC 489).

^aThat is *he laughs*.

^aOr *Terebinths*.

^bHeb *seahs*.

^cOr *wonderful*.

LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him?^a ¹⁹No, for I have chosen^e him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know."

22 So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found

there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³²Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

The Immorality of Sodom

19 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed himself with his face to the earth, ²and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the street." ³But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. ⁴But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; ⁵and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." ⁶Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, ⁷and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." ⁹But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and

18:18: Gen 12:3; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8.

18:19 way of the LORD: In the time of the Patriarchs, the way of justice and righteousness was known through the dictates of the natural law inscribed on the heart (26:5; Rom 2:13-15).

18:21 I will go down to see: God is depicted in humanlike terms, as though he had to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah firsthand in order to confirm reports of their wickedness. See note on 6:6.

18:22-33 Abraham intercedes for Sodom by bargaining with the Lord. The dialogue centers on the character of God, whose *justice* overlooks neither righteousness nor wickedness and whose *mercy* is willing to spare the wicked from mass destruction for the sake of the righteous. These themes play out in the following episode, when divine justice rains down upon Sodom (19:24) and divine mercy spares both Lot (19:16) and city to which he flees (19:21-22).

19:1-23 Angels appearing as men come to inspect Sodom and evacuate Lot (CCC 332). They are sent to destroy sev-

eral cities in the Dead Sea valley (19:29) infamous for their injustice (Is 3:9), disregard for the poor (Ezek 16:49), and unnatural lust (Jude 7).

19:1 sitting in the gate: May indicate that Lot is a respected elder of the city, i.e., someone who adjudicates civil disputes (Deut 21:18-21). **bowed himself:** Lot welcomes the visitors with the same gestures of Near Eastern hospitality shown by Abraham (18:2-8).

19:5 that we may know them: More than just a sin against hospitality, the mob presses in to abuse the visiting men in a perverted, homosexual way. This form of sexual depravity, which is a grievous offense against God and nature (Rom 1:26-27), was rampant among the peoples indigenous to Canaan (Lev 18:22-25). Homosexual sins were punished by death in ancient Israel (Lev 20:13) (CCC 1867, 2357-59).

19:8 I have two daughters: An unflattering depiction of Lot, who is willing to endanger his own daughters to ensure the protection of his guests. The rejection of his offer accentuates the Sodomites' disordered preference for men over women.

^aOr in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

^eHeb known.

drew near to break the door. ¹⁰But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. ¹¹And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you any one else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or any one you have in the city, bring them out of the place; ¹³for we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up, get out of this place; for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

15 When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." ¹⁶But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him forth and set him outside the city. ¹⁷And when they had brought them forth, they ^fsaid, "Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley; flee to the hills, lest you be consumed." ¹⁸And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords; ¹⁹behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me, and I die. ²⁰Behold, yonder city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!" ²¹He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. ²²Make haste, escape there; for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called

Zoar. ^g ²³The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

24 Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; ²⁵and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶But Lot's wife behind him looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. ²⁷And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; ²⁸and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and beheld, and behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

29 So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

The Shameful Origin of the Moabites and Ammonites

30 Now Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; so he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters. ³¹And the first-born said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. ³²Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." ³³So they made their father drink wine that night; and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. ³⁴And on the next day, the first-born said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring through our father." ³⁵So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she

19:24, 25: Lk 17:29. 19:26: Lk 17:32. 19:28: Rev 9:2.

19:11 struck with blindness: A flash of angelic judgment buys enough time for Lot and his family to flee the city before its demise.

19:16 he lingered: Hesitation implies an attachment to Sodom. The same affections can be seen in Lot's wife when she gazes back on the burning city with longing (19:26).

19:22 Zoar: Originally slated for destruction along with the other cities of the valley (19:21). Zoar is spared at the last minute on account of righteous Lot (18:22–23; 2 Pet 2:7–8). Its name in Hebrew means "little," confirming the observation that the city is "a little one" (19:20).

19:24–29 The Lord pulverizes the cities of the valley with flaming rocks of sulfur. The event brings death and destruction to the entire region, leaving it a scorched and smoking wasteland. The memory of this catastrophe serves as a warning to the wicked and stands as an illustration of God's judgment on sin (Deut 29:23; 2 Pet 2:6). Likewise, the destruction of an entire population of sinners, the rescue of a single family, and the account of a sexual sin in which the surviving father begets

offspring that is hostile to Israel are all paralleled in the flood narrative and its aftermath (chaps. 6–9).

19:26 pillar of salt: Lot's wife becomes part of the landscape, resembling one of the natural salt formations in the southern Dead Sea basin.

19:29 cities of the valley: Sodom and Gomorrah as well as Admah and Zeboiim (14:2; Deut 29:23). **God remembered Abraham:** This is the second time Lot is rescued by the timely intervention of his uncle Abraham (14:12–16; 18:22–33).

19:30–38 The shameful origin of Israel's eastern neighbors, the Moabites and the Ammonites. These nations showed themselves enemies of Israel during its Exodus journey (Num 22:1–6; 25:1–3; Deut 23:3–4). The episode recalls the drunkenness of Noah and what appears to be the incestuous origin of the Canaanites in 9:18–27.

19:30 afraid to dwell in Zoar: A reversal of Lot's original fear to dwell in the hills (19:17–20).

19:31 not a man on earth: The sisters seem to think the devastation of the region is a worldwide calamity. Some interpret the incest that follows as a case of poetic justice, i.e., Lot is made to pay the bitter penalty for recklessly offering his daughters to the perverted Sodomites (19:8).

^gGk Syr Vg: Heb *he*.

^hThat is *Little*.

arose. ³⁶Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. ³⁷The first-born bore a son, and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸The younger also bore a son, and called his name Ben-am'mi; he is the father of the Am'monites to this day.

Abraham and Sarah at Gerar

20 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Neg'eb, and dwelt between Ka'desh and Shur; and he sojourned in Ge'rar. ²And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abim'elech king of Ge'rar sent and took Sarah. ³But God came to Abim'elech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man, because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a man's wife." ⁴Now Abim'elech had not approached her; so he said, "Lord, will you slay an innocent people? ⁵Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷Now then restore the man's wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all that are yours."

⁸ So Abim'elech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. ⁹Then Abim'elech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰And Abim'elech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?" ¹¹Abraham said, "I did it because I thought,

There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. ¹²Besides she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. ¹³And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.'" ¹⁴Then Abim'elech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored Sarah his wife to him. ¹⁵And Abim'elech said, "Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you." ¹⁶To Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your vindication in the eyes of all who are with you; and before every one you are righted." ¹⁷Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abim'elech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. ¹⁸For the LORD had closed all the wombs of the house of Abim'elech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

The Birth of Isaac

21 The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. ²And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." ⁷And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸ And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac

21:4: Acts 7:8.

19:37 Moab: Resembles the Hebrew expression "from a father".

19:38 Ben-ammi: Means "son of my people".

20:1-18 Abraham's sojourn in Gerar. The episode shows God ensuring the fulfillment of his promises to Abraham by protecting his wife, Sarah, who will eventually bear him a son (21:1). Despite being taken into the royal harem (20:2), she is untouched by Abimelech (20:6) and delivered back safely to the patriarch (20:14). For similar accounts in Genesis, see 12:10-20 and 26:1-11.

20:1 From there: From the Oaks of Mamre in Hebron, where Abraham had moved his camp after parting with Lot (13:18; 14:13; 18:1). **Gerar:** In the arid Negeb region in southern Palestine.

20:2 Abimelech: The name means "my father is king." It may be a title or throne name of the local monarch. Isaac encounters another king of this name in the same city years later (26:1).

20:3 dream: Often a channel of divine instruction in the Bible. See word study: *Dream* at 37:5.

20:7 prophet: The first occurrence of this term in Scripture. In this context, it means, not that Abraham has a gift

for predicting the future, but that he is a powerful intercessor and friend of God (cf. Num 14:19-20; 21:7; Deut 34:10).

20:9 a great sin: Adultery was widely acknowledged as a serious injustice in the ancient Near East, as it also was in Israel (Ex 20:14; Lev 18:20).

20:12 my sister: Abraham and Sarah have the same biological father but not the same mother. The patriarch plays up this family connection for his own protection. Prohibitions against marriages between close relatives did not arise until the Torah was given to Israel (Lev 18:11).

20:18 closed all the wombs: The royal house of Abimelech is temporarily stricken with infertility.

21:1-14 The birth of Isaac and the banishment of Ishmael. These pivotal events ensure that Isaac alone will inherit the covenant promises made to Abraham (17:21; 21:12).

21:3 Isaac: The name means "he laughs", recalling how Abraham and Sarah burst into laughter when God promised them a child in their elderly years (17:17; 18:12). The same response is expected from all who hear of the miracle (21:6).

21:4 eight days old: As required by the Abrahamic covenant (17:12).

21:8 weaned: At about age three (2 Mac 7:27).

was weaned. ⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹²But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named. ¹³And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring." ¹⁴So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Be'er-she'ba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went, and sat down over against him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." And as she sat over against him, the child lifted up his voice ¹⁷and wept. ¹⁷And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. ¹⁸Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. ²⁰And God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. ²¹He lived in the wilderness of Par'an; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Abraham and Abimelech Make a Covenant


²² At that time Abim'elech and Phi'col the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do; ²³now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned." ²⁴And Abraham said, "I will swear."

²⁵ When Abraham complained to Abim'elech about a well of water which Abimelech's servants had seized, ²⁶Abim'elech said, "I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today." ²⁷So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abim'elech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹And Abim'elech said to Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs which you have set apart?" ³⁰He said, "These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well." ³¹Therefore that place was called Be'er-she'ba; ³²because there both of them swore an oath. ³²So they made a covenant at Be'er-she'ba. Then Abim'elech and Phi'col the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philis'tines. ³³Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Be'er-she'ba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. ³⁴And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philis'tines.

God Tests Abraham

22 After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." ²He said, "Take your son, your only-begotten son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Mori'ah, and offer him there as a burnt

21:10: Gal 4:30. 21:12: Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18. 21:31: Gen 26:33. 22:1-18: Heb 11:17-19.

 **21:9 playing:** The Hebrew is "laughing", here in the negative sense of "laughing at". To the distress of Sarah, the teenager Ishmael is taunting or mocking the toddler Isaac. • Paul will later interpret this as an act of persecution (Gal 4:29).

21:10 shall not be heir: Sarah presses Abraham to disinherit Ishmael and expel him from the camp.

21:17 the angel of God: The same heavenly messenger who spoke to Hagar the first time she left Abraham's camp (16:7-14). See word study: *Angel of the LORD* at 16:7.

21:21 wilderness of Paran: Covers the northeastern expanse of the Sinai Peninsula.

21:22-34 A covenant of mutual peace between Abraham and Abimelech. It follows the pattern of a Near Eastern kinship or parity covenant between equals. Both parties swear a solemn oath during the ratification ceremony (21:31), invoking God's name (21:23) and expressing their mutual commitments through a verbal declaration (21:30) and ritual action (21:28).


21:31 Beer-sheba: Translates "well of seven" or "well of the oath". The two meanings are related, since the number

seven has the same root as the verb for swearing an oath in biblical Hebrew. In this episode, Abraham enacts his oath by giving "seven" lambs as a covenant witness (21:30) to his rightful ownership of the well seized by Abimelech's servants (21:25).

21:33 tamarisk tree: A sacred landmark, planted as a memorial of God's blessings to Abraham during his sojourn in Canaan. See note on 12:7.

22:1-19 The binding of Isaac, recalling how Abraham "bound" his son for sacrifice (22:9). The event is sometimes called the Aqedah, the term for "binding" in Hebrew. For its significance, see topical essay: *The Sacrifice of Isaac*.

22:1 Here am I: The reply of someone ready and eager to accept God's will (Ex 3:4; 1 Sam 3:4; Is 6:8).

 **22:2 only-begotten son:** Follows the reading of the Latin Vulgate. The Hebrew text states that Isaac is the "only son" of Abraham, with the added nuance that he is "unique" and "precious". The expulsion and disinheritance of Ishmael in the preceding chapter is presupposed (21:8-14). The Greek LXX translates the Hebrew "only son" as "beloved son" in all three of its occurrences (22:2, 12, 16). • The epithet "beloved son" is given to Jesus at his Baptism (Mt 3:17) and Transfiguration (Mt 17:5). • Isaac is a type of Christ, for he was a son as Christ was a Son, and he carried the wood of his sacrifice just as the Lord bore the wood of

⁹ Gk Vg: Heb lacks *with her son Isaac*.

¹⁷ Gk: Heb *she lifted up her voice*.

³¹ That is *Well of seven* or *Well of the oath*.

offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from

heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.”¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only-begotten son, from me.”¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide;¹⁵ as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”¹

15 And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only-begotten son,¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies,¹⁸ and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Be’er-she’ba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

22:9, 10, 12: Jas 2:21. 22:16, 17: Lk 1:73; Heb 6:13, 14; 11:12. 22:18: Acts 3:25; Gal 3:16.

the Cross (St. Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator* 1, 5, 23). The Lord carried his Cross as Isaac carried the wood; and the ram, caught by its horns in the thicket, prefigures Jesus crowned with thorns and then slain in sacrifice (St. Augustine, *City of God* 16, 32). **Moriah:** The future site of the Jerusalem Temple according to Scripture (2 Chron 3:1) and Jewish tradition (*Jubilees* 18, 13; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 226).

22:5 come again: By faith, Abraham anticipates the safe return of Isaac, if necessary, by a resurrection from the dead (Heb 11:17–19).

22:9 bound Isaac: The text does not specify Isaac’s age, only that he is old enough to talk and carry firewood (22:6–7). Jewish tradition believed him to be a grown man, either 25 (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 227) or 37 years old (Targum *Neofiti* at Ex 12:42). This would suggest that Isaac gave consent to be tied up and sacrificed, a notion found in ancient Jewish and Christian writings (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 232; 4 *Maccabees* 13, 12; St. Clement of Rome, 1 *Clement* 31).

22:11 angel of the LORD: Sent to rescue Isaac and reward Abraham for his obedience (22:15–18). See word study: *Angel of the LORD* at 16:7.



22:12 not withheld your son: Abraham has learned the lesson of total surrender to God. • Paul alludes to this verse when he marvels that God the Father did not spare his own Son but surrendered him to be sacrificed for the world (Rom 8:32).



22:14 The LORD will provide: The Hebrew is *YHWH yir’eh*, “the LORD will see”. The idea is that God will “see to” providing a lamb for sacrifice (22:8). • The announcement in Jn 1:29 that Jesus is the “Lamb of God” is connected partly with this prophecy.



22:16–18 God swears an unconditional oath to bless the world through Abraham’s offspring (CCC 706). • The divine oath of Gen 22 is central to Paul’s discussion in Gal 3:6–18. It indicates that God assumed full responsibility

for blessing Israel and the Gentiles in spite of their sins and the curses later imposed by the Mosaic covenant. For Paul, the act that elicits the oath (the binding of Isaac) prefigures the act that fulfills the oath (the Crucifixion of Jesus).

22:16 By myself: Men swear oaths by calling on the name of the Lord. God, who has no superior to invoke, must swear by his own name to guarantee the fulfillment of his pledge. For the significance of this, see Heb 6:13–18.

22:18 bless themselves: Or, “be blessed”. See note on 12:3. **you have obeyed my voice:** Abraham’s obedience is rewarded with *blessings* for his descendants and the world (26:4–5). This is in contrast to Adam, who obeyed the voice of his wife instead of the Lord (3:17) and brought *curses* upon his descendants and the world (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22).

Word Study

Descendants (22:18)

Zera’ (Heb.): A noun meaning “seed” or “offspring”. It can refer to seed sown in a field (Ezek 17:5), the produce of a field (Deut 28:38), or male semen (Lev 15:12). Like the English word “deer”, the Hebrew term can be used individually or collectively, referring to one or many. An individual seed is simply the child of his parents (Gen 4:25; 21:13); a collective seed can be a family or nation that stems from a common ancestor (Gen 46:6). Both of these possibilities are inherent in Gen 22:18, where the seed of Abraham (translated “your descendants”) refers to his natural offspring, Isaac, but also envisions his national offspring, Israel. Through the former, the latter is elected to mediate divine blessings to the world (26:4; 28:14). Paul sees Isaac and Israel as types of Abraham’s messianic offspring, Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16).

*Or see.

¹Or he will be seen.

The Children of Nahor

20 Now after these things it was told Abraham, "Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Na'hor: ²¹Uz the first-born, Buz his brother, Ke'muel the father of Ar'am, ²²Che'sed, Ha'zo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethu'el." ²³Bethu'el became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Na'hor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reu'mah, bore Te'bah, Ga'ham, Ta'hash, and Ma'acah.

Sarah's Death and Burial

23 Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years; these were the years of the life of Sarah. ²And Sarah died at Kir'iath-ar'ba (that is, He'bron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went

in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites, ⁴"I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." ⁵The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶"Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our sepulchres; none of us will withhold from you his sepulchre, or hinder you from burying your dead." ⁷Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸And he said to them, "If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me E'phron the son of Zo'har, ⁹that he may give me the cave of Mach-pe'lah, which he owns; it is at the end of

23:4: Heb 11:9, 13.

22:20-24 The sons of Abraham's younger brother, Nahor, living in upper Mesopotamia (11:27). This is the first introduction of Isaac's wife, **Rebekah**, in the Genesis narrative.

23:1-20 Abraham buys land in southern Canaan as a burial plot for Sarah. The chapter details the negotiation and purchase of the property and stresses that Abraham declined to accept it as a gift. This field is the only portion of land that ever belongs to Abraham personally, but his purchase of the site anticipates the full acquisition of Canaan by his descendants (12:7; 17:8).

23:3 the Hittites: The descendants of "Heth" (10:15), one of the ten nations that occupied Canaan before its conquest by the Israelites (15:18-21).

23:4 a stranger: A foreigner living among natives but possessing no property.

23:9 cave of Mach-pelah: Abraham will be buried with Sarah in this same cave (25:9-10), as will Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, and Jacob and his first wife, Leah (49:29-32). Samaritan tradition locates the burial place of the Patriarchs, not in Hebron, but in Shechem in central Palestine. Stephen follows this Samaritan tradition in Acts 7:16.

The Sacrifice of Isaac

The drama of the Book of Genesis reaches its greatest intensity in 22:1-19, the heart-wrenching story of Abraham offering his beloved son as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. So momentous is the event and its outcome that it stands as one of the defining moments of salvation history. Had Abraham shown anything less than heroic faith, there is no telling how the grand narrative of the Bible would have developed thereafter.

The question is how to interpret the significance of the episode. For some, the story is a protest against the rituals of child sacrifice that plagued the biblical world. By holding back the knife, the Lord shows that he rejects rather than requires this kind of savagery in the name of religion. For others, the story is a lesson in trusting God and obeying his word, even when life's circumstances seem to contradict his promises. Stretching our faith beyond comfortable limits is seen as the path to greater blessing that Abraham blazes for us by his example.

Both of these readings provide genuine insights into Genesis 22. But more can be said about the spiritual and theological dimensions of the episode. In the interpretive tradition of Judaism and Christianity, the sacrifice of Isaac is an event of monumental historic importance. It is one of the few events in Scripture that have a lasting effect on the shape of God's plans for the future and the world.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

For Abraham personally, the sacrifice of Isaac marks the highpoint of his developing relationship with the Lord. Ever since his call in Genesis 12, Abraham's faith in God has been gradually deepening and maturing to the point where, in Genesis 22, God sees fit to test the strength of his commitment. Preceding chapters describe how the plot builds to reach this climactic moment. (1) Initially Abraham is asked to leave his *home* and set out for the land of Canaan at the Lord's direction (Gen 12:1-2). (2) Later he is asked to sacrifice animals from his *herds* (Gen 15:9-10) so that the Lord can put his lingering doubts to rest by the ratification of a covenant (Gen 15:18-20). (3) Then the patriarch is asked to sacrifice part of *himself* in a covenant of circumcision at the age of ninety-nine (Gen 17:1-21). (4) Finally, the Lord asks for the life of Isaac, Abraham's beloved *heir* (Gen 22:1-2). No greater sacrifice could be asked of a father than this, all the more so since God's promises to bless Abraham are literally bound up with Isaac on the altar (see Gen 17:19).

So it is that Abraham learns the lesson of trustful surrender to the Lord. At each stage in the process, more is asked of him than before, until all that Abraham holds dear is given over to God and nothing is held back. Each time he is summoned to sacrifice, he is asked to love the Creator more than his creatures and to esteem the divine Giver above his most precious gifts. Even when God's promises and credibility hang by a thread, the only acceptable course is to entrust ourselves to him in faith. Because Abraham followed this course, he shows himself to be one who fears God (Gen 22:12). This is significant because

his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place.”¹⁰Now E’phron was sitting among the Hittites; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹“No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it; in the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead.” ¹²Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³And he said to E’phron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me; I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴E’phron answered Abraham, ¹⁵“My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶Abraham agreed with E’phron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in

the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So the field of E’phron in Mach-pe’lah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave which was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Mach-pe’lah east of Mamre (that is, He’bron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.

The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ²And Abraham said to his

23:16, 17: Acts 7:16.

23:10 who went in at the gate: Not passersby, but the elders or officials of the city that oversee legal transactions (cf. Ruth 4:1-2).

23:15 four hundred shekels: A very high price.

24:1-67 Abraham commissions his head servant to find a bride for Isaac. The story details how God, in his Providence, oversees the process and ensures the success of the mission.

24:2 hand under my thigh: The loins or thighs represent the locus of man's procreative powers (Job 40:16; Heb 7:10). Putting the hand under the thigh is an oath gesture, signifying that the swearing party invokes a curse of sterility upon himself should he fail to uphold his pledge (Deut 33:11). Here the oath makes Abraham's last living request binding upon his servant should he die before Isaac is

the Bible extols “fear of the Lord” as the preeminent religious virtue, the very essence of what it means to possess wisdom and to live uprightly in the eyes of the Almighty (Ex 20:20; Job 1:1; 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7).

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In early Jewish theology, the sacrifice or “binding” of Isaac is an event that sends ripples down through the history of the covenant people. It is said, for example, that Isaac played an active role on Moriah by offering himself as a willing victim and that the merits of his action were stored up for the redemption of Israel in future days. Thus, saving events such as the Exodus from Egypt, the forgiveness of the people after the golden calf apostasy, and the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land were all made possible by the sacrifice of Isaac. Likewise, the cultic ministries of the Temple, especially the daily burnt offering and the yearly Passover sacrifice, were considered liturgical memorials of Isaac's offering. In these and other ways, the sacrifice of Isaac was believed to secure lasting benefits for the descendants of Abraham.

From a Christian perspective, the sacrifice of Isaac points forward to the salvation of the world by the Messiah. Anticipation of this rests on both a prophetic and typological reading of Genesis 22. *Prophetically*, the divine oath to bless the world through Abraham in Gen 22:16-19 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the messianic offspring of Abraham (Gal 3:16). Through him the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham, destined for all families and nations, are poured out for the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles alike (Mt 28:19; Acts 3:25-26; Gal 3:14). In this way, the curses of the Adamic covenant are surpassed and surmounted by the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled by the Messiah (see Rom 5:12-21). *Typologically*, the offering of Isaac serves as a preview of how the world's redemption would be accomplished. Like Isaac, Jesus is an only beloved Son (Mt 3:17; Jn 3:16) who is not spared by his Father but is offered in sacrifice (Rom 8:32). So too, as Isaac is returned alive to the arms of his father, thanks to the intervention of God (Gen 22:12), Jesus is restored to life in his Resurrection (Heb 11:17-19). Building on this NT foundation, the Fathers of the Church went on to correlate Isaac carrying the firewood (Gen 22:6) with Jesus bearing his own Cross (Jn 19:17), to link the deliverance of Isaac on the third day after consignment to death (Gen 22:4) with the deliverance of Jesus from death on the third day (Mt 16:21), and to see the ram caught by its horns in the thicket (Gen 22:13) as a depiction of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb (Jn 1:29), crowned with thorns (Jn 19:2). Finally, the sacrifice of Isaac is said to have taken place on Moriah (Gen 22:2), which is none other than the mountainous elevation of Jerusalem (2 Chron 3:1), the city where Jesus was called upon to offer his life in sacrifice. Given these remarkable prophetic and typological features, it is no surprise that Christian tradition places Genesis 22 alongside other OT passages such as Isaiah 53 that most clearly describe the work of the Messiah for our redemption. «

servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh,³ and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell,⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac."⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?"⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there."⁷ The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there."⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there."⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Na'hor.¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.¹² And he said, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, I beg you, and show mercy to my master Abraham.¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water.¹⁴ Let the maiden to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown mercy to my master."

¹⁵ Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethu'el the son of Milcah, the wife of Na'hor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar upon her shoulder.¹⁶ The maiden was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, and filled her jar, and came up.¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her, and said, "Please give me a little water to drink

from your jar."¹⁸ She said, "Drink, my lord"; and she quickly let down her jar upon her hand, and gave him a drink.¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking."²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels.²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the LORD had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had done drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,²³ and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?"²⁴ She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethu'el the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Na'hor."²⁵ She added, "We have both straw and food enough, and room to lodge in."²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD,²⁷ and said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his mercy and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me in the way to the house of my master's kinsmen."

²⁸ Then the maiden ran and told her mother's household about these things.²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was La'ban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.³⁰ When he saw the ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man; and behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring.³¹ He said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD; why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."³² So the man came into the house; and La'ban ungirded the camels, and gave him straw and food for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.³³ Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, "I will not eat until I have told my errand." He said, "Speak on."

³⁴ So he said, "I am Abraham's servant."³⁵ The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys.³⁶ And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has.³⁷ My master made me

married. For a similar oath imposed by the aging Jacob, see 47:29-31.

24:3 daughters of the Canaanites: Anticipates the later Mosaic restriction that forbids Israelites to intermarry with Canaanites (9:25; Deut 7:1-4).

24:7 his angel: A heavenly scout will be sent ahead to prosper the mission. This appears to be the angel who will lead Israel to the Promised Land (Ex 23:20). See word study: *Angel of the LORD* at 16:7.

24:10 ten ... camels: Taken along to accommodate the entourage of Abraham's men (24:32) as well as Rebekah and her maids on the return trip (24:61). Though camels were not widely used as beasts of burden until after 1000 B.C., there

is evidence from Egypt for a limited domestication of camels in the Near East dating back into the third millennium B.C. Egypt is precisely where Abraham's family is said to have acquired these animals in 12:16. **Nahor:** Located in upper Mesopotamia. A city of this name is mentioned in the Mari tablets of the 18th century B.C.

24:11 well of water: Also the setting where Jacob met his wife, Rachel (29:1-14), and where Moses found his wife, Zipporah (Ex 2:15-22). **evening:** After the heat of midday has passed.

24:12 O LORD: The story is punctuated with the prayers and pious actions of the servant (24:26-27, 42-44, 52).

24:22 gold ring ... two bracelets: Betrothal gifts.

swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; ³⁸but you shall go to my father's house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son.' ³⁹I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' ⁴⁰But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father's house; ⁴¹then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; and if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.'

⁴² "I came today to the spring, and said, 'O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will prosper the way which I go, ⁴³behold, I am standing by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," ⁴⁴and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also," let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

⁴⁵ "Before I had done speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' ⁴⁶She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also. ⁴⁷Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethu'el, Na'hor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms. ⁴⁸Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

⁵⁰ Then La'ban and Bethu'el answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. ⁵¹Behold, Rebekah is before you, take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken."

⁵² When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the LORD. ⁵³And the servant brought forth jewelry of sil-

ver and of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master." ⁵⁵Her brother and her mother said, "Let the maiden remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." ⁵⁶But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way; let me go that I may go to my master." ⁵⁷They said, "We will call the maiden, and ask her." ⁵⁸And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will go." ⁵⁹So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah, and said to her, "Our sister, be the mother of thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gate of those who hate them!" ⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and rode upon the camels and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from^a Be'er-la'hai-roi, and was dwelling in the Neg'eb. ⁶³And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel, ⁶⁵and said to the servant, "Who is the man yonder, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought her into the tent,^o and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Abraham Marries Keturah

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Ketu'rah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Me'dan, Mid'ian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and De'dan. The sons of Dedan were Asshu'rim, Letu'shim, and Le-um'mim. ⁴The sons of Mid'ian were E'phah, E'pher, Ha'noch, Abi'da, and Elda'ah. All these were the children of Ketu'rah. ⁵Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. ⁶But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and

24:58 Will you go ...?: The success of the mission hinges in part on Rebekah's consent (24:5, 8).

24:62 Beer-lahai-roi: In the Negeb region of southern Canaan, where the birth of Ishmael was first announced (16:14).

24:63 went out to meditate: Suggests that Isaac is a spiritual man who has developed a personal and prayerful relationship with Yahweh.

24:65 my master: A turning point in the narrative. Up until now, the servant has repeatedly acknowledged Abraham—not Isaac—as his master (24:9–10, 12, 14, etc.). But now that Isaac the heir has acquired a wife, he becomes the master

of all his father's belongings (25:5). **covered herself:** Out of respect for her future husband, Rebekah dismounts her camel (24:64) and drapes herself with a bridal veil (Song 4:1).

25:1–19 Rounding off the Abraham narrative is a genealogy of the patriarch's offspring: six sons by Keturah (25:1–6), one by Hagar (25:12–18), and one by Sarah (25:19). In between is a short account of his death and burial at 175 years of age (25:7–11).

25:1 Keturah: A concubine taken as Abraham's second wife after the death of Sarah (1 Chron 1:32). She bears additional sons for Abraham (25:2), although he eventually sends them away (25:6) as he did his first-born, Ishmael (21:1–14).

25:5 all he had: Confirms that Isaac has displaced the older Ishmael as the heir of the Abrahamic blessings. See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

^aSyr Tg: Heb *from coming to*.

^oHeb adds *of Sarah his mother*.

while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

The Death of Abraham

7 These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. ⁹Isaac and Ish'mael his sons buried him in the cave of Mach-pe'lah, in the field of E'phron the son of Zo'har the Hittite, east of Mamre, ¹⁰the field which Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife. ¹¹After the death of Abraham God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac dwelt at Be'er-la'hai-roi.

The Descendants of Ishmael

12 These are the descendants of Ish'mael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham. ¹³These are the names of the sons of Ish'mael, named in the order of their birth: Neba'ioth, the first-born of Ishmael; and Ke'dar, Ad'beel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Du'mah, Massa, ¹⁵Ha'dad, Te'ma, Je'tur, Na'phish, and Ked'emah. ¹⁶These are the sons of Ish'mael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. ¹⁷(These are the years of the life of Ish'mael, a hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his kindred.) ¹⁸They dwelt from Hav'ilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled^p over against all his people.

The Birth of Esau and Jacob

19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰and Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, the daughter of Bethu'el the Arame'an of Pad'dan-ar'am, the sister of La'ban the Aramean. ²¹And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²²The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is thus, why do I live?"^q So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³And the LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,

and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

²⁴When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first came forth red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esau. ²⁶Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob.^r Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

Esau Sells His Birthright

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau, because he ate of his game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was boiling pottage, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red pottage, for I am famished!" (Therefore his name

25:13-16: 1 Chron 1:29-31.

25:8 gathered to his people: An idiom meaning Abraham has entered the realm of the dead to rest with his deceased ancestors (35:29; 49:29).

25:9 cave of Mach-pelah: The burial place of Sarah on the plot of land that Abraham purchased from the Hittites in Hebron. See note on 23:9.

25:12-18 The genealogy of Ishmael. His 12 sons, born of an Egyptian wife (21:21), spread across northern Arabia (25:18). Ishmael is traditionally considered the father of the Arabs in Jewish tradition (*Jubilees* 20, 12-13; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 220-21).


25:16 twelve princes: In fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (17:20).

25:19-36:43 Stories of Isaac and Jacob, the grandfather and father of tribal Israel. Less attention is given to Isaac than to Jacob in these narratives, although he is an important link in the genealogical chain of Genesis because he passes the "blessing of Abraham" down to Jacob (28:4), who in turn passes the blessing to his 12 sons, who make up the family of Israel (49:2-28).

25:19 These are the descendants: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*.

25:20 Paddan-aram: Upper Mesopotamia, the home of Abraham's relatives living in Haran (11:31; 24:10; 28:2).

25:21 Isaac prayed: Isaac is a powerful intercessor like his father (20:7). This is because he is a righteous and spiritual man (24:63; Jas 5:16). she was barren: Rebekah carries the burden of childlessness like Sarah before her (11:30) and Rachel after her (30:2).

 25:22 struggled: The unborn twins are already wrestling for primogeniture (first-born status). This anticipates the fraternal rivalry between Jacob and Esau, which comes to a head when the younger Jacob usurps the blessing and birthright from the first-born Esau (25:33; 27:36). Beyond the horizon of Genesis, the "elder" will serve the "younger" (25:23) when the Israelites (descended from Jacob) make vassals of the Edomites (descended from Esau) under the leadership of David (2 Sam 8:13-14). • Paul sees in these events the drama of divine election played out in history (Rom 9:10-13).

25:25 red: The Hebrew term resembles the word "Edom", which is another name for Esau (25:30). hairy: The Hebrew term resembles the word "Seir", which is the mountainous region of southeast Palestine where the descendants of Esau settled (36:8).

25:26 Jacob: The Hebrew name *ya'aqob* resembles the "heel" (*'aqeb*) that Jacob grasped as an infant, foreshadowing how he later "supplanted" (*'aqab*) Esau as the rightful recipient of the first-born blessing (27:36).

25:27-34 As with Isaac and Ishmael, the younger Jacob is elevated over the first-born Esau and becomes the heir to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

25:30 pottage: A type of boiled lentil stew (25:34). Its red color involves another play on Esau's name, similar to the one at 25:25.

^pHeb *fell*.

^qSyr: Heb obscure.

^rThat is *He takes by the heel* or *He supplants*.

was called E'dom.)^s ³¹Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." ³²Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³Jacob said, "Swear to me first." ^t So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Isaac and Abimelech

26 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Ge'rar, to Abim'e'lech king of the Philis'tines. ²And the LORD appeared to him, and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: ⁵because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

⁶ So Isaac dwelt in Ge'rar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister"; for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me for the sake of Rebekah"; because she was fair to look upon. ⁸When he had been there a long time, Abim'e'lech king of the Philis'tines looked out of a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah his wife. ⁹So Abim'e'lech called Isaac, and said, "Behold, she is your wife; how then could you say, 'She is my sister?'" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" ¹⁰Abim'e'lech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." ¹¹So Abim'e'lech warned all the people, saying,

"Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death."

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philis'tines envied him. ¹⁵(Now the Philis'tines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶And Abim'e'lech said to Isaac, "Go away from us; for you are much mightier than we."

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there, and encamped in the valley of Ge'rar and dwelt there. ¹⁸And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philis'tines had stopped them after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names which his father had given them. ¹⁹But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of springing water, ²⁰the herdsmen of Ge'rar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well E'sek,^u because they contended with him. ²¹Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called its name Sitnah.^v ²²And he moved from there and dug another well, and over that they did not quarrel; so he called its name Reho'both,^w saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

²³ From there he went up to Be'er-she'ba. ²⁴And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake." ²⁵So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

26:1-35 The only memories of Isaac in the prime of his life preserved in Genesis. They concern his dealings with the Philistines (26:6-11, 17-33) and highlight the divine blessings showered upon him (26:3-5, 12-16, 28).

26:1 famine: All three of the Patriarchs faced such a food shortage during their sojourn in Canaan (12:10; 42:1-5). **Gerar:** In the arid Negeb region in southern Palestine. **Abimelech:** Earlier a king of this name or title made a covenant with Abraham (21:22-34).

26:3-5 A renewal of the divine oaths sworn to Abraham. God had pledged to give him land (15:18), multiple descendants (22:17), and blessings for all the nations (22:18). Isaac is thus confirmed as the heir of the covenant promises (17:21).

26:5 because Abraham obeyed: The benefits promised to Abraham (land, descendants, worldwide blessing) were pledged as a reward for his loyalty to Yahweh. See note on

22:18. my charge, my commandments, my statutes: The precepts of the natural moral law inscribed on the heart (Rom 2:14-15). These precepts are later made explicit in the Torah revealed to Israel (Deut 11:1).

26:6-11 Isaac's sojourn in Gerar parallels Abraham's sojourns in Egypt (12:10-20) and Gerar (20:1-18). All three episodes have the patriarch passing the matriarch off as his sister instead of his spouse. Apparently it was hazardous at this time to travel abroad with a beautiful wife (12:11; 20:11; 26:7).

26:8 fondling: Or, "caressing". The Hebrew *tsahaq* is a play on the name "Isaac" (*yitshaq*).

26:12 hundredfold: An extraordinary harvest for the first year. It is evidence of the Lord's blessings on Isaac.

26:17-33 A series of disputes over wells dug and redug by the Patriarchs. Isaac stands out amidst the quarreling as a man of patience, waiting for the Lord to give him "room" to claim a well of his own (26:22).

26:17 valley of Gerar: Isaac moves to another location within the same region where he has already chosen to make his residence (26:6).

26:25 built an altar: Isaac continues the priestly legacy of his father, Abraham, who consecrated several sites in Canaan with sacrificial altars (12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9).

^sThat is *Red*.

^tHeb *today*.

^uThat is *Contention*.

^vThat is *Enmity*.

^wThat is *Broad places* or *Room*.

26 Then Abim'elech went to him from Ge'rar with Ahuz'zath his adviser and Phi'col the commander of his army. ²⁷Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" ²⁸They said, "We see plainly that the Lord is with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord." ³⁰So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹In the morning they rose early and took oath with one another; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. ³²That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." ³³He called it Shi'bah; therefore the name of the city is Be'er-she'ba to this day.

Esau's Hittite Wives

34 When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Bee'ri the Hittite, and Bas'emath the daughter of E'lon the Hittite; ³⁵and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son, and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." ²He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me, ⁴and prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ⁷'Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the Lord before I die.' ⁸Now therefore, my son, obey my word

as I command you. ⁹Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he loves; ¹⁰and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies." ¹¹But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. ¹²Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." ¹³His mother said to him, "Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me." ¹⁴So he went and took them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son; ¹⁶and the skins of the kids she put upon his hands and upon the smooth part of his neck; ¹⁷and she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

18 So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" ¹⁹Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that you may bless me." ²⁰But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success." ²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not." ²²So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." ²⁵Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." ²⁷So he came near and kissed him; and he

26:33: Gen 21:31. 27:5: Gen 12:3; Num 24:9.

26:28 covenant with you: Abimelech seeks a covenant of mutual peace with Isaac, like the one made with Abraham years earlier. See note on 21:22-34.

26:33 Shibah: The Hebrew means "seven" and resembles the word for "oath" (*shebu'ah*). **Beer-sheba:** Means "well of seven" or "well of the oath". It was remembered as the place where Abraham and Isaac made covenants with their neighbors (21:22-34).

26:34 took to wife: Unlike Isaac and Jacob, who married Semitic women, the disinherited sons of the Patriarchs, Ishmael and Esau, marry Hamitic women outside the elect family of Abraham (Egyptian, 21:21; Hittite, 26:34; Hivite, 36:2).

27:1-46 Jacob intercepts the blessing intended for Esau and cheats him out of the inheritance of the first-born. His mother, Rebekah, is the mastermind behind the ruse, guiding him at each crucial step. The Genesis narrative is not blind to their underhanded ways; rather, it frowns upon Jacob the deceiver and almost pities Esau the victim. It is just as aware, however, that Esau shamefully despised his natural birthright

(25:29-34). The story thus illustrates how God can further his plan despite the failings of his people. God had already elected Jacob over Esau to bear the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (25:23; Rom 9:10-13). See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

27:4 before I die: Blessings are given on the eve of family separation, either when the death of the father draws near (49:1-33; Deut 33:1-29) or when his children are about to go away (24:60-61; 28:1-5; 31:55).

27:13 Upon me be your curse: Rebekah pays a bitter price for her cunning when her beloved Jacob is forced to flee Canaan, never to return again during her lifetime.

27:21 Esau or not: Suggests that Isaac was suspicious from the beginning, heightening the drama and suspense of the whole episode.

27:22-27 Isaac is deceived by three of the four senses he has left. Already blind (27:1), his sense of touch (27:22), taste (27:25), and smell (27:27) fail to detect the scam unfolding before him. Only his hearing proves to be reliable (27:22).

smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

"See, the smell of my son
is as the smell of a field which the LORD has
blessed!

²⁸May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be every one who curses you,
and blessed be every one who blesses you!"

Esau's Lost Blessing

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." ³²His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." ³³Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all^a before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and he shall be blessed." ³⁴When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" ³⁵But he said, "Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing." ³⁶Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" ³⁷Isaac answered Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?" ³⁸Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

39 Then Isaac his father answered him:

"Behold, away from^y the fatness of the earth shall
your dwelling be,
and away from^y the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you break loose
you shall break his yoke from your neck."

Jacob Escapes Esau's Fury

41 Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." ⁴²But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee to La'ban my brother in Haran, ⁴⁴and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away; ⁴⁵until your brother's anger turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and fetch you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. ²Arise, go to Pad'dan-ar'am to the house of Bethu'el your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of La'ban your mother's brother. ³God Almighty^z bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham!" ⁵Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Pad'danar'am to La'ban, the son of Bethu'el the

27:28 the fatness of the earth: The blessings of prosperity and abundance reserved for Israel in the Promised Land (Deut 7:13; 33:28).

27:29 lord over your brothers: Looks ahead to the subjugation of the Edomites (descended from Esau) under the lordship of the Israelites (descended from Jacob) in the days of King David (2 Sam 8:13–14).

27:33 he shall be blessed: Isaac insists that the fatherly blessing cannot be retrieved once it has gone forth (Heb 12:16–17).

27:36 supplanted: A wordplay on the name Jacob. See note on 25:26.

27:39 away from the fatness: Esau is barred from the blessed and fertile land promised to Jacob (27:28). Histori-

cally, the Edomites lived outside the borders of Israel in the rugged highlands south of the Dead Sea.

27:40 when you break loose: Foresees the Edomite revolt against the divided kingdom of Israel several centuries later (2 Kings 8:20–22).

27:43 flee to Laban: Jacob is urged to find safety in Haran in upper Mesopotamia. This is where Rebekah's family lives under the headship of her brother, Laban (24:29).

27:45 bereft of you both: Rebekah fears that Esau, too, will be slain in vengeance if he manages to kill Jacob as planned (27:41).

27:46 the Hittite women: Esau's wives (26:34).

28:1 Canaanite women: Recalls how Abraham forbade Isaac to intermarry with the foreign peoples of Canaan (24:3). Jacob, like Isaac, is to seek a wife among his Semitic kinsfolk (see 24:4, 10).

28:2 Paddan-aram: Upper Mesopotamia, the homeland of Jacob's mother, Rebekah (25:20).

^aCn: Heb *of all*.

^yOr *of*.

^zHeb *El Shaddai*.

Arame'an, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

Esau Marries Ishmael's Daughter

6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Pad'dan-ar'am to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women,"⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Pad'dan-ar'am.⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father,⁹ Esau went to Ish'mael and took to wife, besides the wives he had, Maha'lath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Neba'ioth.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

10 Jacob left Be'er-she'ba, and went toward Haran.¹¹ And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it^a and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants;¹⁴ and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves.^b ¹⁵Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." ¹⁶Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it." ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This

is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone which he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel;^c but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will give the tenth to you."

Jacob Meets Rachel

29 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east.² As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large,³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place upon the mouth of the well.

4 Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran."⁵ He said to them, "Do you know La'ban the son of Na'hor?" They said, "We know him."⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!"⁷ He said, "Behold, it is still high day, it is not time for the animals to be gathered together; water the sheep, and go, pasture them."⁸ But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."



28:12 ladder: The Hebrew envisions, not a ladder with rungs, but an ascending stairway. It is used by a host of angels, walking up and down, ministering to the will of Yahweh. The dream convinces Jacob that he is lying near the "gate" where heaven touches down to earth (28:17).
 • Jacob's ladder is a prophetic image of Christ, who bridges heaven and earth by the union of his divine and human natures (Jn 1:51). This makes him the one, perfect mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). **reached to heaven:** Recalls the plans for the Tower of Babel in 11:4.

28:13-14 Reiterates the promises made to Abraham by divine oath. The gifts of the covenant include **land** (15:18), multiple **descendants** (22:17), and blessings for **all the families** of the world (22:18). Jacob is thus confirmed as the heir of the covenant promises, just as Isaac was in 26:3-5.

28:14 your descendants: The tribal family of Israel (Ex 1:1-7).

28:15 I am with you: The Lord promises to stay with Jacob on his travels and to prosper his way wherever he goes.

28:18 pillar: Jacob anoints the stone headrest and props it up as a landmark and memorial of Yahweh's presence in the land. The practice of erecting such religious monuments was

well known in pre-Israelite Canaan. Moses later instructed Israel to demolish every pillar dedicated to a Canaanite god (Ex 23:24; Deut 12:1-3).

28:19 Bethel: Means "house of God", alluding to Jacob's description in 28:17. Bethel has been a sacred site since the time of Abraham, who built an altar nearby (12:8).

28:20 If: Jacob's vow is conditional, suggesting he is mildly skeptical of the extraordinary blessings promised to him in the dream (28:13-14). He thus makes a deal with the Lord to test his faithfulness.

28:22 I will give the tenth: A vow to give 10 percent of his earnings to the Lord (14:20). Tithing was later mandated for Israel in the Torah (Num 18:21-24).

29:1-30 The betrothal and marriages of Jacob. In the first episode, divine *Providence* arranges the encounter between Jacob and Rachel, inspires the love between them, and stirs the enthusiasm of Laban for their union (29:1-14). In the second, divine *justice* catches up with Jacob the deceiver and gives him his first taste of the cruelty of deception (29:15-30).

29:1 people of the east: The Semitic peoples of Mesopotamia. Jacob is searching for Haran (29:4), where Abraham had moved with his family before venturing into Canaan (11:31).

29:2 a well: Also the setting where brides are found for Isaac (24:11-27) and Moses (Ex 2:15-21).

^aOr beside him.

^bOr be blessed.

^cThat is *The house of God*.

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. ¹⁰Now when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of La'ban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. ¹²And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

13 When La'ban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴and La'ban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

Jacob Marries Laban's Daughters

15 Then La'ban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶Now La'ban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful and lovely. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel; and he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹La'ban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to La'ban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²²So La'ban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. ²³But in the evening he took

his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴(La'ban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵And in the morning, behold, it was Leah; and Jacob said to La'ban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" ²⁶La'ban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born. ²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week; then La'ban gave him his daughter Rachel to wife. ²⁹(La'ban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) ³⁰So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served La'ban for another seven years.

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. ³²And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben;^a for she said, "Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." ³³She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard^e that I am hated, he has given me this son also"; and she called his name Simeon. ³⁴Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be joined^f to me, because I have borne him three sons"; therefore his name was called Levi. ³⁵And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise^g the LORD"; therefore she called his name Judah; then she ceased bearing.

30 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" ²Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you

29:10 rolled the stone: An impressive feat for one man. Normally it took several shepherds working together to heave aside the well cover (29:2-3).

29:11 kissed ... wept: Expressions linked with the joys of a family reunion (33:4; 45:15).

29:14 my bone and my flesh: An acknowledgment of kinship (Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1).

29:16 two daughters: Leah, the less attractive first-born (29:26), and Rachel, the younger and more beautiful one (29:17). In Hebrew, Leah means "wild cow" and Rachel means "ewe lamb". Destined to marry the same man, the sisters are forced to compete for Jacob's time and attention. Later law forbade an Israelite to marry sisters (Lev 18:18).

29:17 beautiful: Like the other matriarchs in Genesis, Sarah (12:11) and Rebekah (24:16).

29:25 you deceived me: Brides were customarily veiled until the wedding night (24:65). This, combined with the darkness of his tent, explains why Jacob is blind to the scheming of his uncle until the morning after. One senses that Jacob is paying the just penalty for deceiving his blind father, Isaac (27:1-19). That Jacob is tricked into marrying the first-born (29:26) likewise recalls how he himself

used trickery to steal the first-born blessing from his older brother, Esau (27:36).

29:27 Complete the week: Wedding festivities often ran for several days in biblical antiquity (Judg 14:12; Tob 11:19), a tradition that continued in Judaism well into the post-biblical period (Mishnah, *Negaim* 3, 2).

29:31 Leah was hated: Not despised, but "less favored and loved", as indicated by the preceding verse (29:30). **opened her womb:** Hints that God does not endorse Jacob's preferential love for Rachel over the neglected Leah. **Rachel was barren:** Like the other matriarchs in Genesis, Sarah (11:30) and Rebekah (25:21).

29:32-30:24 The eleven sons born to Jacob outside the Promised Land. Each of their names involves a wordplay related to the circumstances of their birth. By Leah, Jacob fathered **Reuben** ("he saw my distress"), **Simeon** ("he has heard"), **Levi** ("he will cling"), **Judah** ("I will praise"), and later **Issachar** ("he has hired"), and **Zebulun** ("he will honor me"). By Rachel's maid, Bilhah, he fathered **Dan** ("he has judged") and **Naphtali** ("my struggle"). By Leah's maid, Zilpah, he fathered **Gad** ("good fortune") and **Asher** ("my happiness"). By Rachel, he fathered **Joseph** ("may he add"). Jacob's twelfth son, **Benjamin** ("son of the right hand"), was born years later near Bethlehem in Palestine (35:16-20).

30:2 the place of God: The blessing of fertility depends entirely upon the Lord, who is able to grant or withhold it according to his purpose (1:28; 25:21; 30:22) (CCC 2374).

^aThat is *See, a son*.

^eHeb *shama*.

^fHeb *lawah*.

^gHeb *hodah*.

the fruit of the womb?" ³Then she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees, and even I may have children through her." ⁴So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. ⁵And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son"; therefore she called his name Dan.^a ⁷Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled¹ with my sister, and have prevailed"; so she called his name Naph'tali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹And Leah said, "Good fortune!" so she called his name Gad.^j ¹²Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³And Leah said, "Blessed am I! For the women will call me blessed"; so she called his name Asher.^k

¹⁴ In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Give me, I pray, some of your son's mandrakes." ¹⁵But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." ¹⁶When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. ¹⁷And God hearkened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸Leah said, "God has given me my hire¹ because I gave my maid to my husband"; so she called his name Is'sachar. ¹⁹And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor^m me, because I have borne him six sons"; so she called his name Zeb'ulun. ²¹Afterwards she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah. ²²Then God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb. ²³She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach"; ²⁴and she called

his name Joseph,ⁿ saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

Jacob Prospers

²⁵ When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to La'ban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ²⁶Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know the service which I have given you." ²⁷But La'ban said to him, "If you will allow me to say so, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you; ²⁸name your wages, and I will give it." ²⁹Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your cattle have fared with me. ³⁰For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" ³¹He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything; if you will do this for me, I will again feed your flock and keep it: ³²let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. ³³So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." ³⁴La'ban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." ³⁵But that day La'ban removed the he-goats that were striped and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in charge of his sons; ³⁶and he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob; and Jacob fed the rest of La'ban's flock.

³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the rods. ³⁸He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the runnels, that is, the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹the flocks bred in front of the rods and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰And Jacob separated the lambs, and

30:3 bear upon my knees: Alludes to an ancient adoption rite where a newborn is placed in the lap of the legal parent soon after delivery. For the Near Eastern custom of surrogate motherhood, see note on 16:1-6.

30:14 mandrakes: Herbal roots thought to enhance fertility. The ancients knew them as a natural aphrodisiac. Ironically, Leah barter away her mandrakes in exchange for a night with Jacob, only to conceive her fifth son without them (30:17).

^aThat is *He judged*.

^jHeb *niphtal*.

^kThat is *Fortune*.

¹That is *Blessed*.

^mHeb *sakar*.

ⁿHeb *zabal*.

^oThat is *He adds*.

30:25-43 After years of loyal service, Jacob is ready to move his family back to Canaan, but Laban, a sly opportunist, tries to manipulate him into staying. The story unfolds as a game of wits between the two men, with Jacob outsmarting Laban and gaining the upper hand.

30:27 divination: The occultic art of predicting future events. Scripture condemns this superstition as evil (Deut 18:10).

30:32 speckled ... spotted ... black: Abnormal colorations. Sheep are usually all white and goats are all black or dark brown.

30:37-43 Ancient herdsmen believed that visual stimuli could affect the offspring of breeding animals. Jacob resorts to this measure with great success: he has the goats stare at the streaked rods while mating and has the sheep stare at the dark-colored goats while mating.

set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of La'ban; and he put his own droves apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. ⁴¹Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding Jacob laid the rods in the runnels before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the rods, ⁴²but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were La'ban's, and the stronger Jacob's. ⁴³Thus the man grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, maidservants and men-servants, and camels and donkeys.

Jacob Flees with His Family and Flocks

31 Now Jacob heard that the sons of La'ban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." ²And Jacob saw that La'ban did not regard him with favor as before. ³Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." ⁴So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, ⁵and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶You know that I have served your father with all my strength; ⁷yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. ⁸If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. ⁹Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. ¹⁰In the mating season of the flock I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. ¹¹Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' ¹²And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that leap upon the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled; for I have seen all that La'ban is doing to you. ¹³I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go forth from this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" ¹⁴Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. ¹⁶All the property which God has taken away from

our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

¹⁷ So Jacob arose, and set his sons and his wives on camels; ¹⁸and he drove away all his cattle, all his livestock which he had gained, the cattle in his possession which he had acquired in Pad'dan-ar'am, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. ¹⁹La'ban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰And Jacob outwitted La'ban the Arame'an, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. ²¹He fled with all that he had, and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

Laban Overtakes Jacob

²² When it was told La'ban on the third day that Jacob had fled, ²³he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴But God came to La'ban the Arame'an in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad."

²⁵ And La'ban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen encamped in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶And La'ban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have cheated me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword? ²⁷Why did you flee secretly, and cheat me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? ²⁸And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. ²⁹It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' ³⁰And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" ³¹Jacob answered La'ban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³²Any one with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

³³ So La'ban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered Rachel's. ³⁴Now Rachel

30:43 exceedingly rich: Jacob finds himself enriched far beyond the basic provisions of food and clothing he has asked of the Lord (28:20-21).

31:1-16 Building on the preceding narrative, which emphasizes the human element of Jacob's cleverness (30:25-43), the story is retold to stress the divine element, stating that God is ultimately responsible for Jacob's protection and prosperity during his years in Paddan-aram (31:5, 7, 9).

31:19 household gods: Cultic figurines, or "teraphim", used for divination (Ezek 21:21; Zech 10:2). That Rachel smuggled them out may suggest a lingering attachment to pagan religion. If so, she will be forced to renounce her idolatrous ways when the caravan reaches Bethel (35:1-4).

31:21 Gilead: The highlands east of the Jordan River.

31:24 not a word to Jacob: The Lord cautions Laban against a hostile confrontation with his fleeing family. Jacob takes this to be a "rebuke" (31:42).

31:27 mirth and songs: It is doubtful Laban would have celebrated Jacob's departure in such grand fashion. He has been fighting all along against the prospect of Jacob leaving (30:25-36).

31:31 Because I was afraid: Does not answer the accusation of stealing (31:30), but states the reason why he fled in secret (31:27). Jacob does not even know the idols have been stolen; otherwise, he would not have promised death to the culprit (31:32), endangering his beloved Rachel (31:19).

had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat upon them. La'ban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵And she said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched, but did not find the household gods.

³⁶Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided La'ban; Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?" ³⁷Although you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. ³⁸These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your she-goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹That which was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself; of my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰Thus I was; by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. ⁴²If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

Laban and Jacob Make a Covenant

⁴³Then La'ban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters, or to their children whom they have borne?" ⁴⁴Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me." ⁴⁵So

Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷La'ban called it Je'gar-sahadu'tha:^o but Jacob called it Gale'ed.^p ⁴⁸La'ban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he named it Gale'ed, ⁴⁹and the pillar^q Mizpah,^r for he said, "The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. ⁵⁰If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, remember, God is witness between you and me."

⁵¹Then La'ban said to Jacob, "See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵²This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. ⁵³The God of Abraham and the God of Na'hor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain and called his kinsmen to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night on the mountain.

⁵⁵^aEarly in the morning La'ban arose, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

32 Jacob went on his way and the angels of God met him; ²and when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's army!" So he called the name of that place Ma'hana'im.^t

Jacob Sends Gifts to Appease Esau

³And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Se'ir, the country of Edom, ⁴instructing them, "Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, 'I have sojourned with La'ban, and stayed until now; ⁵and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, menservants, and

31:35 the way of women: Rachel pretends to be menstrually "unclean" and so excuses herself from climbing off the camel (cf. Lev 15:19-20).

31:39 torn by wild beasts: In the ancient Near East, a shepherd was bound to make restitution for a stolen animal, but he was usually exempt from this obligation if the animal was mauled to death by a predator and its remains could be shown to the owner. Jacob went beyond the call of duty by making up for such losses anyway. This legal background is evident in both biblical (Ex 22:12-13) and Babylonian texts (*Code of Hammurabi* 266).

31:42 the Fear of Isaac: A title for Yahweh, the God of the Patriarchs (31:53).

31:43-55 Jacob and Laban seal a covenant by invoking witnesses (31:48-50), swearing oaths (31:53), and sharing a meal (31:54). In the presence of God, they pledge to live as allies instead of enemies. Covenants of this type were made to establish bonds of legal kinship or strengthen bonds of biological kinship. For parallel examples of a

covenant peace treaty in Genesis, see 21:22-34 and 26:26-33.

31:47 Jegar-sahadutha ... Galeed: Both expressions mean "heap of witness", the first in Aramaic and the second in Hebrew. This bilingual tradition mirrors the genealogical distinction between Laban the Aramean (31:20) and Jacob, the grandson of "Abram the Hebrew" (14:13).

31:49 Mizpah: The Hebrew *mitspah* resembles the saying "The LORD watch" (*yitsep YHWH*). It was an ancient settlement in Gilead (Judg 10:17), presumably where the covenant between Jacob and Laban was ratified (31:25).

32:1 the angels of God: A vision of angels greets Jacob on his return home, just as a vision of angels had sent him off 20 years earlier (28:10-17).

32:2 God's army: Or, "God's camp". **Mahanaim:** The Hebrew means "two camps", referring either to two camps of angels or to Jacob's camp (32:21) and a second angelic one. There was an ancient settlement of this name in Gilead, east of the Jordan (Josh 21:38).

32:3 land of Seir: The hill country south of the Dead Sea. This is the homeland of Esau and his descendants, the Edomites (36:8).

32:4 my lord ... your servant: These titles, used several times in the following narrative (32:18, 20; 33:5, 8, 13, 15), imply that Jacob is surrendering his authority to his angry older brother. In effect, this reverses the fraternal relation-

^oIn Aramaic *The heap of witness*.

^pIn Hebrew *The heap of witness*.

^qCompare Sam: Heb lacks *the pillar*.

^rThat is *Watchpost*.

^sCh 32:1 in Heb.

^tHere taken to mean *Two armies*.

maidservants; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.”

6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men with him.”⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies,⁸ thinking, “If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company which is left will escape.”

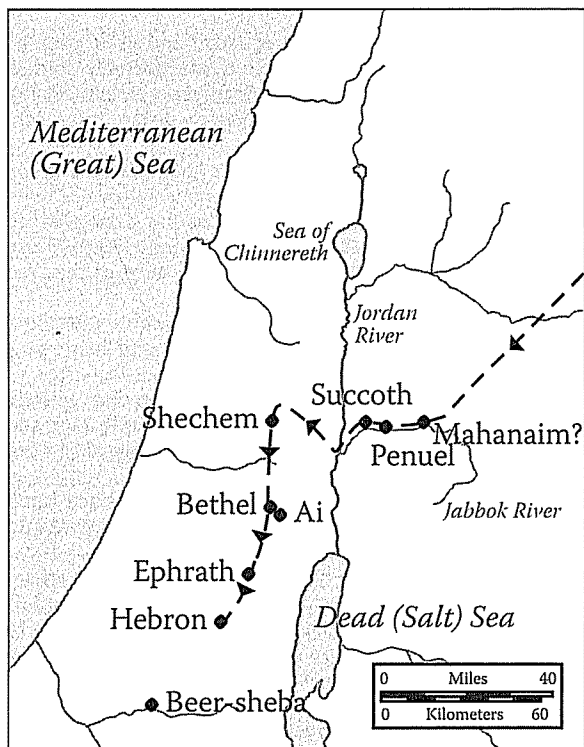
9 And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, and I will do you good,’¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the mercy and all the faithfulness which you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan; and now I have become two companies.¹¹ Deliver me, I beg you, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and slay us all, the mothers with the children.¹² But you said, ‘I will do you good, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

13 So he lodged there that night, and took from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau,¹⁴ two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,¹⁵ thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-donkeys and ten he-donkeys.¹⁶ These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on before me,

and put a space between drove and drove.”¹⁷ He instructed the foremost, “When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these before you?’¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob; they are a present sent to my lord Esau; and moreover he is behind us.’”¹⁹ He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you meet him,²⁰ and you shall say, ‘Moreover your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.”²¹ So the present passed on before him; and he himself lodged that night in the camp.

Jacob Wrestles at Peniel

22 The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.²⁴ And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”²⁷ And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”²⁸ Then he said, “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel,^a for you have striven with God and with men, and have



Jacob Returns to Canaan

ship set out in the blessing of Isaac, which made Jacob the “lord” over Esau (27:29, 37) and the one whom Esau must “serve” (27:40). Coupled with other factors, this strategy helps to pave the way for Esau's unexpectedly warm welcome of Jacob in 33:4.

32:6 four hundred men: To the fearful Jacob, who parted with his brother on bitter terms, this sounds like an approaching army.

32:9–12 Jacob calls upon the Lord and pleads for deliverance from Esau. In the wider context of Genesis, it is evident that Jacob returns home a more humble and prayerful man than when he left.

32:13 a present: A gift of more than 550 animals is unusually extravagant (32:14–15). It is calculated to “appease” an embittered Esau (32:20).

32:22–32 A mysterious contest between Jacob and a nameless angel (Hos 12:4). After a night of outwrestling his opponent, Jacob is renamed “Israel” and limps away from the scene with a blessing and a bad hip. • *Allegorically*, the angel is a type of Christ, and his defeat points to the Passion of Christ, who allowed his own people to prevail over him. And just as the victorious Jacob was blessed and injured at the same time, so with the people of Israel: some are blessed to believe in Christ, while others are crippled in unbelief (St. Augustine, *City of God* 16, 39). *Morally*, to wrestle with God is to struggle for virtue (St. Ambrose, *On Jacob and the Blessed Life* 7, 30) (CCC 2573).

32:22 the Jabbok: A tributary that flows into the Jordan from the east.

^a That is *He who strives with God* or *God strives*.

prevailed.”²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Tell me, I pray, your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him.³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peni’el,^v saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penu’el, limping because of his thigh.³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, because he touched the hollow of Jacob’s thigh on the sinew of the hip.

Jacob and Esau Meet

33 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids.² And he put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.³ He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.⁵ And when Esau raised his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.”⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.⁸ Esau said, “What do you mean

by all this company which I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor in the sight of my lord.”⁹ But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”¹⁰ Jacob said, “No, I beg you, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, with such favor have you received me.¹¹ Accept, I beg you, my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” Thus he urged him, and he took it.

12 Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go before you.”¹³ But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the flocks and herds giving suck are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die.¹⁴ Let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle which are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Se’ir.”

15 So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the men who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.”¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Se’ir.¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth,^w and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Jacob Comes to Shechem

18 And Jacob came safely to the city of She’chem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from

32:30 face to face: God is seen, not directly, but refracted through the face of the angel (e.g., Judg 13:21–22). A direct or unmediated vision of God is not granted in this life but is a blessing reserved for heaven (1 Cor 13:12). See note on 16:13 and word study: *Angel of the LORD* at 16:7. **Peniel:** An

alternative spelling of “Penuel”, both meaning “face of God” (32:31). It was an ancient settlement in Gilead, east of the Jordan (Judg 8:8).

32:32 Israelites do not eat: A food restriction mentioned only here in the OT.

33:1–14 The fateful reunion of Jacob and Esau after 20 years of separation. The encounter is unexpectedly cordial, given the murderous intentions of Esau years earlier (27:41). Henceforth in Genesis the brothers live on distant but reconciled terms (35:29).

33:2 Rachel and Joseph last: Jacob’s favored wife and son are given a more protected position in the caravan.

33:3 bowing himself: Like vassals before a king, Jacob and his family prostrate themselves before Esau (33:6–7) and lavish gifts on him (33:11). For the significance of this, see note on 32:4.

33:8 all this company: Refers, not to Jacob’s wives and children (33:5–7), but to the gift of flocks and herds sent ahead to win Esau’s good favor (32:13–21).

33:10 like seeing ... God: Recalls the preceding episode at Peniel, where Jacob was surprised to see God’s face and live to tell about it (32:30). Here, too, he is relieved to see Esau’s face again and to walk away unharmed.

33:14 until I come: Seems to be a diversion, since Jacob never continues south to Seir but immediately turns west into Canaan.

33:17 Succoth: On the bank of the Jabbok stream where it flows into the Jordan (Josh 13:27). The settlement is named after the “booths” (Heb. *sukkot*) that Jacob set up to shelter his cattle.

33:18 Shechem: A city in central Palestine about 15 miles west of the Jordan. It is named after one of the sons of Hamor, a local chieftain, landowner, and spokesman for the city. Notice that Jacob is retracing the footsteps of Abraham on his return to Canaan from Mesopotamia: both made

^vThat is *The face of God*.

^wThat is *Booths*.

Word Study

Israel (32:28)

Yisra’el (Heb.): Translates “Israel” and consists of a wordplay on the verb *sarah* (“strive, struggle, contend”) coupled with the noun *’el* (“God”). Though compound names such as this are common in Hebrew and related Semitic languages, it is unusual for the divine name suffix to represent the object rather than the subject of the verbal element. But in Scripture the name Israel is taken to mean “he who strives with God” rather than the expected “God strives” (Hos 12:3). This is the new name given to Jacob after wrestling with God’s angel (Gen 32:28; 35:10) and the national name given to the twelve tribes descended from Jacob (Gen 47:27; Deut 1:1). In later biblical history, the name Israel can also stand for the Northern Kingdom that broke away from Southern Kingdom of Judah in the tenth century B.C. (1 Kings 12:20; Amos 1:1).

Pad'dan-ar'am; and he camped before the city.¹⁹And from the sons of Ha'mor, She'chem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money* the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent.²⁰There he erected an altar and called it El-El'oh-Israel.[†]

Shechem Defiles Dinah

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land;²and when She'chem the son of Ha'mor the Hi'vite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humbled her.³And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob; he loved the maiden and spoke tenderly to her.⁴So She'chem spoke to his father Ha'mor, saying, "Get me this maiden for my wife."⁵Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came.⁶And Ha'mor the father of She'chem went out to Jacob to speak with him.⁷The sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard of it; and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had wrought folly in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

8 But Ha'mor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son She'chem longs for your daughter; I beg you, give her to him in marriage.⁹Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves.¹⁰You shall dwell with us; and the land shall be open to you; dwell and trade in it, and get property in it."¹¹She'chem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.¹²Ask of me ever so much as marriage present and gift, and I will give according as you say to me; only give me the maiden to be my wife."

13 The sons of Jacob answered She'chem and his father Ha'mor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah.¹⁴They said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us.¹⁵Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male of you be circumcised.¹⁶Then we will give our daughters to

you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people.¹⁷But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone."

18 Their words pleased Ha'mor and Hamor's son She'chem.¹⁹And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his family.²⁰So Ha'mor and his son She'chem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,²¹"These men are friendly with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters.²²Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised.²³Will not their cattle, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us."²⁴And all who went out of the gate of his city hearkened to Ha'mor and his son She'chem; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Dinah Is Avenged by Her Brothers

25 On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came upon the city unawares, and killed all the males.²⁶They slew Ha'mor and his son She'chem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away.²⁷And the sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled;²⁸they took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field;²⁹all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey.³⁰Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Per'izzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."³¹But they said, "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?"

their first stop in Shechem, where they built an altar (12:5-7; 33:20), and then both turned south to Bethel, where they built another altar (12:8; 35:1, 6-7).

33:19 the piece of land: The eventual burial site of the patriarch Joseph (Josh 24:32). For the Samaritan version of this tradition, see note on 23:9.

34:1-31 The rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah, which triggers a violent response against Shechem and disturbs the balance of peace in the region. Jacob, who neither conceived nor condoned the plan to attack the city, is left fearful of reprisals from local Canaanites (34:30).

34:2 the Hivite: One of the Canaanite peoples (10:17) that occupied Palestine before its conquest by the Israelites (Deut 7:1).

34:9 marriages with us: Hamor negotiates a peaceful alliance between Israel and Shechem with the hope of intermarriage. He sells the idea to the men of the city as an opportunity for gain (34:20-23). The offer is savagely refused by Jacob's sons, anticipating later Deuteronomic law, which forbade intermarriage between Israelites and Canaanites—even singling out the Hivites—and called instead for their destruction (Deut 7:1-3).

34:15 circumcised: Circumcision is proposed as a condition for intermarriage. But to Jacob's sons, it is a cunning means to disable the defensive manpower of Shechem.

34:24 all who went out: All the men of military age who could "go out" to war. Once the entire Shechemite army is temporarily crippled by the wounds of circumcision, the city is left vulnerable to attack (34:25).

34:25 Simeon and Levi: Two of Dinah's older brothers, all three of them being children of Leah (29:31-34; 30:21). Jacob will later curse their burning rage (49:5-7).

*Heb a hundred *gestitah*.

†That is *God, the God of Israel*.

Jacob Returns to Bethel

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." ²So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; ³then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near She'chem.

⁵ And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were round about them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. ⁶And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, ⁷and there he built an altar, and called the place El-beth'el,^z because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. ⁸And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel; so the name of it was called Al'lon-bac'uth.^a

⁹ God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Pad'dan-ar'am, and blessed him. ¹⁰And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So his name was called Israel. ¹¹And God said to him, "I am God Almighty:^b be fruitful and

multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. ¹²The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you." ¹³Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. ¹⁴And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it. ¹⁵So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him, Bethel.

The Birth of Benjamin and the Death of Rachel

¹⁶ Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Eph'rath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷And when she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, "Fear not; for now you will have another son." ¹⁸And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Ben-o'ni;^c but his father called his name Benjamin.^d ¹⁹So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Eph'rath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰and Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. ²¹Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of E'der.

²² While Israel dwelt in that land Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. ²³The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's first-born), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Is'sachar, and Zeb'ulun. ²⁴The sons of Rachel:

35:1-15 Jacob returns to Bethel to fulfill his vow to the Lord (28:18-22). He expresses his full allegiance to God by building an altar (35:7), erecting a memorial pillar (35:14), and ridding his household of idols and other gods (35:2-4). The intervening narratives between his departure (chap. 28) and return to Bethel (chap. 35) amply attest to the faithfulness of God in providing for his needs, protecting his life, and prospering his way.

35:2 Put away the foreign gods: A call to renounce and discard the idol images that made the trip from Paddan-aram (31:19, 33-35). In this way, Jacob's entourage readies itself to worship the true God at Bethel. For another act of idol renunciation at Shechem, see Josh 24:14-25.

35:4 the rings: Superstitious amulets. **the oak:** Possibly the Oak of Moreh, where God first appeared to Abraham in Canaan (12:6-7).

35:5 terror from God: Panic seizes the region as news of Shechem's demise begins to spread (34:30). The Lord incites this fear to ensure the safety of the elect family of Jacob. For a similar protection given to the Israelites entering Canaan, see Ex 23:27 and Josh 2:9.


35:9-12 Jacob is again confirmed as the heir of the Abrahamic covenant at Bethel (also in 28:13-14). The words spoken to Jacob parallel the divine discourse with Abraham in 17:1-8, where God changes the *name* of the patriarch (17:5; 35:10), introduces himself as *God Almighty* (17:1; 35:11), promises to make him *fruitful* (17:2, 6; 35:11), appoints him the father of *nations* (17:4-5; 35:11), pledges to raise up

kings from his line (17:6; 35:11), and grants him a *land inheritance* (17:8; 35:12).

35:14 pillar of stone: This is the second memorial stele that Jacob erects in Bethel (28:18-19).

35:15 Bethel: Means "house of God". See note on 28:19.

35:18 she died: Rachel dies as she delivers her second son to Jacob. Her prayer for another child after Joseph has been answered (30:24). **Ben-oni:** Rachel names the infant "Son of my sorrow". **Benjamin:** Jacob renames the infant "Son of the right hand" or "Son of the south". The latter meaning brings out what is unique to the child: Jacob's 11 older sons were born in Paddan-aram, northeast of Palestine, whereas Benjamin alone was born after Jacob moved his family south into Canaan. Later biblical narratives also indicate that the tribe of Benjamin was assigned a land inheritance in the southern half of Palestine (Josh 18:11-28), and in the days of the divided monarchy, the Benjaminites attached themselves to the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:21).

 **35:20 Rachel's tomb:** Her traditional resting place is still memorialized in Bethlehem today. • The evangelist Matthew assumes knowledge of this tradition when he speaks of Rachel weeping over the slaughtered infants of Bethlehem (Mt 2:16-18).

35:21 tower of Eder: South of Bethlehem on the way to Hebron.

35:22 Reuben ... lay with Bilhah: An aggressive move to ensure his first-born authority over Jacob's other children. Ironically, this sinful bid for power will deprive Reuben of the blessing and inheritance he was entitled to receive by virtue of his place in the birth order. Angered and offended by this treachery, Jacob will pass Reuben's birthright over to Joseph, the first-born of Rachel (49:3-4; 1 Chron 5:1-2). See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

^zThat is *God of Bethel*.

^aThat is *Oak of weeping*.

^bHeb *El Shaddai*.

^cThat is *Son of my sorrow*.

^dThat is *Son of the right hand* or *Son of the South*.

Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁵The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naph'tali. ²⁶The sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Pad'dan-ar'am.

The Death of Isaac

27 And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kir'iath-ar'ba (that is, He'bron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. ²⁸Now the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years. ²⁹And Isaac breathed his last; and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Esau's Descendants

36 These are the descendants of Esau (that is, E'dom). ²Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: A'dah the daughter of E'lon the Hittite, Oholiba'mah the daughter of An'ah the son^e of Zib'eon the Hi'vite, ³and Bas'emath, Ish'mael's daughter, the sister of Neba'ioth. ⁴And A'dah bore to Esau, Eli'phaz; Bas'emath bore Reu'el; ⁵and Oholiba'mah bore Je'ush, Ja'lam, and Ko'rah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

6 Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle, all his beasts, and all his property which he had acquired in the land of Canaan; and he went into a land away from his brother Jacob. ⁷For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together; the land of their sojournings could not support them because of their cattle. ⁸So Esau dwelt in the hill country of Se'ir; Esau is E'dom.

9 These are the descendants of Esau the father of the E'domites in the hill country of Se'ir. ¹⁰These are the names of Esau's sons: Eli'phaz the son of A'dah the wife of Esau, Reu'el the son of Bas'emath the wife of Esau. ¹¹The sons of Eli'phaz were Te'man, Omar, Ze'pho, Ga'tam, and Ke'naz. ¹²(Timna was a concubine of Eli'phaz, Esau's son; she bore Am'alek to Eliphaz.) These are the sons of A'dah, Esau's wife. ¹³These are the sons of Reu'el: Na'hath, Ze'rah, Sham-

mah, and Mizzah. These are the sons of Bas'emath, Esau's wife. ¹⁴These are the sons of Oholiba'mah the daughter of An'ah the son^f of Zib'eon, Esau's wife: she bore to Esau Je'ush, Ja'lam, and Ko'rah.

Chiefs and Kings of Edom

15 These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eli'phaz the first-born of Esau: the chiefs Te'man, Omar, Ze'pho, Ke'naz, ¹⁶Ko'rah, Ga'tam, and Am'alek; these are the chiefs of Eli'phaz in the land of E'dom; they are the sons of A'dah. ¹⁷These are the sons of Reu'el, Esau's son: the chiefs Na'hath, Ze'rah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the chiefs of Reu'el in the land of E'dom; they are the sons of Bas'emath, Esau's wife. ¹⁸These are the sons of Oholiba'mah, Esau's wife: the chiefs Je'ush, Ja'lam, and Ko'rah; these are the chiefs born of Oholiba'mah the daughter of An'ah, Esau's wife. ¹⁹These are the sons of Esau (that is, E'dom), and these are their chiefs.

20 These are the sons of Se'ir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lo'tan, Sho'bal, Zib'eon, An'ah, ²¹Di'shon, E'zer, and Di'shan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Se'ir in the land of E'dom. ²²The sons of Lo'tan were Ho'ri and He'man; and Lo'tan's sister was Timna. ²³These are the sons of Sho'bal: Alvan, Man'ahath, E'bal, She'pho, and Onam. ²⁴These are the sons of Zib'eon: A'iah and An'ah; he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of Zib'eon his father. ²⁵These are the children of An'ah: Di'shon and Oholiba'mah the daughter of Anah. ²⁶These are the sons of Di'shon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Che'ran. ²⁷These are the sons of E'zer: Bilhan, Za'avan, and A'kan. ²⁸These are the sons of Di'shan: Uz and Ar'an. ²⁹These are the chiefs of the Horites: the chiefs Lo'tan, Sho'bal, Zib'eon, An'ah, ³⁰Di'shon, E'zer, and Di'shan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, according to their clans in the land of Se'ir.

31 These are the kings who reigned in the land of E'dom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. ³²Be'la the son of Beor reigned in E'dom, the

36:2: Gen 26:34; 28:9. 36:20-28: 1 Chron 1:38-42. 36:31-43: 1 Chron 1:43-53.

35:29 Isaac breathed his last: The impression is that Isaac dies after a final reunion with Jacob. It is possible, however, that the account of his death and burial is not in the correct chronological order, i.e., it is moved here to conclude the primary Isaac and Jacob stories before turning to a detailed account of the Joseph story (37:1-50:26). Recall that Isaac was already on his deathbed in 27:1-2, some 20 years before Jacob's return to Canaan. **Esau and Jacob buried him:** Recalls how the feuding brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, reunited to bury their father, Abraham (25:9).

36:1-43 Chap. 36 is a genealogical record of the Edomites and the Horites. The first part groups together Esau's wives (36:1-5), his sons and grandsons (36:6-14), and his chiefs (36:15-19), and the second includes a roster of Horite clans (36:20-30), an Edomite king list (36:31-39), and another table of Edomite chieftains (36:40-43).

36:1 These are the descendants: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*.

36:7 their possessions: Overcrowding pressures Jacob and Esau to separate their tribes, just as it forced Abraham and Lot to part company and settle their families and flocks in different lands (13:2-18). The parallel is theologically significant: in both cases, the elect patriarch stays behind in Canaan (Abraham, Jacob) while his kinsmen venture outside its borders, excluding themselves from the blessings of the Promised Land (Lot, Esau).

36:20 Horite: One of the indigenous peoples of Seir, south of the Dead Sea (14:6). The Horites were eventually overrun by the Edomites, to whom God had given their land as an inheritance (Deut 2:12; Josh 24:4).

36:31 before any king: Perhaps an editorial comment inserted into Genesis sometime after the rise of the Israelite monarchy at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.

^aSam Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*.

^fGk Syr: Heb *daughter*.

name of his city being Din'habah. ³³Be'la died, and Jo'bab the son of Ze'rah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. ³⁴Jo'bab died, and Hu'sham of the land of the Te'manites reigned in his stead. ³⁵Hu'sham died, and Ha'dad the son of Be'dad, who defeated Mid'ian in the country of Moab, reigned in his stead, the name of his city being A'vith. ³⁶Ha'dad died, and Samlah of Masre'kah reigned in his stead. ³⁷Samlah died, and Sha'ul of Reho'both on the Euphra'tes reigned in his stead. ³⁸Sha'ul died, and Ba'al-ha'nan the son of Ach-bor reigned in his stead. ³⁹Ba'al-ha'nan the son of Ach-bor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead, the name of his city being Pa'u; his wife's name was Mehet'abel, the daughter of Ma'tred, daughter of Me'zahab.

40 These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families and their dwelling places, by their names: the chiefs Timna, Alvah, Je'theth, ⁴¹Oholiba'mah, E'lah, Pi'non, ⁴²Ke'naz, Te'man, Mibzar, ⁴³Mag'diel, and I'ram; these are the chiefs of E'dom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession.

Joseph Dreams of Greatness

37 Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. ²This is the history of the family of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought an ill report of them to their father.

³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they only hated him the more. ⁶He said to them, "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: ⁷behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright; and behold, your sheaves gathered round it, and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him yet more for his dreams and for his words. ⁹Then he dreamed another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream; and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.


Joseph Is Sold by His Brothers


12 Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near She'chem. ¹³And Israel said to

37:11, 28: Acts 7:9.

37:1–50:26 The final storyline in Genesis is devoted to Jacob's sons, especially Joseph and, to a lesser extent, Judah. This material builds a bridge from the patriarchal narratives to the Book of Exodus, explaining how the family of Israel came to reside in Egypt. Several details in this section pertaining to Egyptian names, customs, funerary practices, and state administration have been verified as historically authentic.

37:2 This is the history: A formula that introduces new phases of history and narrative in Genesis. See introduction: *Structure*.

 **37:3 loved Joseph more:** Preferential love again sows division in the family, just as it had with Jacob's own parents (25:28). **his old age:** Joseph was the last son born to Jacob during his sojourn in Paddan-aram (30:22–24). **long robe with sleeves:** A visible sign of Jacob's favor. The Greek LXX suggests the tunic was striped or multicolored. • *Allegorically*, the multicolored robe prefigures the glory with which the Father clothed the Son at his coming. And just as the sons of Jacob become enraged with their father's beloved Joseph, so the Pharisees would flame with anger against Christ, though he was destined to be their superior (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Glaphyra on Genesis* 6, 4).

 **37:8 reign over us?:** Fulfilled when Joseph is appointed prime minister over Egypt (41:39–43) and his brothers fall prostrate before him (42:6). • *Allegorically*, the dream of Joseph reveals the King who is to come, for the standing sheaf is the resurrected Lord, and the sheaves turned down are the saints on bended knee (St. Ambrose, *On Joseph* 2, 7).

37:11 kept the saying in mind: Jacob ponders the alleged visions, aware that God has revealed the plan for his own

life in this way (28:12–15). Perhaps these dreams influenced his deathbed decision to give Joseph the blessing of the first-born (49:22–26; 1 Chron 5:1–3).

Word Study

Dream (37:5)

Halom (Heb.): A "dream" experienced while sleeping. It was widely believed in the ancient Near East that visions of the night contained meaningful messages, often encrypted in bizarre symbols and storylines. In the biblical tradition, dreams are important channels of divine communication. Through them the Lord issues warnings and instructions (Gen 20:3–7; 31:24), reveals his glory and blessings (Gen 28:12–15; 1 Kings 3:5–15), and gives prophetic insights into the future (Num 12:6; Dan 2:1–45). Dreams play an especially important role in the life of Joseph, who dreams of his own preeminence in the family of Jacob (37:5–11) and interprets the symbolic visions of Pharaoh (Gen 41:1–32) and his royal servants (Gen 40:5–19). As Joseph recognizes, his ability to understand dreams is a gift from God (Gen 40:8; 41:16). Daniel will likewise possess the gift of dream interpretation many centuries later (Dan 1:17; 2:47).

Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at She'chem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am." ¹⁴So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers, and with the flock; and bring me word again." So he sent him from the valley of He'bron, and he came to She'chem. ¹⁵And a man found him wandering in the fields; and the man asked him, "What are you seeking?" ¹⁶"I am seeking my brothers," he said, "tell me, I beg you, where they are pasturing the flock." ¹⁷And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Do'than.'" So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸They saw him afar off, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild beast has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams." ²¹But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." ²²And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; cast him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand, to restore him to his father. ²³So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; ²⁴and they took him and cast him into a pit. The pit was empty, there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ish'maelites coming from

Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood?" ²⁷Come, let us sell him to the Ish'maelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers heeded him. ²⁸Then Mid'ianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ish'maelites for twenty shekels of silver; and they took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰and returned to his brothers, and said, "The lad is gone; and I, where shall I go?" ³¹Then they took Joseph's robe, and killed a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood; ³²and they sent the long robe with sleeves and brought it to their father, and said, "This we have found; see now whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³And he recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶Meanwhile the Mid'ianites had sold him in Egypt to Pot'iphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

37:15 a man: The mysterious stranger may be an angel, like the visitors who came to Abraham (18:2) and the heavenly man who wrestled with Jacob (32:24).

37:17 Dothan: Not far from Shechem to the northwest.

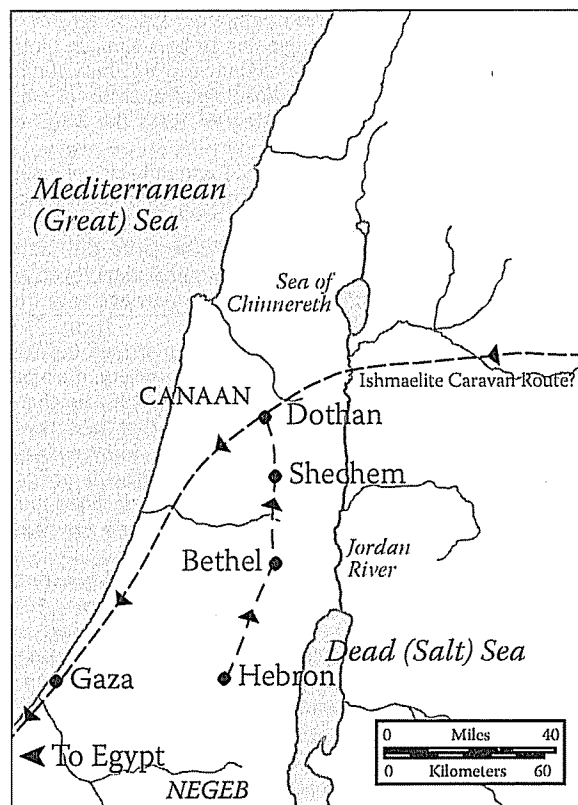
37:18-28 The conspiracy against Joseph by his resentful older brothers. His murder is barely averted by **Reuben**, the oldest, who persuades them to lower him into a pit, and **Judah**, the fourth-born, who advises they sell him to Arabian traders headed for Egypt.

37:28 Midianite traders ... Ishmaelites: Tribal groups descended from Abraham but outside the elect line of Isaac (25:1-2, 12-18). Some see the disparity of names in this verse as an indicator that two different traditions about Joseph have been combined without being harmonized. More likely, the designations Midianite/Ishmaelite were functionally synonymous, both referring to desert traders from Arabia with a common descent from Abraham (as appears to be the case also in Judg 8:22-24). **twenty shekels of silver:** An authentic detail reflective of the early second millennium B.C. The price for a slave climbed to 30 silver pieces by the middle of the second millennium (as in Ex 21:32) and rose much higher in first millennium B.C.

37:29 tore his clothes: A sign of extreme distress and sorrow (37:34; 44:13).

37:31 robe in the blood: The plan to deceive Jacob is soaked with irony. Just as Jacob tricked his own father with goat skins and Esau's garments (27:15-16), so he himself is deceived with goat blood and Joseph's garment (37:31-33). For other indications that Jacob's cunning in chap. 27 comes back to haunt him in later life, see note on 29:25.

37:35 Sheol: The realm of the dead. Biblical descriptions picture it as a dark and dreary land in the heart of the earth (42:38). See word study: *Sheol* at Num 16:30.



Joseph and His Brothers

Judah and Tamar

38 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers, and turned in to a certain Adul'lamite, whose name was Hi'rah. ²There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her, ³and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴Again she conceived and bore a son, and she called his name O'nan. ⁵Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name She'lah. She^a was in Che'zib when she bore him. ⁶And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Ta'mar. ⁷But Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. ⁸Then Judah said to O'nan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." ⁹But O'nan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also. ¹¹Then Judah said to Ta'mar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till She'lah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Ta'mar went and dwelt in her father's house.

12 In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; and when Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hi'rah the Adul'lamite. ¹³And when Tamar

was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," ¹⁴she put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that She'lah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. ¹⁵When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶He went over to her at the road side, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" ¹⁷He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Will you give me a pledge, till you send it?" ¹⁸He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

20 When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adul'lamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he could not find her. ²¹And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the harlot^b who was at Ena'im by the wayside?" And they said, "No harlot^b has been here." ²²So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, 'No harlot^b has been here.'" ²³And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, lest we be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her."

38:1-30 The spotlight turns briefly from Joseph to Judah. Besides hinting that Israel is beginning to be assimilated into its Canaanite surroundings, the chapter explains how Judah became the father of Perez, the genealogical ancestor of King David (Ruth 4:18-22) and ultimately of Jesus the Messiah (Mt 1:3-16).

38:1 Adullamite: A resident of the Canaanite city of Adullam (Josh 12:15), which is later part of the tribal territory of Judah (Josh 15:35).

38:2 a certain Canaanite: Judah disregards the standards of his father (Jacob) and grandfather (Isaac), both of whom went to great lengths to avoid intermarriage with the Canaanites (24:3-4; 27:46-28:2).

38:8 the duty: The custom of levirate marriage (*levir* is "brother-in-law" in Latin). In ancient Semitic society, if a married man died without fathering a son, one of his brothers was expected to marry his widow in the hope that the second marriage would produce a legal heir who could inherit the deceased brother's name and estate. Technically, the obligation that fell upon the brother-in-law could be declined, but this was considered shameful. The duty of levirate marriage was later made into law (Deut 25:5-10).

38:9 spilled: The Hebrew could also be rendered "wasted" (Judg 6:5; Prov 23:8) or "destroyed" (6:17; 2 Sam 1:14). **semen on the ground:** Onan commits grave sin when he withdraws from sexual intercourse just before insemination. This was "displeasing" to the Lord (38:10), as was Onan's dishonorable intention to retain possession of his brother's property instead of providing him with a legal heir. Still, the seriousness of his sin is bound up with his action (*what he*

did) and cannot be exclusively tied to his intention (*why he did it*). The reason for this conclusion is twofold. (1) If Onan's sin consisted simply in his disregard for a cultural custom (see note on 38:8), there would be no reason to spell out the lewd details of his bedroom behavior, especially given the delicacy with which the Bible normally describes sexual activity. At the very least, it would seem that Onan was guilty of lust; otherwise, refusal to have marital intercourse would have sufficed to deny offspring to his brother. (2) Disregard for the levirate marriage custom, however much it was frowned upon in ancient times, was never considered a capital crime. In its codified form, the levirate law prescribes only a ritual of public humiliation for one who declines to fulfill the duty of fathering an heir for his deceased brother (Deut 25:7-10). But since the Lord "slew" Onan, it is clear that his action was a serious transgression, on a par with sexual sins such as adultery, homosexual activity, and bestiality, all of which merit the death penalty in biblical law (Lev 20:10, 13, 15-16). In Catholic moral theology, the sin of "Onanism" covers contraceptive intercourse (including but not restricted to interrupted intercourse) as well as masturbation (CCC 2352, 2370).

38:15 a harlot: Disguised as a prostitute, Tamar is actually a grieving widow in search of the protection of marriage she was entitled to by Judah's third son, Shelah (38:14).

38:18 signet: A small cylinder with personal insignia used to sign contracts and other legal documents by rolling it across wax or clay.

38:21 the harlot: Not the same word used for a roadside prostitute in 38:15, but the Hebrew term for a cultic priestess who engages in ritual prostitution in the Canaanite religion. This subtle shift in terminology suggests the Adullamite is straining to dignify the impropriety of Judah.

^aGk: Heb *He*.

^bOr *cult prostitute*.

24 About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned."

25 As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Mark, I beg you, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff."

26 Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son She'lah." And he did not lie with her again.

27 When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. 28 And when she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, "This came out first." 29 But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Per'ez.¹ 30 Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Ze'rah.

Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

39 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Pot'iphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ish'maelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, 3 and his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and having him he had no concern for anything but the food which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes

upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand; 9 he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie with her or to be with her. 11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house. 13 And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house, 14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; 15 and when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled and got out of the house." 16 Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; 18 but as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled out of the house."

19 When his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison; and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; 23 the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

39:1, 2, 21: Acts 7:9.

38:24 let her be burned: A punishment later applied to the promiscuous daughter of a Levitical priest (Lev 21:9).

38:26 more righteous: The point is not that Tamar's tactics were in all respects honorable, but that she was more in the right than Judah for acting in the interests of her family and future when Judah persisted in withholding his son from her unjustly.

38:29 Perez: The Hebrew means "breach". See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

39:1 Potiphar: Chief officer of Pharaoh's elite guard unit. His name, alluding to the Egyptian deity Re, means "one whom Re gave". **Pharaoh:** A title for the ruling king of Egypt.

39:2 the LORD was with Joseph: The hand of God brings success to Joseph in Egypt and prospers all of his undertakings (39:3, 21, 23). The Lord is shaping Joseph into an effective leader and administrator so that he can be a mediator of blessing to others (39:5; 50:20).

39:4 overseer: Joseph's authority over the palace and possessions of Potiphar anticipates his oversight of the royal prison (39:22) and ultimately his exaltation over the kingdom of Egypt (41:39-44).

39:6-18 Joseph resists the advances of Potiphar's wife with the armor of chastity and wise thinking. Aware of his own weaknesses, he refuses to reason with his passions, and he avoids even the near occasion of sin by refusing to work in the presence of the temptress (39:10; Prov 5:3-8). Fleeing the palace naked, Joseph runs away with his purity even as he leaves his robe and honored position behind.

39:14 a Hebrew: A Semite descended from "Eber" (10:21, 25; 11:16).

39:20 prison: A mild punishment considering that Joseph is a foreign slave charged with the attempted rape of an Egyptian noblewoman. That he is confined rather than killed may suggest that Potiphar had his doubts about the allegations of his wife.

¹ That is *A breach*.

The Dreams of Two Prisoners

40 Some time after this, the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. ²And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker, ³and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. ⁵And one night they both dreamed—the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own meaning. ⁶When Joseph came to them in the morning and saw them, they were troubled. ⁷So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custody in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?" ⁸They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, I beg you."

⁹ So the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me, ¹⁰and on the vine there were three branches; as soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes. ¹¹Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand." ¹²Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; ¹³within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his butler. ¹⁴But remember me, when it is well with you, and do me the kindness, I beg you, to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a

dream: there were three cake baskets on my head, ¹⁷and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head." ¹⁸And Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; ¹⁹within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat the flesh from you."

²⁰ On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants, and lifted up the head of the chief butler and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹He restored the chief butler to his butlership, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; ²²but he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream

41 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ²and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows sleek and fat, and they fed in the reed grass. ³And behold, seven other cows, gaunt and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴And the gaunt and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. ⁷And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸So in the morning his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men; and Pharaoh told them his dream, but there was none who could interpret it ⁹to Pharaoh.


⁹ Then the chief butler said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today. ¹⁰When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, ¹¹we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each

40:8 interpretations belong to God: Also recognized by the prophet Daniel (Dan 2:26–28). See word study: *Dream* at 37:5.

40:13 lift up your head: The subject of a wordplay. For the butler, the expression means that Pharaoh will restore him to service by an act of clemency. For the baker, it means that Pharaoh will sever his head from his body by a gruesome act of execution (40:19).

40:15 dungeon: The same Hebrew term is rendered "pit" in 37:24, hinting that Joseph finds himself back where he started, again cast into confinement as the victim of another's cruelty.

40:19 hang you: Not a public hanging by a noose around the neck, but the public exhibition of his corpse tied or impaled to a tree (cf. Deut 21:22).

 **41:1–57** A pivotal chapter in the Joseph story, when he rises from the depths of a dungeon to the heights of royal power over Egypt. God has arranged for this elevation by endowing Joseph with the wisdom to interpret dreams

and the foresight to prepare Egypt for a coming famine. • Gen 41 displays notable parallels with chap. 2 of the Book of Daniel: in both, a Near Eastern monarch has bizarre dreams about the future (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar), and when his court magicians cannot explain its meaning, the king turns to a Hebrew slave living in exile (Joseph, Daniel), who interprets the visions with divine help and is made a royal overseer in the kingdom (Dan 2:1–49).

41:2 the reed grass: The word for "reeds" is an Egyptian term.

41:6 the east wind: A hot and dry wind that had a scorching effect on field crops.

41:8 magicians . . . wise men: The Pharaohs of the ancient world typically surrounded themselves with such royal advisers (Ex 7:11; Is 19:11–13). **his dream:** Pharaoh's visions of the night are given by God as visions of the future (41:32). See word study: *Dream* at 37:5.

41:9 I remember my faults: Only now, after the passing of two years (41:1), does the butler remember the kind service Joseph rendered to him in prison and the request he made to inform the Pharaoh of it (40:14, 23).

³Gk: Heb *them*.

having a dream with its own meaning. ¹²A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard; and when we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. ¹³And as he interpreted to us, so it came to pass; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

14 Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it; and I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile; ¹⁸and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass; ¹⁹and seven other cows came up after them, poor and very gaunt and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt. ²⁰And the thin and gaunt cows ate up the first seven fat cows, ²¹but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as gaunt as at the beginning. Then I awoke. ²²I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good; ²³and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them, ²⁴and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me."

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dream of Pharaoh is one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁶The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dream is one. ²⁷The seven lean and gaunt cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine. ²⁸It is as I told Pharaoh, God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. ²⁹There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, ³⁰but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will

be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land, ³¹and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of that famine which will follow, for it will be very grievous. ³²And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass. ³³Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. ³⁴Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take the fifth part of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. ³⁵And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. ³⁶That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine which are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."

Joseph's Rise to Power in Egypt

37 This proposal seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his servants. ³⁸And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" ³⁹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are; ⁴⁰you shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you." ⁴¹And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴²Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; ⁴³and he made him to ride in his second chariot; and they cried before him, "Bow the knee!"^{*} Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴Moreover Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaph'enath-pane'ah; and he gave him in marriage As'enath, the daughter of Poti'phera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went

41:14 shaved himself: Unlike Semitic men, who normally wore beards, Egyptian men shaved their faces regularly and their heads occasionally.

41:32 the doubling: The two dreams, which tell one and the same story, are fixed in the divine plan. Within the wider context of Genesis, this statement implies that Joseph's own dreams, doubly attested, are also doubly certain (37:5-11).

41:39-44 Joseph is promoted to the position of vizier or prime minister of Egypt, i.e., the one who is given authority over the royal house (41:40; Ps 105:21). This makes him the highest official in the land, second only to the Pharaoh. Entrusted with the Pharaoh's signet ring, he is given authority to promulgate royal decrees (47:26); and clothed in linen and gold, he is entitled to the honor and submission of the Egyptian people. The prestige of the vizier was widely recognized in the ancient Near East, where similar government

positions were held in the kingdoms of Babylon (Dan 2:48), Persia (Esther 8:2, 15; 10:3), and Israel (Is 22:15-23). See word study: *Over the Household* at 1 Kings 16:9.

41:45 Zaphenath-paneah: An Egyptian name of uncertain meaning. Proposals include "the god speaks and he lives" and "he who is called Ip-ankh" (Ip-ankh being a common name in the second millennium B.C.). **Asenath:** An Egyptian name probably meaning, "belonging to the goddess Neith". **Potiphera:** Thought to be a slight variation of the name "Potiphar" borne by Joseph's former master (39:1). **On:** Ten miles north of modern Cairo. The city was also known by its Greek name, "Heliopolis" (Jer 43:13), meaning, "City of the Sun" (Is 19:18). It was a hub of learning in ancient times and a center of sun-god worship. That Joseph marries into the priestly caste at On means that he joins the ranks of the Egyptian nobility.

41:46 thirty years old: A full 13 years after Joseph first dreamed of greatness (37:2-11) and was sold into Egypt (37:25-36).

^{*}*Abrek*, probably an Egyptian word similar in sound to the Hebrew word meaning to kneel.

out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷During the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth abundantly, ⁴⁸and he gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty¹ in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it. ⁴⁹And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

50 Before the year of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti'phera priest of On, bore to him. ⁵¹Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh,^m "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house." ⁵²The name of the second he called Ephraim,ⁿ "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

53 The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; ⁵⁴and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." ⁵⁶So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses,^o and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" ²And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live, and not die." ³So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might befall him. ⁵Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; he it was who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came, and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷Joseph saw his brothers, and knew them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." ⁸Thus Joseph knew his brothers, but they did not know him. ⁹And Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed of them; and he said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the weakness of the land." ¹⁰They said to him, "No, my lord, but to buy food have your servants come. ¹¹We are all sons of one man, we are honest men, your servants are not spies." ¹²He said to them, "No, it is the weakness of the land that you have come to see." ¹³And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." ¹⁴But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you, you are spies. ¹⁵By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain in prison, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." ¹⁷And he put them all together in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined in your prison, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰and bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they did so. ²¹Then they said to one another, "In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we would not listen; therefore is this distress come upon us." ²²And Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to sin against the lad? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood." ²³They did

41:38-45: Acts 7:10. 41:54: Acts 7:11. 42:2: Acts 7:12. 42:5: Acts 7:11.

41:51-52 Joseph fathered two sons by his Egyptian wife: Manasseh, whose name is similar to the Hebrew expression "God has made me forget", and Ephraim, whose name resembles the statement "God has made me fruitful." These sons embody the joy and contentment of Joseph's new life in Egypt.

41:57 came to Egypt: Also a place of refuge from famine in the days of Abraham (12:10).

42:4 did not send Benjamin: Jacob is especially protective of Benjamin because (1) he is the youngest of his sons and (2) because Benjamin is presumed to be the last living son of his beloved wife Rachel (44:20). Joseph, who is Benjamin's only full brother, was similarly favored by

Jacob (37:3) before his death was faked by his brothers (37:31-35).

42:6 bowed themselves: A fulfillment of Joseph's dreams (37:7, 9).

42:9 You are spies: A false accusation that Joseph uses to gather information about Benjamin and to effect a larger plan to reunite his family in Egypt. It proves successful on both counts (42:31; 43:7; 46:1-7).

42:21 we are guilty: After three days in prison (42:17), the brothers are haunted by memories of their cruelty toward Joseph. With heavy and remorseful hearts, they begin to sense that divine justice is catching up with them (42:22).

42:22 Did I not tell you: It was Reuben who first intervened to rescue Joseph from the murderous plans of his brothers (37:21).

42:23 Joseph understood: Only pretending to need an interpreter, Joseph follows everything his brothers are saying as they converse in their native Semitic dialect.

¹ Sam Gk: Heb *which were*.

^m That is *Making to forget*.

ⁿ From a Hebrew word meaning *to be fruitful*.

^o Gk Vg Compare Syr: Heb *all that was in them*.

not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴Then he turned away from them and wept; and he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

Joseph's Brothers Return to Canaan

²⁶ Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. ²⁷And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey food at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack; ²⁸and he said to his brothers, "My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!" At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹ When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had befallen them, saying, ³⁰"The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us, and took us to be spies of the land. ³¹But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies; ³²we are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³Then the man, the 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 grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. ³⁴Bring your youngest brother to me; then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver to you your brother, and you shall trade in the land.'"

³⁵ As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack; and when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. ³⁶And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin; all this has come upon me." ³⁷Then Reuben said to his father, "Slay my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." ³⁸But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he only is left. If harm should befall him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

Joseph's Brothers Bring Benjamin to Egypt

43 Now the famine was severe in the land. ²And when they had eaten the grain which they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." ³But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.' ⁴If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; ⁵but if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" ⁶Israel said, "Why did you treat me so ill as to tell the man that you had another brother?" ⁷They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions; could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" ⁸And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹I will be surety for him; of my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever; ¹⁰for if we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry down to the man a present, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹²Take double the money with you; carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man; ¹⁴may God Almighty^p grant you mercy before the man, that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." ¹⁵So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin; and they arose and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph.

¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." ¹⁷The man did as Joseph bade him, and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, which was replaced in

42:34 you shall trade: The brothers hide from Jacob the fact that Joseph threatened them with death should they return to Egypt without Benjamin (42:18-19).

42:37 Slay my two sons: Just as Reuben, followed by Judah, intervened to save Joseph's life (37:21, 26), so Reuben, followed by Judah, volunteers to guard Benjamin's life (43:8-9).

42:38 shall not go: Jacob flatly refuses to send Benjamin to Egypt at this first proposal. It is only after the famine drags on and the food supply runs low that he agrees to let

him go (43:1-14). **Sheol:** The realm of the dead. See note on 37:35.

43:1-34 The sons of Jacob make a second trip to Egypt in search of grain. This time they bring Benjamin, under the personal protection of Judah, along with a goodwill gift for Joseph.

43:9 I will be surety: Judah vows to take personal responsibility for Benjamin's welfare on the trip. As a living guarantor, he volunteers to sacrifice himself for the sake of his youngest brother and to bear the consequences of nonfulfillment should anything go wrong (44:32; Sir 29:15).

43:14 your other brother: Simeon, who is still locked up in Joseph's prison (42:19, 24).

^pHeb *El Shaddai*.

our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may seek occasion against us and fall upon us, to make slaves of us and seize our donkeys.”¹⁹ So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house, and spoke with him at the door of the house,²⁰ and said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food;²¹ and when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was every man’s money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it again with us,²² and we have brought other money down in our hand to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.”²³ He replied, “Rest assured, do not be afraid; your God and the God of your father must have put treasure in your sacks for you; I received your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to them.²⁴ And when the man had brought the men into Joseph’s house, and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys food,²⁵ they made ready the present for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present which they had with them, and bowed down to him to the ground.²⁷ And he inquired about their welfare, and said, “Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?”²⁸ They said, “Your servant our father is well, he is still alive.” And they bowed their heads and made obeisance.²⁹ And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!”³⁰ Then Joseph made haste, for his heart yearned for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there.³¹ Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, “Let food be served.”³² They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.³³ And they sat before him, the

first-born according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked at one another in amazement.³⁴ Portions were taken to them from Joseph’s table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Joseph Detains Benjamin

44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, “Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack,² and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him.³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys.⁴ When they had gone but a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my silver cup?’”⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he divines? You have done wrong in so doing.”

⁶ When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words.⁷ They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! ⁸Behold, the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; how then should we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? ⁹With whomever of your servants it be found, let him die, and we also will be my lord’s slaves.”¹⁰ He said, “Let it be as you say: he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and the rest of you shall be blameless.”¹¹ Then every man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and every man opened his sack.¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack.¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph’s house, he was still there; and they fell before him

43:26 bowed down: The second time his brothers bow in homage (42:6), again in fulfillment of Joseph’s dreams (as in 37:7, 9).

43:29 my son!: Benjamin is so addressed because he is much younger than Joseph.

43:32 by himself ... by themselves: Separate seating arrangements for the meal are a reflection of different ranks and races among the participants. The reason why Egyptians refuse table-fellowship with Hebrews is obscure, though it may be linked with the Hebrews’ occupation as shepherds who engaged in animal sacrifice. This interpretation is supported by the fact that what is abominable to the Egyptians is mentioned elsewhere in the Pentateuch only in connection with shepherding (46:34) and ritual sacrifice (Ex 8:26). See note on 46:34.

43:33 amazement: The brothers are astonished when Joseph seats them at the table in the exact order of their birth.

43:34 five times: The heaping portions are evidence of Joseph’s preferential love for Benjamin. This fivefold favoritism is also shown in 45:22.

44:1–13 Joseph stages a final test to ascertain his brothers’ love for Benjamin as well as their loyalty to Jacob. Planting his silver cup in Benjamin’s grain sack succeeds in bringing both of these relational issues into the spotlight.

44:5 he divines: The royal drinking cup is also a divination cup. When liquids, oils, and other objects are poured into the vessel, the resulting formations were thought to reveal information about the future in symbolic ways. The practice was commonplace in the ancient Near East, and the detail adds a touch of authenticity to the account. However, there is no clear indication that Joseph is a practitioner of these superstitious arts; every indication up to this point suggests that he receives revelation directly from God (40:8; 41:16, 25, 32).

44:9 let him die: Recalls how Rachel stole her father’s household gods (31:19) and Jacob, unaware of her scheme, promised death to the thief (31:32).

44:13 tore their clothes: A sign of extreme distress (37:29, 34).

^aGk Compare Vg; Heb lacks *Why have you stolen my silver cup?*

to the ground. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine?" ¹⁶And Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we are my lord's slaves, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found." ¹⁷But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Judah Pleads for Benjamin's Release

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said, "O my lord, let your servant, I beg you, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant; for you are like Pharaoh himself. ¹⁹My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' ²⁰And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children; and his father loves him.' ²¹Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes upon him.' ²²We said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' ²³Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' ²⁴When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. ²⁵And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' ²⁶we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down; for we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' ²⁷Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; ²⁸one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. ²⁹If you take this one also from me, and harm befalls him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' ³⁰Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad is not with us, then, as his life

is bound up in the lad's life, ³¹when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. ³²For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.' ³³Now therefore, let your servant, I beg you, remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord; and let the lad go back with his brothers. ³⁴For how can I go back to my father if the lad is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would come upon my father."

Joseph Makes Himself Known to His Brothers

45 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him; and he cried, "Make every one go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

⁴So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, I beg you." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Make haste and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry; ¹⁰you shall dwell in the land of Go'shen,

45:1: Acts 7:13.


44:16 the guilt: The guilt of disowning Joseph and deceiving Jacob about his fate. Judah senses that divine punishment for this iniquity has finally overtaken them. Note the similar statement by Reuben in 42:22. **my lord's slaves:** An ironic role reversal. Joseph, once sold into slavery by his brothers, is now in a position to enslave those same brothers in Egypt.

44:18-34 Judah steps forward to deliver an emotional speech before Joseph. He is pleading for mercy, not just for Benjamin and the brothers generally, but for the elderly Jacob, who is sure to die in grief if his youngest son does not return to him. Judah is even willing to substitute himself for Benjamin and accept the shackles of slavery to avoid this. His desperate appeal leaves Joseph in tears (45:1-3). See note on 43:9.

44:31 Sheol: The realm of the dead. See note on 37:35.

45:1-15 The highpoint of the Joseph story, when he reveals his identity, reconciles with his brothers, and reflects on the saving plan of God.

45:2 wept aloud: The third and final time that Joseph is overcome with emotion in the struggle to conceal his identity from his family (42:24; 43:30).

 **45:5 do not be distressed:** Implies that Joseph has forgiven his brothers and has no plans to exact revenge on them. **God sent me before you:** Joseph sees the hand of God working all things for the good (50:20; Rom 8:28). Even his rejection by his brothers was part of heaven's larger plan to raise him up in Egypt and to make him a redeemer of the family of Israel, lest the covenant people dwindle and die in the grip of a famine. The theological lesson is that God can bring good out of evil and even fulfill his plan in spite of the faults and failures of those he intends to bless the most (CCC 312). • Stephen's defense speech in Acts makes an implicit comparison between Joseph and Jesus: both were spurned by their kinsmen only to become saviors of Israel. See note on Acts 7:9-16.

45:10 Goshen: A fertile plain in the eastern Nile Delta. The land was ideally suited for grazing and shepherding

and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have; ¹¹and there I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come; lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty.' ¹²And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Make haste and bring my father down here." ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. ¹⁷And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan; ¹⁸and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.' ¹⁹Command them^{*} also, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰Give no thought to your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

²¹ The sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²²To each and all of them he gave festal garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five festal garments. ²³To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten she-donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the way." ²⁵So they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶And they told him, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt." And his heart fainted, for he did not believe them.

²⁷But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived; ²⁸and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive; I will go and see him before I die."

Jacob Brings His Whole Family to Egypt

46 So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Be'er-she'ba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ²And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here am I." ³Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. ⁴I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." ⁵Then Jacob set out from Be'er-she'ba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They also took their cattle and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

⁸ Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob's first-born, ⁹and the sons of Reuben: Ha'noch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰The sons of Simeon: Jemu'el, Ja'min, O'had, Ja'chin, Zo'har, and Sha'ul, the son of a Canaanitish woman. ¹¹The sons of Levi: Gershon, Ko'hath, and Merar'i. ¹²The sons of Judah: Er, O'nan, She'lah, Perez, and Ze'rah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Ha'mul. ¹³The sons of Is'sachar: To'la, Pu'vah, I'ob, and Shimron. ¹⁴The sons of Zeb'ulun: Se'red, E'lon, and Jah'leel ¹⁵(these are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Pad'dan-ar'am, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three).

46:6: Acts 7:14, 15. 46:8-27: Ex 1:1-4; Num 26:4-50.

(46:32). The Israelites were still settled in this area on the eve of the Exodus (Ex 9:26).

45:19 take wagons: Pharaoh approves and assists in the plan to move Jacob and his family from Canaan to Goshen (45:21).

45:22 five festal garments: Similar favoritism is shown in 43:34, where Joseph piles five times more food on Benjamin's plate than on that of any of his other brothers.

45:24 Do not quarrel: i.e., about things like (1) who bears most of the blame for selling Joseph into slavery or (2) about how to come clean with Jacob since lying to him about Joseph's death.

46:1-4 The final appearance of Yahweh to the Patriarchs noted in Scripture. Not until Moses crouches before the burning bush, over 400 years later, will another Israelite encounter the voice and presence of God in this remarkable way (Ex 3:1-22). The promise made to Jacob on this occasion—that the Lord will be with him and bring him back to Canaan—

recalls the similar promise made on the eve of his first departure from Canaan in 28:15.

46:1 Beer-sheba: A settlement in southern Canaan already consecrated for worship by Abraham (21:33) and Isaac (26:23-25). **offered sacrifices:** An important dimension of patriarchal religion (4:3-4; 8:20; 22:13; Job 1:5).

46:3 a great nation: Fulfills the promise made to Abraham at his call in 12:2. See topical essay: *The Abrahamic Covenant* at Gen 12.

46:8-27 The family of Jacob settled in Egypt. The Hebrew text counts 70 descendants of the patriarch (46:27), a number reminiscent of the earlier table of 70 nations descended from Noah and his sons (10:6-32; Deut 32:8). The Greek LXX gives a more expanded list of 75 descendants that includes three sons and two grandsons of Ephraim and Manasseh (46:20). Stephen follows this latter tradition in Acts 7:14.

46:8 came into Egypt: A literal reading of biblical chronology puts the beginning of Israel's sojourn in Egypt around 1876 B.C., a full 430 years before the Exodus (Ex 12:40-41).

* Compare Gk Vg: Heb *you are commanded*.

¹⁶The sons of Gad: Ziph'ion, Haggi, Shu'ni, Ezbon, E'ri, Aro'di, and Are'li. ¹⁷The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beri'ah, with Se'rah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: He'ber and Mal'chi-el ¹⁸(these are the sons of Zilpah, whom La'ban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons). ¹⁹The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manas'seh and E'phraim, whom As'enath, the daughter of Poti'phera the priest of On, bore to him. ²¹And the sons of Benjamin: Be'la, Be'cher, Ashbel, Ge'ra, Na'aman, E'hi, Rosh, Mup'pim, Hup'pim, and Ard ²²(these are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all). ²³The sons of Dan: Hu'shim. ²⁴The sons of Naph'tali: Jah'zeel, Gu'ni, Je'zer, and Shillem ²⁵(these are the sons of Bilhah, whom La'ban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all). ²⁶All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own offspring, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all; ²⁷and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, that came into Egypt, were seventy.

Jacob Dwells in the Land of Goshen

28 He sent Judah before him to Joseph, to appear^a before him in Go'shen; and they came into the land of Goshen. ²⁹Then Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Go'shen; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. ³⁰Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." ³¹Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me; ³²and the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.' ³³When Pharaoh calls you, and says, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of cattle from our youth

even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Go'shen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

47 So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Go'shen."

²And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. ³Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were." ⁴They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan; and now, we pray you, let your servants dwell in the land of Go'shen." ⁵Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Go'shen; and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my cattle."

⁷ Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" ⁹And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." ¹⁰And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. ¹¹Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Ram'es, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹²And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

The Famine in Egypt and Canaan

13 Now there was no food in all the land; for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt

46:27: Acts 7:14.

46:29 fell on his neck: This emotional embrace, sodden with tears, is characteristic of family reunions in Genesis (33:4; 45:14).

46:34 every shepherd is an abomination: The reason for this is not specified, but it seems the Egyptians despised shepherds as offenders against their religion. This is because several herding and grazing animals were revered as symbols of Egyptian deities. Shepherding, which entailed eating these beasts for food and using their hides for various domestic purposes, was probably thought to profane and desecrate these sacred representations of the gods. For the explosive tension created by the sacrifice of flock and herd animals in Egypt, see note on Ex 8:26 and topical essay: *Sacrifice in the Old Testament* at Lev 9.

47:7 Jacob blessed Pharaoh: The elderly shepherd from Canaan pronounces a blessing over the mighty king of Egypt.

Jacob is the more exalted of the two figures in the eyes of God (cf. Heb 7:7).

47:9 my sojourning: Not the 20 years that Jacob spent abroad in Mesopotamia (31:38), but the entire span of his life up to this point. The idea is that man is merely a pilgrim and wayfarer passing through this world, a concept that appears elsewhere in Ps 39:12 and Heb 11:13-16.

47:11 land of Rameses: Another name for Goshen in the eastern Nile Delta. Since the region's namesake, Pharaoh Rameses II, reigned in Egypt from ca. 1304 to 1236 B.C., long after the time of Joseph, it is clear that the name "Rameses" made its way into the story sometime after the 13th century B.C., presumably through an editor or copyist intent upon updating the book of Genesis for a later generation of readers.

47:13-26 Egypt plunges into starvation and economic collapse as the famine grinds on. Soon the currency in circulation is depleted, and the Egyptian masses are forced to

^aSam Syr Compare Gk Vg: Heb to show the way.

and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. ¹⁴And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁵And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, "Give us food; why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." ¹⁶And Joseph answered, "Give your cattle, and I will give you food in exchange for your cattle, if your money is gone." ¹⁷So they brought their cattle to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys; and he supplied them with food in exchange for all their cattle that year. ¹⁸And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent; and the herds of cattle are my lord's; there is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. ¹⁹Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be slaves to Pharaoh; and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them. The land became Pharaoh's; ²¹and as for the people, he made slaves of them^c from one end of Egypt to the other. ²²Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. ²³Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." ²⁵And they said, "You have saved our lives;

may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh." ²⁶So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

The Last Days of Jacob

²⁷ Thus Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Go'shen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. ²⁸And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years.

²⁹ And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh, and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰but let me lie with my fathers; carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." ³¹And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

Jacob Blesses Joseph and His Sons

48 After this Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill"; so he took with him his two sons, Manas'seh and E'phraim. ²And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you"; then Israel summoned his strength, and sat up in bed. ³And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty^a appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' ⁵And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; E'phraim and Manas'seh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶And the offspring born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷For when I came from Paddan, Rachel to my sorrow died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some

sell their livestock, their lands, and even their lives over to Pharaoh. Only Joseph is able to steer them through this crisis and is eventually hailed as a savior (47:25). The impression in 47:27 is that Israel continues to flourish in Goshen even while its host country struggles to survive.

47:17 flocks ... herds ... donkeys: That the Egyptians refuse to eat their livestock, even in times of hunger and desperation, shows how firmly they believed them to be sacred representations of the gods of Egypt. See note on 46:34.

47:27 Israel: The first time in Scripture where the new name given to Jacob becomes the national name borne by the covenant family descended from him. For its meaning, see word study: *Israel* at 32:28. **fruitful and multiplied:** In fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham (17:2, 6), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:14; 48:4). Israel continues to thrive and grow in Egypt up to the time of Moses (Ex 1:7).

^aSam Gk Compare Vg: Heb *he removed them to the cities*.

^bHeb *El Shaddai*.

47:29 hand under my thigh: A symbolic oath gesture. See note on 24:2.

47:31 bed: The Hebrew term can also be vocalized to mean "staff", which is the reading of the Greek LXX and Heb 11:21.

48:1-22 The blind and bedridden Jacob adopts his grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The boys are thus raised to an equal standing with the sons of Jacob and made founding fathers of two of the Israelite tribes. Despite being the youngest of all, Ephraim receives the first-born blessing (48:14) that was withheld from Reuben (49:3-4) and given to Joseph and his sons (1 Chron 5:1; Jer 31:9). See topical essay: *Blessings and Birthrights* at Gen 48.

48:3 Luz: Also known as "Bethel" (28:19).

48:5 Reuben and Simeon: The first two sons born to Jacob (29:32-33). Both are disqualified from receiving the blessing of the first-born, Reuben because he defiled his father's bed (35:22), and Simeon because of his violence (34:25; 49:5-7). Manasseh and Ephraim, the first two sons born to Joseph, take their uncles' places of honor in Jacob's family.

distance to go to Eph'rath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" ⁹Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, I pray you, that I may bless them." ¹⁰Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your children also." ¹²Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³And Joseph took them both, E'phraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manas'sseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. ¹⁴And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it upon the head of E'phraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manas'sseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born. ¹⁵And he blessed Joseph, and said,

"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has led me all my life long to this day,
¹⁶the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads;
and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of E'phraim, it displeased him; and he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manas'sseh's head. ¹⁸And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father; for this one is the first-born; put your right hand upon his head." ¹⁹But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." ²⁰So he blessed them that day, saying,

48:9 God has given me: Recognition that God is the Giver of children is a recurrent theme in Genesis (4:1; 21:1-2; 29:31; 30:22-24; 33:5).

48:10 eyes ... dim: Recalling 27:1, the narrator creates the impression that Jacob is about to make the same mistake as his blind father, Isaac, who gave the first-born blessing to

his younger son, Jacob, instead of his older son, Esau. Jacob does precisely this, only his actions are deliberate (48:14), not misguided by an elaborate deception (27:1-35).

48:12 his knees: Sitting the boys on his lap signifies a legal claim of adoption. See note on 30:3.

48:14 right hand: The channel of the first-born blessing.

Blessings and Birthrights

Genesis gives considerable attention to families and family life. Time and again the storyline twists and turns around the action of fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, uncles and nephews, brothers and sisters. This is not extraordinary in itself, but a distinct pattern emerges in Genesis that, for the most part, runs counter to the social and domestic customs of the biblical world. Several times we read in Genesis that God bypasses a first-born son and blesses one of his younger siblings instead. This was highly irregular in ancient tribal societies, where first-born sons were entitled by their position in the birth order to numerous family privileges not shared by their other siblings. The first-born, for example, was destined to receive a special blessing from his father and to inherit the largest share of his father's estate. He was seen as a father figure to his brothers because he stood in line to be the next leader, protector, and teacher of the family. First-born sons in the patriarchal age also succeeded their fathers in assuming priestly responsibilities in family life. In all essential respects, the eldest son who became the patriarch was the social and spiritual mainstay of the kinship group gathered around him.

Only three first-born sons in Genesis show themselves worthy of such blessings: Noah (Gen 5:28-30; 6:9), Shem (Gen 6:10; 9:26), and Abraham (11:27; 12:1-3). Every other identifiable first-born is passed over and loses his preeminent position to a younger brother. Often the eldest sons in Genesis are prideful and unworthy of the honors that await them; in effect, they disqualify themselves from their natural birthright. Other times the question of guilt or culpability goes unmentioned, and God simply elects the younger son over the older to carry his plans forward. Whatever the case, God's preference for the younger and weaker brother over the older and stronger is pronounced and forms a significant subplot in the book. Six times this pattern repeats itself in Genesis.

1. Abel is favored over Cain, the first-born of Adam (Gen 4:1-7).
2. Isaac is favored over Ishmael, the first-born of Abraham (Gen 17:18-21, 21:8-14).
3. Jacob is favored over Esau, the first-born of Isaac (Gen 25:19-34; 27:1-45).
4. Perez is favored over Zerah, the first-born of Judah by Tamar (Gen 38:24-30).
5. Joseph is favored over Reuben, the first-born of Jacob (Gen 35:22; 1 Chron 5:1).
6. Ephraim is favored over Manasseh, the first-born of Joseph (Gen 48:1-20). «

"By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as E'phraim and as Manas'seh';" and thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. ²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. ²²Moreover I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope^v which I took from the hand of the Am'orites with my sword and with my bow."

Jacob's Last Words to His Sons

49 Then Jacob called his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come.

²Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father.

³Reuben, you are my first-born, my might, and the first fruits of my strength, pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power.

⁴Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—you^w went up to my couch!

⁵Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.

⁶O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit,^{*} be not joined to their company;

for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen.

⁷Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

⁸Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you.

⁹Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he lurked as a lion, and as a lioness; who dares rouse him up?

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs;^y and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

¹¹Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes;

¹²his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

¹³Zeb'ulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Si'don.

49:9, 10: Num 24:9; Rev 5:5.

48:22 mountain slope: The Hebrew is *shekem*, which is identical in form to the city name, "Shechem" (33:18). There is probably an intended wordplay, since Shechem stands at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, near the border that will separate the tribal lands of Ephraim and Manasseh (Josh 17:7-8). This is also the place where Joseph will be buried (Josh 24:32).

49:1-27 The twelve sons of Jacob gather around his deathbed to receive his blessing. The benedictions, uttered in poetic verse, are prophetic oracles about the future of the tribes of Israel. Allusions are made to the occupation of Canaan under Joshua and the Judges, the rise of the Israelite monarchy under David and his successors, and the dawning of the messianic age. The names of the sons are grouped according to their respective mothers: Jacob blesses first the sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar; 49:3-15), then the sons of his concubines (Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali; 49:16-21), and then the sons of Rachel (Joseph, Benjamin; 49:22-27). Judah and Joseph, who share the spotlight in the final portion of Genesis (chaps. 37-48), are given blessings conspicuously more exalted than the others (49:8-12, 22-26). For similar blessings by the elderly Moses, see Deut 33:1-29.


49:1 days to come: Renders a Hebrew expression that appears in other prophetic poems about Israel's future (Num 24:14; Deut 31:29; Is 2:2; Hos 3:5).


49:3-4 Jacob's oldest son, Reuben, is rebuked for his pride and sexual aggression, having disgraced his father by sleeping with his concubine, Bilhah (35:22). This made him unfit to receive the honored blessing of the first-born (1 Chron 5:1).

49:5-7 Jacob curses the fury of Simeon and Levi, who conspired to slaughter the defenseless city of Shechem, much to their father's irritation (34:25-30). The oracle foresees how the Simeonites will eventually divide and dissolve into various cities in the territory of Judah (Josh 19:1-9) and the Levites will disperse throughout Canaan to dwell in 48 separate cities (Josh 21:1-42).

49:8-12 The tribe of Judah is destined to be the royal tribe in Israel. He is depicted both as a lion, sated with prey, and as a king, ruling over other nations with scepter in hand. Allusions to this blessing appear elsewhere in the OT in Num 24:9 ("lion"), Num 24:17 ("scepter"), and Ezek 21:27 ("until he comes").

49:8 bow down: Recalls how Joseph dreamed of his brothers bowing before him in homage (37:7, 9; 42:6). Here it indicates that all the tribes of Israel will acknowledge the kingship of Judah (cf. 2 Sam 5:1-3).

 **49:10 to whom it belongs:** An international ruler is to come from the line of Judah. The oracle is preliminarily fulfilled in David and Solomon, both from the tribe of Judah, when they rule as kings over Israel and neighboring nations (2 Sam 8:1-14; 1 Kings 4:20-21). • Its ultimate fulfillment comes with the heavenly enthronement of Jesus Christ, who is both the Lord of all nations and the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5).

 **49:11 blood of grapes:** A poetic description of wine or grape juice (Deut 32:14). The idea is that wine will be so abundant in the messianic age that people will use it for such menial tasks as washing clothes (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). • *Allegorically*, the wine stains point to the bloodstains of the Messiah, whose death cleansed the garment of the world from sin (St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 32).

49:13 The tribe of Zebulun will prosper as a maritime people in northwest Canaan.

^vHeb *shekem*, shoulder.

^wGk Syr Tg: Heb *he*.

^{*}Or *glory*.

^ySyr Compare Tg: Heb *until Shiloh comes* or *until he comes to Shiloh*.

¹⁴Is'sachar is a strong donkey,
crouching between the sheepfolds;
¹⁵he saw that a resting place was good,
and that the land was pleasant;
so he bowed his shoulder to bear,
and became a slave at forced labor.

¹⁶Dan shall judge his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁷Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
a viper by the path,
that bites the horse's heels
so that his rider falls backward.

¹⁸I wait for your salvation, O LORD.

¹⁹Raiders^a shall raid Gad,
but he shall raid at their heels.

²⁰Asher's food shall be rich,
and he shall yield royal dainties.

²¹Naph'tali is a deer let loose,
that bears comely fawns.^a

²²Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.

²³The archers fiercely attacked him,
shot at him, and harassed him sorely;

²⁴yet his bow remained unmoved,
his arms^b were made agile

by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of
Israel),

²⁵by the God of your father who will help you,
by God Almighty^c who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

²⁶The blessings of your father
are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal
mountains,^c

the bounties of the everlasting hills;
may they be on the head of Joseph,
and on the brow of him who was separate from
his brothers.

²⁷Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
in the morning devouring the prey,
and at evening dividing the spoil."

Jacob's Death and Burial

28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. ²⁹Then he charged them, and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of E'phron the Hittite, ³⁰in the cave that is in the field at Mach-pe'lah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from E'phron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. ³¹There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah—³²the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites." ³³When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

50 Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him. ²And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; ³forty days were required for it, for so many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

4 And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, speak, I beg you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, ⁵My father made me swear, saying, 'I am about to die: in my tomb which I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.' Now therefore let me go up,

49:14-15 The tribe of Issachar will bow to the yoke of Canaanite slavery just to enjoy the fertile plain assigned to it in central Palestine.

49:16-18 The tribe of Dan, though small, will take down larger enemies like a viper topples an unsuspecting horseman.

49:19 The tribe of Gad will be forced to retaliate against desert marauders who invade and plunder his settlements east of the Jordan.

49:20 The tribe of Asher will enjoy an abundance of choice foods.

49:21 The tribe of Naphtali will be as fruitful and graceful as a mother deer.

49:22-26 The tribe of Joseph will be exceedingly blessed, as suggested by the sixfold repetition of the Hebrew root for "bless" in the final stanzas. The similar stress on Joseph's fruitfulness in the opening stanza is an allusion to his son, Ephraim, whose name resembles the statement "God has made me fruitful" (cf. 41:52).

^aHeb *gedud*, a raiding troop.

^aOr *who gives beautiful words*.

^bHeb *the arms of his hands*.

^cHeb *El Shaddai*.

^cCompare Gk: Heb *of my progenitors to*.

49:24 the Shepherd ... the Rock: Two titles for Yahweh, the first celebrating his guidance of Israel (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34:15) and the second his protection of Israel (Deut 32:4; Ps 18:31).

49:27 The tribe of Benjamin will devour his enemies like a wolf that feasts upon its prey.

49:28 twelve tribes of Israel: Descendants of the sons of Jacob, renamed Israel. Note that the blessing bestowed upon Joseph in 49:22-26 was divided between Ephraim and Manasseh, who were adopted by Jacob in 48:1-22. This explains why Israel is hereafter a family of 13 tribes.

49:29 in the cave: Purchased by Abraham as a tomb for Sarah in 23:1-20. It became the burial place of all the Patriarchs and their first wives (49:31; 50:13).

49:33 gathered to his people: Means that Jacob entered the realm of the dead to rest with his deceased ancestors (25:8; 35:29).

50:2 embalm: The Egyptian art of mummification, a long and expensive process that involved dehydrating the body, smearing it with spices and preservative ointments, and wrapping it tightly with strips of linen cloth. Joseph will receive this same honor after his death (50:26).

I beg you, and bury my father; then I will return.”⁶And Pharaoh answered, “Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.”⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,⁸as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Go’shen.⁹And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; it was a very great company.¹⁰When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he made a mourning for his father seven days.¹¹When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians.” Therefore the place was named A’bel-miz’raim;⁴ it is beyond the Jordan.¹²Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them;¹³for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field at Mach-pe’lah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from E’phron the Hittite, to possess as a burying place.¹⁴After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will

hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him.”¹⁶So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷‘Say to Joseph, Forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.’ And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him.¹⁸His brothers also came and fell down before him, and said, “Behold, we are your servants.”¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Fear not, for am I in the place of God?²⁰As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.²¹So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he reassured them and comforted them.

Joseph’s Last Days and Death

22 So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father’s house; and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years.²³And Joseph saw E’phraim’s children of the third generation; the children also of Ma’chir the son of Manas’sseh were born upon Joseph’s knees.²⁴And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”²⁵Then Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, “God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.”²⁶So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

50:13: Acts 7:16.

50:7–9 Pharaoh grants Joseph and his grieving family a military escort to transport the body of Jacob back to Canaan. All this was to fulfill the charge that Jacob laid upon his sons to bury him in the tomb of the Patriarchs (49:29–32).

50:10 threshing floor: A stone or earthen platform, usually on a windy elevation, where grain was sifted in preparation for storage. **beyond the Jordan:** i.e., east of the Jordan.

50:11 Abel-mizraim: Involves a wordplay on the first element (*‘abel*), which resembles the Hebrew word for “mourning” (*‘ebel*).

50:13 Mach-pelah: The field near Hebron where the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob) are buried with their wives (Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah). For the purchase of the site, see 23:1–20.

⁴That is *meadow* (or *mourning*) of Egypt.

50:18 fell down before him: A final realization of Joseph’s dreams (37:7, 9). For earlier fulfillments, see 42:6 and 43:26.

50:19 the place of God?: A rhetorical question also uttered by Jacob in 30:2.

50:20 God meant it for good: A theological interpretation of the entire Joseph story. See note on 45:5.

50:23 upon Joseph’s knees: Suggests that Joseph adopts his great grandchildren, just as Jacob adopted his grandchildren in 48:1–12. See note on 30:3.

50:24 God will visit you: Looks ahead to the Exodus event, when Yahweh will hear the groaning of Israel in Egypt and come to visit the nation with salvation (Ex 4:31).

50:25 carry up my bones: Fulfilled when Moses carts the bones of Joseph out of Egypt (Ex 13:19) and the next generation of Israelites bury them at Shechem in central Canaan (Josh 24:32).

50:26 a hundred and ten: Egyptian records list 110 years as the ideal life-span.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Genesis

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:1–2:4.** The note lists eight teachings of the first creation account. What are they? According to the note, what is the importance of the number seven?
2. **1:2.** Why is the RSV translation of "the Spirit of God" preferable to the translation "a wind from God" or "a mighty wind" in this verse?
3. **1:26.** If the plural "Let *us*" in God's speech does not imply a belief in multiple gods, how should it be read?
4. **Word Study: Image and likeness (1:26).** What do the Hebrew words for "image" and "likeness" often denote? To what concepts does Genesis associate this word pair? How does Genesis apply the prerogative of sonship in a manner different from that of the political ideologies of the ancient Near East?

For application

1. **1: 6–19.** Have modern discoveries of the size and nature of the universe challenged your view of God? How have you dealt with this challenge?
2. **1:26.** What does it mean to you that you are a created being? How does being created in the image and likeness of God affect your image of yourself?
3. **1:27.** How do you regard your own sexuality in view of that "image and likeness"?
4. **1:28.** How have your experiences of family shaped your attitudes toward procreation? How do those attitudes compare with the scriptural view of procreation as a blessing?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:2.** For man, what does it mean to bear the image of God? Of what is the Sabbath the sign in the Old Testament? The New Testament?
2. **2:7.** What Hebrew wordplay is used to describe the creation of man? What does dust symbolize? What makes man unique?
3. **2:9.** If the "knowledge of good and evil" is not a moral awareness of right and wrong, what is it? What would Adam later presume to do, then?
4. **2:21–24.** What four characteristics is the marriage covenant designed by God to have? As a permanent union of the spouses, what does the marriage covenant symbolize?

For application

1. **2:15.** While there are many benefits for doing work, what personal benefits can work provide? How can physical work make people better as human beings?
2. **2:16–17.** How does setting limits help you discipline children? In your experience either as a child or as a parent, what function has the threat of awful consequences served in discipline? How should a parent train children to recognize the consequences of disobedience?
3. **2:24.** How does the view of marriage as a covenant differ from the view of marriage as a contract? Once a covenant that forms a family begins, when does it end?
4. **2:25.** What is the link between nakedness and shame? Aside from physical nakedness, what other kinds of nakedness might there be? What kinds of shame might be linked to them?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:1.** Although the Hebrew term *nahash* often refers to a snake, to what else can it refer? How is the serpent "subtle" or cunning? What does the serpent's question insinuate about God?
2. **3:6.** What makes Adam's capitulation to sin different from Eve's? If Adam's desire was not to "discern good from evil", what was it? What weapons did Christ use to conquer the devil?
3. **3:15.** To whom do the phrases "your seed" and "her seed" refer? What does the word "bruise" mean with respect to the deceiver? To the woman's offspring? How does Christian tradition interpret this text?
4. **3:17.** How does the curse of futility and decay affect the earth? How does it affect human toil? How does Jesus reverse this curse, according to St. Cyril of Jerusalem?

For application

1. **3:1–3.** What do you think is the most effective way to tell a lie? Why is the serpent's lie so effective with Eve? What mistakes does Eve make when the serpent first addresses her? (Compare with Jas 4:4–8.)
2. **3:7.** Reflect on those times when you did something of which you would rather God not have known. What were the consequences to your relationship with him? Have they been resolved?
3. **3:11–13.** How has playing the "blame game" affected your relationships with others? Why do you think it is so difficult to take responsibility for the harm you have done? What might be the antidote?
4. **3:16b–17a.** Have you experienced areas of tension and mistrust between the sexes? If so, in what were they? How have they affected your attitudes toward the other sex? How can you grow in healthy respect for the other sex?

Study Questions: Genesis

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:4.** What does an offering of "firstfruits" represent? What appears to be the main difference between Abel's sacrifice to God and Cain's?
2. **4:7.** What does God warn Cain about sin? In addition to negligent worship, to what sins does Cain yield? What does the reality of sin in primeval times presuppose about the natural law?
3. **4:15.** What does the "mark of Cain" signify? What does it seem that Cain fears?
4. **4:17–24.** What good and shameful characteristics are the descendants of Cain described as having? What is the point of presenting Cain's genealogy in this way?

For application

1. **4:3–4.** What is the difference between an intimate and a casual relationship with an important person? How appropriate do you think it is for our worship of God to be casual? How might a casual attitude toward worship diminish a proper respect for God?
2. **4:6–7.** How might the danger of falling into sin seem like a wild animal ready to pounce? Look up Mt 5:21–22. Given the example of Cain's sin, what do you think Jesus means about anger and the danger of judgment or even the fire of hell?
3. **4:17–24.** Even though our age is one of great technological and scientific advancement, what dangers do you see in it for our civilization? What needs to happen for us to avoid them?
4. **4:23–24.** When have you felt the desire to get revenge? How did you deal with that desire? Given the Christian vocation, how should one deal with vengeful desires?

Chapters 5–6:10

For understanding

1. **5:1–32.** What are some of the contrasts between Cain's line of descendants and Seth's? Whose line will the flood destroy, and whose will it preserve?
2. **5:5.** What are some of the approaches that have been taken to explain the immensely long life-spans of people before the flood? What are the difficulties with these approaches? What seems to be the best working hypothesis?
3. **6:1–4.** What are two interpretations from Jewish and Christian tradition that explain the meaning of the "sons of God" intermarrying with "the daughters of men"?
4. **6:6.** Why should the expression that "the Lord was sorry" not be taken literally? How does the Bible often describe the thoughts and actions of God, and why? What do these and similar word pictures communicate about God?
5. **6:9–9:19.** To what does the biblical flood story have close literary affinities? What is the theological significance of the story? What are the parallels with the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis? What allegorical significance do the Church Fathers find in the story?

For application

1. **5:4–31.** Why do you think young people want to live to be old and old people often want to die? What are your own attitudes about living to an old age? How do these attitudes reflect or contradict the Christian hope of heaven?
2. **5:28–29.** What hopes for their children do parents of newborns often have? How might these hopes be reflected in the names they select? What fears might parents have about their children?
3. **6:1–3.** Read the notes for vv. 1–4 and for v. 2. Why do you think it is morally and spiritually dangerous for committed Christians to marry persons who do not share their faith?
4. **6:5.** According to this verse, from where do evil thoughts come? How does this verse compare with what Jesus says in Mt 15:17–19? What is the antidote?

Chapters 6:11–8

For understanding

1. **6:18.** What does the Hebrew expression concerning God's covenant with Noah imply about it? What does it presuppose?
2. **7:2.** Why are only single pairs of unclean animals brought onto the ark, whereas seven pairs of clean animals are taken aboard? What might the number seven symbolize?
3. **8:6–12.** Why does the raven, when released, return to the ark but not the dove?
4. **8:20–9:17.** As expressed in the sign of the rainbow, what covenant obligation does God take upon himself? Of what is the Noahic covenant a renewal?

For application

1. **6:18.** Have you ever sensed that God was preparing you for impending trouble? How did you respond? For example, what preparations did you make or fail to make?
2. **7:11–12.** Have you ever been caught in a flood or other type of natural disaster, or have you known anyone who has had such an experience? How does one cope with the sense of helplessness in such situations? How can faith in God help?
3. **7:21–23.** What is "survivor's guilt"? Why would someone feel guilty for having survived a catastrophe that claimed others? How can such guilt be assuaged?
4. **8:20.** Why do you think Noah took the clean animals and birds for sacrificial offerings instead of releasing them? In what way was such a sacrifice in keeping with Noah's character?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:6.** Against what is murder a crime? Although the Lord can delegate his judicial authority to individuals or states to avenge wrongful deaths, what policy limits vengeance?

2. 9:22. For what is the Hebrew idiom "seeing the nakedness of his father" a euphemism? Of what is Ham guilty? Of what does Ham's perversity most likely provide the backstory?
3. 9:24. What might the detail of Ham being the youngest son suggest about his motive? What are other Old Testament examples of attempts by family members to usurp another's authority?
4. 9:26. How is the blessing of Shem unique? When does the curse upon Canaan go into effect?

For application

1. 9:2-3. Even though God gives animals and plants to man for food, "[m]an's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute" (CCC 2415). What purpose is man's dominion over these creatures intended to serve?
2. 9:9-11. To whom does God's covenant renewal apply? What does that suggest about what mankind's attitude toward creation should be?
3. 9:23. What responsibility do we have to the victims of crime? What virtues might govern how we exercise that responsibility?
4. 9:25. Given the explanation of Ham's crime in the note for v. 22, why does Noah curse Ham's son instead of Ham himself? What often seems to be the fate of the children of criminals, abusers, and alcoholics? Despite that fate, what is God's attitude toward them?

Chapters 10-11

For understanding

1. 10:1-32. What does the table of nations in this chapter tell us about the national, geographical, and linguistic diversity of the ancient Near East? Geographically, what does the table outline? Why is Palestine situated in the very center of this world map?
2. 10:21. From whom are the Israelites descended? From where does the name *Hebrew* come?
3. 11:1-9. What does the Tower of Babel incident explain? What are the mudbrick towers thought to represent?
4. 11:4. What does the family of man band together to do? Who actually acquires the "name" that the sinners of Babel coveted? What fear motivates the building? What are its ultimate consequences?

For application

1. 11:4. The citizens of Babel wanted to "make a name" for themselves. What has been your driving ambition in life (e.g., fame, wealth, athletic ability)? How well have you succeeded at realizing it? What has been its effect on your spiritual life?
2. 11:6. What are some technological advances of the last hundred or so years that were considered impossible in prior centuries? What are some of the good and evil uses to which they have been put? How similar do you think the modern scientific mind-set is to that of the citizens of Babel?
3. 11:7-8. Has a failure to communicate ever caused separation in your family? If so, what have been some of the difficulties in restoring communication?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. 12:1-50:26. How are the patriarchal narratives often classified? What considerations favor the historicity of the narratives?
2. **Topical Essay: The Abrahamic Covenant.** What three promises did God make to Abraham? When does each promise become a covenant? How are the promises and covenants realized?
3. 12:7. How does Abram sanctify the land of Canaan? What are some of the features of patriarchal religion? What religious role did the patriarchs perform in their families?
4. 12:10-13:1. How does Abram's stay in Egypt foreshadow the story of Exodus?

For application

1. 12:1. Have you ever felt that God was speaking to you personally? Why do you think he would or would not speak to you? How could you discern whether or not he did?
2. 12:4-5. At what points in your life have you parted from your place of birth, your relatives, and your immediate family? What brought about the separations? What, if any, religious or spiritual consequences resulted from them?
3. 12:13. Do you think Abram is simply keeping part of the truth hidden, or is he lying outright? What is a lie? Is it ever appropriate to divulge only a part of the truth in order to protect oneself or someone else? (Compare your answers with CCC 2483-84, 2489.)

Chapters 13-14

For understanding

1. 13:2-18. What is the point of the story of how Lot and Abram go their separate ways?
2. 14:18. What does the title "Melchizedek" mean? Who do various scholars believe that Melchizedek was? Why did Melchizedek bring out bread and wine on Abram's arrival at Salem? Allegorically, what do the actions of Melchizedek prefigure?
3. 14:20. What does Abram's tithe to Melchizedek anticipate?

For application

1. 13:8-9. Abram settles a dispute by allowing Lot to choose between alternative solutions. How does Abram's approach demonstrate wisdom? How are disputes like this handled in your family?

Study Questions: Genesis

2. **13:10–11.** Lot chooses what appears to be the better alternative, though the choice later proves disastrous for him and his family. How do you go about deciding on a course of action that could shape the direction of your life? On what do you base your decisions? How does your relationship with God figure into your decision making?
3. **14:18.** According to the note on this verse, Melchizedek may bring out bread and wine as a thank offering following Abram's victory. Does gratitude figure into your sense of personal accomplishment? How do you concretely express gratitude to God for what you have or have accomplished?
4. **14:20.** Abram gives Melchizedek "a tenth of everything". What do you give to the Lord? What limits do you place on your giving?

Chapter 15

For understanding

1. **15:1–6.** How do these verses mark a critical juncture in Abram's spiritual journey? What opportunity is God giving Abram?
2. **15:6.** In the Genesis narrative, what acts indicate that Abram puts his trust in the Lord? What does the New Testament say that we learn from Abram about faith? What is "righteousness"?
3. **15:10.** What is the significance of cutting the animals in two? Who puts himself under threat of a curse in this ceremony?
4. **15:12–14.** What is implied about Abram's relation to the Promised Land when God tells him that Israel will experience 400 years of oppression before gaining possession of it?

For application

1. **15:1–6.** Scripture contains many promises that reveal God's loving care for us, such as salvation, everlasting life, and so on. How might promises like these test your faith? What stands in the way of trusting that God will fulfill them?
2. **15:8.** Abram asks how he can know that he will receive what God has promised. When you pray to obtain something for yourself or a loved one, for what kinds of assurance do you hope? How appropriate do you think it is to ask God for such assurance?
3. **15:12.** Abram experiences the approach of God as dread and great darkness. Have you ever felt the approach or presence of God? What was the experience like?
4. **15:13–16.** Sometimes, God's promises take time and the right circumstances to be realized. How easily do you give up waiting when someone promises you something good but does not say when the promise will be fulfilled?

Chapter 16

For understanding

1. **16:1–6.** What are the consequences of Sarai's fateful decision to give Hagar to the embrace of her husband? What do archaeological finds show about the ancient practice of surrogate motherhood?
2. **16:2.** What were the rights of a man's lawful wife over the child born of a surrogate mother? Why is Abram's "listening" to his wife an ominous note in the narrative?
3. **Word Study: Angel of the Lord (16:7).** How does this figure sometimes appear? With what characteristic is the angel of the Lord endowed, and what are some of his many tasks?
4. **16:12.** Why is Ishmael called "a wild donkey" of a man?

For application

1. **16:2.** What are some of the methods available today to help childless couples have children? Of those you can name, which are morally allowable and which are not? (Compare your answers with CCC 2373–79.)
2. **16:4.** Have you ever regarded with contempt someone in your family, your circle of friends, or your work environment? What brought about that attitude? How do you think the Lord regards such contempt?
3. **16:5–6.** In your immediate family, about what do you most frequently argue? What role do you tend to play: the Wronged Victim, the Artful Dodger, the Cool Logician, or something else? How do you feel about yourself during an argument?
4. **16:12.** Do you know anyone with personal characteristics like Ishmael's? How do you relate to this person? How do you think the Lord would have you relate?

Chapter 17

For understanding

1. **17:1–21.** What pattern does the circumcision covenant follow? What features does such a covenant have?
2. **17:4.** Which ancient peoples are descended from Abraham? What does the New Testament reveal about Abraham's destiny?
3. **17:5.** What are the original and the expanded meanings of Abram/Abraham's names? What does a change of name signify?
4. **17:11.** What roles does circumcision play in the Abrahamic covenant? Theologically, toward what does it point? Historically, who has practiced circumcision? In the New Covenant, how does Baptism act as the counterpart of circumcision?
5. **17:15–21.** What is the more precise definition of God's promise to Abraham in 15:18–21?

For application

1. **17:5.** What do you think of your given name? If you had the opportunity to change it, what name would you choose? What would be its meaning to you? For example, what might it suggest about your character or how you see your destiny?
2. **17:7.** As a member of the New Covenant, how do you experience your covenant relationship to God? How does your family experience it?

3. 17:10–11. What is the "mark" of a Christian? What practical difference in your everyday life does it make to you that you are baptized?
4. 17:18–21. Even though the older Ishmael is circumcised (v. 23), God's covenant blessings come through the younger Isaac's line (v. 21). Where does that leave Ishmael? Considering the whole Abrahamic narrative up to now, what factors might explain God's preference for the unborn Isaac?

Chapter 18

For understanding

1. 18:2–3. Who were the three men who came to visit Abraham? Why did Abraham worship only one of them?
2. 18:6. Why did Abraham tell Sarah to prepare three measures of flour? In a moral sense, for what virtues do the three measures stand? What do they contain?
3. 18:14. For what does this verse prepare? What is its New Testament echo?
4. 18:22–33. What does this dialogue say about the character of God? How do these themes play out in the next episode?

For application

1. 18:1–8. Have you ever received extravagant hospitality such as Abraham shows to the three men? What was your reaction when it was offered? When an opportunity comes for you to show hospitality to your guests, what do you offer them?
2. 18:11–12. Have you ever questioned or doubted the Lord's ability to provide for you? What did the eventual outcome do to enhance or damage your trust in God's provision?
3. 18:14. Many atheists question God's power because of the evil in the world, arguing that an all-powerful God should be able to prevent evil from happening. How would you answer them?
4. 18:20–32. Have you ever found yourself, in fact or in effect, haggling with God regarding the outcome of a prayer intention? For what were you praying? How was the prayer answered?

Chapter 19

For understanding

1. 19:1. What might Lot's "sitting at the gate" indicate about him? How does he behave toward the two visitors?
2. 19:5. What motive does the mob have for surrounding Lot's house? What form of sexual depravity was rampant among the Canaanites? How was it punished in ancient Israel?
3. 19:24–29. What happens to the cities of the valley? What function does the memory of this catastrophe serve?
4. 19:30–38. What do these verses recount? What other episode of drunkenness does it recall?

For application

1. 19:2. What are some of the dangers of spending the night on the street, as homeless people often must do? What services for the homeless exist in your area? What service, if any, do you render at these facilities?
2. 19:12–14. Why do you think people ignore warnings of impending disaster? If God were today to warn of approaching destruction unless people repented, what do you think the response might be? Can you think of any times in history when God provided such warnings?
3. 19:24–25. When a natural disaster such as a flood, a volcanic eruption, or an earthquake occurs that causes numerous deaths, should the cause be attributed to God? What other causes for human casualties might there be?
4. 19:31–38. What makes the act of deriding the ancestors of one's enemies so insulting? What function does slander or mockery serve for those who deliver the insult? What might be the Christian response to those who insult one's family?

Chapter 20

For understanding

1. 20:1–18. What does this episode show about God's promise to Abraham? What happens to Sarah?
2. 20:2. What does the name Abimelech mean? What function does it serve? Who else encounters someone of this name years later?
3. 20:7. What does the word "prophet" mean in connection with Abraham?
4. 20:12. Is Abraham telling the truth about Sarah being his sister? When did prohibitions against marriages to close relatives arise?

For application

1. 20:3–7. Have you ever had a dream that was so vivid or memorable that you felt the need to take it seriously? What sort of difference (e.g., moral or religious) did it make? In what way might it have been a grace from God?
2. 20:11. Abraham admits to misrepresenting himself out of fear of an unfamiliar and possibly hostile community. When you enter a similar sort of community, how do you tend to protect yourself? Has this self-protection been justified or not?
3. 20:14–16. Abimelech makes extravagant gestures to prove his good intentions and right the situation. When you are shown to be in the wrong, how do you know when a simple apology is sufficient and when to go beyond that to rectify things?

Chapter 21

For understanding

1. 21:3. What does the name Isaac mean? What does it recall?
2. 21:9. What negative sense does the Hebrew word for "playing" have in this verse? What is the teenager Ishmael doing? How will Paul later interpret this incident?

Study Questions: Genesis

3. **21:22–34.** What pattern does Abraham's covenant with Abimelech follow? What do both parties do during the ratification ceremony?
4. **21:31.** How are the two translations of the name Beer-sheba related? In this episode, how does Abraham enact his oath?

For application

1. **21:6–7.** Sarah responds to the birth of Isaac with a certain glee, saying that God has provided laughter for her. What part does laughter or mirth play in your relationship with God? How enjoyable is it to you? What do you think of God's "sense of humor" in happy coincidences?
2. **21:9–10.** What do you think of Sarah's sense of humor in this passage? If you are a parent or a childcare worker, how do you respond when you judge the conduct of your children's friends to be inappropriate?
3. **21:17.** An angel asks the outcast Hagar what troubles her and encourages her not to be afraid. What is it that most troubles you or makes you afraid? On a spiritual level, how do you deal with fear?

Chapter 22

For understanding

1. **22:2.** What does the Hebrew version of this text convey about Isaac? How does the Greek Old Testament translate "only son"? How is Isaac a type of Christ? What is later located on Mt. Moriah?
2. **22:16–18.** According to Paul's discussion in Gal 3, what does the divine oath of this chapter indicate that God will do? What does Paul say the binding of Isaac prefigures?
3. **Word Study: Descendants (22:18).** To what can the Hebrew word for "seed" refer? What are its individual and collective meanings? How does Paul view Isaac (individual meaning) and Israel (collective meaning)?
4. **Topical Essay: The Sacrifice of Isaac.** How do some commentators interpret the significance of this episode? In terms of its spiritual significance, what part might it play in Abraham's developing relationship with the Lord? What is the importance of the lesson Abraham learns? In terms of the episode's theological significance, how does Judaism understand the significance of the binding of Isaac? How does Christian theology view the episode from prophetic and typological perspectives?

For application

1. **22:1.** What is a "test" from God? Do you think he has ever tested you? What was the outcome?
2. **22:2.** Many people avoid or delay surrendering everything to the Lord, fearing that he will take away from them something or someone they treasure. What do you fear the Lord will take away from you?
3. **22:16–18.** How might you be withholding from the Lord something of yourself? What would be the benefit of giving it over to him?
4. **22:18.** What does "obedience" mean to you? Does obedience to God's voice result in liberation or enslavement?

Chapters 23–24

For understanding

1. **23:1–20.** What does this chapter stress about Abraham's negotiation for a burial plot for Sarah? What does the purchase of the site anticipate?
2. **23:9.** Who will be buried in the cave at Mach-pelah? Although the text says the site is in Hebron, where does Samaritan tradition locate it?
3. **24:2.** What do loins or thighs represent in Genesis? What kind of gesture is putting the hand under the thigh? In the context of this verse, what does the oath require of the servant?
4. **24:10.** Why does the servant take ten camels on his journey? What do we know about the domestication of camels?
5. **24:65.** What is the importance of the servant's reply, "It is my master", to Rebekah's question? Why does Rebekah cover herself upon hearing the answer?

For application

1. **24:3–4.** Because of God's call to him, Abraham does not want a Canaanite woman as a wife for his son. What relationships, personal or cultural, come along with the marriage partner one selects? What spiritual hindrances might some of those relationships bring into the marriage?
2. **24:6–8.** How does the locale in which you live affect your relationship with the Lord?
3. **24:12–14.** The servant prays for a sign to confirm his selection of a wife for Isaac. What standards do people of your acquaintance use in their selection of a marriage partner? How might one judge whether the selection is likely to be spiritually beneficial or not?
4. **24:67.** Isaac learns to love Rebekah *after* he marries her. Is this the order promoted by our modern culture? How might learning to love one's spouse after the wedding be good for the marriage?

Chapter 25

For understanding

1. **25:19–36:43.** Although less attention is paid to Isaac than to Jacob in these chapters, why is Isaac an important link in the genealogical chain of Genesis?
2. **25:21.** In what way is Isaac like his father Abraham? Why?
3. **25:22.** For what are the unborn twins in Rebekah's womb already struggling? What does the struggle anticipate, both in this chapter and beyond the horizon of Genesis? What does Paul see in these events?
4. **25:26.** How does Jacob's name foreshadow his future?

For application

1. **25:21.** Isaac prays for his wife Rebekah. How often do you pray for members of your family? In general, for what do you pray? How have these prayers been answered?

2. **25:27–28.** Consciously or not, parents may prefer the personal or temperamental traits of one child over those of another. What dangers do such preferences pose for relationships within the family? What can parents do to minimize "favorite child" preferences?
3. **25:29–34.** In this episode, the rivalry between siblings in a seemingly trivial matter reveals traits that will mature later on. What is your experience of youthful contests among siblings? Have these contests revealed character traits that became settled as the children matured?

Chapters 26–27

For understanding

1. **26:5.** What were the covenant benefits promised to Abraham, and why were they given? What does God mean by "my charge, my commandments, my statutes"?
2. **27:1–46.** In this chapter, what does Jacob do, and what is Rebekah's role? What is the attitude of the Genesis account toward Esau? What is the story intended to illustrate?
3. **27:13.** What price does Rebekah pay for her role in this story?
4. **27:29.** What does Isaac's blessing envision? When is the prophecy fulfilled?

For application

1. **26:14.** What is envy? Why is it described in the Catechism as one of the "capital sins" (CCC 2538–40)? How has envy affected your own life?
2. **26:17–22.** What do you think of Isaac's way of handling this situation? How would you deal with persons who took credit for—or even took over—your efforts? Which approach, yours or Isaac's, seems better able to achieve the Lord's designs for your life?
3. **27:5–19.** Who do you think bears the greater guilt for the deception of Isaac: Rebekah, who instigates the deception, or Isaac, who cooperates in it? What moral effect does deceiving others have on the deceiver?
4. **27:33–41.** Disputes over an inheritance often leave permanent scars on family relationships. How has your family handled distribution of the estate of a family member who has died? What might be a Christian way of handling disputes over such things?

Chapter 28

For understanding

1. **28:12.** What kind of ladder does the Hebrew of this verse envision? Of what does the dream convince Jacob? How is Jacob's ladder a prophetic image of Christ?
2. **28:18.** Why does Jacob make a pillar of his stone headrest? What did Moses later instruct Israel to do with certain pillars?
3. **28:21.** Why is Jacob's vow to God conditional? What is Jacob thus doing with the Lord?

For application

1. **28:1–2.** Parents today seldom determine whom their children will marry—or even whether they will. Since a child's choice of a partner affects the entire family, do you think parents should have some say in the matter? What should the parents do if they disapprove of the child's choice, especially if they disapprove on religious or moral grounds?
2. **28:3–4.** In some families, the parents occasionally bless their children, e.g., before sending them out of the house. Are you familiar with this practice? What benefits do you see in it for both the parents and the children?
3. **28:16–17.** Not uncommonly, people have an almost physical sense of the presence of God in certain locations, such as in a particular church or in a forest. How and where have you experienced God's presence? What has been the religious or moral effect on you?
4. **28:20–22.** What is a vow? (Compare your answer with CCC 2102.) When might it be inappropriate for a vow to be conditional, as Jacob's was? How important is it to keep a vow made privately?

Chapter 29

For understanding

1. **29:1–30.** What does divine Providence arrange for Jacob in the first of these two episodes? What happens to him in the second?
2. **29:16.** What do the names Leah and Rachel mean in Hebrew? What does their destiny of being married to the same man force the sisters to do?
3. **29:25.** How could Jacob have been deceived as to the identity of his bride? How is his blindness a just penalty for Jacob? What does Laban's trickery regarding the first-born sister recall about Jacob's own trickery?
4. **29:31.** What does it mean that Leah was "hated"? What might Leah's pregnancy indicate about Jacob's preferential love for Rachel?

For application

1. **29:10–12.** Family stories of how spouses met can sometimes hold lessons about God's provision for the family. What stories circulate in your family, and what can you learn from them about God providence?
2. **29:16–17.** Although physical good looks may initially attract, what characteristics should ultimately determine one's choice of a marriage partner? What qualities would you look for, and why?
3. **29:23–30.** Despite Laban's deception, Jacob fulfills his end of the service agreement. What obligation would you feel to complete an agreement if the other party had taken advantage of you on a technicality?
4. **29:31.** What pressures might the inability to conceive have on a marriage? What are some Christian ways of reducing these pressures or resolving these difficulties?

Study Questions: Genesis

Chapter 30

For understanding

1. **29:32–30:24.** What kind of wordplay do the names of Jacob's sons involve? What do their various names mean? When and where was Benjamin born?
2. **30:3.** To what ancient rite does the expression "bear [a child] upon my knees" refer?
3. **30:14.** What is the significance of mandrakes? What is the irony in this passage?
4. **30:27.** What is divination? What is Scripture's judgment about it?
5. **30:37–43.** What was the belief of ancient herdsmen about visual stimuli in the breeding of animals? How does Jacob act on this belief?

For application

1. **30:1–24.** In the context of their marriage to Jacob, why are Leah and Rachel locked in such a bitter contest to have children? Might such a rivalry between sisters occur even today? From which of the seven capital sins might such a rivalry stem?
2. **30:1–24.** What do you think of Jacob's role in this contest? How might his acquiescence contribute to the sisters' rivalry? How might a modern husband support his wife when she is distraught over infertility?
3. **30:31–36.** How does Laban try to ensure that he gets the better of Jacob in this agreement? If you were an employer, how would you determine an employee's wage so that you could still make a profit without cheating the employee?
4. **30:37–43.** Jacob retaliates by using his knowledge of animal husbandry to get himself the wage he was promised while minimizing the increase of Laban's wealth. How justified is Jacob in using this stratagem? Why is it inappropriate to cheat someone who has cheated you?

Chapter 31

For understanding

1. **31:1–16.** What does the preceding narrative in chap. 30 highlight? Why is the story retold in the current chapter?
2. **31:39.** In the ancient Near East, what obligations did a shepherd have to his employer if an animal was stolen or mauled by wild beasts? How did Jacob go beyond the call of duty?
3. **31:43–55.** What do Jacob and Laban do to seal their covenant? What do they pledge? Why were covenants of this type made?
4. **31:47.** Why do Laban and Jacob call the same location by different names? What does the bilingual tradition mirror?

For application

1. **31:14–16.** Childhood grievances against parents often carry over into adulthood. Have you held grievances against your parents? What Christian virtues can help minimize or eliminate such grievances?
2. **31:19.** Not every child who leaves home steals from his parents, but everyone does take something of value when he leaves. Assuming you have left your parental home, what have you taken with you? Of what value is it to you? to your parents?
3. **31:20.** Review Jacob's motives in vv. 1–20 for fleeing Laban's service. What are they? As you reflect on your departure from your parental home, what were your motives? How mixed were they? Which were real, and which may have been rationalizations?
4. **31:36.** Have you ever been unjustly accused? How did you respond to the accusation? Given the example of Jesus at his various trials, how should you have responded?

Chapter 32

For understanding

1. **32:4.** What do the titles that Jacob is using imply with regard to Esau? In effect, what is Jacob doing? What does this strategy accomplish?
2. **32:22–32.** What is the outcome of this mysterious wrestling match? Allegorically, what does the defeat of the angel represent? How does this interpretation apply to the people of Israel? On a moral level, what does it mean to wrestle with an angel?
3. **Word Study: Israel (32:28).** What is the wordplay involved in the name Israel? What is unusual about the compound character of this name? What is the name taken to mean in Scripture? In later biblical history, for what group does the name stand?
4. **32:30.** How does Jacob see God "face to face"? What does the name Peniel mean, and where was it located?

For application

1. **32:7–12.** How does Jacob manage his fear and distress at the approach of Esau? How do you typically handle fear? How does or could prayer enter into the way you handle fear?
2. **32:12–13.** Reflect on Jesus' exhortation in Mt 25–34 and the parallel passage in Lk 12:22–31. How much confidence do you place in God's promises in Scripture when you feel that your welfare is threatened? How readily, for example, do such promises even come to mind in times of anxiety?
3. **32:24–26.** The Catechism calls conversion a struggle (CCC 1426) and prayer a battle (CCC 2573ff.). In what ways are they a struggle and a battle for you? How like Jacob are you in continuing the struggle?
4. **32:28.** Through his struggle with God, Jacob "prevails." In prayer of petition, what changes: God's mind or man's? What does it mean to "prevail" in prayer?

Chapters 33–34

For understanding

1. **33:18.** Where is Shechem? After whom is it named? What route is Jacob following?
2. **34:1–31.** With what does this chapter deal? What is Jacob's role in this episode?

3. **34:9.** What is Hamor negotiating between Israel and Shechem? What is in it for the citizens of Shechem? How do Jacob's sons react?
4. **34:15.** What is the condition for marital unions between Israel and Shechem? What do Jacob's sons intend by proposing it?

For application

1. **33:12–15.** Jacob's demurrals and his subsequent actions suggest that he does not fully trust his brother, even though the two are apparently reconciled. When trust is broken, how can it be rebuilt? How would you know when trust had been firmly reestablished?
2. **34:1–2.** The word "rape" comes from a Latin word meaning "to steal" by force. When a rape occurs, what is stolen? Compare your answer with that of the Catechism (CCC 2256).
3. **34:25–27.** Dinah's brothers take revenge by killing all the males in the city of Shechem and reclaiming their sister. In your area, what is the legal punishment for the crime of rape? In comparison with the revenge taken by Jacob's sons, do you think the modern legal punishment is adequate? What purpose should punishment for such a crime serve?
4. **34:30–31.** Jacob's sons dismiss their father's claim that their actions have brought disgrace and danger upon him. What impact does the crime of rape have on the family of the victim? on that of the perpetrator?

Chapter 35

For understanding

1. **35:9–12.** What happens with Jacob at Bethel? How do the words spoken to Jacob parallel the divine discourse with Abraham in chap. 17?
2. **35:18.** How does Rachel die? What is the meaning of the name she gives her infant? What is the meaning of the name Jacob gives him? How does this name bring out what is unique in the child? What do later biblical narratives indicate about the tribe of Benjamin?
3. **35:22.** What is Reuben attempting by lying with Bilhah? What irony results from it? What will Jacob do with Reuben's birthright?
4. **35:29.** What impression is created by placing the story of Isaac's death here? Where else might it have been placed? What other story of a burial by feuding brothers does this one recall?

For application

1. **35:4.** Many people — perhaps you yourself — possess images or wear jewelry that are actually emblems of other religions, such as a bracelet charm or a garden statue of Buddha. What might be a danger, even in modern America, of possessing or wearing such images? What does the Catechism say about images of God? Compare your answer with that of the Catechism (CCC 476, 1159–62).
2. **35:11–12.** Why do you think God repeats the covenant promises to succeeding generations of patriarchs? Why do you think we need to hear promises repeated?
3. **35:17–20.** Why do families create burial markers, even if they have no intention of returning to the burial site? What do such markers indicate about those who are still alive?
4. **35:22–25.** Review the note for v. 22. With Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, dead, why is Bilhah so important to Reuben? If you wanted access to a famous person, but that person was inaccessible, to whom would you go?

Chapters 36–37

For understanding

1. **36:7.** What forces Jacob and Esau to separate their tribes? Why is the parallel with Abraham and Lot significant?
2. **37:1–50:26.** To what is this storyline devoted? What is the link between this material and that of the book of Exodus? What in this material has been verified as historically authentic?
3. **37:3.** What does Jacob's preferential love for Joseph do to his family? What is the significance of the robe Jacob gives Joseph? What is its allegorical significance?
4. **Word Study: Dream (37:5).** What did people in the ancient Near East believe about dreams? In the biblical tradition, why are dreams important? What does the Lord reveal through them? What role do they play in the life of Joseph?
5. **37:28.** Who are the Midianite traders? Does the sum of 20 shekels of silver, paid for Joseph as a slave accord with historical evidence for the price of slaves during that period? When did the price climb to 30 silver pieces?

For application

1. **37:3–4.** In a family with several children, how can the parents avoid showing favoritism? Why is such avoidance necessary?
2. **37:5–11.** In a family with several children, how do children tend to assert their own importance? In this passage, how does Jacob respond to his son? How should a modern parent respond?
3. **37:19–27.** In a family with several children, fraternal envy of a promising sibling may play out in a variety of ways behind the backs of the parents. Have you ever had experience of this sort of retaliation against a favored sibling? How has age or experience changed or confirmed the attitudes of other siblings (including yourself, if applicable)?
4. **37:34–35.** In comparison with Jacob's expression of grief over the loss of a child, what attitude should a Christian parent display?

Chapter 38

For understanding

1. **38:1–30.** On whom is the spotlight in this chapter? What does the story hint, and what does it explain?
2. **38:8.** To what "duty" is Judah referring here? When was this duty made into law?

Study Questions: Genesis

3. **38:9.** In addition to interrupting sexual intercourse, what else made Onan's sin so gravely displeasing to the Lord? What is the twofold reason for the seriousness of what he did? In its codified form, what is the usual punishment for violation of the levirate law in Scripture? In Catholic moral theology, what does the sin of "Onanism" cover?
4. **38:21.** What is the meaning of the Hebrew word used in this verse? What does the shift in terminology suggest?
5. **38:26.** What is Judah's point in saying that Tamar is "more righteous" than he?

For application

1. **38:2.** Read the note for this verse. What standards have your parents had regarding their children's selection of a marriage partner? What role has religion played in those standards? What role should it play?
2. **38:9.** According to Catholic Church teaching, "each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life" (*Humanae Vitae* II). What are some reasons modern couples give for wishing to avoid or delay having children? Which means of regulating births are morally acceptable, and which are not? What makes contraception inherently contradictory to the marriage covenant? (Refer to CCC 2368-71.)
3. **38:13-19.** What is Tamar trying to accomplish by her actions with Judah? Given the levirate custom of the time, how justified is she in taking matters into her own hands?

Chapters 39-40

For understanding

1. **39:4.** What does authority over Potiphar's palace and possessions anticipate?
2. **39:6-18.** How does Joseph resist the advances of Potiphar's wife? Aware of his own weakness, what does he refuse and what does he avoid?
3. **39:20.** Why is prison a mild punishment for Joseph?
4. **40:13.** What is the meaning of this wordplay for the butler? for the baker?

For application

1. **39:7-12.** Have you ever dealt with sexual temptation? What have such temptations taught you about yourself? Why might it be better to flee from such a temptation than to fight it?
2. **39:21-23.** What talents or skills do you have that have brought you success over the long run, despite setbacks? Might the Lord be responsive to them? To whom do you generally give credit for them?
3. **40:8.** Despite the Church's condemnation, many Christians still practice some form of divination, such as consulting horoscopes. What is the difference between using divination to interpret dreams and the way Joseph interprets them? Why does the Church condemn practices such as divination? (Refer to CCC 2116.) What harm can they do to the person who uses them?

Chapter 41

For understanding

1. **41:1-57.** How does God arrange for Joseph's elevation to royal power in Egypt? What are some of the parallels between this chapter and chap. 2 of the Book of Daniel?
2. **41:39-44.** As vizier of Egypt, what authority does Joseph have? What do the symbols of his office signify? In addition to Egypt, what other Near Eastern countries recognized the position of vizier?
3. **41:45.** What are the meanings of some of the Egyptian names in this verse? What was the Greek name for the city of On, and for what was it famous? What does Joseph's marriage into the priestly caste mean?

For application

1. **41:8.** Whenever you have a significant personal or spiritual problem, how do you seek resolution? To whom do you turn for help? How willing are you to take the advice that is offered?
2. **41:14.** Of what importance is it to appear clean and well dressed in the presence of important officials? What do you think explains the current trend to appear in casual or worn attire in the presence of God in the liturgy? How would you rate your own dress when you attend the liturgy?
3. **41:16.** The Catechism discusses charismatic gifts as ways by which the Holy Spirit "makes the faithful 'fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church' [*Lumen Gentium* 12 §2]" (CCC 798). What charisms has the Holy Spirit given you for that purpose? How do you recognize them?
4. **41:47-57.** Because the spiritual life alternates between spiritual "uptimes" and "downtimes", how should you prepare yourself spiritually for the periods of dryness and desolation that tend to follow periods of growth and consolation? For example, which spiritual practices should you strengthen, and which should you begin that you have not yet undertaken?

Chapters 42-44

For understanding

1. **42:34.** What threat and what promise do Joseph's brothers hide from Jacob?
2. **43:32.** Why was there separate seating arrangements at this meal? Why did Egyptians refuse table-fellowship with Hebrews? What other references in the Pentateuch support this interpretation?
3. **44:5.** How was a drinking cup used for divination? What indication do we have that Joseph practiced these superstitious arts?
4. **44:16.** About what guilt is Judah speaking in his reply to Joseph? What is the irony here?

For application

1. **42:28.** When a disaster strikes, particularly one that claims many lives, where do people tend to lay the blame? What challenges to faith can such disasters pose? What answers should faith give to these challenges?

2. 43:1-14. How true is the saying, "Not to decide is to decide"? Have you ever put off making a vital decision out of fear of the consequences? What were your reasons? What finally brought about a decision?
3. 44:1-13. After having treated Benjamin with such elaborate kindness at the feast in chap. 43, Joseph stages a trick that puts the blame on Benjamin for theft, the penalty for which is slavery in Egypt. What do you think is Joseph's motive? What "message" may he be sending to Benjamin's brothers? How might this message be related to what happened to Joseph himself?

Chapter 45

For understanding

1. 45:5. What do Joseph's words to his brothers imply about his attitude and intention? How does Joseph interpret his rejection by his brothers? What theological lesson is contained here? What comparison between Jesus and Joseph does Stephen imply in his defense speech in Acts?
2. 45:10. Where is Goshen? For what was the land ideally suited?
3. 45:24. About what does Joseph admonish his brothers not to quarrel as they journey home?

For application

1. 45:4. Pope John XXIII, whose given name was Giuseppe (Joseph), greeted a delegation of Jews at the Vatican by quoting this verse. What do you think he meant to tell them? How are Christians, in the words of Pius XI, "spiritually Semites"?
2. 45:7-8. Can you think of other incidents in history where God brought good out of evil? How might a setback or disaster in your own life have been a blessing in disguise?
3. 45:24. Read the note for this verse. Why would Joseph suspect that his brothers might quarrel after such good fortune? What might be the motives for such quarreling?

Chapter 46

For understanding

1. 46:1-4. Why is this appearance of Yahweh to Jacob important? How long will it be before another Israelite encounters the presence of God in this way? What does the promise made to Jacob on this occasion recall?
2. 46:8-27. In this inventory of the family of Jacob in Egypt, how many descendants does the Hebrew text count? Of what is that number reminiscent? How does the Greek OT expand that list, and which tradition does Stephen follow in the NT?
3. 46:8. Around what year does a literal reading of biblical chronology place the beginning of the sojourn in Egypt?
4. 46:34. Why is "every shepherd an abomination" to Egyptians? Of what were some herding and grazing animals a symbol, and what aspects of shepherding made that profession represent a profanation of their religion?

For application

1. 46:5-7. How often has your family made a major move from one location to another? What was the occasion of each move, and how difficult was it? What have been the long-term effects of the moves on your family?
2. 46:8-27. Genealogies occur frequently in Scripture. How well do you know the genealogy of your own family? Of what importance to you is it to know who your ancestors were, where they came from, and what kind of people they were?
3. 46:32-34. Do you regard your occupation as a vocation, as a career, or as a job? What is the difference? How did you select your occupation, and how do you feel about it? How can you use it to honor the Lord?

Chapter 47

For understanding

1. 47:9. What does Jacob mean by "my sojourning"? What is his point?
2. 47:11. For what is Rameses another name in this verse? Who updated that name? When did the region's namesake actually reign?
3. 47:13-26. How do the Egyptians fare as the famine grinds on? Who steers them through the crisis? What impression is given in 47:27 about Israel?
4. 47:27. How is the name Israel used here for the first time in Scripture? How are the promises of God to Abraham and Isaac fulfilled here?

For application

1. 47:12-13. Care for an aged parent or disabled relative is not a single-event situation; rather, it is ongoing, often for years. What is involved in such care? What effects does ongoing care have on the caregiver and the caregiver's family? How does such care reflect obedience to the fourth commandment?
2. 47:13-26. Joseph's rationing policy involves selling grain to the Egyptians or bartering for their service rather than giving grain to them. Considering its effects on the populace, what do you think of the policy? How might a modern government handle a similar food emergency?
3. 47:29-30. What do you think are Jacob's reasons for wanting to be buried, not in Egypt, but with his fathers? Why is the place of burial significant? What religious importance might the place of burial have?

Chapter 48

For understanding

1. **Topical Essay: Blessings and Birthrights.** What distinct pattern emerges in Genesis that tends to run counter to the domestic customs of the biblical world? What were some privileges that first-born sons typically had? Who were the only

Study Questions: Genesis

- first-born sons in Genesis to receive the customary blessings? Why did most first-borns lose their positions? How often does the pattern of God's preference for younger sons repeat itself, and who benefits?
2. **48:1-22.** What is the blind and bedridden Jacob doing in this chapter? What is its significance for Joseph's sons? What blessing is given to Ephraim, the youngest?
 3. **48:5.** How did Reuben and Simeon disqualify themselves from receiving the blessing of the first-born? Who takes their places?
 4. **48:22.** What is the Hebrew wordplay on the term translated "mountain slope"? Where is the city of Shechem located? What is its connection with Joseph?

For application

1. **48:1-2.** When notified that a parent is dying, children will often rush to be present before death occurs, even if the parent is not conscious. What are some of the reasons why they might feel compelled to come? What religious motives might prompt them, even if they are not religious themselves?
2. **48:3-4.** Jacob reminds Joseph of God's covenant promises to him. What makes the last words of a dying person important to those left behind? What are the reported or actual last words of people you have known or read about that have impressed you the most? What makes them memorable?
3. **48:15-16.** Jacob's blessing seems to pass on to Ephraim and Manasseh the blessings he has received from God. If you had a blessing to pass on to loved ones, what would it be?

Chapter 49

For understanding

1. **49:1-27.** What sort of benedictions are the blessings that Jacob gives his sons? How are they grouped? How are the blessings given to Judah and Joseph different from the others?
2. **49:5-7.** What does Jacob have to say about Simeon and Levi? What does the oracle foresee about their tribes?
3. **49:8-12.** What is the destiny of the tribe of Judah? How is Judah portrayed? Where else in the OT do allusions to this blessing appear?
4. **49:10.** Who fulfills the oracle of an international ruler from the line of Judah? When does its ultimate fulfillment come?
5. **49:11.** What is the "blood of grapes"? What idea does it convey? Allegorically, to what do the wine stains point?
6. **49:24.** What do the two titles for Yahweh celebrate?

For application

1. **49:3-27.** The attitude of parents toward their children can indicate for good or ill the kinds of persons their children will become. In what ways have the attitudes of your parents determined the course of your life so far? Have you consciously or unconsciously resisted your parents' expectations for your life? If you are a parent, have you passed on such attitudes to your children?
2. **49:9.** Jesus is described in Rev 5:5 as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. What leonine traits does Jesus have? How is this an apt description of him?
3. **49:11.** Read the note for this verse. What connection do you see between the expression "blood of the grape" and the cup of the Eucharist?

Chapter 50

For understanding

1. **50:2.** What was Egyptian embalming? What did the process involve?
2. **50:10.** What was a threshing floor? To what direction does "beyond the Jordan" refer?
3. **50:25.** When was Joseph's request to carry his bones out of Egypt fulfilled? Where did the Israelites bury them?

For application

1. **50:7-13.** Aside from burying a deceased person, what is the purpose of a funeral? Why does the funeral liturgy of the Church include such elements as draping the casket with a pall, incensing it, and sprinkling holy water on it?
2. **50:20-21.** Read carefully Joseph's reply to his brothers' plea for forgiveness. What does he say about his brothers' transgression? In what way might his reply serve as a model of true forgiveness?
3. **50:24-25.** In the OT, the prediction of a "visitation" by God may be either a promise or a threat, depending on the circumstances. Which is Joseph predicting? Have you personally experienced such a "visit" by God? How would you characterize the experience?

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

THE OLD TESTAMENT (OT)

Gen	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deut	Deuteronomy
Josh	Joshua
Judg	Judges
Ruth	Ruth
1 Sam	1 Samuel
2 Sam	2 Samuel
1 Kings	1 Kings
2 Kings	2 Kings
1 Chron	1 Chronicles
2 Chron	2 Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Tob	Tobit
Jud	Judith
Esther	Esther
Job	Job
Ps	Psalms
Prov	Proverbs
Eccles	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Solomon
Wis	Wisdom
Sir	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Bar	Baruch
Ezek	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obad	Obadiah
Jon	Jonah
Mie	Micah
Nahum	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zeph	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zech	Zechariah
Mai	Malachi
1 Mac	1 Maccabees
2 Mac	2 Maccabees

THE NEW TESTAMENT (NT)

Mt	Matthew
Mk	Mark
Lk	Luke
Jn	John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Romans
1 Cor	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	2 Corinthians
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 Thess	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	1 Timothy
2 Tim	2 Timothy
Tit	Titus
Philem	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Pet	2 Peter
1 Jn	1 John
2 Jn	2 John
3 Jn	3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation (Apocalypse)

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