

GENESIS

NAME

Jewish tradition calls the first book of the Bible after its first significant word, *Bereshit*, which can be translated as “in the beginning” or “when first.” It was common in the ancient world to name a book after its first word(s); for example, the great Mesopotamian epic of creation, *Enuma Elish*, gets its name from its first words, which mean “When on high.” *Bereshit* also highlights the character of the book as the beginning of the Bible.

Christian tradition takes its name for the first book of the Bible, “Genesis,” from the old Greek translation of the Torah, the Septuagint. *Genesis* in Greek means “origin” or “birth,” and it appears in labels throughout the Greek translation of book, starting with two labels that refer to a “book of origins/births” (2.4 and 5.1 in the Septuagint). This name highlights an important dimension of the book of Genesis: its focus on genealogical origins. Though Genesis contains some of the most powerful narratives in the Bible, these stories occur within a genealogical structure, starting with 2.4 and ending with 37.2. Within this framework, the book may be understood as an expanded genealogy of the “children of Israel” who will be the focus of attention in the book of Exodus and subsequent books.

CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

The book of Genesis, along with the rest of the Pentateuch/Torah, is one of the most central parts of both the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Old Testament. Every ordering of the Bible places it first, and as such it sets the stage for what follows. Jews have long revered Genesis as the first book in the Torah, the most authoritative part of the Hebrew Bible. Christians have paid particular attention to Genesis because of its focus on God’s work with humanity prior to the giving of the law. When Islam arose, it too featured a prominent focus on traditions from Genesis, such as the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Ishmael, and Joseph. As a result, three major religious traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all lay claim to the characters and stories of Genesis, each with their distinct understanding of the meaning of this important book of beginnings.

AUTHORSHIP

Ancient manuscripts of Genesis lack any claim of authorship. In the ancient Near East, most literary compositions were anonymous. Only during the Greco-Roman period do we start to see statements in early Jewish texts that Moses wrote Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. By this time Judaism had been influenced by Greek culture, where authorship was important and the writings of Homer enjoyed the highest prestige. In response, the Jewish authors of texts such as *Jubilees* (second century BCE) claimed that their Pentateuch had an ancient author as well—Moses. This identification of authorship made some sense since the four books of the Pentateuch that follow Genesis all are set during the lifetime of Moses, and Moses is by far the most prominent human character in the Pentateuch. In addition, verses such as Deut 4.44, “This is the law [Heb *torah*] that Moses set before the Israelites,” were understood by later tradition as attributing the authorship of the entire Pentateuch to Moses.

Nevertheless, careful readers of the Bible realized in subsequent centuries that there were problems with this claim of authorship by Moses. Some verses in Genesis refer to events after the time of Moses, such as when the Canaanites were no longer in the land (12.6). In addition, a few rabbis wondered how Moses would have written a narrative about his own death and burial (Deut 34). To be sure, interpreters who have made it an article of faith to affirm Moses’ authorship of the Pentateuch have found ways to explain these and other problems. These discussions, however, highlight ways that Genesis and other books of the Pentateuch do not seem to have been written originally in the voice of Moses. Like other ancient texts, it was originally anonymous, and only attributed to Moses in the context of later, author-oriented cultures.

DATES OF COMPOSITION, HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, AND LITERARY HISTORY

Two hundred and fifty years of historical scholarship on Genesis have established that Genesis was written over many centuries, using oral and written traditions. “In the beginning,” so to speak, were oral traditions, since

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Genesis was composed in a largely oral culture. We can see marks of that oral culture in the way similar stories about wife endangerment, wells, and oaths were attached to different patriarchs; compare, for example, stories about Abraham in Philistia in 20.1–18; 21.22–34 with stories about Isaac in the same location in 26.6–33. Indeed, these sorts of oral traditions about beginnings were important at every stage in the composition of Genesis.

Most scholars agree that the texts now found in Genesis began to be written down sometime after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel in the tenth century BCE. Building on German scholarship from the nineteenth century, many scholars think they can find (fragments of) two early sources in Genesis, a tenth-century BCE Yahwistic source (“J” for German “Jahwist”) written in Judah during the reign of David or Solomon, and an Elohist source (“E”) written in the Northern Kingdom of Israel sometime during the eighth century BCE. Much recent scholarship, however, has doubted the existence of such sources and preferred to see the earliest written origins of Genesis in separate compositions, such as a Yahwistic primeval history covering the creation and flood, an originally Northern Israelite narrative about Jacob and Joseph, and a separate Moses story. In either case, the earliest works now embedded in Genesis were products of scribes working in the context of the monarchies of early Judah and Israel.

Many important parts of Genesis, however, were not written until after the monarchy had fallen in 586 BCE and Judean leaders were living in exile in Babylon. According to many scholars, this is the time when the Abraham narrative was written, and the theme of the promise of the land and much progeny was added to earlier stories about Jacob and Joseph. Through such new compositions and additions, former royal scribes adapted earlier writings about creation and ancestors to reassure the exiles of God's intent to bless them as God once blessed their ancestors. Moreover, they used this theme of promise to link earlier separate stories to each other and to the Moses story that followed. Alongside these scribal adaptations, a priestly group of authors wrote a parallel version of many stories in Genesis, starting with the seven-day creation account in 1.1–2.3 and the genealogy in ch 5, continuing with a priestly version of the flood story, and moving on from God's covenant of circumcision with Abraham (ch 17) to short stories about the inheritance of this covenant promise by his descendants. This layer of texts in Genesis, parallel to the non-Priestly texts, is called “P” for “Priestly source,” because of its strong links to other Pentateuchal texts in Exodus–Numbers that focus on the priesthood of Aaron and sacrificial worship. For example, in structure and vocabulary, the seven-day creation account in 1.1–2.3 anticipates the story of the creation of the Priestly tabernacle at the end of the book of Exodus (Ex 35–40).

The last major stage in the composition of Genesis was the combination of the older non-Priestly writings about creation–flood and ancestors with their priestly counterparts. This probably happened during the postexilic period, when exiles such as Nehemiah and Ezra had returned and were rebuilding Jerusalem and its Temple. The consolidation of parallel traditions now in Genesis (and the rest of the Pentateuch) resulted in a common Torah around which the community could unite. This consolidation, however, also produced powerful contrasts in Genesis that can be seen by the attentive reader, such as between the seven-day creation in 1.1–2.3 (P) and the earlier non-Priestly story of creation and aftermath in 2.4–3.24, or between a version of the flood culminating in Noah's sacrifice (e.g., 7.1–5 and 8.20–22) and a Priestly version of the flood that lacks such a sacrifice and does not describe the provision of extra animals for it (e.g., 6.11–22 and 9.1–17). The contrasts are so clear that historical scholars already started to distinguish between the Priestly layer and the other parts of Genesis almost three hundred years ago, and the specifics of this distinction of P and non-P throughout the Pentateuch has remained an assured result of historical scholarship.

In sum, we do not know many of the details of the earliest composition of Genesis, and the oral stories that stand behind the book are lost. Nevertheless, we do know that the book was written over centuries by multiple authors, and we have a more specific and assured picture of the final stages of its composition. This picture highlights the way Genesis is not limited to just one situation or set of perspectives. Instead, it is a chorus of different voices, a distillate of ancient Israel's experiences with God over the centuries, written in the form of continually adapted stories about beginnings.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

There are two main sections in Genesis, the primeval history in chs 1–11 and the ancestral history in chs 12–50. The latter section is often divided into the story of Abraham and Sarah (chs 12–25), the story of Jacob and Esau (chs 26–36), and the story of Joseph and his brothers (chs 37–50). Notably, despite the male focus of headings

like this and in the book itself, it is matriarchs of ancient Israel, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, who often play a determinative role in the Genesis narratives of birth and the fulfillment of God's promise.

The primeval history has two major sections that parallel each other: (1) the creation of the cosmos and stories of the first humans (1.1–6.4); and (2) the flood and dispersal of post-flood humanity (6.5–11.9). It features universal traditions similar to myths in other cultures, particularly in the ancient Near East and Greece. For example, the Mesopotamian Atrahasis epic was written hundreds of years before chs 1–11, yet it parallels numerous particulars of the biblical narrative as it describes the creation of the world, a flood, and the vow of the gods (here plural) not to destroy life with a flood again.

The ancestral history picks up where the primeval history left off and tells the story of God's choice of Abraham and the transmission of the promise (12.1–3) through Isaac and Jacob (whose name is changed to Israel in 32.28; 35.10), down to Jacob's twelve sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. These stories are closest to oral folklore, so it is often difficult to find ancient written parallels to chs 12–50. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has found similarities between Israelite tales about the matriarchs and patriarchs and modern legends told in oral cultures. For example, there are some striking parallels between the depiction of the clever deceptions of Jacob and others (e.g., 25.27–34; 27.1–45) and the celebration of wily "tricksters" in Native American and other traditions.

These different parts of Genesis are brought together through the framework of *toledot* ("generations" or "descendants") headings (originally from the Priestly source), each of which guides the reader to the major focus of the section that follows it (2.4; 5.1; 6.9; 10.1; 11.10; 11.27; 25.12; 25.19; 36.1,9; 37.2). After an initial focus on all the peoples of the world descending from Adam (5.1) and Noah (6.9; 10.1), they highlight a narrowing focus in Genesis on those who receive the divine promise. The headings first lead us to Abraham, the first to receive God's promise (11.10,27). Then they distinguish between descendants of Abraham who receive the promise (Isaac and Jacob/Israel) and those who do not (Ishmael and Esau).

Using these kinds of guides, we can outline Genesis as follows:

I. The primeval history	1.1–11.26
A. Creation and violence before the flood	1.1–6.4
B. Re-creation through flood and multiplication of humanity	6.5–11.26
II. The ancestral history	11.27–50.26
A. Gift of the divine promise to Abraham and his descendants	11.27–25.11
B. The divergent destinies of the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac (Jacob/Esau)	25.12–35.29
C. The divergent destinies of the descendants of Esau and Jacob/Israel	36.1–50.26

By the end of the book, the lens of the narrative camera has moved from a wide-angle overview of all the peoples of the world to a narrow focus on one small group, the sons of Jacob (also named "Israel"). As the book concludes, this family is stuck together in Egypt because of famine in their homeland, but they all are heirs of the promise of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This family of promise will become the people of promise featured at the outset of the book of Exodus.

INTERPRETATION

The history of interpretation of Genesis begins with its gradual composition over centuries. Early monarchic scribes reinterpreted oral traditions in writing the first preexilic compositions behind Genesis. Later exilic scribes expanded and joined earlier compositions in the process of addressing an audience of Judeans exiled in Babylon. Priests (exilic or postexilic) wrote their own versions of the beginnings of Israel, "P." Later postexilic writers consolidated the non-Priestly and Priestly writings into a common Torah that was the foundation for later Judaism. Each of these stages involved interpretation of how earlier writings pertained to the present. Genesis as we have it now is a crystallization of these multiple interpretations.

As discussed, the book has continued to be centrally important to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It was a major focus of early Jewish writings from the fifth century BCE to the first century CE. Later Jewish rabbinic scholars built on these traditions, writing midrashic interpretations of Genesis and expansive Aramaic translations of the book. Some of these Jewish traditions adapted the stories of Genesis so that they linked better with Torah law. For example, already in the book of Jubilees (written in the second century BCE), Abraham was portrayed as the first monotheist, destroying his father's idols before departing for the promised land. More-

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over, the story of Abraham's virtual sacrifice of Isaac (22.1–19), termed the "Akedah" (the "binding") in Jewish tradition, was adapted by some readers into an account of how Isaac actually was sacrificed by Abraham and resurrected by God—anticipating later Jewish suffering and hopes for redemption.

Christian communities likewise focused on the stories of Genesis. For example, Paul, the central figure behind the outreach of Christians to Gentiles, argued that Abraham was an important example of how grace, through faith, came before the giving of the law. In his letter to the Romans (4.1–15) he notes that Abraham had his faith "reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen 15.6) before he had undergone circumcision (Gen 17). Based on this and other arguments, Paul argued that Gentiles did not have to fulfill Torah requirements such as circumcision in order to partake of God's promise, as long as they joined themselves to Jesus Christ, whom Paul affirmed as the true spiritual offspring and heir of Abraham. Thus, whereas earlier and later Jewish interpreters tended to stress Abraham's and other patriarchs' Torah obedience, Paul, himself also a Jew, reinterpreted Abraham apart from Torah obedience in order to create a place for non-Jews to have a full relationship with the God of Israel.

Stories originating from Genesis also play a prominent role in Islam. Building on older Jewish traditions about Abraham destroying his father's idols, the Koran and other Muslim traditions revere Abraham as one of the first monotheists. Yet within Islam, Ishmael and not Isaac is the most important of his sons. It is Ishmael and not Isaac whom Abraham almost sacrifices (cf. Gen 22) according to Islamic tradition. Moreover, after that, Islamic tradition holds that Abraham and Ishmael went on to find and rebuild the Kaaba shrine at Mecca, Islam's most holy site. In this way, stories from Genesis are linked to two of the five central pillars of Islam: monotheism and pilgrimage.

In the modern era, Genesis has been an important battleground as communities have worked to live out ancient faiths in a modern world. For example, much discussion of Genesis, at least among Christians in the West, has focused on whether the stories of Genesis are historically true. Astronomers, biologists, and other scientists have offered accounts of the origins of the cosmos and humanity different from those in Gen 1–2. Some believers, however, insist on the importance of affirming the historical accuracy of every part of Genesis, and have come to see such belief as a defining characteristic of what it means to be truly faithful. This definition is relatively new: the historicity of Genesis was not a significant concern prior to the rise of modern science and the historical method; in fact, in premodern times, the stories of Genesis were often read metaphorically or allegorically. Moreover, many would argue that an ancient document such as Genesis is not ideally treated as scientific treatise or a modern-style historical source. Instead, its rich store of narratives offer nonscientific, narrative, and poetic perspectives on values and the meaning of the cosmos that pertain to other dimensions of human life.

Finally, recent years have seen a proliferation of other approaches to Genesis, particularly literary studies of Genesis in its final form and feminist rereadings of many narratives in Genesis. For example, some feminist scholars have questioned whether the typical reading of the garden of Eden story, which is highly critical of women, is correct. Others have highlighted the crucial role of the matriarchs as actors in the Genesis drama, especially as determiners of which son of a given patriarch will inherit the promise (e.g., Sarah and Rebekah) or as influencers of the levels of privilege among brothers (e.g., Rachel). Reading from another perspective, African American interpreters have traced the misuse of the story of Ham to reinforce racism and slavery, and a wide variety of interpreters have called into question the traditional interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as a judgment on homosexuality. In these ways and many others, an ever more diverse range of interpreters of the Bible have offered new perspectives on a text centrally important to readers for many centuries.

GUIDE TO READING

Many who have resolved to read the whole Bible actually have made it through Genesis, but what they find often surprises them. Those who know the stories of Genesis through the lens of later interpretation often assume that the characters in the book are saints. A closer reading reveals otherwise. The supposedly "faithful" Abraham often seems doubtful of God's intent to protect and provide for him, and Jacob and his family are distinguished by their ability to survive in the world through bargaining and trickery. Such stories pose a challenge to those who would use the Bible as a source of role models for ethical behavior. Standing at the Bible's outset, they challenge readers to develop other models for understanding and appreciating this ancient text.

Genesis has been a major focus for literary approaches to the Bible. These approaches adopt techniques from study of contemporary literature to illuminate the artistry and poetics of the Bible. The story of Joseph

and his brothers is a particularly constructive place to explore this kind of approach. Note how the narrator subtly leads the reader through an arc extending from Joseph's initial dreams of rule of his brothers in ch 37 to their submission to him and his provision of food for them in chs 42–50. Along the way, the speeches of Joseph and his brothers often do not correspond precisely to the reality described by the narrator, and the divergences reveal much about their characters. For example, Joseph's brothers trick their father about Joseph being killed (37.31–35), but their failure to report that their money was back in their sacks (42.25–34) is found out by Jacob, who guesses that they were planning to take Benjamin from him (42.35–38) as they actually took Joseph. Later, Joseph puts his brothers in a position where they can save themselves from slavery by betraying Benjamin, Joseph's full brother, as they once betrayed Joseph himself (44.1–17). Only when Judah, who formerly initiated the sale of Joseph into slavery (37.26–28), offers himself in place of Benjamin (44.18–34) does Joseph break down and reveal his true identity to his brothers (45.1–15). In this way the Joseph story artfully describes the first movement in Genesis from the urge toward fratricide (cf. 4.1–16; 27.41–45; see 33.12–17n.) to full reunion. Reading the Joseph story for such turns and characterizations can be an excellent introduction to the elegance of biblical narrative more generally.

Finally, one strategy in reading Genesis is to observe the differences between some of the writings embedded in it. The reader can compare parallel stories in Genesis, such as the different stories of creation in 1.1–2.3 and 2.4–3.24 or the parallel and yet different accounts about Hagar (chs 16 and 21), the covenant with Abraham (chs 15 and 17), or Abraham and Sarah (12.10–20 and 20.1–18), or Abraham, Abimelech, and Isaac (20.1–18; 21.22–34 and 26.6–33). Comparing these different accounts helps uncover the distinct perspectives of each and their contribution to the book of Genesis as a whole.

David M. Carr

1 In the beginning when God created^a the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^b swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there 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

^a Or when God began to create or *In the beginning God created*

^b Or while the spirit of God or while a mighty wind

1.1–11.26: The primeval history: from creation to the birth of Abraham. This unit is composed of two principal layers, a Priestly source that also provides an editorial framework (1.1–2.3; 5.1–28,30–32; 6.9–22; 7.6,11,13–16a,18–21,24; 8.1–2a,3–5,14–19; 9.1–17; 10.10–27), and an earlier non-Priestly primeval history that uses the divine name Yahweh (represented as Lord in the translation) found in the rest of 2.4–11.9. As seen in the chart on correspondences spanning the primeval history (see p. 13), the present combined text is an intricate narrative, with echoes of creation and un-creation, struggles surrounding human god-likeness, and other themes.

1.1–2.3: Creation culminating in sabbath. This Priestly account of creation presents God as a king, creating the universe by decree in six days and resting on the seventh. **1.1:** Scholars differ on whether this verse is to be translated as an independent sentence summarizing what follows (e.g., “In the beginning God created”) or as a temporal phrase describing what things were like when God started (e.g., “When God began to create . . . the earth was a formless void”; cf. 2.4–6). In either case, the text does not describe creation out of nothing (contrast 2 Macc 7.28). Instead, the story emphasizes how God creates order from a watery chaos. **2:** As elsewhere in the Bible, *the deep* (Heb “tehom”) has no definite article attached to it in Hebrew. Some scholars understand “tehom” to be related to the Babylonian goddess Tiamat, a deity representing primeval oceanic chaos, whom the head god, Marduk, defeated in *Enuma Elish*, a major Babylonian myth that includes an account of creation. Christian interpreters have often seen the “Spirit” of the Trinity later in this verse. *Wind* fits the ancient context better (see 8.1). **3:** The first of eight acts of creation through decree. Like a divine king God pronounces his will and it is accomplished. **4–5:** These verses introduce two other themes crucial to this account: the goodness of creation and the idea that creation is accomplished through God's separating, ordering, and naming elements of the universe. The seven-day scheme of 1.1–2.3 requires the creation of light, day, and night at the outset.

evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years,” ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day

and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky 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, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² 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, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind^a in our image, according to our likeness;

^a Heb *adam*

6–8: The *dome/Sky* made on the second day separates an upper ocean (Ps 148.4; see Gen 7.11) from a lower one. This creates a space in which subsequent creation can take place. **9–13:** Two creative acts: creation of dry land and command that the land bring forth vegetation. *Earth* is a feminine noun in Heb. The text thus echoes other ancient mythologies and the life cycle in having a feminine earth bring forth the first life in the universe (cf. Job 1.21). God is involved only indirectly here, commanding the earth to *put forth*. **14–19:** There is a correspondence between days one to three and days four to six (1 || 4, 2 || 5, 3 || 6), which heightens the symmetry and order of God’s creation. Here, God’s creation of heavenly *lights* on the fourth day corresponds to creation of light, day, and night on the first. In a critical response to non-Israelite cultures who worshiped these heavenly bodies, the bodies are not named and are identified as mere timekeepers. **20–23:** See vv. 14–19n. The second day featured the dome separating upper and lower oceans; the corresponding fifth day features the creation of birds to fly *across the dome* and ocean creatures, including sea monsters (Ps 104.25–26)—this is probably a polemic against other ancient Israelite traditions, which suggested that the sea monsters rebelled against God (e.g., Isa 51.9). God’s blessing of the swarming creatures (1.22) anticipates a similar blessing that God will give humanity (1.28). **24–30:** The third day described creation of land and plants in turn, the corresponding sixth day involves the creation of two types of plant-eating land-dwellers: animals and then humans. **24–25:** Again, earth is involved in bringing forth life (see 1.9–13n.). **26:** The plural *us, our* (3.22; 11.7) probably refers to the divine beings who compose God’s heavenly court (1 Kings 22.19; Job 1.6). *Image, likeness* is often interpreted to be a spiritual likeness between God and humanity. Another view is that this text builds on ancient concepts of the king physically resembling the god and thus bearing a bodily stamp of his authority to rule. Here this idea is democratized, as all of humanity appears godlike. This appearance equips humans for godlike rule over the fish, birds,

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 wild animals of the earth,^a and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind^b in his image,
in the image of God he created them,^c
male and female he created them.

²⁸ 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 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all 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 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

and animals. **27–28:** The text stresses the creation of humanity as simultaneously male and female. This leads to the emphasis in the blessing of v. 28 and the book of Genesis as a whole on the multiplication of humanity in general (6.1; 9.1–7) and Israel in particular (17.2–6; 47.27). **29–30:** The text envisions an ancient mythological time before violence disturbs God’s perfect order (cf. 6.11). **31:** Where individual elements of creation were “good” (vv. 4,10, etc.), the whole is *very good*, perfectly corresponding to God’s intention. **2.1–3:** This day is the climax to which the whole seven-day scheme has led. God does not command the sabbath, but does rest (Heb “shabat”) on the seventh day and bless it, weaving the seven-day rhythm into creation. The establishment of institutions is found in other ancient creation stories as well.

2.4a: Although many scholars view this as the conclusion to the Priestly creation account, it is probably a separate introduction to the following material, as elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 5.1; 6.9; 10.1).

CORRESPONDENCES SPANNING THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY

Creation (1.1–2.3)

Crime and punishment with <i>eating of fruit</i> (2.4–3.24)	Crime and punishment with <i>brother conflict</i> (4.1–16)
Prevention of godlike immortality (3.23–24)	Origins of cultures (4.17–24 origins of peoples, ch 10)
Flood: un-creation and re-creation (6.5–9.17)	
Spreading of peoples (10.1–11.9) as part of divine prevention of people gaining godlike power (11.1–9)	<i>Brother separation</i> : subjugation of a people (9.20–27) as a result of the first drinking of wine

2.4b–25: Creation in a garden. This non-Priestly Yahwistic tradition is different from 1.1–2.3, as evidenced by the different style and order of events. Though distinct from the Priestly account of 1.1–2.3, it nevertheless reflects ancient temple imagery. **4b–6:** A description of how things were prior to creation (cf. 1.1–2) is common in ancient Near Eastern creation stories. **7:** The wordplay on Heb “adam” (human being; here translated “man” [cf. 1.26]) and “adamah” (arable land; here *ground*) introduces a motif characteristic of this tradition: the relation of humankind to the soil from which it was *formed*. Human nature is not a duality of body and soul; rather

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

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

In the day that the LORD^d 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 one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the

^a Syr: Heb *and over all the earth*

^b Heb *adam*

^c Heb *him*

^d Heb YHWH, as in other places where “LORD” is spelled with capital letters (see also Exod 3.14–15 with notes).

ground,^a and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for 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 flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches.¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;¹⁷ but 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 as his partner.”¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal 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.²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man^b there was not found a helper as his partner.²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.²³ Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,^c
for out of Man^d this one was taken.”

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they be-

^a Or formed a man (Heb *adam*) of dust from the ground (Heb *adamah*)

^b Or for Adam

^c Heb *ishshah*

^d Heb *ish*

God's *breath* animates the *dust* and it becomes a single *living being* (Ps 104.29; Job 34.14–15). **8–9:** *Eden* means “delight.” This divine garden recalls the “garden of God/the LORD” mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (13.10; Ezek 28.13–16; 31.8–9; Isa 51.3; Joel 2.3); such sacred gardens are known in other ancient Near Eastern temple traditions. In addition, ancient Near Eastern art and texts feature a prominent focus on trees, often associated with feminine powers of fertility. Usually such trees symbolize life, as in the *tree of life* here (3.22; see Prov 3.18; Rev 22.2,14,19). But this story focuses more on the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, symbolizing wisdom (2 Sam 14.17; 1 Kings 3.9). See further 12.6–8n. **10–14:** This section, along with the preceding one describing the “stream” rising up to water the ground (2.6), may draw on the ancient tradition that a temple is built on a primal mountain of creation from which the waters of the earth flow. The rivers mentioned here combine world rivers like the *Tigris* and *Euphrates* (both in Mesopotamia) with the local *Gihon* that flowed from Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Ps 46.4; Isa 7.6; Zech 14.8), although *Cush* is generally either Ethiopia or in Arabia. *Pishon* is unknown; *Havilah* is probably in Arabia. **16–17:** The speech concludes with a legal prohibition using technical Priestly death-penalty language (e.g., Lev 20.9,11,12). **18–20:** Animals are created after the first human rather than before (cf. 1.24–25). The human's naming of the animals implies a dominion over them analogous to that seen in 1.26–28. Yet the LORD God here contrasts with the all-powerful deity depicted in ch 1. The LORD God creates the animals in a comical, failed attempt to make a *helper* for the human that “corresponds to him” (NRSV: *as his partner*). **21–23:** Just as the connection of humanity to the ground is affirmed in the making of the first human (Heb “*adam*”) from earthy “*humus*” (“*adamah*”) (2.7), so also the connection of men and women is affirmed here through the crowning event of creation: the making of the woman from a part of the man (2.21–22). The man affirms this connection in a jubilant poem (2.23) featuring a wordplay on “man” (Heb “*ish*”) and “woman” (“*ishshah*”). This concluding song of praise of the woman corresponds to God's concluding affirmation of all of creation as “very good” in 1.31. **24–25:** Sex between a *man* and *his wife* is regarded here as reflecting the essence

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

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die;⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^a knowing good and evil.”⁶ So 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, who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the LORD

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

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

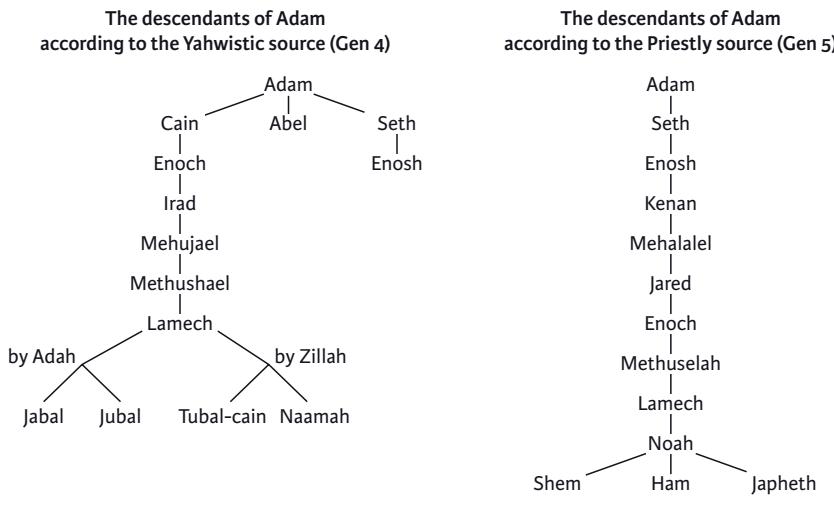
¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶ To the woman he said,
“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;

^a Or gods

of the connection God created between men and women. The unashamed nakedness of the man and woman indicates their still uncivilized and innocent status.

3.1–24: Garden disobedience and punishment. Though this story is often taken by Christians as an account of “original sin,” the word “sin” never occurs in it. Instead, it describes how the maturing of humans into civilized life involved damage of connections established in 2.4–25 between the Lord God, man, woman, and earth. **1:** This characterization of the snake emphasizes his wise craftiness (Heb “arum”), a characteristic that contrasts with the innocent nakedness (“arum”) of the man and woman. Snakes were a symbol in the ancient world of wisdom, fertility, and immortality. Only later was the snake in this story seen by interpreters as the devil (see Wis 2.24). **4–5:** The snake introduces doubt by rightly predicting the consequences of eating the fruit—the humans will not be put to death as implied in the language of 2.17 and their eyes will be *opened* (see v. 7) so they gain wisdom, *knowing good and evil*. **6–7:** The woman sees that the pleasant fruit of the tree is desirable *to make one wise*; she eats it and shares it with her husband. The result is enlightenment: *the eyes of both were opened*. Such wisdom takes them from the earlier unashamed nakedness (2.25) to clothing, a mark of civilization. **8–13:** Legal forms recur as the Lord God interrogates first the man and then the woman (see 2.16–17n.). The disintegration of earlier connectedness is shown by the hiding of the humans from the Lord God and the tendency of the man to blame the woman (and implicitly the Lord God) for his action. Later interpreters of the story have shown a similar tendency to blame the woman (e.g., Sir 25.24; 1 Tim 2.14). **14–19:** A proclamation of sentence or penalty follows the interrogation, starting with the snake and concluding with the man. **14–15:** Here the crawl of the snake is linked to the Lord God’s punishing curse. As a result, later audiences can look to the crawling snake as a reminder of the story and testimony to its truth. **16–19:** Though this is often understood as a curse of the woman to pain in childbirth, the word “curse” is not used in these verses. Another interpretation is that the woman is sentenced to endless “toil” (not *pain*) of reproduction, much as the man is condemned in vv. 17–19 to endless toil in food production. The man’s *rule* over the woman here is a tragic reflection of the disintegration of



in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷ And to the man^a he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of
your wife,
and have eaten of the tree
about 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;
¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth
for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the
field.
¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve,^b because
she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the
LORD God made garments of skins for the
man^c and for his wife, and clothed them.

²² Then the LORD God said, “See, the man
has become like one of us, knowing good and
evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and
take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live
forever”—²³ therefore the LORD God sent him
forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground
from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the
man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he
placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and
turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and
she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I
have produced^d a man with the help of the

^a Or to Adam

^b In Heb *Eve* resembles the word for *living*

^c Or *for Adam*

^d The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Cain*

original connectedness between them. ²¹ The LORD God’s clothing of the humans here reflects care for them in the process of becoming civilized, even though that process involved disobedience. ²² As elsewhere in the ancient Near East, humans here are depicted as having a brief opportunity for immortality. The LORD God’s fear of humans becoming godlike (cf. 1.26–27) recalls the snake’s assertions in 3.4–5. The term “us” probably refers to the heavenly court (see 1.26n.). ²⁴ Cf. Ezek 28.13–16. The last echoes of temple imagery (see 2.8–9n.; 2.20–11n.) occur here. *The cherubim* are composite, winged creatures like the Sphinx of Egypt, half human and half lion. Representations of them guarded sanctuaries like the one in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6.23–28,32,35). The gate to the garden of Eden is in the east, like the processional gate to the Temple (Ezek 10.19).

4.1–16: Cain and Abel. While 2.4–3.24 featured relations between men and women, 4.1–16 turns to relations between brothers, paralleling 3.1–24 in many respects. **1:** This first verse emphasizes the wonder of creative

LORD.”² Next 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 for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, 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?⁷ If 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 his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.”^a 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 your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”¹⁰ And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out 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 will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!¹⁴ Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on

the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.”¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Not so!^b Whoever kills Cain will suffer a seven-fold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,^c east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech.¹⁹ Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock.²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe.²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

^a Sam Gk Syr Compare Vg: MT lacks *Let us go out to the field*

^b Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Therefore*

^c That is *Wandering*

power in the first birth of a child. The child’s name, “Cain,” derives from a Hebrew word for create, “qanah.” Ancient Israelites may have associated this Cain with the Kenite tribe (Num 24.21–22). **2:** The name “Abel” is the same word translated as “vanity” (or “emptiness”) in the book of Ecclesiastes. His name anticipates his destiny. The distinction between Cain and Abel’s occupations implies a further step toward culture. **3–5:** The story does not explain why the LORD *had regard for Abel and his offering* but not for *Cain and his offering*. Instead, it focuses on Cain’s reaction to this unexplained divine preference for the sacrifice of his younger brother. **6–7:** This is the first mention of *sin* in the Bible. It is depicted as a predatory animal, *lurking at the door*. **10–11:** Blood is sacred, for it is the seat of life (9.4; Deut 12.23), and blood of unpunished murders pollutes the ground (Num 35.30–34). **13–14:** The importance of arable ground in these chapters can be seen in Cain’s conclusion that expulsion from the *soil* means being *hidden* from the LORD’s *face*. **16:** See 11.1–9n.

4.17–26: First overview of generations from creation to flood. Though the order of the names is different, most of them are variants of those in 5.1–32. **17:** Cain’s marriage, along with his fear of others (4.14), presumes the presence of a broader population, indicating that the narratives about him were not originally connected with creation. **19–22:** The emphasis on civilization seen in 3.1–24 emerges again here in the depiction of the occupations of Lamech’s sons. This tradition does not anticipate a flood narrative. **23–24:** The first half of this song may once have been used to brag about the ability of Lamech and his family to avenge their honor. Placed where it is and including v. 24, it now functions to demonstrate a major consequence of the expansion of civilization: an expansion of the violence with which the family tree began (see 4.1–16). **25:** A parallel to 4.1,

²⁴If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

²⁵Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has appointed^a for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him." ²⁶To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD.

5 This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them^c in the likeness of God. ²Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind"^b when they were created.

³When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to 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 thirty years; and he died.

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

⁹When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹¹Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.

¹²When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³Kenan

lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

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

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

²¹When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²²Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²³Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. ²⁴Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

²⁵When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech. ²⁶Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died.

^a The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Seth*

^b Heb *adam*

^c Heb *him*

introducing a new line of Seth. ²⁶: This tradition locates the beginning of use of the divine name "Yahweh" (Lord) in the primeval period, in contrast to the Priestly tradition, in which the divine name is not used until the time of Moses (Ex 6.2–6).

5.1–32: Second overview of generations from creation to flood. This Priestly genealogy parallels 4.1–26, building from the P creation story (1.1–2.3) to the Priestly strand of the flood narrative. **1a:** *The list of the descendants of Adam* was evidently a separate source which the Priestly writer drew upon for this chapter and used as a model for later notices (6.9; 10.1; etc.). **1b–2:** The Priestly writer uses this reprise of 1.26–28 to bind his genealogical source (where "adam" designates a particular person) to 1.1–2.3 (where "adam" designates humanity as a whole). **3:** The divine *likeness* (v. 1; see 1.26n.) was continued in Adam's son Seth and thus transmitted to succeeding generations (9.6). **4–32:** Ancient Babylonian lists similarly survey a series of heroes before the flood, each of whom lived fantastically long times. Like those lists, the list in 5.4–32 gives extraordinary ages for pre-flood figures, with ages declining over time to the 100–200 years of Israel's ancestors. The names in this list resemble those of 4.17–26 (see 4.17–26n.). **24:** Babylonian traditions also report that some individuals—e.g., Emmeduranki (a pre-flood figure), Etana, and Adapa—were taken up into heaven by God. Later Jewish tradition

²⁸ When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son;²⁹ he named him Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.”³⁰ Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters.³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; and he died.

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

6 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them,² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.³ Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide^a in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their

hearts was only evil continually.⁶ And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.⁷ So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”⁸ But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

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

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.¹² And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.¹³ And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of cypress^a wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.¹⁵ This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

speculated at length on Enoch’s travels. **29:** This (non-Priestly) verse links the curse of the ground in 3.17–19 and viticulture, which was inaugurated by Noah (9.20).

6.1–4: Divine-human reproduction illustrates the breaching of the divine-human boundary that the LORD God feared in 3.22. There the LORD God drove humans away from the tree of life. Here, in an abbreviated narrative often attributed to the Yahwistic primeval history, the LORD God limits their life span to *one hundred twenty* years, the life span of Moses (Deut 31.2); another interpretation is that the *one hundred twenty* years refer to a reprieve from punishment for several generations. Nothing appears to happen to the *sons of God* (see the “heavenly court” in 1.26n.) who instigated it all. **4:** The products of divine-human intercourse are legendary *warriors of renown*. They are distinguished here from the *Nephilim*, a race of giants said to exist both prior to and after those times (cf. Num 13.33; Deut 2.10–11).

6.5–8.19: The great flood. This story describes God’s un-creation and re-creation of the world. The version preserved here is an interweaving of parallel accounts, one of which links with the Priestly traditions of 1.1–2.3; 5.1–32 and the other of which links with the Yahwistic primeval history in 2.4b–4.26. This type of intertwining of traditions is less usual but is necessary here to avoid describing two consecutive floods. **6.5–8:** This introduction links with the non-Priestly material, particularly 2.7 (compare 6.7). **5:** Though the biblical account is quite close in many respects to Mesopotamian flood stories, one significant difference is that this text attributes the flood to God’s judgment on *the wickedness of humankind* rather than divine frustration with human overpopulation and noise. **9–22:** This section begins the Priestly account of the flood. **11–13:** Here the Priestly writers attribute the flood to corruption of the earth and *violence* filling it (see 4.8,10,23–24). **14–16:** In the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, the hero, named Utnapishtim, is told to build a similar houseboat, sealing it with pitch. The description of a three-leveled ark may be based on an ancient idea that the ark reflects the

height thirty cubits.¹⁶ Make a roof^a for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks.¹⁷ For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die.¹⁸ But 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.¹⁹ And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.²⁰ Of 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 kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.²¹ Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.”

²² Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.² Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate;³ and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.⁴ For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

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

¹¹ In 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.¹² The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.¹³ On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark,¹⁴ they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature.¹⁵ They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life.¹⁶ And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷ The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.¹⁸ The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.¹⁹ The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered;²⁰ the

^a Or window

three-part structure of both universe and temple. It is about 437 x 73 x 44 ft (133 x 22 x 13 m). **18: Covenant**, see 9.8–17n. **19–20:** See 7.2–3n. **7.1–5:** This non-Priestly text parallels P in 6.11–22 and continues the tradition seen in 6.5–8. **2–3:** The provision of extra *clean* animals allows for the sacrifice that will occur in 8.20. If only one pair of each animal were taken, every sacrifice would eliminate a species. In contrast, the Priestly tradition presumes that both sacrifice and the distinction between clean and unclean animals (see Lev 11) were not introduced until Sinai. Therefore only one pair of each species is taken in that tradition (6.19–20; 7.14–15; cf. 7.9), and there is no concluding sacrifice (9.1–17). **6–16:** Noah, his family, and the animals enter the ark twice (7.7–9 || 7.13–16), reflecting the interweaving of the two flood accounts discussed earlier. Whereas the non-Priestly account has the flood caused by forty days of rain (7.4,12), the Priestly account attributes the flood to God's opening of the protective dome created on the second day (1.6–8), thus allowing the upper and lower oceans to meet (7.11). **17–24:** The P and non-P strands are thoroughly interwoven in this description of the flood itself, including multiple descriptions of the extinction of life outside the ark (7.21–23). Such flood imagery seems to have been a powerful image of worldwide chaos. Though many world traditions speak of floods, there is no geological

waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.²¹ And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings;²² everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.²³ He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings 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.²⁴ And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided;² the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained,³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated;⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.⁵ 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 appeared.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters

had subsided from the face of the ground;⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him.¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark;¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.¹² Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

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

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every

evidence of a global flood of the sort described here. **8.1–5:** With the exception of 8.2b–3a, this unit comes from the Priestly writer. **1–2a:** God’s wind echoes the first creation (1.2) in the process of starting the re-creation process. The closing of the *fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens* reestablishes the space for life that was first created on the second day (1.6–8). **4:** In the Gilgamesh epic the boat also rested on a mountain. **Ararat**, a region in Armenia. **6–12:** Part of the non-Priestly account. In the Gilgamesh epic the hero sent out two birds, a dove and a swallow, each of which came back; the third, a raven, did not return. **13–19:** The Priestly account resumes here with a description of the exit from the ark of Noah, his family, and the animals.

8.20–9.17: Divine commitments after the flood. This section features two accounts of God’s commitments after the flood (8.20–22 [non-P]; 9.1–17 [P]), both of which include God’s promise not to destroy life through such a flood ever again. **8.20–22:** The non-Priestly tradition describes Noah’s *burnt offerings* of clean animals (see 7.2–3n.). In the Gilgamesh epic (see 6.14–16n.; 8.4n.; 8.6–12n.) the hero offered sacrifices and “the gods smelled the pleasant fragrance” and repented of their decision to destroy humanity. Here the LORD smells the *pleasing odor* of Noah’s offering and resolves never again to curse the ground or destroy all creatures (v. 21). The LORD does this despite full recognition that the human heart has not changed (cf. 6.5–7). The final result of Noah’s sacrifice is the LORD’s promise to preserve the cycle of agricultural seasons (v. 22). A central aim of temple sacrifice in Israel and elsewhere was to preserve that cycle. The echo of that idea here is yet another way in which the “non-Priestly” primeval history reflects temple concerns (see also the focus on responses to

clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.”

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.⁴ Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.⁵ For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed;
for in his own image God made humankind.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.”

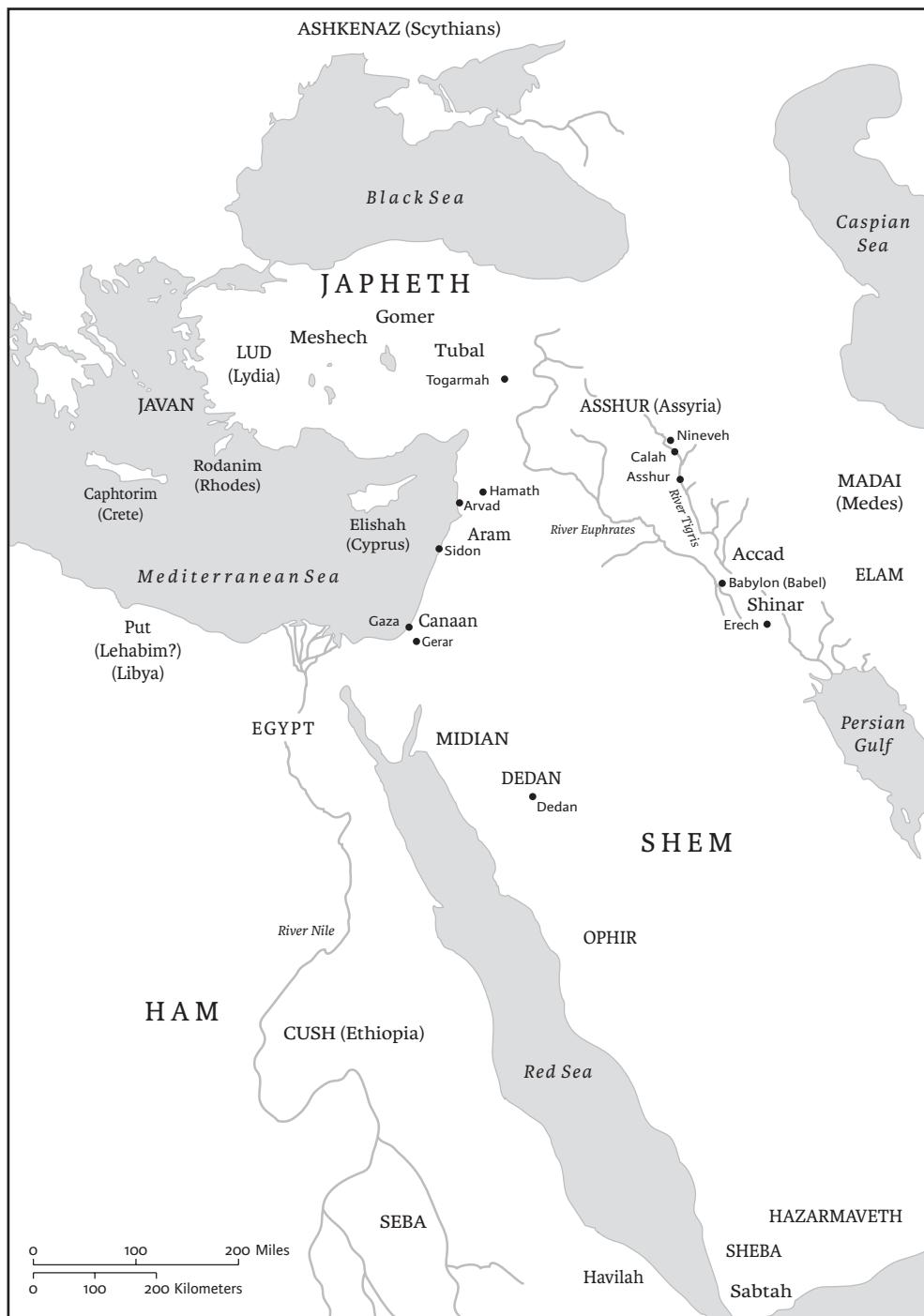
⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.^a ¹¹ I establish 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.” ¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the

^a Gk: Heb adds *every animal of the earth*

sacrifice in 4.1–8 and notes on 2.8–9, 10–14; 3.24). **9.1–17:** The Priestly tradition lacks an account of sacrifice (see 7.2–3n.). Instead it focuses on affirmations of some aspects of the creation in 1.1–31 and revisions of others. **1–7:** This section begins and ends with a reaffirmation of the fertility blessing (vv. 1,7; cf. 1.28). **2–6:** Here God revises the earlier command of vegetarianism (1.29–30). This is a partial concession to the “violence” observed prior to the flood (6.11,13) and an extension of the human dominion over creation described in 1.26–28. At the same time, God regulates this violence through stipulating that humans may not eat the blood in which life resides (see 4.10–11n.) and that humans as bearers of God's image (1.26–27) may not be killed. Since these laws are given to Noah and his sons, the ancestors of all post-flood humanity, they were used in later Jewish tradition as the basis for a set of seven Noahide laws that were seen as binding upon Gentiles as well as Jews (see Acts 15.20; 21.25; *b. San.* 58b). **8–17:** This is the first covenant explicitly described as such in the Bible, and it encompasses all of humanity, as well as the animal world (vv. 10,12,15) and even the earth (v. 13). A “covenant” is a formal agreement, often between a superior and inferior party, the former “making” or “establishing” (vv. 9,11) the bond with the latter, and the superior protecting the weaker party. This agreement is often sealed through ceremonies. In this case, God sets his weapon, the bow (Ps 7.12–13; Hab 3.9–11), in the sky facing away from humanity as a sign of God's commitment not to flood the earth again.

9.18–29: Noah and his sons. Aside from P in vv. 18–19 and 28–29, this text is part of the Yahwistic primeval history. It repeats major themes from the pre-flood period: farming (see 3.17; 5.29), nakedness, alienation in



Ch 10: The table of nations. Only places that can be identified with probability are shown.

sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ²¹ He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³ Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on 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. ²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his
brothers.”

²⁶ He also said,

“Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”

²⁷ May God make space for^a Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”

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

10 These are the descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; children were born to them after the flood.

² The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and

Tiras. ³ The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴ The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.^b ⁵ From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the descendants of Japheth^c in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations.

⁶ The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. ⁷ The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

⁸ Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” ¹⁰ The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and^d Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. ¹² Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim,¹⁴ Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Capthorim, from which the Philistines come.^d

^a Heb *yapht*, a play on *Japheth*

^b Heb MSS Sam Gk See 1 Chr 1.7: MT *Dodanim*

^c Compare verses 20, 31. Heb lacks *These are the descendants of Japheth*

^d Cn: Heb *Casluhim*, from which the Philistines come, and *Capthorim*

the family, curse, and domination. ^{22–23}: Some have speculated that Ham had sex with his father, since seeing nakedness refers to incestuous behavior in Lev 20.17. Nevertheless, a more common expression for sexual intercourse in Leviticus is “uncover nakedness” (e.g., 18.6; 20.18) or “lie with” (e.g., 20.11–12). Moreover, the description of Ham's brothers' contrasting behavior in v. 23 (*their faces were turned away*) makes clear that the problem with Ham's behavior was that he did not look away. In the ancient Near East, sons were expected to protect the honor of their father, including caring for him when he was drunk (there was no negative judgment attached to getting drunk). Ham here does the opposite, both looking upon his father naked and telling his brothers about it. Such behavior is an example of the breakdown of family relationships seen in ch 3 (see 3.8–13, 16–19n.) and ch 4 (see 4.1–16n.). ^{24–27}: Many have puzzled over why Canaan is cursed for his father, Ham's, misdeed (9.25–26). Some speculate that a story originally focusing on Canaan was modified to focus on Ham, featured in the broader context. Yet it is more likely that a later editor redirected an earlier curse on Ham toward Canaan, so that the curse could help justify the conquest of the land of Canaan (see 10.16–18a; 14.1–12, 13–16n.).

10.1–32: The table of nations. See map on p. 23 and compare with 1 Chr 1.4–23. This is a (largely Priestly) survey of the world of the Israelites. Like many ancient peoples, they depicted the relations between national groups in kinship terms. This list identifies three large spheres of nations—Japhethites, Hamites, and Shemites—that overlap precisely in the holy land of Canaan. ^{2–5}: *The descendants of Japheth* had their center in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). ^{6–20}: *The descendants of Ham* lived in the Egyptian orbit. ^{8–15}: A fragment of the non-Priestly primeval history. It features a legend regarding Nimrod's building a kingdom in *Shinar* (southern Mesopotamia) and Assyria (vv. 8–12). Canaan is the father of two sons, *Heth* (representing the Hittites originally of Asia Minor) and *Sidon* (who represents the Phoenician coastal cities). ¹⁴: See Jer 47.4; Am

¹⁵ Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,¹⁶ and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites,¹⁷ the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites,¹⁸ the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.¹⁹ And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.²⁰ These are the descendants of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

²¹ To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born.²² The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram.²³ The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.²⁴ Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber.²⁵ To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg,^a for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan.²⁶ Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,²⁷ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah,²⁸ Obal, Abimael, Sheba,²⁹ Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan.³⁰ The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar, the hill country of the east.³¹ These are the descend-

ants of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

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

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.² And as they migrated from the east,^b they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.⁴ Then 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; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built.⁶ And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech."⁸ So the LORD scattered

^a That is *Division*

^b Or *migrated eastward*

9.7. 16–18a: This survey of Canaanite peoples lists ethnic groups rather than ancestors, including the *Jebusites* (centered in Jerusalem), *Amorites* (natives of the hill country), and the *Hivites* (a group in central Palestine). The list resembles later lists of peoples displaced by Israel (e.g., 15.19–21; Deut 7:1) and may be an addition from the same hand that directed Noah's curse toward Canaan (see 9.18–27n.). **21–31:** *Shem* is the father of the Semitic peoples, including Israel. Another pair of fragments of the non-Priestly primeval history (vv. 21,24–30) focuses on the *children of Eber*. The name *Eber* may be related to "Hebrew." If so, then this text postulates a wider group of *children of Eber* of which the Israelites are a part.

11.1–9: The tower of Babel. This narrative (from the non-Priestly Yahwistic primeval history) revisits the theme of preservation of the divine-human boundary. The threat to that boundary, self-reflective speech by the LORD, and act of divine prevention all parallel 3.22–24 and 6.1–4. With 11.2 the human family completes the eastward movement begun in 3.22–24 (cf. 4.16). Yet this story will focus on a scattering of the human family into different ethnic, linguistic, and territorial groups. As such, it now gives background for the table of nations in ch 10, although it was not originally written with that in view. **2:** *Shinar*, see 10.8–15n. **4:** The humans are depicted as fearful of being scattered and thus aiming to make a name for themselves through a *tower* reaching into heaven. The humans' intention here to stay together contradicts the divine imperative to "fill the earth" now found in Priestly traditions (1.28; 9.1,7). **6:** The LORD is described here as fearing the human power that might result from ethnic and linguistic unity (see 3.22). **7:** *Let us*, see 1.26n. **8–9:** The LORD's scattering of humanity and confusing of language is the final step in creation of civilized humanity, with its multiple territorial and linguistic groups. The movement toward cultural maturity begun in ch 3 is complete. Each step toward this end has been fraught with conflict and loss. The name "Babel," interpreted here as "confusion" but originally meaning "gate of god" (cf. 28.15n.) serves as a final testimony to the ambiguous results of this process.

them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused^a the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

¹⁰These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was one hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; ¹¹and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹²When Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah; ¹³and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred three years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴When Shelah had lived thirty years, he became the father of Eber; ¹⁵and Shelah lived after the birth of Eber four hundred three years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁶When Eber had lived thirty-four years, he became the father of Peleg; ¹⁷and Eber lived after the birth of Peleg four hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁸When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Reu; ¹⁹and Peleg lived

after the birth of Reu two hundred nine years, and had other sons and daughters.

²⁰When Reu had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; ²¹and Reu lived after the birth of Serug two hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

²²When Serug had lived thirty years, he became the father of Nahor; ²³and Serug lived after the birth of Nahor two hundred years, and had other sons and daughters.

²⁴When Nahor had lived twenty-nine years, he became the father of Terah; ²⁵and Nahor lived after the birth of Terah one hundred nineteen years, and had other sons and daughters.

²⁶When Terah had lived seventy years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

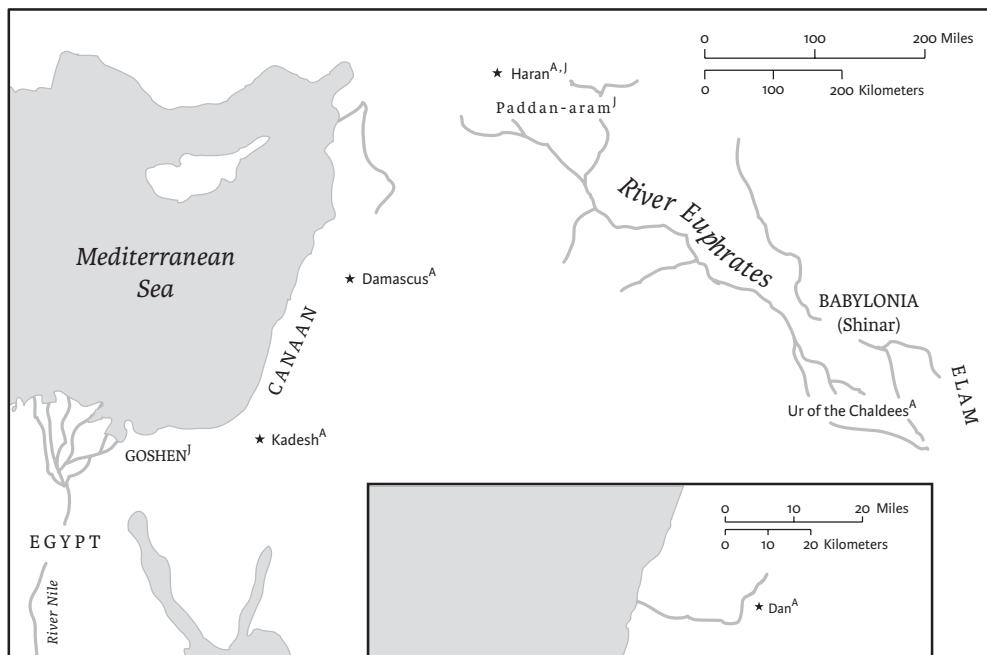
²⁷Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot. ²⁸Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. ²⁹Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran

^a Heb *balal*, meaning to confuse

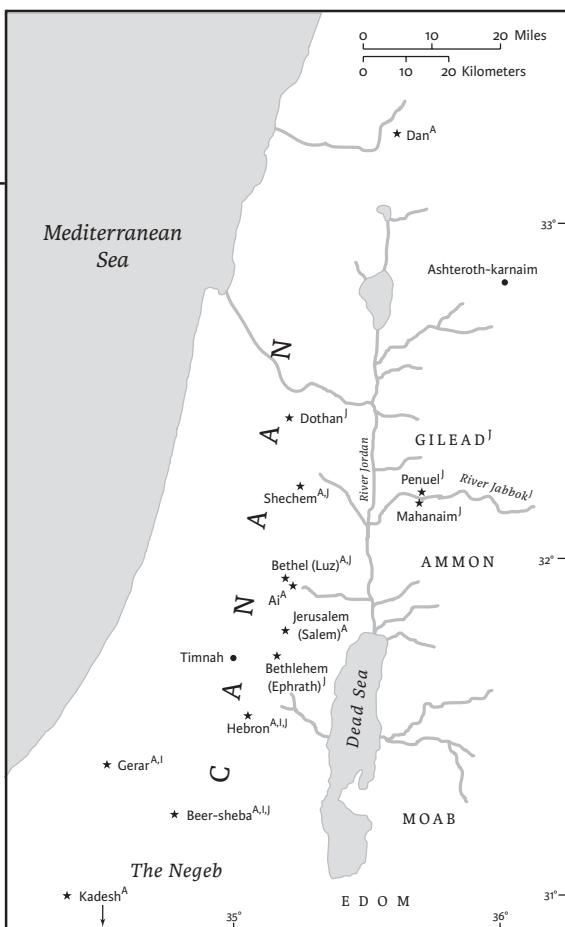
11.20–26: The descendants of Shem. This genealogy from the Priestly tradition closely parallels 5.1–32 (though it lacks death notices). It builds a genealogical bridge from Shem to Terah, the father of Abraham. Parts of the genealogy of Shem (10.21–31) are repeated, but now the text focuses exclusively on those descendants who will lead to Abraham. The text implies that all these descendants are firstborn sons, thus setting up Abraham as the firstborn heir of Shem, the eldest of Noah's sons.

11.27–25.11: The story of Abraham and his family. The bulk of this section is a non-Priestly narrative about Abraham. It builds on a blend of oral traditions about him, such as the stories standing behind the present narratives about his descent into Egypt (12.10–20), the Abraham and Lot cycle (13.2–13; 18.1–16; 19.1–28,30–37), a pair of Hagar and Ishmael narratives (16.1–14 and 21.8–20), and the tradition about Abraham's stay in Philistine Gerar (20.1–18; 21.22–34; cf. 26.6–33). Some scholars think that these once were part of two separate written J and E sources, with remnants of J (the Yahwistic source) found primarily in chs 12–19 (along with ch 24) and E (Elohist source) fragments in chs 20–22. Others see indicators that these chapters, though building on a range of separate traditions, were composed as a single whole (see the Introduction and 20.1–18n.). Scholars generally agree, however, that other parts of the Abraham story were added later, such as the story of conquest and covenant in 14.1–15.21 and Priestly materials found in 17.1–27 and elsewhere (see 11.27–32n.; 12.4b–5n; 16.3n; 17.1–27n; 21.3–5n; 25.7–11n). For patterns uniting this complex whole, see "Chiasm in the Abraham Story" on p. 38.

11.27–32: Introduction to the Abraham story. The genealogical heading (v. 27) and the concluding notices regarding Terah's travels and death (vv. 31–32) are Priestly, but most scholars consider vv. 28–30 to be earlier, non-Priestly material. **27: Abram**, see 17.5n. The designation "Abraham" is used here in the annotations as the better-known name of Abra(ha)m. Aside from his birth, nothing is told about the early life of Abraham; this lack is filled in by later postbiblical tradition. **29–30: Sarai**, see 17.15n. This is the first appearance of the theme of barrenness of the three most central matriarchs: Sarai/Sarah, Rebekah (25.21), and Rachel (29.31). Their initial



Chs 12–50: The geography of the ancestral narratives. Places associated with a particular ancestor are highlighted with a star, and the initial of the ancestor follows the place name: A(braham), I(saac), or J(acob).



the father of Milcah and Iscah.³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

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

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.² 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.³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”^a

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons

^a *Or by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*

barrenness helps highlight God's power to provide heirs of the promise. **31: Haran**, in northwest Mesopotamia, was Abraham's ancestral home, according to 24.10 (cf. 29.4). Nonbiblical sources show that several of the names of Abraham's ancestors in the preceding genealogy were place names near Haran; e.g., Peleg (vv. 16–19; also 10.25), Serug (vv. 20–23), Nahor (vv. 24–25; cf. 26), and Terah (vv. 24–26).

12.1–3: The Lord's call and promise to Abraham initiates a major new movement in the story of Genesis. This is the first of three divine speeches in which a patriarch is given travel directions and promises of blessing (12.1–3; 26.2–5; 46.1–4; see also 31.3,13). The combination of command (v. 1) and promise (vv. 2–3) implies that the Lord's fulfillment of the promise will follow upon Abraham's fulfillment of the command. **1:** This command to Abraham is similar to, and may have been modeled on, the later divine command for Jacob to return to the “land of your ancestors and to your kindred” (31.3) and to “the land of your birth” (31.13). Due to the complex history of the book of Genesis, it is not surprising that material found in earlier chapters is based on material found in later parts of the book. **2:** The promise that *a great nation* will come from Abraham stands in tension with Sarah's barrenness in 11.30. Much of the following narrative revolves around this tension. *Nation* implies not just a numerous people (cf. 13.16; 15.5; etc.), but a politically independent social group. *I will bless you*, involves giving Abraham the power to flourish in flocks, other riches, and offspring (12.16; 13.2,5,16; etc.; cf. Job 42.12–13). *And make your name great*, to become famous. The Lord promises Abraham a fame similar to that promised to Israelite kings (2 Sam 7.9; 1 Kings 1.47). Thus Abraham, as heir of Shem (see 11.20–26n.)—which means “name” in Hebrew—gains the great “name” that the peoples at Babel had futilely sought for themselves (cf. 11.4). *So that you will be a blessing*, implies that those associated with Abraham and his heirs will flourish as well. Later Laban (30.27–30) and Potiphar (39.5) will both gain blessing through their association with Abraham's heirs. **3:** Though obscured in the translation, the promise to curse *the one who curses* Abraham is a slight modification of a similar formula. Whereas the parallel texts (e.g., 27.29; Num 24.9) speak of God cursing the one who curses, the Lord in this text promises to curse anyone who even “treats [Abraham] lightly.” *In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* has been a particularly important passage in Christian tradition. Building on the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, Paul interpreted this as a blessing of the Gentiles through Abraham (Gal 3.8). Yet the closest analogies to this promise suggest that the alternate translation, *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*, i.e., they will say “may we be like Abraham,” is probably closer to the meaning of the Hebrew. Like 48.20, it envisions other nations of the world looking to Abraham's great blessing and wishing a similar one on themselves (see Ps 72.17). Later in the narrative we see this kind of recognition of Abraham and his heirs' special blessing by foreigners like Abimelech (26.28), Laban (30.27), Potiphar (39.3–5), Joseph's jailer (39.21–23), Pharaoh (Ex 1.9), Jethro (Ex 18.10–12), and Balaam (24.1).

12.4–9: Abraham's first journey to the land. 4b–5: Part of the Priestly Abraham narrative. **6–8:** This brief report of Abraham's journey anticipates the much longer story of Jacob's travels through similar places: Shechem with its oak (cf. 33.18–35.4) and Bethel (cf. 35.1,9–16; see map on p. 27). Sacred trees like the *oak of Moreh* (“oracle giver”; cf. 13.18; 18.1; 35.4; Deut 11.30; Josh 24.26; Judg 9.37) occur elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 21.33; 35.8) and seem to have played an important role in the religion of the ancient Israelites and surrounding peoples (see 2.8–9n.).

whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak^a of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring^b I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country 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 invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live.” ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.”

¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

¹⁵ When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?”

¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your

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

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

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ He journeyed on by stages from the Negeb 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 Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, ⁷ and there was strife between the herders of Abram’s livestock and the herders of Lot’s livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land.

⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred.

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 Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan 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 had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his

^a Or *terebinth*

^b Heb *seed*

12.10–13.1: First story of endangerment of the matriarch (cf. ch 20; 26.6–11). Putting Sarah in jeopardy to protect himself, Abraham appears not to trust the promise of protection just offered him. On Abraham’s later claim to be Sarah’s half-brother, see 20.12n. Overall, this story of descent into Egypt because of famine and rescue through plagues anticipates many aspects of the later narrative about Israel’s descent into Egypt and Exodus from it (Gen 45–Ex 14).

13.2–18: Split of Abraham and Lot. **2–7:** This narrative describing huge flocks and riches in Abraham’s household testifies to the preliminary fulfillment of the promises of blessing in 12.2–3. **Lot**, see 11.27,31. **8–13:** The narrative anticipates the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative (ch 19) through mention of those cities, the wickedness of their inhabitants (13.13), and references to *Zoar* (19.19–23). It also notes that Lot, the heir apparent, does

tent as far as Sodom.¹³ Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

¹⁴ The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring^a forever. ¹⁶ I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

¹⁷ Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks^b of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD.

14 In the days of King Amraphel of Shinar, King Arioch of Ellasar, King Chedorlaomer of Elam, and King Tidal of Goiim,² these kings made war with King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).³ All these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea).^c ⁴ Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim,⁶ and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the edge of the wilderness;⁷ then they turned back and came to

En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar. ⁸ Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim ⁹ with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits; and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country. ¹¹ So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; ¹² they also took Lot, the son of Abram’s brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

¹³ Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks^b of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. ¹⁴ When Abram heard that his nephew had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred eighteen of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought

^a Heb *seed*

^b Or *terebinth*

^c Heb *Salt Sea*

not choose to stay in the land of Canaan (vv. 10–12). **14–17:** Only after Abraham has split from Lot and settled in Canaan does God show him the land (cf. 12.7). This certifies that Abraham has fulfilled God’s command to go to the land that God “will show” him (12.1). Similarly, Jacob is promised the land after he has split from Esau (28.13–14). **18:** Mamre was an ancient southern sacred place, slightly north of Hebron, with which Abraham was associated (see ch 23).

14.1–24: Abraham’s rescue of Lot from the eastern kings. This and ch 15 are closely related (see 15.1n., 15.12–16n.) and link in multiple ways with late layers of the primeval history (see 9.18–27n.; 10.16–18a n.). **1–12:** Here an alliance of four eastern kings conquers five Canaanite kings associated with the Dead Sea region where Lot is said to have settled. In a fulfillment of the curse of Noah predicting the enslavement of Canaan by Shem (9.25–26), these Canaanite kings had been subject for twelve years to an eastern alliance of kings headed by the Shemite king, Chedorlaomer (cf. 10.22). When the Canaanite kings rebel, the eastern kings crush the revolt and seize Lot and his household and take them back toward their home. Neither the battle nor any of the kings can be identified in nonbiblical sources. **13–16:** Abraham’s ability to pursue and overcome the Shemite conquerors testifies to his status as heir of Shem and recipient of Shem’s blessing (9.25–27). Moreover, this demonstrates the fulfillment of the divine promise to protect Abraham and his household (12.3). **13:** Hebrew, probably meaning

back his nephew Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.^a ¹⁹ He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God
Most High,^a
maker of heaven and earth;
²⁰ and blessed be God Most High,^a
who has delivered your enemies into
your hand!”

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. ²¹ Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself.” ²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High,^a maker of heaven and earth,²³ that I would not take a thread or a sandal-thong or anything that is yours, so that you might not say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’” ²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them take their share.”

an outsider, as often in the Bible (see 39.14; Ex 1.15; 1 Sam 29.3; Jon 1.9). **17–20:** This is the only section of Genesis associating a patriarch with Jerusalem; indeed, it is the only place in the entire Torah where Jerusalem is referred to by name. As heir of Shem, Abraham now receives the blessing of the priest in what will become Israel's royal and religious center. *Salem* is a name for Jerusalem (Ps 76.2), where the ancient high god of the Canaanite pantheon, El Elyon (*God Most High*), was worshiped in pre- and early Israelite times. The *King's Valley* is near Jerusalem (2 Sam 18.18), and the priest *Melchizedek* appears as the founder of a royal priesthood in an ancient Jerusalemitic psalm (110.4). This mysterious Melchizedek was later interpreted eschatologically at Qumran and typologically by early Christians (Heb 7.1–17). **20:** *One-tenth*, i.e., a tithe; cf. 28.22; Num 18.21–28.

15.1–21: The first covenant with Abraham. The LORD promises Abraham protection, reward, and an heir in the wake of his recent military encounter with the eastern kings. **1:** The promise to be a *shield* (Heb “magen”) for Abraham echoes Melchizedek's praise of the god who “delivered” (“miggen”) Abraham (14.20), and the *reward* replaces the goods he had refused from the king of Sodom (14.21–24). **2–5:** The parallel objections from Abraham (vv. 2 and 3) and parallel divine responses (vv. 4 and 5) may be indicators of growth in this text, whether parallel sources (J and E; see the Introduction) or the supplementation of an earlier story by later material. **6:** This verse indicates that Abraham considered his objections answered. Though later tradition has generally understood God to be the one who reckoned righteousness to Abraham (e.g., Rom 4.9; Gal 3.6), the subject and object are not specified in Hebrew. *Righteousness* is being true to one's social obligations and commitments. It is possible that it is Abraham here who reckons righteousness to the LORD, certifying that he now believes that the LORD will be true to his commitments in 15.1 (cf. 15.2–3). **7–21:** This section parallels the promise–objection–reassurance pattern of 15.1–6, but with the added component of a covenant ceremony sealing God's promise to give Abraham the land. **9–17:** The ceremony (9–11,17) reflects an ancient practice in which the participants in a covenant oath passed through the dismembered parts of an animal and proclaimed a similar fate on themselves if they

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”^b ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴ But the word of the LORD came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed the LORD; and the LORD^c reckoned it to him as righteousness.

7 Then he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.” ⁸ But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” ⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove,

^a Heb *El Elyon*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Heb *he*

and a young pigeon.”¹⁰ He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹³ Then the LORD^a said to Abram, “Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years;¹⁴ but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.¹⁵ As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.”¹⁶ And they shall

come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.¹⁸ On 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,¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites.”

16 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar,² and Sarai

^a Heb *he*

disobeyed the terms of the agreement (see *Jer 34.18*). Likely because of this, the Hebrew word for “making” a covenant is literally to “cut” a covenant (found in 15.18). In this case, God passes between the pieces in the form of fire (see *Ex 3.2; 13.21*). **12–16:** A speech has been inserted into this ceremony that echoes Abraham’s earlier triumph over the eastern kings at “Dan” and return from there with “goods” (Heb “*rekush*”; 14.14–16). Here in v. 14 God promises a future *judgment* (Heb “*dan*”) on Egypt and escape of Abraham’s descendants from there with yet more goods (again “*rekush*” in 15.14; see *Ex 3.21–22; 12.33–36*). Though this is promised in four generations at the end of the speech (15.16), a Priestly editor may have modified this in v. 13 to four hundred years in order to better match Priestly material in Exodus (*Ex 12.40*). **16:** *The iniquity of the Amorites*, see *Lev 20.23; Deut 9.4*. **18–21:** The ceremony is concluded with God’s promise to give the land of the Canaanite peoples (cf. 10.16–18) to Abraham. **18:** The boundaries given here are the broadest definition of the promised land in the Bible. They correspond to similarly broad, ideal descriptions of the land in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g., *2 Sam 8.3; 1 Kings 4.21*; cf. *Deut 1.7; 11.24; Josh 1.4*). The phrase *river of Egypt* occurs only here, and may refer to the Nile. But elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., *Num 34.5; 2 Kings 24.7; Isa 27.12*) and in other sources, the “Wadi of Egypt” is apparently either the Wadi Besor or the Wadi el-Arish, both south of Gaza. **19–21:** The form of this list of ten nations to be displaced resembles the list of Canaanite groups in *Gen 10.16–18*, but its contents more resemble lists of Canaanite peoples in the Tetrateuch (e.g., *Ex 3.8,17; 13.5*) and Deuteronomistic History (e.g., *Deut 7.1; 20.17; Josh 3.10*). This list, however, is longer than others. Though it is missing the “Hivites” (see 10.16–18a n.), who occur on most other lists, this list is unique in including the *Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim*.

16.1–16: *Hagar’s encounter with God and the birth of Ishmael* stand at the heart of the Abraham story (see “*Chiasm in the Abraham Story*” on p. 38), enveloped by parallel traditions dealing with covenant (chs 15 and 17), Lot and Abraham (chs 13–14 and 18–19), the endangerment of Sarah (12.10–20 and ch 20), and the promise (12.1–6 and 22.1–19). This story echoes the story of Abraham’s endangerment of Sarah in 12.10–20 in describing the complications resulting from human attempts to fulfill the promise, in this case the promise of offspring. In addition, like that story, this one links with the Exodus, though offering a quite different picture. In the book of Exodus Israelites are “oppressed” (Heb “*anah*”) by the Egyptians (*Ex 1.12*), flee east toward Israel through the wilderness, and meet God there (*Ex 19.24.1–2,10–11*). In this chapter, however, it is an *Egyptian*, Hagar, who is “oppressed” (Heb “*anah*”; “dealt harshly with” in the NRSV of v. 6) by the Israelite matriarch Sarah; Hagar flees west from Israel toward Egypt and meets God in the wilderness. Later, in *Gen 21.8–21*, we will see a doublet of this story, where Hagar again must leave Abraham’s clan, go into the desert, and hear an oracle that will revolve around an interpretation of the name of Hagar’s son, Ishmael (Heb for “God hears”). Both stories have their origins in ancient traditions surrounding the origins of the Ishmaelites, seen in Genesis as ancestors of the Arab peoples (see *Gen 25.12–18*), but the version here in *Gen 16* is distinguished by its echoes of the Exodus story

said to Abram, “You see that the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife.⁴ He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl 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!”⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, “Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away 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.⁸ And he said, “Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.”⁹ The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her.”¹⁰ The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.”¹¹ And the angel of the LORD said to her,

“Now you have conceived and shall bear a son;

and ultimately sympathetic focus on Hagar. ²: According to ancient surrogate motherhood customs, a wife could give her maid to her husband and claim the child as her own (30.3,9). ³: This duplicate notice of Sarah’s transfer of Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate mother probably comes from the Priestly source. ^{4–5}: The translation *looked with contempt* implies that Hagar disdained her mistress, whereas the Hebrew verb (“qll,” “to treat lightly”) only implies that Hagar did not look up to her mistress the way she once did. Having had a child, Hagar is now derisively seen by her mistress as a slave who is not sufficiently submissive. ⁷: Here *the angel of the LORD* is not a heavenly being subordinate to God but the LORD (Yahweh) in earthly manifestation, as is clear from v. 13 (cf. 21.17,19; Ex 14.19). ¹¹: *The Lord has given heed*, lit., “The Lord has heard,” an explanation of the name Ishmael (see note ^a and 21.17n.). ¹³: *God of seeing* (see note ^b) was the name of the deity at the Beer-lahai-roi well, now identified with Israel’s God. On Hagar’s question, cf. 32.30; Ex 33.20; Judg 6.22–23; 13.22. ^{15–16}: Priestly material focusing more on Ishmael than on Hagar.

17.1–27: The everlasting covenant and sign of circumcision. This account from the Priestly tradition is parallel to that in 15.1–21 and links to the Priestly covenant with Noah in 9.8–17; see further 9.8–17n. ¹: The phrase translated as *God Almighty* (Heb “El Shadday”) is variously understood as “God [or “El”], the one of the mountains,” “God of the Shadday [deities],” or even “fertile God” (literally, “God with breasts,” see 49.25). Whatever its original meaning, the Priestly tradition understands this epithet to be what the early ancestors of Israel called God before they learned the name Yahweh (Ex 6.2–8). ^{2–6}: In a parallel to 15.1–6 this text includes the

you shall call him Ishmael,^a for the LORD has given heed to your affliction.

¹² He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.”

¹³ So she named the LORD who spoke to her, “You are El-roi”;^b for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?”^c ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi;^d it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him^e Ishmael.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty;^f walk before me, and be blameless.² And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.”³ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “⁴As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram,⁶ but your

^a That is *God hears*

^b Perhaps *God of seeing* or *God who sees*

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d That is *the Well of the Living One who sees me*

^e Heb *Abram*

^f Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

^g That is *exalted ancestor*

name shall be Abraham;^a for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring^b after you. ⁸And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.”

⁹ God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. ¹³Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.

¹⁴ Any 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 God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah 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 give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” ¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, “O that Ishmael might live in your sight!” ¹⁹God said, “No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac.^c I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. ²¹But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.” ²²And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

²³ Then Abraham took his son Ishmael 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. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the

^a Here taken to mean *ancestor of a multitude*

^b Heb *seed*

^c That is *he laughs*

promise of offspring in the covenant. ⁵A new name signifies a new relationship or status (see 32.28). *Abraham*, a dialectal variant of *Abram*, means “the [divine] ancestor is exalted.” Here the name is explained by its similarity to the Hebrew for *ancestor of a multitude*, referring to nations whose ancestry was traced to Abraham (v. 16; 28.3; 35.11; 48.4), such as Edomites and Ishmaelites. The promise to make Abraham “exceedingly numerous” (v. 2) and *exceedingly fruitful* (v. 6) echoes the broader fertility blessing given animals (1.22; 8.17) and humanity (1.28; 9.1,7) in the primeval history. ⁷: Within the Priestly tradition, the promise to be God to Abraham and his offspring leads to the divine provision of religious laws and a tabernacle sanctuary into which God comes to dwell in Israel’s midst (Ex 25–31; 35–40). Like the covenant with Noah (9.8–17), this covenant to be bound to Israel is an *everlasting covenant* (vv. 13,19) because it is grounded in the will of God, not human behavior. It is a covenant of grant, rather than a conditional covenant. ^{9–14}: Circumcision was an ancient rite practiced among some Semitic groups, perhaps originally connected to marriage (see 34.14–17), probably having to do with warding off demons (see Ex 4.24–26). Here, however, it is moved to early childhood and reinterpreted as a sign of God’s everlasting covenant with Israel, a mark of membership in the covenant community. Unlike the covenant with Noah (9.1–17), this one pertains only to the household and heirs of Abraham. ¹⁵: *Sarah*, meaning “princess,” is a variant of *Sarai*; see v. 5n. ¹⁷: Abraham’s laughter here in the Priestly tradition anticipates Sarah’s laughter in the non-Priestly account (18.9–15n.).

flesh of his foreskin.²⁵ And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.²⁶ That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised;²⁷ and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham^a by the oaks^b of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little 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.” ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures^c of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that 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 your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.”

¹⁰ Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and

Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.

¹⁷ The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,^d seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?^d ¹⁹ No, 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 about for Abraham what he has promised him.” ²⁰ Then the LORD said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! ²¹ I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

^a Heb *him*

^b Or *terebinth*

^c Heb *seahs*

^d Or *and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him*

^e Heb *known*

18.1–15: The Lord's visit to Abraham and Sarah. **1:** The oaks of Mamre, see 12.6–8n.; 13.18n. **2–8:** A description of ideal hospitality of Abraham parallel to that of Lot in 19.1–11. This motif of secretly divine visitors is widespread in folklore. The relation between the three visitors and the LORD (v. 1) is unclear. The narrative fluidly shifts from speaking of them as a group (e.g., v. 9) to having “the LORD” speak alone (e.g., v. 13; cf. v. 10). Later materials in v. 22 and 19.1 conceive of “the LORD” as one of the three angels (see 16.7n.), though this is not specified in the preceding narrative (“one” in the NRSV of v. 10 is a translator’s addition). **9–15:** The narrator uses the theme of Sarah’s laughter (cf. 17.17) to stress the incredibility of God’s promise of a son (eventually Isaac, 21.1–3). **11: Ceased . . . after the manner of women,** a circumlocution for menopause. **12:** Isaac’s name means “he [God] laughs,” and other traditions develop the link with laughter as well (17.17–19; 21.6, 8; 26.8).

18.16–33: Abraham’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah. **17–19:** This first speech by the LORD stresses that he speaks to Abraham because he chose him to teach his household the ways of righteousness. In vv. 22–32 the LORD will model such righteousness in his responsiveness to Abraham. **18:** See 12.3n. **20–21:** This second speech by the LORD echoes his decision at Babel to *go down and see* what was going on there (11.5; cf. divine self-reflection in 3.22; 6.3, 5–7; 11.6–7). Unlike vv. 17–19, this speech suggests that the LORD has not yet

²² So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.^a ²³ Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far 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 what is just?” ²⁶ And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷ Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose 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.” ²⁹ Again he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹ He said, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³² Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

19 The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. ² He said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night in the square.” ³ But 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. ⁴ But 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; ⁵ and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” ⁶ Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, ⁷ and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸ Look, I have two daughters who have not known a 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.” ⁹ But they replied, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, 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 came near the door to break it down. ¹⁰ But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. ¹¹ And they

^a Another ancient tradition reads *while the LORD remained standing before Abraham*

decided what to do. **22–33:** Like Moses (e.g., Ex 32.9–14), Abraham negotiates with an angry God, appealing to God’s righteousness. In this case, however, the terms he ends up winning—aversion of disaster if ten righteous people can be found—do not avert destruction. Thus, this text appears to be a theoretical reflection on God’s righteousness and how many righteous people are required to save a broader group; cf. Ezek 14.12–23.

19.1–38: The rescue of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a prominent example in Israelite tradition of God’s total judgment (Deut 29.23; Isa 1.9; Jer 49.18; Am 4.11). **1:** *Two angels*, see 18.2–8n. **1–11:** As in the case of 18.1–8, the main issue here is hospitality to secretly divine visitors. Here, however, the sanctity of hospitality is threatened by *the men of the city* who wish to rape (*know*) the guests (cf. Judg 19.22–30). The primary point of this text is how this threat by the townspeople violates the value of hospitality (contrast 18.1–16). Hospitality is valued so strongly in this context that Lot offers his virgin daughters in place of his guests (vv. 7–8). Nevertheless, this foolish and cruel act has the opposite of its intended effect, leading the townspeople to threaten worse things to Lot than the rape they were going to inflict on his guests (v. 9), and requiring the guests to protect their host (vv. 10–11). Where Abraham was the model of hospitality (Gen 18.1–16), Lot’s actions show him to be a bungling, almost heartless

struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

¹² Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place. ¹³ For 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.” ¹⁴ So 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, “Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city.” ¹⁶ But 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 out and left him outside the city. ¹⁷ When they had brought them outside, they^a said, “Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed.” ¹⁸ And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords; ¹⁹ your servant has found favor with you, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. ²⁰ Look, that 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!” ²¹ He said to him, “Very well, I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. ²² Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.” Therefore the city was called

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

²⁴ Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven; ²⁵ and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶ But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD; ²⁸ and he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace.

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

³⁰ Now Lot went up out of Zoar and settled in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar; so he lived in a cave with his two daughters. ³¹ And the firstborn 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 world. ³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.” ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night; and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. ³⁴ On the next day, the firstborn said to the younger, “Look, I lay last night with my father; let us make him drink wine tonight also; then you go in and lie with him, so that we may preserve

^a Gk Syr Vg: Heb *he*

^b That is *Little*

imitator who does not deserve to be the heir of the promise to Abraham. **12–14:** In place of Sarah’s laughter (Heb “tshq”) in the preceding hospitality scene (18.11–14), we have here the Sodomite *sons-in-law* assuming that Lot is *jesting* (Heb “tshq”). **15–23:** Once again, Lot is unfavorably contrasted with Abraham. Where Abraham hurried to serve his angelic guests (18.2,6,7), Lot hesitates at their urging to leave Sodom, requiring them to take him away by force (vv. 15–16). Then, doubting their rescue plan, he asks them to let him stop in a nearby city (Zoar, which means “little”; see note *b* and v. 20) lest he be caught up in the coming destruction (vv. 17–22). In the end, though Lot claims that he has found a Noah-like favor with his angelic rescuers (19.19; cf. Gen 6.8), this is not affirmed by the angels or the narrator. **24–25:** The *rain* of destruction continues the echoes of the Noah story. **26:** This text turns salt formations in the Dead Sea area into a testimony to the truth of the story, asserting that one of those formations was Lot’s wife, who disobediently looked back at the cities God was destroying. **29:** This is a Priestly summary of the story, echoing 8.1 and attributing Lot’s rescue to his relation with Abraham.

offspring through our father.”³⁵ So they made their father drink wine that night also; and the younger rose, and lay with him; and he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.³⁷ The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day.³⁸ The younger also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day.

20 From there Abraham journeyed toward the region of the Negeb, and settled between Kadesh and Shur. While residing in Gerar as an alien,² Abraham said

of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah.³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, “You are about to die because of the woman whom you have taken; for she is a married woman.”⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent people?⁵ Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ I did this in the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands.”⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; fur-

37–38: This story suggests that two of Israel’s closest neighbors, the Moabites and Ammonites in Transjordan, originated in incest. Mistakenly assuming that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was so total that there is no one else on earth by whom to have children (19.31), Lot’s daughters get their father drunk so that he will conceive with them. The themes of drunkenness and (implicit) nakedness are reminiscent of the story of Noah and his sons (9.20–27).

20.1–18: The second story of endangerment of the matriarch (cf. 12.10–20; 26.6–11). Many scholars have argued that chs 20–22 contain the first major block of an Elohist (E) source parallel to the Yahwistic (J) source found in chs 12–19 and extending through the rest of the Pentateuch (see further 15.2–5n. and the Introduction). Note parallels between stories of endangerment of Sarah in 20.1–18 (E) and 12.10–20 (J); the Hagar stories 21.8–19 (E) and 16.1–14 (J), and even stories about Abimelech in 21.22–34 (E) and 26.17–33 (J). These similarities indicate that the author of the non-Priestly Abraham narrative probably drew upon cycles of Yahwistic and Elohist traditions that were parallel at some points. Nevertheless, there are some important indicators that the Elohist traditions seen in Gen 20–22 were written down as part of a larger whole that included the preceding narratives in Gen 12–19 and thus do not reflect (in their present form) a separate written source. Not only are the Elohist accounts organized as part of a broader chiasm that includes the narratives of Genesis 12–19, but details of Genesis 20–22 are understandable only when these chapters are read following Genesis 12–19.

CHIASM IN THE ABRAHAM STORY

There are a series of correspondences between different parts of the Abraham story, where themes introduced at the outset of a narrative are resumed in reverse order in its second half. This chiastic pattern binds many parts of the Abraham story together and puts a heightened emphasis on the sections that occur at the center (in **boldface**).

- A. Prologue (11.28–30)
- B. First challenge: call for Abraham to leave family of origin (12:1–3)
- C. Wife-sister story 12:10–13:1
- D. Separation from Lot (13:2–18)
- E. Covenant of pieces with Abraham (14–15)
- F. Hagar-Ishmael story (Gen 16:1–14)**
- E.' Covenant of circumcision with Abraham (17)
- D.' Hospitality/progeny episodes; Abraham contrasted with Lot (18–19)
- C.' Wife-sister story (20)
- B.' Final challenge: calls for Abraham to let go of family of future (21.8–21 and 22.1–19)
- A.' Epilogue 22.20–24

For example, Abraham’s brief claim in 20.2 that Sarah is his sister would not make sense without the explanation of his request to her to make the same claim in 12.11–13. **3–7:** The depiction of Abimelech is far more detailed and sympathetic than that of the foreign king in either of the parallel accounts (cf. 12.15–19; 26.9–10).

thermore it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.⁷ Now then, return 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 Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants and told them all these things; and the men were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I sinned against you, that you have brought such great guilt on me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that ought not to be done."¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?" ¹¹ Abraham 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.¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife."

¹³ And 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.'

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him.

¹⁵ Abimelech said, "My land is before you; settle where it pleases you."¹⁶ To Sarah he said, "Look, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver; it is your exoneration before

all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.¹⁸ For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

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

⁸ The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.^a ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."¹¹ The matter was very distress-

^a Gk Vg: Heb lacks *with her son Isaac*

7: To Abraham is attributed the intercessory role of *prophet*; this is the Bible's first use of the term, and the only designation of Abraham as a prophet in the Torah (but see Ps 105.15). **12:** The narrator never asserts that Sarah is Terah's daughter (cf. 11.27–30). Nevertheless, faced with Abimelech's passionate questioning, Abraham claims to be her half-brother by way of his father. Though many have taken his assertion at face value, it may be an attempt to provide as many excuses for his behavior as possible (cf. 20.11).

21.1–21: Isaac and Ishmael. 3–5: A notice of Isaac's birth and circumcision taken from the Priestly source (see 17.1–24). On the name *Isaac*, see 18.12n. **6:** See 18.9–15n. **8–21:** This story of endangerment of Ishmael parallels the following one of endangerment of Isaac. After God gives Abraham the command to let his child go (v. 12; 22.2), he rises *early in the morning* to fulfill it (v. 14 || 22.3), the child is delivered when an *angel of God/the LORD* cries out from heaven (v. 17; 22.11–12), and Hagar and Abraham both see a way to save the child (v. 19 || 22.13). These features distinguish this story of Hagar and Ishmael from its parallel in ch. 16, where Hagar likewise left Abraham's clan, went into the desert, and heard a message from an angel of God (there an "angel of the LORD") about her child's destiny. Though the divinity is referred to in ch. 16 as "the LORD" and here in ch. 21 as "God," the angel in both cases promises that Hagar's offspring will be numerous (16.10; 21.18) and assures her that God has "heard" hers (ch. 16.11) or her child's (ch. 21.17) suffering, wordplays on Ishmael's name, which means "God hears" (see also 17.20, part of the Priestly tradition). These are probably oral variants of a story about the origin of the Ishmaelites (see 25.12–18). **9:** *Playing with*, literally "making [him] laugh," another reference to Isaac's

ing to Abraham on account of his son.¹² But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you.¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.”¹⁴ So 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 about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bow-shot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.¹⁸ Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

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

²² At that time Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham,

“God is with you in all that you do;²³ now 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 resided as an alien.”²⁴ And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

²⁵ When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized,²⁶ Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.”²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant.²⁸ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs of the flock.²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?”³⁰ He said, “These seven ewe lambs you shall accept from my hand, in order that you may be a witness for me that I dug this well.”³¹ Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba;^a because there both of them swore an oath.³² When they had made a covenant at Beer-sheba, Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, left and returned to the land of the Philistines.³³ Abraham^b planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.^c³⁴ And Abraham resided as an alien many days in the land of the Philistines.

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² He said, “Take your

^a That is *Well of seven* or *Well of the oath*

^b Heb *He*

^c Or *the LORD, El Olam*

name; see 18.12n. **14–17:** In these verses Ishmael is a little boy, a stark contrast to the presentation of him as a teenager in the preceding Priestly traditions (16.16; 17.25; 21.5). This is just one sign that stories like this one about Hagar and Ishmael were not originally written with the Priestly tradition in view. **17:** See 16.7n.

21.22–34: Abraham’s dispute with Abimelech. This text continues the story about Abraham and Abimelech that was begun in ch 20. Together, the narratives of Abraham’s sojourn in Gerar in ch 20 and 21.22–34 resemble that of Isaac’s sojourn in Gerar in 26.6–33, and they may have a common oral background. This story combines a tradition that explains the name *Beer-sheba* as meaning “well of seven” (see 22.28–30) with an explanation (parallel to 26.31–33) that it means “well of oath.” **33:** On the tamarisk tree, see 12.6–8n. *Everlasting God* (“El Olam”) may be an ancient divine name once associated with the sanctuary at Beer-sheba.

22.1–19: The testing of Abraham. Although in later tradition this is one of the most significant chapters in the ancestral narratives, nothing in the text marks it as such. **1a:** The narrative begins by informing the reader of something that Abraham does not know, that *God tested Abraham*. Abraham’s “fear” of God is not proven (v. 12) until he has reached out his hand to slaughter his son (v. 10). **1b–2:** After giving up Ishmael earlier (see

son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show 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; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.”⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill^a his son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”¹² He said, “Do not lay

your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”;^b as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”^c

¹⁵ 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 son,¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies,¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

²⁰ Now after these things it was told Abraham, “Milcah also has borne children, to your brother Nahor:²¹ Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram,²² Che-

^a Or to slaughter

^b Or will see; Heb traditionally transliterated *Jehovah Jireh*

^c Or he shall be seen

21.8–21n.), Abraham must prepare to give up Isaac, his promised heir, as well. The story echoes the opening of the Abraham story. Just as he was once asked to go (Heb “*lek leka*”) from his family of origin and travel to a land God would show him (12.1), so now he must go (“*lek leka*”) and sacrifice his future family on a mountain that God will show him (v. 2). The way the command is stated (*your only son . . . whom you love*), which parallels the syntax of 12.1, presupposes that what is being asked of Abraham is extraordinary and extremely difficult. The narrative is not a polemic against child sacrifice: while it does not presuppose a general practice of sacrifice of the firstborn, it does suggest that such a practice could be performed under extraordinary circumstances (see 2 Kings 3.27). 3: As in 12.4–6 Abraham obeys the command immediately. 5: Abraham’s promise that he and Isaac will return may suggest a faith that God will work out an alternative sacrifice (see v. 8). 9–13: The narration slows down here, showing how close Abraham came to fulfilling the command. Some later Jewish traditions understood Abraham to have actually sacrificed (an obedient) Isaac, making both men models for later generations of Jewish martyrs. A similar image stands behind the Christian understanding of Isaac as a prefiguration of Jesus. 12: See 22.1a n. 14: Like other characters in Genesis (e.g., Jacob in 28.19 and 32.2,30), Abraham names the place in response to his encounter with God (see 22.8; cf. 28.19; 32.30). The name *The LORD will provide* is not attested elsewhere as a place name. The mention of *Moriah* in v. 2 and of *the mount of the LORD* in v. 14 may be allusions to Jerusalem (see 1 Chr 3.1). 15–18: This second divine call stands out as an additional divine response to his obedience (cf. vv. 11–12), this time providing a reward for Abraham’s passing of the “test.” 18: See 12.3n.

22.20–24: The descendants of Abraham’s brother Nahor. See 11.27–29; 24.15.

sed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.”

²³ Bethuel became the father of Rebekah.

These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. ²⁴ Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

23 Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah’s life. ² And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³ Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, ⁴ “I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” ⁵ The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ “Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold from you any burial ground for burying your dead.” ⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸ He said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar, ⁹ so that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying place.” ¹⁰ Now Ephron 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 my people I give it to you; bury your dead.” ¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ He said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “If you only will listen to

me! I will give the price of the field; accept it from me, so that I may bury my dead there.”

¹⁴ Ephron 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.” ¹⁶ Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that 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 Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, passed ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, in the presence of all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham’s possession as a burying place.

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. ² Abraham said to his 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 earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred and get 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

23.1–20: Abraham’s purchase of a family burial place. A late Priestly tradition. **2:** *Kiriath-arba*, the older name of Hebron (Josh 14.15; 15.13; Judg 1.10). **3:** The *Hittites* are considered at this point to be among the Canaanite peoples (see v. 7 and 10.15; 15.9). **4–16:** The narrative stresses the legitimacy of the Israelites’ claim to this burial plot. **10:** Legal transactions often took place at the city gate; see 34.20; Deut 20.19; 25.7; Ruth 4.1–11; 2 Sam 15.2).

15: Four hundred shekels, about 10 lb (4.5 kg). **17–20:** As in many ancient cultures, the Israelites believed that burial of ancestors in a plot of land gave their heirs a sacred claim to it. The Priestly notices of the Genesis story indicate that descendants of Abraham who did not inherit the promise ended up outside Canaan (e.g., Ishmael in 25.12–18 and Esau in 36.1–43; cf. 25.1–6), while Israel’s early patriarchs and matriarchs were buried in the land (25.9–10; 35.27–29; 49.29–32; 50.12–13; etc.; cf. non-Priestly traditions in 35.19–20; 50.5,25).

24.1–67: Finding a wife for Isaac among kinfolk in Haran. **2:** Putting the hand under the thigh, an old form of oath taking (47.29), reflected the view that reproductive organs were sacred. **3:** The text describes a concern by Abraham about intermarriage with Canaanites that is otherwise seen primarily in late materials from Deuter-

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 offspring 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 kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor.¹¹ He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water.¹² And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham.¹³ I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water.¹⁴ Let the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Please offer 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 steadfast love to my master.”

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder.¹⁶ The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me sip a little water from your jar.”¹⁸ “Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered 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 finished 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 or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-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 spend the night?”²⁴ She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.”²⁵ She added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.”²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD²⁷ and said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the way to the house of my master’s kin.”

²⁸ Then the girl ran and told her mother’s household about these things.²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.³⁰ As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring.³¹ He said, “Come in, O blessed of the LORD. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?”³² So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder 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 wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys.³⁶ And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my

onomy (e.g., Deut 7.3–4) and texts influenced by Deuteronomy. **10:** Aram-naharaim, the upper Euphrates region of northern Syria, in which Haran, Abraham’s original home, was located (see 12.4). **12:** Steadfast love, NRSV’s translation of Heb “hesed” that signifies the loyalty arising from a relationship (e.g., friendship; see 1 Sam 20.8).

Applied to God, it means benevolent action, loyalty manifest in deeds. **15:** See 22.20–23. **22:** A shekel weighed

master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has.³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live;³⁸ but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.'³⁹ I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.'⁴⁰ But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father's house.⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred; even 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 only make successful the way I am going!⁴³ I am standing here 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,'⁴⁴ and 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 finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming 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.'⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels.⁴⁷ Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms.⁴⁸ Then 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 obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.⁴⁹ Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good.⁵¹ Look, 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 ground before the LORD.⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments.⁵⁴ Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, "Send me back to my master."⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go."⁵⁶ But he said to them, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has made my journey successful; let me go that I may go to my master."⁵⁷ They said, "We will call the girl, and ask her."⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will."⁵⁹ So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men.⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

"May you, our sister, become
thousands of myriads;
may your offspring gain possession
of the gates of their foes."

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had come from^a Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb.⁶³ Isaac went out in the evening to walk^b in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming.⁶⁴ And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel,⁶⁵ and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself.⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and

^a Syr Tg: Heb *from coming to*

^b Meaning of Heb word is uncertain

Shuah.³ Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim.⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.⁵ Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.⁶ But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

⁷ This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred seventy-five years.⁸ Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.⁹ His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre,¹⁰ the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites.

about .4 oz (11.5 gr). **62: Beer-lahai-roi**, see 16.14; 25.11.

25.1–11: The death of Abraham. **1–6:** The ancestry of Arabian tribes, including Midian (Ex 2.15b–22; 18.1–27), is traced to Abraham through another wife, Keturah. **7–11:** A conclusion to the Abraham story taken from the Priestly source. On the cave of Machpelah, see ch 23. **11: Beer-lahai-roi**, see 16.14; 24.62.

25.12–18: Overview of the descendants of Ishmael (cf. 36.1–43). Before the narrative discusses the descendants of Isaac (25.19–35.29), it gives an overview of the descendants of Ishmael, the firstborn son of Abraham. For the genealogy of Abraham, see chart on p. 52. **16:** Like Israel, the Ishmaelites are said to have twelve tribes.

18: The Ishmaelites are placed in the desert on either side of the Red Sea. See map on p. 23.

25.19–35.29: The story of Jacob and his family. The bulk of this section of Genesis goes back to early traditions about Jacob/Israel, the father of the Israelite tribes. Though many originated as ancient Israelite oral traditions, this written version of the Jacob story shows multiple connections to places that were important in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (see 28.10–11n., 20–22n., 31.13n., 32.1–2n., 32.30–31n., and 33.18n.), and it thus likely originated there. This story has been enriched through additions that balance the early northern focus on Jacob with an emphasis on Judah, King David's ancestor (see 30.21n.; 34.1–31n. and 49.1–28n.). Later, still other texts were added, such as the interlude about Jacob's father, Isaac (26.1–33), the gift of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob at Bethel (28.13–16), and fragments of Priestly material (25.19–20; 26.34–35; 27.46–28.9; 31.17–18; 35.9–15, 22b–29).

CHIASM IN THE JACOB STORY

As in the Abraham story [see p. 38], there may be a chiastic pattern in the Jacob story, where themes introduced in its first half are resumed in reverse order in the second. This kind of pattern places emphasis on its center (in **boldface**), in this case the fertility of Jacob himself and of his flocks:

- A. Encounter between Jacob/Esau (25.21–34; 27)
- B. Encounter with God and departure from home (28)
- C. Acquisition of wives, Leah and Rachel (29.1–30)
- D. **Fertility: the birth of Jacob's children (29.31–30.24)**
- D.**' Fertility: the growth of Jacob's flocks (30.25–43)**
- C.**' Jacob's removal of his wives from their father's household (31.1–32.1)**
- B.**' Encounter with God on return home (32.22–32)**
- A.**' Reunion encounter between Jacob and Esau (33.1–33.17)**

There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah.¹¹ After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

¹² These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham.¹³ These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam,¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa,¹⁵ Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.¹⁶ These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes.¹⁷ (This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.)¹⁸ They settled from Havilah to

Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down^a alongside of^b all his people.

¹⁹ These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac,²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.²² The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.²³ And 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."

²⁴ When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb.²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau.²⁶ Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.^d Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

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

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.³⁰ Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.^e)³¹ Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me first."^f So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

26 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines.² The LORD appeared to Isaac^g and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you.³ Reside in this land as an alien, 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 fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.⁴ I will make your offspring as numerous as the

^a Heb *he fell*

^b Or *down in opposition to*

^c Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d That is *He takes by the heel* or *He supplants*

^e That is *Red*

^f Heb *today*

^g Heb *him*

25.19–28: Introduction of the descendants of Isaac. **19–20:** Introductory Priestly material. For the genealogy of Isaac, see chart on p. 52. **22–23:** The narrative presupposes an ancient practice of seeking a divine oracle at a local sanctuary. **25:** The Hebrew word for *red* ("admoni") is a play on the word "Edom" ("edom"; v. 30); *hairy* ("se'ar") is a play on Seir, the region of the Edomites (32.3). **26:** *Jacob*, which probably means "may (God) protect," is interpreted here by a play on the Hebrew word for "heel," i.e., "he takes by the heel" or "he supplants"; see Hos 12.3. **27–28:** As in the Cain and Abel story, this narrative plays on the tension between the hunter and the shepherd (4.2), as well as between the older and the younger brother.

25.29–34: Jacob buys Esau's birthright. **30:** See 25.25n. **31–34:** The *birthright* refers to the extra rights that normally go to the eldest son: leadership of the family and a double share of the inheritance (Deut 21.15–17). This caricature of Esau as a dull person, outwitted on an empty stomach, is intended to explain Israel's domination of Edom (2 Sam 8.9–14; 1 Kings 11.14–22; 1 Kings 3.9–12; 8.20–22).

26.1–33: Interlude on Isaac. Whereas the surrounding sections focus primarily on Isaac's descendants, this chapter focuses on Isaac apart from his children. Although relatively little is told about Isaac, it is significant that each element makes him parallel to his father Abraham: the initial note linking his trip to Gerar with Abraham's initial journey to Egypt (v. 1; cf. 12.10), the travel command and promise (vv. 2–5; see 12.1–3n.; 22.18n.), the story of endangerment of the matriarch (vv. 6–11; cf. 12.10–13.1 and 20.1–18), the manifestation of blessing on Isaac (vv. 12–14; cf. 12.16; 20.14), the recognition of that blessing by Abimelech (v. 28; cf. 21.22), and the well stories (vv. 17–33; see 21.22–34n.). The narratives of Abraham and Isaac have clearly influenced one another. By the end of the chapter it is clear that Isaac has successfully inherited Abraham's blessing and is thus prepared

stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring,⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister”; for he was afraid to say, “My wife,” thinking, “or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance.”

⁸ When Isaac had been there a long time, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw him fondling his wife Rebekah. ⁹ So Abimelech called for Isaac, and said, “So she is your wife! Why then did you say, ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought I might die because of her.”

¹⁰ Abimelech 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.” ¹¹ So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death.”

¹² Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped up and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there. ¹⁸ Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham; for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names that his father had given them. ¹⁹ But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰ the herders of Gerar quarreled with

Isaac’s herders, saying, “The water is ours.” So he called the well Esek,^a because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah.^b ²² He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth,^c saying, “Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

²³ From there he went up to Beer-sheba. ²⁴ And that very night the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham’s sake.” ²⁵ So he built an altar there, called on the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

²⁶ Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army. ²⁷ Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” ²⁸ They said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you ²⁹ so that 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.” ³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. ³² That same day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well that they had dug, and said to him, “We have found water!” ³³ He called it Shibah,^d therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba^e to this day.

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and

^a That is *Contention*

^b That is *Enmity*

^c That is *Broad places or Room*

^d A word resembling the word for *oath*

^e That is *Well of the oath or Well of seven*

to pass it on to one of his sons (see ch 27). 8: *Fondling*, Heb “metsaheq,” another reference to Isaac’s name; see 18.12n. 33: Another explanation of the name “Beer-sheba”; see 21.22–34n.

26.34–28.4: The transfer of blessing to Jacob and not Esau. 26.34–35 (cf. 28.8–9 and 36.2–3): This Priestly

Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite;³⁵ and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.”² He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me.⁴ Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so 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,⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷ ‘Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die.’⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes;¹⁰ and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”¹¹ But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, “Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin.¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.”¹³ His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.”¹⁴ So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved.¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob;¹⁶ and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.¹⁷ Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to 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?”¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.”²⁰ But 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.”²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.”²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.²⁴ He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.”²⁵ Then 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.²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.”²⁷ So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

“Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field that the LORD
has blessed.

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

²⁹ Let 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 everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses
you!”

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother

note on Esau’s difficult marriages was originally connected with 27.46–28.9 (P). Now, however, it helps legitimate the following story about how he was tricked out of his father’s blessing. **27.1–45:** This non-Priestly story of Rebekah and Jacob’s cunning resembles “trickster” traditions in other cultures, where a culture hero flourishes through underhanded tactics (cf. 29.23–25; 31.19–35; 34.1–31; 38.1–30). Women had little power and often had to use unconventional means to accomplish their goals. **4:** Deathbed blessings (and curses) were important in the life and literature of ancient peoples (e.g., 48.8–20; 49.1–28). It was believed that such blessings irreversibly released a tangible power that determined the character and destiny of the recipient. Ch 27 itself focuses exclusively on Isaac’s blessing, but the preceding chapter (ch 26) makes clear that this is Isaac’s transfer of

Esau came in from his hunting.³¹ He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, “Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may bless me.”³² His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.”³³ Then 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 blessed he shall be!”³⁴ When Esau heard his father’s words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me, me also, father!”³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.”³⁶ Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob?^b For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.” Then he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, “I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?”³⁸ Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

³⁹ Then his father Isaac answered him: “See, away from^c the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from^d the dew of heaven on high.

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

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.”⁴² But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran,⁴⁴ and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—⁴⁵ until your brother’s anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you 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.² Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.³ May God Almighty^f bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien—land that God gave to Abraham.”⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away;

^a Cn: Heb *of all*

^b That is *He supplants* or *He takes by the heel*

^c Or *See, of*

^d Or *and of*

^e Meaning of Heb uncertain

^f Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

a divine blessing first given to Abraham (12.1–3; etc.). 11: See 25.25n. 34–35: The blessing was believed to release a power that could not be retracted (see v. 4n.). 36: See 25.26n.; 25.29–34. There is a wordplay in the Heb words for *my birthright* (“bekorati”) and *my blessing* (“birkati”). 39: An inversion of the same words in v. 28. 40: See 25.31–34n. Edom repeatedly revolted from subjection by Judah (1 Kings 11.14–22; 2 Kings 8.20–22). 43: See 24.4,29. *Haran* was the home of Abraham’s brother Nahor, whose son was Laban. Like Isaac, Jacob will marry within the extended family; see 24.4,10n.,29; 29. 46: See 26.34–35n. 27.46–28.2: On intermarriage, see 24.3n. 28.1–4: A Priestly parallel to the preceding story (27.27–29) where Isaac was not tricked into blessing Jacob, but intended from the outset to bless him in the process of sending him away to find a proper wife (see 26.34–35n.). Compare with P in 17.1–8; 35.11–12; 48.3–4. 3: *God Almighty*, see 17.1n.

28.5–22: The split between Jacob and Esau occurs twice here, the Priestly version in 28.5–9 and the non-

and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

⁶ Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram 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 Paddan-aram. ⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, ⁹ Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the 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. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder^a set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the LORD stood beside him^b 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 offspring;^c ¹⁴ and your offspring 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

all the families of the earth shall be blessed^c in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that 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 what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ And 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 that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel,^d but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰ Then 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 surely give one-tenth to you."

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

^a Or stairway or ramp

^b Or stood above it

^c Or shall bless themselves

^d That is House of God

Priestly account in 28.10–22. **8–9:** See 26.34–35 and compare 36.2–3. **10–11:** Bethel (see 12.6–8n.; map on p. 27) was one of the two major royal sanctuaries of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.26–13.10; Am 7.10–13). Here it is depicted as an unsettled place. **12:** The earliest version of this oracle described divine messengers (NRSV *angels*) ascending and descending a stairway (a better translation than NRSV's *ladder*) to heaven. This is reflected in v. 17. **13–15:** God's appearance here is awkwardly linked to the preceding stairway vision. Therefore, many scholars see another authorial hand here, adding the Abrahamic promise to an early Bethel narrative that lacked it. **13–14:** The promise to Jacob here after his split from Esau is similar to the promise to Abraham in 13.14–17 just after his split from Lot. On the formulation of these promises, see 12.1–3n. **15:** This portion of the divine promise relates specifically to Jacob's journey and anticipates both his vow (vv. 20–22) and later references to this event (35.3; cf. 31.13). It may be the earliest layer of the promise speech. **16–17:** Some scholars have seen a doubled response here by Jacob, a response to God's appearance and speech in v. 16 and a (possibly earlier) response to the vision of the stairway in v. 17 (see v. 12n.). Verse 17 explains the name "Bethel" ("house of El") as *house of God*. *Gate of heaven* suggests the ancient view that a sanctuary was a place where the god came to earth, like "Babel" ("gate of god," 11.1–9). **18:** Ancient Israelite local sanctuaries featured sacred pillars, perhaps signifying male powers of fertility (see v. 22; 31.13,45–54; 35.14,20). For feminine tree imagery, see 2.8–9n. **19:** *Bethel*, see vv. 16–17n. **20–22:** This text looks toward both Jacob's immediate trip to Haran and the longer range future of the sanctuary at Bethel (see 28.10–11n.). **22:** *One-tenth*, see 14.20n.

29.1–30: Jacob's marriages to Laban's daughters. **2–12:** Wells often serve as meeting places for men and women in the cultures of the Near East. The Bible describes several such well scenes (e.g., 24.10–27; Ex 2.15–22).

and three flocks of sheep lying there 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 on 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 Laban son of Nahor?" They said, "We do." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" "Yes," they replied, "and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep." ⁷ He said, "Look, it is still broad daylight; 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."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. ¹⁰ Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. ¹² And 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 Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob^a told Laban all these things, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters;

the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely,^b and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me."

²⁰ So 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 Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵ When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" ²⁶ Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn." ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. ²⁹ (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) ³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban^c for another seven years.

³¹ When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. ³² Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben;^d for she said, "Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely

^a Heb *He*

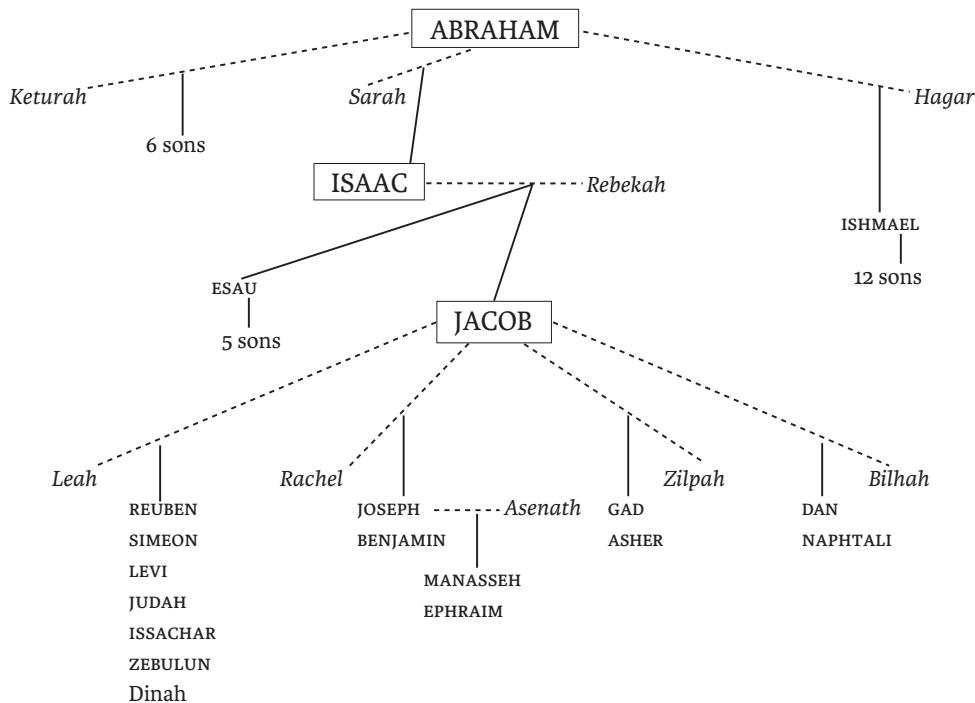
^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c Heb *him*

^d That is *See, a son*

4-5: See 24.10n.; 26.43. **10:** Jacob, the folk hero, has superhuman strength (see v. 3). **18:** Jacob asks for Rachel as a reward for service (cf. Josh 15.16-17; 1 Sam 17.25; 18.17) instead of paying the usual marriage price (34.12; Ex 22.16-17; Deut 22.29). **23-25:** Here Jacob the trickster (see 27.1-45n.) is tricked; this motif will continue throughout the Jacob story. The exchange could be made because the bride was brought veiled to the bridegroom (24.65). **27:** *The week* refers to the week of marriage festivity (Judg 14.12).

29.31-30.24: *The birth of eleven of Jacob's sons and Dinah* (for Benjamin's birth, see 35.16-18). This birth of children and the later birth of flocks (30.25-43) stand at the heart of the Jacob story. The pathos of the conflict



Chs 12–50: The genealogy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Dashed lines show wives or concubines; solid lines show descendants.

now my husband will love me.”³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has heard^a that I am hated, he has given me this son also”; and she named him Simeon.³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be joined^b to me, because I have borne him three sons”; therefore he was named Levi.³⁵ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise^c the LORD”; therefore she named him 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!”² Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”³ Then she said, “Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.”⁴ So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and

Jacob went in to her.⁵ And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son”; therefore she named him Dan.^d Rachel’s maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.⁸ Then Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled^e with my sister, and have prevailed”; so she named him Naphtali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.¹⁰ Then Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.¹¹ And Leah said, “Good fortune!” so she named him Gad.^f

^a Heb *shama*

^b Heb *lawah*

^c Heb *hodah*

^d That is *He judged*

^e Heb *niphtal*

^f That is *Fortune*

between women is expressed through folk-explanations of the names (see NRSV text notes). **30.3,9:** Like Sarah, Rachel and Leah give their servants to Jacob as surrogate wives; see 16.2n. **14:** *Mandrakes*, roots of a potato-like

¹² Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ And Leah said, "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy"; so she named him Asher.^a

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, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." ¹⁵ But 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." ¹⁶ When 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. ¹⁷ And God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Leah said, "God has given me my hire^b because I gave my maid to my husband"; so she named him Issachar. ¹⁹ And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor^c me, because I have borne him six sons"; so she named him Zebulun. ²¹ Afterwards she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.

²² Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach"; ²⁴ and she named him Joseph,^d saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

²⁵ When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know very well the service I have given you." ²⁷ But Laban 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; ²⁸ name your wages, and I will give it." ²⁹ Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served

you, and how your cattle have fared with me. ³⁰ For 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?" ³¹ He 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: ³² let 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. ³³ So 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." ³⁴ Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." ³⁵ But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female 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; ³⁶ and he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban'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. ³⁸ He set the rods that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the rods, and so the flocks produced young that were striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and the completely black animals in the flock of Laban; and he put his

^a That is *Happy*

^b *Heb sakar*

^c *Heb zabal*

^d That is *He adds*

plant, were thought to have aphrodisiac properties. ²¹ The note about the birth of Dinah is inserted (without a story or explanation of the name) to anticipate the story about her in ch 34.

30.25-43: The birth of Jacob's flocks. Since striped or speckled coloration was unusual, Laban seemingly had nothing to lose. **37-40:** Ancient breeders believed that the female, at the time of conception, was influenced by visual impressions that affect the color of the offspring. Jacob produced striped animals by putting striped sticks before the females' eyes while they were breeding.

own droves apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock.⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob laid the rods in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the rods,⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.⁴³ Thus the man grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, and male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys.

31 Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father."² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before.³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you."⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was,⁵ and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me.⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength;⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me.⁸ If he said, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped.⁹ Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me.

¹⁰ "During the mating of the flock I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats that leaped upon the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled.¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!'¹² And he said, 'Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.¹³ I am the God of Bethel,^a where

you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth.'¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house?¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us.¹⁶ All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

¹⁷ So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels;¹⁸ and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹ Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods.²⁰ And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee.²¹ So he fled with all that he had; starting out he crossed the Euphrates,^b and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

²² On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled.²³ So he took his kinsfolk with him and pursued him for seven days until he caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead.²⁴ But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night, and said to him, "Take heed that you say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad."

²⁵ Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsfolk camped in the hill country of Gilead.²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword.²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away

^a Crn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Heb *the river*

31.1–55: Jacob's departure from Laban's family. 4–16: This speech by Jacob and reply by his wives is often assigned by scholars to a different author than the surrounding verses, generally identified as J. In it Jacob presents to his wives a particular perspective on the previously narrated events (cf. 30.25–43). **13:** Where Jerusalem Zion traditions claimed that the LORD dwells in Zion (Ps's 9.12; 135.21), God claims in this text to be "the god of Bethel" (see 28.10–11n.). This probably reflects the particular perspective of this originally northern Jacob story in comparison with Jerusalem-oriented traditions that predominate in the Bible. **19–35:** The *household gods* (see 1 Sam 19.13–17) may have been figures representing ancestral deities. Possession of them ensured leadership of the family and legitimated property claims. Here Jacob's favored wife, Rachel, is the trickster (see

with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre.²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish.²⁹ It 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.'³⁰ Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father's house, why did you steal my gods?'³¹ Jacob answered Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.³² But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsfolk, point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.^a

³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered Rachel's.³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about in the tent, but did not find them.³⁵ And 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.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided Laban. Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?³⁷ Although you have felt about through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsfolk and your kinsfolk, so that they may decide between us two.³⁸ These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks.³⁹ That 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.⁴⁰ It was like this

with me: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.⁴¹ These 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.⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear^b 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."

⁴³ Then Laban 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 today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne?⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me."⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar.⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap.⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha:^c but Jacob called it Galeed.^d ⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed,⁴⁹ and the pillar^e Mizpah,^f for he said, "The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.⁵⁰ If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me."

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between

^a Heb *them*

^b Meaning of Heb uncertain

^c In Aramaic *The heap of witness*

^d In Hebrew *The heap of witness*

^e Compare Sam: MT lacks *the pillar*

^f That is *Watchpost*

27:1–45n.). ³⁵: *The way of women*, menstruation. ⁴²: The Hebrew word rendered as *Fear* in *Fear of Isaac*, is different from the Hebrew word usually used for "fear" of the Lord. The same word clearly means "terror" or "dread" elsewhere, as in the "terror of the Lord" refrain in Isa 2.10,19,21. Some scholars, however, have proposed alternative understandings of the word in this context, such as "refuge" of Isaac. ^{43–54}: The story is built around an older tradition regarding a boundary covenant between Arameans and Israelites (vv. 44,52), both of whom laid claim to the region of Gilead in northern Transjordan (see map on p. 252). On the *pillar*, see 28.18n. ⁴⁷: The stone heap is given two names (see notes *c* and *d*), one in Laban's language (Aramaic) and one in Jacob's (Hebrew).

you and me.⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor”—the God of their father—“judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear^a of his father Isaac,⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

⁵⁵^b Early in the morning Laban rose up, 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;² and when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called that place Mahanaim.^c

³ Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom,⁴ instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have lived with Laban as an alien, and stayed until now;⁵ and I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male and female slaves; and I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.’”

⁶ The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are 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 that 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 steadfast love and all the faithfulness that 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, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him; he may come and kill us all, the mothers with the children.¹² Yet you have said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their number.’”

¹³ So he spent that night there, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau,¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,¹⁵ thirty milch camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

¹⁶ These he delivered into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of 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 ahead of 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 ahead of me, and afterwards I shall see his face; perhaps he will accept me.”²¹ So the present passed on ahead of him; and he himself spent that night in the camp.

²² The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven chil-

^a Meaning of Heb uncertain

^b Ch 32.1 in Heb

^c Here taken to mean *Two camps*

⁵³: *Nahor*, Laban’s father, and *Abraham*, Jacob’s father, were brothers (11.27).

32.1–32: Journey toward Esau. **1–2:** The Transjordanian town of Mahanaim (see map on p. 252) may have been a capital of the Northern Kingdom during the brief reign of Ishbaal, Saul’s heir (2 Sam 2.8–9); was a site to which David fled during Absalom’s rebellion (17.24–29) and was an administrative center in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 4.14). *Angels*, see 28.12n. **3–21:** The ever-clever Jacob develops multiple strategies to appease his brother: dividing his camp (vv. 6–8), praying for divine help (vv. 9–12), and then sending several waves of livestock as a gift to Esau (vv. 13–21). **22–32:** Abraham unknowingly hosted divine visitors (18.1–15); now Jacob unknowingly

dren, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip 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 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."²⁸ Then the man^a said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,^b for you have striven with God and with humans,^c and have prevailed."²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel,^d saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.³² Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

33 Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids.² 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 ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

fights with God (cf. Ex 4.24–26). The narrative includes a complicated wordplay on the names of Jacob (Heb "ya'aqob"), the river Jabbok ("yabboq"; modern Nahr ez-Zerqa), and wrestled ("wayye'abeq"; v. 24). **25:** Jacob is so strong (29.10) that he is winning the contest until his divine opponent pulls Jacob's hip out of joint. **26:** The divine being had to vanish before sunrise—a mark of the antiquity of the tradition on which this story is based. **28:** Jacob's new name reflects a new self: no longer was he the "supplanter" (25.26; 27.36), but *Israel* (35.10), which probably originally meant "El rules" (the god El was the head of the Northwest Semitic pantheon). Here, however, it is interpreted to mean "the one who strives with God" (cf. Hos 12.3–4). *And with humans* refers to Jacob's strife with Esau and Laban. In this way, the community of Israel, as descendants of this god-wrestler, is depicted as a group that successfully strives with God and humans. **29:** The divine being refuses lest Jacob, by possessing the name, gain power over him. **30:** Jacob had feared to see Esau's face (v. 20), but instead saw God *face to face* and lived (see 16.13n.). **30–31:** The story is located at Penuel/Peniel ("face of El"), one of the first capitals of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.25). **32:** An Israelite prohibition against eating the thigh muscle of an animal is cited as testimony to the truth of the story. This prohibition is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

33.1–17: Partial reunion with Esau. **10:** *Like seeing the face of God*, who at Penuel (or Peniel) also proved to be gracious (32.30–31). **12–17:** Esau proposes to stay with Jacob, but Jacob sends him ahead, promising to join with him (v. 14). Jacob does not join him, however (v. 17), perhaps noting that Esau had always planned to wait

4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.⁵ When Esau looked up 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 finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.⁸ Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord."⁹ But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."¹⁰ Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor."¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

12 Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you."¹³ But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die.¹⁴ Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant,

^a Heb *he*

^b That is *The one who strives with God* or *God strives*

^c Or *with divine and human beings*

^d That is *The face of God*

and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."

¹⁵ So Esau said, "Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me." But he said, "Why should my lord be so kind to me?" ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth,^a and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

¹⁸ Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money^b the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.^c

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the region. ² When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the region, saw her, he seized her and lay with her by force. ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this girl to be my wife."

⁵ Now Jacob heard that Shechem^d had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, ⁷ just as the sons of Jacob came in from the field. When they heard of it, the men were indignant and very angry, because

he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done.

⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The heart of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. ⁹ Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and trade in it, and get property in it." ¹¹ Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, "Let me find favor with you, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Put the marriage present and gift as high as you like, and I will give whatever you ask me; only give me the girl to be my wife."

¹³ The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴ They 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. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male among you be circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live among you and become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

¹⁸ Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. ¹⁹ And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was

^a That is *Booths*

^b Heb *one hundred qesitah*

^c That is *God, the God of Israel*

^d Heb *he*

to kill him until their father died (27.41; cf. 35.29). ¹⁷ *Succoth* means "booths." Its precise location is uncertain.

33.18–35.5: The stay in Shechem and the rape of Dinah. **33.18: Shechem**, see 12.6–8n., was an important town in early Israel and one of the first capitals of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12.25). **19:** Here and in ch 34 *Shechem* is a personal name. As elsewhere in Genesis, the story portrays, in the guise of individuals, relations between Israel and non-Israelite groups. **20:** The name of the altar ("El is the God of Israel") may be another reflection of the worship of El in early Israel (see 28.16–17n.; 32.28,31–32n.). **34.1–31:** In its broader context, this story explains why Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's elder sons, did not receive his highest blessing; see 49.1–28n. **2:** See 33.19n. *Lay with her by force*, raped her, though some scholars interpret the Hebrew verbs as suggesting illicit sexual intercourse rather than rape. **7:** *Committed an outrage in Israel* is an old expression for ultimate offenses, such as violations of the sexual honor of the tribal group (here), the ban on booty in holy war (Josh 7.15), and the sanctity of hospitality (Judg 19.23–24; 20.6,10). **8–12:** Israelite law stipulates that a man who has sex with an unbetrothed woman must retroactively marry her by paying her father a high marriage price (Ex 22.16–17; Deut 22.28–29). This narrative either does not recognize this law, or assumes that it does not apply outside the

delighted with Jacob's daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his family.²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying,²¹ "These people are friendly with us; let them live in the land and trade in it, for the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters.²² Only on this condition will they agree to live among us, to become one people: that every male among us be circumcised as they are circumcised.²³ Will not their livestock, their property, and all their animals be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will live among us."²⁴ And all who went out of the city gate heeded Hamor and his son Shechem; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

²⁵ On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males.²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away.²⁷ And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled.²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field.²⁹ All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey.³⁰ Then 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 Perizzites; my numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household."³¹ But they said, "Should our sister be treated like a whore?"

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."² So 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 clothes;³ then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."⁴ So 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 that was near Shechem.

⁵ As they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities all around them, so that no one pursued them.⁶ Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him,⁷ and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel,^a because it was there that God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.⁸ And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth.^b

^a That is *God of Bethel*

^b That is *Oak of weeping*

people of Israel. **13–17:** Jacob's sons now are the tricksters (see 27.1–45n.). On circumcision see 17.9–14n. **21–23:** In contrast to Hamor's proposal to the Israelites of intermarriage and acquisition of land (vv. 8–10), his speech to his countrymen here betrays an interest in impoverishing the Israelites through assimilating them. On concern about intermarriage, see 24.3n. **25–26:** Simeon and Levi lead the killing and recapture of Dinah because, as older full brothers of Dinah (29.33–34; 30.21), they were responsible for avenging the violation of the family's honor through her. **27–29:** In a reversal of what the Shechemites had planned for them (vv. 21–23), the Israelites take all the Shechemites' possessions. **30–31:** Jacob is depicted here as less concerned about family honor than about good relations with the Canaanites (see 35.5). His sons' question is left unanswered at the end of the story (cf. Jon 4.11), but is ultimately addressed in 49.5–7. **35.1–4:** The present narrative reflects a later judgment on non-Yahwistic ritual objects. Like its parallels (Josh 24.23; Judg 10.16; 1 Sam 7.3), it may presuppose, however, a more ancient practice of burial of divine images in sacred places, i.e., by a sacred tree (see 12.6–8n.). **5:** Jacob's fears (see 34.30) prove to be unfounded.

35.6–15: Jacob's return to Bethel (cf. 28.10–22). **6–7:** In the ancient world deities had local manifestations (e.g., on two ancient inscriptions we find "Yahweh of Samaria"). Jacob honors the local manifestation of El at Bethel by calling the sanctuary there "El of Bethel." **8:** Once again a tree is associated with a revered sanctuary

⁹ God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. ¹⁰ God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he was called Israel. ¹¹ God said to him, “I am God Almighty:^a a fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you. ¹² The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” ¹³ Then God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ So Jacob called the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

¹⁶ Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, “Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son.” ¹⁸ As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni;^b but his father called him Benjamin.^c ¹⁹ So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there

(see 12.6–8n.). **9–15:** A Priestly parallel to the non-Priestly renaming tradition in 32.28 and the Bethel tradition in 28.10–22. **10:** Cf. 32.28. **11–12:** Cf. non-P, 28.13–15. The divine fulfillment of Isaac’s wish (28.3–4) that God bestow Abraham’s blessing (17.1–8) on Jacob. **11:** *God Almighty*, see 17.1n. **13:** P stresses that God is not bound to Bethel in the way asserted in the non-Priestly Bethel narratives (28.10–22; 32.6–7). God merely spoke there and left. **14:** In a P doublet of 28.18–19, Jacob sets up a pillar at Bethel (see 28.18n.) and (re)names the place.

35.16–21: The birth of Benjamin and death of Rachel. **18:** Dying in childbirth, Rachel gives an ominous name (“son of my sorrow”) to the baby. In this instance (cf. 29.31–30.24) the father overrules his wife’s naming and gives him a more propitious one. *Benjamin* (see note c) refers either to the right hand as a symbol of power or to the tribe’s position south (“right”) of Ephraim. **19:** Here and in 48.7 the tomb of Rachel is located near Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem). Compare 1 Sam 10.2 and Jer 31.15. **20:** On pillars, see 28.18n. **21:** From this point on the name *Israel* is often used to refer to Jacob (32.28).

35.22–29: Concluding materials on Jacob’s sons and Isaac’s death and burial. **22a:** This aside describes how Reuben violated his father’s honor by sleeping with Jacob’s concubine, the servant of recently deceased Rachel, Bilhah (29.29; 30.3–8). Later he will be cursed for this act (see 49.3–4n.). This is a part of a series of texts added to the early Jacob and Joseph narratives that explain Jacob’s preference for Judah (see 49.1–28n.), and thus Judean kingship under David and his successors. **22b–29:** A Priestly listing of Jacob’s sons and the death and burial notice of Isaac.

36.1–43: Overview of the descendants of Esau and prior inhabitants of Edom/Seir. Cf. 25.12–18. Before the narrative goes into detail on the descendants of Jacob (37.2–50.26), it gives an overview (largely Priestly) of the descendants of Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac. **2–3:** Though this note agrees with other Priestly material in stressing his intermarriage with foreigners, the names or parentage of Esau’s wives are different here (cf.

to this day. **21** Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

22 While Israel lived 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. **23** The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

24 The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

25 The sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maid: Dan and Naphtali. **26** The sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maid: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

27 Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had resided as aliens. **28** Now the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years. **29** And Isaac breathed his last; he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

36 These are the descendants of Esau (that is, Edom). **2** Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah daughter of Anah son^d of Zibeon the Hivite, ³ and

^a Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

^b That is *Son of my sorrow*

^c That is *Son of the right hand* or *Son of the South*

^d Sam Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*

Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth.⁴ Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau; Basemath bore Reuel;⁵ and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle, all his livestock, and all the property he had acquired in the land of Canaan; and he moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob.⁷ For their possessions were too great for them to live together; the land where they were staying could not support them because of their livestock.⁸ So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom.

⁹ These are the descendants of Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir.¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz son of Adah the wife of Esau; Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath.

¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.¹² (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These were the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.¹³ These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife, Basemath.¹⁴ These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah son^a of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

¹⁵ These are the clans^b of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the clans^b Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz,¹⁶ Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the clans^b of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Adah.¹⁷ These are the sons of Esau's son Reuel: the clans^b Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the clans^b of Reuel in the land of Edom; they are the sons of Esau's wife Basemath.¹⁸ These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: the clans^b Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are

the clans^b born of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah.¹⁹ These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their clans.^b

²⁰ These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,²¹ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the clans^b of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom.²² The sons of Lotan were Hori and Heman; and Lotan's sister was Timna.²³ These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.²⁴ These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; he is the Anah who found the springs^c in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon.²⁵ These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.²⁶ These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran.²⁷ These are the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.²⁸ These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.²⁹ These are the clans^b of the Horites: the clans^b Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah,³⁰ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the clans^b of the Horites, clan by clan^d in the land of Seir.

³¹ These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites.³² Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhhabah.³³ Bela died, and Jobab son of Zerah of Bozrah succeeded him as king.³⁴ Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king.³⁵ Husham died, and Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king, the name of his city being Avith.

^a Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*

^b Or *chiefs*

^c Meaning of Heb uncertain

^d Or *chief by chief*

26.34–35; 28.8–9). 6–8: Echoes the (non-Priestly) story of Abraham's split from Lot (13.2–13). 9–14: A list of Esau's descendants organized by the mother (cf. 35.23–26). 9: The repeated introduction (cf. 36.1) may indicate that an earlier Priestly overview of Esau's descendants began here. 15–19: A list of clans of the sons of Esau that diverges slightly from vv. 9–14 in its list of offspring of Eliphaz (cf. 36.11 and 15–16). 20–30: A list of clans of Horite inhabitants of Seir (see 14.6), which may have been originally understood as a region in Transjordan different from Edom. In Deut 2.12,22 Esau (Edom) is described as having expelled the Horites from Seir. 31–39: A

³⁶ Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. ³⁷ Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates succeeded him as king. ³⁸ Shaul died, and Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as king. ³⁹ Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, and Hadar succeeded him as king, the name of his city being Pau; his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab.

⁴⁰ These are the names of the clans^a of Esau, according to their families and their localities by their names: the clans^a Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹ Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴² Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³ Magdiel, and Iram; these are the clans^a of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their settlements in the land that they held.

37 Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. ²This is the story of the family of Jacob.

list of early kings of Edom (see Num 20.14). **40–43:** A list of a slightly different kind of clan group (Heb “alup”) in Edom that partially overlaps with names occurring in 36.9–19.

37.1–50.26: The story of Joseph and his family. As indicated in the Introduction, this portion of Genesis features an intricate depiction of Joseph's relations with his brothers and father. Starting with a pair of dreams (37.5–11), the narrative follows a trajectory from his brothers' murderous hatred of Joseph to Joseph's eventual testing of and reunion with them (chs 42–45; 50). Like the Jacob story, this narrative has Northern connections, especially with the addition of the story in 48.8–14 of Joseph's special blessing on his son, Ephraim. The first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam, was a member of the tribe of Ephraim (1 Kings 11.26), and stories like these about early Israelite ancestors would have reinforced his claim to rule. Yet over time the story evolved in significance, through additions assuming *Judah's* destiny to rule (see 49.1–28n.), inserted echoes of the promise theme first introduced in the Abraham story (such as 46.1–4; 48.15–16 and 12.1–3n.), connections leading to the book of Joshua (50.24–25), and a few fragments that may come from the Priestly source (e.g. 37.1–2; 46.8–27; 47.27–28; 48.3–6; 49.29–33).

37.1–11: Joseph's dreams of power. These narratives open the remarkably cohesive story of Joseph and his brothers in chs 37–50. Source critics have attempted to trace strands of the hypothesized Yahwistic and Elohistic source documents (see Introduction) through the Joseph story; thus sections focusing on Reuben and Midianites (e.g., 37.22–24, 28–36) were assigned to E, while sections focusing on Judah and the Ishmaelites (e.g., 37.25–28) were assigned to J. Others suggested that an early Joseph story focused on Reuben was revised by an author who focused on Judah and referred to Jacob as “Israel.” Despite the presence of some additions and modifications (e.g., 37.2a; 41.46), however, the essential unity of the Joseph story is clear. **2a:** *This is the story*, despite the different translation here in the NRSV, this heading is identical with those in 5.1; 6.9; 10.1; 11.27; 25.12, 18; 36.1, 9 that refer to the “descendants” of a given figure. Here it identifies what follows as concerning the “descendants of Jacob,” that is Joseph and his brothers. **2b–4:** According to the Priestly narrative (vv. 1–2), Joseph tattled on his brothers. The non-Priestly narrative (vv. 3–4) explains his brothers' antagonism toward him as resulting from jealousy about Jacob's love. Joseph is favored as the eldest of the children of Jacob by his favorite wife, Rachel (30.22–24). The *long robe with sleeves* (v. 3; see note *b*) is a royal garment (2 Sam 13.18–19) anticipating Joseph's future status. At this point in the story neither the reader nor the brothers know how this will come about. **5–8:** This first dream report predicts Joseph's domination of his brothers (43.26; 50.18; cf. 42.6). The story may intend to predict the future rule of Jeroboam, a member of the

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.^b ⁴ But 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 Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, “Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷ There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves

^a Or *chiefs*

^b Traditional rendering (compare Gk): *a coat of many colors*; meaning of Heb uncertain

gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.”⁸ His brothers said to him, “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

⁹ He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, “Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?”¹¹ So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem.¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.”¹⁴ So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.

He came to Shechem,¹⁵ and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, “What are you seeking?”¹⁶ “I am seeking my brothers,” he said; “tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.”¹⁷ The man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan.¹⁸ They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him.¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here

comes this dreamer.²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.”²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.”²² Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves^a that he wore;²⁴ and they took him and threw 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 Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers agreed.

²⁸ When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces 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.³⁰ He returned to his brothers, and said, “The boy is gone; and I, where can I turn?”³¹ Then they took Joseph’s robe,

^a See note on 37:3

Joseph tribe of Ephraim, over the other tribes of northern Israel (1 Kings 11.26; 12.1–14.20). **9–11:** Jacob sees this dream as predicting that he and Joseph’s mother, Rachel, will join the brothers in submitting to Joseph. This episode was probably part of an independent Joseph story that originally did not follow an account of Rachel’s death (see 35.16–20).

37.12–36: Joseph is sold into slavery. **17:** Dothan is about 15 mi (24 km) north of Shechem and lay along a trade route from Syria to Egypt. **20:** *The pits* were cisterns for storing rain water and sometimes used to imprison people (Jer 38.6). **22–27:** The advice of Reuben and Judah reflects the ancient idea that blood cannot be “concealed” (v. 26), but cries out for requital (see 4.10–11n.). **25–36:** Most scholars agree that some combination or modification of traditions has occurred here. Though the brothers decide here to sell Joseph (v. 27) and Joseph later says that they did so (45.4–5), this narrative describes the *Midianites* as drawing him out and selling him to the *Ishmaelites* (v. 28). Later, both the *Midianites* (37.36) and the *Ishmaelites* (39.1; cf. 37.25) are identified as the ones who sold Joseph to Potiphar. **25:** *Gilead*, in northern Transjordan, was famous for its *balm*, an aromatic resin used in healing (see Jer 8.22). **26–27:** On the role of Judah, see 44.18–34n. **31–34:** Now Jacob is tricked by an

slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood.³² They had the long robe with sleeves^a taken to their father, and they said, “This we have found; see now whether it is your son’s robe or not.”³³ He recognized it, and said, “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.”³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters sought 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 bewailed him.³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

38 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and settled near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah.² There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her.³ She conceived and bore a son; and he named him Er.⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son whom she named Onan.⁵ Yet again she bore a son, and she named him Shelah. She^b was in Chezib when she bore him.⁶ Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar.⁷ But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death.⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, “Go in to

your brother’s wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother.”⁹ But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother’s wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother.¹⁰ What he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also.¹¹ Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Remain a widow in your father’s house until my son Shelah grows up”—for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father’s house.

¹² In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter, died; when Judah’s time of mourning was over,^c he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.¹³ When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep,”¹⁴ she put off her widow’s garments, put on a veil, wrapped herself up, and sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. She saw that Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage.¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face.¹⁶ He went over to her at

^a See note on 37.3

^b Gk: Heb *He*

^c Heb *when Judah was comforted*

article of clothing (contrast 27.15; see 29.23–25n). **35: Sheol**, the underworld to which a person went at death—the Hebrew Bible does not recognize a differentiated heaven and hell. Since this afterlife was at best a shadowy existence (see Ps 6.5; Eccl 9.10), Jacob’s going to his son there was not a comforting expectation. **36: Multiple traditions** testify to some kind of connection between Joseph and an Egyptian *Potiphar*/* *Potiphera*.” *Potiphar* is a form of “*Potiphera*,” the name of the Egyptian priest who is Joseph’s father-in-law in 41.45 and 46.20.

38.1–30: Judah and Tamar. Though an apparent interlude in the Joseph story, this chapter echoes elements of ch 37 and anticipates themes from the upcoming Joseph story. Yet this story contrasts with most of this part of Genesis in its focus on Judah, not Joseph. Moreover, it has striking parallels with later narratives about David (see 38.1–2n., 6n.). Both elements—the focus on Judah and anticipation of David—link 38.1–30 with a sequence of episodes, starting in 30.21; 34.1–31; 35.22, that prepare for Jacob’s blessing of Judah and prediction of the Davidic dynasty in 49.8–12. See 49.1–28n. and 8–12n. **1–2: Adullam**, a town where David later built up his mercenary army (1 Sam 22.1; 2 Sam 23.13). The locales in this narrative are appropriately in the territory of the tribe of Judah. Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua (Heb “*Bat Shu’ā*,” v. 12), anticipates the later “*Bathsheba*” of the David and Solomon narratives (2 Sam 11; cf. 1 Chr 3.5). **6:** Links to the David and Solomon story continue with mention of “*Tamar*” (see 2 Sam 13). **8–10:** According to the ancient custom of levirate marriage (Deut 25.5–10), *the duty of a brother-in-law* was to father a male descendant for his deceased brother and thus perpetuate his name and inheritance. Onan’s death is attributed to his refusal to perform this duty (thus endangering Judah’s line), probably by coitus interruptus (rather than “onanism,” masturbation). **11:** Judah apparently fears that the death of his sons resulted from Tamar’s sinister power. **12–19:** Tamar tricks Judah into playing the role of the brother-

the roadside, 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?" ¹⁷ He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it." ¹⁸ He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹ Then she got up 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 Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he could not find her. ²¹ He asked the townspeople, "Where is the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the wayside?" But they said, "No prostitute has been here." ²² So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; moreover the townspeople said, 'No prostitute has been here.'" ²³ Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, otherwise we will be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her."

²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom." 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, "It was the owner of these who made me pregnant." And she said, "Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." ²⁶ Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more in the right than I, since I did not give her to

my son Shelah." And he did not lie with her again.

²⁷ When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. ²⁸ While she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a crimson thread, saying, "This one came out first." ²⁹ But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore he was named Perez.^a ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out with the crimson thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.^b

39 Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ 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; 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 on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife

^a That is *A breach*

^b That is *Brightness*; perhaps alluding to the crimson thread

in-law by dressing as a prostitute and allowing him to hire her to have sex (see 27.1–45n.). **18:** The *signet* was a seal, often suspended from the neck with a *cord*, used to "sign" documents. **20–22:** Though some interpret the Hebrew here for "holy woman" ("qedeshah") as referring to a *temple prostitute* (so NRSV), it is unlikely that there was an institution of sacred prostitution in ancient Israel. Some commentators propose that Judah's Adullamite friend is just delicately referring to the missing "prostitute" as a similarly unattached "holy woman." **24:** Stoning was the usual punishment for adultery (Deut 22.23–24; cf. Jn 8.5), although burning was prescribed for exceptional cases (Lev 21.9). **25–26:** The presentation of evidence to Judah here echoes the presentation of the bloody robe to Jacob in 37.32–33. **27–30:** The birth of Judah's twins is depicted in terms similar to that of Jacob and Esau (25.24–26). The final link of this chapter to the David narrative (see 38.1–2, 6n.) occurs with Perez, the firstborn and ancestor of David (Ruth 4.18–22; see 49.1–28 and 8–12n.).

39.1–23: Joseph's success, temptation, and imprisonment. **1–6:** Joseph's enjoyment of blessing and Potiphar's recognition of it are an outgrowth of the promise to Abraham in 12.1–3 (see 12.2n.). **7–20:** A parallel Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers" also tells a tale of how a man rejected the advances of another's wife, who then

cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.”⁸ But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. ⁹He 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 could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”¹⁰ And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. ¹¹One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house,¹² she caught hold of his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.¹³ When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,¹⁴ she called out to the members of her household and said to them, “See, my husband^a 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; ¹⁵and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”¹⁶ Then she kept 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 raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”

¹⁹ When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, “This is the way your servant treated me,” he became enraged. ²⁰And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. ²¹But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²²The chief jailer committed to Joseph’s care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.

²³The chief jailer 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.

40 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt.² Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker,³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined.⁴ The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody.⁵ One night they both dreamed—the cupbearer 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.⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled.⁷ So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?”⁸ They 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? Please tell them to me.”

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me,¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes.¹¹ Pharaoh’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.”¹² Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days;¹³ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office; and you shall place Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer.¹⁴ But remember me when it is well with you; please do me the kindness to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this place.¹⁵ For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also

^a Heb *he*

laid false accusations against him and almost brought about his death. **12–15:** Again (see 37.31–33), Joseph’s garment is used as misleading evidence. **14:** Hebrew, see 14.13n. **21–23:** Abraham’s blessing is again evident here.

40.1–23: Joseph establishes his expertise as dream interpreter. Doubled dreams are a recurring motif in the Joseph narrative (see 37.5–10; 41.1–7,32; 42.9). **13:** Lift up your head, i.e., graciously free you from prison (2 Kings 25.27). The same expression is applied ironically to the baker’s fate in v. 19. **15:** Stolen, 37.28.

I have done nothing that they should have 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,¹⁷ and 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."¹⁸ And Joseph answered, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days;¹⁹ within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a pole; 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 cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand;²² but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them.²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

41 After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile,² and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass.³ Then seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile.⁴ The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke.⁵ Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk.⁶ Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them.⁷ The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream.⁸ In the morning his spirit was troubled; so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my faults today.¹⁰ Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard.¹¹ We

dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own meaning.¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each according to his dream.¹³ As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh.

¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile;¹⁸ and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass.¹⁹ Then seven other cows came up after them, poor, very ugly, and thin. Never had I seen such ugly ones in all the land of Egypt.²⁰ The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows,²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had done so, for they were still as ugly as before. Then I awoke.²² I fell asleep a second time^a and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk,²³ and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them;²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. But when I told it to the magicians, there was no one who could explain it to me."

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "Pharaoh's dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one.²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of

^a Gk Syr Vg: Heb lacks *I fell asleep a second time*

41.1–57: Joseph's elevation as the result of successful dream interpretation. 8: The narrator intends to demonstrate the superiority of Israel's God over Egyptian magic and wisdom (cf. Ex 8.18–19; 9.11; Dan 2.2–19; 5.8,15–

famine.²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt.³⁰ 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.³¹ The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous.³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years.³⁵ 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.³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine."

³⁷ The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.³⁸ Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?"³⁹ So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you."⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."⁴² Removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; he arrayed him in garments of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck.⁴³ He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they cried out in front of him, "Bow the knee!"^a Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.⁴⁴ Moreover Pharaoh said

to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."⁴⁵ Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, as his wife. Thus Joseph gained authority over the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt.⁴⁷ During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly.⁴⁸ He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty^b 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.⁴⁹ So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

⁵⁰ Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him.

⁵¹ Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh,^c "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."

⁵² The second he named Ephraim,^d "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

⁵³ The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end;⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread.⁵⁵ When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do."⁵⁶ And since the famine had spread over all the land,

^a *Abrek*, apparently an Egyptian word similar in sound to the Hebrew word meaning to *kneel*

^b Sam Gk: MT *the seven years that were*

^c That is *Making to forget*

^d From a Hebrew word meaning *to be fruitful*

28. 16: Joseph denies having any occult art and ascribes his skill solely to God. 42: *His signet ring* (see 38.18n.) empowered Joseph to act as Pharaoh's representative. 45: The installation rites culminate in the bestowal of an Egyptian name on Joseph. Joseph's adoption into the Egyptian court is further indicated by his marriage into the priesthood of *On* or *Heliopolis*. No judgment is attached to this intermarriage with an Egyptian foreigner (see Deut 23.8–9). *Potiphera*, see 37.36n. 46: This is the first Priestly notice since the outset of the Joseph story (37.2). 50–52: The birth of Joseph's two sons; see 46.20; ch 48.

Joseph opened all the storehouses,^a and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt.⁵⁷ Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you keep looking at one another? ²I have heard,” he said, “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.⁴ But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him.⁵ Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

⁶Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he 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.⁷ When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.”⁸ Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.⁹ Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!”¹⁰ They said to him, “No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food.¹¹ We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies.”¹² But he said to them, “No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!”¹³ They said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.”¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have

said to you; you are spies!¹⁵ Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here!¹⁶ Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.”¹⁷ And 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:¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households,²⁰ and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they agreed to do so.²¹ They said to one another, “Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us.”²² Then Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”²³ They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter.²⁴ He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes.²⁵ Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man’s money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

²⁶ They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed.²⁷ When one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money at the top of the sack.²⁸ He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in

^a Gk Vg Compare Syr: Heb *opened all that was in (or, among) them*

42.1–38: Joseph’s brothers’ first journey to Egypt. 5: See 12.10; 26.1. 6: *Bowed themselves before him*, since all but Benjamin are present, Joseph’s first dream (37.5–8) is almost fulfilled (cf. 43.26). 9–14: The charge of spying is natural, since Egypt’s frontier, facing Canaan, was vulnerable to attack (Ex 1.10). Nevertheless, the narrator (v. 9) explains Joseph’s accusation as related to his memory of his dreams (37.5–11). 15–17: Though Joseph claims to be “testing” whether his brothers are spies, he actually seems to be “testing” whether they will betray his full brother and father’s favorite (v. 4), Benjamin, the way they once betrayed him (see chs 43–44). The reader, however, does not yet know this and is left to wonder about Joseph’s motives for putting his brothers through the following ordeal. 21–23: The brothers’ expression of guilt at their earlier betrayal of Joseph hints at the change

my sack!" At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, "What is this that God has done to us?"

²⁹ When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, ³⁰ "The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. ³¹ But we said to him, 'We are honest men, we are not spies. ³² We are twelve brothers, sons of our father; one is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in the land of Canaan.' ³³ Then 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, take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. ³⁴ Bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will release your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.'

³⁵ As they were emptying their sacks, there in each one's sack was his bag of money. When they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were dismayed. ³⁶ And their father Jacob said to them, "I am the one you have bereaved of children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has happened to me!" ³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "You may kill 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." ³⁸ But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left. If harm should come to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol."

43 Now the famine was severe in the land. ² And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little more food." ³ But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food; ⁵ but 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.'" ⁶ Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" ⁷ They 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?'" ⁸ Then Judah said to his father Israel, "Send the boy with me, and let us be on our way, so that we may live and not die—you and we and also our little ones. ⁹ I myself will be surety for him; you can hold me accountable for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. ¹⁰ 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 them down as a present to the man—a little balm and a little honey, gum, resin, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹² Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the top of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³ Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; ¹⁴ may God Almighty^a grant you mercy before the man, so that he may send back your other brother and Benjamin. As for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." ¹⁵ So the men took the present, and they took double the money with them, as well as Benjamin. Then they went on their way 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." ¹⁷ The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, replaced in

^a Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

of heart for which Joseph is looking. **25: Money**, lit., "silver." **38: Sheol**, see 37.35n.

43.1-34: Joseph's brothers' second journey to Egypt. **1-2:** Simeon, left as a hostage in Egypt (vv. 14,23), is apparently forgotten, for the brothers return only when more grain is needed. **3-7:** Cf. 42.29-34. **8-10:** Again (see 37.26-27) Judah is depicted as the hero; see 44.18-34n. **11: Balm . . . gum, and resin**, echoing 37.25. **14: God**

our sacks the first time, that we have been brought in, so that he may have an opportunity to fall upon us, to make slaves of us and take our donkeys.”¹⁹ So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house.²⁰ They 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 each one’s money in the top of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it back with us.²² Moreover we have brought down with us additional money 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 When the steward^a 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 fodder,²⁵ they made the present ready for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him.²⁷ 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 did obeisance.

²⁹ Then he looked up 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 With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private

room and wept there.³¹ Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, “Serve the meal.”³² They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians.³³ When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, 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.

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 top of his sack.² Put my cup, the silver cup, in the top 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 only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward, “Go, 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?’^b Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.”

⁶ When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them.⁷ They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should

^a Heb *the man*

^b Gk Compare Vg: Heb lacks *Why have you stolen my silver cup?*

Almighty, see 17.1n. **23:** The Egyptian steward anticipates the emphasis of the story on divine providence (44.16; 45.5–8; 50.20). **26:** With all eleven brothers now bowing down (cf. v. 15), they unknowingly fulfill the first dream in 37.5–8 (see 50.18n.). **29–30:** Joseph was overcome with affection for Benjamin, his only full brother (through Rachel). **34:** Just as Benjamin (42.4,38; 43.6–14) and before him Joseph (37.3–4) was favored by Jacob, so here—through Joseph’s actions—the brothers watch a son of Rachel enjoy special privilege in the Egyptian court. The stage is set for a reprise of their murderous envy once shown toward Joseph in Gen 37 and now potentially directed at Benjamin.

44.1–34: Joseph’s final test of his brothers. **1–5:** Here the focus is on Joseph’s cup, a sacred vessel for divination, prediction of the future (cf. 42.25–28). The brothers’ (unknowing) taking of the cup and pronouncement of a death penalty on the thief (v. 9) echo the earlier story of Rachel’s stealing of Laban’s household gods (31.19) and Jacob’s pronouncement of the death penalty on the thief (31.32). In a narrative that parallels those stories,

do such a thing! ⁸Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves.” ¹⁰He said, “Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free.” ¹¹Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. ¹²He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

¹⁴Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. ¹⁵Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?” ¹⁶And Judah said, “What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? How can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; here we are then, my lord's slaves, both we and also the one in whose possession the cup has been found.” ¹⁷But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the one in whose possession the cup was found shall be my slave; but as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

¹⁸Then Judah stepped up to him and said, “O my lord, let your servant please speak a word in my lord's ears, and do not be angry with 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. His brother is dead; 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, so that I may set my eyes on him.’ ²²We said to my lord, ‘The boy 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. Only if our youngest brother goes with us, will we 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 comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.’ ³⁰Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, ³¹when he sees that the boy 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 surely for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I will bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life.’ ³³Now therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers.

³⁴For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father.”

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away

Joseph lays a trap for his brothers. **17:** Joseph tests his brothers (see 42.15–17) to see whether they will let Benjamin go into slavery as they once did with him (37.25–35). In this case, the stakes are higher, since the brothers now think that they themselves will go into slavery if they do not betray Benjamin. **18–34:** Judah had secured Jacob's release of Benjamin through offering himself as collateral (43.8–10; see v. 32). Now he steps forth to express a respect for their father's bond to Rachel's son(s) that had not been evident among the brothers before (cf. 37.19–35). This is a prime example of a passage in the Joseph narrative where Judah, rather than the elder Reuben, plays the role of the most powerful and prominent son (see also 37.26–27; ch 38; 43.3–5, 8–10; 46.28). Such texts have typically been assigned to a Judah-Israel (or J) layer of the story (see Introduction and 37.1–11n.), but may rather reflect an attempt in the Joseph story as a whole (perhaps an early Northern text) to show even Judah, King David's ancestor, eventually recognizing Joseph's right to rule over his brothers.

from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry 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 delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹² And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And 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," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. ¹⁷ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. ¹⁸ Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land.' ¹⁹ You are further charged to say, 'Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

²¹ The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. ²² To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. ²³ To his father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel^a along the way."

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶ And they told him, "Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt." He was stunned; he could not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die."

46 When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² God spoke to Israel in visions

^a Or be agitated

45.1–28: Joseph makes himself known to his brothers and father. **1–3:** The brothers initially react with shock to the knowledge that they face the brother whom they sold into slavery. **4–13:** Joseph reassures his brothers by telling them that God—not they—sent him into slavery. God sent him there so that he might feed his family in the famine. **10:** *The land of Goshen*, probably located in the eastern Nile Delta. **16–20:** Asiatics are frequently attested as living in Egypt, though no Egyptian records refer specifically to the Israelites living there.

46.1–27: Jacob's migration to Egypt. **1–4:** Jacob's first stop on the way out of the land is *Beer-sheba*, where the same God who told Isaac to stay in the land and not to go to Egypt (26.2–3) now tells his son, Jacob, to leave

of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” ³Then he said, “I am God,^a the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. ⁴I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph’s own hand shall close your eyes.”

⁵Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they 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.

⁸Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt. Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, ⁹and the children of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰The children of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,^b the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹The children of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹²The children of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the children of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³The children of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Jashub,^c and Shimron. ¹⁴The children of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel ¹⁵(these are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; in all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three). ¹⁶The children of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Arel. ¹⁷The children of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. The children of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel ¹⁸(these are the children of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons). ¹⁹The children of Jacob’s wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter

of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. ²¹The children of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard ²²(these are the children of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all). ²³The children of Dan: Hashum.^d ²⁴The children of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem ²⁵(these are the children of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, 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 the wives of his sons, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷The children of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

²⁸Israel^e sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, ²⁹Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. ³⁰Israel said to Joseph, “I can die now, having seen for myself 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. ³²The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; 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 livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors’—in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians.”

^a Heb *the God*

^b Or *Saul*

^c Compare Sam Gk Num 26.24; 1 Chr 7.1: MT *Job*

^d Gk: Heb *Hushim*

^e Heb *He*

the land for Egypt (see 12.1–3n.; 28.13–15n.). God also expands the earlier promise that Abraham would be a *great nation* (see 12.2n.) by saying that God will make Jacob a great nation in *Egypt* (v. 3; see 47.27; Ex 1.7,9). **8–27:** A Priestly section listing Jacob’s descendants by their mothers, using the traditional number seventy (v. 27; Ex 1.5; Deut 10.22). Most names of the clan leaders are in the Priestly list in Num 26. **12:** See ch 38.

46.28–47.28: Jacob’s family settles in Egypt. **46.34:** All shepherds are abhorrent, there is no nonbiblical evi-

47 So Joseph went 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 Goshen.”² From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh.³ Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were.”⁴ They said to Pharaoh, “We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants’ flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen.”⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you.⁶ The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.”

⁷ Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.⁸ Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the years of your life?”⁹ Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn.”¹⁰ Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.¹¹ Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed.¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe. The land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine.¹⁴ Joseph collected all the money to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house.¹⁵ When the money

from the land of Egypt and from the land of Canaan was spent, all the Egyptians came to Joseph, and said, “Give us food! Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.”¹⁶ And Joseph answered, “Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.”¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph; and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. That year he supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock.¹⁸ When that year was ended, they came to him the following year, and said to him, “We can 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.¹⁹ Shall we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land in exchange for food. We with our land will become slaves to Pharaoh; just give us seed, so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.”

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh’s.²¹ As for the people, he made slaves of them^a from one end of Egypt to the other.²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.²³ Then Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you; sow the land.²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give one-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.”²⁵ They said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh.”²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have

^a Sam Gk Compare Vg: MT *He removed them to the cities*

dence for this assertion. **47.7,12:** According to this Priestly tradition, *Jacob blessed Pharaoh*. **11:** A Priestly notice. *The land of Rameses* cannot be identified with certainty. The first Egyptian pharaoh with that name ruled at the beginning of the thirteenth century BCE. **13–26:** Joseph’s clever impoverishment of the Egyptians here contrasts

the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; and they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly. ²⁸ Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred forty-seven years.

²⁹ When the time of Israel's death drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If I have found favor with you, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. ³⁰ When I lie down with my ancestors, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." ³¹ And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself on the head of his bed.

48 After this Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," he^a summoned his strength and sat up in bed. ³ And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty^b appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.' ⁵ Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶ As

for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. ⁷ For when I came from Paddan, Rachel, alas, died in the land of Canaan on the way, while there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; 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?" ⁹ Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them.

¹¹ Israel said to Joseph, "I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also." ¹² Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees,^c and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³ Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them near him. ¹⁴ But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵ He blessed Joseph, and said,

"The God before whom my ancestors
Abraham and Isaac walked,

^a Heb *Israel*

^b Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

^c Heb *from his knees*

with his beneficent provision for his own family (see 45.5–11; 50.20–21). **27–28:** Another fragment from P. Here the Priestly fertility promise to Abraham (17.2,6; cf. 1.28; 9.1,7) is fulfilled in Egypt. **27: Goshen**, see 45.10n.

47.29–49.33: Jacob's preparations for death, including the adoption and blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.

This section is viewed by many scholars as a series of later insertions into the Joseph story, linking it back to the Jacob story and forward to the story of the Israelites. **47.29:** *Put your hand under my thigh*, see 24.2n. **30–31:** Joseph binds himself by oath to bury Jacob in an ancestral burial place, perhaps in Transjordan (see 50.10n.). This non-Priestly notice parallels the Priestly notice where Jacob orders his sons to bury him in the cave at Machpelah (49.29–33; see ch 23). **48.3–6:** This Priestly narrative refers to the Priestly Bethel (Luz) account (35.9–13) in describing Jacob's adoption of his two grandsons by Joseph. The narrative accounts for the division of the "house of Joseph" (Josh 17.17; 18.5; Judg 1.23,35) into two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. **7: 35.16–20. 8–14:** In having Jacob favor the younger son, Ephraim, over the older, Manasseh, this non-Priestly narrative echoes the previous accounts of Jacob's achievement of ascendancy over Esau (25.22–34; 27.1–45). Like the older Joseph story into which this scene is inserted (see 47.28–49.33n.), this section may intend to predict the Ephraimite Jeroboam's ascendancy over the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 11.26; 12.1–14.20; see 37.5–8n.). **10:** Cf. 27.1. **15–16:** Jacob passes

the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth."

17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." 19 But 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 offspring shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying,

"By you^a Israel will invoke blessings, saying,
 'God make you^a like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'"

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. 22 I now give to you one portion^b more than to your brothers, the portion^b that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

onto the Joseph tribes the special blessing of Abraham and Isaac (12.1–3; 26.2–5; etc.). 17–19: See 8–14n. 20: This older version of the blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. vv. 15–16) is an example of people "blessing themselves by" another (see 12.3n.). 22: In Hebrew *one portion* (or "shoulder," Heb "shekem") is a play on the name "Shechem" (see 12.6n.). *With my sword and with my bow*, cf. 33.19–34.31. *Amorites*, see 10.16–18a n.

49.1–28: **Jacob's blessing on his twelve sons.** Though the poem is depicted as a deathbed *blessing* by the text following it (49.28; cf. 27.4 and n.), this poem seems to have been originally designed as a prediction of the destinies, good and bad, of the tribes of Israel. Many scholars have argued that the poem is ancient on the basis of its language and resemblance to tribal poems in Deut 33 and Judg 5. Nevertheless, the present form of the poem appears to have been modified to fit the narrative context in which it has been put. Its first part follows the birth order of 29.31–35 and legitimates rule for Judah and—by extension—the Davidic dynasty. The author of these changes may be responsible for inserting the whole poem into its present context, as well as for the addition to the Jacob-Joseph story of the narratives referred to in 49.3–7 (30.21; 34.1–31; 35.21–22a; cf. 37.36–38.30). 3–4: This section justifies Reuben's ejection from favor as firstborn by recalling the story of his sleeping with his father's concubine (see 35.22n.). 5–7: Judah's older brothers, Simeon and Levi, fail to take Reuben's place because of their role in the despoiling of Shechem (34.25–31). 8–12: With his three older brothers out of favor (vv. 3–7), Judah receives the greatest part of his father's blessing. The narrative of the succession to David features a similar displacement of older sons: Amnon (2 Sam 13), Absalom (2 Sam 15–18), and Adonijah

49 Then Jacob called his sons, and said:
 "Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob;
 listen to Israel your father.

3 Reuben, you are my firstborn,
 my might and the first fruits of my vigor,
 excelling in rank and excelling in power.

4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel
 because you went up onto your father's bed;
 then you defiled it—you^c went up onto my couch!

5 Simeon and Levi are brothers;
 weapons of violence are their swords.

6 May I never come into their council;
 may I not be joined to their company—
 for in their anger they killed men,
 and at their whim they hamstrung oxen.

7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
 and their wrath, for it is cruel!

^a *you* here is singular in Heb

^b Or *mountain slope* (Heb *shekem*, a play on the name of the town and district of Shechem)

^c Gk Syr Tg: Heb *he*

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 crouches down, he stretches out like a
lion,
like a lioness—who dares rouse him
up?

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his
feet,
until tribute comes to him;^a
and the obedience of the peoples is his.

¹¹Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
he washes his garments in wine
and his robe in the blood of grapes;

¹²his eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk.

¹³Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the sea;
he shall be a haven for ships,
and his border shall be at Sidon.

¹⁴Issachar is a strong donkey,
lying down between the sheepfolds;

¹⁵he saw that a resting place was good,
and that the land was pleasant;
so he bowed his shoulder to the burden,
and became a slave at forced labor.

¹⁶Dan shall judge his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁷Dan shall be a snake by the roadside,
a viper along the path,

that bites the horse's heels
so that its rider falls backward.

¹⁸I wait for your salvation, O LORD.

¹⁹Gad shall be raided by raiders,
but he shall raid at their heels.

²⁰Asher's^b food shall be rich,
and he shall provide royal
delicacies.

²¹Naphtali is a doe let loose
that bears lovely fawns.^c

²²Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.^d

²³The archers fiercely attacked him;
they shot at him and pressed him
hard.

²⁴Yet his bow remained taut,
and his arms^e 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 the Almighty^f who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the
womb.

^a Or until Shiloh comes or until he comes to Shiloh or (with Syr) until he comes to whom it belongs

^b Gk Vg Syr: Heb *From Asher*

^c Or that gives beautiful words

^d Meaning of Heb uncertain

^e Heb *the arms of his hands*

^f Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

(1 Kings 1–2). See 38.27–30n. **10:** The *scepter* and *staff* are symbols of sovereignty. The latter part of the verse, however, is obscure (see note *a*). It appears to predict rule for Judean royalty until Judah's Davidic descendants achieve universal dominion (Num 24.17; Pss 2, 110) and is therefore preexilic. **13–27:** This latter part of the blessing (vv. 13–27) diverges from the birth order of 30.1–24. This section appears to predate placement into its present context in the story of Jacob and Joseph. **16:** The tribal name *Dan* is derived from the Hebrew verb for “judge” (“dan”). **18:** Probably a late scribal addition; cf. Ps 119.166. **22–26:** The lengthy blessing on Joseph and its triumphant conclusion (v. 26) suggest that he may have been the original focus of the early blessing (see 49.1–28n.). **25:** *The Almighty*, see 17.1n. *Blessings of heaven*, i.e., rain, dew, sun. *The deep that lies beneath*, an allusion to the subterranean ocean (see 1.6; 2.6). Compare Deut 33.13.

²⁶The blessings of your father
are stronger than the blessings of the
eternal mountains,
the bounties^a of the everlasting hills;
may they be on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of him who was set apart
from his brothers.

²⁷Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
in the morning devouring the prey,
and at evening dividing the spoil."

²⁸All these are the twelve tribes of Israel,
and this is what their father said to them
when he blessed them, blessing each one of
them with a suitable blessing.

²⁹Then he charged them, saying to them,
"I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury
me with my ancestors—in the cave in the
field of Ephron the Hittite,³⁰ in the cave in
the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the
land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham
bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial
site.³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah
were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah
were buried; and there I buried Leah—³² the
field and the cave that is in it were purchased
from the Hittites."³³ When Jacob ended his
charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into
the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered
to his people.

50 Then Joseph threw himself on his
father's face and wept over him and
kissed him.² Joseph commanded the physi-
cians in his service to embalm his father. So
the physicians embalmed Israel;³ they spent
forty days in doing this, for that is the time
required for embalming. And the Egyptians
wept for him seventy days.

⁴ When the days of weeping for him were
past, Joseph addressed the household of
Pharaoh, "If now I have found favor with
you, please speak to Pharaoh as follows:⁵ My

father made me swear an oath; he said, 'I am
about to die. In the tomb that I hewed out
for myself in the land of Canaan, there you
shall bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, so
that I may bury my father; then I will return."⁶
⁶ Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your
father, as he made you swear to do."

⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father.
With him went up all the servants of Phara-
oh, the elders of his household, and all the
elders of the land of Egypt,⁸ as 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 Goshen.⁹ Both chariots and charioteers
went up with him. It was a very great com-
pany.¹⁰ When they came to the threshing
floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan,
they held there a very great and sorrow-
ful lamentation; and he observed a time of
mourning for his father seven days.¹¹ When
the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw
the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad,
they said, "This is a grievous mourning on
the part of the Egyptians." Therefore the
place was named Abel-mizraim;^b it is beyond
the Jordan.¹² Thus his sons did for him as
he had instructed them.¹³ They carried him
to the land of Canaan and buried him in the
cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near
Mamre, which Abraham bought as a burial
site from Ephron the Hittite.¹⁴ After he had
buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt
with his brothers and all who had gone up
with him to bury his father.

¹⁵ Realizing that their father was dead,
Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still
bears a grudge against us and pays us back
in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"

^a Cn Compare Gk: Heb *of my progenitors to the boundaries*

^b That is *mourning (or meadow) of Egypt*

49.29–33: This Priestly section includes an order to bury Jacob at Machpelah (see ch 23) that parallels the earlier non-Priestly burial order (47.29–31).

50.1–26: Burial of Jacob and final days of Joseph. **1–11:** This non-Priestly narrative seems to presuppose that the burial and mourning occurred in Transjordan, not at the cave at Machpelah (23.1,19). **2–3:** Jacob is provided with Egyptian honors: embalming and lengthy mourning. **5:** This speech by Joseph links to the non-Priestly order to bury him at an ancestral burial place, here a tomb that Jacob had hewn out for himself (see 47.30–31n.). **10:** Hebron/Mamre (see v. 13) is much closer to Egypt than this unidentified location in Transjordan. **12–13:** The Priestly narrative. **15–16:** In fear now that their father is dead (cf. 27.41 and 33.12–17n.), Joseph's brothers attempt

¹⁶ So they approached^a Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷ ‘Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.’ Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept,^b fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.” ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

²² So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. ²³ Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph’s knees.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” ²⁵ So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, “When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.” ²⁶ And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

^a Gk Syr: Heb *they commanded*

^b Cn: Heb *also came*

to protect themselves through reporting that Jacob had ordered Joseph to forgive them (vv. 16–17). **18–21:** For the first time, the brothers knowingly subject themselves to Joseph (cf. 43.26), fulfilling Joseph’s first dream (37.5–7) and thus refuting their challenge of his destiny to rule them (37.8). Since they had just spoken of themselves as God’s slaves (v. 17; translated in the NRSV as *servants*), their description of themselves here as Joseph’s slaves implicitly equates him with God. Echoing his father’s words to Rachel (30.2), Joseph rejects this equation, attributing his dominion over his brothers as resulting from God’s plan. Later readers could have taken this as an implicit endorsement of the divine destiny of Joseph’s descendants—such as the Ephraimite king Jeroboam (1 Kings 11.26)—to rule over the other tribes. **23:** *Machir* was an early tribal group (Judg 5.14), later viewed as a clan within Manasseh that laid claim to Gilead (Num 32.39–40; Deut 3.15). *Born on Joseph’s knees*, see 30.3. **24:** A reference to God’s covenant oath to give the land to Abraham (15.9–17n.; 22.15–18). It closely resembles similar texts in Deut 1.8; 6.10 and related materials. **25:** This request will be fulfilled in Ex 13.19; Josh 24.2, one of the links between Genesis and the narrative extending to the end of Joshua.